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of me has made it difficult to settle for less in relationships. Thank you for setting

the standard so high…I think.

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Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to explore the community of one purposely selected department of secondary social studies teachers. I aimed to provide insight into the nature of one community of congruence amid the many constraints and systemic pressures in school systems today. Many have suggested that education is a microcosm of larger society, and that we have approached both in an increasingly fragmented manner. Systems theorists suggest that one way to address this problem would be to develop a systems consciousness in order to start viewing the world and education as connected and interrelated. One way to do this might be to create a "community of congruence" in the school system. A community of congruence is defined as a group of "like-minded people, gathering in community to reinforce fragile beliefs" in order to "offer mutual support and opportunities to develop a shared vision." The data suggest that this community of congruence was evolutionary, interdependent, and politically sophisticated. The study used systems theory to better understand the community's transformation. One benefit of this research may be to offer possible insights for those interested in developing communities of reassurance and support while simultaneously furthering a shared vision for education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I have previously been a teacher in a public elementary school and have taught in the first and fourth grades. The circumstances surrounding the formation of the school were complex, and may have contributed to my subsequent feeling of dissatisfaction. The years I spent there led me to wonder about the educational environment, relationships that foster teaching and learning, and how these two things might work to influence each other. I think it is necessary to describe my perception of those events, because my time in this setting influenced my career and research choices. I acknowledge that others' perceptions of this school setting will certainly vary, and I do not suggest that anyone else will describe the school in this way.

An increase in population compelled the district where I was student teaching to add a sixth elementary school, which I will call Jefferson Elementary. Prior to this addition, four of the five existing schools shared a somewhat even distribution of socioeconomic populations. The redistricting of neighborhoods caused an increase in the socioeconomic discrepancies between the six schools. The most affluent schools reduced their student populations qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches from 3% to 1%, while in the least affluent school, 50% of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. After the redistricting, Jefferson and one other elementary school contained the populations with the lowest socioeconomic status. There was unrest among the teachers in the district

about who would be reassigned to the new school because of the perceived correlation between low socioeconomic status, low student achievement, and increased behavioral problems. Student achievement (defined by state testing) was higher among schools containing students with a higher socioeconomic status. Unbeknown to the larger teacher population, Harrison[1], the appointed principal, had been given permission by the district superintendent to pick a staff comprised of "the best of the best."

Due to perceived difficulties caused by a population of students with lower socioeconomic status, unrest among teachers who feared they would be forced to relocate, and other challenges experienced in a new school[2] Harrison was adamant about staffing Jefferson with those he considered the most motivated and successful teachers.[3] To do this, the principal chose teachers with whom he had been impressed during his 20-year career. Harrison convinced many teachers, including me, to transfer to Jefferson Elementary by promising us integral roles in the decision-making processes. I felt this experience would provide a feeling of ownership for teachers and students and therefore foster a sense of community in the school.

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

[2] For the first year we had virtually no materials (e.g., textbooks, student workbooks, and student manipulatives). The library and gymnasium were unusable until after the second semester, and we had frequent interruptions because of building construction.

[3] I can only conjecture what Harrison meant by "successful." However, he often praised teachers who received high test scores, worked long hours, displayed unique projects, and were involved in extracurricular activities.

While Harrison's reasoning was well-intentioned, this left the new school with a staff of teachers expecting to be a part of every decision. Of a staff of 40, another teacher and I were the only first-year teachers at Jefferson Elementary. Therefore, we were willing to take more subservient roles. Each of the remaining 38 teachers had over 10 years of experience and, as intended by the principal, were highly motivated. Harrison chose teachers who had a reputation for producing high test scores, had been identified by administrators as highly successful, and had been in leadership positions in their previous schools.

Thus, Jefferson was staffed with highly motivated teachers who had held leadership positions in their previous schools. Many of the teachers had strong opinions about everything from curriculum decisions to building procedures. For example, I witnessed repeated arguments regarding issues like which direction students should walk when leaving recess. Alliances were quickly formed among teachers from the same schools in order to gain greater support.

Pressure for Uniformity

Many teachers in Jefferson felt uniformity was of utmost importance. With 500 students housed in one modest sized? elementary school, certain procedural standards were probably necessary to prevent chaos; however, strong social pressures to conform existed in other areas as well. As a supplement to the standard textbook curriculum, I spent my first year in a departmentalized social studies position creating thematic lesson plans around issues of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. I had a friend who was an artist, and who loved to decorate

inside and outside my room accordingly. I quickly realized that these elaborate decorations violated some set of social norms of which I was previously unaware. One of my colleagues jokingly referred to me as "such a first-year teacher," and this term caught on. I was actually relieved because it seemed to be an acceptable reason for me to do the things teachers in my grade level deemed "over the top" or "too much."

I thought this pressure might be due to the fact that we shared students, but I found similar circumstances in other grades. When the principal publicly praised his grandchild's second-grade teacher for the grandparent book the child had made, the other second-grade teachers thought it was a personal attack against their decisions to do a different literature activity. Similarly, when I taught first-grade, we practiced cafeteria, hallway, and other building procedures as a grade level to ensure students all behaved the same way. I realized the full extent of this pressure when another teacher and I decided to teach an animal unit together. When the other teachers did not want to participate and we decided to go through with the project as a duo, we were cornered separately and made to feel guilty about our decision.

The Competition

There appeared to be more competition at Jefferson than at other elementary schools I had observed, perhaps fueled by a combination of varying factors, including the pressure to conform and the population of teachers. On the first day of school, I walked into my classroom to find my tables and chairs

haphazardly stacked one upon another, the nametags and supplies in disarray, and a film of roof insulation covering the surfaces of the desks. Since the building was still under construction, I correctly assumed that the builders had needed to access something in the ceiling above my classroom. I frantically rearranged desks, redistributed papers and supplies, and vacuumed the insulation off the surfaces. On my way to retrieve my students from the gym, a colleague met me in the hallway and said, "I sure hope you are prepared for today. Some of us have spent all weekend here. By the looks of your classroom, I don't know how you could possibly be prepared."

I was shocked and shaken by this blatant attack based on her perception of my preparedness.   Unfortunately, it was a sign of things to come. I discovered I could not gain computer access to my students' pre-assessment reading scores after they took their first 9-week assessment. I went to the media specialist who was in charge of assigning passwords and helping with technology difficulties. The specialist told me I did not have permission to access those scores because I was only the social studies teacher. Thinking my colleague, the reading teacher, would have no problem sharing those results, I sent her a brief e-mail asking her to print a copy for me. Instead of responding to my email, she avoided me for the next two weeks, greeting everyone in the mornings except for me and walking away when I joined teachers at lunch or in the hallway.

My hopes of integrating the reading and social studies curriculum quickly vanished. I spent my first year discovering what my fourth-grade students were

doing in their other classes by reading their homework assignments and discussing their days with them. I was genuinely pleased at what they were learning because the activities they were doing looked fun and engaging, but I continued to feel as though I should not overstep any boundaries into other subject areas.

Feeling Disconnected

During this time, I continued to believe in integrated teaching by making curriculum relevant to students. I wanted to continue emphasizing the importance of all types of knowledge, including the arts, humanities, and social studies. Consequently, I believed the different subjects within my departmentalized setting were unnecessarily separated from one another, the lives of students, and broader society.

After two years as a fourth grade teacher, I moved to first grade. I was excited to use the natural integration of subjects rather than teaching from a more discipline-centered approach. During my first meeting with the other five first-grade teachers, I realized there were strong disagreements about what type of curriculum to use, how much we should collaborate, and who should take the lead on various projects. Two of the teachers cornered me so they could "let me know" that anything they gave me as a resource was to stay between the three of us. I found out later that I had taken the place of a teacher these two had ostracized to the point that she moved grade levels after 18 years.

This lack of community was not unique to the first and fourth grades. I found a fifth-grade teacher crying in her room after two of her colleagues told her that the team's Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) mathematics scores had better not reflect her maternity-leave absence. In a different grade, I heard a teacher loudly call that she did not trust teachers who left at 3:30 every day. Confused, I stuck my head out of my door to see one of her team members leaving the building with her small children.

I assume that the evolutionary nature of a preexisting school would mean that relationships are developed and negotiated over time. A natural hierarchy among co-teachers would presumably develop due to a number of variables, such as classroom experience, energy, expertise, and personality. It seems to me that in other schools, different teachers are invested in varying aspects of managing the school, so decisions are made by smaller groups. Although major disagreements have certainly existed in established schools, within such schools decisions and disagreements have been worked out over time.

I do not believe I was working with bad teachers or that they were intentionally mean or unsupportive. However, my school community, the departmentalized setting in which I taught during my first two years, and the competitive nature of the experience left me feeling something was wrong. I began to pay more attention to my philosophy of education, the classroom practices of my colleagues and myself, and the ways in which these factors affected our school community. I recognized something had skewed our beliefs

about the purposes of schooling and that this was reflected in the ways we treated

one another. As a result, I began to look to the literature to find explanations for

why I was feeling a sense of isolation and a lack of community.

Purpose of Schooling

Many would agree that one purpose of schooling has been to prepare

students for effective citizenship in a democratic society (Barr, Barth, & Shermis,

1977). However, the idea of citizenship education has been highly contested.

Banks (2008) asserts that the purpose of education is to help students "acquire the

knowledge, skills, and values needed to function effectively within their cultural

communities, nation-states, regions, and the global community" (p. 4). He argues

that education should transform society to be more equitable:

> Such an education helps students acquire the cosmopolitan perspectives
> and values needed to work to attain equality and social justice for people
> around the world. Schools should be reformed so that they can implement
> a transformative and critical conception of citizenship education that will
> enhance educational equality for all students. (Banks, 2008, p. 4)

Similarly, some educational theorists believe internal debates have been

"consistent with a field that values democracy and diversity and are also a source

of strength" (Banks, 2008, p. 15). For example, Cherryholmes (2010) says,

"Contentiousness over beliefs and values, arguably, is our normal state of affairs,

one that characterizes a democracy. A danger to us all lies in uniformity, the loss

of difference" (p. 256).

Others have contested this way of thinking. Leming (2003) interprets

citizenship education to mean that education should work to reproduce a

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conservative, patriotic society, and that differences in ideologies have caused

problems in social studies education. Social studies contrarians insist that the

problems in our educational system could specifically be attributed to those

attempting to make schools a place to achieve social change (Leming, Ellington,

& Porter-Magee, 2003). They seek to bring back what they consider basic

education:

> Democracy's survival depends upon our transmitting to each new
> generation the political vision of liberty and equality before the law that
> unites us as Americans and a deep loyalty to the political institutions our
> Founders put together to fulfill that vision. (Leming, et al., 2003, pg. 12)

The numerous and differing ideas regarding the purposes of education

have been difficult to separate neatly into categories; therefore, I attempted to

broadly define transformative and reproductive ideologies. I acknowledge that

these terms are an oversimplification of many complex ideas that cannot be

reduced to one or two specific headings. I alternated between theories and

practices of schooling as a whole and theories and practices specific to the field

because social studies has been the curricular area most associated with

citizenship education.

Citizenship Education to Reproduce Society

Many argue that the educational system has historically served to

reproduce society (Ballantine & Spade, 2008; Eisner, 2003; Schiro, 2008).

Schools have served to maintain order in societies by transmitting a common

moral code (Ballantine & Spade, 2008; Durkheim, 2008). Durkheim analyzed the

ways education has functioned to socialize "or train" the child to be a good

citizen.[4] He referred to the socialization of students as the process of preparing

good citizens, and described a code of conduct and a variety of duties that

students were expected to be able to complete (i.e., use self-restraint; have

appropriate attitude manners; do not disrupt; respect rules/authority).

One way we have continued to transmit a common moral code or socialize

students in the social studies has been by transmitting a Eurocentric historical

perspective. Slekar (2009) recently described the Eurocentric approach taught in

many classrooms as a patriotic indoctrination that promoted American

exceptionalism. Essentially, American exceptionalism is the idea that Americans

are somehow exceptional. Worthy activities and contributions are glorified and

presented as if they are unique to Americans, as opposed to being the kinds of

things that are practiced by conscientious citizens of any society.

Slekar (2009) illustrated this idea by describing a lesson observed aimed at

teaching elementary school students about Johnny Appleseed. In this lesson, the

teacher dressed up as the character and told about Appleseed's life in the first

person; students sang a song, graphed different types of apples, and read a

children's book. The students undoubtedly enjoyed seeing the teacher dressed up

in character, and the teacher being observed expressed that this lesson was a

positive example of a social studies lesson using integration. Additionally, this

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[4] Durkheim and other functionalists believed this type of training was a positive function
of the school system; later I present this type of indoctrination in negative terms.

aligned with what the teacher believed to be a good overall lesson: a fun activity

rooted in American heritage that engaged the students. Slekar said this was one

example of the way in which social studies has been taught in many classrooms,

and it illustrated the underlying idea of American exceptionalism by glorifying

and sensationalizing the actions of Johnny Appleseed.

American exceptionalism can be especially harmful when we

sensationalize individuals from historically marginalized groups because we are

perpetuating the myth that one can pull oneself up by one's bootstraps (Bell,

2010). Furthermore, even though this teacher perceived the lesson to be integrated,

it was done in a relatively disconnected and shallow way. Although graphing

apples may have been a developmentally appropriate activity, it did not connect

or reinforce any overlapping concepts.

Others have argued that schools perpetuate existing inequities in society

by valuing certain types of social and cultural capital (Anyon, 1980; Ballantine &

Spade, 2008; Bowles & Gintis, 2008).

> Schools reproduce capitalist society through the student selection and
> allocation processes that create hierarchies within societies, socializing
> students into these hierarchies of power and domination, and legitimizing
> the hierarchies by claiming they are based on merit. … School structure is
> based on the needs and standards of the dominant capitalist group in
> society and thus serves the purposes of that group. (Ballantine & Spade,
> 2008, p. 14)

Similarly, some have written about how the educational system

"reproduces and legitimates a preexisting pattern in the process of training and

stratifying the work force" (Bowles & Gintis, 2008, p. 41), and critical theorists

have continued to analyze ways in which social norms have been perpetuated in society and in schools (Apple, 1980; Freire, 2007; Giroux, 2001; Pinar, 2004). Eisner (2003) said schools, by their very nature, have a "special difficulty in changing their nature. Part of this difficulty stems from the fact that all of us have served an apprenticeship in them—and from an early age" (p. 648).

Critical theorists argue that curriculum (whether hidden or explicit) has played a role in reproducing the values and attitudes of the dominant culture. For example, Parker (2010) asserts that although curriculum work "sometimes liberates people; more often, it domesticates them by securing them in established relations of production, consumption, culture, politics, and regard" (p. 237). According to Pinar (2004), there are deeply embedded assumptions about how knowledge, culture, and values have perpetuated a modernistic and Eurocentric worldview. By leaving out parts of history and valuing objective knowledge over subjective knowledge, Pinar asserts that the educational system has been used to further dominant modes of thought. He suggests that hidden curriculum shapes the beliefs of students and, in turn, contributes to society's worldview: "The schools have inculcated not virtue but bourgeois respectability, competition, instrumentality, and Eurocentric monoculturalism" (Pinar, 2004, p. 16).

The perpetuation of existing inequalities might be partly attributed to teachers' avoidance of discussing systemic inequalities with their students. This is likely for a variety of reasons, but it has been linked to teachers' overreliance on the textbook to inform curricular decisions. Current research suggests that many

teachers use the textbook as the primary means to teach social studies content (Brophy & Alleman, 2009; Ross, 2006; Zhao & Hoge, 2005).

Teachers' overreliance on the textbook is problematic because textbooks have historically avoided democratic inquiries regarding risky topics, such as racism and other systemic inequities (Apple, 1980; Bell, 2010; Bolgatz, 2005; McCall, 2010; White, 2008). Additionally, textbooks have historically been written from a Eurocentric point of view and, therefore, have failed to represent many students' identities and heritages as integral parts of the formation of the United States. Banks (2001) says this has negatively affected "many students of color because they often find the school culture alien, hostile, and self-defeating" (p. 2).

Even when historically marginalized groups have been represented in textbooks, they have typically been presented in a safe and sanitized manner. This type of curriculum has prevented students from examining complex issues such as gender inequalities, race relationships, and equality movements that help make social studies relevant and inherently interesting. In addition, by presenting history in a Eurocentric, blindly patriotic way, students might detrimentally interpret this perspective as the single historical truth.

When the teaching of social studies is extended beyond the textbook, it is often done in a shallow way. Banks (2001) describes the content as being "limited primarily to holidays and celebrations, such as Cinco de Mayo, Asian/Pacific Heritage Week, African American History Month, and Women's History Week"

(p. 47). Banks says this could be detrimental to students because it may contribute to stereotypes and discriminatory practices inherent in Western societies. Others describe this happening often in the elementary classroom. According to Brophy & Alleman (2009), elementary social studies content often consists of "parades of disconnected facts that provide a 'trivial pursuit' or 'mile-wide but inch-deep' curriculum" (p. 359).

Pinar (2004) suggests that the hidden curriculum shapes the beliefs of students and, therefore, contributes to the worsening of society's problems by inculcating "not virtue but bourgeois respectability, competition, instrumentality, and Eurocentric monoculturalism" (p. 16). Pinar argues that democratic development and the public school cannot be linked as long as politically vulnerable groups continue to be marginalized and kept ignorant of their heritage.

Standardization and Marginalization of the Social Studies

Certain historical factors have affected the ways in which the social studies have been used. Those who have debated the nature and content of the field have historically disagreed about whether citizenship education should attempt to create loyal, patriotic citizens through the process of cultural assimilation, or follow a social science approach aimed at teaching the separate disciplines. More recently, the debate has included critical theorists aimed at providing a curriculum that has the potential to transform society.

Disagreements about the purpose of the field can be evidenced by the sheer variety of language used in the current literature attributed to social studies

education (i.e., multicultural education, citizenship education, human rights education, democracy education, character education, economics, geography, history, civics, government, humanities, culture learning, and service learning). According to Cherryholmes:

> One important consequence for social studies educators is that there is no one or set of undisputed, authoritative stories or theories or concepts or facts for social studies educators to adhere to and teach, even though governments at various levels are increasingly endorsing specific bodies of knowledge in standards documents and high stakes assessment tests. But not having one set of agreed-upon theories and concepts, or a stance from which to engage them, does not mean one can avoid taking a stance. Indeed, a stance is inherent in whatever we choose to say or keep silent about. (2010, p. 6)

In the 1890s, traditional notions of social studies education were reinforced by two committees, The History Ten and the Committee of Seven, formed by the National Education Association, who desired a national curriculum (Barr et al., 1977). Initially, the History Ten recommended teaching the universal scientific knowledge of the separate disciplines (Evans, 2004). Later, the Committee of Seven promoted studying distant history and recommended that students strengthen their mental discipline by memorizing factual historical information (Evans, 2004).

During this time, Western traditionalists controlled the "canon," the ideological framework that perpetuated the curriculum (Banks, 2008; Pinar, 2004). Educators often sought to transmit history in a linear, chronological manner through lecture (Evans, 2004). Western traditionalists have perpetuated a modernistic, Eurocentric worldview by implementing a curriculum that reflects

deeply embedded assumptions about knowledge, culture, and values. According to Dewey (1938), educators who implement this type of curricula transmit skills and bodies of information.

According to Schiro (2008), the scholar-academic ideology dominated many educators' aims and purposes during the first half of the 20th century. Scholar academics viewed "the formal education that takes place in schools as a process of acculturating children into society in such a way that they become good citizens" (Schiro, 2008, p. 13). Furthermore, they believed that schooling should transmit a common body of knowledge that would promote an increased national identity and the development of an Anglo-Saxon race (Evans, 2004). Those who aligned themselves with this scholar-academic ideology believed the curriculum should be organized around standardized core disciplines, and that knowledge should be transmitted in a linear, progressive manner.

Certain historical events have marginalized the social studies curriculum. Between approximately 1957 and 1975, the United States engaged in a competition widely known as the "space race." With the successful launch of *Sputnik 1*, there were concerns regarding the perceived lack of American superiority in mathematics and science. Schools were subsequently blamed for not adequately preparing students in mathematics, science, and technology. Pinar (2004) asserts that a largely passive sector, such as a school system, is convenient to blame because it is unlikely to engage in a counter campaign, therefore, an unprecedented amount of money and attention was focused on mathematics,

science, and technology. The perceived inadequacies placed pressure on teachers to focus on these subjects, and this helped marginalize the social studies and other areas of the curriculum such as visual and performing arts.

During the 1960s, John F. Kennedy blamed the lack of success in the Cold War on the schools. He said the education system was responsible for "going soft" by creating feminized and impotent men, and he called for a refocusing of strength, power, aggressiveness, and competition (Pinar, 2004). As (mostly male) legislators felt increasingly entitled to intervene in the jobs of (mostly female) teachers, the academic freedom of the teacher slowly decreased. A lack of choice in curriculum decisions further marginalized subjects that political leaders deemed unworthy. Teachers were expected to teach what had been mandated by someone else, and this effectively reduced teachers to the role of managing technicians, with the school being run as a business model (Giroux, 1985).

According to Schiro (2008), the social-efficiency ideology dominated the curriculum "canon" between 1940 and 1980 and greatly influenced many generations of teachers. The aim of the social-efficiency ideology was to perpetuate the functioning of society and to shape individuals who can function efficiently as adults in the workplace (Schiro, 2008. Subsequently, schooling was seen as a place to prepare citizens to be contributing members of society. Social efficiency educators "learn to use the scientific techniques of production developed by industry" (p. 51). Schiro (2008) asserts that the necessity for perpetuating society was accepted unquestionably and that students were

subsequently "taught to function in a desired way" (p. 63). Although the social-efficiency and scholar-academic ideologies have different views of teaching and learning (i.e., transmission of hierarchical knowledge versus a behaviorist or school-as-business model), each ideology is consistent in its aim to reproduce or perpetuate society through education.

Because the schools were thought to have failed, political institutions became increasingly involved in mandating curriculum. The 1983 Reagan-era report *A Nation at Risk* capitalized on Americans' fears that the schools were failing. Holt (2002) describes how our views of learning and the business model for schooling led to the standards-based reform movement:

> Influenced on the one hand by the idea that education is an atomistic, science-like activity, and on the other by the output-led simplicities of supply-side economics, schools in America have been in the grip of some form of standard-based reform for nearly 20 years. (p. 266)

Researchers have confirmed the role of policy in the marginalization of social studies and have credited the No Child Left Behind legislation with furthering standardized curricula (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; McCall, 2010; McEachron, 2009).

Many elementary school teachers have responded to No Child Left Behind by focusing more time on reading and mathematics and decreasing instructional time for social studies and other subjects. Fitchett and Heafner (2010) conducted a comparative analysis using 17 years of nationwide data. They conclude that "a significant decline in social studies instruction coincided with educational policy

that places greater importance on mathematics and language arts" (p. 114).

Similarly, Brophy and Alleman (2009) argued that "one of the many forms of

collateral damage that has resulted from the high-stakes testing frenzy has been a

narrowing of the curriculum, with teachers reducing time devoted to social studies

and other subjects not included in the testing program, in order to devote more

time to test preparation" (p. 361).

More recently, social studies educators have exhibited strong feelings

regarding the transformation/reproduction debate. For example, in the book

Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong? (Leming et al., 2003), social studies

educators critiqued what they called "politicized and often superficial topics such

as peace studies, the environment, gender equity issues, multiculturalism, and

social and economic justice" (p. ii). These educators said global education,

multiculturalism, and teaching methods involving student questioning should be

feared. They recommended countering the dangers of a radical social studies

curriculum by alerting the public.

> Alert policy makers and the public of radical leftists' multicultural ideas
> that have been institutionalized in teacher education programs through
> such things as NCATE [The National Council for Accreditation of
> Teacher Education] requirements that compel the nation's future teachers
> to learn distortions of reality that are antithetical to what most Americans
> believe. We believe that once policy makers and the larger public are fully
> informed that their tax dollars actually support the inculcation of radical
> multicultural notions in future and practicing history and social studies
> teachers, the stage will be set for changing these requirements. (Leming et
> al., 2003, p. 88)

Some of the recommendations proposed by Leming et al. include "reaffirming" the need to study content matter, especially the "true heroes of the American story" such as Washington and Jefferson; providing a common factual basis such as the names, dates, and statistics that "presupposes" the promotion of higher order thinking skills; and finally, to "create fewer doubters and cynics" (Leming et al., 2003, p. 28).

Citizenship Education to Transform Society

At the turn of the 20th century, some educators began to envision a more democratic education. Dewey (1916/1990) said one purpose of education was to prepare students to be active members in society, and some progressive educators started to assert that knowledge was socially constructed. Dewey was concerned with the connection between students' knowledge and society, and he suggested that they will learn more completely when they experience information that is relevant to their lives. This means shifting the focus of subject matter away from memorization and recitation of isolated facts to a curriculum that is interrelated and connected.

In 1916, a committee report issued by the National Education Association called for the inclusion of history, geography, and civics (and later economics, anthropology, psychology, and sociology) to form a social studies curriculum aimed at preparing students for citizenship education (Brophy & Alleman, 2009; Evans, 2004; Ross, 2006). Banks (2008) writes about the change in perception regarding citizenship education:

> The assimilationist conception of citizenship and citizenship education has come into question in view of the historical, political, social, and cultural developments that have occurred around the world since World War II. Institutionalized notions of citizenship have been vigorously contested since the ethnic revitalization movements starting in the 1960s and 1970s. Worldwide immigration, the challenges to nation-states brought by globalization, and the tenacity of nationalism and national borders have stimulated debate, controversy, and rethinking about citizenship and citizenship education. (p. 5)

According to many educational theorists, education should promote the transformation of society (Apple, 1980; Banks, 2001; Bell, 2010, Pinar, 2004; Schiro, 2008). For example, Pinar (2004) argues that democratic and diverse schools could provide greater opportunities for marginalized groups to study their histories and cultures, build on their strengths, and construct curriculum linked specifically to their "existential projects, grounded in the process of their self-formation in a society" (p. 227). To do this, Pinar called for a reawakening of the progressive movement where self-realization and democratization were inextricably intertwined:

> The *educational* point of the public school curriculum is *understanding*, understanding the relations among academic knowledge, the state of society, the process of self-formation, and the character of the historical moment in which we live, in which others have lived, and in which our descendants will someday live" (2004, p. 186).

Pinar (2004) suggests the reformulation of Dewey's (1916/1990) commitment to democracy and education, keeping in mind that the last time this idea was for "Whites only." Pinar added that there has been a divorce between school curriculum, public life, and students' self-formation, and the current "cult of academic vocationalism which ensures profound social alienation" (p. 187). Pinar

(2004) looks forward to the day when public schools are no longer "knowledge-and-skill factories, not academic businesses but schools: sites of education for creativity, erudition, and interdisciplinary intellectuality" (p. 11).

Similar to Pinar, Banks (2008) believes citizenship education should be for self-realization and democratization. He argues that "individuals who know the world only from their own cultural perspectives are denied important parts of the human experience and are culturally and ethnically encapsulated" (p. 1). Banks illustrates this point by saying it is in the best interest of a political democracy to help foster full participation in a common civic culture. For education to transform society, schools should facilitate the analysis of social injustices stemming from race, gender, and social and economic inequalities and then act to correct them (Schiro, 2008).

This idea has been explicitly linked to promoting more democratic ways of living. According to Pinar (2004), this commitment to democracy would enliven and enrich the lives of students, as individuals and citizens, and create possibilities for a more complex and inclusive society. Many believe that we need to begin this transformative social studies education at an early age (Banks, 2001; Brooks, 2009; Lucas, 2009; Slekar, 2009; White, 2008).

More than 40 years after Baldwin (1963) wrote "A Talk to Teachers," educators have continued to use his arguments to justify transformational curriculum with young students. Educators have used Baldwin (1963) to justify students' right and necessity to examine everything (Bogatz, 2005), including

what some would consider controversial issues. For example, Bolgatz (2005) argued that elementary school students "need to examine the history of the United States so that they will question the systems of racial privilege and racial discrimination that exist in it. To exclude such questioning from teaching is, according to Baldwin, enormously dangerous" (p. 259). For education to be transformative, it must seek to critically question the existing canon as well as the system that made that canon possible:

> Thus, unlike movements such as social history, women's history, history from the bottom, or some manifestation of multicultural history, which have mostly added previously unknown, often marginalized histories to the existing canon, but have done little to question the canon or the system that makes it possible, a critical approach poses a fundamental challenge to the very assumptions underlying what it means to "do" and study history and the operations constituting them. (Segall, 2010, 131)

Implications for Research

In my previous teaching experiences, I perceived that certain circumstances contributed to a lack of connectedness. This lack of connectedness caused me to look to the literature to explain the relationships between my understandings of the purposes of schooling, the curriculum, and the school environment. The literature suggests that our educational environments have been affected by various historical factors, including our perceptions regarding the purposes of citizenship education. Some suggest that a commitment to transformative education could enrich the lives of students, as individuals and citizens, and create possibilities for a more *complex and inclusive society* (Pinar, 2004). Some teachers have implemented transformative citizenship education,

using their common beliefs about the purposes of education to foster a relational educational environment.

In light of my concerns, I looked to others who were able, despite systemic constraints, to use their communities to support their educational aims and purposes. To begin to understand the nature of one such community, I focused the current study on a group of secondary social studies teachers who used their relationships to support their own educational aims. Exploring the nature of a purposively selected community of teachers, the study aims to inform myself and others about how this community evolved, achieved interdependence, and persisted despite social and political pressures. I hoped to provide insights that might assist for others as they struggle to develop their own communities and work to connect a fragmented system.

Based on these various issues and experiences, the question guiding my inquiry was as follows: "What is the nature of a community of congruence within a secondary social studies education department?"

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL LENS

Understanding the relationships between society, educators, the school environment, and the curriculum is important if we want to envision alternatives for educational communities. Many believe there is a cyclical relationship between our thoughts and actions. Freire (2007) explored the notion of praxis and described it as "reflecting on the world in order to change it" (p. 125). Some educators argue that actions influence thoughts, and thoughts influence actions. Therefore, change would be possible if new thinking inspired different behavior and provided new ways to imagine the world.

The recursive nature of our thinking and actions makes it difficult to determine whether historical events influence a shared consciousness or the other way around. In this section, I suggest that certain *events* have helped shape a shared *consciousness* (for some); however, it would have been equally plausible for me to describe how the *consciousness* (of individuals or groups) caused these *events*. Additionally, I explain how a postmodern lens might suggest ways to envision different possibilities for education. My purpose is not to *tell* another version of history, but to use these ideas to facilitate dialogue about the possibilities of postmodern educational communities.

A Shared Worldview

As a global society, we have had a history of social problems. Both historically and currently, we have faced problems such as racism, sexism,

poverty, worker exploitation, inadequate healthcare, consumerism, war, and energy shortages, to name but a few (Kohl, 1994; Kozol, 2001; Quinn, 1997; Schiro, 2008; Zinn, 2010). Examples of the extreme inequities that persist in our global society are illustrated in recent statistics. For instance, it was reported in 2005 that the wealthiest 10% of the world was responsible for consuming 59% of private products,[5] while the poorest one fifth was responsible for consuming 1.5% of private products (UNICEF, 2005). As another example, in 1998, global military spending reached $780 billion (United Nations Human Development Reports, 1998). When this is contrasted with the $9 billion projected cost to provide global water and sanitation services, it is difficult to deny that some are more invested in individual interests than in the welfare of the whole.

Some have suggested it would be inadequate to attempt to address these societal inequities independently because they are systemically related (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Capra, 1996; Fleener, 2002; Lazlo, 1996; Palmer, 2007). These theorists insist that we need to view such issues relationally, as part of a larger social system. In the United States, we can see the interrelatedness of various sociological problems. We have had a long history of racism and intolerance, but these prejudices have been magnified by current political events. Zeskind (2010) identified the complexities and difficulties of "the anti-Obama movement." He described this as the product of many different ideas that have evolved over time.

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[5] Private products are defined as consumable products beyond those considered as basic human survival staples (i.e., water; percentage of money for food).

These include "ultra-conservative" Republicans of both the Pat Buchanan and free market variety; anti-tax Tea Party libertarians from the Ron Paul camp; Christian right activists intent on re-molding the country into their kind of Kingdom; birth certificate conspiracy theorists, anti-immigrant nativists of the armed Minuteman and the policy wonk variety; third party "constitutionalists"; and white nationalists of both the citizens councils and the Stormfront national socialist variety. (Zeskind, 2010)

As suggested by Zeskind, current politics are influenced by a variety of factors. Nonetheless, we have a history of attributing one-way causational factors to such phenomena.

History of Fragmentation

Numerous theorists have suggested that political, religious, scientific, philosophical, and technical advances between the 15th and 18th centuries helped shape our perspectives and ways of dealing with each other and our world (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Capra, 1996; Fleener, 2002; Lazlo, 1996; Palmer, 2007). The advent of machines like the steam engine helped humans manipulate the environment (Briggs & Peat, 1989). The benefits of changing the environment to meet personal needs gradually increased the desire to live this way (Quinn, 1997). Many eventually stopped living as they previously had in order to make life easier.

Despite disagreements regarding specific dates, theorists believe this worldview was the result of various historical occurrences and perspectives, including scientific rationalism, social advances in Western society, and the Industrial Revolution. According to Heilman and Segall (2010):

The Renaissance, the Reformation, then the Scientific Revolution fostered radical shifts in ideas about how one knows and interprets phenomena. Reason began to replace tradition and religion as the ultimate source of

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knowledge, while fact replaced metaphor. Many tenets of the Christian worldview were not replaced wholesale but were incorporated into the modern worldview, particularly ideas about dominion over nature, the existence of chosen people and the inevitability of progress. (p. 14)

Modernism has been described as a worldview that emphasizes individual rationality, certainty, universal truth, and progress over all other forms of reason (Briggs & Peat, 1989, Capra, 1996; Lazlo, 1996; Palmer, 2007).

Today, many view time as eternal and absolute. When viewed this way, time and space can be seen as having a causal relationship (Heilman, 2010). Heilman and Segall (2010) say "Modern ideas of knowledge and self begin with the notion that there is a stable, coherent, knowable and knowing self" (p. 15). The absoluteness of space and time has been an essential component in the quantification of mathematical reasoning. It allows for the temporal division of years, months, weeks, days, hours, seconds, and even milliseconds.

One consequence of modernity is that reason became the dominant way of knowing, and language reflected the belief that phenomena could be known (Segall & Heilman, 2010). Newton proposed that physical phenomena could be reduced to basic elementary units (Briggs & Peat, 1989). Accordingly, complex phenomena were objectively separated from the whole in order to "know" them. Isolating aspects of nature in order to control the environment may have contributed to the notion that the individual parts were not equal. Capra (1996) suggests that thinking this way allowed humans to take a dominant position over each other and the Earth.

A growing emphasis on rational ways of thinking promoted the idea that things could be known with certainty. Metaphors used to describe nature reflected the change in perception. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, new machine-like metaphors were significantly different from previous notions that the world was interrelated and connected (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Capra, 1996; Fleener, 2002; Lazlo, 1996; Palmer, 2007). For example, Earth as a giant clock was a new metaphor describing the belief that we could take nature apart to study it, fix it, and put it back together.

Through mathematical measurement, scientists could allegedly determine an absolute truth (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Capra, 1996; Fleener, 2002; Lazlo, 1996; Palmer, 2007). The mathematization of science and the belief that everything in nature could be measured helped ensure that mathematics and science were regarded as the best means to achieve success. Therefore, achievement and progress were measured by modernist methods, including objective fragmentation of complex phenomena and statistical measurement of irreducible qualities. Segall, Heilman and Cherryholmes (2010) write: "In the modern view, reason is separate from nature and superior to it, and scientific investigation through inductive analysis of concrete data (allow for the) discovery of universal truths about the world" (p. 15).

Eventually, businesses and corporations applied a modernist worldview to production and human labor. Job tasks were separated, isolated, and measured to ensure greater productivity. More recently in the corporate or business world,

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many have been rewarded based on individual criteria rather than the success of the group. Consequently, these institutions have perpetuated competitiveness and individualism at the expense of relationships and community.

Most people would demand statistical reassurance for objects we rely upon today (e.g., medical procedures or aeronautical endeavors). Similarly, many appreciate the efficiency provided by modern conveniences. However, with the numerous benefits attributed to the Agricultural and Scientific Revolutions, new problems have arisen.   One challenge has been that the overreliance on a modernist mindset has not encouraged other ways of knowing. As Lazlo (1996) observes:

> Once the capacities (of reason) were developed, we became utterly dependent on them. If one uses reason in tracking down one's prey and in defending the common territory, one cannot stop using it when gazing at the starlit sky; reason cannot turn itself off. It is likewise impossible to reserve one's mystical feelings and mythical beliefs for times when these serve some positive function—as in rituals which can take the place of real aggression—and become unfeeling and unbelieving in daily life. (p. 74)

Laszlo (1996) suggests that although we have not lost by gaining reason, rationality has been problematic if we have lost the ability to be relationally and emotionally connected. According to Heilman and Segall (2010), during the middle of the twentieth century "science wasn't creating progress as hoped. It created new horrors, in the form of automatic weapons, chemical warfare, industrialized forms of killing, and atomic and nuclear bombs" (p. 16).

The emphasis on isolation, fragmentation, and individualism has implications for society. It has filtered down to institutions that have implications for our personal and environmental health. For example:

> On their own and in alliances with the government and the scientific community, twentieth-century American businessmen planned and executed a series of revolutions in farming. They turned the early-modern philosophical proposition, championed by Descartes, that animals should be viewed as machines into reality for thousands, then millions, and now billions of farm animals. (Foer, 2009, p. 108)

The agricultural businesses continue to dominate animals and the earth by applying production and growth practices in the food industry despite opinions that they are harmful to animals, people, and our environment. Farm factories are living expressions of the attitude that animals and the environment are things, raw materials, to be consumed however we wish. Foer (2009) offers the following example:

> Today's chicken farms are not really "farms" anymore, but should more accurately be called "chicken factories." Factories, because the chickens live their whole lives inside buildings entirely devoid of natural light. The day of the barnyard is long gone. There are no barns and no yards in today's mechanized world of poultry production, only assembly lines, conveyer belts, and fluorescent lights. Factories, because these proud and sensitive creatures are treated strictly as merchandise, with utter contempt for their spirits, with not a trace of feeling or compassion for the fact that they are living, breathing animals. Factories, because the chickens are systematically deprived of every conceivable expression of their natural urges (p. 118).

This logic may have been applied to *animals,* but what are the implications for our social systems, and for education in particular?

Fragmentation in Education

Shannon (2001) describes how our public school system was founded upon modernist assumptions. He says the primary goal of schooling, according to Jefferson's Enlightened three-tier system, was "to supply his vision of a republic with a 'natural aristocracy', who were selected for their powers of rationality" (p. 12). Shannon (2001) argues:

> At its inception, the United States can be understood as a test of the practical validity of the political assumptions of the Enlightenment. Coupling a great *faith in reason* to decipher the mysteries of the physical and social worlds to enhance human material comfort, an embryonic belief in the powers of capitalism to govern relations among men and families, and a pessimistic although wholly secular appraisal of human nature, Jefferson and other American philosophers attempted to create a *science of freedom* by encoding the lessons of history into a government of laws that would control and be controlled by its citizens. (emphasis added, p. 11)

Scientific rationalism has infiltrated our educational communities. Palmer (2007) refers to the disconnectedness experienced in the education system as a product of *objectivism,* a truth that is "something we can achieve only by disconnecting ourselves, physically and emotionally, from the thing we want to know" (p. 52). Palmer describes objectivism as an unconscious way of knowing that relies exclusively on reason and facts, logic and data. In contrast, subjectivism has been feared based on the assumption that it might forge potential relationships and connectedness and provide opportunity for transformation of the self or other (Palmer, 2007).

Manifestations of a modernist viewpoint can be seen in aspects of education. Many educators, including myself, have participated in a reductionist

mindset. Palmer (2007) says we are distanced by "a grading system that separates teachers from students, by departments that fragment fields of knowledge, by competition that makes students and teachers alike wary of their peers, and by a bureaucracy that puts faculty and administration at odds" (p. 36). Palmer's (2007) ideas helped me identify how the fragmentation in schooling perpetuated the individualism and competition I was feeling at Jefferson Elementary.

School systems, in general, are separated in other ways as well. Starting in kindergarten, the physical structures of many classrooms are created carefully in order to guide students toward adult-selected structured activities. Gracey (2008) shows how one kindergarten teacher organized the room to mimic the adult world. Gracey describes the division of six teacher-selected periods that limited the time for spontaneous creation by the students. These physical structures and time allotments were rationalized by the teacher as necessary in preparing students for the next 12 years of school. Presumably, the next 12 years (at least) will resemble the kindergarten classroom, evidenced by the departmentalization of subjects and seven class periods structured around 45-minute intervals.

The separation of the physical structure of the school has been connected to what Gracey (2008) defines as the separation of the social structure. He argues that this is "established by the very rigid and tightly controlled set of rituals and routines through which the children are put during the day" (p. 134). The teacher described by Gracey (2008) drilled procedures and tasks the entire first semester so students could perform them automatically. Furthermore, many of those

routines were practiced without explanation, causing students to have little understanding of why they were being asked, for example, to "discipline their bodies" in this way.

Just as classroom procedures were practiced as discrete tasks, concepts were "being taught by rote meaningless sounds in the ritual oaths and songs" (p. 135). These phenomena were not unique to kindergarten and could be evidenced by the way content and curriculum was reduced to mechanistic behavioral objectives. Behavioral objectives have been further reduced to include isolated facts so that they can be measured more easily. Oftentimes, the result has been a curriculum that is disconnected in its own discipline as well as isolated from other subject areas.

Middle schools and high schools have continued to be carefully structured around isolated subjects and standards as well. The consequence of this has been a lack of communication between departments and grade levels. Because of structural separateness, it seems few collaborate even among those in the same department who teach different facets of the same subject (i.e., U.S. history, World history, Oklahoma history). For example, when students in Oklahoma are in the 11th grade, they study American literature in English courses and American history in social studies courses. Instead of using the interconnectedness of the subject matter, the two areas have been studied in isolation. By the 11th grade, students have been socialized to comply with the separateness of subjects. One

implication may be that many students and teachers have lost the ability or desire

to make natural connections among subjects, schooling, and larger society.

A Postmodern Critique

Although mechanistic thinking has become prevalent in contemporary

society, it is not the only way to understand the world. For the vast majority of

human history, people have lived in holistic ways (e.g., Capra, 1996; Quinn,

1997). There have long been people who have recognized that life is a complex,

multifaceted web of connections that cannot be understood in isolation.

Modernity reinforces a belief that time is eternal and absolute. However, this has

not always been the case. People used to experience time as a natural occurrence

in relation to the Earth. Calendars were internal, based on the sun and seasons.

> The premodern European world, like most premodern societies, was
> relatively stable. Ideas about knowledge, truth, and reality were typically
> understood through entrenched systems that integrated cultural, political,
> and religious understandings. Explanations for one's place in society, for
> the workings of the natural world, and for daily activities were
> fundamentally religious and symbolic. (Heilman & Segall, 2010, p. 14)

Throughout history numerous societies have recognized the fundamental

connectedness of life. Thus, many indigenous peoples countered emerging

divisions of agricultural societies by resisting what they perceived as the

destruction of the earth. Some claimed that plants and animals were their brothers

and sisters and that to destroy the land was to destroy the people (Heilman &

Segall, 2010). In ancient Greece, the Sophists and Skeptics challenged the

assumption of absolute "truth." Centuries later, Einstein's theory of relativity

disputed modern absolutism (Lazlo, 1996). Even more recently, a growing

number of scholars have examined the ways fragmentation has separated related

phenomena. Today, there is a growing effort to recapture and understand

wholeness.

Because modernism reinforces individualism, rationalism, and isolation,

some have begun to question these ideas, participating in what has become known

as a postmodern critique. Proponents of postmodernism have not suggested that

we discard all forms of modernity; rather, they have sought to transcend and

transform modernism by finding ways of being more critical and inclusive.

> We are not suggesting simply a break from the research and theory of a
> previous generation. Rather, building on the idea that postmodernism isn't
> simply that which comes after modernism but instead critically and
> reflexively reexamines modernism and its implications, we mean to
> indicate a departure rather than a break, one that is inherently implicated
> in that which came before. (Heilman & Segall, 2010, p. 13)

Among other things, postmodernists question grand narratives, or single ways of

knowing (Capra, 1996; Cherryholmes, 2010). According to modernist

assumptions, one can break apart an entity and analyze those individual parts.

Although this idea may have benefits, it is not adequate to explain everything.

Capra (1996), a physicist, suggests that many of our problems are the

result of a "crisis of perception." This crisis of perception refers to "the fact that

most of us, and especially our large social institutions, subscribe to the concepts

of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our

overpopulated, globally interconnected world" (Capra, 1996, p. 3). Therefore,

when looking at a global problem such as poverty, it is inadequate to presume that it can be cured with a topical solution aimed at economics alone. Instead, one would have to simultaneously examine the complexities and relationships of other global problems such as population growth, overconsumption, pollution, and ethnocentrism.

Capra (1996) also resists the idea that humans are separate from nature. Capra argues that "deep ecological awareness recognized the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena and the fact that, as individuals and societies, we are embedded in (and dependent upon) the cyclical processes of nature" (p. 6). Similarly, Palmer (2007) describes ecological studies as becoming less focused on the survival of the fittest and more concerned with "the dance of communal collaboration, a picture of the great web of being" (p. 98).

Systems Theory

According to Heilman and Segall (2010), science has gradually come to be understood as incapable of capturing truth as it has replaced previously held notions at ever-increasing rates. Some scientists have responded to new discoveries by challenging their assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Capra, 1996; Fleener, 2002; Lazlo, 1996; Palmer, 2007). Systems theory is one response to recent discoveries in science.

When scientists realized subatomic particles behave in relation to each other even when they are seemingly too far apart to do so, they were forced to reevaluate the simplistic notion that the atom can be thought about in isolation

(Palmer, 2007). Over time, the belief that the world is made up of basic building blocks was replaced by the idea that the world is a complex web of patterns and relationships. As Lazlo (1996) observes:

> The laws of physics were insufficient to explain the new and complex interactions which take place in a living organism, and thus new laws had to be postulated—not laws of "life forces," but laws of integrated wholes, acting as such. (p. 8)

In time, scientists started applying theories of wholeness to other areas and began rediscovering the interconnectedness of the sciences and, therefore, of the world itself. Others have followed their lead, looking at the relationships between a number of different and interacting properties. These varied efforts have led to understanding behavior as a whole under diverse influences (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Capra, 1996; Fleener, 2002; Lazlo, 1996; Palmer, 2007).

Many also currently resist the idea that humans are separate from nature and suggest that people must act in accordance with nature rather than in opposition to it. Capra says that "deep ecological awareness recognizes the fundamental interdependence of all phenomena and the fact that, as individuals and societies, we are all embedded in (and ultimately dependent on) the cyclical processes of nature" (Capra, 1996, p. 6). This holistic, interconnected belief system suggests that we should live in harmony with each other and the Earth.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, many new ideas emerged, including chaos theory. Briggs and Peat (1989) suggest that chaos theory was a result of discovering that nonlinear interactions can produce self-organizing

systems, and that mathematics cannot quantify the results of how various factors

respond when exposed to a number of different and interacting variables. They

note that "the scientific term chaos refers to an underlying interconnectedness that

exists in apparently random events" (p. 2) and suggest that chaos theory can help

merge our dualistic perceptions:

> Chaos theory points us beyond simplicity and complexity, objectivity and
> subjectivity, my view versus your view, order and randomness, stability
> versus hypersensitivity, naked power versus subtle influence, control
> versus uncertainty. It transcends these and other dualities that underlie our
> thinking and pump energy into our stereotypes and projections. Chaos
> theory shows us that it is an illusion to separate the self from the other, and
> that it can be equally illusory to imagine a false or inauthentic merging of
> the self with the other. (Briggs & Peat, 1989, p. 96)

The "butterfly effect" is an aspect of chaos theory that deals with issues of

interdependency and connectivity (Briggs & Peat, 1989). The idea is that a single

event as seemingly insignificant as the flapping of a butterfly's wings could

potentially have a far-reaching ripple effect on distant events. Lorenz was a

meteorologist who popularized the term "butterfly effect" after plugging forecast

numbers into a feedback loop equation designed to predict the weather (Briggs &

Peat, 1989). When Lorenz shortened the initial model number by three decimal

places, he discovered a tremendous difference in the final outcome. The second

result differed so greatly from the original model that Lorenz used "butterfly

effect" to describe the phenomenon of an incremental difference in the "initial

condition" of a dynamic system having the power to cause large variations in the

system's behavior. Recently, this idea has been broadly applied to systems in general.

Connectedness in Education

Just as holistic thinking has had an impact on new science and society, it has also affected education. The advent of these scientific discoveries allowed for systemic ways of looking at the world. For example, Fleener (2002) observes that "systems logic provides images and metaphors that significantly change how one can look at schooling and the complex relationships among the child, curriculum, and society" (p. 6).

The metaphor of knowledge as a mechanistic building, supported by Newton's idea that the world can be broken into basic building blocks, could now be replaced by the metaphor of knowledge as a network. Kincheloe (2010) argues that embracing the metaphor of complexity can provide new insights and "knowledge previously relegated to the shadows" (p. 213):

> Explorations of complexity touch upon foundational philosophical concerns such as the relationship between chaos and order, determinacy and randomness, and synthesis and analysis. When we add the phenomenon of emergence—the ways complex phenomena arise from the interaction of simple parts—the concept of complexity becomes an exciting new domain of study. (Kincheloe, 2010, pg. 213).

As suggested by Fleener (2002) and Palmer (2007), the metaphor of the school as a network or web can be useful when using systems theory as a lens.

Seeing schooling as a network or web suggests that it is unnatural to think, learn, and teach in fragmented ways. Systems thinkers argue that it is more

natural for learners to draw on past experiences and the experiences of others to

connect new information to society and other subject areas. Additionally, systems

thinking suggests that teachers would benefit from collaborating with one another

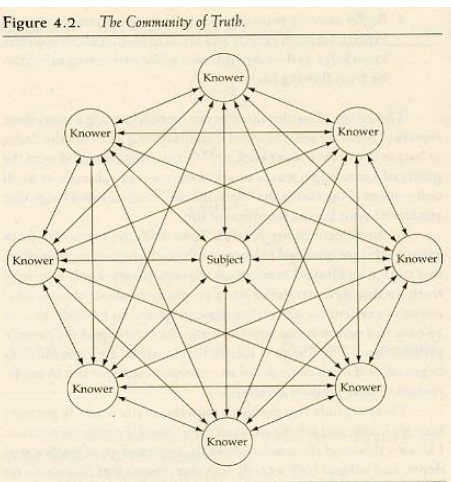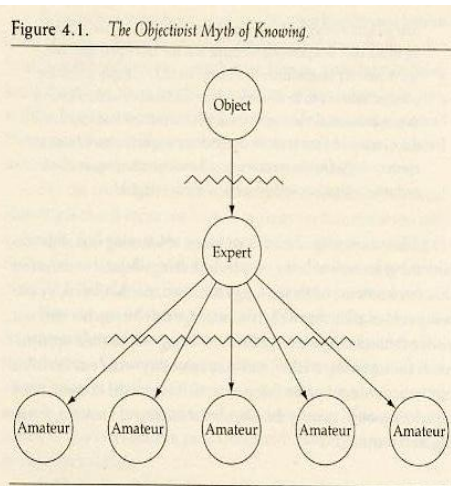as well as with students and administrators.

Figure 1.   Palmer's (2007) comparison of a traditional objectivist view (above)
with a subject-centered view (below).

Palmer (2007) contrasted a traditional, objectivist model of teaching (which tends to promote education for reproduction) with a subjective, relational view (which can be potentially transformative). Palmer provides an interactive circular perspective as an alternative to the linear, hierarchical model that is traditionally used (see Figure 1). He argues that the strengths in relational knowing and connectedness are dependent on societal beliefs that knowing is helped, not hindered, by being part of the web of community.

Other educational philosophers have made similar suggestions. For example, Whitehead (1929) declared two educational commandments: "Do not teach too many subjects," and "What you teach, teach thoroughly" (p. 35). The implications are that education may have little meaning if we teach in mechanistic and superficial ways. Whitehead also suggested that for students to internalize any type of subject, they should come in contact with the subject matter in numerous and various ways.

Like Whitehead (1929), other theorists who were part of the progressive educational movement in the twentieth century also valued holistic learning. Piaget (1952) and Dewey (1916/1990) were concerned with children's knowledge being deep and meaningful. They demonstrated that students learned more completely when they experienced information in a variety of ways. This meant shifting the focus of subject matter away from the memorization and recitation of isolated facts to a curriculum that was interrelated and connected to students' lives. Dewey (1916/1990) discussed "waste in education" as being the isolation in the

organization including the inability of schools to connect learning to the daily

lives of the students. Dewey's forward thinking regarding the connectedness of

life and school is evident below.

> Though there should be organic connection(s) between the school and
> business life, it is not meant that the school is to prepare the child for any
> particular business, but that there should be a natural connection of the
> everyday life of the child with the business environment about him, and
> that it is the affair of the school to clarify and liberalize this connection, to
> bring it to consciousness, not by introducing special studies, like
> commercial geography and arithmetic, but by keeping alive the ordinary
> bonds of relation. (p. 76)

Consistent with many of Dewey's ideas, Palmer (2007) also supported the idea

that teachers and students need wholeness. He said, "If we want to develop and

deepen the capacity for connectedness at the heart of good teaching, we must

understand—and resist—the perverse but powerful draw of the 'disconnected' life"

(p. 35).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Since many of contemporary problems are related to a reductionistic worldview manifested in all parts of society, including the education system, it makes sense to think about ways to address these problems in schools. Numerous theorists have suggested that education is a microcosm of larger society, and that educators have approached curriculum and instruction in an increasingly fragmented, specialized manner. Some have advocated a systems consciousness that views the world as a web of interconnected relationships. Palmer (2007) suggests that one way for teachers to work systemically is to create a "community of congruence" in the school system. In light of this suggestion, I decided to study a purposively selected "community of congruence."

In this chapter, I will first discuss purposes of a community of congruence and describe how the setting and participants helped inform my research choices. Next, I explain the methodological framework and epistemological assumptions underlying the approach. Third, I discuss the data sources and methods used for data collection. Finally, I discuss specific methods of data analysis and ways I tried to ensure trustworthiness. The broader question guiding my inquiry was "What is the nature of a community of congruence within a secondary social studies education department?"

Purposes of a Community of Congruence

A community of congruence has been defined as a group of "like-minded people gathering in community to reinforce fragile beliefs (and to) offer mutual support and opportunities to develop a shared vision" (Palmer, 2007, p. 182). Palmer says this may happen after individuals decide to live "divided no more" in their own lives, and begin to look for outside ways to live in harmony as well. The purpose of a community of congruence is to offer mutual reassurance to those on the same path and to help develop a language that can represent a movement's vision.

A community of congruence is consistent with the literature regarding systems consciousness because it supports relational ways of living within the school system. Utilizing a systems-theory lens, one might predict that if teachers were to value connectedness and collaboration, school structures could begin to reflect these values. Conversely, attempting to solve these problems in individualistic (as opposed to relational) ways would perpetuate the fragmented nature of the system.

To begin to understand the nature of this community, I specifically focused on the relationships the participants deemed most supportive. I wanted to see if their relationships, community, and vision for education helped create possibilities for a more *inclusive society* (Pinar, 2004). Specifically, I focused on those who shared a vision for education and relied on their relationships for reassurance and support.

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of a community of teachers, and how this community evolved, achieved interdependence, and persisted, despite social and political pressures. I used a case study approach due to the bounded nature of this group (Stake, 1995). Case study research generally involves a variation of data collection and analysis methods consistent with qualitative research. Before discussing my methodological framework, I will first introduce the participants.

Participants and Setting

This study took place in the fall of 2011, during a time when teachers in Oklahoma were feeling increasingly marginalized by outside mandates. Budget cuts as well as other legislative decisions from previous years (many related to NCLB) led to the reshifting and discharging of many teachers. Subsequently, this increased class sizes and some teachers (especially those who were new to teaching) sensed a lack of job security. This has placed more pressure on teachers who are already among the lowest paid in the nation, in a state historically with one of the lowest allocations of per-pupil spending.

Oklahoma is a politically conservative state located in what is commonly known as the Bible belt. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, an average of 46.9% of Oklahoma children lived under the poverty level from 2008 to 2011. The total population below the poverty level in Oklahoma from 2006 to 2010 was 16.2%, and this was higher than the national average of 13.6% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In 2010, one third of Oklahomans received food stamps or

Medicaid (Pearson, 2011). Participants noted that Truman High School had students in a higher socioeconomic bracket than that of the general public.

During 2011, approximately 2,000 students attended Truman High School in Grades nine through twelve. More than a quarter (27%) of the students lived below the poverty level, which was significantly less than the 46.9% state average. With regard to the school demographics, the students were 59% White, 13% Native American, 11% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 8% African American. Students throughout the district scored well on state and national standardized tests, and many teachers credited this to student motivation. According to the participants, high numbers of students expected to go on to college after high school, and many enrolled in challenging courses in order to prepare.

Truman High was located in a large suburban district. This suburb was located near a major city populated by more than a million people. Truman opened in 1988, was the second of three high schools in the district, and had a reputation for having a strong sense of community. The building was a large, single-story building with subject areas located in specific hallways. Therefore, all social studies classes were located in close proximity.

The general sequence of high school social studies courses included Oklahoma history in ninth grade, World History in tenth, U.S. history in eleventh grade, and U.S. Government in twelfth. High school students in Oklahoma are required to pass four of seven standardized exit examinations to graduate. United States History, usually taken at the 11th-grade level, is the only social studies

course included in these seven examinations. However, each grade-level social studies course, excluding advanced-placement, has district-mandated examinations every 6 or 9 weeks. Pacing guides and content materials are provided so teachers know which curriculum to cover for each examination. These scores are reported to the district, but there are currently no penalties in place for students scoring poorly.

Meeting the participants included in this case began as a personal journey. As an elementary-education undergraduate major, the types of questions and topics I explored in social studies courses inspired me. The literature, activities, and dialogue provided me with the ability to *name* some of the feelings I had experienced throughout my life. Among other things, I explored history from multiple perspectives: the myths that I knew; "the one right way" to live; and the interrelatedness of modern society, consumer culture, and the degradation of global resources. Throughout my adolescence, I attended meetings with my father aimed at reforming the prison system; therefore, I had a vague sense of the existence of systemic inequalities. But during these social studies courses, I was confronted with ideas about White privilege, levels of racism, and the invisibility of inequities in society, and I began to untangle how my own situatedness afforded me power at the expense of others.

Before my first year of teaching, I applied to the social studies graduate program because I wanted to continue exploring the implications of these issues for my students and myself. My goal was to seek to understand the theoretical

ideas and attempt to connect theory to practice within my classroom. I spent the first year of graduate school listening to professors and classmates who were well versed in a language I coveted. Slowly, I began joining the conversation and forming relationships based on mutual interests, and I found the sense of community that was missing in my work environment.

I met David in 2008 in a graduate course entitled, Critical Research Paradigms and Approaches, and we immediately became friends. Students in the class, including David and me, began meeting each week to discuss the readings. David taught social studies at a suburban high school, which for the purposes of this paper will be called Truman High. He introduced me to several colleagues in his social studies department, including Marie, Laura, Bailey, and Mike. I began joining them and others in their weekly after-school meetings.

The purposes of these gatherings were to unwind, not necessarily to discuss education, but many conversations centered around their work together. They not only discussed concerns related to power and privilege, but they seemed to embody these ideals. My passion was amplified by being in community with this group, and I began to wonder what it would be like to have this type of community in a work setting.

During one gathering, Laura, the chair of the social studies department, briefly mentioned applying for a position at a local museum as the education coordinator. For the first time, I witnessed the group's mutual appreciation for and reliance upon one another. They jokingly told Laura she could not leave, but

something inside me *seriously* did not want her to leave Truman High. When I

later asked Marie if she remembered this conversation from years prior, she said,

"If Laura left, I think it would make a huge impact on the culture of the

department."

David described Laura as "imaginative and inspiring in her teaching and

leadership" and said, "She sets the tone for our department." He described a

course she created that helped "generate a mood where critical and meaningful

instruction were encouraged." The course, entitled International Studies, "helped

students understand world conflicts, international organizations, humanitarian law,

aid agencies, human dignity, and a variety of other topics through the use of

lecture, simulation activities, and illustrative media."

Three years later I was still witnessing their devotion to teaching and to

one another. David decided to accept a university position just before this study

took place. He wrote that his time at Truman High School was "a golden age in

my professional career." Marie, who was going through a divorce during the time

of the study, said that she relied on her colleagues and her work to "keep her sane."

Faculty members at Truman High School were overwhelmingly White,

accurately representing the 86% of teachers in the United States who consider

themselves to be of European American decent (Banks, 2008; Brown, 2004). The

18 members of the social studies department all considered themselves to be

White. Eleven of these teachers were male, and seven were female. Three of the

social studies faculty members had worked at the school since its inception in

1988. Laura, the social studies department chair (and teacher of the International Studies course described earlier), had been working in the district for 18 years and at Truman for 12. During the course of this study, I came into contact with 14 of the 18 faculty in the social studies department. These interactions yielded data gathered during observations, casual conversations, formal group or personal interviews, and professional-development meetings. Participants referred to by name are listed in Figure 2.

NAME	Subject(s)	Grade(s)	Experience	Interests/Sponsorships
Laura	A.P. U.S. Hist. Global Iss.	11th Elective	18 yrs.	Dept. Head; Red Cross; Asian American Sponsor
Marie	U.S. Hist. Pre-A.P. Okla. Hist.	11th 9th	9 yrs.	Anti-Genocide Sponsor
Susan	A.P. World Hist.	10th	12 yrs.	Jewish Faith Alliance President of the Holocaust Museum Educ.
Bailey	U.S. Hist.	11th	9 yrs.	Gay Straight Alliance
Mike	A.P. U.S. Hist.	11th	10 yrs.	
David	A.P. Government A.P. Psychology	12th Elective	7 yrs.	Anti-Genocide Sponsor
James	Psychology	Elective	22 yrs.	
Jason	U.S. History	11th	3 yrs.	Head Baseball Coach

Figure 2. Research participants named in study.

Methodology

A qualitative methodological framework seemed most appropriate for exploring this community of congruence, their interactions and relationships, and the impact of a broader systemic structure upon the community. Merriam (1998) suggests that qualitative research "can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole" (p. 6), contrasting this with quantitative research "which takes apart a phenomenon to examine component parts" (p. 6). Consistent with my theoretical lens and a qualitative framework, I resisted modernist research assumptions during this study (e.g., the objectification of data or participants).

My epistemological assumptions are relativist and constructivist rather than objectivist. Those opposed to postmodernist and postpostivist ideologies have criticized a relativist perspective for being value free. Recently, educators responded to this criticism by writing:

> According to Stanley (1992), the use of relativism as a negative characterization only makes sense if we assume the possibility of objective, stable knowledge. If following Derrida (1979), we believe that truth is plural, then relativism, or what those within a critical perspective prefer to identify as perspectivism, "is the background or condition under which we seek knowledge in the human sciences and in our daily practical existence. Relativism … *does not* imply that all human knowledge claims are equal or that we have no effective way or basis for discriminating among various knowledge claims" (Stanley, 1992, p. 189). (emphasis in original, Segall, 2010, p. 137)

According to these educators, a belief in relativism does not mean that "anything goes," but that perspectives, judgments, and findings should be seen as situated in time, place, and through a particular framework.

I did not wish to provide generalizations, but to gain emic perspectives from my participants and insights into their community. I believe both the participants' and my own understandings are subjective and mediated through language and perspectives. An interpretive approach allows the researcher to describe the context and to analyze this community without assuming the existence of an absolute "truth."

Specifically, I used case-study methodology to help me understand this community. Consistent with Merriam's (1998) idea that qualitative research can reveal the relationships of the parts to the whole, a case study can be useful when trying to understand dynamic elements in a bounded time and place (Stake, 1995). This was consistent with my theoretical lens, which suggested the benefits of understanding numerous properties interacting together. Many qualitative methodologies would have been useful to interpret this community, but Merriam (1998) described the following particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic characteristics that seem most consistent with my purposes:

Category 1: The particularistic nature of a case study can do the following:

- Suggest to a reader what to do or what not to do in a similar situation.

- Examine a specific instance but illuminate a general problem.

Category 2: The descriptive nature of a case study can do the following:

- Illustrate the complexities of a situation—the fact that not one but many factors contribute to it.

- Show the influence of personalities on the issue.

- Describe how preceding decades led to a situation.

Category 3: The heuristic nature of a case study can do the following:

- Explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened, and why.

- Discuss alternatives not chosen.

These categories, described by Merriam (1998), suggest that there are different ways to define a case, and that cases have a variety of attributes that can yield diverse information related to a study.

My research utilized other methodologists as well. Because of my personal interest in *this* particular department of teachers, I also drew on Stake's (1995) ideas regarding an intrinsic case study:

> We are interested in it, not because studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case. We have an intrinsic interest in the case, and we may call our work our *intrinsic case study*. (emphasis in original, 1995, p. 3)

Consistent with the definition of an intrinsic case study, I was not attempting to learn about other cases. Studying this preselected case allowed me to untangle the complexities of the environment, the relationships of the social studies department, and the possible results of the community.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

According to Merriam (1998), data in a study are determined by the researcher and informed by the researcher's theoretical orientation. Therefore, data are not out there to be discovered, but selected and analyzed from a certain

perspective. Recently, social studies educators have applied this idea to how we

have given meaning to the past.

> This suggests that history is not about the past, but rather *about* our ways
> of creating meanings from and about it (Kellner, 1989). As such, a critical
> approach is not simply interested in studying the past… for itself. Rather,
> and in addition to the above, it is interested in how and why particular
> pasts are constructed, legitimated, and disseminated by various discursive
> communities. This means going beyond the study of individual texts or of
> a particular historian to explorations of the relation of the individual
> historical text to the operations of the broader discursive procedures that
> make individual texts acceptable as "history" (de Certeau, 1988).
> (emphasis in original, Segall, 2010, pg. 129)

My aim was to gain insights about the nature of a community of

congruence, and I chose methods that would allow me to collect this type of data.

A case study is useful when trying to capture the complexities of a system, while

considering the values and attitudes of the participants. Multiple sources of data

are useful when trying to capture the complexities of a system, the attitudes of

participants, the holistic nature of a community of congruence.

I began data collection and analysis at the beginning of the fall semester of

2011. During my first face-to-face meeting with the participants, I scheduled

subsequent interviews and observations. This type of research often follows an

ongoing process of planning, acting, fact finding, and analysis (Merriam, 1998;

Tripp, 1990). It is cyclical, conscious, and deliberate. Planning, data collection,

and analysis were interconnected and overlapping, even though I eventually

explain them in a linear way.

Interviews

Merriam (1998) suggests using interviews as data-collection sources when hoping to understand perceptions, experiences, or large amounts of information that would otherwise be difficult to compile. Interviews allowed participants to discuss feelings, beliefs, and values. Methods that objectified my participants, or attempted to unnecessarily reduce them, would have been incongruent with my philosophical framework and the larger purposes for the study.

Semistructured interviews allow participants and researchers to dialogue about issues that arise naturally. According to Merriam (1998), semistructured interviews are useful when specific information is desired, but they are a format in which the researcher can participate. A holistic approach was desirable in order to gain insight into the lives of the participants, including their background experiences, home lives, and work experiences outside teaching.

This community has come together in a specialized way; therefore, it was useful to understand the events that led them to seek these particular types of relationships. Because interviews are a way to learn about information and events that have already occurred, I decided interviews were a relevant method of data collection for the study. As I composed a list of interview questions related to the purpose of the study, I used open-ended items that could be rearranged or elaborated based on the participants' responses. Questions included on my interview guide were:

- What made you want to become a teacher? What made you want to teach secondary social studies?

- Has anything in your life helped shape your current philosophy of teaching and learning or your purpose for education in general?
- Were the people in your life supportive of your decision to become a teacher? Are the people that are in your life now supportive of your teaching career?
- How long have you been at this school, and have you worked at any other schools before this? How are they different or the same?
- How would you describe the school in which you work? Are your administrators supportive? Is there collaboration between departments?
- How long have you been here, and how would you describe your social studies department during that time? How has it changed since then?
- Currently, who are you as a department? Would you define any in your department as taking leading or subservient roles? Have those roles evolved?
- In your teaching philosophy, who in your department would you consider to be similar to you? Do you discuss your teaching goals, purposes, or philosophies often with these people? Where would these discussions take place? What type of discussions do you find this group having?
- What prevents you from teaching in the way you want?
- What are things that contribute to you being able to teach in a way that is consistent with your beliefs about the best teaching and learning philosophies?

The interviews were conducted at Truman High School because it was convenient and comfortable for the participants. I interviewed eight individuals independently, and the remaining six were questioned in two group interviews consisting of three participants each. For any session lasting more than one hour, I scheduled a second appointment to finish the interview. I worked to maximize my participants' cooperation and thoughtfulness.

Each interview was transcribed and coded in the order in which they occurred. New questions emerged from the coding and were incorporated into the next interviews. Because I conducted interviews throughout the study, I scheduled

follow-up meetings or asked questions informally when I needed to clarify my

perceptions.

Observations

A case is better understood in the context it occupies so the researcher can

gain insights into the *particularities* of the environmental influences (Stake, 1995).

According to Merriam (1998), a case "offers a firsthand account of the situation

under study and, when combined with interviewing and document analysis,

allows for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated" (p. 111).

These descriptions are consistent with my goals for the study.

Part of the purpose of a community of congruence is to offer mutual

support in an effort to develop a shared vision. I used the following list, drawn

from Merriam (1998, p. 158), to guide possible observations relative to this

purpose:

- *Physical setting*: What is the physical environment like? What is the context? What kinds of behaviors are encouraged by the setting? How is space allocated? What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting?
- *Participants*: Who is in the scene, how many people, and their roles. What brings them together? Who is allowed here? Who is not here who would be expected to be here? What are characteristics of the participants?
- *Activities and interactions*: What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? How do the people interact with the activity and with one another? How are people and activities connected or interrelated? What norms or rules structure the activities and interactions? When did the activity begin and end? Is it typical? What is the content of conversations? Who speaks to whom?
- *Subtle factors*: What is *not* happening? Is there symbolic meaning in activities or language? Is there any nonverbal communication?

Specifically, I observed participants in their natural settings over a 16-week period. I observed two formal meetings, including a grade-level subject-area meeting and a vertical advanced-placement meeting. I was in the building frequently to supervise three secondary social studies interns placed in the department. Therefore, I was also able to observe whether the participants' relationships extended beyond the department.

I took field notes each visit based on direct experiences and my perceptions of my surroundings. I tape recorded formal and informal dialogue that occurred and, after each observation, transcribed my audio recordings and organized the data based on observation dates.

Documentation

Documents include "a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand" (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). These include public records, personal documents, artifacts, physical materials, and researcher-generated documents. Unlike interviewing and observation, documents may not always specifically address the research question (Merriam, 1998).

I collected many documents during the semester, including e-mail correspondences among participants, photographs, professional-development agendas, handouts given to participants during observations, resources provided by the district, and papers of participants who had written teacher research reports or personal philosophy papers. I used these documents to help clarify my understanding of participants or corroborate preliminary findings.

Data Analysis

Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed throughout the

semester. To analyze data, I used a process called open coding, which has been

defined as "a procedure that disaggregates the data (e.g., transcripts of

observations, field notes), breaks them down into manageable segments, and

identifies or names those segments" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 32). Transcribing the

interviews after each session allowed me to identify categories. I assigned

descriptive words to segments of data and wrote them in the margins. These were

some initial categories after the first round of interviews:

- banana time/carnivalesque
- natural
- uncoerced
- grassroots
- coping
- adaptive
- strong leadership
- multifaceted
- autonomous
- generous
- pet projects
- critical inquiry
- strong leadership
- stemming from others
- trust
- qualified
- pressure

I organized the data based on observation dates. Later, I highlighted

reoccurring categories, or themes, with the same color. I continuously reflected on

the available data to identify emerging themes. The constant comparative method

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967) allowed me to be aware of consistencies and

inconsistencies among situations, participants, and developing themes. After the

semester was complete, I engaged in one additional individual interview with

Laura to reinforce or dismiss some of the themes.

Qualitative studies rely upon rich, thick descriptions during observations.

Each formal observation was recorded and transcribed, and informal observations

were transcribed based upon descriptive notes. I transcribed direct statements, but

also interpreted what I thought the participants were saying, feeling, or doing.

After transcribing, I reread previous transcriptions to compare and contrast data

that recurred or appeared consistently. As with the interviews, I used open coding

to break down and name the segments (Schwandt, 2001). This helped me create

and narrow potential categories.

The coding of documents initially consisted of categorizing small

segments of data similar to how I coded the observations and interviews. I later

used a process called constant comparison to analyze documents in order to

reinforce or complicate preliminary findings. After early coding resulted in the

development of categories, more documents were gathered specifically focusing

on those categories and their properties. This cyclical process was repeated

several times, and I continued to gather data through field notes, observations, and

interviews.

Trying to Ensure Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a term often associated with a positivist research

paradigm. I was not interested in producing objective, generalizable data, but I

was concerned with representing participants and events ethically and accurately. To do this, I engaged in critical self-reflection regarding my role in the study, practiced the triangulation of data, and implemented a process known as member checking (Merriam, 1998).

Some research is concerned with researcher positionality (Tripp, 1990). Tripp (1990) said, "Our consciousness and values have to do with what are usually called problematics, namely, the viewpoints that make certain things a problem for us" (p. 162). Consequently, I continued to acknowledge and reflect on my beliefs to account for how my viewpoint affected my perceptions of the data. I also attempted to be self-reflective regarding my belief that there are power differentials occurring in society based on gender, race, and socioeconomic status, because I knew this belief would affect how I categorized and applied meaning to my observations.

Tensions can exist between researchers and participants due to the structural system of observer versus observed (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). I attempted to alleviate some of these tensions by building trust in the community, depending on previously established relationships, and reflecting on my positionality. I scheduled time after each observation or interview to question my assumptions about the participants' experiences and to assess the effects my presence may have had on their environment (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

In many types of qualitative research, the researcher is encouraged to remain authentic within their researcher role. I did not attempt to remain objective

or hide my personality due to our previously established relationships. I shared some commonalities with my participants because I had attended graduate school, taught with, and shared beliefs with some of them. The participants knew I was studying their department for the purpose of gaining insights about who they were as individuals and as a group. I did not use the term community of congruence, because at least two of the participants had read Palmer (2007), and I did not want to influence the ways they named their thoughts and activities.

Member-checking has been said to be "more of an ethical act than an epistemological one…simply the civil thing to do for those who have given their time and access to their lives…the courtesy of knowing what the inquirer has to say about them" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 156). Additionally, according to Stake (1995), "although it is they who are studied, they regularly provide critical observations and interpretations, sometimes making suggestions as to sources of data" (p. 115). I used e-mail correspondence and informal questioning for the purpose of member-checking, which served each of the purposes listed above.

I regularly asked informal clarification questions of Marie and Laura because I valued their insights and I saw them often. I also asked eight of the participants to check some of my preliminary findings (see Appendix A). The responses were thoughtful, and I felt they helped me better understand some aspects of the community. In particular, I wanted their opinions on a preliminary finding that I ultimately excluded from the final draft. A portion of the email

exchange is included below. The first section is the message I sent to the

participants:

> Okay, the last section might sound a little weird to you, but after
> describing the ways in which the department has evolved organically,
> from the ground-up, has a humanitarian/critical orientation, can adapt
> within the system, blah blah blah—I still felt something was missing that
> describes who you are as a group.
>
> An idea I am playing with is the ways in which you joke around with each
> other. In the academic literature, an extreme version of this has been
> referred to as carnivalesque behavior—meaning that the "common" people
> engage in inappropriate behavior/jokes/etc. in order to cope within the
> system or "make light" of a situation that would otherwise be dogmatic.
> It's a way to stand up or talk back to the system by not letting it dictate
> your behavior—and ultimately this has the result of regeneration. Feel free
> to tell me if I'm way off here, but if you *do have examples* of that I would
> appreciate them.

Laura was the first to respond:

> First of all, I think carnivalesque is a PERFECT way to describe what we
> do "off the record" in our emails, meetings, etc. There's definitely a need
> to diffuse the difficulties of working in public schools (and all it's
> attendant stressors) and our personal approaches to that do tend to draw
> our "core" together. I've never heard that term used in this way before and
> I think it fits just right to describe us.

James, a teacher who had been at Truman High School from its inception, with

more conservative political beliefs than many in the group, wrote the following:

> Carnivalesque behavior, I really like that term! I know from my work with
> various police departments as the Mental Health member of hostage
> negotiations teams that it is very common for law enforcement to have a
> very dark coping skill which involves the use of inappropriate nicknames
> for certain types of crime scenes and victims as a way of buffering the
> reality of the unimaginable. It has been my observations that teachers in
> general, not just within our department, have a unique ability to sift
> through the latest educational insight de jour passed down the chain of
> command from those who haven't been in the classroom for years and
> reinterpret that into applicable additions to their arsenal of effective
> teaching techniques. I think that a certain amount of satirical jocularity

provides the lubricant that allows this effort to experience as little friction as possible. Perhaps those would be considered inappropriate comments if they were to be made to administration or certainly to our students but they seem perfectly understandable and cathartic between our fellow teachers.

These participants, along with others, offered positive feedback. They corroborated some of my preliminary findings and provided specific details regarding when such events had occurred. In addition to these valuable comments by Laura and James, others (who will be introduced in Chapter Four) helped me understand further complexities I had not yet considered.

Merriam (1998) argues that "triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity…especially in terms of using multiple methods of data collection and analysis" (p. 207). In this study, I triangulated the data by collecting and comparing information based on three types of methods: interviews, observations, and documents. Chapter 4 will reveal the findings that emerged through the use of these methods of data collection, analysis, and trustworthiness checking.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

A lack of community in my work setting led me to search elsewhere for other educators who were engaging in thoughtful, ongoing dialogue regarding educational issues. As mentioned in Chapter 3, I became part of one such community in graduate school and began to notice how the community kept expanding to include others interested in equity education. Fellow graduate students with whom I developed relationships taught in the social studies department at Truman High School. As I came into contact with more of the teachers in their department, their passion, shared vision, and delight in their work inspired me. It seemed that part of their job satisfaction was due to their close relationships with one another. I sought to understand how their community contributed to fulfilling their goals as educators and, ultimately, to sustaining their continued job satisfaction.

Specifically, I asked, "What is the nature of a community of congruence among teachers in a secondary social studies department?" What I found was that this community was evolutionary, interdependent, and politically sophisticated. During the study, it was difficult to determine how much of their evolution, interdependence, and political sophistication was due to agency as opposed to intuition. For example, many participants were very knowledgeable about best teaching practices and theories regarding education, and they were articulate about intentionally implementing these ideas and approaches. However, much of

what they did seemed to be intrinsic, part of a set of natural instincts not able to be reduced to technique. I recognize that these ideas are false dichotomies and probably happened simultaneously; therefore, in this chapter I attempted to illustrate the complexity of *both* intentionality *and* intuition when participants seemed to rely on one more than the other.

The Evolution

The first finding was that this community did not form at once in a linear manner but evolved over time. The participants took advantage of opportunities to create change after they identified a desire for greater instructional leadership and collaboration. They strategically used tools at their disposal to build quality relationships despite conflicts that arose.

In a group interview, Susan, Marie, and Laura described how the climate had been 12 years earlier. The previous head of the social studies department, a woman named Cheryl, had set the tone for the department with her leadership style. Laura started by cautiously saying, "Well, she was *older*, and she retired three years into me being here, and I got her position." They all paused, and Laura said, "She was really well educated." Susan, a former student of Cheryl's, added:

> Oh, she was smart, and she knew her history, and she was endearing for a lot of reasons. Like, she used to make up nicknames for her students. There were a group of girls that sat at my table, and she called each one of us Mush.

Laura agreed and added, "She was just super-traditional when it came to instruction, so we didn't do anything at all as a department that was remotely—"

She paused, then said, "and the problem was that we also weren't getting instructional leadership from the admin building, so, I mean, you were fending for yourself." Everyone nodded in agreement, and Marie added, "You might collaborate with the person down the hall, and that was really it before Laura took over as the department head."

According to participants, Cheryl did not provide opportunities to foster collaboration or teaching and learning improvement. To illustrate a lack of instructional leadership, Laura described an example of a previous department meeting. After establishing that this was not an attack on Cheryl *as a person*, Laura unapologetically described Cheryl's traditional teaching style and how it was manifested in department meetings.

> It was very much, I mean, I remember those department meetings being—it was a nightmare. She was a very traditional teacher; she read to high school kids out of the textbook. [They would] all read together out loud, *seniors*, taking world history. And she made fun of me for bringing color pages for their notebooks, and she thought I was too "junior high." So the department meetings were *her* at the beginning of the year. And it was Susan, Mark, Marie, and I, 15 guys, and a lot of them were coaches—we are old and a lot of them have retired or been fired—and it was like a junior high classroom in our department meetings. She would sit at the front, on her podium, and read to us what our daily class counts were. That was our department meeting: "Smith: 1st hour, 22 students. 2nd hour, 23 students. 3rd hour, 21 students." And the boys would sit in the back of the class and holler, and she would get mad and shush them like you would in a classroom, and it was so uncomfortable. I remember sitting there and (thinking) "this is such a waste of time." And I was so mad at those guys because it made the recitation of our class sizes even longer. I mean, there was never any type of instructional leadership.

In this conversation and others, Susan, Marie, and other participants expressed their desire for instructional leadership and collaboration.

Opportunities for Change

Part of the evolution of the department was due to participants' ability to take advantage of opportunities for change. A few moments in particular allowed for circumstances to change dramatically. Most participants identified Laura's appointment as department chair as being the initial event that allowed the department to behave differently.

A few years before Cheryl retired, Mr. Garrett, the principal, approached Laura about eventually becoming the head of the social studies department. When Cheryl retired, Laura accepted. Contrary to Cheryl's approach, Laura used department meetings as an opportunity to foster dialogue. She explained by saying, "I am not their administrator. It's not this adversarial thing, because that automatically separates us from each other."

Participants agreed that Laura did not view her position as hierarchical, and Mike illustrated this by recalling how she began her first meeting as the department head. According to Mike, Laura said that "we were a team, and she wasn't our boss (and did not have) any authority over us." Laura did not want to stand at the front of the class and recite class sizes, but the larger issue involved her view of the relationship between herself, as department head, and her peers. This new relationship continued the evolution that had already begun among some in the community.

The department continued to develop and foster the type of community many participants desired. Required department meetings previously spent on the

recitation of class sizes were now used to develop and articulate a department

vision, share resources and teaching materials, and outline plans for improvement.

Laura focused their planning efforts by having smaller, subject-area meetings,

when possible. She did not spend whole-group meeting time to share

"housekeeping" instructions or information that could be disseminated over

e-mail.

Mike liked these aspects of Laura's leadership style and said they saved a

lot of time. He said Laura has been known for her "efficiency at pushing

information out to us" instead of calling meetings for those purposes. Several

participants expressed their appreciation for the way Laura respected their time by

using her position to make their jobs easier.

As in any system, change in leadership can be met with opposition, and

this can cause a period of unrest. This happened when Paul, a coworker, felt that

he was better suited than Laura for the department head position. Paul notified Mr.

Garrett of his interest in the position, and Mr. Garrett decided to conduct brief

interviews with both candidates. After deciding to give the position to Laura, Mr.

Garrett, perhaps erroneously, informed Paul through a brief e-mail message.

Laura described Paul as being "pissed enough that he didn't want to speak to me.

It wasn't amicable at all. It was horrible." She further explained how Paul reacted

in one department meeting:

> He was really angry the first couple department meetings. Because I
> always introduce with some sort of—we don't spend the whole time
> talking about some type of instructional thing—but the first one was about

assessments. "What type of assessments are you using?" And I had everybody bring in one of their own assessments, and we talked about formative assessments, cumulative assessments, and higher-order thinking assessments. And I had everyone trade their tests with each other—not to edit each other's work, but for the person to add a higher-order thinking question to their existing assessment. So it wasn't like someone was editing your work. And Paul would raise his hand in the middle of a question about assessments and yell, "I THINK YOU HAVE THIS WRONG" about someone's assessment question on their test. And I mean, it was, like, crazy-pants oppositional. It's like, it was the kind of crazy that I was like, "I don't even know how to respond to that."

The conflict continued to escalate while Laura was on maternity leave during the end of that year. Paul went to Mr. Garrett and told him that Laura had done a "piss-poor job" as the head of the department. A coworker, who had been at Truman High School from the beginning but has since retired, told Laura that Paul was spreading rumors while she was gone. This coworker told Laura she deserved to know about Paul's escalating behavior and how Mr. Garrett, the principal, had approached him the coworker ask about Laura's performance. Mr. Garrett also told Laura that he had informally inquired about her position while she had been gone, and that the department had said "to a man" that they have never had "more useful meetings."

Laura told me that until Paul contacted the district social studies coordinator, she had not been overly concerned by his behavior. This was because Laura and Mr. Garrett had established a positive working relationship. This changed when Paul told the district social studies coordinator, reputed to be wary of the political ideologies of the teachers in Truman's social studies department, that Laura had not been providing curriculum guides.

Laura attempted to stop the division and unrest in the department, even

though she stated that she was uncomfortable with direct confrontation:

> So I told [Paul] I wanted to have a meeting with him about some of the
> things he's been doing and our professional relationship. This was on a
> Monday, and he said, "The earliest time I have for you is after bus duty on
> Friday afternoon." And I was like "Oh, hell no." So I said, "I will arrange
> for someone to cover my class tomorrow and come meet with you on your
> plan tomorrow because this won't wait until Friday." So I went into his
> room and said, "I want to know what your problems are specifically with
> me." … He was immediately—and I had my pencil because I was going to
> record it, and I said, "I know you have been telling people around here
> what you think the problems are, and I want to hear it straight from you."
> And he was immediately like, "Oh, well, I don't really know what you
> mean," and then he was, "You don't sponsor any clubs around here." And
> I said, "Like the Asian club and the Model UN?" and all these other things
> I was involved in at the time and it was just (he thought that) I shouldn't
> be the department head because I hadn't taught every single subject within
> the department, which he hadn't either. None of it made sense. It was like
> talking to a mentally ill person, and I said, "I'm just letting you know that
> I called the union and said that I have a coworker that is causing problems
> with the administration." Not that I thought Mr. Garrett would buy into it,
> but the district curriculum coordinator is a different story. So I said, "With
> me, you need to come talk to me out of professional courtesy, because this
> can't stand anymore." And he was like, "Oh, okay, I didn't mean it."

Although Laura expressed discomfort due to conflicts with colleagues like Paul,

she expressed appreciation for the support she received from others, like Marie,

Susan, and Mike. This support and reliance on one another helped further develop

the community.

Strategic Capacity

Another aspect of this community's evolution was their ability to be

strategic. During the hiring process, Laura and others were advocates for teachers

who shared their vision for schooling. Also, several coaches in the social studies

department asked to be moved to the "business hall." During the next three years,

the population of teachers shifted dramatically. Susan said, "Two of the weakest

teachers moved to the business hall, two of the old timers retired, one teacher was

fired, and one moved to the junior high for a coaching position." The six open

positions were filled as strategically as possible by hiring such teachers as David,

Bailey, and Marie, who was Laura's student teacher and long-term substitute

during her maternity leave. These hires added to the formation of a core group

who shared similar teaching philosophies, desired collaborative environments,

and helped support one another.

　　Laura attempted to give Mr. Garrett credit for the quality of teachers in the

social studies department, saying he had done a "really good job of hiring people."

However, Marie countered by saying to Laura, "You're pretty proactive when you

can be." Laura acknowledged this, describing how she attempted to influence Mr.

Garrett:

> I always feed him names when I can or make sure our favorite student
> teachers have a lot of face time. But I also talk to him a lot about hiring
> non-coaches whenever possible. Not because I necessarily have this
> problem with coaches, but even if they're great teachers as well, their
> schedules are so odd that you can't have a meeting. So other departments
> meet after school, and if we're going to have a meeting, we have to get
> here at 7:00 a.m., and we have teachers who teach zero hour (an early
> morning course, beginning at 8:00 a.m.), and it doesn't matter which
> semester you do it. It's a little better at our school than at other schools
> that have an even greater concentration of coaches. And even the coaches
> he has to hire have been pretty good. Like this one guy he was going to
> hire, he said he "just couldn't do it to me," and he put him in the business
> hall.

Mr. Garrett's placement of a newly hired coach in the business hall suggested that Laura's strategies were working, and that he trusted her ability to recognize good teachers.

According to several participants, the department has been favorably influenced by the lack of coaches. Almost all faculty mentioned the present-day lack of coaches in their department as a positive thing, but not because of assertions that coaches do not teach (as one might suspect). They acknowledged the long, hard hours that coaches maintain and the importance of their positions for many students who connect to and need mentors in nonacademic settings. Marie mentioned coaches as being one of the more marginalized groups within the teaching profession because of their long hours and low pay. She said,

> Oftentimes they will have stayed up until 2:00 a.m. to watch replay videos and strategize for this week's game, and, I mean, they aren't getting paid for any of this. They do it for intrinsic purposes. They love the athletes, and they love the sport, and with those hours, when would you find the time to make up an awesome lesson plan?

When the participants mentioned coaches in the department, Bailey pointed out their teaching abilities:

> One thing that is very shocking about this department is that there are not a lot of coaches, being that it is a social studies department, but I think that a lot of the coaches do take an interest in teaching and try to do it well. Especially with a school that is 6A and very focused on athletics as well, we're very competitive in sports, and something I found that is very interesting, too, is that I don't think it's just a department thing; I think it is a school wide attitude.

Interdependence

The second major finding regarding the nature of the community of

teachers I chose to study was that they formed a shared sense of interdependence.

The interdependence developed as participants expressed mutual appreciation for

individual strengths, honored one another by supporting individual endeavors, and

relied on supportive relationships. Their interdependence was furthered by

forming a shared sense of identity that was focused on quality instruction.

Working relationships were participant driven and were based primarily on the

desire for students to learn, rather than on other factors such as gender or role

commonalities. This focus united coaching and non-coaching, male and female,

and progressive and traditional teachers. Eventually, within the larger department

community, a sort of core group formed that shared a greater sense of

interdependence based on similar purposes for education.

Mike described how the evolution of the department continued as the

community formed a shared sense of interdependence:

> At one point, there was a boy group and a girl group, but that has broken
> down. A lot of that has changed over the years. When I came in, that was
> already established. It was the coaching world versus the non-coaching
> world, and that slowly changed. And I think we're one of the departments
> with the least amount of coaches. When I tell people I'm a U.S. history
> teacher and I don't coach, they're shocked because they always have that
> stereotype. I sponsor other stuff to get around that, but we do mingle boys
> and girls.

Participants seemed to be saying that artificial boundaries based on factors such as

gender dissolved as relationships developed based on the desire to improve

teaching and learning. When a new high school was built in the district, more than half of the teachers in other departments transferred to that school. Mike recalled that this did not happen in the social studies department: "When the schools split up, our department didn't leap ship. Only one or two [actually, three out of 21] left, because they were moving up in positions, but the rest stayed." Marie confirmed the low turnover rate in the social studies department and compared it with the turnover rate of Truman High School's mathematics department.

> It's weird because the math department, in their whole department [20 teachers total], there are only three teachers that are still here (from) before the split, which was 4 years ago. So [they are] close to the same department size we (are), and only three were here before that switch. And in our department, we've only gotten three new people since then. Everybody else has been here before. This year, when David and another teacher left, it's the first time we've had a teacher leave since maybe that sophomore split, and I think that was because of coaching. And I feel like the core of it has stayed so much the same that it hasn't made that big of an impact on the department.

The interdependence that existed, as well as a lack of competition within the group, may have been reasons that the turnover rate was low.

During one observation, all of the U.S. history teachers had combined their classes in the auditorium because other grades needed their rooms for testing. Marie used the situation as an example to describe the positive relationships within the community. She said, "I don't feel like we have much competition within the department. It's stuff like this. [The administrators] put the whole department together because they figure we could find something to work together on."

Jason, a first-year teacher at the school, had been waiting for a position to open for years. He attributed teacher satisfaction and a low turnover rate to the types of students that attended the school:

> This social studies department in general is pretty special when compared to my other group. A lot of the teachers have been here awhile, and I think that speaks to the kids, to the school, and what the school in general does. What kind of test scores the school puts out. The teachers stay around. There isn't a high turnover rate. Teachers have been really good and willing to help me in my transition. I'm excited about moving here.

Other participants acknowledged that the student population, their families, and resources of the school contributed to their perceived success. Marie said her test scores validated her teaching even though she did not necessarily believe there was a direct correlation:

> (T)he kids that go to school here are middle class to upper middle class and have these supportive families, and we have this sweet school building with all of these resources, so they're going to do fine on the test. So I get good test scores, which validate me being able to teach the way I want to teach even though there may not be a correlation. Because when I'm pulling a 93% pass rate, no one is going to question what I'm doing too much.

Participants recognized that their high test scores contributed to their being able to teach in the way they desired.

Mike described the inevitability of the test scores eventually going down and alluded to the fact that this may cause some unrest when it happens.

> We're 94 to 95% passing on the [End of Instruction assessment] EOI, so at some point, we will go down. So we'll see what happens then. It will be interesting the first year that our scores go down, because they will.

When discussing achievement, participants freely credited one another and the student population. Mike said, "Our test scores, since they have counted, have

been really good. It's due to the teachers before me and the parents and students we're getting."

Similarly, Laura described her relief at having Marie, Mike, Susan, and David teaching Advanced Placement and subject areas with EOI assessments. She said she could trust they were "100% on track." Other departments were often curious about their success and frequently asked Laura to describe her secret. She said, "Everyone is like, 'Oh, my God, your scores have gone through the roof in the last 10 years. What are you doing?' And I'm like, 'I put good people on it.' No big secret." The participants acknowledged the role that Laura had in the development of their interdependence.

I interviewed others in the department who were more independent and not necessarily collaborating as regularly as the others. One such interview included James, one of three remaining teachers who had been in the social studies department since the school opened. Even though he did not regularly participate in collaborative activities, he recognized Laura's leadership abilities and the role she played in facilitating the department's autonomy.

> [We are] more like a family system in that teachers can easily feel as if they are the teenager who is on the verge of getting grounded or as one who is entering adulthood and is finally being treated as such. What makes the difference? The mindset, skill set, and perspective of the teacher. What does Laura do to promote the better of those? She is like the child advocate who rewords the edu-speak of administration so that the intent is there without the punitive tone, mediates in a way that allows us to feel autonomy even when operating under strict guidelines, and finally she lets us be who we are.

Although the group was interdependent, as James described, it was also mutually affirming. For the most part, the participants expressed that they appreciated individual differences and personalities. Marie agreed that they were able to feel autonomous as well as supported when she said, "Everyone knows that they're bringing something to the table." This suggested a mutual appreciation that honored the individual person while strengthening existing relationships.

Participant Directed

Another component of the community's interdependence was that it was participant directed rather than forced from outside the group. The level of collaboration that was happening due to the increased amount of time together caused Marie and Mike to describe some in the department as "almost team teachers." In the beginning, teachers in the department met often, but over time, this occurred less frequently. Collaboration happened more regularly, and formal meetings were no longer needed for those purposes. Marie described how relationships also became less formal as the group continued to develop. Over time, teachers no longer met in their subject areas as often because they already knew what the other teachers were using and how they were teaching similar concepts.

The participants distinguished the differences between mandated, top-down meetings and those that they had on their own accord. Because they no longer needed to collaborate as often in their subject areas, participants said they shared new information in the hallway or through e-mail. For example, Marie said

that their department was not "overinundated by useless meetings," and Laura

"only scheduled them when they were necessary." Mike said that administrators

could not force teachers to collaborate by making them spend time together.

Participants believed that collaboration happened when teachers were open about

their teaching practices and wanted each other to succeed. Mike said:

> Some departments have regular meetings, but when we exchange ideas, it
> is in the hallways, over emails. There isn't this idea that I don't want you
> to know how I teach. Especially in the tested subjects, we ask each other
> how you get your score so high in that subject area, and then their method
> might not work for you, but you can tweak it a little so it will.

Focus on Quality

The community's interdependence seemed to be strengthened by their

focus on quality teaching and learning. Part of this focus might have been due to

the six participants, Laura, Marie, Susan, Bailey, Mike, and David, who had

extensive opportunities outside normal teaching hours for ongoing learning. These

six teachers are highly educated in traditional and nontraditional styles of teaching.

Each has a master's degree in education, and Marie and David have finished

coursework for their doctoral degrees. Laura, Marie, and David have had

extensive experience teaching university preservice teachers, and Laura is a

master-level teacher for the Red Cross Organization. Susan works for the Jewish

Federation, Bailey is involved in local lesbian–gay–bisexual–transsexual–queer

organizations, and most have been active in some type of humanitarian

organization since they have been teaching. These affiliations have facilitated

their personal ongoing learning and almost certainly contributed to the focus they have in their classrooms.

I witnessed their focus on quality instruction through a range of e-mail messages in which teachers demonstrated the sharing of resources, curriculum, and pertinent information. Many e-mails consisted of a few informal sentences describing a curricular resource attachment. For example, Laura sent an attachment along with an email saying, "Please find attached a cool discussion tool that can be used to foster **cooperative controversy** in the classroom (see the Appendix B)! I am totally going to use this one in class!". She added an ecological democracy presentation on Prezi with a message stating, "I made a quick Prezi ecodemo … enjoy!"

Other e-mail messages solicited help with aspects of the curriculum. For example, Marie asked fellow U. S. history subject-area teachers if they had an outline for important Civil War battles or any new resources for teaching those battles "because she was sick of lecturing." Throughout the remainder of that day, a thread of e-mails was generated that included Civil War resources and jokes. More formal e-mails included new focus areas established by scores from the 11th-grade U.S. History EOI test results (see Appendix C). Laura included where the focus areas connected to 9th-grade Oklahoma History and 10th-grade World History curricula, and she asked teachers to emphasize those points when appropriate. Laura ended her e-mail message with this bolded and underlined statement: "**<u>Again, our hope is that by targeting these areas in other</u>**

curricular areas, we will see gains in the 11th grade scores." Participants

expressed their appreciation for the information and resources shared by e-mail.

Laura observed that whole-group meetings could now be aimed at

clarifying educational goals and purposes because collaboration was happening

more regularly and productively in smaller, subject-area groups. When the

community held whole-group meetings, Laura thought it was important for them

to engage in some sort of dialogue about their purposes for education. She said

preexisting time pressures placed on teachers made her wary of requiring more

than one mandatory whole-group meeting per year:

> I don't want to waste anyone's time in department meetings, and I don't
> want to give anyone extra work, but I want when we do meet as a whole
> group, I want to foster a climate where we can have conversations about
> things that are really important.

One article used to foster dialogue was entitled "Twenty Reasons Why Football Is

Better than High School" (see Appendix D), and Laura described how she used it

in an attempt to help herself and others rethink some of the ways we structure

school.

> And it was just this commentary on why it is so difficult to get kids to love
> school when they love extracurricular stuff so much. So what is it about
> football that motivates kids in a way that school doesn't? (The author)
> wasn't slamming school; he was just trying to illustrate some things we
> need to rethink, and maybe some ways we could do school to make it
> more appealing to kids. So I had everyone read it beforehand; it was short,
> like two pages or something, and then in groups we made a chart of things
> we couldn't control. Like things he said we couldn't change, like, one of
> them was when you schedule extracurricular activities. Well, we can't
> change that within the course of our school day, so we made a chart of
> things we could or couldn't control. The things we *could* control, we
> discussed some subject-specific things we could do and how to implement

them in the classroom, and I don't remember what else; we made post-it notes or exchanged lesson plans or something.

Even though the department had made tremendous gains in communication and collaboration, Laura explained how the interdependence of the department was complex. She described a conflict that arose due to the message in the "Twenty Reasons Why Football Is Better than High School" article:

> He came to me and said that he wasn't going to be there on site-improvement day but that he wanted to give me his response to the reading. And it was this four-page, crazy response. It said, "Dear Herb"—that was the author—"I think you're full of shit" and goes line by line and refutes everything in the article. The article was two pages, and he literally refuted every point the guy made because I guess he felt insulted by it. I was like, "I don't even know what to do with this because he didn't even come to the meeting." Like, it's one thing if he read this and misinterpreted it as some kind of attack on your instruction, which it totally is not. I think he knows better than that because he prides himself on being all challenging to authority and out of the box, and you'd think that would be right up his alley, but he was defending the way we do school. His kids love his class. It's all theater style. So the next day, he was at work and asked how the meeting went, and I said "It went really great. I thought it was a great day. We had a good conversation and then we got to go work in our rooms." And he said, "Well, did my letter help?" And I said, "Not really." And he was like, "Oh, okay." So it was never addressed beyond that point.

This particular article did not seem to inspire interdependence among all, and disagreements among a department of diverse adults can be expected. Despite occasional differences, Laura continued to facilitate dialogue during whole group meetings, and many of the teachers continued to develop meaningful relationships.

Identity Development

The participants agreed that the department had formed an identity. This may have been due to increased collaboration or opportunities to have conversations about shared purposes. For example, Marie said that meetings that were previously spent on a recitation of class sizes were now used to develop and articulate a vision for the department. As a whole group, the department recently reexamined the purposes behind social studies. Marie explained the importance of their first department meeting of this school year:

> One of our first department meetings, we really thought about why we do history, *why*, [and it was] one of the first times we have ever done that, but that's the reason [Laura] said she wanted to do it. Because she said she realized she teaches college classes and talks about it all the time, but once you get into the field, you kind of quit talking about it. So there's that mural in the social studies hall of words we came up with about why we do history. (see Appendix E)

Laura believed that new social norms based on the desire for quality instruction contributed to their ability to teach well. She contrasted this with "how it used to be *cool* to come to work and do nothing" and said, "We still have four or five [teachers] that are lame, but they have to hide their lameness because the standard is so much higher and the climate has so fundamentally changed." Although there seemed to be a low level of intolerance for perceived laziness, participants did not exclude teachers based on this perception.

Laura summarized this by saying, "It's not this adversarial thing. I'm not their administrator. So we just keep giving them good resources and hoping one day they'll use some of it." As James suggested, this statement seemed to capture the way they allowed others to remain autonomous.

As a whole group, participants described their department as "being known for being dedicated and capable." Marie described what she called an inner "core group" as being progressive, but she did not dismiss teachers who taught in more traditional ways:

> Obviously the whole department isn't like this, but we have pretty progressive thinkers, and I think that defines our department a whole lot. We have this *core group* of progressive thinkers who really like to try new things, and then outside of that, we have a group of really good teachers. They may be traditional but *good* teachers, and I think that's part of what makes our department so strong.

Marie analyzed the complexity in the group by describing the differences in their teaching methods. She said Susan's style is "the most student centered and she uses the most projects", Laura is "the most progressive, critical, and able to teach most consistent to her identity." She described Mike as "somewhat more traditional but a really, really good teacher," and acknowledged that out of the progressive group, she "probably lectured the most."

Many factors contribute to the environment of a school or department, and thus to the development of community. Beyond explicit cognitive dimensions of education, social, cultural, emotional, linguistic, historical, and physical factors can also profoundly affect a teaching and learning community. For example, Susan described how someone could deduce a teaching philosophy based on the arrangement of the room;

> Just walk into our rooms, and that will give you some sense of our teaching styles. Some have desks like soldiers, not a sound in the room. But you walk into Marie's room, or Mike's, or Laura's and you've got tables. So clearly the atmosphere is different because you know some type

of collaboration is going on and the students are going to be working together. It's not, I'm standing in the front of the room lecturing, feeding you the information, but I'm guiding you so you can do the learning. But there are definitely different teaching styles.

Laura said the shift from desks to tables signified a "table culture" mentality that reflected a change in the values of the teachers and department as a whole.

> That a lot of us have tables says a lot. That is something that has changed in the last seven or eight years. I begged for tables, and they gave me crappy, square, lunchroom, elementary school tables, and they fell apart. So when I was the department head, I used department money to put tables in teachers' rooms that wanted them. Maybe five of us don't have them. I'm not going to make anybody have tables, but I think the kind of table culture says that you're more about conversations.

According to Laura, the "table culture" signified that teachers were facilitating dialogue and providing a venue where students could explore their own and one another's ideas in a safe space. This culture may have been an extension of the culture of the department because it was clear that participants trusted and valued each other as educational decision-makers, despite differences in their teaching methods.

Core Group

As previously mentioned, there appeared to be a sort of "core group" within the larger departmental community. Although the core group was somewhat fluid, and participants often welcomed others to join, six teachers in particular formed relationships based on similar societal concerns, conceptions of citizenship, and purposes for education (see Figure 2). Part of what fueled this perspective might have been that the six participants, Laura, Marie, Susan, Bailey, Mike, and David, shared many societal and educational concerns, including the

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effects of war and militarism, worker exploitation, racism, sexism, economic

inequalities, unearned privileges, and environmental degradation. I witnessed

many conversations in which participants explored why things are the way they

are in terms of power relationships and issues of equity.

NAME	Subject(s)	Grade(s)	Experience	Interests/Sponsorships
Laura	A.P. U.S. History Global Issues	11th Elective	18 yrs.	Dept. Head; Red Cross; Asian American Sponsor; Masters Degree
Marie	U.S. History Pre-A.P. Oklahoma History	11th 9th	9 yrs.	Anti-Genocide Sponsor; Masters Degree; Finished with Doctoral coursework
Susan	A.P. World History	10th	12 yrs.	Jewish Faith Alliance; President of the Holocaust Museum Education; Masters Degree
Bailey	U.S. History	11th	9 yrs.	Gay Straight Alliance; Masters Degree
David	A.P. Government A.P. Psychology	12th Elective	7 yrs.	Anti-Genocide Sponsor; Masters Degree; Doctoral Degree

Figure 3. A "core" group within the larger social studies community.

Participants also had similar concerns regarding perceived problems in

education. Although they expressed an appreciation for high standards and

accountability, they pointed out problems existing in current curriculum standards.

In a conversation about the amount of learning and forgetting that happened over

a student's lifetime, David said, "If we covered less material in more depth,

students wouldn't forget everything from year to year. They forget because it's

irrelevant, and we just skim over it because we're not allowed the time to go

deeper." He continued by insisting,

> The people that make the most decisions in the district are disconnected
> from what's happening in the classroom. The experts in social studies,
> oftentimes the teachers, are rarely consulted on what should be learned.
> It's all hierarchical. It comes from above. Some of the people on the top
> aren't as knowledgeable as the people having to take the orders. In a
> perfect world, teachers would have more input on what they teach. We are
> told what to teach, and we have little room to think about how. In most
> subjects, you're not allowed to go into much depth because of the amount
> of breadth you are supposed to cover.

Others agreed that top-down curriculum decisions are problematic. Participants

recognized the limitations of the standardized test even though they knew their

high scores contributed to their ability to teach in ways they desired. Mike said:

> Yes, I want my students to have a high pass rate, but what I really want is
> for my students to learn and to want to keep learning 'cause that pass score
> is arbitrary at some point. Is it all memorization? Do they even know it?

Marie explained the realities of a tested, top-down curriculum that focused

on breadth rather than depth. All 11th-grade students in Oklahoma are required to

take a U.S. history course with an EOI test. She started by showing me one tested

Priority Academic Student Skill (PASS) she is required to teach. It read:

Evaluate the rise of the Progressive Movement in <u>relation</u> to political changes at

the national and state levels (e.g., workers' compensation, the direct primary,

initiative petition, referendum, and recall). Marie said there was nothing wrong

with this objective, and she liked teaching about the Progressive Movement. The

relation part seemed to become nonexistent when she explained that this one

PASS skill came with a "checklist" that included some major themes that might

be on the test regarding the Progressive Movement:

- effects of the "muckrakers" and reform movements (women's suffrage and temperance)
- reforms such as child labor, wages, working conditions, trade, monopolies, taxation, and the money supply
- rise of Progressive Movement
- conservation of natural resources
- voting reforms
- workplace protection
- progressive causes
- increased political strength of third parties

The themes on the above checklist were further reduced to vocabulary that might

be associated with these ideas. Therefore, Marie was also expected to "cover"

these 24 items:

- Progressive Movement
- Muckrakers
- Upton Sinclair/The Jungle
- Social Gospel
- Settlement House
- Jane Adams/Hull House
- 17th Amendment
- Susan B. Anthony/Elizabeth Cady Stanton
- 19th Amendment
- Niagara Movement
- NAACP
- Theodore Roosevelt/Square Deal
- Trust busting
- Hepburn Act
- Meat Inspection Act
- Pure Food and Drug Act
- William H. Taft
- New Nationalism
- Bull Moose Party/Progressive Party
- Woodrow Wilson
- Federal Trade Commission
- Clayton Antitrust Act

- 16th Amendment
- Federal Reserve Act

The futility of this effort became apparent when she showed me the EOI blueprint.

This PASS objective, with eight related topics and 24 vocabulary terms, was

projected to be 4% of the test. It did not even merit its own correlated title; rather,

it was included within a larger objective. Therefore, Marie needed to "cover" the

Progressive Movement adequately enough for students to learn at least 32 related

concepts in the event that there *might* be three questions on the test pertaining to

that information (see Appendix F).

The mechanistic ways in which the participants felt forced to teach,

combined with the pressures of scoring well on the tests, helped them clarify their

goal to implement a "holistic curriculum." In order to facilitate a more holistic

curriculum while also helping students internalize particular concepts, members

of this community focused on promoting active citizenship. Marie said, "I think

we have the same conception of citizenship, so the driving goals are really similar,

even though maybe our teaching methods aren't exactly the same." Laura agreed

that their goals were similar regarding social studies education: "I think for most

of us, we see social studies instruction as a tool that can help us accomplish

political, economic, and social change." Similarly, Bailey talked about the role of

empathy in promoting active citizenship.

> I have many views and theories about the success of our department, and I
> think it all boils down to empathy. There is a debate in education on how
> empathy is acquired, and I think we're addressing it head on from several
> sides. If kids can empathize, then education in the social studies comes

easy because they have open minds and concern about why things happen and how they can be changed. Active citizenry is our goal, and empathy is the answer.

The participants' philosophies regarding education were highly consistent with their teaching practices. They attempted to make the curriculum relevant and meaningful by connecting it to the student and larger society. For example, David said, "In real life, we don't separate our learning into categories. It's an industrial phenomenon to break learning into separate pieces." He came back to this point later in saying:

> What's *natural* is for students to work things out together in relation to each other. What is *unnatural* is the random curriculum and the shoving them into classes for 50-minute periods where nothing is connected and real lives aren't validated.

He described the uselessness of a mechanistic curriculum.

> Pre-scripted material breaks [learning] down to the point of trivia learning. [Teachers] aren't given time to do much else besides transmission. This creates passive students and [a passive] curriculum. In a democracy, it would be a lot more beneficial if students had practice solving things and working on actual problems—learning deeply. But there's no room for it.

David illustrated what this might look like in a conversation about how to hypothetically teach environmental issues to elementary school students.

> I would require an activism portion [where] students needed to make a decision which legislation is worth their support and then do something about it. To track climate change, we would use statistical analysis and bring in the science of environmental change. Bringing these real issues together cohesively allows the students to leave being able to speak intelligently on an issue and being somewhat experts.

Members of this community promoted active citizenship through dialogue in the classroom. Laura described how she used this method in her classroom: "I think

many of us see history as creative and useful on a daily basis," and "One of my goals is to help students become more comfortable with civil discussions on hot topics. I think we need this skill more than ever now, and unfortunately, students don't see many adults modeling this behavior." Similar to the way she viewed her role as the head of the department, Laura pointed out that their teaching has been "more of a community discussion and less about power in the classroom." She believed her responsibility was to avoid indoctrinating students, but she rejected the misconception that personal perspective equals indoctrination:

> I never force opinions or try to indoctrinate students, but it's a myth to believe that teachers can be completely neutral. Even in what they pick to discuss and how the discussion is set up, there is bias. In my opinion!

It became apparent that the participants believed it was authentically impossible to be politically neutral in the classroom, and that it was important to fight for issues vital to their identities and integrity.

Good Education Can Be Bad Politics

My third major finding regarding the nature of this community of congruence was that they were politically sophisticated, and that this enabled them to more effectively advocate for their students and for education reform. Good civic education can involve serious discussion of controversial issues, and education for equity may require social critique and advocacy. Although such practices may be educationally sound, they may be politically volatile. For this reason, Hartoonian (1991) argued that within the social studies, "good education

is bad politics" (p. 22). Hartoonian insisted that changes in schools will *only* become a reality *if*:

> (teachers) take account of the tensions between politics and education as well as the attending conflicts that define the scope and tolerance of change within the educational community. …Taking on the conventional (political) wisdom is no place for the timid. It is far safer to hold to the politics of the present and bury education reform under the fragments and debris of political rhetoric. (1991, pp. 22–23)

As suggested by Hartoonian (1991), it can be difficult to be politically active in order to confront inequities within the education system.

In this section, I use one story in particular to illustrate differences between school politics and the values of a "core group" of teachers working within this broader departmental community. Several of the participants indicated that they felt a responsibility to become politically active in order to stay true to their identities and vision for education. It became apparent that although a "community of congruence" might be *pleasant* in normal circumstances, it became *necessary* in circumstances where teachers "are taking on the political wisdom" of the system (Hartoonian, 1991, p. 22). If education is to be truly transformative, it might mean resisting the pressure to conform, thus creating "bad politics."

I wanted to make sure I was not misrepresenting the group. Therefore, before Thanksgiving break, I sent out a brief e-mail message with the hope that they would be willing to read a short description of some preliminary findings. The email included what I thought to be some generic and relatively non-

threatening descriptions of a few of the ideas I was pursuing. I expressed my desire to represent the department in the most accurate way possible, and I told them I was soliciting their help by asking for any thoughts or corrections they may have.

In part, the e-mail read, "One of the findings describes the ways in which you have been able to adapt within the oppressive system," and included some examples of the ways in which Laura had been a buffer for some of the participants when they wanted tables in their classrooms and curriculum materials that might be considered progressive. I used the term *oppressive system* because that was the language I had used to introduce the study to the participants. Before each individual interview, I explained that I was studying their department because, as a whole, they had a reputation for being really good at what they do-*despite the oppressive constraints that all teachers face* (e.g., testing; the pressure to perform better each year; mandated curriculum; top-down reform; feeling a lack of decision-making capability; and a low pay scale compared to hours worked). Since this was the language I used in the interview to represent the study, and since I had felt no apprehension based on the participants' reactions, I was surprised by Bailey's e-mail response:

> I would be very cautious about what you email us about your dissertation at work. The email I received yesterday morning could be very alarming to the administration if someone "stumbled" across it. There have been a few times over the years that I've been skeptical of how certain people had acquired information about me. Needless to say, there are people in the building that can access our email, and they are not necessarily fans. I'm probably a bit more skeptical than most but thought you might want to be

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aware of this. I'm happy to help as much as I can, and you're welcome to email my personal address anytime.

Bailey's interview, conducted the previous week, had changed the course of the study, and I felt chastised for not seeing potential problems with my choice of language. My immediate reaction was to start constructing an apology. But underneath my genuine concern, there was something else, something more selfish. Of course, I was sorry for having caused any discomfort for Bailey, but was I apologizing because I wanted to maintain a positive relationship with her, or because I wanted her to grant me the reassurance that I felt I needed? After acknowledging the tone of her e-mail, I *really* wanted to be reassured that Bailey did not want to remove herself from the study. I struggled with my conflicting emotions because part of me believed I had enough data to represent the group without her interview. In many ways, it would have been easier to omit this story. However, the other part of me did not believe I could capture the extreme resilience and transformative potential of this group without including her story. Still, I could not help feeling as if I was putting Bailey, and perhaps the entire group of teachers, at risk.

Before my interview with Bailey, other participants had described the Truman High School administration as supportive and generally "hands off." For example, Marie described the administration positively:

> I've never worked anywhere else, so I don't have anything to compare it to, but I think our administrative staff is probably the best that it's been since I worked here. I feel like they're really good at letting us do our jobs for the most part, and they kind of stay out of our business unless they

need our help or we're doing something super crazy wrong. So when I talk to people who have worked for other people, they say we're really lucky to have the administration that we have.

Similarly, Laura described how Mr. Garrett did his best to provide the supplemental materials she requested for the department, and how he had supported her when there were conflicts in the social studies department. She also said he made good hiring decisions.

> My principal has done a really good job of hiring really good people. He's a good principal in many ways, and he has some things he can work on like everybody else. But he has a good eye for talent, and the hires he has made for our department are even [of] higher quality than the rest of the school.

Marie said Laura's positive relationship with Mr. Garrett had often worked to their advantage. She said, "Sometimes she'll be the bridge between us and the administration. Like, if we want to do something, she'll go to them because they trust her," and she can "get away with" ordering curriculum that might otherwise be considered "risky."

Jason, in his first year at Truman High School, confirmed Marie's assertion that those who had worked elsewhere valued this administration. He said there was a "180-degree difference" between his previous and current administrations. His perspective was interesting because he had transferred from a high school in the same district. He seemed to appreciate the routines that had been established over the years that provided a sense of efficiency:

> This place is like a well-oiled machine. Everyone knows what they're doing; everyone knows what's going on. There's a procedure for this, and if I have any problems, I can sit down and ask the principals, and they're going to send me in the right direction. The administration is two different

ballgames. [Here] it runs so smoothly, and [at the previous school] I was in a new routine every year.

Before Bailey's interview, the only reference to political differences between the teachers and the administration was when Laura offhandedly referred to them as part of a "good old boys" club. Even so, Laura expressed her appreciation for the administrators by empathizing with their administrative responsibilities. Laura said 95% of her energy was spent on the 5% of social studies staff that caused the problems. She said she could "not possibly imagine doing that on a larger scale" and appreciated what the administrators do "behind the scenes." Despite the positive rhetoric in every other interview, Bailey illustrated how "good education can be bad politics."

Bailey, who seemed nervous and unsure in our one-on-one interview, began by asking specific questions about anonymity and possible identifiers. In particular, she wanted to know how much I was going to share about the participants' outside group affiliations and the location of the school in the state. It was clear that she thought some descriptions would make her department easily identifiable, and this was a concern for her. Bailey did not mind being identified in my dissertation, since she did not think she was in danger of an administrator "actually reading a 200-page dissertation," but she wanted reassurance that I would further de-identify participants if the research were to be published in an academic journal. I agreed, and Bailey transformed into her usual self: upbeat and straightforward.

Becoming Political

When students approached Bailey in the fall of 2008 and asked her to be

the teacher-sponsor for a new Gay–Straight Alliance (GSA) at Truman High

School, she agreed. They began researching the procedures required to get a new

club approved by the school and found that students had to have a willing sponsor.

Because she had already agreed to be the sponsor, they continued their endeavors.

Bailey foreshadowed some of the difficulties she would face by agreeing to be the

sponsor of the club:

> I had some students, I believe they went to Laura first and asked her if she
> would be willing to do it. I think there has always been an interest in it;
> there have always been kids who have been interested but no one who
> would be willing to sponsor it. Not because they didn't support it, but
> because they weren't willing to "commit social suicide," and I really don't
> care what anyone else thinks about me, so I guess I was the right person
> for it.

During that time, a teacher-sponsor could help guide the students with the

application requirements, including writing the constitution, gaining membership,

and acquiring club approval from the administration. Most new clubs were

approved at the high school by Mr. Garrett; however, he denied this particular

request and told them they would have to present it to the school board. Bailey

indicated that after meeting opposition from the principal, Mr. Garrett thought the

students would be too intimidated to want to continue the formation of the club.

Instead of being deterred, Bailey and the students began to look for outside

support:

At this point, we were establishing the constitution, and Mr. Garrett made me well aware that this club was not welcome here. I started to get some outside support, some outside help: counsel from attorneys, people who specialized in civil rights, lobbyist and gay activist groups that were well versed in legislation [and] the equal access legislation that applies to students. And so I became very versed in these, you know, issues and what the school could and could not do and what the students had the right to do. And ummm, Mr. Garrett quickly learned that I knew. Because I think he was trying to do things that were not necessarily legal, but once he realized—because you can break a law until someone realizes that you're breaking it. You know?

According to Bailey, after Mr. Garrett realized she and the students were seeking outside help, he told her she was no longer allowed "under any circumstances" to give students guidance or direction regarding federal legislation. He defended his position by saying she was "not yet considered their sponsor since the club had not yet been approved." Once again, Bailey suggested that Mr. Garrett and other administrators did this in an attempt to deter students from further pursuing their efforts. Without Bailey's support, she thought students would not know their rights or protection under the law. Instead, outside groups began working with the students directly.

And so outside groups started informing them, since I couldn't. The equal protection clause and its federal legislation deals with school clubs. If you are going to allow one club, one student-driven club, all clubs have to be allowed. So basically, if someone wanted to start a Wicca, or whatever that type of group is, according to legislation, it has to be allowed if there is someone willing to sponsor it. So that's where we were at that point. [Mr. Garrett said,] "You cannot inform them." And I think they figured at that point that it would fizzle out.

The students continued to pursue the cause, and the school's legal counsel became involved. The administration realized they had to allow the GSA if the district was going to continue allowing any club.

To signify their opposition, the administrators initially considered eliminating all student clubs in order to prevent the GSA from forming in the district. Over 100 teachers and students attended a meeting the administration held in order to gauge if the public would be in support of eliminating all clubs. Bailey said she was unclear who was there for what purposes; however, she believed that one result of the meeting was additional student support for the club. Bailey said:

> As a result of that [meeting], it actually got a lot of the kids behind the GSA club because they thought it was ridiculous that the school would eliminate all clubs because a few gay and straight kids want to show support.

> According to Bailey, the administration also attempted to prevent student

participation by requiring parent permission to attend GSA meetings.

> They told me that the kids had to have parental permission, and I told them I would be more than happy to do that if all clubs were required to do that. And I just went back to the legislation. If you're going to require this for the GSA, all clubs must be required to do this. And what came out of that, now, is that there is a little waiver on the club site that says that parents have the right to prevent their children from attending meetings. They have the right to physically come and get their children from the meetings at the school building, but that technically applies to all clubs. The problem with the parent notice is that I would argue that [for] about 75% of the students that participate, their parents don't know that they participate. And I make it a point to not know their orientation. I make it a point to never ask because it's the gay–*straight* alliance. It's a non-issue, and I want them to know they have allies, and I've been established as an ally. So kids know they can come to me when things arise, because they may not trust the administration or something like that.

Bailey recalled that as administrators attempted to block the club, tensions began to arise in other parts of her life. Parents started calling to complain about her classes, and her teaching practices began to be questioned. Some claimed Bailey

was using her classroom as a platform for gay rights, but Bailey told me this

assertion was "totally ridiculous." She denied discussing any part of the GSA or

any topic regarding sexual orientation with her students. She said she never

discussed those issues unless they applied directly to the history they were

learning, and "at that time, there wasn't even any legislation going through that

pertained to those issues." She acknowledged that students had many questions

regarding the club and regretted that she could not discuss them in class, but after

consulting the teachers' union, she decided against discussing the GSA during her

teaching contract hours.

One morning when Bailey was teaching, she received a threatening note

on her classroom door. She told me how she found the note and was able to

pinpoint the timing of its placement:

> So I let the students in, and I started class. [I] taught class, and the students
> started working, and I had to use the restroom. So I walked out to use the
> restrooms and found the note on my door. So I had a very narrow time
> period of when the note had been placed on my door.

The school had installed cameras in the hallways a few weeks prior to the incident,

one of which happened to point at Bailey's door. After class, she made a copy of

the note and took it to Mr. Garrett. She told him that she wanted him to find out

who put it on her door, and that she wanted the student held responsible.

According to Bailey, instead of complying with her request, Mr. Garrett became

evasive, telling her that he thought she was overreacting because the note was not

very threatening:

Over the days I keep talking to Mr. Garrett, and he keeps saying, "You know, we can't really—the camera doesn't really see your door." And I say, "Well, you can at least see during that 20 minutes who walked up to my door during that period, because there's one right out there." And it goes on and goes on. Mr. Garrett says he's "still investigating it," and I'm trying to figure out what to do.

According to Bailey, she continued to approach Mr. Garrett, encouraging him to address the note, and he continued to evade her requests to use the cameras to identify the perpetrator. She eventually offered to watch the cameras herself, outside her contract teaching hours, and says she was told he would get back to her about a convenient time.

A chance discussion helped Bailey discover why Mr. Garrett may have been avoiding her requests. The technician who had installed the cameras a few weeks prior to the incident happened to have attended school with Bailey's sister, and he and Bailey were acquainted with each other on a personal level. Sometime after the posting of the note, the technician stopped by Bailey's classroom to say "hello". Bailey nonchalantly asked about the cameras, and received confirmation that one of them was in fact pointed at her door. The technician established that the camera view would provide a clear picture of whoever placed the note on Bailey's door. Bailey asked what typically happened to the old video tapes. She was told, "It runs for two weeks and then it just records over itself and it erases." Bailey surmised that Mr. Garrett had apparently been avoiding her, knowing that after two weeks, the evidence would have been erased and the problem would have been avoided.

A few days later, Bailey woke to the sound of people screaming in her

yard and knocking on her window. She arose from her sleep to see what she

perceived to be students yelling and holding a sign to her window. Bailey

described the incident, her frustration with the entire administration, and the

escalation of the problem:

> Mr. Garrett isn't doing anything about the note. And a few days later, I
> had my windows up, and I think it was like October because the weather
> was cooler, and I live by myself, so I probably shouldn't do that. But I
> hear screaming, and I get up, and I see that they're holding a sign up to my
> bedroom window, and I can't see it because I wear glasses and I didn't
> have my contacts in. So I jump up, of course, to see what was going on,
> and it sounded like kids' voices. So I wasn't really scared, but I run
> outside to see if I can see the car, and they drove off.

Bailey called the police. When they arrived, they told her that what had happened

was not a crime. They told her the event did not qualify as trespassing because it

is not illegal for people to enter someone's yard. Frustrated, Bailey asked the

police officer if she had to take matters into her own hands the next time.

According to Bailey, the officer condescendingly told her that shooting people in

her yard was illegal and made it obvious he was taking note of everything she said.

The next day, Bailey again approached her administration, and again they

refused to use the cameras to identify who had written the threatening note. She

contacted the teachers' union, and they advised her to go to the police department

if the administration refused to address the matter. At the local police station, the

officer taking the report asked Bailey if she was gay. She responded by telling

him that her sexual orientation was not his business. Bailey recounted that the

officer told her the event would be different if she were actually gay, so she told

him that she was. Bailey recalled his demeaning response: "[The police officer

said,] 'It is very well known in the community that you are not gay', and then he

referenced knowing Mr. Garrett personally…and [stated] how they weren't really

concerned." Bailey left with the distinct impression that the police were not going

to take the threat seriously, either.

Finding Advocates and Going Public

Members of Bailey's community of congruence supported her privately

until it became evident that something more needed to be done. For example,

David approached Mr. Garrett and offered to talk to him about different

perspectives regarding sexual orientation. He also provided "short, reader-friendly

literature" in hopes of initiating a framework for discussion. And Laura notified

Bailey that she had technically filed her report with the wrong police department.

Although Truman High School is part of a suburban school district, it is actually

located slightly outside the city limits.

Reflecting on the information provided by Laura, Bailey began to think

that she might "at least be heard" by a police station not closely affiliated with the

school. She followed up with a report to the neighboring police department, which

took the complaint a lot more seriously:

> I was really frustrated because to me, it's a hate crime if someone attacks
> someone because of their sexuality. And I think they have established that
> under the Matthew Shepard legislation a year or two ago, but this is before
> this, so I'm very irritated. And then I realize that I have filed under the
> wrong police department. So I go to the [correct] police department, and

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before he says anything or asks me any questions, in big letters on the top of the report, he writes in bold letters. He writes, "hate crime."

Newspapers and journalists had been contacting Bailey for months, but she kept denying their requests since she had no legal protection for speaking out against the school district in which she worked. However, an activist group had arranged for a local news station to interview the future GSA President. The interview took place at the student's home to prevent any legal ramifications from the school, and Bailey notified the principal before the interview was aired. According to Bailey, it was "the big story on the ten o'clock news, how the school was not doing anything about (the threats), and that I had offered to review the tape myself." On the next school day, within two hours of the first bell, the principal had discovered who had posted the note on Bailey's door, and the student was reprimanded.

In the meantime, a school board meeting was held and revisions were made for the rules governing student-led groups at Truman High School. Finally, after months of contention, the Truman High Gay-Straight Alliance was approved. Even though students showed up in opposition to the GSA, the first meeting went well. According to Bailey:

> Some of the groups were there, and you could tell they were against it. But it actually went really well. We kept it controlled, and administration was there in case anything happened. They tried to? Or "speak-out" against the club but that wasn't the *purpose*. It was a club meeting, therefore, that was not welcomed. A lot of them voiced their concerns and the president said, "This is not a gay club, this is a gay–straight alliance, so this is a community for gay and straight people." And so the students were like, "We're going to make a straight club." You know how high school

students are, and the president was like, "Well, I think every club at this school is a straight club."

Other than this minor disruption during the first GSA meeting and a few posters subsequently torn from the walls, student opposition to the group subsided. According to Bailey, there have been a few years when the club was not very active. She explained that new regulations might have contributed to that. For example, the establishment of the GSA caused the district to differentiate between student-led and academic-led clubs. Student-led groups are no longer allowed to make public announcements and are limited to where and how they can advertise for their clubs. At the end of the interview, I asked Bailey why she would put herself through such emotional turmoil. She referred back to her identity as a teacher and her vision for a change in society:

> I became a teacher because I was not successful in high school. And I know that if one teacher would have taken an interest in me, I would have succeeded, and I want to be that for my students. And more importantly, the fact that all of this has come about in this way is very representative of the fact that this club needs to be here.

Despite tremendous political pressure, Bailey and other members of this social studies community were advocates for human rights and for students who needed support. They modeled what active citizenship looks like in a democratic society, and they went public when all else failed. This was consistent with the core group's purpose for social studies education: "to prepare students for active citizenship." Since "taking action" was the aspect of social studies they were attempting to promote, this experience was paramount in illustrating the

community's dedication to educating in a way that was consistent with their identity.

The development of the GSA was only one illustrative example of this community's political sophistication, which drew on the interdependence that had gradually evolved within the department over the years.   My use of this example was not meant to romanticize some participants or demonize others. Rather, it was meant to show why a community is necessary and appreciated when one is confronted with tensions between good education and bad politics. As Hartoonian (1991) argued, taking on school politics is no place for the timid, and reforming the system may require advocacy.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

Case-study research is designed to study the particularity and complexity of a single case in an attempt to understand it in its contextual circumstances. However, when trying to capture both the uniqueness and commonality of this case, I was bound by the constraints of language and my perceptual filter. I ran the risk of losing the complexity of the case because the act of naming and analysis is reductionistic. Throughout the study and in retrospect, I have struggled with how to most "accurately" capture the layers and integrated aspects of this community of congruence.

The purpose of this section is not to objectively or simplistically analyze the findings, but to focus on some integrated themes that emerged when using systems thinking as a lens. There were certainly other theoretical frameworks that might have been used to interpret this community, and I could have organized what I came to label "the findings" in many different ways. Additionally, I was also unable to tell every story that I heard during from participants, and I am sure that teachers in this department who were not interviewed would have described this department differently.

In this chapter, I analyze the findings using a systems theory lens. The role of the evolution of this community will be discussed, as well as how the group attempted to address problems that arose. Their interdependence and political sophistication are analyzed in an effort to better understand how the participants

were able to support one another under pressure to conform to an ideology contrary to their identity. Following this analysis, I consider the implications of these themes for theory and practice. I will suggest possible implications for others who may also be dissatisfied with individualistic conditions in the education system and are interested in more relational ways of teaching and living.

Analysis of the Evolution of a Community of Congruence

Consistent with the literature on systems theory, this community could not be adequately understood by analyzing individual members or isolated moments In part, this is because there were too many "members" to consider, when thinking about the community in a holistic sense. Another reason is based on the idea of Plato's dialectic (Lazlo, 1996), which describes how two people can transcend the knowledge of the two individuals:

> According to Plato, two people, by challenging and responding to each other, can come closer to the truth than either one could by himself. The outcome of such a dialectic is not merely the knowledge of the one added to the knowledge of the other. It is something which neither of them knew before, and which neither would have been capable of knowing by himself. Such a twosome constitutes a whole which has properties irreducible to those of each individual by him- or herself. (as cited in Lazlo, 1996, p. 26)

As suggested above, two (or more) people engaging in dialogue can exponentially increase the complexity or understanding of the phenomena being discussed. This phenomenon makes it difficult to reduce a system to its individual parts or participants.

Drawing upon the idea that the essence of a system is not simply the sum of its parts, it might be accurate to say that the relationships in this department

helped form a community of a *particular sort*. Instead of attempting to "know"

this community by breaking it down to specific characteristics, participants, or

deterministic labels, I have attempted to capture the complexities of the system by

exploring how mutual relationships helped form shared aspects of organization.

As Lazlo (1996) observes:

> To speak of systems *per se* is, of course, a simplification, but it is not a reductionist one. Whereas traditional reductionism sought to find the commonality underlying diversity in reference to a shared substance, such as material atoms, contemporary systems theory seeks to find common features in terms of shared aspects of *organization*. (emphasis in the original, 2002, p. 17)

Following, I discuss the evolution, interdependence, and political sophistication

of this particular group, *not* to suggest that other groups should attempt to follow

an identical path, but as a way of considering some of the systems aspects of a

community of congruence.   It may be helpful to view this group through a

systems-theory lens to gain valuable insights into how they were able to rely on

their community of congruence to offer mutual support. Specifically, this group

focused on creating a more inclusive and active form of citizenship education, and

they went to tremendous lengths to achieve these goals.

An important goal of the study was to understand how this community

came to be. What became a valuable part of analyzing this group was recognizing

that they were intuitively and intentionally strategic in both big and small ways.

As the "core" group shared their stories and perceptions about their department, it

became clear that they envisioned citizenship education aimed at social

transformation. Despite a few exceptions described by Laura in Chapter Four, most of the department appeared to share a desire to create an equitable learning environment for teachers and students. In their quest to achieve these goals, they encountered obstacles that pushed against values integral to their identity. When this happened, they drew on the support of the community to overcome these obstacles.

The first finding was that this community of congruence was evolutionary in nature. The evolution of the community seemed to follow certain patterns described in the previous chapter: using opportunities for change, adapting when encountering opposition, and becoming strategic about the direction of the community. These data might be better understood when viewed through a systems-theory lens.

The community of congruence at Truman High used existing opportunities for change to help begin the evolution of the social studies department. According to Lazlo (1996), full transformation requires an initial trigger that provides the opportunity for radical change:

> Processes build up until they reach critical thresholds; then they trigger sudden change. By contrast, incremental improvements are seldom of fundamental importance. They may adapt a system to is [*sic*] environment, but are not likely to change it in a radical and lasting way. The fact is that systems that evolved a complex structure have a great deal of instability, and they manage to persist in their environment by buffering out all forces that threaten to change their structure in a radical fashion. (Lazlo, 2002, p. 52)

In this case, Laura could be viewed as one initial trigger. Her appointment as the head of the department allowed for sudden systemic change. For example, she restructured the meetings to change the types of interactions colleagues were having, and she sent a clear message that dialogue and best instructional practices were valued because she structured the meetings around those things. The dynamics of the department continued to change as new positions were gradually filled with teachers who desired a collaborative community, and Laura used time in contract hours to foster this community. The community continued to grow and adapt, based on the needs of the participants and the additions of new faculty.

The evolution of this community was furthered by its ability to adapt when it encountered opposition. These teachers faced the kinds of pressures others encounter, including temporal constraints, testing pressures, and the emphasis on content coverage. When utilizing a systems theory lens, this has specific implications for the evolutionary process.

> Under pressures from within and without, natural systems change with the times. Those that do not are left to history as ossified relics of the past. Inputs from within and without call forth innovations, and the innovative system produces new kinds of inputs on all systems with which it communicates. Thus a change in one triggers changes in others. (Lazlo, 1996, p. 52)

Normal pressures, "from within and without" the social studies department, helped facilitate change. Some participants began to collaborate to help alleviate pressures "from without" such as mandated content coverage and testing demands. This collaboration furthered the community's evolution and "called forth new

innovations" for participants' who desired something different, something that included relationships to help facilitate quality instruction.

The evolution of the department was not linear, and Laura and Bailey, in particular, encountered much opposition. This is consistent with Lazlo's description regarding how systems continue to evolve. He says systems are constantly challenged from within because "their own membership criticizes them and presses for changes" (Lazlo, 1996, p. 50). The oppositions, or "inputs" and "outputs," were vital to the initiation and continuation of the evolutionary process. For example, the initial opposition to Laura's appointment as the department head "triggered" others to publicly acknowledge her ability. Laura's colleagues who might not have shared her exact teaching philosophy were at least thankful for her instructional leadership and sharing of resources. This was evidenced in Mr. Garrett's conference with members of the department, after which he told Laura, "To a man, they said these were the most meaningful department meetings they've ever had. So keep it up."

Laura was a major trigger providing an opportunity for radical change, but others had also been contributing by collaborating with one another. This sudden change occurred because some in the department were ready for change and others were willing to support a new vision. For example, Marie, David, Mike, and Bailey seemed to have been making strategic investments aimed at creating the type of educational environment that supported their teaching identities.

Although Laura helped trigger the initial change, the community would not have continued its same journey had the other participants not been part of the process. Laura could not have transformed the department alone, just as a change in administration seldom creates the change envisioned by outside agents. Lazlo (1996) explains, "It is a precarious organization, indeed, that is tied to the character or personality of a single person however great he or she may be. No organization could survive under such conditions for very long" (p. 7).

Many participants in the community continued to be strategic about change, and their evolving "system" communicated in new ways with other systems. Thus, the department affected other systems within which it communicated, including the student and administrative populations. For example, as the evolution of the department gained momentum, the administration responded accordingly, granting Laura additional input in the hiring process. This reinforced the changing dynamics within the department, which contributed to the evolution of the community of congruence.

Analysis of the Interdependence of a Community of Congruence

The study of this community revealed that the participants developed a high degree of interdependence facilitated by shared purposes for citizenship education and an unwillingness to compromise those beliefs. Although seemingly contradictory, participants relied on one another at the same time they exercised a sense of self. In essence, they fostered relationship while promoting individuality. Palmer (2007) says educators should learn to embrace this paradoxical concept if

the goal is to resist *either-or* logic in order to think the world together. Parker

(2010) illustrates some paradoxical ideas he has attempted to untangle in relation

to social studies education:

> Several interesting contradictions have been central to this work. Consider four: *unity/diversity* (How can a democracy, which is a kind of political unity, embrace and foster cultural pluralism in such a way that one is not a threat to the other but a resource and mirror?); *knowledge/engagement* (Do democratic citizens, in order to perform well this role, need mainly to act in certain ways or mainly to know certain things?); *multicultural education/democratic education* (Why are these two fields of study and education activism not one field?); and *nationalism/cosmopolitanism* (Is there any longer a useful distinction between civic education and global education?). (emphasis in original, 2010, p. 238)

As Parker argues, the complexity of a democracy that is *both* unifying *and*

appreciative of diversity seems at first contradictory. In an effort to resist binary

logic, Parker opens the space to consider these ideas on a deeper level.

When viewed through a postmodern lens, many apparent opposites can be

recognized as false dichotomies. In relation to this case, I question whether a true

democratic educational environment could do anything *but* promote unity *and*

diversity. The paradox of their interdependence—independence and

dependence—may have helped this community develop relationships that thrived,

despite difference. For example, Bailey was not always considered part of the

"core group", and other members of the "core group" described times when

differences of opinions caused them to collaborate less often.

Department members were able to negotiate multiple layers of

participation, furthering a sense of autonomy and freedom. Some in the group

readily supported collaboration whereas others did so reluctantly or not at all. Marie referred to a "core" group who had similar values; however, consistent with systems theory, the boundaries of those she considered in the core and outside the core were somewhat relative and flexible. Palmer (2007) referred to the "core group" as happening when "two or three people gather and make a commitment to each other" (p. 180). However, he also acknowledged that communities are diverse:

> But making common cause in a movement does not require partners whose vision matches our own. As we link arms, we will find ourselves tugged in dangerous directions, but because our arms are linked, we will have the chance to do some tugging of our own. Making common cause opens the possibility of teaching and learning across previously alien fields. As a movement goes public, the identity and integrity of its participants are tested against the great diversity of values and visions at work in the public arena. (Palmer, 2007, p. 186)

As Palmer suggested, the various participants within this community did not equally share the "core" group's vision for citizenship education or Bailey's vision for implementing the GSA. However, in their ongoing activities they were able to teach and learn in ways that were previously not possible because their "arms were linked" around a common cause aimed at providing what students needed.

Reminiscent of Palmer's (2007) idea that authority must be granted to create lasting change, this group's decision to live relationally was initially suggested by a few and not directed from outside. Following new leadership and supporting a new vision were decisions made by individual participants. Mike

alluded to the fact that this would not necessarily have worked if it had been mandated by administrators when he said "forced meetings were not going to facilitate collaboration." The participant-directed aspect of this community meant that their interdependence was fluid, and participants were not always an active part of the "core" group.

This community of teachers consistently functioned at a high level, and systems theory suggests there are reasons this was possible. After the initial "trigger" or actions of a "change agent," participants used existing opportunities to develop relationships, share and develop their curricula, and further their personal visions for education. Finding time to be together was one step that helped facilitate change. Systems theorists (Briggs & Peat, 1989; Fleener, 2002; Lazlo, 1996) suggest that it takes multiple "inputs" and "outputs" to bring about change. In this case, that meant creating space for multiple people to come together to collaborate.

As described in Chapter Two, the "butterfly effect" involves a small, single, seemingly insignificant event such as the flapping of a butterfly's wings that could potentially have a far-reaching ripple-effect on later events. In this case, the continual collaboration and sharing of ideas may have been the butterfly that created a ripple effect. The collaboration involved creating new lessons or curriculum that had a greater focus on issues of equity. Curriculum focused on equity might have inspired students to stand up for marginalized peers within their own community, which may subsequently have forced a change that gradually

helped transform the system. This is consistent with the concept of the "butterfly effect", a fundamental idea in systems theory.

Thus, a small series of events appears to have helped facilitate the evolution and interdependence of this group of social studies teachers. The community was then able to draw on their relationships to resist political oppression. This ultimately had lasting implications on a school system that now provides systemic support for a group of students who have historically been marginalized. Furthermore, this group has continued the ripple by empowering students who have otherwise been disempowered.

Over time, the community of congruence, particularly those with similar values, clearly developed and articulated their vision for schooling. They spent time examining best school practices, systemic inequalities, and ways to create change, using results from their own teacher research. Consequently, this case should not be regarded as "exceptional" or unlikely to occur in other situations because small investments can yield great results.

Analysis of Going Political

Much of the literature focused on transformative education, as discussed in Chapter One, suggests that change does not happen without confronting advocates of social reproduction (Apple, 1980; Banks, 2001; Pinar, 2004). According to Segall (2010), this means investigating the politics of schooling by exploring who has been included and excluded. As illustrated in this case and suggested by Hartoonian (1991), investigating or confronting the dominant

politics of the educational system can bring a person into conflict with others who either resist or lack the power to make institutional changes. Remaining "true to oneself" could be career ending if it directly confronts the political, societal, or religious norms of the larger community.

This case suggests that attempts to "change the system" may be more possible to accomplish with the support of a community who share each others' beliefs and goals for education. In this case, Bailey was able to face political pressures and personal attacks because she had others who supported her vision. When private support was not enough, she found outside advocates who were able to help share her burden. Eventually, Bailey and other advocates decided to alert the general public. This is consistent not only with the idea that systems are interconnected, but also with Palmer's (2007) views on the importance of "going public":

> The distinction (between a movement and a pseudo-movement) hinges on a movement's willingness to enter this third stage and go public. A fascist "movement" refuses to go public—and in that refusal it degenerates from being a movement to being an exercise of coercive power. (p. 182).

Fortunately in this case, when advocates of the GSA "went public," the tensions created helped overcome the dominant political power.

The tension caused by working against the school system *while simultaneously* relying on that system for financial support suggests another paradoxical situation. Recently, social studies educators have suggested that learning to live within the paradox might facilitate transformative education

(Parker, 2010; Segall, 2010). Segall says *both* existing within *and* changing the community can be done "through a reflexive counter, one that does not operate separately from the two other approaches. Instead, it operates on them, not by simply replacing them, but rather by disturbing them" (Segall, 2010, p. 130). When members in this community worked within the system while simultaneously highlighting tensions, they were able to disrupt the status quo and provide the space for alternative possibilities.

As Pinar (2004) suggests, democratic development and public schooling will be separate as long as politically vulnerable groups continue to be marginalized. Kincheloe (2010) agrees that the political status quo will only be disrupted if we question the ways we have prevented true democracy by limiting the free flow of information. To do this, he suggests using inclusive postmodern theories to understand how power operates to perpetuate itself:

> In this context modes of oppression are uncovered and the traditional disciplines' complicity in maintaining the political status quo are interrogated. By the way disciplines fragment knowledge, they subvert the free flow of information to people who need it the most in their political struggles against dominant power. (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 214)

Therefore, these educators suggest that democratic development in schooling is dependent on the inclusion of previously untold or fragmented stories combined with the interrogation of norms that have perpetuated the canon. In this case, the teachers within the community of congruence included previously untold stories in their social studies courses. Social norms were interrogated and disrupted in order to provide a more inclusive environment for students.

This community of congruence publicly resisted political norms in an effort to begin to address the needs of marginalized students. What emerged from the decision to "go public" in a political sense was the story of an expanding community that furthered more equitable circumstances within their school. This expansion, initiated by an evolving community of teachers, was further extended by the inclusion of students.

Eventually teachers and students, parents and government officials, and even media members and school administrators contributed to a growing community whose membership and vision was unquestionably more than the sum of its parts. This is consistent with Lazlo's idea of systemic integration: "A holarchically (rather than hierarchically) integrated system is not a passive system, committed to the status quo. It is a dynamic and adaptive entity, reflecting in its own functioning the patterns of change over all levels of system" (1996, p. 58). This community of congruence was an integrated system that was dynamic, adaptive, and not committed to the status quo.

Implications

Social studies educators who are interested in utilizing a postmodern framework suggest we need to *question a collective memory* of history that has been passed down as an objective, authorless and neutral truth. They insist that it is problematic to expect students "to accept and memorize, rather than question and critically engage. By engaging history as objective and true…we advance students estrangement from it, as students are left with the notion that the

historical narrative is not negotiable" (Segall, 2010, p. 130). Moreover, this type

of education cannot stop with the inclusion of "others," but must critically

question the system that makes it possible to have left others out. It must ask:

> Inclusion on what and whose terms? For what and whose purposes?
> Merely "correcting" a curriculum, sanitizing it of its "offensive"
> omissions…does little to help students examine those very issues in the
> broader society that gave rise to the initial, presanitized curriculum or to
> the politics underlying such corrections. What a critical approach, then,
> attempts to guarantee is that even as those "other" histories are
> included…their contributions are not used to simply legitimize the
> "includer." If it were so, we would lose the ability to use these "new"
> stories to question the very power relationship that differentiates between
> center and margins, between "majority" and "minority" texts. Rather, the
> aim is to "seek to destabilize the very 'majoritarianism' that underlies
> disciplinary authority (Appadurai, 1996, p. 34, cited in Segall, 2010, p.
> 130).

This case suggested that it is difficult to promote a transformative

education, but that it might be easier with a community of support. However,

school systems do not necessarily support living in relational ways, and teachers

become used to working with their own students in their own classrooms. As

Mike said, creating more time together does not necessarily equate to

collaboration or interdependence. So, where does that leave us?

Although proponents of postmodernism have historically resisted

formulating new solutions or prescriptive practices, others have insisted that we

must collaborate among one another and provide suggestions for other educators

who wish to teach in these ways. Still others have recognized that theoretical

endeavors alone will not transform the system:

> If our theoretical sophistication and revisioning of the field distances us from students and teachers, then we have abjectly failed the democratic mission. Thus, a critical social studies in this articulation is intellectually rigorous, socio-politically transgressive, and practical in the praxiological sense of the term. (Kincheloe, 2010, p. 213)

In an effort to provide suggestions for others interested in developing a community to further their teaching goals, I looked to this case and the literature to provide possible implications for education.

A lack of community in the educational system is highly problematic. This study suggests that it is possible for educators to develop communities of congruence to help form relational ways of being to support their goals for teaching. By examining the efforts of a successful community of congruence, we can gain insights into how to support the development of other such communities within the educational system.

This study suggests that it might be helpful to support the evolution of a community that is already forming. The route of every community will inevitably differ due to the existence of numerous variables (e.g., the vision of the participants; the political atmosphere the school occupies; the population of the students). Therefore, I am not attempting to "construct new coherent linear narratives" (Giroux, 1994, p. 51) by suggesting a specific set of steps educators should follow. However, since this study does suggest that certain events helped perpetuate the evolution of a community of congruence, and since these patterns are consistent with the literature on systems theory, others who are interested in

creating educational communities might also look to these shared aspects of organization.

The first finding suggests that the evolution of a community of congruence might be furthered if participants use existing opportunities for change. Thus, administrators who would like to support this type of community could seek to identify or attempt to find teachers like Laura who exhibit natural leadership abilities and a progressive, equity-centered vision for education. Participants in this community of congruence suggested that the appointment of Laura as the head of the department facilitated the opportunity for more collaboration than previously existed. Similarly, the literature suggests a "trigger" may be a pivotal moment in the evolution of a system. However, it would probably be inadequate to try to impose such leadership from the outside-in because top-down reforms mandated by administrators are not teacher-selected endeavors. Therefore, rather than trying to mandate or impose a community of congruence, concerned administrators might provide *support* for those educators who have already began to collaborate and articulate a vision in community with colleagues.

The first finding also suggests that the evolution might be furthered if participants become strategic about forming their communities. This study indicated that a few members of in particular worked together to facilitate change. For example, participants strategically used Laura's positive relationship with Mr. Garrett to acquire progressive materials for their classrooms and to hire teachers

who would help further the community. Educators looking for this type of community might seek others who share a similar vision for education.

Evolution may occur slowly, unfolding over time, and it will seldom be supported by all members. As in the case of the community at Truman, opposition can cause the process to stop and start, to go sideways, or even to regress. When this happens, this case suggests that educators should attempt to support one another and strategically act in ways that promote the growth of the community. Consistent with the literature on systems theory, inputs from other participants might be required to continue the transformation. If this is so, it suggests that others could strategically continue to make investments, both small and large.

The second finding suggests that a community of congruence may develop greater interdependence if participants have opportunities to collaborate with one another. If this is so, administrators and teachers could schedule time together with the intent to build relationships. It might be necessary to deliberately establish opportunities for colleagues to find commonalities and begin to act upon shared purposes. As suggested in the literature, small investments can yield great results, and the possibilities may exponentially increase as encounters increase. However, since this study suggests it is important for collaboration to be self-directed, here again it will be important for administrators to provide and support opportunities for dialogue rather than attempt to mandate or impose such experiences.

The second finding also suggests that this community developed a shared identity that simultaneously reinforced the participants' personal identities. Some of these teachers had a sophisticated understanding of the social studies, the methods or techniques they wanted to use, their purposes for teaching equity-focused education, and how their personal identities intersected with these purposes. The interdependence of self and community is reflected in Palmer's (2007) thesis that teachers teach from the self in a community. If this is so, teachers need to be encouraged, in teacher-education programs and beyond, to teach from an undivided self.

Many educators work long hours to try to create meaningful educational experiences that will further student understanding and achievement. Other educators work tirelessly to empower students. However, few teachers working alone would be able to create systemic change in the face of the kind of strong political pressure encountered by the community of congruence at Truman High School. This community optimized opportunities for its participants to remain true to their identities, and in the process they were able to enact substantive change under difficult circumstances.

Finally, the third finding suggests the need for a support system not only in the school but also in the community. When teachers act in ways that begin to change a broader system, there are likely to be adverse reactions. The members of this community of congruence were able to maintain their purpose for education in the face of political adversity because they mutual support and clearly

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articulated goals. Sharing experiences and difficult encounters with others who hold a similar vision may provide essential support. This is especially important in a profession where individuals are often seen as too radical, too political, or too outspoken by those who do not recognize the systemic problems.

Although our educational system is often fragmented, competitive, and individualistic, many teachers, administrators, students and citizens recognize the possibility of something better. The community of congruence that evolved within the social studies department at Truman High School provides evidence of this fact. Transformative changes such as the ones described in this case suggest a possible path toward the creation of a more inclusive, equity-based education. However, if we are to fully experience relational teaching, we will need to continue to reflect upon and change our basic orientations and perceptions of schooling, and to develop new ways to reach policymakers, more conservative educators, and the public in general.

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Appendix A

Preliminary Dissertation Findings

From: Province, Rachael D. [mailto:provincer@ou.edu]
Sent: Sunday, November 20, 2011 2:23 PM
To: ███████████████████████████████████████
███████████████████████████████████████
Subject: preliminary dissertation findings

Hey guys,

At your convenience, I would love to hear any feedback you have.

I have my preliminary findings and am trying my best to capture them in the most accurate way. If you feel like making sure I am representing you correctly or leaving anything out, they are as follows:

The community is:
1. organic (natural, uncoerced, grassroots, evolving, adaptive, a system within a larger system)
2. interdependent (autonomous AND collaborative, specializing in individual strengths, executive decision making, a pressure to be competent)
3. Progressive??? - humanitarian, critical, competent, generous, student-focused
4. regenerating (see last paragraph)

Within the third finding, I am trying to describe how the "core group" - or the inner circle within the department or whatever I end up referring to it as - has a progressive orientation while operating within a traditional state. But the problem with "progressive" is that it can mean too many different things and I don't want to spend ten pages dissecting what I do and do not mean by the word progressive. Soooo, I am trying to describe your orientation in a way that captures you, but doesn't overgeneralize your positions either. Do you have any thoughts that would help me come to a closer understanding of your orientation? Don't make it formal - a run-on sentence, bulleted list, spewing of thoughts would be just fine. I just don't want to assume I know your positions.

Also, one of the findings describes the ways in which you have been able to adapt within the oppressive system. Some of you have briefly mentioned the ways in which ████ has been a "buffer" for you when it comes to things (tables, curriculum?, etc?). So if you have any specific examples of the ways in which she has supported you in that way, I would really appreciate those.

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Okay, the last section might sound a little weird to you, but after describing the ways in which the department has evolved organically, from the ground-up, has a humanitarian/critical orientation, can adapt within the system, blah blah blah - I still felt something was missing that describes who you are as a group.

An idea I am playing with is the ways in which you joke around with each other. In the academic literature, an extreme version of this has been referred to as carnivalesque behavior - meaning that the "common" people engage in inappropriate behavior/jokes/etc. in order to cope within the system or "make light" of a situation that would otherwise be dogmatic. It's a way to stand up or talk back to the system by not letting it dictate your behavior - and ultimately this has the result of regeneration. Feel free to tell me if I'm way off here, but if you *do have examples* of that I would appreciate them.

If you would rather not use your work email for any of this, I understand too. I owe you!

Thanks,
Rachael

Appendix B

Cooperative Controversy Exercise

Positive/Negative

1. Odd number in groups (3 or 5) not too big but must be odd number.
2. Small Group:
    a. Provide a discussion topic and
    b. each student in the small group must present a positive (+) comment for the topic and
    c. the next is followed by a negative (-) comment and this
    d. continues around the group for 2 minutes or another specific time period.
    e. In this way, students must practice viewing the topic from multiple perspectives.
3. Whole class:
    a. The teacher then can direct discussion by having the groups share one of their responses in the same manner around the large group.
    b. Group 1 states a positive (+) followed by
    c. Group 2 which must counter with a negative (–) and so on for a set time period or cycles.

This could be done in the same manner with research by the groups to present arguments for and against a position or event.

Example: Sociology researched the OWS movement, beginnings and platform in the library. We will divide into groups today and do the pos. neg. activity.

This was presented at a HSTW training session probably in the late 90's. No source but to say they took it from someone else. Great activity I just don't know who to credit.

Appendix C

2011-2012 United States History End of Instruction Goals

From: ████████████████

Sent: Wednesday, September 07, 2011 10:54 AM

To: ███████████████████████████████████
██
████████████████████████████████

Subject: Annual US Goals 2011-2012.docx

Please find our US History EOI goals for this school year. Take a moment to read the two focus areas and notice any connections to your subject area content.

Our two areas of focus are:
1.   Imperialism/WWI/Isolationism
2.   Economic destabilization/Great Depression/FDR/New Deal

We are asking that <u>World Teachers</u> really focus on Imperialism/WWI/Isolationism and the 1920's-1930s as it relates to your curriculum.

We are asking that <u>OK History Teachers</u> really focus on the 1920s/1930s/New Deal in Oklahoma as it related to your curriculum.

<u>Again, our hope is that by targeting these areas in other curricular areas, we will see gains in the 11th grade scores.</u>

We will have a department meeting in October for US/World and in November for US/OK so that we can put our heads together and really focus on what we need to do to accomplish all this.

Thanks for your participation and thoughtfulness yesterday!
██

Seventeen Reasons Why Football Is Better Than High School

By Herb Childress

As an ethnographer, Mr. Childress was able to watch more than a hundred high school students in a variety of circumstances. Here's what he learned.

Illustration © 1998 by Jem Sullivan

WE DEFINE SCHOOL as a place of learning. But as I visited classes in the high school in which I was an observer for a year, what I saw mostly -- and what the students told me about most frequently -- was not learning at all but *boredom*. I saw students talking in class, not listening to lectures, having conversations instead of working on their study guides, putting their heads on their desks, and tuning out. Teachers talked about what a struggle it was to get students to turn in their homework at all, much less on time. Students picked up enough information to pass the test, did their work well enough to get the grade, and then totally forgot whatever it can be said that they had learned.

We adults could see this as yet another moral problem. We could call young people lazy and tell one another that they won't put any effort into their work. We could press for more testing to tell us that -- sure enough -- test scores are declining. We could seek more penalties when students don't do well in class -- more ways to coerce them into doing their work. We could talk about going "back to basics," which is to say making school an even less appealing and more restrictive place than it is now.

But as an ethnographer, I had the advantage of hanging around with more than a hundred of this school's students outside the classroom, and I got to watch them in a variety of circumstances. For example, in February I spent one Thursday through Saturday with Bill, a junior who had good grades during his first two years of high school but lost interest in school during his third year. I watched him not bother to study at all for a French test and fail it. I watched him skip a class and play a computer game instead of writing his article for the school newspaper. I watched him get busted in a couple of classes for tardies and talking. But that same guy on that same weekend spent two hours running full out in a soccer practice and spent more hours than I can count playing hacky sack. (He taught me

how to play acceptably well, no small achievement in itself.) He cooked a wonderful dinner at home one night and worked five fast-paced hours at his restaurant kitchen job the next night. He spent most of his home time playing games invented by his little brother and sister, who loved him. He spent two hours surfing on Friday and three more hours preparing for another surfing trip on Sunday.

When I was with him in school, he was an archetypal slacker, but when I was with him outside school, he was a person with a lot of interests -- things that he was dedicated to and good at doing. And that pattern carried over to many of the students that I followed. I watched other young people operate computers and wash horses. I saw them playing video games that had dozens of rules and literally hundreds of decisions to be made every minute, and I watched them play card games that I couldn't begin to understand. I watched them drive four-wheel-drive trucks at insane speeds on dirt roads and watched them working on those trucks as well. I watched them acting, opening their hearts in front of hundreds of people. I watched them wrestling and playing the piano. I was privileged to see them doing the things that they loved to do. The things that they put themselves into without reserve. The things that they were damn good at. The students I knew were a skilled bunch of people. So why didn't those skills and capabilities and that enthusiasm show up more often in the classroom?

In the school that I observed, I saw striking -- and strikingly consistent -- differences between the perfunctory classroom sessions and lively extracurricular activities. The same students who were emotionally absent from their classes came alive after school. We say, "If only she'd spend as much time doing her algebra as she does on cheerleading . . ." with the implication that students blow off algebra because they're immature. We don't usually think to turn the question around and ask what it is about the activities they love that is worthy of their best effort. We don't usually ask what it is about school that tends to make it unworthy of that kind of devotion. But if we're interested in looking at places of joy, places where students lose track of how hard they're working because they're so involved in what they're doing, places where teenagers voluntarily learn a difficult skill, places that might hold some important lessons for schools, football is a good choice.

Let me give you 17 reasons why football is better for learning than high school. I use football as my specific example not because I love football; I use it because I hate football. It's been said that football combines the two worst elements of American society: violence and committee meetings. You can substitute "music" or "theater" or "soccer" for "football," and everything I say will stay the same; so when I say that football is better than school, what I really mean is that even football is better than school.

1. *In football, teenagers are considered important contributors rather than passive recipients.* This attitude is extraordinarily rare in teenage life, but it is central to both learning and self-esteem. A football team is framed around the abilities and preferences of the players; if there's nobody who can throw the ball but three big fast running backs and a strong offensive line, the team isn't going to have an offense that dwells much on passing. But the geometry class -- and every student in the geometry class -- has to keep pace with the same state-ordained curriculum as every other school, regardless of the skills and interests and abilities of the students. Football players know that they, and nobody else, will get the job done. Students know that they are considered empty minds, to be filled at a pace and with materials to be determined by others.

2. *In football, teenagers are encouraged to excel.* By this, I don't mean that players are asked to perform to someone else's standards (which may already be limited); rather, they are pushed to go beyond anything they've ever been asked to do before, to improve constantly. There is no such thing as "good enough." We congratulate players on their accomplishments, but we don't give them much time to be complacent -- we ask them to do even more. In the classroom, we give them a test on polynomials, and the best result they can get is to score high enough never to have to deal with polynomials again.

3. *In football, teenagers are honored.* Football players get extraordinary amounts of approval: award banquets, letter jackets, banners around the campus, school festivals, team photos, whole sections of the yearbook, newspaper coverage, trophies, regional and even state recognition for being the best. The whole community comes out to see them. We put them on floats and have parades. That doesn't happen for members of the consumer math class.

4. *In football, a player can let the team down.* Personal effort is linked to more than personal achievement: it means the difference between making the team better or making it weaker, making a player's teammates and coaches grateful for his presence or irritated with his apathy. A single player can make his peers better than they would have been without him. That's a huge incentive that we take away from the classroom with our constant emphasis on individual outcomes.

5. *In football, repetition is honorable.* In the curriculum, we continually move forward, with not much opportunity to do things a second time and get better. Students have to do new things every time they get to class. In football, students do the same drills over and over all season long -- and, in fact, get better at them. The skills get easier, and players start to use those skills to do things that are more complex.

6. *In football, the unexpected happens all the time.* Every player will line up across from the same opposing player dozens of times during a game, but he knows that, each time, his opponent could do something different, and he'll have to react to it right in the moment. There's no opportunity to coast, to tune out, to sit back and watch others work. Every player is required to be involved and absorbed in his work, and a talented player who holds back is typically held in lower regard than his less talented but more engaged teammates. Contrast that with a normal class period, scripted by a teacher with the idea that a successful class is the one that goes as planned, with the fewest disruptions, and it's clear why apathy can be a problem in the classroom.

7. *In football, practices generally run a lot longer than 50 minutes.* And when they end, there's a reason to stop: the players work until they get it right or until they're too tired to move anymore. There's no specific reason that a school class should run for 50 minutes instead of 35 or 85, and there's no reason why classes should run the same length of time every day. The classroom schedule responds to pressures that come from outside the classroom -- state laws, other classes, even bus schedules. The football practice schedule is more internal -- the coach and team quit when they're done.

8. *In football, the homework is of a different type from what's done at practice.* Students do worksheets in the classroom and then very often are assigned to do the same kind of worksheet at home. Football requires a lot of homework that comes in the form of running and weight training, things not done at practice. Players work at home to find and build their strengths and then bring those strengths to practice to work together with their teammates on specific skills. The work done at home and the work done in common are two different jobs, and each is incomplete without the other.

9. *In football, emotions and human contact are expected parts of the work.* When players do well, they get to be happy. When they do poorly, they get to be angry. Players are supposed to talk with one another while things are going on. But we have no tools to make use of happiness or frustration in most classrooms, and we generally prohibit communication except for the most restricted exchanges. When we bring 30 students together and ask them not to communicate, not to use one another as resources or exhort one another to go further, then we make it clear to them that their being together is simply cost-effective.

10. *In football, players get to choose their own roles.* Not only do they choose their sport, but they also choose their favorite position within that sport. In the classroom, we don't allow people to follow their hearts very often. We give them a list of classes they have to take, and then we give them assignments within those classes that they have to do, and we don't offer many alternatives. We've set the

whole school thing up as a set of requirements. But sports are a set of opportunities, a set of pleasures from which anyone gets to choose. Each one of those pleasures carries with it a set of requirements and responsibilities and difficult learning assignments, but youngsters still do them voluntarily, following their own self-defined mission of seeking their place in the world.

11. *In football, the better players teach the less-skilled players.* Sometimes this teaching is on purpose, but mostly it is by example. Every player is constantly surrounded by other players who can do things well and who love doing what they do. The really good players are allowed to show off -- in fact, it's demanded that they show off, that they work to their highest capacity. The people who aren't as good observe that. They don't simply see skills they can learn; they become inspired. They get to see another person -- not just the teacher but a peer -- who knows what he's doing and who loves to do it. In the classroom, the best students aren't often given a chance publicly to go beyond what everyone else is doing. They're smothered, held back, kept to the same pace as their classmates.

We give the appearance of not caring so that we won't be hurt when the

students don't care either.

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12. *In football, there is a lot of individual instruction and encouragement from adults.* A coach who has only the nine defensive linemen to deal with for an hour is going to get a pretty good sense of who these youngsters are, what drives them, what they can and can't do. And those players are going to see the coach in a less formal and more human frame; they get to ask questions when questions arise without feeling as though they're on stage in front of 30 other bored students.

Let's admit a basic truth: bigger classes make personal contact more difficult. The school I was in had an average class size of 27 students. That was considered pretty good, since the statewide average was 31. But as I looked around the halls at the team photos in their glass trophy cases, the highest player-to-coach ratio I saw was 13 to one; sometimes it was better than 10 to one. There was one photo of the varsity football team with Coach Phillips and his three assistants surrounded by 35 players; erase the three assistants from the picture, and you could have had a photo of any one of his history classes.

On the first day of freshman basketball practice, 23 hopefuls tried out, and by the end of the first week, there were still 17. On the next Monday morning the coach said to me, "I sure hope some more of these kids quit. You can't do anything with

17 kids." True enough -- so why do we expect him to do something five periods a day with 25, 30, or 34?

13. *In football, the adults who participate are genuinely interested.* The adults involved in football are more than willing to tell you that they love to play, that they love to coach. And they don't say it in words so much as in their actions, in the way that they hold themselves and dive in to correct problems and give praise. But the teachers I watched (and the teachers I had from grade school to grad school) were, for the most part, embarrassed to death to say that they loved whatever it was that they did. It takes a lot of guts to stand up in front of 25 students who didn't volunteer to be there and say, "You know, dissecting this pig is going to be the most fun I'm going to have all day." We're candidates for the Geek-of-the-Month Club if we let people know that we really love poetry, or trigonometry, or theater, or invertebrate biology. And so we often hide behind a curriculum plan, a textbook, and a set of handouts, and we say, "You and I have to do this together because it's what the book says we have to do." We give the appearance of not caring so that we won't be hurt when the students don't care either.

But it was only in those few classrooms where the teachers said, both in word and in action, that they absolutely loved what they were doing that the students were engaged, that they learned. I talked with a lot of students -- and their teachers and their parents -- about what they loved to do, whether it was photography or surfing or hunting or reading -- things that are real skills. And when I asked how they got involved in those activities, both the young people and the adults always answered that it was someone who got them interested, and not anything intrinsic in the event itself. They followed someone they respected into an activity that that person loved, and they discovered it from there.

14. *In football, volunteers from the community are sought after.* No sports program in a high school could ever operate without assistant coaches, trainers, and other local people who aren't paid to help out. These people give hours and hours to the school in exchange for a handshake, a vinyl jacket, and a free dinner at the end of the season. Volunteers are a natural part of human activity. There are almost never volunteers in the classroom -- no adults who seem to believe that math or chemistry is so interesting that they would help out with it for free on a regular basis. There's no sense that anyone other than "the expert" can contribute to a discussion of ideas.

15. *In football, ability isn't age-linked.* Freshmen who excel can play varsity. In a ninth-grade English classroom, an extraordinary student can't go beyond what the other ninth-grade students are doing, even if he or she could profit from what's being assigned to the seniors. When a student tries out for football, he gets a

careful looking over by several coaches, and if he's really good, they're going to move him up fast. In the classroom, if that same student is really good -- if he's inspired -- one person sees it and gives him an A. Big deal -- it's the same A that someone else gets for just completing the requirements without inspiration.

The pace of advancement in football isn't linked to equal advancement in another, irrelevant area. If a boy is an adequate JV basketball player but an extraordinary football player, the football coach isn't going to say that the boy has to stay with the JV football team so that he's consistent with his grade level. No way! The coach is going to tell that player, "Come on up here; we need you." Have you ever heard an English teacher recruit a young student by saying, "We need you in this classroom"? Have you ever heard a science teacher say, "Your presence is crucial to how this course operates -- we're not at our full potential without you"?

16. *Football is more than the sum of its parts.* Players practice specific moves over and over in isolation, but they know that their job at the end is going to mean putting all those moves together. In school, we keep the parts separate. We don't show our students how a creative writer might use a knowledge of science; we don't show them how a historian might want to know about the building trades; we don't show them how a mechanic can take joy in knowing about American history. We don't let our students see the way that all these different interests might come together into a worthwhile and fascinating life. We pretend they're all separate.

17. *In football, a public performance is expected.* The incentive to perform in front of family and friends was a great motivating force for the athletes I knew. The potential for a poor performance was another motivator -- nobody wants to be embarrassed in public. These students were contributing an important civic service to their small community, with over a thousand home fans at every game, and they took that responsibility seriously. But schoolwork is almost always performed and evaluated in private. Successes and failures are unseen and have no bearing on the happiness of others.

No single one of these 17 patterns taken individually constitutes a magic potion for a good learning environment. But when we look at these patterns taken together, we can see that football has a lot to recommend it as a social configuration for learning. I'm not going to argue that we should give up on school and focus on football. What I am saying is that we have a model for learning difficult skills -- a model that appears in sports, in theater, in student clubs, in music, in hobbies -- and it's a model that works, that transmits both skills and joy from adult to teenager and from one teenager to another.

We need a varsity education.

HERB CHILDRESS holds a doctorate in Environment-Behavior Studies from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. His ethnography of a Northern California high school, "Landscapes of Betrayal, Landscapes of Joy," is available from University Microforms International, Ann Arbor, Mich. He can be reached via e-mail at miaktxca@aol.com.

Appendix E

Social Studies Mural in Hallway