

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

HOPE IN EDUCATION: A DIALOGUE WITH EDUCATORS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

TRACEY A. ROSE

Norman, Oklahoma

2007

UMI Number: 3271219

Copyright 2007 by
Rose, Tracey A.

All rights reserved.



UMI Microform 3271219

Copyright 2007 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

HOPE IN EDUCATION: A DIALOGUE WITH EDUCATORS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

Dr. Neil Houser

Dr. Frank McQuarrie

Dr. Stacy Reeder

Dr. Courtney Vaughn

Dr. Elizabeth Wilner

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Despair and Hope in Education.....	5
Research Question.....	10
 CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	12
Systems Theory.....	13
Relationships.....	15
Chaos.....	16
Sustainability and Transformation.....	18
 CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	21
Research Approach: Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology.....	21
Data collection and analysis procedures.....	24
Participants and Setting.....	27
 CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.....	30
Experiencing Hope Relationally.....	38
Experiencing Hope Chaotically.....	46
Experiencing Hope as a Sustaining and Transforming Force.....	50

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE.....	57
Developing Relationships through Interaction and Dialogue.....	58
Challenging Conformity through Uncertainty and Ambiguity.....	61
Sustaining and Transforming Education and Society.....	63
Conclusion.....	64

ABSTRACT

Contemporary educators (and students) continue to struggle within challenging social, political and educational contexts of power and conformity that often result in despair. Historically, humans have responded to despair through hope. This study examined the phenomenon of hope, as experienced by educators, within the context of systems theory, which holds that there is a serious mismatch between the interconnected or systemic *nature* of the world and our modern mechanistic *perception* of the world. The study used a qualitative design with elements of narrative inquiry and phenomenology to investigate the experiences and perspectives of four public school teachers. The findings suggest that educators experience hope: (1) relationally, (2) chaotically, and (3) and as a sustaining and transforming factor. As such, hope provides a supportive foundation that makes possible the continued struggle and growth of teachers, learners, and teacher educators. In light of these findings, I believe teachers and teacher educators need to engage in and provide opportunities for: (1) developing relationships through meaningful interaction and dialogue, (2) exploring uncertainty and ambiguity as means of challenging unnatural conformity in education and life, and (3) sustaining and transforming education and society. I conclude that one of the greatest sources of despair in modern society involves the replacement of natural systemic relationships with unnatural mechanistic relationships and that one of the greatest sources of hope lies in the possibility of recovering natural human perspectives through contemporary public education.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Any experience, however trivial in its first appearances, is capable of assuming an indefinite richness of significance by extending its range of perceived connections.

- *John Dewey*

I stood in an unfamiliar oval room with numerous tables and unknown faces. The students all seemed to know what they were doing. They did not stress when they were asked about how they would pay for their college. They all seemed calm; they appeared pulled together in their dress, speech, and demeanor. It was my turn and this unsure 18 year old, who could never look anybody in the eye, stepped forward. I gave the woman seated behind the table the paperwork I had completed for admission along with a letter stating the fact that I had been awarded a PELL Grant. This was the kind of grant you could get if you were a welfare kid like me.

She looked uneasy from the time she initially raised her eyes toward me. I was very thin and not well nourished. My clothes were simple, my sneakers well worn, and there were no matching accessories of any sort on my person like I'd seen on all of the other girls. They were, for the most part, with *others* – friends and family members - Moms and Dads smiling down, patting their shoulders and pulling out their checkbooks.

The woman that was helping me seemed more uncomfortable after glancing at the PELL Grant paper. She said she'd have to look and see if the grant came in yet. That was something that had never occurred to me. What if it wasn't there? She looked through a small file of papers, then back up at me, more alarmed, and then quickly shuffled through the papers again. I just stood there awkwardly with downcast eyes awaiting the news.

Her face became serious and her eyes leveled somewhere on my face. She evenly and flatly spoke the words I will always remember, *“Your grant has not arrived yet. I don’t know if you will be able to begin this semester.”*

Time and space froze for me. I wanted to weep. I thought I might easily melt into a puddle of tears on the floor and disappear and then all would be well. The impact of that statement at that moment in my life was unbelievable. I was so stunned that I could not speak. I glanced up once quickly, but it was as if I’d just received a fatal wound. ALL of my hopes, dreams, and aspirations were tied up in beginning college. I was desperate to catapult my way out of my unbearable home situation. I was hanging onto hope by a thread. Now that I reflect back, it seems a somewhat overly dramatic response to potentially having to wait a semester or two before beginning school. But at that time, I had very few options, and did not know where else to turn if I did not enter college.

The college worker told me to come back tomorrow. I felt a bit like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz when she finally arrived at the Wizard’s door. She thought her dreams and wishes would come true; but then she was told to come back tomorrow. The woman instructed me to call the next day. I said, “Um, We don’t have a phone.” “Excuse me?” was the reply. I answered her quizzical expression emphasizing each word, “We...don’t...have...a...phone.” “Then just come back and check tomorrow.” “Come back tomorrow?!” I repeated crestfallen and heartbroken. Tomorrow seemed like an eternity. I got on the bike that my friend gave me to trek back and forth to college. We did not own a car either. I wonder what the college attendant would have thought about that piece of information.

I went back the next day and returned to the same oval room with the tables and

the confident enrollees. I entered the room and when the woman saw me, she quickly looked down instead of smiling a greeting like she had just done with the students that entered before me. I was afraid. What was I thinking? I don't belong here! But I had nowhere else to go.

It was only a short distance between the door and her table, but the distance seemed to expand greatly as I approached her area. The distance felt as if it was also expanding between my hope of education and the looming reality. I arrived at the table and began, "I'm Tracey Mitchell and..." She stopped me. "Yes, we've been reviewing your file." That sounded so foreign to me; I'd never had a file reviewed before. She looked at me blankly and called two other women over for a consultation. I stood there feeling nervous and ready to bolt. They glanced up at me with a half smile and watched me stare down at my feet as I shifted back and forth. They were looking through a stack of papers that they shared. The woman in the middle held them while the other two looked on. Why was everyone looking so serious? I felt like I was in the doctor's office about to get some really bad medical news for which there may be no cure. In my case, perhaps there may *not* be a cure for non-admittance.

The women all turned to look at me at the same moment. They were expressionless except for the one woman who attempted a smile. "Do you have any alternative means of payment?" "No, Ma'am", I answered quietly barely making eye contact. "We can't let you start school without your grant." My head spun, my eyes stung, and my stomach dropped all at once. My hope, my only hope was gone. I looked up with my watery eyes revealing my crushed soul. "Oh," I managed to utter. I couldn't move, and the first tear fell. I thanked them and started to turn away.

The woman who had attempted to smile at me earlier looked at me with compassion. “Wait a minute,” she said. Her eyes darted back and forth between the eyes of her two companions. They looked at her strangely. She said, “Let me make a phone call.” She reached down and picked up the phone that I had not seen sitting in the upper left hand corner of the table. She asked me to have a seat in a chair near the wall. She took my paperwork and began a conversation with someone on the phone. She nodded her head occasionally, looked at the various pages she held in her hands, responded to the person on the phone, listened, and then repeated this process several times.

The other two women had walked away; and I sat isolated in the chair wondering what would become of me. She hung up the phone and she was smiling so big now. I felt the hope return a bit, but I remained guarded. “You start school in two weeks!” I was already holding my breath. I felt myself breathe in even more air before I could finally exhale. I had just about given up all hope. I was not used to things working out for me. That just didn’t seem to occur. I didn’t have much control over my environment – so I was used to things just happening to me instead of me influencing the outcome of anything. If my transparency and vulnerability influenced the outcome of this situation in any way, fine.

I stood there staring at the woman. Had I heard her correctly, or had my dreams prompted me toward an auditory illusion? Looking again at her face and encouraging expression, I realized I had heard her accurately. I replayed her words slowly in my head, “*You will start school in two weeks.*” My eyes welled up again, but this time it was joy instead of sorrow. I thanked her several times and then floated out of the room which I thought would hold devastating news. I pedaled my bike as fast as I could, threw open the

door, and loudly announced to anyone who happened to be home at the time, “I’m starting college in two weeks!”

Despair and Hope in Education

The preceding account was an excerpt from a journal I kept as I began to systematically investigate issues of despair and hope in education. The experience cited in this particular narrative exemplified despair contrasted with hope in education and in my life. As a graduate student, elementary teacher, and university instructor, I have become increasingly concerned about the critical relationships that exist between hope and struggle in society and education.

Contemporary public school education takes place within multiple layers of context. It is affected by modernist historical perspectives as well as local, national, and international social, economic, and political issues. Large scale differences in ideologies, philosophies, religions, and cultures generate difficulties in universal interconnectivity and communication. Worldwide social problems include such concerns as social injustices, human rights, gender equity concerns, and population growth. Global economic dilemmas include deficient educational opportunities besieged by lack of access to adequate nutrition, housing, and healthcare. International political crises involve decisions about power, managing resources, and environmental sustainability. These dominance issues have tragically led to wars, terrorism, genocides, and ethnic cleansings.

Nationally, our public school system faces complex challenges. Problems such as feelings of disconnection, lack of community, violence, overemphasis on standardized

tests and conformity, dropouts, and lack of teacher retention exist in our schools. Gang activity is present throughout our nation's schools. Our country has been traumatized by numerous school shootings (e.g., Eaker, 2005).

Contexts of extensive emphasis on rigid standardized testing result in potential increased anxiety and stress for educators and learners. Teachers and students are pressured to meet federal and state mandates. A sense of hopelessness exists in today's learning communities due to numerous contributing factors.

It has been suggested that hope is an important aspect of teaching and learning that makes possible the continuation of struggle in order to support and sustain public education (e.g., Curwin, 1992; Freire, 1992). Hope varies among individuals and is dependent upon multiple contextual influences. Societal hope, both national and global, has also manifested itself in a variety of ways historically and is continually emergent in present times. Yet, elusive as it may be, it has been argued that hope needs to be taken seriously. Freire (1992) suggested:

Teachers not only need to take hope seriously and seek to embody it in their actions, they must also find ways of fostering it among their pupils and colleagues, and especially now given that so much in our world, privately, nationally, and globally is characterized by chronic uncertainty. Because education is essentially a future oriented project concerned to bring about improvement specifically growth in the learner's knowledge and understanding, successful teaching requires practitioners to teach with hope in mind. (pp. 8-9)

Freire proposed that educators consider hope as a viable option toward encouraging growth and expanding knowledge in the learner.

John Cartwright (2004) is concerned that we often speak of hope with regard to seemingly frivolous matters, as well as with inconceivable challenges. However, within these great challenges lies opportunity. Cartwright (2004) used the metaphor of a quest to describe hope. He wrote,

In his extensive section on hope, Aquinas states succinctly, ‘Hope is directed to a future good which is hard but not impossible to attain’. If, in other words, the goal were easy to attain, hope would not be necessary; if on the other hand, it were impossible to attain, hope would be pointless and self deluding. Hope as an operative capacity is therefore at its most effective if it is associated with clear thinking and the realistic assessment of options and possibilities. The consistent linking of hope to human rationality and the power of judgment is therefore clear. (p. 169)

Imaginative and creative steps can be taken toward overcoming adversities and developing desirable outcomes through positive change. Together with great adversities is the potential for great possibilities.

There seems to be a sense of resignation in the field of education. Creative, vibrant, and innovative educational experiences do not seem to be very encouraged in today’s standard driven society. John Dewey (1922) stated, “Generally speaking, good people have been those who did what they were told to do, and lack of eager compliance is a sign of something wrong in their nature” (pp. 2-3). Dewey called for educators to “foster conditions that widen the horizon of others and give them command of their own powers” (2002, p. 294). Dewey guides us away from this sense of resignation toward a more hopeful exertion of our power to effect positive change in public school education.

Hope and struggle can perhaps be part of this sustenance of public education. School cultural transformations and collaboration may also play important roles in sustaining education in the public domain. Curwin (1992) stated, “Changing expectations of the way schools function and adapting them to genuinely serve students is both frightening and overwhelming. But change is the driving force of hope. Hope is the belief that desirable changes can and do occur. When hope is a school value, it is very powerful indeed” (p. 49). Situations can sometimes seem impossible, and changes can seem out of our grasp. Struggle is necessary for change, and the integration of hope and struggle can support educators in their perseverance toward positive changes in educational learning communities

Robert Eaker (2005) believes connections between struggle and hope can result in significant school cultural renewal:

Significant school transformation will require more than change in structure – the policies, programs, and procedures of a school. Substantive and lasting change will ultimately require a transformation of culture – the beliefs, assumptions, and habits that constitute the norm for the people throughout the organization.

Educators can be placed in new structures and go through the motions of new practices, but unless they eventually develop new competencies, and new commitments that lead to true school re-culturing, they will continue to be under the inexorable pull of their traditional practices and the assumptions that drive them. (p. 11)

Systemic cultural transformations both within and outside of the institution of public education require collaborative efforts. Richard DuFour (2005) discussed our need

to “work together collaboratively” (p. 2). He continued, “Faculties should recognize, honor, and utilize their own collective wisdom. The success of each generation of students will depend upon the collective expertise, shared commitments, and purposeful actions of men and women who shape students’ school experiences each day” (p. 6). The implication here is that hopeful wishes can change to positive transformations through cooperative relationships.

Herbert Kohl (1998) provided an additional perspective that potentially addresses both local and national societal issues in relation to hope. He said, “Many people who enter teaching do so to heal hurting children or to overcome social and political oppression. I believe in those things, but what characterizes good teaching above all is concern for the process and content of learning. If I taught in a perfect and untroubled society, I would still be challenged by helping children to learn” (p. 69). I interpret this to mean that hope in the field of education would remain necessary even if all of our societal afflictions were solved.

Hope may be erroneously viewed as a utopian ideal. One may wonder how *hope* could be useful in our global results-oriented educational environments. While interpretations of the meaning and impact of hope may vary among educators, and while hope may be a label that has been given to a variety of experiences, this does not mean that it has no effect on us. Although hope may ultimately be irreducible, Paulo Freire (1992) nonetheless suggests: “One of the tasks of the progressive educator, through a serious correct political analysis, is to unveil opportunities for hope no matter what the obstacles may be” (p. 9). Dewey seems to concur. Educational establishments are challenged daily with myriad complex tasks in their attempts to engage a variety of

people from a range of backgrounds and encounters. Recognizing these daily challenges, he asserted, “The world is hopeless to one without hope” (2002; p.166).

Yet, the literature suggests that educators often underestimate their power to effect change in education and society (e.g., Curwin, 1992). Freire (1992) declared, “To defeat the practice, you have to defeat the ideology – to defeat the ideology, you have to change the language – to change the language is the beginning of changing the world” (p. 80). Freire further suggested, “In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world in which they find themselves” (p. 83).

Freire (1992) makes strong claims about the relationships between hope, struggle, and human existence. He notes, “I do not understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is untested feasibilities and possible dreams” (p. 205). Freire goes on to suggest that if we are to make systemic and far reaching institutional changes, we must re-read the world in order to obtain that new vision. However, even that hopeful new vision may not be enough. To the extent that we are indeed suffering from despair in public education, it seems that we need to *act* upon that hopeful re-vision. Dialogue can be one form of action that can lead to hope.

Research Question

The rationale for this study centers around the notion that feelings of despair exist in education and society and that they need to be addressed if we are to improve our

contemporary conditions. I desired to begin a dialogue of hope as a starting point toward addressing this dilemma. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of how educators experience hope in education. Understanding the variety of ways instructors experience hope may help inform practice not only for public school teachers, but also for teacher educators in higher education. Specifically, the research question is: How do educators experience hope in education, and what are the implications for educational theory and practice?

In this chapter, I have addressed critical problems related to struggles contemporary educators experience within challenging sociopolitical contexts. I have suggested that despair is an ongoing aspect of education and society and that hope is one potential means of addressing this problem. In chapter two I will discuss the main theoretical lenses that will be used to interpret the data. The third chapter will describe the research methodology. Chapter four will provide analysis and interpretation of the data. The final chapter will offer implications for educational theory and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Contemporary educators are challenged with providing positive academic and social learning experiences for their students within contexts that are sometimes despairing. The myriad contextual influences within the walls of our schools as well as outside of our campuses can impact students and learners in a variety of ways. These despondent influences outlined in the previous chapter can potentially give rise to feelings of hopelessness in public school settings. My career as an elementary school teacher spanned thirteen years and contributed to my interest in knowing more about how other teachers experience hope in education. This study began with a curiosity about the possibilities and limitations of hope in learning contexts.

The theoretical framework for this investigation was based upon Systems Theory. Systems Theory involves the integration of multiple disciplines as well as multiple perspectives. Systems are viewed as webs of interdependent, interactive, and interrelated relationships which work together to form a new whole. The *whole* may be comprehended more fully when the parts are viewed collectively. This is the opposite of traditional Cartesian reductionistic perspectives which investigate fragmented bits of information in an attempt to understand mechanistically. In this chapter, I will briefly introduce the Cartesian method of thought. I will then describe components related to Systems Theory as set forth by Fritjof Capra (1996) and James Gleick (1987). Finally, I will discuss the concepts of relationships, chaos, and sustainability within the context of systemic thought.

The Cartesian method of thought originated with Rene Descartes who was a 17th Century philosopher, mathematician and scientist. This worldview has been dominant in recent centuries. Patrick Bracken (2001) said, “In the wake of the European Enlightenment, which challenged the authority of received wisdom and religious revelation, a central goal of Western culture became the development of a society ordered according to the dictates of reason. In the utilitarian calculations of modern times the best society would be predictable and orderly” (p. 735). The Cartesian model of thinking proposed that true understanding could take place by viewing the fragmented pieces of the whole in a linear and static fashion.

Descartes introduced the mechanistic metaphor of the clock to comprehend the world. Cartesian thought included the notion that by disconnecting structures and systems into parts, one could gain knowledge of the essence of the whole. Descartes’ famous quote, *I think therefore I am*, addresses the mind-body distinction that has come to be known, more generally, as Cartesian “dualism.” He guarded against being deceived by his perceptions of the world, even to the point of sometimes doubting his own existence (Descartes, 1996).

Systems Theory

An alternative to Cartesian dualism that has emerged in recent years is Systems Theory. This worldview, characterized by global interconnections, has arisen within the context of the postmodern critique of modernity. Capra (1996) explains the theory of living systems as comprehensive and inclusive. Systems Theory provides another way of looking at and thinking about life in the world. Capra (1996) noted, “Since the early days of biology, philosophers, and scientist have noticed that living forms, in many seemingly

mysterious ways, combine the stability of structure with the fluidity of change” (p. 175). Rather than concentrating on disjointed pieces or parts, the systems view gives attention to tenets of organization. Living systems may then be seen in a comprehensive manner through a holistic view. Capra (1996) espoused the view that all living systems organize, including social and ecological systems.

One notable feature of Systems Theory is that living systems employ organization. Gleick (1987) argued that there is order within chaos, “There is no library of forms and ideas against which to compare the images of perception. Information is stored in a plastic way, allowing fantastic juxtapositions and leaps of imagination. Some exists out there, and the brain seems to have more flexibility than classical physics in finding the order in it” (p. 164). The plasticity of thought and possibilities which Gleick addressed may provide an example of potential sudden order and stability which can emerge within chaotic environments.

Stability is found in the notion of interdependence which exists within the context of Systems Theory. Capra (2000) provided an example of this notion using the image of a tree. He noted that Cartesian worldviews may attempt to understand the tree by conceptually breaking it down into fragmented pieces. However, this thought process prevents us from ever understanding the *nature* of the tree. Alternatively, a systems theorist may view the tree within ever broadening contexts such as the interdependence of air, water, and soil in relation to the tree itself. Further, Systems Theory might afford an investigator the opportunity to view the tree within the context of weather and seasonal changes, as part of an ecological community which gives and receives from various forms of nature surrounding it.

Finally, one might use a systems theory lens to extend connections between earth and sky and even humanity and the universe. From a Systems Theorists' standpoint, the tree is not viewed in isolation but rather as part of a larger interdependent living system. This notion suggests that each component depends upon other components for life itself within a web of relationships. Stability exists in the pattern of the systemic organization and it is within the process of self-renewal that the system may transcend itself to create new forms (Capra, 2000).

There are numerous components comprising Systems Theory. However, three aspects in particular help frame the context for this study. They are as follows, (1) relationships, (2) chaos, and (3) sustainability and transformation.

Relationships

The relational component of systemic thinking is comprised of holistic and interdependent aspects. Capra (1996) explains that sustainable human communities require interdependence. He stated, "All members of an ecological community are interconnected in a vast and intricate network of relationships, the web of life" (p. 298). He further proposed that all ecological systems are dependent upon relationships for their very existence.

The concept of relationships is a notion central to Systems Theory. The impact of relationships within living systems can have unpredictable effects. Gleick (1987) stated, "The simplest systems are now seen to create extraordinarily difficult problems of predictability. Yet order arises spontaneously in those systems – chaos and order together. Tiny differences in input could quickly become overwhelming differences in

output” (p. 8). The web of relationships found within living systems may perhaps seem chaotic at times, and yet these same relationships may also provide stability and sustainability for the entire system.

For humans, relationship involves interaction and dialogue with one another. Thus, conversations within the realm of authentic communities are important to learning and development (e.g., Vygotsky, 1962). A central aspect of human dialogue and learning is the process of naming the objects that influence our thinking and being (e.g., Greene, 1988). Analogous to systems existing of interdependent relationships is the notion that human relationships are dependent upon social interaction, communication and dialogue.

Chaos

The chaotic aspect of Systems Theory is characterized by dynamic and nonlinear activity. According to Capra (1996), a network is used as a metaphor for knowledge in systems theory and may be likened to learning in community. Small changes may produce dramatic results in many nonlinear systems. However, sensitive dependence on initial conditions, or the butterfly effect, demonstrates that systems can have highly unpredictable behavioral outcomes. Major differences can be made to a complex system through even minor changes, as represented by the well-known analogy of weather being affected by a mere flap of a butterfly wing. A holistic worldview calls for seeing the integrated whole rather than disconnected parts. Capra (1996) stated:

Chaotic behavior is very different from random, erratic motion. With the help of strange attractors a distinction can be made between mere randomness, or ‘noise’ and chaos. Chaotic behavior is deterministic and patterned, and strange attractors

allow us to transform the seemingly random data into distinct visible shapes. In many nonlinear systems, however, small changes of certain parameters may produce dramatic changes in the basic characteristics of the phase portrait.

Attractors may disappear or change into one another, or new attractors may suddenly appear. Such systems are said to be structurally unstable, and the critical point of instability are called 'bifurcation points,' because they are points in the system's evolution where a fork suddenly appears and the system branches off in a new directions. They correspond to points of instability at which the system changes abruptly and new forms of order suddenly appear. Such instabilities can occur only in open systems operating far from equilibrium. (pp. 134-137)

When I read Capra, I envision hopeful possibilities lying within minute changes in nonlinear systems. I imagine changes that can potentially create spontaneous, unpredictable, and dramatic results. Within a human context, perhaps there is hope in the notion that the seemingly small contributions which one person or group can make could have vast positive effects.

With regard to human learning and development, uncertainty or chaos can be related to what Jean Piaget (1979) has termed disequilibrium. This concept involves a sense of imbalance which requires either accommodating space for new information in order to gain understanding, or assimilating information into the framework of our current knowledge of the subject. Thus, through the processes of either accommodation or assimilation, equilibrium may be restored. This is somewhat analogous to finding order in the chaos which leads to new possibilities and creations in complex living systems.

Sustainability and Transformation

Sustainability in Systems Theory can be seen as a transforming and self-transcending process. Capra (1996) believes that we should not attempt to view current social and environmental difficulties in isolation. He clarified that the despairing problems are systemic in nature and thus characterized by interdependence and interconnection. Capra (1996) felt that the problems could be seen as part of a larger dilemma, a “crisis of perception.” He stated,

It derives from 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. There are solutions to the major problems of our time, some of them even simple. But they require a radical shift in our perceptions, our thinking, our values. Not only do our leaders fail to see how different problems are interrelated; they also refuse to recognize how their so-called solutions affect future generations. From the systemic point of view, the only viable solutions are those that are sustainable. One of the greatest challenges of our time is to create sustainable communities having social and cultural environments in which we can satisfy our needs and aspirations without diminishing the chances of future generations. (pp. 3-4)

Modern societal problems include difficulties we face in relation to the challenges of continual renewal in public school settings. As we seek solutions, it may be helpful to think of schools systems in terms of past, present and future, and to recognize that they are holistically interrelated. We are confronted with the notion of not only searching for

ways to move toward more positive social and educational, but also ways to make improvements and advances which will help ensure the stability of future generations.

Ironically, the stability and sustainability of a system may actually depend upon the structure's ability to change. This type of flexible adaptation was addressed by Gleick (1987). He expressed, "A critical issue is robustness; how well can a system withstand small jolts. Equally critical in biological systems is flexibility: how well can a system function over a range of frequencies. A locking-in to a single mode can be enslavement, preventing a system from adapting to change. Organisms must respond to circumstances that vary rapidly and unpredictably" (1987, p. 293). Gleick used the respiratory system with its changing heartbeat and respiration as an example of systems responding to unpredictable conditions. I believe his point was to exemplify that although traditionally we may view stability as static, stability and sustainability can also be seen as dynamic and supported through change.

The idea that stability and sustainability can be maintained through ongoing change appears paradoxical. The paradox of constant stability versus intermittent change also exists in educational systems. We appear to currently be in a state of homogeneous thinking regarding how schools should be structured. With regard to the notion of despair, perhaps we are poised to begin to consider where we are, how we got here, and where we will go from here in modern public education.

While sustainability in systems thinking applies largely to ecological systems, it has additional applications. In education and society, for example, the sustainability of critical analysis and reflection is often considered essential for development and change. One way educators have thought about sustainability is in terms of what Dewey (1938)

has called “continuity.” Continuity includes the notion that humans are affected by experience. Paradoxically, continuity is necessary both for stability and growth among learners. Dewey explained that we are to challenge our students to their full potential, yet the experiences we provide them should not be so advanced as to frustrate the learner to the point of impeding future successful learning experiences. Similarly, it is critical both to stability and transformation where societies are concerned. This notion of sustainability through changing transformation both large and small is intriguing and influenced my engagement in this study.

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework for this study which centers around Systems Theory. This theory encompasses the notion of interconnected and interrelated webs of relationships for sustainability. Systemic thinking incorporates the concepts of relationships, chaos, and sustainability. In the next chapter, I will present the methodology and data analysis used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a study of hope in education. Again, my research question was how do educators experience hope in education, and what are the implications for educational theory and practice? In the two previous chapters, I clarified the focus of the research, and discussed the main theoretical lenses used in the inquiry. The purpose of this third chapter is to explain the research methodology used in the study. First I will discuss the research approach. Next I will clarify the data collection methods and data analysis strategies. I will conclude with a description of the research participants and context.

Research Approach: Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology

The aim of this study was to investigate experiences of educators with regard to hope in education and the implications for educational theory and practice. This is a qualitative study written in a narrative form in which I was a participant observer. This interpretivist framework drew upon aspects of phenomenological and narrative inquiry. Qualitative approaches engage researchers in perspective seeking (Vaughn, Langenbach, & Aagaard, 1994). This is an emic, or insider perspective rather than an etic, outsider perspective. According to Schwandt (2001), “To call a research activity qualitative inquiry may broadly mean that it aims at understanding the meaning of human action” (p. 213). This type of research involves the use of qualitative data, such as interviews, documents, and field notes based on participant observation to understand and explain social phenomena.

Qualitative research typically involves sustained interactions with participants in order to gain meaningful insights. Investigators can gain deeper understandings of their study from the participants' multiple perspectives. The researcher begins to make interpretations while observing, questioning, and dialoguing with participants over an extended period of time (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Qualitative techniques for data collection are often exploratory in nature. Glaser and Strauss (1967) point out that in qualitative research, some of the questions and details of the data collection emerge as the investigation continues. Interpretations were made during this study using narrative inquiry and phenomenological modes of investigation.

Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology are particular modes of qualitative research utilized in this study. Experience and story are combined in narrative inquiry through understanding experience as lived and told stories (Clandinin and Connely, 1994). Schwandt writes: "Narrative inquiry is a broad term encompassing the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories of life experiences (e.g., life histories, narrative interviews, journals, diaries, and memoirs) and reporting that kind of research" (p. 171). Narrative inquiry portrays unique individual and human elements that cannot be quantified.

The phenomena under study can be illuminated through narrative inquiry. The qualitative investigator strives to understand phenomena from the participants' point of view. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) stated, "Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect" (p.1). This method of inquiry was created to investigate social and cultural phenomena, including deeper understanding of people, and the social, and cultural contexts in which they live. Narrative inquiry creates

a way for amplification of the voices of the participants; their realities are heard through sharing their personal stories.

Narrative inquiry and phenomenology are modes of qualitative research. The qualitative researcher collects, codes, and analyzes data; and these processes are ongoing and intertwined throughout research. Glaser and Strauss believe, “The discussional form of formulating theory gives a feeling of ‘ever-developing’ to the theory, allows it to become quite rich, complex, and dense, and makes its fit and relevance easy to comprehend” (p. 32). As concepts, categories, and patterns develop regarding the phenomena under investigation, the theory begins to emerge.

Phenomenology is an aspect of qualitative research which closely examines a particular object, event, or subject. Schwandt (2001) remarked, “Phenomenologists insist on careful description of ordinary conscious experience of everyday life (the life world) a description of ‘things’ (the essential structure of consciousness) as one experiences them” (p. 191). This includes the participant’s *perceptions* of the experiences. “Phenomenology is a matter of studying everyday experience from the point of view of the subject” (Schwandt, 2001, p.192). Phenomenology affords the researcher the opportunity to take a deep, clear, critical view of the subject under investigation.

Perceptions of education and, in particular, hope in education vary among educators. Glesne (1999) stated, “A phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experience of the phenomena under study” (p. 7). My study was better understood through inquiring about the perspectives of others and discovering personal meanings they gave to the phenomenon of hope in education.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The number of participants in the study was purposefully low in order to spend extended periods of time with a few respondents. This is important as it applies to the notion set forth by Alfred North Whitehead (1985) who argued that exploring a few subjects in depth was often more desirable than investigating a breadth of subjects in a shallow manner. The interview questions were broad and open-ended to begin with. When participants said something that was more directly related to my study, I suggested that they tell me more about what they meant by their responses. I tape recorded the interviews for later transcription in order to further inform my study and guide the development of additional questions for follow-up interviews with the participants.

The interview process consisted of a sequence of three dialogues with each participant. The first phase of individual interviews began in the summer of 2005. The second set of individual interviews occurred in the fall of 2005. The third and final series of interviews was a group interview which included all of the participants and took place in the winter of 2006. The interviews were each approximately one and one half hours long.

In addition to participating in the interview process, the participants kept a reflective journal throughout the study. The researcher provided the participants with identical blank journals. The participants included a variety of personally meaningful items which related to hope in education, such as quotes, anecdotal notes, photos, journal and newspaper articles, exposes, and personal thoughts. The information gathered from

the interviews, reflective journals, and the literature provided the data for this investigation.

This qualitative study was conducted within an interpretive epistemological framework and incorporated the use of social inquiry through ongoing discussions and interviews. I believe this was an appropriate method of study because interviews provided valuable information regarding the perceived relational connections between teaching, learning, and hope. Ruth Behar (1996) addressed this type of personal experience and introspective life story. She spoke of attempting to “bridge the border between the private and the public” (p. 173). Authentic and novel insights may be provided by carefully attending to the fabric of personal experiences of both self and others. The author stated, “A personal voice, if creatively used, can lead the reader, not into miniature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into the enormous sea of serious social issues” (Behar, p. 14). I investigated personal voices of educators in order to discover perceptions of hope with regard to education. This investigation included clarifying bias from the start, member-checking, prolonged engagement, data collecting on multiple occasions over time, and ongoing, detailed documentation.

The protocol for the study included the use of important information sources such as interviews and “free write” sessions. The participants engaged in focused interviews and additional individual reflective writing about their experiences with and perceptions of hope in education. These dialogical interactions afforded me the opportunity to gain important sources of data through understanding information, discussing issues central to the research focus, and asking specific questions which arose as a result of the ongoing investigation. The study was enriched through multiple data collection methods including

interviews, reflective writing, and literary analysis. The investigation offered possibilities of increased understanding of experiences related to hope in education.

I used an iterative approach to analyzing the data. This cyclic process of reading, reflecting, and writing was conducive to this qualitative investigation. This process informed the subsequent stages of data collection. Analysis continued throughout the data gathering phase of the research. Emergent concepts began to be identified during the early stages of data generation. Relationships among concepts were noted. I chose to group the transcriptions by question to more deeply understand the interconnectivity among the respondent's perceptions. Following each question, I recorded the answers of each participant in order to compare and contrast their views.

I transcribed all of the interview data leaving a wide margin on the right side of each typed page. I employed thorough, multiple readings of the transcribed data. I searched for similarities, differences, emerging concepts, and themes. I then added text boxes in the margins to make notations throughout the transcriptions. I engaged in systematic coding of the transcriptions and reflective journal writings to bring structure, and meaning to the information. The concepts were grouped into categories and assigned a code to organize and synthesize the data. Modifications were made regarding the codes as needed. The codes were further studied and analyzed in order to identify developing themes.

The contents of the reflective journals were read during the tape recorded interviews. The data from the journals were therefore included in the transcriptions and thus incorporated in the coding and theming processes. I highlighted each line in the transcription margin with different text colors according to the theme addressed. I later

cut and pasted the corresponding themes together in a separate document. This facilitated a more clear view of the emerging categories, concepts and themes. In addition to the transcriptions and reflective journals, I also kept process notes in a binder throughout the study. I wrote impressions, thoughts, ideas about the research, additional questions to ask participants, concerns, successes, and changes in perception regarding hope in education.

Participants and Context

The study consisted of three interviews and reflective journal writing with a total of four participants. The participants, all currently practicing teachers, consisted of two females and two males. I included male and female voices as well as experienced versus limited experienced perceptions within the study. The participants ranged in age from 22 to 56. Their public school teaching experience ranged from a first year teacher to a 25 year veteran two years from retirement. The grades represented in the study ranged from preschool to high school. I engaged in dialogue with teachers to better understand experiences of others with regard to hope in education.

It was helpful to approach educators and administrators for assistance in selection of the participants. The participants were employed in four separate school buildings within two separate towns and school districts. I spoke with teachers from early childhood, elementary, middle, and high schools. I gained access to schools through associations with professional colleagues and acquaintances in the field of education. The timeline for this study was approximately one year.

Pseudonyms were used throughout the writing in reference to the participants. The first participant was a 56 year old female speech pathologist at the preschool level.

Emily taught in the public school system for more than 25 years and was two years away from retirement. She taught courses at the university level as well. Emily was discouraged by the notion that policymakers spent so little time in public schools and yet made such far reaching decisions, policies, and mandates. Among other things, she was encouraged by the possibility that she could become more involved in the political aspects affecting public education.

The second participant was a 24 year old male teacher at the elementary school level. This was Ryan's second year to teach in the public schools. Ryan continually augmented the curriculum with self-made materials. Ryan was frustrated with the lack of space for creativity and originality for both teachers and students in the public schools. Among other things, he found encouragement in the practice of engaging in authentic dialogue with his students.

The third participant was a 31 year old male who taught social studies at the intermediate school level. This was Dustin's eighth year to teach in the public school system. Dustin also coached sports in the intermediate school. While discouraged by the inflexibility of some of his colleagues, Dustin was encouraged by his ability to find time for incidental learning experiences and by the full participation of special needs students.

The fourth participant was a 22 year old female who taught social studies at the high school level. This was Brandy's first year to teach in the public schools. Brandy was frustrated by the inconsistencies between what she felt were best practices and what she had the time to do with the students within the framework of her building operations. She was encouraged by previous notions set forth through literature related to education. Brandy felt that the ideals written about by authors such as Parker Palmer could be

reached in public schools with effort.

The purpose of this third chapter was to explain the research methodology used in the study. First I discussed the research aims and design. Next, I clarified the methods of data collection and analysis. I concluded with a description of the participants and the context. In the fourth chapter I will present analysis and interpretation of the research data.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Educators and students engage in teaching and learning amid contexts of power and conformity. Schools can sometimes become environments of coercion and submission to conventional norms. Uncritical obedience to mandates has contributed to an expanding acceptance of the deprofessionalization of educators. A potential resulting lack of autonomy and creativity can contribute to despair in educational environments. One historical response to despair has been hope. I propose that hope can be infused within contexts of despair in education, influencing positive change.

My perspectives regarding hope in education evolved throughout the course of the investigation. I began the study with the notion that it was sufficient to persist in the hope that the public school system would eventually recuperate from its current woes. I was intrigued with the topic of hope. I sensed that hope was something in the back of teachers' minds because the concept seemed to appear often in conversations with educators and teacher candidates.

There have been numerous times when I have heard educators begin dialogues with words like the following: "I hope my students..., I hope I can help my students understand..., I hope our education system...." I originally viewed hope as simply an optimistic attitude that could help smooth the rough edges within our modern educational system. My understanding of hope in education deepened as I explored related literature and dialogued with educators.

My viewpoints about hope have been influenced by my experiential background in early childhood public education and higher education. My perceptions are further influenced by my race, class, and gender. I am a middle class Caucasian female. I understand that “invisible” structures exist within society which provide me with unearned privileges. Thus, the assumptions I make, and the conclusions I draw about hope, are framed within these unseen constructs. Peggy McIntosh (1989) stated, “White skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us” (p. 127). Though it is not my intention to take advantage of unearned privileges, I am aware that it may be easier for me to have hope in a society which promotes and sustains the dominant white culture.

Hope does not exist in isolation, but is inherently imbedded in expanding and interrelated contexts of influence. These contexts can be likened to what Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) discussed in his ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner proposed that children develop within concentric circles of environmental influences. (see Figure 1) He viewed these nested systems as having bidirectional influences across boundaries of four major contextual categories. Beginning with the individual, Bronfenbrenner theorized expanding contextual influences, working from the microsystem (e.g., family, school, neighborhood), to the *mesosystem* (e.g., community, culture), to the *exosystem* (e.g., society), and then finally to the *macrosystem* (e.g., global, economic, political, and cultural contexts).

Based on my experiences, and discussions with others, I believe that hope can be found in and can move among these sub-contexts. Individual behaviors of teachers are inherently interconnected with simultaneous contexts. Educators may act in the best

interests of the students in their classrooms, yet they must also be mindful of school policies as well as state and federal mandates.

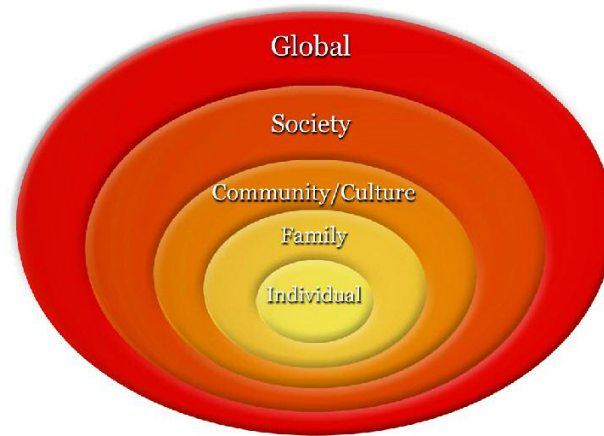


Figure 1. Contexts of Influence.

During the research process, I began to consider multiple ideas about hope as it relates to education. For instance, I had not previously considered the extent of liberation which hope in education could potentially provide. At the conclusion of my research, my perspectives grew to include the need for a clear plan to accompany the hopeful visions of constructive improvements in public education. I began to revise my thought that simply having an optimistic attitude could change public learning domains. I became aware that more was needed, but I was unsure exactly what that entailed. I began to sense that meaningful dialogue could play a vital role in positive educational changes. Hearing voices of others and spending time considering multiple perspectives could be a start. Collaboration regarding identification of local and global educational problems as well as potential solutions could also bolster positive changes.

The question for this study was, how do educators experience hope in education,

and what are the implications for theory and practice? First, I clarified the focus of the research and provided a historical context for the study. Next, I explored the phenomenon of hope in the literature, exhibiting a theoretical framework centered on systems theory. In this chapter I will present analysis and interpretation of the data. First, I will discuss the participants' perceptions of education. This will provide a context for thinking about elements of education, including despair. Then, I will discuss findings regarding hope in education.

The first interview began with a general, open-ended question: What is your perception of education? The four participants talked at length about a range of ideas and beliefs. Elements of despair became evident as the participants responded. A variety of concerns were expressed such as lack of respect for the teaching profession, test driven curricula, fragmented rather than holistic approaches to education, uniform and rigid mandates, breadth versus depth of learning, and lack of family involvement in preparing students for school.

The participants discussed lack of respect among family and others for the field of education. Brandy originally chose to study pre-law. Her family was happy about that and supported her strongly in that decision. Brandy relayed, "It was kind of a fluke that I ended up in education anyway. All of my family members, except my mom, all really feel like I like failed somehow. When I changed my major from pre-law to education; that was like going down – you know what I mean?" Brandy had family members offer to pay for her schooling if she would reverse her decision and attend law school.

Participants cited test driven curricula as a despairing factor in education. Ryan addressed this issue:

Test driven curriculums scare teachers into not being creative anymore, A teacher isn't going to necessarily be *fired* over her test scores, but...you're placed under a certain amount of stress because your principal wants you to perform at a certain level because they have a certain expectation that they have to meet. It's just going to get passed down. Like, it never stops. I guess they just have a fear of not performing because they either get it from their principal or it's in the media all the time. You can't escape it.

Statements such as these could possibly lead to the notion that educators may accept a lack of creativity as a norm due to fears that they will not rise to the expectations of administrators. Ryan wondered if teachers' very livelihood may be threatened if they choose to step outside of the boundaries of administrative control and expectations.

Brandy addressed practices of disconnected engagement in fragmented bits of information rather than holistic knowledge:

I think that there's a lot more to education than just skills, or just fragmented bits of knowledge. I think there are too many standards, and too much emphasis on testing that don't measure anything like creativity, innovation, or anything like that. I think there's a big gap in what we should be doing, and in what educators want to be doing, and what we're being told to do.

Brandy needed the curriculum to make sense and be interconnected with relevancy to real world circumstances. She concluded by saying, "Offering isolated and fragmented facts for students to memorize is not good education".

Another topic addressed by participants involved the perceived practice of policy makers enforcing mandates expecting *all* children to perform in a uniform manner. Emily

expressed frustration about uniform decisions that affected many children. She relayed that she had been fortunate to work with administrators and teachers that viewed the situation broadly. They attempted to meet mandates while meeting the needs of their students. Emily made the following comments:

I would like to see decision-makers spend a significant amount of time in all different types of schools, upper socio-economic, mid, low, inner city schools to see what's really happening. You can't make a rule that applies to *all* children and expect *all* children to meet that goal. It's just not realistic. You wouldn't do that in business, you wouldn't do it in a lot of other areas. And yet, I don't know why we feel like education is where it needs to be. I feel that we're putting so much on them so early that we may be creating more problems than we're solving.

Emily's uneasiness with current policies and procedures is not an unfamiliar one. As a public school teacher, I heard this sentiment mirrored in numerous conversations among educators in recent years. When we begin to recognize that education is nonlinear and dynamic, static and uniform academic formulas do not seem practical.

Brandy talked about emphasizing depth versus breadth in academic endeavors. If her students did not comprehend something that she covered in class, she would go back over it even if she had to put something else off. She stated that this flexibility was very important. Brandy explained:

I want the kids to learn. If I don't get everything covered by the end of the year, oh well. I could cover everything, but they won't get it. I would change the focus on trying to get *everything* covered. I teach high school social studies and am told that I must get through the Civil War to Reagan. And so that leaves little freedom

for creativity, that leaves little freedom for *depth*, connections, and comprehension.

While there is a broad sense that more is better in our contemporary society, theorists such as Whitehead (1929) have suggested that perhaps less is indeed more. Freire (2002) was concerned with what he termed a *banking method* of simply depositing information into students' heads devoid of critical reflection. The banking method came to mind recently as a student teacher was describing a math lesson. Some of her students had difficulty understanding the skill, and she was attempting to review the concept to increase their comprehension. However, she was told by her cooperating teacher to keep moving and stay on schedule rather than stop and help those who were struggling. This situation could be viewed as a metaphor for the time restraints and pressure to finish cumbersome curriculum in today's classrooms.

A final example of my participants' general perceptions of education included the notion that students are entering classrooms with less assistance from their families of origin. Emily discussed her concern that children come to school ill-prepared for the challenges that await them. She is a preschool speech pathologist; she also works with children with special needs. Emily laments that the children she sees have a tremendous amount of trouble with basic receptive and expressive conversational skills. She feels that this is due, in part, to excessive amounts of time in front of the television and video games. She expressed that the *screen* seems to have replaced face to face contact. Children are arriving at school with less pre-knowledge and academic background.

Emily relayed that families with young children seem to be engaging less in dialogue, reciting nursery rhymes, and reading books together. She commented on

diminished engagement, “Things like that set the groundwork for school. So, I feel like we need to look at what we’re expecting of young children if they are potentially entering school with moderate skills to cope with the demands placed on them. I think that’s where the whole breakdown in education is. They don’t have the skills to do what we’re asking them to do. That’s like asking me to go build an airplane!” Thus, it appears that educators are wondering if the tasks at hand are possible. Students may be ill prepared to even begin the struggle of meeting the school expectations.

The participants’ concerns regarding issues like lack of respect, fragmentation, universal mandates, test driven curricula, and reduced family support suggest that a sense of despair exists in modern education. At no point did the term *hope* appear in our initial conversation of perceptions of education. It was not until I explicitly asked the participants about hope that they began to utilize the term and identify connections with their practices. Yet, once the subject of hope was broached, participants began to think about and relay ways they felt they experienced hope in education.

One of the foundational needs for a study of hope is its potential influence on dissipating despair in education so that it is possible to address the broader social conditions that create and perpetuate despair in the first place. An atmosphere of hopelessness negatively affects educators, learners, and other stakeholders within the educational community. As I found during my study; a climate of hope can have a positive impact upon these same entities.

Analysis of the research data revealed three main findings regarding the ways in which these teachers experienced hope. Specifically, they experienced hope: (1) *relationally*, (2) *chaotically*, and (3) *as a sustaining and transforming force in education*

and life. As we continued our dialogues in the interview sessions with a new and explicit focus on hope, all observed that they had become more conscious of the manifestations of hope in their professional lives.

Hope Experienced Relationally

The first finding included the notion that educators experience hope relationally. The idea that hope is experienced relationally was the finding cited most often by the research participants. This is true of experiences between teachers and students, teachers and their colleagues, and teachers and parents. Hope experienced relationally involves an ethic of care, the importance of vulnerability, and the value of dialogue will be addressed in this segment of the findings. Teachers and students, as well as others involved with education, build relationships through dialogue. Authentic conversations can build connections and meaningful bonds among people. Ryan illustrated an application of this statement to interactions between teachers and students; “Educators will always have the most important job in the world, to *care*”.

When the participants reflected on their own previous teachers, the overriding themes of care and concern appeared numerous times. The importance of relationships within educational contexts is one of the overriding themes of this study. Participants remembered feeling hopeful in classrooms where teachers “went the extra mile,” believed in them, and encouraged them. One example of hope experienced relationally was set forth by Dustin:

Relationships are a big part of teaching. The relationships you have with your students are so important. Sometimes I would get home and there would be some

of my students in my front yard asking me if I wanted to toss the ball around. My first instinct after a long, tiring day at work was to tell them no thanks. I felt a little irritated at first that I wasn't going to be able to arrive home to relax for a little bit before facing another day. But after playing ball with these guys in my yard, the days and weeks that followed at school were enhanced and the few behavior problems that I had seen among them seem to diminish.

Dustin's statements revealed that perhaps his students felt valued because he spent time with them after school hours. This time spent building relationships beyond the classroom paid dividends in improved student behavior and performance too. The investment seemed to be a win-win situation for the teacher and the students.

Another example of relational hope was clarified in a dialogue I shared with Brandy. She felt that relationships among faculty members were sometimes hard to forge, especially if an instructor was new to the school. She found working with her grade level team to be quite beneficial. They shared their successes and failures with one another. Brandy noted that her colleagues did not seem to judge or think less of one another if someone was struggling. Their grade level meetings were sometimes frustrating though because they all approached problems differently. But she believed that the time spent collaborating together and building bonds helped a lot.

Brandy and her colleagues made a point to get together every month for dinner. They all looked forward to time when they could just relax and enjoy being together. It was important to her to build relationships with her colleagues. They gave one another hope when things weren't going well.

An additional example of hope experienced relationally involved an experience

Ryan shared. He sometimes felt hassled by parents. When they called on the phone, he braced himself wondering what they thought he had done wrong or had failed to do. Ryan indicated that his views began to change recently after a student's parents asked to meet with him. They explained what an encouragement he had been to their child and to them during the school year. They expressed their gratitude and told him some specific examples of the difference he had made in their lives that year.

Ryan was surprised because it seemed to him that not many people took the time to thank teachers. He began to view his students' parents in a somewhat different light after that encounter. Ryan said, "I think when my attitudes changed, and I let my guard down some, I found that building relationships with parents was easier and it benefited the kids too. They saw us as more of a team and that we were there to help them be successful." Nel Noddings (1999) spoke of a foundational ethic of care with regard to relationships in schooling and learning. Noddings felt that an ethic of care could be manifested through dialogical engagement by relating to one another, and being attentively receptive to one another. There is a saying; students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. It is possible that when learners feel cared for, they can learn to care for others. I am hopeful that this sense of nurturing can flourish and move beyond the borders of the four walls of the classroom setting.

Participants shared experiences about those people they cared about. For example, Brandy spoke about her family and their reactions to her entering the field of education, All of the participants shared fond experiences they had with their students which were enhanced when they took extra time to interact with them through dialogue, interaction, and even play after school. More than one participant shared experiences of improved

relationships with parents through respectful communication. This makes me wonder what would happen if we were to consider our closest relationships. Is there a degree of hope associated with all of these connections? We hope the bonds will remain close. We hope that good things will befall our dear ones. We hope that there will be continuity in the relationship despite life changes. Hope within relationships may exist within contexts of care, loving attention, and perhaps a sense of vulnerability.

A sense of vulnerability can infuse panic, alarm, and fear into the hearts of people in general, and sometimes educators in particular. Educators are placed in a position to be good stewards of their students and provide them with appropriate and powerful learning experiences. Some interpret this task to mean that they must stop being themselves and focus solely on the curricular tasks at hand. I question whether meaningful and valuable learning can take place in educational environments devoid of care and hope.

The teachers involved in the study had varying years of experiences and a range of perspectives about education. I, too, have viewed the field of education from a variety of perspectives. I have been learner, teacher, parent, and teacher educator. I was recently engaged in my role of supervising student teachers. I viewed my supervisee struggle with a cooperating teacher's rules which included silence upon entering the classroom. There were to be no discussions, greetings, words of encouragement, or questions of concern. This seemed an unnatural social setting for children, and it disturbed me. The sense of community was thwarted before the school day even began. Dewey (1938) would suggest that forcing learners to exist in isolation rather than connecting with others interrupts opportunities to learn in community and would therefore be viewed as miseducative.

Indeed, this tearing away of natural relational tendencies is poignant. Maxine

Greene (2000) discussed the vital inclusion of dialogue in schools. She stated:

Defining the possibilities of schools and the purposes of a system of US public education is therefore an uneasy task. Familiar certainties have slipped. Upsurges of optimism with regard to technical and economic advances have become more startling. Yet the tendency to ignore the growing gulfs between rich and poor is all-pervasive, and ethnic and racial prejudices are seemingly insuperable. No serious consideration seems to be given, perhaps especially among public school curriculum-framers, to the traditions that should be kept alive, of the ‘unrehearsed intellectual adventure of the conversation’. (p. 268)

I interpret Greene’s statements to mean that the learning environments become lifeless when they are devoid of dialogue. According to Greene (2000) it seems that part of the wonder and task of learning is dialogical in nature. This plea for dialogue is echoed by Foucault (1994), “The assertion that discourse is autonomous covers more than the claim that discourse can be made intelligible on its own terms. It is rather the extreme and interesting (if not ultimately implausible) claim that discourse unifies the whole system of practices, and that it is only in terms of this discursive unity that the various social, political, economic, technological, and pedagogical factors come together and function in a coherent way” (p. 65). Foucault’s point is that a central unifying factor in building and solidifying relationships is dialogue.

Avoiding vulnerability and care has contributed to the despair which currently exists in educational settings. Displays of power such as objectifying students as marginalized beings can potentially have significant and negative impacts. Brandy expressed, “I think that there’s a lot more to education than just skills, or just fragmented

bits of knowledge. I think that education, there's a bigger purpose to it. And it's to humanize people, to get people to care, to get people to be good citizens. We need a more humanized approach in schools." Authoritative and emotionally barren interactions in schools can impair opportunities for creativity and dynamic growth. Perhaps learning and civic communities could benefit from striving toward enhanced genuineness in relationships.

Authenticity in education and in life beacons us to be vulnerable, available, and transparent. I propose that this manner of interacting necessitates frank dialogue. Noddings (1999) supports this notion with the following statement, "As we try to care, we are helped in our efforts by the feedback we get from the recipients of our care. Dialogue is such an essential part of caring that we could not model caring without engaging in it' (p. 191).

Relationships are important among educators and learners. Many teachers have found peace of mind in the knowledge that they have tried to make a positive difference in the lives of their students. Dustin offered, "Teachers can give the students the message, 'I've got your back. I'm here for you no matter what and I won't give up on you'." Instructors engaging in hope in education also guided their students to engage in diverse communications, to increase their tolerance for others, and to learn to respectfully disagree.

Along similar lines, Emily, Brandy, and Ryan reminisced about the care their former teachers provided them. Emily explained:

I don't remember anything academically about Kindergarten, it was so long ago. It was just a matter of the positive way my teacher treated me that I remember. I

had a teacher in first grade; she was just very caring and compassionate. I don't remember much about school, but I remember that *I felt good in her class*. Then in the third grade, I had a very similar teacher that just made me feel good about being in school.

The educators described as caring were instrumental in providing hope in education for the study participants. Three of the respondents noted that their former teachers exceeded common requirements in their classrooms. This provided a hopeful atmosphere where children could thrive, as well as dialogical space within which students could discuss and consider the thoughts of others. The transcendental dimension addresses the concept that hopeful teachers tend to surpass and rise above basic expectations.

Ryan talked about teachers exceeding required tasks, "I think if you're a good teacher, we all go above and beyond for what we're paid and what we do". Dustin expanded on this idea:

What I get out of teaching is just peace of mind. Where I'm at, and what I have in life, this is probably one of the biggest differences I can make is in the job I have now. You know, we're not rewarded, but it's the little things I like. You go home at night and think of something that happened that day and you just crack up.

There's never a day I don't look forward to going to work, really!

Educators teach who they are, and this vulnerability can lead to the presentation of an undivided self. Parker Palmer (1998) addressed this notion and indicated that when hopeful educators reveal their authentic selves; this is where personal and public spheres are joined. Through this type of openness, I believe, teachers may have the potential to

change lives forever.

The literature also reveals the importance of holding tensions where a *welcome* is as important as a *challenge* in the classroom. Educators must connect with their students in order to facilitate connections to the diverse world around them. Students can connect and learn within community. Both the literature and the participants reflected that a major problem in education and society is a growing fragmentation. Connectivity is one possible solution to fragmentation in current learning communities (e.g., Palmer, 1998).

As stated earlier, hope can potentially influence the dissipation of despair in education. Hope is found in community with others. Greene (2006) noted, “Clearly, the creation of communities in classrooms may be one of the most difficult and yet the most essential undertakings in the schools of the future” (p. 273). Both the literature and the data suggest that an atmosphere of hopelessness can negatively affect educators, learners, and other stakeholders within the educational community. Yet, the evidence also indicates that a climate of hope can have a positive impact upon these same entities.

All of the participants in my study indicated that they experience hope relationally. They described hopeful interactions with students, colleagues, and parents. The participants and the literature support the notions that hope experienced relationally is manifested through an ethic of care, a sense of vulnerability with one another, and engagement in meaningful dialogue. My participants perceived relational possibilities as well as the chaotic nature and sustaining and transformative capacity of hope in education.

Hope Experienced Chaotically

The second major finding was the participants experienced hope chaotically. By this I mean that hope was often experienced as random and unpredictable. Paradoxically, throughout the interviews participants suggested in a variety of ways that uniformity was alienating while uncertainty was empowering. Much of their time, it seems, was spent within prescribed boundaries of education of society, including spaces of fragmentation, conformity, and stagnation. Although these spaces offered a degree of predictability and perhaps even a kind of safety, the teachers seemed to yearn for something more. In spite of perceived security, it was almost as if they sensed that something was missing.

Among the participants, the origins, manifestations, and impacts of hope seem to be unpredictable. This was evident one day when Brandy mentioned, “Some days I have hope, and some days I have no hope at all.” This statement illustrates the elusive nature of hope. The results of hopeful attitudes and interactions are unpredictable as well. Dustin stated, “There’s no other job I’m qualified for where I can maybe touch so many people, or have an effect on so many different people as what I have now.” Educators work within a future-oriented mode of experience. Teachers are seldom certain of the depth and breadth of their influence.

One example of hope experienced unpredictably involved Emily’s recollections. She relayed that this was not a good year for her to talk about hope. She was going through some things at home and at school that were making her feel less than hopeful. Emily explained that she became increasingly aware of instances of hope after she began to dialogue about it in the interviews and write about it in her journal. She expressed that

when she felt ready to give up on a situation, there was occasionally a sudden and unexpected twist that renewed her hope. She said she never knew when that was going to happen. Emily concluded, “So, in a way I guess I found myself hoping for the appearance of hope at times!” Experiences such as these indicate that hope is often experienced chaotically. While it may not be predictable, at times it can unexpectedly influence the outcome of difficult situations.

Another example of the inherent chaotic nature of hope was when Emily explained about an autistic child in her class. When the little girl first arrived at the school she did not speak, participate, or interact with the other children. After listening to the background provided by her parents and another professional, the prognosis for improvement seemed bleak. Nonetheless, Emily patiently worked with the child and tried to enhance her antisocial behaviors by making the classroom a safe place for her and inviting her to join the others.

Throughout the days and weeks that followed, little progress of any kind was noted. Then the child made a sudden and dramatic change. One day the girl said “bye.” It was the first word her teachers had heard her utter. It gave them so much hope! After that initial movement, the little girl continued to make marked leaps in her social and academic development. Although this is but a single case, this scenario serves as an illustration of the unpredictable influence of hope to shift situations sometimes in permanent and positive ways.

A final example of hope experienced chaotically was expressed by Ryan. He questioned whether his students were engaging in authentic learning experiences. He talked about feeling he had to keep plodding along with the dry curriculum at a steady

pace to keep up with the teachers around him and to meet expectations of his principal. One day he decided to try something new and set aside his agenda for an hour. He talked with his students about their interests and concerns. They opened up in a way he had never seen before. Seemingly out of the blue, they were engaged in a lively discussion that had far reaching impact on their classroom climate for weeks to come. Ryan felt new hope and believed that the students did too. He relayed his amazement of the impact that one creative conversation could have on the atmosphere in the classroom. Ryan said, “The rest of the year went so much better after we started really talking with one another.” They continued with their conversations while still managing to get their work done that semester. As I listened to Ryan, I wondered about the potential for dialogue to alter the flow of relationships and situations, possibly offering hope in the midst of despair in other social and educational settings.

The chaotic nature of hope can be observed from the perspective of Systems Theory, which addresses diverse relationships and interconnectivities. According to Capra (1996), diversity is vital for survival. Lack of diversity results in nonsustainability. Diversity is necessary for sustainability in complex systems which thrive in an environment of *multiplicity* rather than uniformity. Capra (1996) went as far as to suggest that society is currently encountering a *crisis of perception* regarding its globally interconnected and systemic problems. Many view societal problems in isolation rather than in relation to multifaceted influences.

The experiences of my participants suggest that this may be true of educational settings as well as broader social and biological settings. Emily addressed this concept in the following way, “We can’t view student learning in isolation. We have to consider the

influence of their family of origin, as well as their local and more extensive surroundings.” A systemic worldview would see diversity of people and thoughts as strengths for a society and a rich context in which citizens can develop, evolve, and positively influence their environments.

The chaotic and tacit nature of hope is likened to a sort of invisible force. This type of energy is further illustrated by Witte-Townsend and Hill (2006):

The acceptance and valuing of the unresolved and immeasurable is a tradition that has come to us from Plato, who reminds us that we are not able to know everything; what we see is incomplete. Educational environments must respond to the whole range of human abilities. Teachers need to have the freedom to respond to the invisible within as well as the visible without, where one marks the edge of the other, because the exploration of both are essential to the emergence of complex thinking. (p. 376)

Though this ‘force’ perhaps remains unseen, it keeps educators going and allows them to not grow too weary in doing good for their students. The research revealed that hope among these participants was often below the surface and experienced, but not articulated. By stating that hope was experienced tacitly, I mean that it is unspoken and inferred. It is a sort of elusive, hidden phenomenon. Dustin stated, “There’s always hope. You just have to keep looking for it and keep plodding along, but it’s always there.”

Educators in this study perceived a chaotic nature of hope. This instability can be viewed within the context of Systems Theory. Hope was certainly experienced in the case of the autistic child’s first utterance, as in several other instances. Such cases suggest that

there may indeed be a sort of order within chaos, particularly where matters of hope and perception are concerned. It seems likely that these are but a few of numerous other possibilities that can positively influence teachers, students, and educational settings.

Hope as a Sustaining and Transforming Force in Education and Life

The third finding in this study was that hope was experienced by educators as a sustaining and transforming force in education as well as life. One way educators experienced hope as a sustaining included the notion that they were motivated to continue the struggle through the hard times in order to help their students be successful. The teachers did not give up on themselves, and they did not give up on their students. They had hope of journeying toward success. This is part of the transforming power that the educators experienced. They spoke of either needing hope to continue on with what was working, even in the midst of opposition. They also cited hope as potentially transforming, carrying them through the struggle to change what it not working. When they were able to sustain through the chaotic and despairing times long enough, often they experienced positive and transforming change.

The participants in this study collectively indicated that they perceived hope as sustaining and a necessary factor to persevere through the despair and dissonance of educational life. Hope encouraged the educators in my study to not give up on themselves, their colleagues, or their students. Each of the participants relayed the notion that hope assisted them with finding balance and avoiding stagnation. They discussed the importance of action along with hopeful visions.

The educators expressed their thoughts about the capacity of hope to motivate and sustain. Emily reflected, “I think we have to say that there’s hope, or we just would give up! We’d just throw our hands up and say, why are we trying? So there *has* to be hope in education.” Ryan added, “You would quit if you didn’t have any hope! I mean really, you couldn’t do this day in and day out without hope that things would improve or children would learn or that parents would be involved.” Brandy noted, “I don’t think that you can be an effective teacher if you don’t have hope. Hope does sustain the life of a teacher”.

The motivational influence of hope was further explained by Dustin. He felt that hope is what keeps teachers going, “Because everyday, you wake up and you have your hope. But sometimes you get knocked down. And I can’t imagine that any of us would ever go back if we didn’t have this hope and these goals. I think that as a teacher, that’s what keeps us going.” Dustin said that he definitely thought hope was motivational. He expressed that he didn’t know any teachers who would teach if they didn’t have hope they were changing lives. He added, “I think that we’re dreamers. Teachers are dreamers!”

Teachers discussed their beliefs about the effects of hope in the lives of their students. Dustin noted, “I think hope’s important in everything. If a kid, or even a teacher for that matter, loses hope, they’re done. I mean it’s over. For the kids I think, it’s important for the kids I mean hope fuels all their dreams!” Brandy expanded on this notion by saying, “I think as teachers, we need to give the kids hope”. Ryan gave an additional thought regarding this aspect of hope, “Hope is a motivating factor. I guess hope in general is motivation Maybe that it’s driven me to want to try these things, because with that philosophy, other people that normally don’t, it’s a *motivating* factor. I

guess hope in general is motivation”.

Another example of the sustaining ability of hope in education was discussed by Ryan. He said, “I’m thinking it’s an everyday occurrence, that you hope that change is going to be tomorrow or the next day, or the next day, or the next day. If you get bored or stagnant, nothing really good comes out of that. I guess maybe nothing really bad happens either...but maybe it’s bad just to be stagnant.” Hope here seemed to be offered as an anecdote to stagnation. Critical consciousness and reflection may also be seen as avenues to avoid stagnation in educational processes.

Yet another illustration of hope as sustaining and transformative was expressed by Emily. She explained that she believed that hope sustains you in the field of education and in everyday occurrences. Emily stated, “Teaching is not an easy job. You don’t wake up in the morning without a hope of something positive happening. I think that teachers who burn out probably have lost their hope. They can’t see the forest for the trees. Maybe they neglected to find hope in the little successes. You *have* to have hope that you can make a difference!” Emily relayed that she had never thought of it in these exact terms before, but that hope was probably the biggest thing that kept her going.

Education seems to bring sustainability and transformation to hopeful teachers who appear to approach the profession as a sort of labor of love. Attitudes such as these help educators persevere and assist students through smooth and rough times. This idea was supported by Dustin, “It’s really hard for me to try to have hope in students who have already lost hope in themselves. I’m not going to quit trying. I’m behind them no matter what”.

There seems to exist a continuing demand to hold tensions within the classroom

setting. Teachers attempt to balance such issues as compassion and perseverance with experiences that challenge students and aide in consciousness-raising. Direct dialogical engagement within a diverse community of thought is one avenue to support understanding and respect in public school classrooms. Ryan addressed his beliefs about the value of student dialogue:

But if you teach them how to have a conversation where someone is going to raise their hand, voice an opinion and talk, without interrupting them or screaming which is hard sometimes, but they get better at it. It's important to just teach them to respect each other's opinions whether they agree or disagree. I hope to give them the tools to learn forever. I want them to have the tools to continue to learn later. I want them to learn how to question, interpret, and think. I hope that I always will grow creatively and that I'll never get stagnant with the way I want to do things. I want my colleagues to do the exact same thing. I hope that they all respect an environment where people are free to express themselves.

Ryan, Brandy, and Emily communicated their perceptions that though hope was a sustaining force in educational settings, it may not be enough. All of the participants seemed to jointly believe that *action* provides the hopeful stepping stones to achieving collective dreams of positive changes in today's educational communities. Brandy relayed her thoughts:

It is like in order to really internalize the hope, you have to *act* on it. You have to take a step forward...doing something. It's like somebody can say something to you to try to give you hope. But, until you take an action in that direction nothing may happen. I think hope has to have action. I really do. I think maybe when I *do*

have the hope it's because I've taken more *action* to change.

These statements illustrate that there is a possible mutual reciprocity among hope and action. Hope can be realized through action, and action necessitates hope. This view was reinforced through further discussion with additional participants. Brandy commented on the necessity of hope and then she read an excerpt from her journal. She included a quote from an unknown author and a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.:

But I really, really think that action maybe is necessary to hope. You're not going to have any hope unless you even take the little baby steps that you can take to make changes. I know that my mentor teacher, she's trying to build that curriculum into the class that she teaches. She's got the hope because she is taking an action. "Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all." And that, I think goes along with what we were just talking about. They had hope because they were trying. This is a quote from Dr. King: 'If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving. You lose the courage to be: that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all, and so today I still have a dream!' And again...it is action. If you lose hope, you lose the vitality that keeps you moving...to say things like vitality and moving – that's action.

According to King's quote and the comments of this educator, the vitality of action is directly related to hope. Hopelessness and despair dominate when inactivity reigns; hope requires action. The literature suggested that education is a progressive unveiling. As educators engage in this unveiling and move toward transcending self, a clearer picture of hope in education emerges. Hope precedes and is an integral part of struggle; and hope

requires struggle to come to fruition (Freire, 1992). Dreams of positive changes in public education may manifest through hope and the ensuing struggle to create constructive transformations.

Greene (2006) offered her perspectives regarding conversation and transformations:

There are implications for those of us wondering about the future of US public schools. There is the metaphor of looking through the window. There were children expressing what might have been their desires and thoughts through their skipping and their stopping, their reaching out of their own language. There was their 'doing it completely', in the mood Dewey was describing when he wrote about imagining intellectual possibility and seeing something we had never thought of before. Out of dread, out of the inequalities, out of the contradictions and the cruelties and the misunderstandings, there may be a vision of the 'marvelous'. The dialogue, the wonder, the openings: we can only trust they will continue. (p. 279)

I believe transformation can arise through authentic relationships and genuine dialogue. Near the end of the study, the participants took part in a final group interview. It was a sort of focus group interview in which clarifications were made together regarding hope in education. Although it seemed a bit awkward at first to engage with one another, the educators soon found commonalities and the uneasiness fell away. They discussed several aspects of despair and hope in education which were raised in earlier conversations during our individual interviews. They spoke in community within a short period of time and seemed to draw renewed conclusions about hope following their

dialogical engagement. This was an important experience. Although hope can be unpredictable and meeting with an unfamiliar group can be uncertain, the final interview seemed to allow space for true interaction, expanded dialogue, and creative possibilities to address problems within a context of despair in modern public education.

In sum, the teachers with whom I worked engaged in teaching and learning amid contexts of power and conformity. Hope did not exist in isolation, but was inherently imbedded in expanding and interrelated contexts of influence. The four participants shared a range of ideas and beliefs and revealed elements of despair related to concerns like lack of respect for the teaching profession, test driven curricula, fragmented rather than holistic approaches to education, uniform and rigid mandates, breadth versus depth of learning, and lack of family involvement in preparing students for school.

Fortunately, in addition to despair, my participants also experienced hope in a variety of ways. Analysis of the data revealed that they experienced hope *relationally*, *chaotically*, and *as a sustaining and transforming force in education and life*. In light of these findings, I believe educators need to address problems and possibilities explicitly, dialogue in order to encourage , establish relationships, and uncertainty, ambiguity, embrace disequilibrium as a means of challenging unconscious norms of conformity, and open new spaces for possibilities. The final chapter will discuss implications resulting from this research.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS

Only if you reach the boundary will the boundary recede before you. And if you confine your efforts, the boundary will shrink to accommodate itself to your efforts.
You can only expand your capacities by working to the very limit.

- Benjamin F. Fairless

This study originated with a recurring thought that I sensed a degree of hopelessness within and surrounding the field including public and higher education. Sometimes it was a subtle and quiet thought in isolation, and at other times it was strongly and loudly reinforced in discussions with others involved in the field. As I began this study, I asked the participants about their perceptions of education. Their answers set a vivid context for exploring some of the hopelessness and despair experienced currently in public education. Some of the participants' concerns included lack of respect for the teaching profession, test driven curricula, fragmented rather than holistic approaches to education, uniform and rigid mandates, breadth versus depth of learning, and lack of family involvement in preparing students for school.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed within the framework of Ecological Systems Theory that individuals exist within interrelated contexts. These contexts consist of ever broadening influences beginning with immediate family, schools, and neighborhoods, and extending to those with more global bearing such as economic, political, and cultural contexts. The contexts within which we live, work, and relate to one another influence our perceptions. This idea provided support for the study.

The purpose of this study was to explore educators' perceptions of hope in

education. I hoped that beginning a dialogue of hope in education could contribute to the building of interconnections among various participants in the educational community. When I refer to educators and educational communities, I am referring to both public school and higher education instructors and settings. The problem and rationale for this study was that despair exists in our current public school system.

The primary theoretical framework which guided the study was Systems Theory. The research question was: How do educators experience hope in education, and what are the implications for educational theory and practice? This final chapter will present implications for the three main findings of the study, including hope experienced: (1) relationally, (2) chaotically, and (3) as a sustaining and transforming force in education and life.

Developing Relationships through Interaction and Dialogue

The participants' responses indicated that hope is often experienced relationally. Since relationship is essential to education and society, and since human relationships are established largely through dialogue, I believe educators need to provide opportunities for meaningful interaction and dialogue. Authentic conversations can potentially build strong connections and meaningful bonds. The participants reported the value of building relationships with students, colleagues, and parents both within and outside classroom settings.

As Noddings (1999) proposed, when we display an ethic of care toward one another, we can more successfully construct positive relationships. This relational enhancement seemed to be created out of a context of vulnerability with one another. The

educators in this study relayed that when relationships were enhanced between themselves and students, colleagues, and parents, this seemed to lead to richer learning environments.

Capra (1996) has suggested that because systems consist of interdependent relationships, life itself is relational. The participants in this study concur. If this is the case, it seems we need to foster relationship in schools and classrooms. I believe this is both necessary and possible. While it is possible to imagine many means of fostering relationships in educational settings, my findings suggest it is important to recognize and affirm the natural efforts of teachers and students.

The value of understanding and developing multiple perspectives in collaboration with others became evident during this investigation. If community can be developed and enhanced through dialogue, then perhaps the desire to connect with others can be considered a natural state. However, my discussions with others indicated that often classroom settings incorporate an unnatural forced silence. This lack of dialogue can potentially interrupt learning opportunities and negatively influence development of students' sense of belonging and community. Since learning in community is one way that students can acquire knowledge, authentic dialogue in classrooms bears consideration.

There is a critical need for interacting with others both within and outside of educational settings. Dialoguing with diverse persons with varying beliefs and opinions can broaden our perspectives about the topics we discuss. When we encounter different beliefs, we can assimilate aspects of these differing perspectives into our own worldviews. This growth and refinement of thought can build understanding and

connections with others which can create pathways toward renewed hope for self and community. Taking the time to consider the perspectives of self and others is an important endeavor. This study suggests that relationships may be needed to provide contexts for growth and learning. Providing more opportunities for people to discuss their passions and concerns about education today could be a beginning point in re-visioning public schools and our notions of what constitutes quality learning experiences. As we continue to enhance and develop our social identities in community with others, we increase possibilities to enhance our immediate and global society. Authentic classroom communities can result from participants becoming significant to one another within contexts of meaningful interactions and dialogues.

As stated in the findings, educators and learners engage in teaching and learning amid contexts of power and control. Systems Theory views the world as interconnected wholeness and proposes that open, dynamic systems manifest space for creative and endless possibilities to thrive. As Capra (1996) addressed, the stability of structure combines seemingly mysteriously with the fluidity of change. This constant flow of energy allows active structures to develop and evolve, which can result in social and biological transformation. I believe that this can occur within contexts of learning environments as well.

Both the data and literature suggest that we should avoid such practices that my student teacher brought to my attention, forcing learners to exist in inert silence. When we recall our own experiences in school, many teachers remember those in authority who were intolerant of conversation among students. I believe that this restraining of natural tendencies to interact with one another and engage in dialogue interrupts learning and

correlates with what Dewey (1916) would term miseducative experience.

If relationships are fostered through dialogue and interaction, it makes sense that we should create room in our school days for such encounters. Some of the most beneficial moments in the school day were exemplified by the participants when they seized that time. As relayed in the findings, Ryan slowed the fast academic pace to make room for his students to simply engage in a conversation without borders. The discussion was allowed to meander to various topics of interest and concern to the students. It was a turning point in his school year, too. The class seemed to bond in a unique way during that time, and subsequent time spent together in the classroom that semester was improved. My recommendation is that we create spaces for students to authentically engage with, learn about, and value one another. Students need to be permitted to dialogue and interact with one another in order to enhance social awareness and cognitive growth.

Challenging Conformity through Uncertainty and Ambiguity

The data suggest that hope is often experienced chaotically, and the very nature of hope is chaotic and unpredictable. If this is the case, I feel we need to provide opportunities to explore uncertainty and ambiguity as means of challenging unnatural conformity in education and in life.

Drawing again on systems theory, the interconnected or web-like nature of systemic thinking also applies to education. Is it truly possible for us to consider the varying aspects of public education in isolation? Viewing fragmented parts of education while disregarding the system as a whole follows a Cartesian model of mechanistic and

linear thinking. Holistic observation which considers varying interwoven and influential aspects of our public school system provides a context for more dynamic thinking leading to broader understanding of education and society and their complex relationships.

The notion of chaos within Systems Theory can be seen as a dynamic force that can manifest in unpredictable forms. Cognitive dissonance could be viewed as a form of chaos in public school settings. The concept of dissonance may be perceived by some not only as uncomfortable, but as unnecessary. However, this sense of disequilibrium can actually be beneficial with regard to its potential for transformation of thought and action. Cognitive dissonance can lead to depth of learning and the development of new understandings. This type of chaotic and unpredictable influence can pave the way for unexpected and significant changes for the better. This may be why one of the participants said they were in essence hoping for hope.

Our interconnected and multifaceted education system contains people with varying perceptions and a multiplicity of viewpoints. This diversity is needed for the continuation of the system. However, I am not proposing a non-critical perpetuation of antiquated thoughts and educational approaches. Diverse perspectives and voices are necessary in order for such a system to remain dynamic and avoid stagnation or collapse.

Both the participants' responses and the basic premises of systems theory suggest that the existence and importance of hope needs to be made explicit in learning communities. I recommend that educators and learners embrace the struggle of knowledge acquisition as we endeavor to accept ambiguity in education and in life. Teachers and students can benefit from engaging in uncertain chaotic disequilibrium.

When these encounters with the unknown are sustained to completion with hopeful resolve, unexpected order and new ways of knowing can emerge from the chaos.

I am relatively confident that this time of creative emergence of new thought does not occur while isolated students are silently filling out worksheets. New paradigms of thinking more likely appear within contexts of authentic interactions and dialogues in conjunction with sustained engagement in the rather chaotic state of disequilibrium. This type of engagement is complex and dynamic, as are all living systems. Exact predictions of the outcomes of such interactions are not possible. Therefore, if educators experience hope chaotically, this could indicate that the possibilities for expansion of understanding in social and cognitive realms are virtually limitless. I recommend that we put away mechanistic approaches (e.g., embodied in worksheet curricula) long enough for learners to really see and engage with the people right in front of them.

Sustaining and Transforming Education and Society

Since hope was experienced in the study and theorized in the literature as a sustaining and transformative phenomenon, I suggest teachers and teacher educators consciously recognize this potential power. The sustaining force of hope lies in the notion of continuing the struggle once we are engaged in learning and life's experiences. This may include persevering through encounters with dissonance. Dissonance may result, but this can lead to substantive learning and development. The possibility of deeper cognitive as well as social understanding and development exists when we utilize and value cognitive dissonance. Sustainability through dissonance is an avenue through which deeper understanding can emerge. However, this is a beginning rather than a stopping

point. After educators gain new insights, we must then use creative and collaborative approaches to remedy our concerns and improve our schools and communities.

In this study, I have viewed hope through the perspectives of classroom teachers. However, a vast amount of people are involved in public education. Additional information regarding the impact of hope in education could be discovered through more extensive research. A larger scale study of educators from a broader geographical expanse would be beneficial in gaining further understanding of perspectives of hope in education. A more comprehensive study of hope in education may include researching the perceptions of hope from the perspectives of other participants in public education.

There were several instances during the interviews when the respondents indicated that they had increased hope in the education context through working with special needs children. This is just one of many areas of education that could benefit from further investigation. Additional inquiries might include observing educators in classroom and school settings and interviewing students, administrators, parents, university educators, policy makers, community members, and other stakeholders to obtain their perceptions of problems and solutions in order to build communication, understanding, community, and ultimately successful lifelong learners.

Conclusion

I consider our tasks in public school and higher education to include building relationships through authentic interactions and dialogues, accepting the ambiguity and chaotic disequilibrium inherent in the struggle to develop understanding, and to sustain

this struggle long enough for new paradigms to emerge. One of the greatest sources of despair in modern society is the replacement of natural systemic relationships with unnatural mechanistic relationships in education and society. Conversely, I believe the combination of nonlinear and dynamic approaches to learning has limitless possibilities for positive enhancements in modern public education. When educators are faced with despairing and chaotic conditions, *hope* can potentially assist in sustaining them long enough to reach spaces of positive changes. Further, the way that this sustainability can be enhanced and supported is through relationships. This demonstrates interconnectivity between chaos, relationships, sustainability, and transformations.

Hope in education can potentially open spaces for endless creative possibilities to enhance the experiences of educators and learners and positively support citizenship education in a global community. Hope can offer opportunities for educational re-vision regarding how we view education and existing problems in the field, how we approach solutions, what actions we take, how we teach and how we learn. There is a real possibility that hope can infuse life into educational renewal by promoting creativity, risk-taking, innovation, and advocacy.

In light of this study, I believe one of the greatest sources of hope in modern society could be the replacement of unnatural mechanistic perspectives and relationships with natural systemic perspectives and relationships in modern public education. I would like to extend an invitation to all who care about students, learning, and contemporary education to engage in further dialogues of hope. Positive changes for the days which lie ahead begin now. Perhaps we could heed the words of a famous quote by poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning and *light tomorrow with today*.

REFERENCES

- Behar, R. (1996). *The vulnerable observer*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bracken, P. J. (2001). Post-modernity. *Social Science & Medicine*. 53, 733-743.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32, 513-531.
- Connely, F. M. & Clandinin, D.J. (1990, June). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 2-14.
- Capra, F. (1996). *The web of life: A new scientific understanding of living systems*. NY: Anchor Books.
- Capra, F. (2000). *The Tao of physics*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
- Cartwright, J. (2004). From Aquinas to Zwelethemba: A brief history of hope. *Annals of the American academy of political and social science*. 592, 166-184.
- Curwin, R. L. (1992). *Rediscovering hope: Our greatest teaching strategy*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Educational Service.
- Descartes, R. (1996). *Meditations in first philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1922). *Human nature and conduct*. NY: Henry Holt & Company.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Art as experience*. NY: Capricorn Books.
- Eaker R. (2005). *On common ground*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Service.
- Foucault, M. (1994). *Order of things: An archaeology of human sciences*. NY: Random House.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. NY: Continuum.
- Freire, P. (1992). *Pedagogy of hope*. NY: Continuum.

- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gleick, J. (1987). *Chaos, making a new science*. Viking Penguin Inc.
- Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. NY: Longman.
- Greene, M. (1988). *Dialectic of freedom*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Kohl, H. (1998). *The discipline of hope: Learning from a lifetime of teaching*. NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Langenbach, M., Vaughn, C., & Aagaard, L. (1994). *An introduction to educational research*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- McIntosh, P. (1989). *White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack*. Peace and Freedom, July-August, 10-12.
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Noddings, N. (1999). *Justice and caring: the search for common ground in education*. Professional ethics in education series. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Piaget, J. (1979). *The child's conception of the world*. Totowa, New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams, Co.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2001). *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*. CA: Sage Publications.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Whitehead, A. (1985). *The aims of education*. NY: Macmillan.