TRANSFORMATION OR TRAGEDY?
A RETROSPECTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SCHOOL CLOSURE

GLENDA E. TONEFF-COTNER

Bachelor of Music
Bowling Green State University
May 1986

Master of Guidance and Counseling
University of Toledo
August 1995

Education Specialist
University of Toledo
August 2000

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN URBAN EDUCATION
at the
CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY
MAY 2015
We hereby approve the dissertation of

**Glenda E. Toneff-Cotner**

Candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy in Urban Education degree

This Dissertation has been approved for the **Office of Doctoral Studies**, College of Education and Human Services and

**CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY**
College of Graduate Studies by

________________________

Dissertation Chairperson: Anne M. Galletta, Ph.D.
Curriculum and Foundations, May, 2015

________________________

Dissertation Methodologist: Joanne Goodell, Ph.D.
Teacher Education, May, 2015

________________________

Marius Boboc, Ph.D.
Curriculum and Foundations, May, 2015

________________________

Brian E. Harper, Ph.D.
Curriculum and Foundations May, 2015

________________________

Leigh Chiarelott, Ph.D.
Curriculum and Instruction, University of Toledo, May, 2015

Student’s Date of Defense: **May 1, 2015**
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my husband, Craig Cotner, as well as my sons, Andrew and Trent Hathaway. I also dedicate this work to anyone who has experienced school closure and to those who are yet destined to live through the closing of their school.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I continue to be inspired by Dr. Anne Galletta and Dr. Joanne Goodell. Every apprentice needs to have a mentor who is willing to share his or her knowledge and expertise related to the field. I was lucky in that I actually had two mentors. Both of these women have my utmost respect and admiration.

I will be forever grateful to my department chair, Marius Boboc, who has continued to support my professional growth. Quite honestly, I think he was as anxious for me to complete my PhD as I was.

I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to family members who were with me from the beginning of this journey to the end, specifically, my two sisters, Michelle Beck and Julia Kohler, as well as my father, Michael Toneff.

Lastly, I would like to thank my closest friends for their support and encouragement, with special acknowledgement to Jessie and Thom Baginski, as well as Carmine Stewart, Jeanne Hufford and Donna Bochi.
TRANSFORMATION OR TRAGEDY?

A RETROSPECTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SCHOOL CLOSURE

GLENDA E. TONEFF-COTNER

ABSTRACT

School closure has become an accepted method of school reform policy as outlined in federal legislation found in The No Child Left Behind Act. The academic literature regarding school closure is limited and tends to be quantitative in design, focusing on the relationship between student achievement and school closure and/or student transitions. Qualitative studies around this topic have only recently emerged, focusing on the immediate impact of school closure and transition. There is a need for a retrospective study, reflecting on the long-term effects of school closure on individuals and their communities, as told by the students who experienced it.

This study seeks to understand the experience of DeVilbiss students who attended the high school in the year its closure was announced, and who transitioned to a neighboring high school for the 1991-1992 school year. Using semi-structured interviews to explore issues related to transitions, the study will examine identity, social capital, relational trust, community connectedness and engagement, school and community pride, tradition, and the sense of belonging. The study will offer insight into the long-term effects of school closure, particularly through the eyes of those who experienced the closing of DeVilbiss High School. The study has implications for current and future policy decisions.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xviii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Closure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Factors</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Action and Policy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Action and School Choice</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty, Unemployment and Housing</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Change and Migrating Patterns</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Flight and Urban Flight</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Renewal and Breakdown of Poor Communities</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Activism</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences of School Closure and Community Response</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics and Equity</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster Capitalism</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Choice</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences of NCLB</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Identity</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity and Loss</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Capital/Place Identity/ Place Attachment</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segregation and Identity</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Practices</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Birth of DeVilbiss High School</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeVilbiss High School Showing Symptoms of Decline</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Death of DeVilbiss High School</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Transition Plan for Displaced Students</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying Goodbye</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebirth/Repurposing of DeVilbiss</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rest of the Story</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Phenomenon and Questions</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Qualitative Research</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paradigm</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Methodology ............................................................................................................ 101

Choosing the Sample ........................................................................................................ 103

Data Collection Methods .................................................................................................. 104

Interviews ............................................................................................................................. 105

Data Gathering .................................................................................................................... 106

Pre-interview Steps ............................................................................................................ 106

Finding Participants ............................................................................................................. 107

Interview Location ............................................................................................................. 109

Interview Process ............................................................................................................... 109

Pre-interview Protocol ...................................................................................................... 109

The Interviews .................................................................................................................... 110

Individual Participant Interviews ..................................................................................... 112

Data Organization and Management .................................................................................. 114

Transcribing ....................................................................................................................... 114

Pre-coding .......................................................................................................................... 115

Immersed in the data .......................................................................................................... 116

Formal Coding ................................................................................................................... 117

The Themes ......................................................................................................................... 120

Data Analysis and Writing .................................................................................................. 123

Bracketing Researcher Subjectivity .................................................................................... 126

Data Triangulation .............................................................................................................. 128

The Role of the Researcher in Data Collection .................................................................. 129

Particular Ethical Considerations ....................................................................................... 130
Trustworthiness ................................................................. 131
Credibility and internal validity ........................................ 131
Consistency and reliability .............................................. 132
Transferability and external validity .................................. 133
Limitations ........................................................................ 133
Reflective Writing ............................................................. 134
Introduction ...................................................................... 134
Examples of reflective writings ........................................... 135
Summary .......................................................................... 140
CHAPTER IV ........................................................................ 141
STUDY FINDINGS ............................................................. 141
Introduction ...................................................................... 141
Setting the Context ........................................................... 142
Treva .............................................................................. 143
Dale ................................................................................. 144
Linda .............................................................................. 145
Stacey .............................................................................. 145
Shaina .............................................................................. 146
The Themes ...................................................................... 146
Data Analysis .................................................................... 148
Introduction ...................................................................... 148
The DeVilbiss High School Experience ................................ 148
Introduction ...................................................................... 148
The Enrollment/Class Size and Resources ............................................. 189
The Physical Space/Architecture ......................................................... 190
Choir and Show Choir ...................................................................... 191
Survival Mode/Biding Time/Helpless and Hopeless ......................... 192
Conversations about Racial Issues ..................................................... 194
Social Life .......................................................................................... 198
Academics ......................................................................................... 202
Summary of the Transition Experience and Receiving School ........... 205
Summary of School Closure and Transition Experience .................... 211
CHAPTER V ......................................................................................... 213
STUDY FINDINGS ................................................................................ 213
Introduction ....................................................................................... 213
Sense of Belonging .......................................................................... 214
Socially Exclusive/Inclusive Groups of Students ............................ 216
Experiencing of Race and Class Within the Neighborhoods .......... 217
Experiencing Exclusive/Inclusive Social Groups at DeVilbiss .......... 221
Experiencing Exclusive/Inclusive Social Groups at Start ............... 223
Experiencing exclusive/inclusive social groups at Scott ............... 228
Experiencing of exclusive/inclusive social groups at Rogers ........ 229
Social capital ..................................................................................... 231
Social capital at DeVilbiss ................................................................. 232
Social capital at the receiving schools ............................................. 238
Relational trust ................................................................................. 248
Relationships with school staff ........................................... 248

Relationships with students ............................................ 254

Sense of Belonging Summary ............................................ 256

Grief and Loss .................................................................. 260

Introduction .................................................................... 260

No control/no voice ......................................................... 263

Identity .......................................................................... 268

Treva ........................................................................... 269

Dale ............................................................................. 272

Linda ............................................................................ 273

Stacey ........................................................................... 276

Shaina ........................................................................... 277

Place identity and attachment ......................................... 278

Lack of closure ............................................................... 288

Treva ........................................................................... 289

Dale ............................................................................. 291

Linda ............................................................................ 293

Stacey ........................................................................... 295

Shaina ........................................................................... 296

Agency .......................................................................... 297

Silent Protestor ............................................................... 298

Social justice for all ........................................................ 298

Just get it over with ......................................................... 301
The adults let us down ................................................................. 304

Summary of Grief and Loss .......................................................... 306

Summary of Chapter .................................................................... 310

CHAPTER VI .................................................................................. 312

STUDY FINDINGS ......................................................................... 312

Introduction .................................................................................. 312

Community Connectedness/Pride and Tradition ......................... 312

   Connections to the old neighborhood ...................................... 313

   Connections to Toledo ............................................................... 315

   Connections to DeVilbiss and/or the receiving school .............. 317

   Pride in school and/or community ....................................... 318

   Maintaining connections ....................................................... 321

   Summary of Community Connectedness/Pride and Tradition ..... 323

Long-term Impact of School Closure .......................................... 325

   Identification to an alma mater ............................................. 325

   The building: Is it intact or torn down? ................................. 329

   Mistrust of authority/policy makers .................................... 330

   Regrets .................................................................................. 333

   Long-term impact unique to individual participants ................ 336

      Shaina ........................................................................... 336

      Treva ............................................................................ 337

      Linda ............................................................................. 341

      Dale ............................................................................... 344
Minimize the disruption of relationships .................................................. 371
Receiving schools should be prepared and supported .......................... 371
Support specifically targeted toward seniors ........................................ 372
Public Trust: Voice/Choice/Communication/Relationships .................. 373
Display Humanity .................................................................................. 374
Student Agency/Advocacy ...................................................................... 375
Future Research ..................................................................................... 376
Additional perspectives ......................................................................... 376
Issues for study that are unique to the school closure experience ..... 377
Scientific or Scholarly Significance of the Study .................................... 378
Conclusion .............................................................................................. 380
REFERENCES .......................................................................................... 382
APPENDIX A ............................................................................................ 397
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Participant Demographic Data......................................................... 110
Table 2 Themes and Subthemes................................................................. 122
Table 3 Participant Demographic Data......................................................... 143
Table 4 Themes and Subthemes................................................................. 147
Table 5 Participant Involvement in DeVilbiss Extracurricular Activities.......... 150
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Visual Conceptualization of the Interconnectedness of Themes…………………138

Figure 2 Factors Associated With Participant’s Sense of Belonging………………….364
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Opportunity, not poverty, shapes and molds the destiny of our nation’s children. For 101 years, no one has understood this more than the NAACP and I know that no matter how hard this work and no matter how long this journey toward educational equity, you will always be setting the pace, lighting the path, and leading the march. I am proud and honored to march with you.”

–U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in remarks to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Kansas City, Mo. (7/14/10) on strengthening community involvement and engagement in school reform (as cited in Curriculum Review, 2010)

Secretary Duncan’s quote demonstrates a heartfelt caring about the education of all students in the United States, but his focus on opportunity as the primary operative in improving educational outcomes only makes sense if the definition of opportunity extends beyond the recent school reform jargon of core academic standards, highly qualified teachers, and value-added data. Research documents that standards, credentialed teachers, and access to scientifically based curriculum will not provide adequate opportunity without meaningful relationships between teachers and students (Kirshner, Gaertner, & Pozzoboni, 2010; Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2011).
Current policies regarding school closures, including the arbitrary closure of underperforming schools, often ignore the importance of sustaining these critical relationships as often the most at-risk students in the nation are bounced from school to school throughout their educational career (Kirshner et al., 2010; Steinberg et al., 2011).

**School Closure**

There are primarily three factors cited in the research regarding the cause for school closure, two of which have been around for many years. The first is declining student enrollment primarily in urban areas as well as school consolidation in rural areas, and the second is limited financial resources (Tyack, 1974). The third factor is the influence of the school choice movement that really gained momentum in the 1990’s and continues to garner support, certainly as seen in recent educational policy (Carl, 2011; McMillin, 2010). School choice encourages an exodus from neighborhood public schools by offering school vouchers to attend private schools and also by the opening of competing charter schools. However, there is an additional factor directly impacting school closure that is not mentioned in most research, which is the issue of educational policy focused on school accountability. The relationship between school accountability and school closure is rooted in federal policy, specifically, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The No Child Left Behind Act designates a series of consequences for schools that fail to show improvement in student academic achievement over time, one of which is to shut the school down (Peterson & West, 2003; Rebell & Wolff, 2008). Per No Child Left Behind (NCLB), school closure is viewed as a solution to improving public education, and yet there has been little research regarding the impact of school closure on students and communities.
Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni (2010) address key issues related to school closure. According to the authors, “the research base examining effects of closure on displaced students is remarkably thin” (p. 407). Kirshner et al. developed and implemented a participatory action research project using mixed methods to study the academic performance and the experiences of Latino and African-American high school students in the year following the closure of their high school. The study found declines in academic performance after transferring to a new school. Additionally, qualitative data from the study showed that closure of the school added stressors to students who were already navigating challenges associated with urban poverty. According to Kirshner et al., “the most prevalent transition task for students involved forming new relationships and managing old ones disrupted by the closure” (p.419). While fifty percent of the students reported there was an adult in their new school that treated them well, their experience in the new school introduced considerable struggles. For example, forty percent of survey respondents reported that the newly formed relationships with teachers were weaker than those they had with teachers from their previous school. The transitional students reported being stereotyped by adults and youth from the new school, resulting in the transitional students belief that they were stigmatized or labeled. As a result, there was an increase in the dropout rate and a decrease in the graduation rate of students in transition. Kirshner et al. caution that forcing school closure on students and then reassigning them to another school “has the potential to marginalize them further from school” (p.423). In this study, students who transitioned to the new school lost the social capital they had established at their prior school. For the seniors, this equated to
the loss of three school years of social capital, primarily among fellow students and the teachers.

The importance of the relationship between the teacher and students also surfaced in a recent report on the Chicago Public Schools that focused on student and teacher safety. The goals of the report were to “show the scope of the problem of school safety in Chicago and provide evidence on which to base decisions about policy and practice” (p. 45). Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson (2011), examined the internal and external conditions impacting school safety, and/or students’ reported feeling of safety. They found that “the external conditions around the school, and in students’ backgrounds and home communities, strongly define the level of safety in schools” (p.1). A school is merely a microcosm of the community within which it is located. Neighborhood poverty, crime and social resources cannot be viewed as separate entities when looking at school safety. Steinberg et al. found that “schools located in areas with high crime rates and substantial poverty tend to be less safe than schools located in more advantaged areas” (p.2). However, the report identified some schools in Chicago located in high crime and high poverty areas, where teachers and students reported feeling safe within the school community. Steinberg et al. set out to find out what distinguished these schools from the others. They found that the difference had to do with the quality of the relationships formed within the school building. The authors state, “It is the quality of the relationships between staff and students and between staff and parents that most strongly defines safe schools. Indeed, disadvantaged schools with high-quality relationships actually feel safer than advantaged schools with low-quality relationships” (p.1). The quality of the interaction between students and adults matters greatly. Another important
finding in the Chicago study was the relationship between student academic achievement and disruption outside the school, defined as family disruption such as mobility, violence, and stress. According to Steinberg et al., “students living in high-poverty and high-crime neighborhoods are particularly vulnerable and likely to experience disruption, and those students are likely to exhibit both low academic achievement and more behavioral problems” (p. 46). Contrary to the thesis that closing down a failing school and sending the children elsewhere will result in higher student achievement, this study indicates the opposite may be true in that causing more disruption in the lives of these children may actually be harmful. The authors stated, “Students are more respectful and helpful to each other the more that there are adults present with whom they have trusting relationships” (p. 47). Steinberg et al. (2011) concluded:

What comes out most clearly is the importance of social relationships and cooperative work for creating a safe, orderly environment—through social resources in the community, a shared commitment among teachers, the building of trusting relationships with students, and partnerships with parents. Schools need to search for ways to make students with low incoming achievement more invested and successful in school in order to promote safer schooling environments (p.47).

The Chicago study found that students feel safe when they have formed trusting relationships with adults in the school. However, trusting relationships form over time. When schools are closed and students are sent to another school, they enter with little or no social capital and must start the entire process of building trusting relationships all over.
While displaced students enter their receiving school with little social capital, they bring with them the reputation of their sending school. Galletta and Ayala (2008), address this phenomenon in a study of small-school restructuring in a multietnic, northeastern urban high school. The focus of the study was on “creating a future and managing a past in a newly restructured former comprehensive urban high school” (p.1959). While many of the current school reform models are grounded in an erasure of the old structure of organization, few researchers have been able to define it in a way that can be conceptualized. Galletta and Ayala (2008) used a multiple-method approach in their study that included interviews, participant observation, focus groups and a review of archival data. The study by Galletta and Ayala (2008) is significant because it clearly identifies erasure as a component of school closure and reconstitution, and the authors provide a description of how the phenomenon occurs in the process. According to the study, erasure occurs at various levels for diverse reasons. For example, in this particular study the community ignited the process of closure of the comprehensive high school by organizing demonstrations. For the community, “the restructuring reflected a desire for deep and lasting erasure of all links to past institutional inequalities” (p. 1962). For the teachers and administrators, the emphasis was on erasing past failures, especially the multiple years of being labeled by the state as a failing school as determined by their accountability system. For the students, erasure meant trying to disassociate from the negative reputation of the failed school, in order to create a more positive identity or reputation in their new setting. Galletta and Ayala state, “one striking enactment of erasure, then, secured the beginnings of institutions promising to be something different, something better” (p. 1962). This is congruent with the theory of action associated with
school reform models, which is discussed later in Chapter II. It also parallels the school choice model, which is to focus on failures, create dissatisfaction, and then promise something better by offering parents options or choice. In the study by Galletta and Ayala (2008), those who sought the closure of the comprehensive high school wanted “deep and lasting structural change” and the belief was that “erasing all connections with the comprehensive high school was viewed as a necessary impetus for substantive educational change” (p. 1963). The authors identify “casualties and survivors” of this process and cautioned that while restructuring can lead to educational change, the process of erasure and survival “have the potential to suppress the kind of conflict and turbulence often necessary for productive institutional transformation” (p. 1963).

**Economic Factors**

Goldin & Katz (2008), two economists who examined why the public school system in the United States is falling behind the educational systems of other countries, found that economically, the growth of resources in many states has not kept pace with the increased disadvantages of many students. Additionally, there has been a shifting of public funds to charter schools and voucher programs, chipping away at the existing American school system. School choice and a dismantling of the public K-12 educational system are cited by Goldin & Katz (2008) as reasons for America’s inability to compete with the educational systems of other countries. Darling-Hammond (2010) believes that the increasing achievement gap of students of poverty and/or color is creating a national threat to our country. She suggests that the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) needs to be revamped so that it includes opportunity-to-learn standards and
resource equalization strategies. Rebell and Wolff (2008) also stress the need for opportunity-to-learn standards in their research.

**Problem Statement**

As previously mentioned, the closing of schools is not only on the rise in the United States and elsewhere, but it has become an accepted practice for school improvement as outlined in federal legislation found in The No Child Left Behind Act. While the practice of closing schools has been around for many years, there is very little research regarding this subject. Economists Goldin and Katz (2008) provide a broad historical view of the role of education in economic growth in the United States. Within their research, they discuss school closure and the movement toward privatization of the educational system from an economic perspective. However, there is a need for research that examines the long-term effects of school closures on communities, beyond the economic factors. Qualitative researchers have just recently begun to study the immediate impact of school closure on students currently in the educational system. Quantitative studies have documented the relationship between school closure and student achievement. What is missing is a qualitative study that examines the experiences of students who lived through a school closure, who transitioned to a neighboring school, and are now grown adults.

This research study will use a phenomenological approach to gather data that describes the experiences of alumni who were forced to transition to a neighboring high school due to the closure of their home high school. DeVilbiss High School was a public high school in Toledo, Ohio from 1931 to 1991. The building still exists at 3301 Upton Avenue and is home to several of Toledo Public School’s specialized programs,
including the Toledo Technology Academy. DeVilbiss High School was closed at the end of the 1990-1991 school year due to declining enrollment and a reduction in school funding (Hage & Michaels, 2001; Krauth, 1991). This retrospective study seeks to understand the experience of the participants, both as they remember it happening, but also how this group of alumni have come to understand the closure of DeVilbiss as adults who are now in their mid to late thirties. The study will use semi-structured interviews to explore issues related to the transitional experience, such as identity, social capital, relational trust, community connectedness and engagement, school and community pride, tradition, and the sense of belonging. The study will explore issues specific to this group of alumni, for example, the sense of loss, the initial ramifications of the closing, the long-term relational effects, and how this group views current public educational organizations. This study utilizes a qualitative approach in an effort to examine the long-term effects of school closure on one community in West Toledo, Ohio.

**Research Questions**

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of students who lived through a school closure, who transitioned to a neighboring school, and who are now grown adults. Therefore, the principal research question for this study is: How do adults, who as teenagers attended a school that closed during their high school career, describe the impact of school closure on their lives? Embedded within this phenomenon are additional questions that require exploration in order to gain an understanding of the main research phenomenon of school closure in its entirety. Therefore, the following sub-questions will be investigated:
1. How do adults, whose high schools closed while they were attending them, describe their experience of school closure and transition?

2. How have these adults sustained connections to their community, particularly in terms of maintaining a sense of pride, tradition, and identification to that community?

By asking these questions, we will better understand the experience of students who are uprooted from an environment that they know and catapulted into a world of unknown.

**Significance of the Study**

Egelund & Lausten (2006) found that school closure is a symptom of a greater problem, indicative of a community that is in the final phase of the death process. This paradigm shift, the idea that a failing school is a symptom of a weakened community, not the cause of a weakened community alludes to the complexity of the issue. School closure cannot be studied in isolation, but must be viewed in the context of the system in which the schools reside (Senge, 2007). The picture of America that follows, describes a national, regional, and local economic structure that has increasing numbers of people falling into the category of poverty, a declining national median household income that is reflecting a declining middle class, and a polarization of wealth with an increasing percentage of annual income flowing to the top of the economic structure. There are population shifts occurring within the nation, causing some regions to experience a significant loss in human capital. School districts residing in those regions have the potential for experiencing an even higher number of school closures as they face economic stressors, as well as declining enrollment.
According to the U.S. Department of Education-National Center for Education Statistics (2009), from 2008-09 to 2020-21, the rate of increase in overall public school enrollment is projected to differ by grade level and among states. For example, throughout the United States enrollment in grades preK-8 is projected to increase more than enrollment in grades 9-12. States that are projected to have the highest total enrollment increases are Nevada, Arizona, and Alaska. The states of Michigan and West Virginia are projected to decrease the most, by more than 6 percent. In fact, since 1970-71, the enrollment trend for public schools has been steadily increasing in the South and West, while enrollment in the Northeast and Midwest has been decreasing. According to projections, by 2020-21, approximately 15% of the public school students will reside in the Northeast, 21% in the Midwest, 25% in the West, and 39% in the South.

The Brookings Institute provides an even more comprehensive description of the population growth in the United States. Their 2011 study, which focused primarily on the 2010 Census data, found that the Sun Belt accounted for most of the nation’s population growth in the 2000’s. Southern and Western states added 23 million people, compared to just 4 million added in the Northeast and Midwest (Frey, Berube, Singer, & Wilson). In fact, declining primary cities were located in metro areas that experienced slow growth or decline such as Youngstown, Cleveland, Buffalo and Pittsburgh. A declining population in a concentrated area greatly impacts the enrollment numbers of the public schools, which in turn, impacts the per-pupil funding levels. The city of Detroit clearly understands the critical nature of this relationship, as well as the impact it has on the community. The Associated Press (2011) reported that Detroit Public Schools’ enrollment is currently at 66,000 students; it had been 104,000 in 2007. The district has
received state approval for a deficit-elimination plan that would increase class sizes and result in the closure of about 70 schools. The district is experiencing a $327 million deficit. That follows the closing of about 60 schools in the past two years due to declining enrollment and efforts to cut building maintenance costs. The district believes the enrollment decline is due to its reputation for not being safe and having poor performance on standardized tests. Many parents chose to send their children to area charter schools.

In addition to declining population, many cities like Detroit are struggling with high poverty levels. According to a 2011 Brookings Institute report, the 2000s marked the first census decade on record in which real median household income declined (Frey, Berube, Singer, & Wilson). The typical household earned $50,046 in 2010, down 8.9 percent from 2000. The share of people living in poverty, nationwide, reached 15.3%, the highest since 1993. The report states, “The negative trends surely reflect the deep recession affecting the country in the late 2000s, but also the limited progress experienced by average households and the poor during the years in which the overall economy grew” (p.10). It continues by stating, “With unemployment projected to remain high for some time, many parts of the country will confront higher fiscal and social burdens associated with poverty, including concentrated poverty, for the foreseeable future” (p.10). In fact, a recent article in the Toledo Blade (Reiter, 2011) stated, “The concentration of poor people living in Toledo’s poorest neighborhoods grew by more than 15% in the past decade,” making Toledo the number one metropolitan area among American’s largest metro areas in terms of poverty growth (p.1). More than 46,000 people in Toledo reside in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 40% or higher.
According to the U.S. Department of Education-National Center for Education Statistics (2009), Toledo Public Schools has experienced a steady decline in enrollment, with 39,100 students in 1999-2000 and a current enrollment of 26,000. Since 2005, the district has closed 10 school buildings, leaving them with 61 schools in operation.

The Brookings Institute (2011) study concluded, “A cascade of statistics from the 2010 Census and other Census Bureau sources released during 2011 show a nation in flux- growing and moving more slowly as it ages, infused by racial and ethnic minorities and immigrants in its younger ranks, and struggling economically across a decade bookended by two recessions” (Frey et al., p.1) This data paints a rather depressed picture of America, especially in the Northeast and Midwest. Fundamental economic and social changes are greatly disrupting the structural system of the nation, creating stress across the country, states, cities and neighborhoods. Simultaneously, the nation’s public school system, the institution that has historically provided stability during times of social and economic volatility, is also undergoing fundamental systemic challenges that may significantly reduce its ability to offer the most marginalized populations a sense of hope and purpose. It is for this reason, that it is imperative to study the impact of school closure.

There are ample quantitative studies that provide insight regarding the number of school closures, the history of school closure, and the relationship between economics and school closure. Senge (2007) would refer to these as “tangible” variables. Senge believes in the theory of Systems Thinking, which focuses on multiple interactions within the organization and between organizations as a whole. Some variables are quantitative in nature and can be easily observed and measured, these are referred to as “tangible”
variables. Examples of tangible data within a school system would be test scores, enrollment numbers, daily attendance, and per-pupil spending. However, Senge (2007) recognized that there is critical information within an organization that is not always easily measured or observed; he referred to these as “intangible” variables. He found that the most successful organizations value both the tangible and intangible variables equally. Intangible variables that are likely to emerge through this study would be, for example, relationships, social capital, relational trust, identity, community connectedness and engagement, school and community pride and tradition, and sense of belonging. Through qualitative research, these types of variables can be measured and observed through the process of categorical coding.

This study is designed to gain a better understanding about the “intangible” effects of school closure. This study focuses on the experience of those who must navigate through the process of school closure. It is only through a qualitative method design that the researcher will obtain a comprehensive understanding of the long-term impact of school closure. This research study will focus on the nature of the transition experience as described by alumni as they first learned about their high school closing, through the first transitional year at their receiving high school. Additionally, the study will explore how connections to their neighborhood were sustained after the closing of the area high school, particularly in terms of maintaining relationships.

**Definition of Terms**

Within the literature review and in the introductory chapter, terms appear that may require further clarification. The following definitions are provided in preparation for the literature review section.
Disaster Capitalism- Disaster capitalism is a pattern that is occurring in the United States in which business is capitalizing on disaster. The belief that the best and most profitable way to correct an underperforming or failing system is to “blow it up” and start over (Saltman, 2008).

Human Capital- Human capital is an economic measure of a person’s skills and his or her education, experience and abilities that have economic value in the labor market. Human capital is created by providing individuals with skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways (Coleman, 1990).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is a reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act that requires annual testing, annual academic progress, state report cards, highly qualified teachers and funding directly tied to test results. Within this policy, parents are given the option of sending their children to another school in the same district if a school fails to make adequate yearly progress (AYP). If a school fails to make progress for consecutive years, the school is placed in corrective action and is required to undergo prescribed interventions, school closure being the most extreme action (Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Viteritti, 2005; Peterson & West, 2003).

Place Attachment- Place attachment is defined as “an affective bond or link between people and specific places” (Spencer, 2005, p. 308). Individuals create memories and form attachments to specific places as they interact with their environments.

Place Identity- As place attachments grow, individuals begin to view their identity within physical spaces, resulting in self-concepts directly related to places and the people
they interact with in those places, for example, neighborhoods, schools, and churches (Marcouyeux & Fleury-Bahi, 2011; Urban, Lewin-Bizan, and Lerner 2009).

Privatization- The term “privatization” has a variety of definitions; however for the purpose of this paper it is defined as the transfer of ownership or governance from the public sector to the private or business sector. Milton Friedman, a free-market economist, originated the idea of privatizing the American public educational system. Friedman blamed failing public schools on the lack of competition, arguing for an educational system based on free-market economics (Carl, 2011; Viteritti, 2005).

Receiving School- The term “receiving school” refers to the school the students attended after the closing of their neighborhood school. The receiving school may have been chosen by the student, or assigned to the student.

School Choice- School Choice gives parents the power to select a school for their children through a variety of methods, including charter schools, school vouchers, open enrollment, and magnet schools (Carl, 2011).

Social Capital- Social capital refers to a set of resources that surface in family relations and in community social organizations that are useful for cognitive or social human development. These resources differ between individuals and impact the capacity for developing human capital, especially in children and young adolescents. The relations of authority and trust are forms of social capital (Coleman, 1990; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).

System- A system is two or more parts that work together to accomplish a shared goal (Senge, 2007).
**Systems Thinking** - "Systems Thinking" is a theory that emphasizes the ability to see a system as a whole and in the context of its wider social setting. Systems Thinking focuses on the need to understand that a system is made up of interdependent parts, often taking on a life of its own and having hidden connections and interactions with consequences that are often delayed (Senge, 2007).

**Urban Renewal** - Urban renewal refers to various federal policies beginning in the 1940’s through the 1960’s that focused on the process of reinventing urban centers. The goal of urban renewal was to beautify the city, while at the same time, create new jobs, new technologies and new uses for land; this resulted in the reclaiming of land by the city government. Areas of the city were identified as “blighted” and in need of an aesthetic makeover. The plan was to decrease the size of the ghettos, replacing them with residential housing that would result in a revitalization of white, middle class neighborhoods. What resulted were losses in economic and social capital and an increased number of minorities living in overpopulated spaces and ghettos located in areas that were even more isolated from the general population than prior to the renewal process (Fullilove, 2004).

**White Flight** - White flight refers to the migration of the white population from racially mixed urban areas to more homogenously white areas in the suburbs. As white people living in the cities earn enough money to move to a neighborhood located on the edge of the city, they do so (Coleman, 1990; Fullilove, 2004).
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the spring of 2010, Toledo Public Schools announced the closing of Libbey High School (Criswell, 2010). Toledo Schools had not closed a traditional high school since 1991 (Svoboda, 2003) at which time, DeVilbiss High School, located in West Toledo, was shuttered after an operating levy failed in November of 1990 (Svoboda, 2003). Urban areas have been faced with the need to close school buildings for many years. However, in more recent years, suburban areas have also been forced to close schools. For example, Oregon City Schools, a suburb of Toledo, announced in the fall of 2010, after a third levy defeat that Wynn Elementary would be closed beginning with the 2011-2012 school year (McKinnon, 2011).

At the time that DeVilbiss High School was closed in Toledo, Ohio, in 1991, the only factor affecting its closure was the loss of human capital, or urban flight, resulting in a reduction in per-pupil funding (Hage & Michaels, 2001; Krauth, 1991). However,
since 1991, there are multiple factors affecting school closure, including increased privatization of education, referred to as the “school choice” movement, and federal educational reform policy which mandates consequences for failing schools, the most severe of which is to close the school (US Department of Education, 2008; Viteritti, J., 2005). The most current federal legislation addressing school reform is referred to as The No Child Left Behind Act.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is based upon a theory of action, which implies objectivity associated with the quantitative research method. A theory of action implies that decisions are driven by a series of steps or events that are well-planned and done with intent. For NCLB to be viewed as a necessary policy, terms such as “scientifically-based research” and “data-driven decision making” are used to support the belief that the American educational system is failing and that individual schools have reached such a low level of student achievement that extreme interventions are required (Hess, 2008, p. 534). By keeping the focus on testing and accountability, other critical issues rarely are discussed, such as socio-economic status of the students, inequity of resources, or unfunded mandates associated with policy implementation. Sullivan, Baruch, & Schepmyer, (2010) explore this phenomenon, stressing the important role that qualitative research plays when looking at a problem systemically. According to Sullivan et al. (2010), research approaches that rely exclusively on quantitative data lead to incorrect assumptions regarding cause and effect, which then lead to ineffective solutions. A criticism of NCLB is that it focuses exclusively on accountability as defined by testing and evaluation data and does not consider school reform within the complex system that
it indeed exists, ignoring the role that social issues play in student achievement, for example, the impact of poverty on the development of the whole child.

This literature review is guided by a key point of Sullivan et al. (2010), who underscore the importance of attending to issues of human capital in the study of educational reform. I begin by defining “theory of action” in the most basic terms followed by an early example in the history of the United States where scientifically based research, specifically intelligence testing, was used to inform policy. This literature review frames the study of schools within the context of their community (Senge, 2007); therefore, the decline of urban neighborhoods will be considered in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between declining neighborhoods and school closure. Urban renewal of the 1950’s will be discussed not only as a potential starting point of the decline of urban neighborhoods and schools, but as an example of how federal policy often fails to meet its desired outcomes, resulting in an entirely new set of problems. Similar to urban renewal, the current school reform initiatives have also been met with disappointment and unforeseen consequences. These school reform strategies will be discussed through policy that addresses topics such as: school choice, accountability, high-stakes testing, and school closure. Consequences of urban renewal and school reform policies will be examined, for example the loss of human capital and a reduction of resources needed for the sustainability of strong communities and public schools. The economic structure of the United States, specifically, capitalism and privatization will also be discussed. This chapter concludes with a review of DeVilbiss High School and a description of the theory of action that resulted in the closing of DeVilbiss in 1991.
Theory of Action and Policy

Federal educational policy, such as No Child Left Behind, is based on a theory of action, which Hess and Petrilli (2006) state is grounded in the belief that “strong, external pressure on school systems, focused on student achievement, will produce a political dynamic that leads to school improvement” (as cited in Rebell & Wolff, 2008, p. 41). But when decisions are not well planned or thoroughly thought through, they often result in both intended and unintended consequences. Descartes stated, “Each thing, provided that it is simple and undivided, always remains in the same state as far as is in its power, and never changes except by external causes” (as cited in Kees et al., 2008). The external causes become the effectuators of change. In the example of school closure, the external causes are frequently linked to policies developed by those in power at the state or federal level. This idea of interference or external causes triggering the disruption of an entire system is critical to consider when analyzing the decline of urban neighborhoods and the closing of schools. Fullilove (2004) found that people who were uprooted as a result of urban renewal policy lost much and gained little, and in many cases, lost themselves in the process.

Science provides us with knowledge believed to be free from political or social bias. However, consideration must be given to the idea that there is subjectivity influencing scientific research. When scientific research is used to inform policy decisions, it can be presented with subjectivity that supports personal agendas (Henig, 2008). In his book, Spin Cycle (2008), Henig uses the charter school movement as a case study to show how research is used (or misused) in policy debates. Henig states, “The idea that wise governance should be guided by science has deep roots which can be
traced back to our founding fathers” (p. 15). His point is that America has a long history of relying on empirical data when making decisions. However, Henig points out that in the social sciences and education, there is a human element that cannot be measured by scientific data that is solely based on what is observable or measurable. Senge (2007) refers to these variables as the “intangibles” when describing the “systems thinking” theory. According to Senge (2007), a devaluing of this human element, or intangibles, within an organization leads to a failing system.

Throughout the history of the United States, social and political agendas have gained great momentum when supported with what is viewed to be objective data. This strategy was used to gain momentum for urban renewal and school choice, which will be addressed later. For an earlier example, one only needs to look at the history of intelligence testing in the United States and how it impacted immigrants. In Stephen Jay Gould’s book entitled, *Mismeasure of Man* (1996), he counters the objective view of science, illustrating ways in which conscious and unconscious bias have influenced research on mental testing resulting in little more than social and racial prejudice. The theme of Gould’s book is biological determinism and it leads to the classic discussion about nature verses nurture. Gould states, “a principal theme within biological determinism is the claim that worth can be assigned to individuals and groups by measuring intelligence as a single quantity” (p.52). It was primarily the desire to rank one individual or group of individuals above the other, along with fear of anyone who was different that motivated the participation in this eugenics movement. Scientific research based on the theory of biological determinism provided the support necessary to maintain the economic and social hierarchies of privilege and exclusion (Gould, 1996).
According to Gould (1996), H.H. Goddard took the work of Alfred Binet regarding intelligence testing, and used it to support his research findings that rank ordered people, placing those with the lowest test scores in a category, labeling them feeble-minded or morons. Based on his findings, people were inappropriately committed to institutions. The results of his research and other American eugenics efforts favorably influenced the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, which restricted the numbers of immigrants from undesirable racial groups. This process used for determining the worth of immigrants in the early 1900’s is very similar in practice to the accountability criteria found in current federal educational policies. Just as there were high-stake consequences for immigrants who were assessed using one single quantifier, there are high-stakes associated with the testing mandates prescribed in No Child Left Behind. Achievement scores on state tests are used to rank order students, teachers, and schools. The consequences for those labeled as failures are severe; students are denied a high school diploma, teachers are denied employment, and entire school buildings are shuttered or reconstituted. Just as in the Gould example, the impact of school reform consequences is heavily weighted in poor and marginalized populations. The irony is that well-intentioned school reform policy that was meant to reduce the marginalization of the poor appears to have had the opposite effect. An outcome of current federal school accountability policy has produced a type of social determinism. Gould concludes his book with the following quote from Charles Darwin, “If the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin” (as cited in Gould, 1996, p. 424).
Federal school reform policy, specifically the penalties for failure to achieve school accountability as tracked within NCLB, has become institutionalized within the American public education system. One of the penalties for a school’s failure to achieve adequate yearly progress, a key component to NCLB, is ultimately the closure of a school. School closure, as it pertains to NCLB is grounded in the corporate school reform model and the belief that a school should be run like a business. When a business is failing and has reached the end of its life, all assets are liquidated and redistributed to other companies. When a school has experienced consecutive years of failure, the existing resources are liquidated and redistributed to successful area schools; this includes its human capital, which is comprised of the students and staff. Free-market economics shows no empathy. The strongest organizations will survive, the weakest will be eliminated or dispersed into the majority and accept their place in society.

Theory of Action and School Choice

In the Gould example, testing was used to determine a person’s worth and to divide people into categories. Just as testing was used to justify policy decisions pertaining to immigration, today testing is used within the guidelines of NCLB to inflict a series of consequences affecting, almost exclusively, the poor and marginalized urban and rural populations, the most severe consequence being the closing of the school. The inclusion of rigorous consequences within NCLB was done with the belief that by increasing the accountability it would lead to a strengthening of the American educational system; the intention was not to harm students. While policies are often developed with good intentions, it is not unusual to have them fall short of the intended goals due to a shortsighted understanding of potential consequences. The school choice movement is
another example of a well-intentioned idea that resulted in both intended and unintended outcomes.

According to Cobb & Glass, the theory of action for school choice is that by encouraging market-based competition among schools, the overall school quality will improve, specifically for students attending low-performing schools. However, the theory of action is grounded in a false assumption, “that all families have the time, information, and resources to change schools if they wish,” and that all students have access to better performing schools than the one they are currently attending (Cobb & Glass, 2009, p. 264).

Zhang (2009) describes the school choice phenomenon in terms of “family social capital,” meaning the types of resources attained from long-term relationships between family members or social organizations that function within a family-like structure, such as schools (p. 397). He states, “This kind of social capital is embedded in social relations and social structure in various forms such as attitude, trust, rules, networks, and systems. These forms of social capital are obtained and applied by families; moreover, they facilitate the action of school selection. In other words, possession of social capital determines the ability of the parents and families to apply the resources of social networks, and belongs to a type of capital characteristic of social relations outside the family” (Zhang, 2009, p. 397). In essence, Zhang is saying that it is the gap in social capital developed by families influencing the extent to which they can effectively navigate the system that contributes to the inequity in compulsory education, especially in areas permeated by the school choice movement.
Two decades ago, Coleman (1990) predicted how American high schools would be impacted as a result of a more elaborative school choice system, stating, “Children would attend schools not according to area of residence, but according to parental choice, as private schools under a voucher system or magnet schools in the public sector are chosen” (p. 351). He further stated the following, “However, this direction is only viable if two conditions hold: The population density of the area must be great enough that choice among schools is feasible without long-distance travel; and the parents of the high-school students must retain sufficient authority to delegate it to the school” (p. 351). Coleman further explained that without access to adequate transportation, from a structural perspective, there is no possibility for choice. Coleman is describing access as it pertains to transportation and the proximity of the receiving school, and power as it relates to the parent in the context of the relationship between the parent and the young adult (Coleman, 1990). In the early 1990’s when the school choice movement was just gaining momentum, Coleman had the foresight to predict the consequences associated with limited access or no access to school transportation, and he also understood the complexity of the social contract between the school and parent. The school choice movement increases parental choice, but for many high school students, the parent/child relationship is one of shared authority, or in some cases, sole authority residing with the student. Coleman’s point is that there is only parental choice when the parent is the sole person making the decision.

The theory of action driving school choice policies today is similar to the theory of action that resulted in the Immigration Act of 1924. It convinces the general population that the result of school choice will be social and economic progress for all,
and the trigger is almost always traced back to the economy, with those of power and wealth benefitting politically and/or financially. School choice is based on privatization and competition. Depressed test scores are used to incite panic and to motivate parents to seek an alternative to public education. This creates a revolving door system as parents move their children from one school to another rarely finding a school that exceeds the achievement level of the public school they originally fled. Competition shows no compassion, it is meant to produce winners and losers. Just as with any other competitive game, if school choice is allowed to continue indefinitely, only a few winners will remain.

**Poverty, Unemployment and Housing**

Since the 1950’s, there have been multiple federal programs that were initiated with great hope and promise, and that were targeted in the high-minority urban areas (Anyon, 2005). These programs were to address, among other things, poverty, unemployment and housing. A few examples of those programs were Model Cities, Urban Renewal, Job Training Partnerships, Empowerment Zones, and Hope VI. According to Anyon (2005), the federal programs have failed primarily for two reasons; one reason is that many were underfunded. She believes that if they had been fully funded and supported, many would have been successful. For example, the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 was meant to outlaw redlining by banks and realtors. Prior to this Act, mortgage lenders often discriminated against African-American borrowers. They would be required to have more money to put down on a house and/or expected to accept terms for repayment that were less conducive than those offered to the general population, primarily white clients. Some neighborhoods were automatically refused
mortgage loans, referred to as redlining. Anyon (2005) acknowledges that a policy was needed to address such discriminatory practices; however, the policy never received adequate funding.

According to Anyon (2005), the second reason federal policies have not been successful is that the programs failed to address the root of the problem, such as the macroeconomic policies and regional practices that define the spoken and unspoken rules that maintain the cycle of poverty. Congress will often rule in favor of the poor and oppressed, but then they fall short in the language that speaks to the implementation of the law. In the Community Reinvestment Act, Congress provided vague language that directs banking regulatory agencies to serve the credit needs of their local communities, safely and soundly. Community groups then had to organize to address the lack of law enforcement of the Act. This type of vague language within the law allows for slow enactment, or even worse, it leaves room for misinterpretation of the law itself. For example, Brown v. the Board of Education (1954) ended the legalization of segregated schools. However, in Brown II (1955) the phrase “with all deliberate speed” was used in reference to the urgency in which the courts believed schools should be desegregated. Due to the vagueness the language, those four words allowed school districts in the south to delay the process of integrating schools, some for decades. This is an example of the failure in legislation and spoken and unspoken rules and regional practices that maintain the cycle of poverty and stops systemic change.

Today, there is a great emphasis on globalization and the idea that high-tech communication has created a world with no boundaries (Friedman, 2007). Friedman has argued that in order for America to compete globally, we need to embrace this new
unbounded system. This will require a complete paradigm shift for many, given the fact that much of the policy focus in America has been grounded in creating or maintaining physical boundaries and separation by class and race. Historically, policies intended to create a more open society have only created superficial “quick fixes,” and confined interventions to areas within specific boundaries. While some of them arguably did more good than harm, they still proved to be unsustainable and were never able to impact the broader population. Partial implementation of policy due to lack of resources creates what is known as “unfunded mandates.” In this next section, I would like to focus on one federal program, urban renewal, beginning with a brief overview of how urban populations have changed over time. Urban renewal was one act in a multi-act drama that led to loss of social capital among the urban poor, contributing to the current set of conditions within which school closure has occurred.

**Population Change and Migrating Patterns**

Jim Crow laws (1890-1910) caused further discrimination and segregation among races (Fullilove, 2004). Resources and power remained with the whites, leaving blacks deprived and powerless. Jim Crow laws impacted rural blacks, especially, who were still tied to working the land due to debt owed to landowners (Fullilove, 2004). Millions of African-Americans migrated from the southern states to the northern states to remove themselves from racism and prejudice and to seek employment in cities with a large amount of industry; this is referred to as The Great Migration (Tyack, 1974). The Great Migration began in 1910, but really gained momentum in 1915. One and a half million black people left the South by 1930, settling in major cities in the Northeast and Midwest, still others chose to stay in the South, settling in southern cities (Tyack, 1974).
White Flight and Urban Flight

Fullilove (2004) provides a historic overview of what is referred to as “urban flight” or “white flight.” In her book, Root Shock, she explains that when African-Americans and other immigrants arrived in the cities, the majority lived in newcomer neighborhoods, which were those areas located closest to the mills and factories. Sociologists traced the movement of the newcomer neighborhoods located in the central city, finding that as white people established themselves, earning enough money to move to a better neighborhood, they did so. The wealthier, more residential neighborhoods were located at the edges of the cities (Fullilove, 2004). Federal subsidies for housing loans offered through Federal Housing Administration (F.H.A.) and newly developed freeways facilitated the process of white flight (Tyack, 1974). Because of the racial divide in America, blacks had no housing options, they remained in the central city and over time, these areas were referred to as “Negro Ghettos” (Fullilove, 2004). Black families that tried to move just a few blocks beyond their neighborhoods, into predominantly white neighborhoods were often the victims of violence and crime. This pattern of migration occurred repeatedly, creating a cycle, which resulted in white people moving further and further away from the cities and into the suburbs, referred to as “white flight” (Rury, 2005). This also caused businesses to move from the urban communities to malls in the suburbs thereby reducing the tax revenue available to sustain the schools in the urban areas.

Today, a more commonly used term is “urban flight,” which is more racially inclusive. Eventually, the term “urban flight” was representative of anyone who could afford to move out of the cities, including African-Americans. Currently, 90% of
African-Americans live in an urban setting, which is completely opposite of what they represented 100 years earlier (Fullilove, 2004). It is important to note that urban flight was at first motivated by racial intolerance. However, as industry left the cities, people moved for economic reasons as well. Many people no longer had a reason to stay in or near cities and migrated elsewhere for employment (Rury, 2005).

Coleman (1990) provides a view of urban decline in relationship to schools and communities, impacting a family’s social and human capital. The decline of the neighborhoods decreases the chance of consensus or common visioning, which in turn decreases the chance of shared resources and supports within the communities from which the school student population is drawn, resulting in a decline in the families’ social capital. The lack of jobs and increased poverty impact each family’s ability to earn a living and results in a decline in human capital. According to Coleman, the decline is caused by “the growth in transportation, which allows separation of work and residence, and secondarily because of the extensive movement of women into the labor-force, which removes much of the foundation of the community-based associations” (p. 350). Along with the separation of work and the residence, is the separation of schools and residence.

**Urban Renewal and the Breakdown of Poor Communities**

Prior to urban renewal, there was a time in history when African American youth had role models living within their neighborhoods. There were successful businesses owned and operated by people who lived right in their community (Anyon, 2005; Fullilove, 2004). Goldin and Katz (2008) contrast the assets within these neighborhoods of the past with current conditions in their description of concentrated poverty within cities, stating:
The high economic returns to doing well in school and the pathways through which schooling can lead to labor market success may not be salient (or even known) to the children from disadvantaged backgrounds. These youths lack adult role models who have succeeded in the labor market, and their peers are frequently hostile, to say the least, to students who achieve academically (p. 348).

The identified cause of urban decline may lie in the lens of the perceiver. An economist might say that what triggered the decline of urban areas was the loss of industry and jobs. A person motivated by racial intolerance of the black population might say the trigger was the Great Migration itself. But, according to Fullilove (2004), the single greatest cause of the destruction of the urban African-American communities was the process of urban renewal, beginning in 1949 and ending in 1973. Fullilove’s study of urban renewal represents the perspective of those closely impacted that lived in the very neighborhoods that were eliminated.

The goal of urban renewal was to beautify the city, while at the same time, create new jobs, new technologies and new uses for land; this resulted in the reclaiming of land by the city government. Areas of the city were identified as “blighted” and in need of an aesthetic makeover. City officials submitted a plan, and once it was approved, they had the right to seize the property of landowners using eminent domain. The people living there and the business owners were given a minimal amount of compensation and were expected to move out. The existing buildings were cleared away and the land was sold to developers at a fraction of what it cost the city to acquire, who then built businesses, educational and cultural institutions, and residences for middle and upper class people (Fullilove, 2004).
In her book, *Root Shock*, Fullilove provides a series of case studies of several American cities that were torn apart by urban renewal, one being Pittsburgh’s Hill District. Regarding the Hill District and how the plan for urban renewal was developed, Fullilove (2004) states:

> It was guided by explicit concepts, described in publications for planning professionals, of hiding and marginalizing the poor. Their tools included using highways, massive buildings, parking lots, and open spaces as barriers; eliminating connecting streets to inhibit travel in and out; and housing people in public housing projects that were cut off from the flow (p. 64).

This approach to urban renewal could only lead to one thing: urban ghettos.

There have been other times in history when America has tried to hide a marginalized population, for example, self-contained classrooms for special needs students, reservations for the Native Americans, and mental institutions, to name a few. The plan was to decrease the size of the ghettos, replacing them with residential housing that would result in a revitalization of white, middle class neighborhoods. What resulted, in part due to the second wave of the Great Migration, was an influx into the cities of even more poor. Contrary to what the city governments intended, there was not the return of the rich, but a higher number of people needing access to low-income housing. Even with this influx of more poor, in most cases, cities chose to continue the containment of the ghetto neighborhoods. Some cities, like Chicago, built more housing projects in a contained area. A worse option was to not build any additional housing projects. In Detroit, between the years of 1956 and 1960, there were 8,000 low-income units demolished, but only 758 added through the federal program (Fullilove, 2004). At that
time, existing housing was expected to house two to three times the number of people as it had originally intended. It finally reached a breaking point and civil discourse erupted, which became referred to as the American ghetto revolts of the 1960’s (Fullilove, 2004). The cities did not plan for appropriate housing for the residents that they had displaced by reclaiming their land. It was if they were expected to just disappear.

One of the most critical points made in the research is this: even though many of the neighborhoods identified as “blighted” and then eliminated through urban renewal had a great deal of poverty within them, they still functioned as a supportive community. People knew each other, and people took care of each other. Not everyone living in those neighborhoods were poor, some of them were business owners, providing services to those within their community (Fullilove, 2004). Patty White-Fullilove grew up in Newark, New Jersey. She states, “It was the kind of neighborhood that, if somebody saw you doing something wrong, they called your mother or grandmother. It was a multiracial neighborhood when I was little, and by the time I left, it was all black” (Fullilove, 2004, p. 135). She goes on to speak about the businesses within her community, one being a medical practice owned by her fiancé’s father, others included a dental office, a funeral home, and a church. The owners of these businesses were leaders within the community and served as role models to youth, helping them to see the connection between education and income. In about 1968, urban renewal claimed Patty’s family home on Waverly Avenue, forcing them to relocate. Patty is not alone. Fullilove provides multiple quotes from those who experienced the upheaval of urban renewal, and virtually all of them express a longing for their old neighbors and the sense of community.
that they once felt. Many describe how they never were able to find their place, continuing to look for something that no longer existed (Fullilove, 2004).

**Community Activism**

Newark, New Jersey, is an example where the poor, minority communities were able to organize and fight back. When an urban renewal project was to occur in the Central Ward, there was great outcry from the residents. A public hearing was held on June 12, 1967, to review the designation of the area as “blighted.” Those in favor of the project spoke of the need to create opportunities for jobs, education, religion, health care and entertainment for all. But George Richardson, a civil rights activist, stated the following, “Any urban renewal project, planned or contemplated, that will uproot 22,000 Negroes, without any planned new housing to be built, will never be completed in Newark” (Fullilove, 2004, p. 149). People uprooted by urban renewal had no control over their lives, or their destiny. In this particular case, Newark did not implement the Central Ward project as planned. Instead, it became a scaled-down version of the original, primarily because the businesses scheduled to build there understood the need to compromise.

Fullilove reports that there were pockets of people who organized, but it was most often too little, too late. However, in at least two cases, they were able to limit the destruction, earning the designation of “historic district” for one area and winning a lawsuit that resulted in compensation to a family who sustained major financial losses due to the closing of their medical facility. And while financial loss can be measured, it is much harder to measure the social loss or the psychological hardship these families experienced by being forced from their homes. When urban renewal ended in the 1970’s,
some areas of the cities had miles of open land where entire communities had been bulldozed, but nothing built in its place. As is the case with many federal programs, budgets change and there is no guarantee that the program will be in place from one year to the next. Projects that were meant to occur were left unfunded. Fullilove’s research supports the statement earlier made by Anyon (2005) regarding the fact that the federal programs never addressed the root cause of poverty, she states: “Without money, buildings burn, and people move, taking their despair to the next neighborhood” (Fullilove, 2004, p. 157). In summary, it was a combination of federal policies of racialized financial lending practices and urban renewal and its destruction of African American neighborhoods, together with the lack of industry that contributed to the decline of major cities in the United States and set the stage for the failure and closure of inner-city schools.

**Consequences of School Closure and Community Response**

It is important to understand the cycle of decline of the urban areas and how it has impacted school closure. Just as additional schools are built when there is a surge in the population, schools are closed when there is a loss of human capital (Goldin & Katz, 2008). According to Cobb & Glass (2009), schools are an important place for the exchange of cultural and social capital, but so are the communities in which the students live. The authors state, “Concentrated poverty in schools is a reflection of concentrated poverty in neighborhoods” (Cobb & Glass, 2009, p. 270). Regarding the process of assigning displaced students to neighboring schools, they state “School reform plans redistribute students possessing varying degrees and different types of cultural and social capital, these forms of capital represent important resources for the schools” (Cobb &
Glass, p. 270). This implies that students with more social or cultural capital are more desirable to the receiving schools. Egelund & Laustsen (2006) provide research based on a qualitative analysis performed in 2003 of 30 Danish school closures in the period of 1990-1999. Communities experiencing these closures believed that the closure of a school is the deathblow to the local society. However, the findings indicated the reverse is true, the school closure is a symptom of a community that is in the final phase of the death process due to a lack of people, and thus a lack of human capital. This implies an interactive relationship, rather than a causal relationship between schools and communities. A school will thrive where the community thrives. A school will struggle where the community struggles. A school cannot destroy a community, nor can it save it.

Johnston (2001) provides data on several city school districts experiencing severely declining enrollment and examples of how communities are reacting to the closures. In Dayton, Ohio, school officials announced a plan to close 14 schools, while Baltimore placed nine schools on its closure list. In 1981, Dayton had 32,000 students, but in 2001, they had fallen to 21,000 students. “School leaders say they don’t need as many buildings as they once did because economic blight, lower birthrates, and middle class flight have eroded their enrollments” (Johnston, 2001 p.1). Additional contributors include school choice options, especially “public financed but largely independent charter schools” (Johnston, 2001, p.1). Dayton school leaders estimate that they are losing $14 million in annual per-pupil funding from the state to area charter schools. In Pittsburgh, multiple school facility studies revealed that the city school system was spending too much on facilities and that they needed to close buildings. In the 1970’s, Pittsburgh schools enrolled 80,000 students, but in 2001, it had declined to 39,000 students.
By 2001, Baltimore’s enrollment had fallen to 106,000 students, compared to 135,000 in the 1980’s. Some of the Baltimore school buildings were at 40 to 50 percent capacity. The state of Maryland controls new construction dollars for school districts and they made it clear that Baltimore Schools would not have access to those dollars unless they closed some existing school buildings. Community groups appealed to state officials, arguing that the district did not provide enough opportunity for public comment regarding the nine schools identified for closure. One community member argued that the board hired an outside consultant to justify the closures, but not to figure out a solution to the declining enrollment (Johnston, 2001).

Gardner (2010) provides more recent descriptions of community reaction to school closures. In November 2010, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board voted to close ten schools. The board did not foresee the backlash that would occur within the community due to the fact that the closures fell on racial lines. The schools that were to be closed were 95 percent minority, while the district’s overall student population at the time was 33 percent white. A similar “firestorm” took place in Boston in December, 2010, when the decision was made to close nine schools and merge eight others into four (Gardner, 2010, p. 1). Gardner (2010) states:

When districts decide to close schools on the basis of criteria that parents do not support, they better be prepared for push back. That’s because parents feel betrayed. I can’t blame the parents, particularly when they have not been given an opportunity to voice their opinions before a decision is made (p.1).

In March 2011, the Ford Foundation sponsored an event “focused on promoting local accountability and meaningful opportunities for parents and community residents to
make their voices heard” (Herold, 2011, p. 2). Delegations from Chicago, Los Angeles, Newark, New York and Philadelphia were there to discuss several topics, of which school closure was one. Jitu Brown, a longtime community organizer from Chicago attended the event. Herold quoted Brown by stating:

Between 2001 and 2009, Chicago Public Schools closed 44 schools, decisions that Brown argued were driven more by real estate prices in the surrounding communities than the educational needs of students. The results, he (Brown) said, were a spike in school violence, the destabilization of schools receiving displaced students, and the awarding of several public schools to unqualified charter operations (Herold, 2011).

Michelle Fine, a professor of social psychology at the City University of New York was one of the event’s organizers. Fine (2011) stated, “When we started to notice the rash of school closings, we started to recognize this as a major technology of privatization” (as cited in Herold, 2011, p.1). According to Fine, the conference was intended to help “educators and community to mobilize and generate rich democratic alternatives” to the school closings, turnarounds and privatization trends occurring within the American educational system (as cited in Herold, 2011, p.1).

Parent trigger laws take the language found in NCLB that allows school boards and district personnel to close failing schools, and turns that power over to the parents. The nation’s first parent trigger laws were enacted in California in 2010 (Webley, 2011). Parent trigger laws allow parents to initiate school closure or restructuring of a school, including its conversion to a charter school. This is done primarily through a petition process. Compton, California is the location of the first incident where parents have
organized and petitioned for school reform using the parent trigger laws. The petition process in Compton was initiated by a charter ally group who recruited parents in secret without informing the school district that they were organizing the community in an effort to convert the public school to a charter school. Since then, parents who signed the petition have reported that they were given misleading information and wanted their names rescinded. The administrators of the charter school, Celerity Sirius, opened a new charter school in Compton. However, only about one-third of the parents who signed the petition actually enrolled their students in the charter school. Similar legislation has passed in Texas, Ohio and Connecticut and is being considered in other states (Medina, 2011). Ultimately, the predictions that by opening the new charter school it would significantly impact the enrollment at McKinley school did not come to fruition. Parent Revolution, the organization that drew up the petitions and led the signature-gathering effort, was unable to accomplish their goal of making McKinley school a model for parent-trigger reform laws (Los Angeles Times, 2011).

Countries outside the United States are also struggling with declining enrollment, closing or consolidation of schools, and repurposing of school buildings. Boddington (2010) provides a case study of Atlee-Jenner School District in Southern Alberta Canada and the Medicine Hat School Board over a policy decision that resulted in the busing of children for the first time to a new school a long distance away in the mid-1960’s. The need to bus students this far was a result of the consolidation of several smaller rural school districts and the closing of the local school district. While parents initiated the dispute on the grounds that the bus ride was too long, and forced children to travel over unsafe roads (this was a very rural area with undeveloped roads), other deeper issues
surfaced that revolved around the loss of identity and traditions of rural families and communities. Universal public schooling at a local level had allowed the inculcation of appropriate values and beliefs shared by the community it served; but by the consolidation of these primarily farming communities which resulted in their children being bused to a more urban school district, these rural families felt threatened at the idea that they could no longer control their child’s environment (Boddington, 2010). Boddington’s study provides a glimpse of how economic and administrative transformations brought with them social and cultural changes.

**Economics and Equity**

In the United States, there is a high correlation between the quality of education and the income of the community. Communities with a higher per household average income tend to have more resources, better school buildings and grounds, and higher performing schools. The urban school districts tend to have a high poverty rate, and this is reflected within the schools with inadequate resources and facilities, and lower performing schools. According to Cobb & Glass (2009), “Residential and school segregation by class and race is widespread in many of the urban settings, and poor students who attend these schools in isolation receive relatively inferior educations” (p. 272).

Goldin & Katz (2008) authors of the book, *The Race Between Education and Technology*, present a comprehensive analysis of United States economic trends and the impact on the educational system. The authors provide data and a historical overview of the educational system in the United States to support their conclusion that while the United States was a leader in public education for many years; it has been on a downward
spiral since the 1980’s. One of the consequences of our current economy is that there is a growing income inequality; in fact, America has the most unequal income and wage distributions of any high-income nation (Goldin & Katz, 2008).

Rothstein (2004) tackles an unpopular topic, one that is on the cusp of being taboo, the relationship between poverty and achievement. He discusses in great detail the economic structure of the United States, issues such as capitalism, free market, and privatization. Rothstein (2004) describes how the economic structure creates a stratified system and an economic gap that continues to grow between those of wealth and those of poverty. He presents a logical argument against the idea that schools should be held solely accountable for improving student achievement, while ignoring the social and economic inequalities among them. In his concluding chapter, he asks for public policy to address poverty conditions of the lives of students. Only after students feel safe and warm, only after their basic needs have been met, can we begin to treat school accountability equally (Rothstein, 2004).

Darling-Hammond (2010) examines the achievement gap that exists between students in the United States and in other developed nations, and the fact that it is widening, not narrowing. Immigration trends are analyzed with awareness that American schools are more diverse today than ever, with 50 million Americans speaking a language other than English. This fact, combined with the increasing achievement gap of students of poverty and/or color is creating a national threat to our country. This group of students is increasing in percentage, and yet, this group is excluded and marginalized resulting in poor academic performance. Darling-Hammond (2010) believes that we must create
equity within the schools, or the overall student achievement scores will continue to decline when compared to other countries.

**Disaster Capitalism**

There is a growing belief in America that the best and most profitable way to correct an underperforming or failing system is to “blow it up” and start over (Saltman, 2008). However, when it moves beyond inanimate objects and into the realm of human beings, the “blow it up theory” fails to consider the short-term and long-term effects on those who live within the existing system. Questions which should always precede a school closing but are rarely considered include: What will be the effect on the student who must be assimilated; what will be the effect on the receiving students whose existing social capital may be threatened; and what will be the impact on the social fabric of the neighborhoods? Social variables can be measured and observed, variables such as: identity, social capital, community engagement, and sense of belonging. However, federal school reform policy does not require accountability measures related to social variables. Implementation of the “blow it up” theory of school reform results in schools being closed based on one single quantifier, which is standardized high stakes tests. The social and emotional damage done to those involved in the “blow it up” process is considered to be an acceptable and necessary outcome. Saltman (2008) examines a pattern that is occurring in the United States in which business is capitalizing on disaster. As examples, he cites the Asian tsunami of 2005 that allowed corporations to seize coveted shoreline properties for resort development; reconstruction contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan; the privatization of public schooling in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina; and how No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has set up failing public schools to be
dismantled and made into investment opportunities. He refers to this trend as “disaster capitalism” (Saltman 2008, p.187). Saltman (2008) describes how the political "right" is capitalizing on disaster in education, stating that:

This conservative movement threatens the development of public schools as necessary places that foster engaged critical citizenship [in] that it undermines the public and democratic purposes of public education, amasses vast profits for few, and even furthers U.S. foreign policy agendas (p. 188).

Saltman was not the first to coin the term “disaster capitalism.” In 2007, Naomi Klein authored a New York Times bestseller entitled, The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism. She began researching the free market’s dependence on the power of “shock” as early as 2003, specifically how it had surfaced during the military occupation of Iraq. In 2005, her research continued with the natural disaster in New Orleans, Hurricane Katrina. According to Klein (2007), “the three trademark demands” for disaster capitalism to occur are: “privatization, government deregulation and deep cuts to social spending” (p.10). Klein (2007) connects the theory of “disaster capitalism” to Milton Friedman, sometimes referencing the “Friedman’s Chicago School movement” (p.13). This movement, which requires disasters to advance, had surfaced in places outside the United States since the seventies, but only recently was it “fully applied” in America (Klein, 2007, p.13). The opportunity arose when the September 11th World Trade Center was attacked. According to Klein (2007), the Bush administration “immediately seized upon the fear generated by the attacks not only to launch the ‘War on Terror’” and to breath new life into a failing economy by funneling dollars into the for-profit market (p. 14). By the time of the attack on the World Trade Center, the
followers of Friedman had practiced “disaster capitalism” for three decades in other countries. Klein makes it clear that she in no way believes the disaster capitalists play a role in creating events such as September 11th or Hurricane Katrina. However, they are so well organized that when these events happened, they are ready to set a plan in motion that would capitalize on the “shocked” unstable system. The natural disaster, Hurricane Katrina, was perceived by Friedman as “an opportunity to radically reform the educational system” (as cited in Klein, 2007, p. 5). Led by right-wing think tanks, the Bush administration provided tens of millions of dollars to transform the New Orleans schools into a private system. The public school system was dismantled and replaced with a voucher system in which families would receive public funding to be used at private institutions, many which were for-profit.

Perhaps the most critical point made by Saltman (2008) and Klein (2007) is this idea that the current conservative political climate is resulting in the loss of public participation in the school reform process. Democratic decision-making takes a significant amount of time. However, in the midst of a disaster, there is urgency for resolution that does not allow for the collaborative process. In the case of New Orleans, a hurricane created the urgency for school reform. However, natural disasters are not occurring across the nation. Therefore, it is educational failure that reinforces this notion of needing to “blow up” failing schools. Poor student performance as determined through the use of standardized state achievement tests create the urgency needed for perceived disaster within the American educational system. Because capitalism is grounded in competition, it creates a cycle that is driven by the fear of not being able to compete, specifically with other nations. It is not unusual, then, to find federal policies in
the United States created to counter a perceived national threat. For example, when the Russians launched the satellite referred to as Sputnik in 1957, the federal government reacted by implementing policy strategically directed at improving math and science education (Rebell & Wolff, 2008). Peterson (2003) attributes the bipartisan support needed to pass NCLB, to the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. Baumgartner and Jones state, “Sometimes a triggering event occurs, clarifying or dramatizing an issue that has hitherto attracted little attention” (as cited in Fowler, 2009, p. 32). Such was the case regarding a 1983 report regarding the state of American education. The landmark U.S. Department of Education report, *A Nation at Risk*, found that about 13 percent of 17-year-olds were functionally illiterate, SAT scores were dropping, and students needed an increased array of remedial courses in college (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). This report came out in 1983 and triggered the school accountability movement, creating justification for more privatized alternatives. School reform was in the national spotlight, and what followed was a heightened involvement of the federal government in education reform. This resulted in federal school reform policies such as: the Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994), and finally, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

What becomes clear is that the federal government has assumed a greater role in American education. However, it is important at this point to examine how federal funding (input) progressed as federal policy focused more and more on accountability (output). According to Sunderman and Kim (2007), when Congress passed NCLB, federal spending for elementary and secondary education had increased by 50% and by almost 20% for Title I between 1998 and 2001. However, Boyd (2003) reports that
NCLB was implemented at a time when state government faced the biggest decline in state revenues in at least twenty years (as cited in Sunderman & Kim, 2007). Ohlemacher and Okoben, (2003) provide the following example: “The Governor of Ohio signed an executive order in March 2003 that cut funding for the Ohio Department of Education by $9.3 million and state aid to schools by $90.6 million” (as cited in Sunderman & Kim, 2007, p. 1074). At that time, Ohio had a conservative governor and a conservative-controlled legislature who refused to approve a budget that included an increase in taxes. These kind of budget cuts force districts to make decisions that include alternatives such as laying off teachers, shortening the school year or school day, increasing class size, cutting textbook or technology dollars, or the elimination of entire programs (Sunderman & Kim, 2007; Cavanagh, 2011).

The 1983 “A Nation at Risk” report ignited a discussion around student achievement, which laid the foundation for policy development that should have ensured that schools had the capacity to create educational opportunity for all students. Instead, the federal educational polices continued to focus on accountability, rather than opportunity. In concept, “leaving no child behind” was the right idea, but without a system in place to ensure appropriate resources were in the hands of all teachers and students, it was doomed for failure from its inception. Viewing this in the context of “disaster capitalism,” the current context raises the question, “who stands to gain from a stratified public educational system and a culture of school failure?”

School Choice

The idea of school choice is traced back to Milton Friedman who advocated for a market approach to education. According to Viteritti (2005), Friedman believed that “the
ensuing competition would force the closure of low-performing institutions, and the appropriation of public funding for nonpublic schools would create a market of new educational providers” (p. 138). Friedman’s original proposal was the use of school vouchers; however, in practice, vouchers are just a minor component of school choice. According to Carl (2011), many believe that vouchers first came into being in the 1990’s; however, they were actually enacted in the 1950’s in response to forced integration as a result of the 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* Supreme Court case. According to Carl (2011), maintaining whites-only schools was a priority for many southern communities, and utilizing vouchers was a way to achieve their goal. The State of Ohio has played a key role in the growth of the school voucher program due to the 2002 Supreme Court ruling in the *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* case that found that the voucher program implemented in the City of Cleveland did not violate the establishment clause (Carl, 2011). While there are various degrees of school voucher usage in the United States, charter schools became the most significant force in school choice because they themselves are public schools and therefore, less extreme than using school vouchers for private and parochial schooling. With over 4700 charter schools operating in 40 states and the District of Columbia, charter schools are the largest vehicle for school choice in America (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2009). Carl states, “In the late 20th century, efforts to privatize public education have encompassed tools other than vouchers. Education management companies, tuition tax credits, and charter schools are some of the newer entities to join the older constellation of private vendors that continue to market textbooks, school construction, transportation services, and the like to the public schools” (p. 5).
Clandfield (2010) provides shocking data in regard to school closures in Ontario, Canada. According to his report, “172 schools are slated or recommended to close in Ontario between 2009 and 2012, and another 163 are under review” (Clandfield, 2010, p.99). He states, “school closures need to be seen in a context of shrinking government funding coupled with increased central control and more prominence given to private alternatives to public schools or private corporate partnerships with public institutions” (Clandfield, 2010, p. 99).

Ravitch (2010) addresses the influence of various foundations, for example the Walton Family Foundation whose agenda is school choice, school competition, and school privatization. She now believes that rather than punishing teachers for underperformance in achieving ever-increasing goals tied to accountability, we need to support them with appropriate resources and opportunities for growth. Ravitch (2010) blames the efforts to reform public education for diminishing its quality and endangering its very survival. She acknowledges that current policies in our country are moving education in the exact opposite direction needed if we are to strengthen public education and become a national leader again.

School choice has significantly impacted public schools, driving their enrollment down and depleting their finances; forcing premature closure of public schools due to low enrollment and inadequate funding. On average, approximately 80 percent of the per student capita funding of the public school follows the student to the receiving charter school (Viteritti, 2005). Research has shown that on average, charter schools do not outperform public schools; in fact they are performing slightly below the public schools. By
the year 2005, almost 10 percent of the 2,996 charter schools that had opened were shut down for academic, managerial, or financial reasons (Viteritti, 2005).

**Consequences of NCLB**

According to Sunderman and Orfield (2007), NCLB was designed with two assumptions, one is that the state education agencies have the capacity to implement every aspect of the law, and the other is that the states can provide support and technical assistance necessary to help low-performing schools bring all students to the proficient level. A large part of the current school improvement trend is related to accountability and testing. In fact, the focus of NCLB is driven by the desire to hold schools accountable based upon student test scores on state-developed tests. Districts that fail to show improvement over several years risk undergoing major reform initiatives, such as the closing of school buildings. The No Child Left Behind Act is a federal law that requires states to assess the performance of all students in grades three through eight in math and reading each year, with an additional test administered at some point during grades ten through twelve (Rebell & Wolff, 2008). Test results are released to the public each year, and every school is expected to show that students are making, on average, adequate progress toward mastery.

Research by Gewertz (2006) reports on three schools in Houston, Texas, that will be closed after the current school year if they fail to make enough improvement in academic achievement. Interventions for schools in year three of academic underperformance as defined by NCLB are intense and include bonus pay for teachers who have student test scores increase. After four years of showing little or no
improvement, the school must be closed or placed under the management of a nonprofit organization or another district.

Reconstitution is viewed as one of the harshest of NCLB consequences for schools that do not show Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Spitser (2007) defines reconstitution as the process of replacing most or all of the entire staff of a school. Spitser examines the significant legal liability that may fall on those districts that choose reconstitution over NCLB’s less harsh provisions. The arbitrary manner in which these decisions are made, together with inequity issues further complicate legal issues already brewing in the movement to use test scores to evaluate teachers. This in itself is causing conflicts with contracts and the collective bargaining process. The author contends that by adding the reconstitution of schools to the list, it increases the likelihood of liability issues for the district. The author explores the consequences of reconstitution, and suggests that it fails to accomplish what it set out to do, which is improving the quality of the teachers, and that it actually does the opposite. Spitser (2007) warns that the reconstitution of schools threatens to punish students by removing them from a stable environment with caring, familiar adults; and that in the end, the students are not in a better environment, but a worse one due to the upheaval of the staff. Reconstitution is often seen as the final step prior to closing a building. Both reconstitution and school closure result in creating chaos for students who already have a great deal of upheaval and instability in their lives.

Community and Identity

Tyack (1974) states, “To be sure, the actual funds that reached ghetto schools were often small, prompting the comment that pouring in funds at the top of school
bureaucracies was like feeding a horse in order to feed the sparrows. Parents of urban students who were told about their student’s low achievement scores and continued failures lost trust in the expertise of the professionals” (p.282). This statement by Tyack is in regards to public schooling in the 1950’s; however, it could easily be reflective of today. In order to bypass the top-level bureaucracy and regain community trust, decentralization has been viewed as a potential solution.

One of the most comprehensive long-term studies in regard to turn around schools comes out of Chicago. Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) provide seven years of data from several hundred Chicago elementary schools regarding school reform in the Chicago schools. The authors provide a historical overview beginning in the 1950’s leading up to The Chicago School Reform Act of 1988. This reform act constrained power of central administration and empowered individual schools to have autonomy for school improvement methods. The main premise of this movement was this, “if local school professionals reconnected with the parents and communities they were supposed to serve, and if everyone were empowered to reform their schools, together they could be much more effective in solving local problems than some impersonal bureaucracy” (Byrk et al., 2010, p. 12). The authors set out to discover how the organization of schools and local communities affects their capacity to improve student achievement.

The outcome measures in this study are from annual reading and math scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills from 1990 to 1996, as well as school records that provide demographic data, and surveys completed by principals, students and teachers. Every aspect of what is required for improving student achievement is examined, beginning
with attendance trends. In the final chapter, the authors discuss their findings, referencing “five essential supports for school improvement” (Byrk et al., 2010, p. 197). Of specific interest is the importance of relationship building and development of trust within the community. The authors state, “Some of the most powerful relationships found in our data are associated with the effects of relational trust and how it operates as both a lubricant for organizational change and a moral resource for sustaining the hard work of local school improvement. Absent such trust, it is nearly impossible for schools to develop and sustain strength in the essential supports” (2010, p. 207). Small school size, enrollment stability, and relational trust interact, influencing the formation of the relationships that play a critical role in the school improvement process. In the final summary, the authors reflect on decentralization as a strategy for improving schools. Decentralization allowed for community participation at the most local level, and in many cases, this resulted in significant school improvement. However, a group of schools that were in the most distressed neighborhoods could not achieve similar levels of improvement. This finding was attributed to the fact that the schools were under-resourced and stressed by poverty. School reform must be viewed systemically and requires a “realism about the base capacity” available to each individual school. Those schools that lack the capacity necessary to support school improvement must first focus on strengthening the base capacity (Byrk et al., 2010, p.220).

Leonard (2011) conducted a historical case study of one troubled urban high school in Boston. He analyzed the stories of the participants by using the theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner in an effort to answer the question: How can an ecological systems theory help us better understand school-community partnering that promotes student
Most ecological theories focus on school improvement and emphasize the overall positive gains while ignoring the needs of individual students, many of whom are vulnerable. Brofenbrenner’s theory, which is one of the first ecological theories, focuses on the individual child. This theory is “expansive, yet focused; one eye is trained on the complex layers of school, family, and community relationships, and the other eye is sharply focused on individual student development” or identity development (Leonard, 2011, p. 990). Leonard raises concern regarding policies that hinder communication and collaboration between institutions and agencies existing within the mesosystem of vulnerable students, calling for cultural reform. He states, “When No Child Left Behind legislation requires accountability for the drop-out rate and graduation rate of all students, one worries that the resources required by our most vulnerable students lie largely outside the school; that the agencies with these resources are not talking to each other” (Leonard, 2011, p. 1000). Cultural cohesion is needed so that those agencies begin to align and share resources, such agencies include: housing, health, safety, the courts, and the Department of Social Services. Brofenbrenner also stressed the importance of empowering those who are being affected, stating that “The developmental potential of a setting is enhanced to the extent that there exist direct and indirect links to power settings through which the participants in the original setting can influence allocation of resources and the making of decisions that are responsive to the needs of the developing person and the efforts of those who act in his behalf” (as cited in Leonard, 2011, p. 1001). Leonard found that the exosystem partnerships often gave students and their teachers access to resources and influence that would never have been accessed without the partnerships. He found that schools do need to utilize systems level thinking, but they also need to
“drill down to the individual student, the focus of the Bronfenbrenner circles, and to examine the encircling relationships” (Leonard, 2011, p. 1007). He further states that “The developmental needs of all students are larger than what a school can address alone” and that “these needs are met through relationships we hardly notice between teachers, parents, peer groups, and other members in microsystem settings” (Leonard, 2011, p. 1007).

Urban, Lewin-Bizan, and Lerner (2009) used data from a subsample of early adolescents in the 2002-2005 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development to determine how neighborhood assets affect adolescent activity involvement on positive and negative developmental outcomes. Positive youth development descriptors included: competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring-comprises. Negative developmental characteristics were depression, delinquency, and substance use. They found that all youth stand to benefit from supportive relationships, contexts, and ecologies, but that the strategies for promoting these assets may differ as a function of the individual’s social location. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the hypothesis that the effect of increased levels of participation in extracurricular activities would vary inversely with the asset level of the neighborhood. For girls living in low asset neighborhoods, increased activity involvement was associated with increased levels of positive youth development and decreased levels of risk behaviors and depression. The relationship was weaker for girls living in high asset neighborhoods, but was still significant. The results were different, however, for the boys. Boys living in high asset neighborhoods benefitted from activity involvement, but boys living in low asset neighborhoods exhibited decreased levels of positive youth development and increased levels of risk behaviors.
Extracurricular activity involvement may escalate risk behaviors by providing opportunities for informal peer interaction at a time when youth are most vulnerable to peer influence in terms of identity formation. Perhaps the most critical finding of this study in terms of school reform is this: “the greatest impact on positive developmental outcomes will occur when individual factors are considered together with environmental contexts” (Urban et al., 2009, p. 613). The most successful reform initiatives will be those that consider the goodness-of-fit between the individual student and the context of the environment.

There is not a great deal of research in regard to identity issues specific to school closure. There is research, however, on the impact on identity of individuals who experience a crisis. To many of those who experience the closing of a school, it falls within the crisis category. Erikson (1968) describes identity development in three stages: the first is introjection and is experienced by infants, the second is identification, which is experienced in childhood, and the third is identity formation, which begins where the usefulness of identification ends, usually in adolescence. Erickson (1968) states, “The fate of childhood identification depends on the child’s satisfactory interaction with trustworthy representatives of a meaningful hierarchy of roles as provided by the generations living together in some form of family” (p. 159). Identity formation is dependent on the process by which a society or sub-societies identifies the young individual, recognizing him for the person he has become. The community gives such recognition in making acquaintance of the individual, and the community in turn feels recognized by the individual. This is a simplified version of Erikson’s theory of identity development. However, his theory is useful in thinking about the meaning students and
their families give to their schools. Erikson describes a relationship grounded in dependency between the individual and the community, similar to that of peer pressure. It is important to note that there must be an existing relationship between both parties, and a desire to be accepted by one another. This need for acceptance is the motivator for decision making and critical to identity development. As discussed earlier, the process of urban renewal forced the upheaval of entire communities who reportedly suffered great social and psychological loss. A school is a small community within the larger community. The losses felt between the school and the larger community, and between the school and the students within the school are equally traumatic.

Everall, Bostik and Paulson (2005) studied adolescents in periods of transition and found that “because they are not yet fully developed cognitively and have limited life experiences, teens may be vulnerable to limited decision making skills, poor problem-solving abilities, and irrational decision making when overcome by stress, intense affect, or inescapable conflict” (p. 696). Erikson (1968) believed that adolescents who find themselves in stressful and unsupportive environments are at risk of experiencing an identity crisis resulting in feelings of discomfort, confusion, impulsiveness, mood changes and impaired coping behavior (as cited in Everall, et al. 2005). A critical task at this time for teens is reaching autonomy, while also balancing the need for attachment. According to Everall, et al. (2005) “researchers are increasingly seeing that adolescent autonomy is established with less difficulty in an environment of secure and enduring relationships and not at the expense of attachment relationships” (p. 697).

Eccles (2009) provided research regarding how identity is connected to motivated action. She believes that identity operates in a way that “both decreases the probability of
engaging in those activities or roles perceived as inconsistent with one’s central values” and increases the likelihood of “engaging in roles or activities perceived as consistent with one’s definition of self” (Eccles, 2009, p.83). According to Eccles (2009), “individuals place more value on those tasks that either provide the opportunity to fulfill their identities or are consistent with their identities and long-range goals” (p.83).

Additionally, each person has a set of beliefs that influence decisions pertaining to the cost of participating in the activity. Cost can be influenced by many factors, including “anticipated anxiety, fear of failure, and fear of the social consequences of success” (Eccles, 2009, p. 83). External social influences also play a role in the process. Eccles (2009) states, “Parents, teachers and peers tell people what they are good at or not good at, often with very little information on which to base such conclusions” (p. 82).

Identity and Loss

Over the course of a person’s development, he or she experiences “predictable psychosocial crisis,” such as an adolescent’s awareness of the impending loss of childhood (Hayes, 1981, p.369). An example of this would be “senioritis,” which presents itself as “a lack of enthusiasm, fits of irresponsibility, and a general depressed effect” (Hayes, 1981, p.369). However, there are times a person may experience a psychosocial crisis that is not predictable, for example the loss of a loved one. According to Erikson (1968), when a teen is experiencing a “psychosocial crisis,” it should be viewed as a “crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential” (as cited in Hayes, 1981, p. 369). When resolved positively, the crisis can lead to a “new balance of forces” within the individual; however, failure to reach closure “presents limitations to the individual’s capacity for further development” (Hayes, 1981, p. 369). This may result

According to Hayes, “A successful negotiation of the identity crisis requires a reevaluation of the self, which leads to a stabilization of a sense of self and a lasting personal commitment to self-evaluated goals” (1981, p. 370). Hayes goes as far as to compare an adolescent’s transition to adulthood as “a death of his or her identity as a child” (1981, p.370).) Hayes found that it was important that adolescents complete the process of grieving the loss of their high school experience. He stated, “For adolescents who do not grieve the passing of their high school experience, it would seem that the next crisis is not too far away” (Hayes, 1981, p. 371). Hayes also addresses the fact that adolescents are highly susceptible to “loneliness,” because they desperately seek intimacy, but have great difficulty finding it. In his research regarding “senioritis,” Hayes concluded that educators that try to stop the process of grieving, actually do harm. The grief expressed by the adolescent should be acknowledged and supported, not viewed as something to be stopped. He found that school counselors who were willing to confront their own identity and share it with their students were of the greatest support. Keeping the adolescent active was also shown to reduce the adolescent’s anxiety.

The article that pertained to “senioritis” addressed the need for students to grieve the loss of their high school experience and navigate through an identity crisis. For students who go through school closure and transition, this may require they navigate such crises multiple times. According to Thomas (2011), the teen years focus on negotiating transitions and relationships through trial and error with a focus on “defining an integrated identity that essentially seeks to answer the question, “Who am I in the
world?” Thomas studied the impact of the loss of a loved one on adolescent identity development, with a specific focus on Identity vs. Role Confusion. One of the ways teens come to know themselves is in relationship to others. The loss of a loved one in their lives can result in the loss of a person who had been their “mirror,” reflecting back to the student and providing them information about who they are (Thomas, 2011). Like Hayes, Thomas also found that “fundamental to healing is the capacity of the adult to be with grieving adolescents, validate their feelings, allow them to talk, and to hold these conversations in confidence. Trust is key” (2011, p.14).

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler (2005) define grief and describe what the grieving process may look like for individuals who have experienced the loss of a loved one. In her previous work, Kubler-Ross defined the stages of death and dying as: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005), expand on the stages of loss, acknowledging the important role crying plays in dealing with sadness. Also discussed, is the idea that individuals may feel a sense of relief after a loved one has passed away from an extensive illness. They discuss how the grieving process is impacted when an illness is unexpected, for example, the belief held by many that only old people die. If a loved one appeared to be healthy and then dies suddenly, the grieving process is affected. For example, the “denial” stage may take more time to resolve.

The “acceptance” stage is defined as the stage in which individuals recognize the permanence of the reality that their loved one is gone and they can live with that understanding. Closure is reached when an individual has a perspective that allows them to live with the loss (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). This is not an easy process, due to
the pain and discomfort associated with loss and grief. Individuals may be hesitant to fully embrace their own grief, or support someone who is grieving. Thomas (2011) states, “In essence, my understanding is that, after death, we need to acknowledge that life has forever changed; we can no longer be who we were before, nor can we go back to the way things were” (P. 15). Teens may have difficulty doing this, which may result in them continuing to try to live their lives in the past, keeping alive memories so that the life that has ended is proven to have mattered. According to Thomas (2011), “this may be demonstrated in career choices, the internalizing of a value system, the writing of poetry or songs, the creation of visual art, the planting of a garden, or raising money for a cause- anything dedicated to the person who has died that says, ‘Your life mattered to me.’” (p. 15).

Thomas warned that the grieving process should not be viewed in terms of a linear model. She implied that the stages of grief as defined by Kubler-Ross, are often misunderstood to mean that once a person moves through them, linearly, a person has completed their grieving process. She makes the point that everyone’s process in terms of grief is unique and varies in the amount of time that is needed, stating, “Remember that grief doesn’t end, and any event could trigger and upsurge in grief responses” (p.15). She advises educators working directly with adolescents to watch for changes in behavior, specifically in terms of social isolation and withdrawal. It is important for teens to understand that what they are feeling is normal (Thomas, 2011).

**Social Capital/Place Identity/Place Attachment**

McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined “sense of community” as “a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that
members’ needs will be met by their commitment together” (as cited in Cicognani, Menezes, & Nata, 2011, p. 34). According to Cicognani, et al., “the physical environment where we live has an important role in creating a sense of meaning, order, and stability in our lives” (2011, p. 34). The physical space in which social interaction occurs is related to identity development and identity formation (Cicognani, et al., 2011). Woolley et al. (2008), found that increased levels of neighborhood social capital and lower levels of poor physical conditions were predictive of higher student scores on achievement tests in math and reading. Additionally, they found that this relationship grew stronger as the child progressed through school. This has strong implications regarding the closing of schools located within the community where a child lives, and the transfer of a student to a neighboring community. In an earlier study by Woolley & Bowen (2007), they found that there was a positive relationship between the number of supportive adults in the neighborhood, including school and home, and behavioral and psychological engagement in school among middle school students (as cited in Woolley, et al, 2008). Leana & Pil (2006) used mixed-methods to study social capital and its relationship with performance at the organizational level. Their study encompassed 88 schools, grades K-12, in an urban public school district in the northeastern United States. They found that the degree of social capital of a student predicts student achievement in math and reading.

Social capital, identity and self-concept are closely linked in that all three are dependent upon the relationships formed within an existing social system. According to Marsh (2005), “Self-concepts broadly defined are persons’ perceptions of themselves that are formed through experience with and interpretations of their environment, and
influenced by evaluations by significant others, reinforcements, and attributions for one’s own behavior” (p.2). Individuals are more likely to accomplish more in their life if they have a positive self-concept and a belief in their own abilities. Marsh (2005) further states, “Programs or societal changes that undermine self-concepts are also likely to also have negative effects on accomplishments” (p.2). Marsh is accredited with developing a frame of reference model called the big-fish-little pond effect (BFLPE). This model is grounded in social comparison theory. The hypothesis of BFLPE when applied to educational settings is that students compare their own abilities to the abilities of their peers, which then informs their self-concept.

Place attachment is defined as “an affective bond or link between people and specific places” (Spencer, 2005, p. 308). Spencer provides a literature review regarding place attachment, place identity and the development of a child’s self-identity. He found that the literature does recognize place attachment as being critical to the development of self-definitions, “including individual and communal aspects of identity” (Spencer, 2005, p. 306). Place attachment provides the individual with “a sense of stability amid change,” and that the disruption of place attachment threatens the individual’s self-definitions or identity (Spencer, 2005, p. 306). A frequently cited source is a text, Place Attachments (1992), written by two environmental psychologists, Altman and Low. The book is a collection of essays, providing qualitative data regarding children’s attachment to places and the importance of childhood places as remembered by adults. Altman and Low analyze place disruptions or violations, which include situations that pertain to burglary, voluntary re-locations, and involuntary disruptions. It is this third category, involuntary disruptions that most closely speaks to the situation of school closure and
reassignment to another school. Altman and Low studied the impact of disruption on refugees and found that those who fared the best stressed the importance of establishing new identities, or re-establishing identities similar to those from their past among the exiled groups (Spencer, 2005). Cooper Marcus (1992) found that for many people, their most powerful memories center on places from their childhood. She has collected hundreds of essays by adults about their fondest childhood memories and found that the earliest places provide powerful images into adulthood (as cited in Spencer, 2005).

A change in environment may result in “feelings of loss, of displacement and subsequent identity discontinuity” (Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007, p. 228). When students make transitions to new environments they must form a new situated identity. A recent study focused on the relationships between the perceived image of a place by an individual and place identity. Place identity was measured in three sub-areas: place attachment, place dependence, and group identity. Marcouyeux and Fleury-Bahi (2011) used self-administered questionnaires to interview 542 high school students in France. Through regression analysis, results showed positive relationships between the students’ evaluation of his or her high school’s image and his or her place identity. Almost half of the participants showed a clear relationship between their social evaluation of their high school and their place identity. Those students reporting strong place identification were more likely to evaluate the place’s image as positive. Those students who evaluated the place’s image as negative were more likely to report lower place identity. However, of the three sub-areas evaluated within place identity, the sub-area of place attachment, when isolated from the other variables, showed that individuals do develop place attachment relationships despite the poor image of that place. This finding is significant
regarding school closure because it strengthens the idea that student identity is related to their current school, and that even if the image of the school is viewed as negative, students still develop a place attachment (Marcouyeux & Fleury-Bahi, 2011). According to Proshansky et al. (1983):

Place identity stems from the socialization of the self to the physical world: An individual not only integrates the standards and values of his group into his persona but also learns through his interactions with his environment the rules of life that are inherent to the places where he lives in and eventually ends up identifying himself to those places (as cited in Marcouyeux & Fleury-Bahi, 2011).

**Segregation and Identity**

According Scanlon, Rowling, and Weber (2007), “individuals develop an identity grounded in the assimilation and acceptance of contextually specific shared beliefs, rules, values, and expectations as a result of interaction with significant others and with the generalized other; that is, with the attitudes of the social group to which the individual belongs” (p. 227). In an ethnographic study by Gustafson (2009), the researcher looked at segregation within the school building and schoolyard, specifically studying the “us” and “them” dynamic. She found that “segregation is a process by which different agents, also children, take part in constructing and reconstructing spatial divisions between different groups. This includes constructions of “us” and “them” and the border work that goes with it. During these processes, which include making us and them, children prove to be very competent in constructing both shared and segregated places in their schools and school yards and navigating between them.” Ira Lit describes this “us and
them” dynamic in his book, *The Bus Kids*. He describes a voluntary transfer program from the child’s point of view (Lit, 2009).

Social networks are a form of social capital, and are valuable resources students acquire in school. Robert Putnam (2000) provides research supporting the idea that child development is greatly influenced by social capital (as cited in Cobb & Glass, 2009, p. 270). He describes the micro and macro relations as one of “bonding” within a social network, and “bridging” between social networks. Integrated settings provide the best opportunity for bridging social networks, offering more diverse sets of cultural and social capital than do segregated schools (Cobb & Glass, 2009). From a systemic approach, it is virtually impossible to view the school system as separate from the community system, therefore, “housing policy should be considered alongside school desegregation to ameliorate the inequitable conditions brought on by concentrated poverty that exists both within schools and the neighborhoods they serve” (Cobb & Glass, 2009, p. 274).

Without integrated schools, education as a tool for upward mobility becomes a virtually impossible goal. De Marrais and Le Compte (2000) stated: “Education has been the key to upward mobility. It takes place in two stages. First, one must acquire at least some of the characteristics of the upper class, most important of which is a level of education that will provide competence in higher-status jobs and give a luster to social and intellectual interaction. Second, one must learn the language patterns, social graces, and habits of behavior of the class to which one aspires” (as cited in Weiston-Serden, p. 400). In order for these two stages to occur, there must be an opportunity for the mingling or merging of socioeconomic classes.
Best Practices

Darling-Hammond (2010) references the need to revamp the No Child Left Behind Act, in which she discusses the need for Opportunity-to Learn Standards (which were omitted in the original version of NCLB) and the need for “Resource Equalization Strategies” (p.310). She did not suggest extreme school reform measures, like closing schools and starting over. Sustainable school reform is not something that occurs quickly, there is no “quick fix” or simple solution. It is systemic well planned, and must be done over a three to five year period before it becomes ingrained into the culture of the school. It also takes money and resources to support and sustain such reform. It requires a stable school leader and stable staff that experiences this reform process together; including targeted professional development so that all staff are moving in the same direction. It requires incentives for the staff so that they remain stable, so that they choose to stay at that school and work as hard as is needed. Closing schools due to low achievement is not viewed favorably, and is further proof that students in poverty are marginalized and viewed as lesser when compared to their suburban peers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). However, if students must be reassigned to a new school, there is research that provides strategies that can make the transition less obtrusive. Research by Hern-Dar Bih (1992) suggest that people certainly do survive disruptions in their lives. One way they do it is by bringing artifacts from the past into their present environment. Hern-Dar Bih (1992) found that both old and new were important to a person’s adjustment in a new setting. He cited several instances for why this is the case, but the most pertinent to school closure is the idea that familiar objects serve as a place of release.
from the foreign environment and help to establish cultural continuity (as cited in Spencer, 2005).

There is current research regarding how to turn schools around, rather than close them down. Aarons (2010) provides information regarding a teaching program used by the nonprofit organization Strategic Learning Initiatives (SLI) in Chicago, Illinois. The program was targeted in schools with low achievement in an effort to turn them around. The program did not follow current trends established by the U.S. Department of Education, which includes firing school principals and other staff, or closing down the school, instead, the program used the Focused Instruction Process (FIP). FIP consists of shared leadership, targeted professional development, continuous improvement, and engagement. Aarons provides an example of an effective method for improving student performance in schools that were in jeopardy of being reconstituted or closed. Findings include information on the cost of using this particular teaching method and a discussion that concludes with the idea that investing in current staff is much more cost effective than firing existing staff, starting over, or closing entire schools. The best way to avoid closing schools is to retain or increase student enrollment. The best way to accomplish this is by improving student performance and maintaining the confidence of the population served.

Cobb & Glass (2009) state, “Considerations of social justice suggest that policymakers should continue to search for ways to design school choice programs that promote integration” (p. 262). They believe that educational policies that further isolate poor students and/or students of color are more likely to leave them worse off than just doing nothing. Policymakers should resist fiscally attractive, unregulated reform
initiatives that further segregate students. When making reform decisions, policymakers need to understand that they must consider every child within the system, which requires not just looking at one particular group of students and how they might benefit, but looking at the academic performance or potential performance among all students from all social classes within the greater system. Any action has both intended and unintended consequences. Regarding school choice, Cobb & Glass (2009) state, “choice affects not just those who participate but the nonchoosers as well” (p.275). This dynamic is clearly seen in the theory of action behind school closure.

Policy that addresses the growing gap between wealth and privilege must also be considered. Woolley et al (2008), state:

If variables outside the school and outside of the domain of school personnel account for some of the variance in student performance, then effective educational policies must recognize and address those neighborhood and family factors. It seems clear that to formulate school reforms that will advance educational outcomes for all students, policies and programs must strive to level the playing field for students living in resource poor neighborhoods (p. 144).

The students themselves must be empowered to advocate for the right to receive a quality education. This begins with a lesson on the relationship between educational attainment and socio-economic status. Weiston-Serdan (2009) believes the solution lies at the grassroots level, stating: “A concerted effort to teach students grassroots activism further aids them in the goal to begin the redistribution of capital. The historic background of major grassroots movements such as the American Revolution, the Women’s Rights Movement, and the Delano Grape Strike are viable examples of
activism. Students should be required to create their own movements around issues of significance to them, preparing and training them to be active members of democracy” (p.407). Goldin & Katz (2008) state:

Three main types of policies are needed to increase the growth rate of U.S. educational attainment and the relative supply of college workers. The first policy is to create greater access to quality pre-school education for children from disadvantaged families. The second is to rekindle some of the virtues of American education and improve the operation of K-12 schooling so that more kids graduate from high school and are ready for college. The third is to make financial aid sufficiently generous and transparent so that those who are college ready can complete a four-year college degree or gain marketable skills at a community college” (p.350).

The Birth of DeVilbiss High School

In 1931, the student council adopted a prophetic motto: “Finis origine pendet—the end depends upon the beginning” (“The Rebirth,” 2000). The students could not have predicted in 1931 that DeVilbiss High School would close sixty years later in 1991. A Toledo Blade article appeared on February 5, 1929, declaring the birth of the new high school stating:

Toledo’s new West End high school, which is to cost approximately $1,500,000.00 will be located on the site of the Contagious Disease hospital [sic] on Upton Avenue, near Central avenue [sic]. The new school, which will be named DeVilbiss High School, in honor of the memory of the late Thomas A.
DeVilbiss, will be located on the fifteen-acre hospital site and an adjoining ten acres ("West Toledo," 1929).

In May of 1930, Mrs. Thomas DeVilbiss, widow of the Toledo businessman and philanthropist for whom the new school was named, was featured in a picture in the Toledo Blade shown lifting the first shovelful of earth for the new school ("Work Starts," 1930). Next to her in the picture is Charles S. Meek, Superintendent of Toledo Schools in 1930. During the ceremony, Judge Scott Stahl, president of the West Toledo Chamber of Commerce, spoke of the "rapid commercial development of that section of the city and the work of pioneers in the community" ("Work Starts," 1930). The groundbreaking ceremony paints a picture of a thriving community in the midst of economic growth and development. However, the Great Depression had started in Toledo in the spring of 1929 when the Willys-Overland Company laid off the first of several thousand workers (Porter, 1987). In January 1930 the Merchants and Manufacturers Association estimated that as many as 18,000 Toledoans had no work (Porter, 1987). In regard to economic development in 1930, Porter (1987) states, "Toledo banks appeared to be stable and the many building projects underway in the city that year gave further cause for optimism" (p. 82). No one could have known that only two years later, in 1932, more than 13,000 people would receive direct relief and with $1,400,000 tied up in accounts in the insolvent banks, the city would lack the money for its own operation. However, even in turbulent economic times, when compared to other Toledo neighborhoods, the DeVilbiss High School community was considered to be one of affluence. In fact, athletic opponents taunted the DeVilbiss athletes by referring to them as "cake eaters" (Hackenberg, 2012). DeVilbiss High School was completed in 1931,
followed by the addition of a new stadium in 1934 ("New Stadium," 1934). The Henry A. Page football stadium was dedicated in September, 1934, and in 1935 the school fight song, adapted from that of Princeton, emerged (Hage & Michaels, 2003).

The first principal of DeVilbiss was Merrit C. Nauts. In 1958, a portrait of the principal painted by a Toledo artist, John Swalley, was the gift of the DeVilbiss High School senior class at graduation exercises ("Gift of Graduates," 1958). Merritt C. Nauts retired from DeVilbiss as principal in 1960, serving in that position since it opened in 1931. A full-page article appeared in the Toledo Blade on June 26, 1960, announcing his retirement; included in the article was a historical narrative of DeVilbiss over three decades. According to the article, the first graduating class in June of 1932 included only four seniors (Cota, 1960). This is because the district permitted seniors who lived in the DeVilbiss attendance region to remain at Scott High School for graduation; consequently, DeVilbiss in its first year, had grades 7-11. At the time of Merritt C. Nauts retirement in 1960, the average enrollment at DeVilbiss High School was 2,200 students (Cota, 1960). When DeVilbiss closed in 1991, the enrollment was just under 1,000 students (Krauth, 1990).

Prior to becoming the principal at DeVilbiss High School, Merritt C. Nauts attended Columbia University and had the opportunity to study under significant contributors to the education profession, for example, John Dewey and Thomas Briggs (Cota, 1960). In the 1960 Toledo Blade article, DeVilbiss is described as one of the best-equipped high schools in northwest Ohio. Mr. Nauts is credited with creating a high level of professionalism among the teaching staff by encouraging active participation in professional organizations and attendance of workshops. In 1960, 85% of DeVilbiss
seniors left school with plans to attend college, and 75% actually went on to enroll in college. DeVilbiss was the first school in the area to have an Advanced Placement program. In 1960, the innovative faculty was researching ways to promote school improvement and considered an 11-month school year and greater integration between high schools and colleges, for example, juniors and seniors attending area colleges and universities (Cota, 1960). In modern-day school reform terms, this would be referred to as post-secondary options or dual credit and early college high school. These were progressive ideas for 1960, as these programs did not actually reach implementation in Toledo Public Schools for another 30 years or more. What was made clear in this article is the significant influence that Merritt C. Nauts had on defining DeVilbiss High School.

Mr. Nauts did not retire by choice, but was forced to retire due to declining health issues. Upon his retirement, he stated, “Perhaps later, I’ll write a book about the history of DeVilbiss” (Cota, 1960). Approximately one year later, his obituary appeared in the Toledo Blade newspaper. The 1960 article announcing the retirement of Mr. Nauts did not mention the economic hardships or overcrowding DeVilbiss experienced during the 1959-1960 school year when a 2.5 mill building levy was turned down in November of 1958 (“Split School Sessions,” 1959). The money generated from the proposed levy would have allowed the district to move forward with the building of two new high schools, one in West Toledo, and one in South Toledo. These two high schools were needed to accommodate the projected enrollment increases in both the DeVilbiss High School and the Libbey High School attendance areas (“Split School Sessions,” 1959). Due to the levy defeat, DeVilbiss and Libbey both operated under staggered sessions, or split sessions. This was the first time in the history of the Toledo School District that
such a schedule was implemented. Juniors and Seniors attended in the morning and Freshman and Sophomores attended in the afternoon (Whipple, 1959). In November, 1959, a $20,000,000 bond issue passed and both of the new high schools were built in the years that followed (Hage & Michaels, 2003). Bowsher High School was built in 1961 and helped alleviate the overcrowding at Libbey High School and Start High School was built in 1962 to alleviate the overcrowding at DeVilbiss High School. Ironically, during the 1990-1991 school year, it was DeVilbiss and Libbey that were targeted for closure, along with the vocational high school, Macomber-Whitney High School (Hage & Michaels, 2003). Back in the late 1950’s, few understood that by the building of the two new high schools, the longevity of DeVilbiss and Libbey would be placed in jeopardy.

The opening of Start High School in 1962 did not have a negative impact on DeVilbiss High School’s reputation for having a rigorous curriculum and innovative programming. DeVilbiss was one of the first high schools in the area to offer Chinese Language, beginning with the 1963-1964 school year (“DeVilbiss Chinese,” 1963). On April 13, 1967, The U.S. Office of Education approved a three-year $165,699 operational grant to the Toledo Board of Education for its Chinese-Russian study center located at DeVilbiss High School (“Study Center,” 1967). The center served both secondary students and adult learners.

**DeVilbiss High School Showing Symptoms of Decline**

An article from 1985 provides a glimpse of the physical decline of DeVilbiss, in which it describes Page Stadium as a safety hazard. The stadium that was completed in 1934 was condemned in 1985 and closed temporarily (Gugger, 1985). Page Stadium reopened in the Fall of 1986 at a rededication ceremony and football game between
DeVilbiss and Start (“Start Beats,” 1986). The temporary closing of Page Stadium, however, did not appear to significantly impact the students of DeVilbiss. In 1987, the DeVilbiss boys’ track team went on to win the Class AAA Ohio High School Track and Field Championship (Agee, 1987). Page Stadium was later demolished in June, 2012 (Hackenberg, 2012).

While positive things were happening in the eighties at DeVilbiss, such as the 1987 track team championship, the mid-eighties resulted in what would become the darkest moments for DeVilbiss High School. The Fall of 1984 began with disturbing reports of racial discrimination in the assignments of students to classrooms. Both school authorities and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People investigated the incident. At the onset of the investigation in November of 1984, Hugh Caumartin, superintendent, stated, “It would be premature to say anything right now. It’s the kind of thing where once an accusation is made, the damage is done” (Ferguson, 1984). Just a few days later after the results of the investigation were made public, the superintendent was quoted saying, “It is serious and our reaction will be serious. There are classrooms at DeVilbiss that are racially isolated beyond what is acceptable and those students were assigned to certain teachers based on punishment. Why? We don’t know” (Lane, 1984). The report speculated that the segregation was done intentionally to keep students who came from an upper-middle class neighborhood from leaving DeVilbiss, choosing instead to attend a private school. Later, the U.S. Justice Department’s Office of Civil Rights was asked to investigate. Toledo School District disciplinary hearings resulted in recommendations involving the two employees deemed most responsible for the segregation during the years that it occurred. The board members voted to support
the recommendations, calling for the dismissal of the then Assistant Principal of DeVilbiss, Marilyn Schiffer, and the demotion of the former Principal of DeVilbiss, Martin Vieth (Nichols, 1985). Both actions by the board moved to arbitration and in August of 1985, an arbitrator ordered that Marilyn Schiffer be reinstated (Lane, 1985). Four months later, in December of 1985, an arbitrator ordered the reinstatement of Martin Vieth (Lane, 1985). The arbitrator stated, “There was not even an hint that Mr. Vieth was responsible personally for racial imbalance in the classrooms. His background showed he worked long and hard to achieve racial harmony at DeVilbiss” (Lane, 1985). While time and distance may have repaired some of the immediate damage resulting from the racial discrimination incident, the wound never completely healed. In the final DeVilbiss High School yearbook, students, parents and staff are shown holding a candlelight vigil in an attempt to save the school (DeVilbiss High School, Pot O’Gold, 1991). Next to the pictures appears a quote from a teacher, Roger Gill, who stated:

DeVilbiss passed through many of the problems of the eighties, but never fully recovered from the negative publicity generated by the racial discrimination charges in the mid-eighties. The students and the faculty fought hard to set the standards for a quality-integrated education (p.4).

The fallout from the eighties produced negative publicity, which left a poor impression for the community, especially the black community. Exposed was policy and practice that while not intentionally racist, had the consequence of privileging one group over the other. The use of policies resulting in racially isolated classrooms are not uncommon across racially and economically diverse districts, and in some cases, such
policies keep the buildings integrated but fail to address racial isolation in classrooms (Gustafson, 2009; Lit, 2009).

The Death of DeVilbiss High School

The final event that triggered the closing of DeVilbiss High School was the failure of a new 9.9-mill levy, which would have generated $22 million a year beginning in the fall of 1991 (Krauth, 1990). Krauth stated, “Even if voters approve another levy try, the money wouldn’t come in soon enough to prevent budget chopping” (1990, p.1). Just to balance the 1990-1991 budget, primarily due to the boost in oil prices, the school district had to borrow $6.1 million. According to the Toledo Blade article, one of possible reductions proposed for the following school year was to close one or two high schools. One board member, Tom Lopez, was quoted saying, “We have to protect quality education. If we don’t, we’ll see a decline in standards and white flight. Our worst fears will be realized” (Krauth, 1990, p. 5). Prior to the levy, rumors were flying around the district’s school buildings. The word at Libbey High School was that it would be closed if the levy failed. At Macomber-Whitney Vocational High School, the rumor was that there would be many cuts, including textbooks, athletics, extracurricular and academic programming; the closing of the school was not mentioned (Krauth, 1990).

Just three weeks after the voters rejected the operational levy in November of 1990, Ruth Scott, the superintendent of Toledo Public Schools, announced her retirement effective December 7, 1990. Ruth Scott understood the significance of the levy defeat and that it equated to severe budget cuts which would have long-term implications for the district. She stated, “A superintendent is needed who will be with the district at least another five years and that is not in my plans” (Krauth, 1990, p.1). Ruth Scott believed
the district was heading into the “worst financial crisis since the late 1970’s when voters defeated levies; teachers went on strike, and the schools closed down” (Krauth, 1990, p.1). She said, “We have been cutting back all along and it is getting more and more difficult to do it without biting into the quality of education” (Krauth, 1990, p.5). This is congruent with what was being felt across the state, especially in rural and urban districts. In fact, the landmark case, DeRolph v. State was filed in the Perry County Common Pleas Court on December 19, 1991 and reached the Ohio Supreme Court in September of 1996. The ruling on March 24, 1997 found that funding for education in Ohio was unconstitutional, primarily due to the fact that it relied heavily on property taxes, resulting in a direct relationship between the quality of education and the residential zip code. The DeRolph case brought the issue of school funding to a heightened awareness not only in Ohio, but nationally. Equity of school funding had been a common topic of discussion, but after the DeRolph case, attention shifted to include the issue of adequacy, as well (McKinley, 2005).

The heading of an article in the Toledo Blade on December 1, 1990, set the stage for what was to follow; it read: “Board eyes closing some high schools to ease fund crisis” (Krauth, 1990). Krauth (1990) stated, “Like urban districts nationally, ongoing white flight to the suburbs is stealing students and tax dollars. Toledo’s high schools lost almost 900 students in the last year alone” (p.9). Krauth states later in the article, “In addition, state funding isn’t keeping pace with inflation or growing numbers of programs it mandates” (1990, p.9). Consequently, in December of 1990, the board found itself in the position of revisiting the closure of one or more high schools, a recommendation Superintendent Ruth Scott had made earlier in the spring of 1990. At that time,
Superintendent Scott had recommended the closure of Macomber-Whitney High School along with one other comprehensive high school; however, the board was not ready to act on it. A citizen’s committee had urged administrative cuts instead of high school closings. The board was influenced by the citizen’s committee and did not move to close any high schools in the spring of 1990. Adding to the board’s financial pressure was the fact that all three bargaining unions were due for raises in the winter of the 1990-1991 school year; the teachers and administrative unions had relinquished their last scheduled pay increases. Krauth stated, “Now, between the financial stranglehold and dwindling student population, they are looking [at school closings] reluctantly again” (1990, p.9).

In the Toledo Blade article, it is clear that individual board members had differing ideas regarding the budget cuts. Ken Perry, board president, indicated that he would support cutting high schools if everything else has been considered, stating, “My own personal bias is we need to do as little damage as possible to K through 8” (Krauth, 1990, p.9). Another board member, Mrs. Kennedy, implied that the closing of a high school may be inevitable; however, she stated “It is devastating action to a community, where the school is an anchor” (Krauth, 1990, p.9). Board member Dr. Lopez believed that all schools needed to be considered for possible closure, while board member Wilma Brown stated, “I will discuss closing any school but Macomber-Whitney” (Krauth, 1990, p.9).

On December 5, 1990, the board held a special meeting and appointed Crystal Ellis as the acting superintendent. Mr. Ellis became deputy superintendent in 1985, holding the second-highest position in the district (Zaborney, 1990). Later, in the same special meeting, the board reviewed the financial state of the district. Joe Coley, the business manager, reported that the district must cut more than $17 million to balance the
budget by the end of the 1993 fiscal year. He listed 15 items that could be cut in order to achieve the fiscal goal of a balanced budget included in the list was academic programming, staff layoffs, reducing transportation to the state minimum, extra-curricular activities, and the closure of the vocational high school (Zaborney, 1990). The vocational high school was not named in the article, but it was understood that it was Macomber-Whitney Vocational High School. The closure of DeVilbiss High School was not discussed at that special meeting held on December 6, 1990 nor was the closure of any other comprehensive high school in the district.

At the December 19, 1990 board meeting, the board approved the elimination of $11.4 million from the 1991 budget, which included massive layoffs and a new contract without raises. The board agreed to close two high schools next fall, although no specific schools were named, and agreed to eliminate school sports and other after school activities beginning in January, 1991 (Krauth, 1990). Bruce Purdy, president of the PTA, stated, “There will be a lot of irate parents. But they were told before the election that the board would have to make cuts if [the 9.9-mill school levy] didn’t pass” (Krauth, 1990, p. 21). According to the board, all high schools were candidates for closure, although Libbey and DeVilbiss both had enrollments of less than 1,000 students, not including special education enrollment numbers. The only high school most likely not considered was Waite High School “because it stands alone on the East Side” (Krauth, 1990, p.21). Only one member of the audience addressed the board regarding the potential closure of Macomber-Whitney Vocational High School. John Meeker, who ran a furniture business where Macomber-Whitney students worked as apprentices, predicted “a bloody knuckle, broken-toothed fight” if the board tried to close Macomber-Whitney (Krauth, 1990,
Throughout the discussion of budget cuts and school closure, the board indicated that they would maintain programming that if eliminated, might accelerate “white flight.” Spared from the cuts were foreign language, art and music clubs, and possibly honor societies that had been scheduled for elimination. Additionally, the district kept some small, expensive classes that serviced more advanced students, such as foreign language, math and science. Board members implied that this was to combat the “white flight” and loss of middle-class minorities that plagues Toledo (Krauth, 1990, p. 21).

The following day, December 20, the staff and students at DeVilbiss were processing the potential impact the budget cuts would have on their school. Students were heard talking about their teachers, admitting what in normal circumstances they would never acknowledge, “they like their teachers and don’t want to go anywhere else” (Krauth, 1990, p.25). Teachers voiced concern regarding how attendance would be affected, predicting it would decline due to the cut in transportation. C.J. Washington, a science teacher, said, “without their half-price bus passes, many students will stay at home or come in late” (Krauth, 1990, p.25). Half the students in his first-hour class were already arriving late, or missing first hour completely. Teachers and students were also discussing how the loss of sports would impact the school year, predicting that it would negatively impact attendance and achievement. Terrell Loveless, a student at DeVilbiss stated, “Sports give you a reason not to cut back on your school work, and they keep you busy. There’s going to be a lot more gang violence and drug-selling without sports” (Krauth, 1990, p.25). Several athletes acknowledged that they only keep their grades up so they can meet the required 2.0 grade point average for athletes. Junior Abby Creecy stated what many parents, teachers and students were heard saying, “They’re [the school
board] blackmailing us, they’re trying to scare us, and the only people they’ll hurt is the
kids” (Krauth, 1990, p.25). She then went on to place equal blame on the city of Toledo,
stating, “I don’t know where all the money goes, but I can’t believe there’s no money in
Toledo to save the schools” (Krauth, 1990, p.25).

A Toledo Blade editorial from December 20, 1990, went as far as to question the
very survival of the entire school district, stating, “Toledo public schools, beset by social
problems, a stable or declining tax base, and a slowly decreasing student population, are
beginning to face up to a very hard question: Can it survive?” (“Toledo School
Alternatives,” 1990, p.22). The editorial expanded on what is believed to be the factors
impacting urban school districts, stating:

Ohio big-city systems are in trouble, in part because of antiquated school-
financing formulas that do not take into consideration the higher cost of educating
children in troubled urban settings. Schools also have been sandbagged by
unwise policies of city governments, such as tax abatement and unplanned growth

The school board had earlier considered a regional approach to educating the
children in and near Toledo, expressing a desire to possibly merge with a neighboring
school district, Washington Local Schools, or perhaps a countywide district that served
all students from the seven current districts in Lucas County. Board member Ken Perry
stated, “We’re almost like a trapped rat. There is no potential growth; all of the
development is outside the district” (“Toledo School Alternatives,” 1990, p.22).

The editorial described one possible solution as being the initiation of community
partnerships with area businesses, although they recognized that the corporate sector was
also declining. The editorial criticized the school board for governing with a top-down, “father knows best” attitude, and urged the board to move to a more decentralized management approach, one that would allow for more autonomy at the local level. In the editorial, it is stated, “Building autonomy appears to be the wave of the future, and it makes sense to let those who have the most contact with children make decisions that will affect their educational futures” (“Toledo School Alternatives,” 1990, p.22). Also of interest, the editorial stated, “Jointly, the school districts of Lucas County should lobby the Legislature to do something about relieving local districts of the extremely heavy costs of special education of all sorts” (“Toledo School Alternatives,” 1990, p.22). While many practicing educators are aware of the often-unfunded mandates associated with special education outlined in state and federal policies, it is rare to see a statement like this in such a public forum.

The Index of the final DeVilbiss High School yearbook (1991) provides a personal glimpse of what it was like at DeVilbiss when the school year started, and the progression of events that followed until the decision to close DeVilbiss was announced in January:

When the 1990-1991 school year began, the mood was positive and the year seemed promising. Homecoming left us with rousing memories. We revived the bonfire and we even won the game against Start. However, in November, the 9.9 mill school levy failed, marking the beginning of the end of the DeVilbiss tradition of excellence. Ruth Scott retired and Crystal Ellis became superintendent of the schools. He announced that the schools would have to make major cutbacks including the closing of two high schools. DeVilbiss, Macomber-
Whitney, and Libbey were the most logical buildings to close. The Friends of DeVilbiss immediately went to work to save DeVilbiss. Mailers, a candlelight vigil, petitions, and letters to board members were all part of the plan. A group of members came up with alternative plans to present to the Board of Education at a January hearing. People worked diligently on their speeches. The Friends of DeVilbiss plan called for merging Start and DeVilbiss. One of the schools would be a neighborhood high school and the other would be a neighborhood junior high school. The Board of Education rejected the merger and opted to close DeVilbiss and Macomber-Whitney at the end of the school year. DeVilbiss students would be redistricted to Start, Bowsher, Scott and Rogers. During the sixty years of DeVilbiss excellence, countless scholars, athletes and creative students passed through the doors to carry on the TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE.

There were many editorials published in the Toledo Blade that were written by concerned citizens. One appeared on January 23, 1991, written by Connie Reger who expressed her outrage at the closing of DeVilbiss High School. She admittedly reported that she did not send her own child to DeVilbiss; she chose to send her to a parochial school. However, she did send two of her foreign exchange students to DeVilbiss, one from Japan and one from Germany. Both girls were welcomed into the DeVilbiss community and received a “stimulating” education. Ms. Reger’s own daughter informed her mother that if she could not attend parochial school for any reason, she would choose to attend DeVilbiss (Reger, 1991). Another editorial written by Dean E. Burget appeared on January 29, 1991. He lived in the DeVilbiss district for eighteen years, serving nine years as the principal of McKinley School, a K-8 school that fed into DeVilbiss High
School. Both of his boys attended DeVilbiss. He believed that the closing of DeVilbiss High School and Macomber-Whitney Vocational High School was “a step backward” for the Toledo Schools. In his editorial, he mentioned that he had attended the public forums held regarding the closure of two high schools and that he was impressed with those who spoke on behalf of DeVilbiss. He made reference to the fact that the community organization that lead the charge to keep DeVilbiss open, Friends of DeVilbiss, presented optional plans to the district, which in his opinion were feasible and should have been considered. He addressed the earlier negative event in the 1980’s that associated DeVilbiss with racial discrimination in a very subtle way, stating “It was heartening to see and hear parents and students of various races working so harmoniously for such a just cause” (Burget, 1991). Mr. Burget ended his editorial by urging all concerned parents to attend the January 29 meeting of the board of education “en masse” and present petitions with several thousand signatures urging the board to reconsider and find a way to keep both DeVilbiss and Macomber-Whitney open.

The board met on January 29, 1991; however, DeVilbiss and Macomber-Whitney were not even mentioned in the Toledo Blade article, which summarized the events. Some 200 parents and students crowded into the meeting. From the readers perspective, it appeared that the larger community had accepted the closing of the two high schools and moved on to an agenda that impacted every student in the district, pushing for a May levy to be placed on the ballot to save athletic programs, as well as a host of academic programs. CITE (Citizens Involved in Toledo Education) was formed one month earlier, led by levy organizer and parent, John Ludeman. At the board meeting, Mr. Ludeman presented the board with “a fat pile of petitions and endorsements from PTA presidents
and several unions,” all supporting a levy (Krauth, 1991, p. 9). He also presented data from a “random phone survey” to parents, implying strong support, although not universal support for a levy in May, indicating that 68% of parents supported such a levy; however, when asked if their neighbor would support the levy, the number was reduced to 43% (Krauth, 1991, p.9). The board also was provided with an update regarding contract negotiations, indicating that two of the three bargaining units had settled, accepting cuts in health care benefits and substantial layoffs. The superintendent could not implement the cuts scheduled for January until the last contract had been settled, the teacher’s contract. An independent mediator failed to reach a settlement, forcing the negotiations into the hands of a fact-finder. Board president, Brenda Facey, stated, “For every day the cuts are postponed, the district loses $8,500 in savings” (Krauth, 1991, p.9). The words of the Toledo Blade editorial from December 20, 1990 that criticized the board for a centralized management approach did not go unheeded. Superintendent Ellis stated, “There’s a feeling out there that there are too many fat cats [in central office] and we’re trying to deal with that” (Krauth, 1991, p.9). He mentioned this in reference to the newly settled contract with the administrative union, Toledo Association of Administrative Personnel, in which they agreed to cut 37.5 central office positions; however, 10 new administrative positions were created that would increase direct services to students through additional assistant principals positions and dean positions. Dal Lawrence, president of the Toledo Federation of Teachers, believed that “the cuts will disproportionately hurt teachers” and accused the board of “making a back-room deal with the administrator’s union” (Krauth, 1991, p.9). If community members attended the January 29, 1991, school board meeting to make one last plea for saving
DeVilbiss High School, they were overshadowed by a larger community organization that was there to advocate for a May levy, as well as the drama surrounding the union contract negotiations.

**The Transition Plan for Displaced Students**

By February 28, 1991, the district was unveiling its plan for the closing of DeVilbiss High School and the assignment of its students for the 1991-1992 school year.

In a *Toledo Blade* article from February 28, a map was included that showed by residential location, which high school students would be assigned to for the following school year. There were four junior high schools that fed into DeVilbiss, they were: DeVeaux Junior High, McTigue Junior High, Robinson Junior High, and Byrnedale Junior High. However, very few students who resided in the McTigue area and the Byrnedale area attended DeVilbiss; the largest majority of the DeVilbiss population came from either Robinson Junior High or DeVeaux Junior High (Krauth, 1991). The district assigned DeVilbiss students to their receiving high school by the following: DeVeaux Junior High students will attend Start High School, McTigue Junior High students will attend Rogers High School, Robinson Junior High students will attend Scott High School, and Byrnedale Junior High students will attend Bowsher High School (Krauth, 1991).

This was a very easy and clean way to assign students because it followed the “feeder patterns” established in the district. On the map, it is easy to see that DeVeaux and Robinson were the closest in proximity to DeVilbiss, and thus, those students would be far greater in number than the other two junior high schools mentioned. Therefore, there were really only two Toledo high schools significantly impacted by the closure of DeVilbiss, Start High School and Scott High School (Krauth, 1991).
However, the closing of Macomber-Whitney impacted all of the Toledo high schools because the district relocated the vocational programs out in the existing high school skill centers (Krauth, 1991, p.23). For example, a student who was studying Cosmetology at Macomber-Whitney would now be attending that program at Scott High School, since that is where the program was to be housed. However, if the student’s neighborhood high school is not Scott, then they would take all of their academic classes at their neighborhood high school, then travel to Scott for the vocational education courses. All extracurricular activities would take place at the neighborhood high school. Krauth (1991) summarized the process in a Toledo Blade article, stating:

Many Macomber-Whitney kids will go to the school in their neighborhood.
Some, like Sylvester Harris, will attend two schools. At Bowsher, the sophomore will attend academic classes, play football and run track. But since he wants to continue studying heating and air conditioning, which is being moved to Waite’s skills center, he’ll spend part of the day taking those classes at the East Toledo school.

Students from DeVilbiss and Macomber-Whitney were given a chance to apply to their “school of choice” if they did not want to attend their neighborhood high school (Krauth, 1991, p. 23). The deadline for applying was February 20, and had since passed at the time this article was printed. Krauth (1991) reported that some of the students were “mourning the loss of their first choice school,” and so the district expanded the rules, allowing them to move to their “second choice” (p.23). Since the application deadline had passed prior to the open houses, the district was considering extending the application deadline so that students who may be “won over” at Saturday’s open house
by “an impressive skills center at another school” can still apply (Krauth, 1991, p.23).

The receiving schools were to hold an open house in the spring of 1991 so the students in transition could become familiar with the school and could sign up to join “the cheerleaders or clubs” at their new schools (Krauth, 1991, p.23). The open houses were also meant to draw in students who had primarily taken college preparatory classes. It was implied that the district’s guidance counselors at the schools had pushed college prep over the vocational programming. Ken Searfoss, Executive Director of Vocational Education, stated, “One of the reasons we’re closing Macomber-Whitney and DeVilbiss is to make better use of the skills centers” (p.23). He acknowledged the “stigma” associated with the skills centers and that the enrollment is “half what it started at two decades ago” (Krauth, 1991, p.23). Marty Vieth, Executive Director of Secondary Education, stated, “The open houses also will show [new] students their new school, teachers, students and activities” (Krauth, 1991, p.25). It was suggested that school administrators understood that student government leaders at DeVilbiss and Macomber-Whitney may not have the social capital, or as the article reads, “be popular enough,” to be elected and so some of the principals indicated that they might create second vice-president slots for the newcomers (Krauth, 1991, p.25). The district also hoped to court “dislodged” students who may be considering transferring to parochial schools for fear that the spring levy might fail and fall sports would not be reinstated (Krauth, 1991, p.25).

A Toledo Blade article from March 20, 1991 reported, “Friends of DeVilbiss, the school’s booster group, met last week to begin finalizing plans for activities that will mark the end of the line for the 60-year-old high school” (Piscopo, 1991, p.1). The
article described a community that had accepted its fate and was trying to put its best foot forward, but also a community who still had questions and anxiety about the future. Parents still had questions of the superintendent regarding what their children could expect after the transfer to their receiving school. Parents who had made contact with the various receiving high schools reported a mixed degree of cooperation. Mr. Ellis, the Superintendent, stated “It should be a warm welcome” but that hardly eased the minds of many parents. Leslie Lake was worried that her son would not have as good of a chance to be a leader in sports, athletics and clubs as the students who have been at their high schools since their freshman year, stating “It’s not an even competition” (Piscopo, 1991, p.1). Ms. Lake voiced concern about the fact that colleges emphasize extracurricular activities, as well as academic achievement and questioned whether DeVilbiss students would have “rigorous accomplishments” to list on their college applications (Piscopo, 1991, p.1). Mr. Ellis admitted, “the pool of students competing for such slots will be increased, but each still has the same opportunity, regardless of where he or she began high school” (Piscopo, 1991, p.9). He later stated, “That student with the highest GPA is the valedictorian, that’s not going to change” (Piscopo, 1991, p.9). Regarding the future of DeVilbiss, he said, “The only thing we’re contemplating now is putting this building in mothballs” (Piscopo, 1991, p.9).

Saying Goodbye

When a family member dies, his or her finances must be put in order, belongings distributed to the living and the estate settled. In March of 1991, DeVilbiss was in the midst of a similar process. Friends of DeVilbiss voted to redistribute $80,000 in scholarship money among the four classes at DeVilbiss High School. The group also
received a request from the Libbey High School parent organization to purchase the sign in front of DeVilbiss, who stated, “They didn’t want to see the sign deteriorate in front of an empty DeVilbiss” and they hoped that by making the request, they did not appear to be vultures circling the building (Piscopo, 1991, p.9). The final week at DeVilbiss included an academic banquet on May 29 and an athletic banquet on May 31. After final examinations, the school hosted one final “blowout,” a party opened to all DeVilbiss students on June 7 (Piscopo, 1991).

The community opened the school to the public for one last viewing on June 1, 1991. Organizers estimated close to 2,500 people went through the school, many eager to purchase old yearbooks and other memorabilia. Herb Pilz, 75, was a member of the first graduating class that had started and finished high school at the then new school. According to Mr. Pilz, he came to the event because “It’s the last time and I just wanted to see what I’d remember. As you get older, it seems more important” (Feehan, 1991). Kenny Lister, class of ’57 commented that he plans on getting a picture of his 1957 Chevy convertible in front of the school before it is boarded up, stating, “They were the best years of your life” (Feehan, 1991). Those attending carried cameras and video cameras. They brought their children and grandchildren. They ran into fellow classmates and shared memories. Many were thrilled to be back, but sad to know that the school would no longer exist. The school officially closed on June 10, following commencement ceremonies. Rick Belcher, class of ’65, stated, “The idea of this school closing is like a chapter ending. I don’t know what will happen to it. I hope something good” (Feehan, 1991).
Rebirth/Repurposing of DeVilbiss

In September of 1996, Crystal Ellis retired from the district. He cited the closing of DeVilbiss High School as the lowest point in his career, although he still believed it was the right thing to do (Troy, 1996). DeVilbiss was partially reopened in the fall of 1997 to house special programs. The skill center of DeVilbiss would be the location for the new four-year technology high school, Toledo Technology Academy (Troy, 1996). The first year, it served only juniors and seniors, but later expanded to include freshman and sophomores (Hage & Michaels, 2003). In 1997, a section of the former DeVilbiss High School was renamed, The Crystal Ellis Conference Center (Baessler, 1997). In June 2002, the Toledo Technology Academy had its first class graduate in which the students had attended all four years of high school there.

Athletics did not play a role in the specialized programs housed at DeVilbiss in the late 1990’s to present. Consequently, Page Stadium, which had been renovated in the eighties, was left in disrepair since the closing of DeVilbiss in 1991. In a recent Toledo Blade article Hackenberg (2012) described its condition stating:

Page Stadium has been a dead-man walking for years. All that was left were the south stands and ramshackle press box, and as the I-475 expansion and interchange project intruded not-so-gently within a pooch punt of the old joint it had become an eyesore (p. C-1).

Hackenberg (2012) provides a glimpse of the stadium in its glory days when it drew standing-room-only crowds for the DeVilbiss Night Relays, referencing the six straight City League track and field titles won by DeVilbiss in the 1940’s. Hackenberg pays tribute to legendary football coaches who built strong programs in the 1950’s and 1960’s,
and describes how the program was negatively impacted by the opening of Start High School in 1962, which pulled a large percentage of the student population from DeVilbiss. However, the final blow to the DeVilbiss football program was the decision to end night football games in the city. According to Hackenberg, it was never the same after that. DeVilbiss went on to experience only two more exceptional football seasons, occurring in 1973 and 1974. Hackenberg (2012) states, “After DeVilbiss closed in 1991, nothing was the same in a neighborhood once so affluent that opponents taunted the school’s athletes as cake eaters” (p. C-1). In reference to the removal of Page Stadium, he states, “And now that it is gone, there is some sadness. I mean, shouldn’t we at least say good-bye? What a history” (p. C-1).

The Rest of the Story

In January of 2008, the 1600 students attending Start High School entered their new building (Zapotosky, 2008). The old Start High School was torn down and rebuilt onsite. However, the old auditorium was saved from demolition and incorporated into the new Start High School. In 2009, the YMCA that was located near Start High School was rebuilt so that it is connected to Start High School, sharing the auditorium and gymnasium space (Ramsey, 2009). In May of 2010, the Toledo Public Board of Education voted to close Libbey High School. One of the board members, Brenda Hill, explained that the district couldn't afford the aging school with its declining enrollment. She also referenced the declining population in South Toledo, specifically near Western Avenue where Libbey was located (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Two years after Libbey High School was closed, the building was torn down (McCartney, 2013). Libbey High School was spared from closing in 1991, but would survive only another nineteen years. The
physical space that was DeVilbiss High School, has been repurposed and remains open, while the physical structure that was Libbey High School has been eradicated.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The closing of schools has become a prescribed intervention for school reform as outlined in federal legislation, specifically, The No Child Left Behind Act (Peterson & West, 2003; Viteritti, 2005; Rebell & Wolff, 2008). School closure as a model for school reform may make sense to policy makers when viewed only within the context of fiscal and academic accountability; however, the phenomenon of school closure is situated within a system of complexity reaching far beyond just financial and academic issues (Fullilove, 2004; Henig, 2008; Senge, 2007). If the intended goal of school closure is to achieve long-term systemic improvement of the American educational system, then school closure must be studied within its existing system to include: neighborhoods, communities, regions, states, the country, and ultimately, the world (Schutz, 1962, 1964, 1967, 1970, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Senge, 2007). Furthermore, in order to determine the effectiveness of a policy, researchers must allow for the
occurrence of adequate time and distance after its initial implementation in order to understand its long-term impact (Senge, 2007).

While the practice of closing schools has been around for many years, there is little research regarding its long-term impact, particularly in regard to the social and psychological effects on those who experience school closure. There is a need for research that examines the long-term effects of the school closure experience as only those who have lived through it can describe. In accordance with phenomenological research, this study is concerned with “lived experience,” and investigates the “personal journey” of the participants; the goal being to “develop a rich or dense description” of the phenomenon of interest (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 616). Therefore, this dissertation research uses an empirical phenomenological approach as the primary methodology with individual participant experiences as the focus of the study. In this chapter, I will discuss the research methodology for this study including the participant selection, sampling method, data collection, data analysis, theoretical framework, and limitations of the study.

**Research Phenomenon and Questions**

The purpose of this research is to understand the long-term impact of school closure among those who experienced the process of school closure two decades ago as an important and understudied phenomenon. Since this topic has not garnered sufficient attention, this research will inform school personnel, students, parents, community members, and policy makers. The absence of data on the long-term impact of school closure contributes to the current problem in that policy makers do not have a
comprehensive understanding of how school closure impacts students and communities in the long term, especially regarding social and psychological development.

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of students who lived through a school closure, who transitioned to a neighboring school, and who are now grown adults. The study also examined the nature of the transition experience of moving from one high school to another. The study used semi-structured interviews to explore issues related to the transitional experience, such as identity, social capital, relational trust, community connectedness and engagement, school and community pride, tradition, and the sense of belonging. Of specific interest was how the participants made meaning of the experience of school closure, given time and distance from the event and now in the voice of mature adults with substantial life experience. Additionally, the study explored if and how social connections were sustained after the closing of the high school, particularly those connections with individuals and groups nearest to the community in which they resided at the time the school was closed.

The data collected from the participants was used to examine the long-term effects of school closure on adults who experienced it while students in one community in West Toledo, Ohio. Therefore, the principal research question for this study was: How do adults, who as teenagers attended a school that closed during their high school career, describe the impact of school closure on their lives? Embedded within this phenomenon were additional questions that required exploration in order to gain an understanding of the main research phenomena of school closure in its entirety. Therefore, the following sub-questions were investigated:
1. How do adults, whose high schools closed while they were attending them, describe their experience of school closure and transition?

2. How have these adults sustained connections to their community, particularly in terms of maintaining a sense of pride, tradition, and identification to that community?

Through the investigation of these questions, we better understand the experience of students who are removed from an environment that they know and catapulted into a world of unknown.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

The majority of existing research pertaining to school closure is quantitative in design; therefore, I begin with a brief discussion of the role quantitative research has played in the investigation of the phenomenon of school closure. In research studies that are quantitative in nature, the findings are often discussed in terms of “how much” or “how many,” and results are presented in numerical terms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Quantitative studies may be used to determine the strength of the relationship between factors, which may help in making predictions regarding similar events in the future (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Quantitative studies have provided insight regarding the number of school closures and have described relational effects, for example, the relationship between these three factors: school budget allocations, student enrollment and school closure. However, quantitative methods cannot describe the lived experience of the individual given the complex nature of social systems.
According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative researchers “seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (p. 10). Only recently have researchers produced studies that give voice to the experience of school closure and the immediate impact on those involved. However, in order to understand the long-term impact of school closure, a study is needed that gives voice to the individuals who experienced school closure several years ago, individuals who have felt and perhaps still feel the effects of the experience and who can communicate the long-term impact. It is only through dialogue and observation that the researcher will obtain a comprehensive understanding regarding the school closure impact phenomenon. It is for this reason that a qualitative approach was critical for this study. In the limited qualitative studies that have been implemented on this subject, various themes have emerged. My hope is that I have expanded on those themes by implementing a retrospective study that focused on a group of participants who experienced school closure decades ago.

Research Paradigm

According to Ponterotto (2005), a research paradigm sets the context for an investigator’s study. My beliefs and assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, axiology, rhetorical structure and methodology created my paradigm and influenced my research design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state, “The constructivist-interpretive paradigm assumes a relativist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures” (p. 24). Therefore, my paradigm for this study was constructivist-interpretive, as it aligned well with my theoretical framework. The constructivist-interpretive paradigm accepts that
there are multiple constructed realities due to the fact that reality is constructed in the
mind of the individual, and that meaning is often hidden and must be brought to the
surface through reflection (Ponterotto, 2005). The primary goal of the constructivist-
interpretive researcher is to gain an understanding of the lived experiences within a
historical and social context (Ponterotto, 2005).

Epistemology, in the simplest of terms, is the philosophy of knowledge or how we
come to know (Krauss, 2005). In regard to research paradigms, epistemology is
concerned with the relationship between the research participant and the researcher.
Krauss (2005) states, “When one engages in a research effort, one engages in an intensive
learning process where new knowledge and information is achieved” (p. 763). According
to Cousins (2002), the constructivist view is that “knowledge is established through the
meanings attached to the phenomena studied; researchers interact with the subjects of the
study to obtain data; inquiry changes both the researcher and subject; and knowledge is
context and time dependent” (as cited in Krauss, 2005, p. 759). The researcher guided by
the constructivist-interpretive paradigm advocates a transactional and subjective stance
that reality is socially constructed and therefore the dynamic interaction between
researcher and participant is central to capturing the lived experience of the participant
(Ponterotto, 2005).

Axiology pertains to how the researcher’s values emerge in the scientific process.
Constructivist-interpretive researchers believe that “values” and “lived experience”
cannot be separated from the research process (Krauss, 2005). It is the researcher’s
experiences that guide the facilitation of the research process (Ponterotto, 2005).
Axiology applies only to the research process itself, not to the phenomenon of school
closure and should not be confused with the term “bracketing” as applied in a phenomenological study. Phenomenological research requires the researcher to suspend or “bracket” all presumptive constructs about the phenomenon of study (Giorgi, 1985).

**Research Methodology**

The discipline of phenomenology draws from philosophy, psychology, and education. The philosophy behind phenomenology seeks to gain understanding of how experience is transformed into consciousness (Merriam, 2009) and has been traced back to the works of the great philosophers such as Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant (Giorgi, 1985). However, the modern phenomenology philosophy emerged from Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and reached a level of prominence by 1913 (Giorgi, 2009). Husserl believed that humans live in a natural attitude, a natural world, and it is from this social setting that a phenomenon should be investigated (Giorgi, 2009).

According to Creswell (2007), the phenomenological approach focuses on understanding the essence of the experience and the lived phenomenon. Several individuals that have shared the experience are studied, primarily through interviews with individuals, although documents, observations, and art may also be considered. Frankl (1963) believed that meaning is of paramount importance in human life; consequently, many topics within the social sciences are deeply rooted in personal meaning. According to Merriam (2009), “to get at the essence or basic underlying structure of the meaning of an experience, the phenomenological interview is the primary method of data collection” (p. 25). Data are analyzed for significant statements, meaning units, textural and structural description, and description of the “essence” (Creswell, 2007). The written report or conclusions describe the “essence” of the experience. Phenomenology’s aim is
to understand phenomena on their own terms, rather than to seek explanation by going “behind” phenomena via operationally defined hypotheses about them (Barrell et al., 1987). There are many versions of phenomenology (Giorgi, 2009). This study employed the empirical phenomenological research method.

Empirical phenomenology was chosen as the most suitable methodology for this research, informed by the work of Van Kaam who defined empirical phenomenological research in psychology (Moustakas, 1994). The empirical phenomenology approach involves “a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Giorgi (2009) describes the empirical phenomenological approach as occurring in two phases: The first phase consists of naïve descriptions of the experience, which are obtained through open-ended questions and dialogue. In the second phase, the researcher describes the structures of the experience using reflective analysis and interpretation of the participant’s descriptions. According to Moustakas (1994),

The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words, the essences or structures of the experience (p. 13).

Empirical phenomenology is grounded in philosophical theory, but also has roots in the social sciences, giving credence to the idea that phenomenon must be viewed within its
existing system or natural setting, and within this natural setting is the potential for unintended consequences (Aspers, 2004; Senge, 2007).

**Choosing the sample.**

This interpretation of the data depends upon the naïve stories of the participants, which ideally will be “rich or dense” descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Purposive sampling is consistent with the interpretive paradigm and is best suited for phenomenological research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The study used purposive sampling and included five participants. Participants were students in grades nine through eleven at DeVilbiss High School during the 1990-1991 school year. They experienced the process of the closing of DeVilbiss High School in 1991, followed by assignment to a receiving area high school.

My original intent was to interview students who transitioned into two specific receiving schools, Scott High School and Start High School. I chose these two receiving schools because based on the attendance zones, these were the two schools that significantly bordered what had been established as the DeVilbiss attendance area. I had hypothesized that since these two schools had been the closest in proximity to DeVilbiss High School, the majority of the students displaced from DeVilbiss would have gone to these two schools. Once I began searching for participants, I learned from their descriptions that many of the students who might have transitioned to Scott High School opted instead to enroll in Rogers High School. It is for this reason that I made the decision to focus on three receiving schools, which included Scott High School, Start High School and Rogers High School.
While each of the five participant’s stories was unique in many ways, common themes began to surface. After coding the transcripts of the fifth participant, I was confident that I had reached the level of data saturation required when using qualitative methods. However, I did take note of the fact that the perspective that was not represented was that of an African American male student. A priority for the purposive sampling was to have gender balance and an attempt was made to include students with diverse experiences. My intent was to allow for “maximum variation” by allowing for diverse variations and identification of common patterns (Creswell, 2007). I achieved this goal to a degree, with the exception of the limited access to male participants, specifically African American males. I will discuss this in a later section when I address limitations. I will provide the reader with specific background information on each participant when I discuss the interview process used for data collection.

**Data collection methods.**

Triangulation of data is important to the phenomenological research approach (Creswell, 2007). Methods of data collection consist of a sequence of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they are aligned with the constructivist-interpretive paradigm as well as the empirical phenomenological methodology, and they provided multiple opportunities for participants to explore and describe their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Triangulation of the question, in other words, asking several questions that initiate discussion around the same topic was another way to make sure the participants’ responses reflected the true understanding of their experience.
Interviews.

In empirical phenomenology, interviews are the primary source of data and serve a specific purpose (Giorgi, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). Interviews are a vehicle for helping participants remember and describe lived experience and allow for the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue, thus developing a conversational relationship necessary for exploration of meaning (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). There are primarily three types of interviews in qualitative methods: structured, unstructured and semi-structured. According to Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, the structured interview “aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature so as to explain behavior within pre-established categories,” whereas the aim of the unstructured interview is to “understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (p. 706).

The semi-structured interview lies somewhere in between; it is preset and takes place in the field and the interviewer is somewhat directive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). A semi-structured interview format was deemed to be the best fit for this research study. Semi-structured interviews were implemented with the intent to explore issues related to the transitional experience of school closure such as identity, social capital, relational trust, community connectedness and engagement, school and community pride, tradition, and sense of belonging. The interview questions were open-ended and therefore very much shaped by the participant, followed by probes, and when needed several slightly more specific questions. See Appendix A for a list of the key questions asked during the interviews. Prior to moving into the formal interview questions, a pre-interview protocol
was completed by each participant. The pre-interview protocol was designed to gain general background information about the participants.

Data Gathering

Pre-interview steps.

Prior to interviewing participants, there were several steps that had to be completed; some of them were organizational, while others were institutional requirements. I first had to pass my prospectus hearing. In order to present my prospectus, I needed to have the DVD ready of the final graduation held at DeVilbiss High School in the spring of 1991. I was lucky in that my husband had worked extensively with a teacher from DeVilbiss who was recognized as a leader in the teacher’s union. A meeting was arranged and I had the opportunity to speak with this teacher briefly about the closing of DeVilbiss. At that meeting, he gave me his VHS copy of the final graduation ceremony for DeVilbiss High School. It also included a videotaped tour of the school as it stood empty after the last day of the school year. I took the VHS copy and had it transferred to a DVD. I then reduced the DVD to about 10 minutes. With my DVD in hand, I presented and passed my prospectus hearing on June 25, 2012.

I submitted my IRB application on July 16, 2012. Not too long after the date of submission, it was approved with minor revisions. I had originally thought I would record the interviews using “Garage Band” on my Mac Book, but thought better of it and purchased a hand-held digital recorder. The reason I reconsidered is I realized that I would need a laptop to show the DVD and then would also have to navigate the process of using “Garage Band” on a laptop as well. I felt it would be cumbersome and increase
the potential for error, as well as being potentially distracting to the participant. I had become familiar with NVivo software while taking an advanced qualitative methods course at Cleveland State University (CSU). I saw the value in it and decided to purchase NVivo 10.0 software from QSR International. I attended an introductory NVivo course in the fall of 2012. Once I began the data collection process, I attended another NVivo course that moved beyond the introductory stage.

**Finding participants.**

At the same time that I was preparing myself to be able to utilize the technology associated with the data collection process, I was looking for participants. This is where I was able to draw from my relationships formed while working for Toledo Public Schools. I contacted a teacher I had worked with in the district who was recognized as an advocate for DeVilbiss High School. I remembered that she was an active member in the DeVilbiss Alumni Association. I met with her in September of 2012. At that meeting, I received multiple names of past DeVilbiss students who experienced the closure and transition process, as well as their contact information. I contacted two of the names she had given me and both agreed to take part in the study; however, I was only able to connect with one. This would be my third interview participant, Linda.

I also contacted a retired assistant superintendent I had worked with in the district. He is also recognized as a leader within the City of Toledo, serving on several organizational boards. He was able to help me connect with my first participant, Treva, as well as my second participant, Dale. Treva, participant one, offered to help me find someone for the study who had transferred to Scott High School after DeVilbiss closed. It was during that initial interview that I learned that many of the African-American
students who were designated to attend Scott High School after the attendance lines were redrawn, actually opted to attend schools other than Scott, primarily, Rogers High School. Treva gave me the name of one person she knew who attended Scott High School who might be interested; this would be my last interview participant, Shaina. In the meantime, one of my family members informed me that a coworker actually attended DeVilbiss at the time of the closure and transitioned to Start High School. This was how I made the connection with interview participant four, Stacey.

Regarding participant five, Shaina, I had made contact with her after receiving her information from participant one, Treva. We left a series of voice messages with each other and seemed to have a hard time making an actual connection. Several months passed as I was immersed in the data of the first four participants. I was getting a bit panicked because I had not been able to lock down a participant who attended Scott High School. However, in the summer of 2013, I was at one of the local malls where a “Back to School” fair was taking place. I had worked with many of the school administrators who were representing Toledo Public Schools. One of the administrators there helped me to connect with the person who would be the final participant in the study. Ironically, it was the same person that Treva, participant one, had recommended. Participant five agreed to take part in the study and I was able to finally secure a participant who had graduated from Scott High School.

Somehow, word spread throughout the community about my research pertaining to the closure of DeVilbiss. For example, I attended a football game at the University of Toledo in August of 2012 and was approached by a couple of different people who offered to help me with my research. I soon realized that there were a lot of people who
wanted to tell their individual story about the closing of DeVilbiss and how it impacted them. Each time I made a new contact, I created a memo for that contact, utilizing the “memo” folder available in NVivo. I copied and pasted email communication into the memo that was housed within the “School Closure” project in NVivo. I found this “memo” tool to be a critical strategy for keeping my records organized. It also served as a journal in that it helped recreate my timeline, as well as provided a place for me to house critical findings through reflexive thought.

**Interview location.**

In July of 2012, I secured a location to conduct the interviews for those participants who resided locally. I secured a conference room in a school that was centrally located in downtown Toledo. I wanted to make sure that parking was free and easily accessible. One of the requirements of CSU was that I receive a letter from the school administrator stating that I had permission to use the designated space. After I had received the letter, I scheduled my first interview session. I gave the participants the option of meeting at the secured site or meeting at a mutually agreed upon location. Participant one chose to meet at the secured location. Participants two and three lived out of state so I traveled to their locations for the interviews. Like participant one, participant four chose to meet at the secured location. Participant five requested that we meet at her workplace in downtown Toledo.

**Interview process.**

*Pre-interview protocol.*

The first session with each participant began with a brief questionnaire that allowed me to gather pertinent background information. From this information, I was
able to learn that one participant graduated high school in 1994, two participants graduated high school in 1993 and two participants graduated high school in 1992. The amount of time spent at DeVilbiss varied among the participants. One participant was at DeVilbiss for only one year, two participants for two years and two participants for three years. Three out of the five participants were black, while two participants were white. Four participants were female, while only one was male. Table 1 provides demographic information of each of the five participants for this study. They are listed in the order in which they were interviewed.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Receiving School</th>
<th># Years at DeVilbiss</th>
<th># Years at Receiving School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treva</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Rogers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacey</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaina</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participant Demographic Data*

Note: B=Black; W=White; M=Male; F=Female

*The interviews.*

The interview questions were structured so that they would take place over a series of three sessions. After each participant completed a consent form, as well as the pre-interview protocol discussed in the previous section, I began the interview process by
showing the participants a 10-12 minute DVD of the last graduation at DeVilbiss, which I referenced in an earlier section. I also had the last DeVilbiss yearbook displayed and opened to the page with each participant’s class picture. My mistake in the first interview with participant one was that I did not turn on my audio recorder while the DVD was playing; consequently, I missed some wonderful, free-flowing descriptions offered by participant one. I made notes of her dialogue as the DVD played. I found with all the participants, that the interview began with the DVD, not with the first formal prompt. The DVD and yearbook transported the participants immediately to the year 1991 and the memories began to flow. In the first interview, I asked the participant to write down words that came to mind as she viewed the DVD. Once the DVD started, she forgot my directive and was lost in the memories. I realized that the participants did not need this directive, and in fact, it might even distract them from immersing themselves in the memories. I did not ask future participants to do this activity.

The formal interview prompts were sequenced so there was a beginning, middle and an end. The beginning section was designed to address the experience of being a student at DeVilbiss, the closing of DeVilbiss, and the transition into the receiving school. The interview prompts for the middle section focused on the participant’s life after graduation to the present. The final section of the interview was structured so that the focus was on the long-term impact of school closure and transition, as well as policy implications. In other words, the closing interview questions were meant to answer the question of how we might take their experience and learn from it to inform future policy pertaining to school closure and transition.
The interviews were designed to take place over a series of three sessions, closely following the beginning, middle and final questions as outlined in the interview questions. I found that each participant was different in how quickly he or she moved through the interview questions. I kept close attention to the time to make sure I did not run over the allotted time, while still maintaining a relaxed setting. I facilitated the process in a manner that supported as much self-direction as possible by the participants and only moved on to the next question when I felt certain that the participant had said all she or he needed to say about a specific issue. I also made sure to bring each session to a close by summarizing what we had covered and then explaining where we would be heading in the next scheduled session. My experience as a school counselor and as a school administrator helped me effectively facilitate each session. My goal was to provide enough structure to allow for free-flowing dialogue, while always being conscious of where we were headed. I began each session with a summary of the previous session and then picked up where we left off in the interview questions.

**Individual participant interviews.**

I interviewed Treva, the first participant in the study, during the month of November of 2012. We met in the conference room of a school located in the central city. We had three sessions, scheduled at one-week intervals. The second participant was Dale, who lived out of state. I arranged to meet him at his workplace located in the eastern part of the United States. He had a limited amount of time available and so we agreed to meet two consecutive days in December of 2012. I did not feel that reducing the process to two days in any way negatively impacted the richness of the descriptions.
Linda, the third participant, also lived out of state. Since I was unfamiliar with the area, I asked her to suggest a meeting place. In January of 2013, we met in a coffee shop not too far from where she lived, which was in the southern part of the United States. Again, due to time limitations, I agreed to reduce the number of interview sessions from three down to two. However, in Linda’s case, we had to do two interview sessions on the same day with just a short break in between the sessions. I was not as comfortable having the interview sessions take place in a single day’s time, concerned that there would be no reflective time in between the sessions. My instincts were correct in that I believe this did impact the depth and richness of Linda’s descriptions. I discuss this as a limitation later in the paper.

I met Stacey, participant four, at the conference room I had secured at the school located in the central city of Toledo. We met during the month of February 2013. Her second interview took place a week later at her work place. By the end of the second interview, we had completed all the interview questions. I had been through the interview process enough by now to determine that for the amount of interview questions I was asking, two sessions were sufficient. I also became very aware of the importance of having some time and distance between the two or three interview sessions. It allowed the participant time to reflect and often the participant would arrive at their next scheduled interview and announce that they had remembered something they wanted to share that related to the previous session.

I prioritized the transcription of the descriptions of the first four participants to get an initial overview of the emerging themes. No new themes had emerged since I had coded the transcripts for the second participant. I had considered the idea that the data
was close to reaching the point of saturation; however, a critical piece was missing, which was the story of a participant who had transferred to Scott High School. In August of 2013, I interviewed participant five, Shaina. I had had a difficult time connecting with Shaina. In fact, we had arranged to meet months earlier, but she had to cancel. I sensed that her life was very busy and that it was difficult for her to find the time for the interview sessions. She chose to meet at her workplace. We began moving through the interview questions and I noticed that we were moving at a faster pace than with the previous participants. Within the first hour, we had completed the interview questions designated for the first two interview sessions. It could have been because we were meeting at her workplace during her lunch hour and she was cognizant of the time knowing that she would be returning to work. Within the first hour together, it did not appear that additional themes were emerging. With this in mind, I decided to offer her the option of having two interview sessions on the same day, with a small break in between just as I had done for participant Linda. This limited time together is discussed later as a limitation.

**Data Organization and Management**

**Transcribing.**

I did not begin the transcription process until after I had completed the interviews for the fourth participant. I began transcribing participant one, using NVivo 10.0 computer software. After I completed the initial transcription of the first interview for participant one, I realized the amount of time it was going to take for me to transcribe the audio for all participants. I decided to contract with Peachtree Transcription Associates
to have the interview audio transcribed for participants two and three. In the meantime, I planned to work on beginning the analysis of participant one’s data using NVivo 10.0.

I learned I had free access to a speech recognition software, Dragon, which I utilized for transcribing participant one’s second and third interviews. Even though I had used Dragon for transcribing a portion of participant one’s audio, as well as using a transcription company for transcribing participants two and three, I still relied on NVivo 10.0 for cleaning up the initial transcript copies. I reviewed each transcript an additional three or four times to make sure each was in the purest form, written exactly as stated by the participant. After dabbling in alternative ways to transcribe interview audio, I returned to NVivo 10.0 to transcribe the last two participants, Stacey and Shaina. By exploring three different tools for transcribing the audio, I felt I had constructively utilized my time while increasing my knowledge of the practical application of qualitative research. When I had completed the transcriptions for all five participants, I was left with 231 pages of dialogue, single-spaced.

**Pre-coding.**

Prior to doing the official coding using NVivo 10.0, I made hard copies of the initial transcripts for each participant. I read each one all the way through, correcting any typos and making initial notes off to the side. Each time I listened to the audio, I did two things: one, I made corrections until the transcriptions were clean and pure, and two, I made notes of any significance regarding the emergence of themes. It is important to note that data analysis begins immediately. It begins during the interview process and continues through the transcription process. The notes taken during the interview and the
reflections written during the transcription process develop into a type of pre-coding that then leads to further analysis until the formal themes are identified.

**Immersed in the data.**

From the time of my prospectus hearing to the present, I was not able to immerse myself in the data for long periods of time. I did have blocks of time when I was totally immersed, but they came in short spurts and were worked in around my teaching obligations. I did most of my work during the summer months, followed by the holiday breaks scheduled in the university calendar. While I was never in a permanent state of immersion, I was always conscious of the data. When my time and attention was focused on work-related duties, I tried to stay connected to my study in creative ways. For example, I travel two hours each way to work. In those four hours on the road, I would often listen to the participant interviews as a way of keeping the study present in my mind. I also did a lot of air travel during this time period and used the time on the plane to listen to participant interviews and take notes. These notes would become part of my “memo” entries housed within NVivo.

Interestingly, I became very aware of the phenomenon of moving between the present and the past. I felt like I had a foot in two worlds, one in the present and one back in the late 1980’s to early 1990’s. Every time I revisited the data, I found myself transported to that time period. I was reliving my own past experiences, especially those that had to do with Toledo Public Schools. In the late 1980’s I was a substitute music teacher. In fact, I vividly remember subbing in the late 1980’s for the DeVilbiss Choir Director. I was assigned there for consecutive days and I was able to recall that there was a pregnant girl in the DeVilbiss Choir. I had two young children at home myself and I
remembered bringing a bag of old baby clothes that I no longer needed to give to this young girl. I never would have recalled that memory if it were not for this study. As the participants spoke about the choir program at DeVilbiss, I was able to recall what it looked like, and what it felt like standing on the podium, presented with the unfamiliar faces of the choir students and looking beyond the students to the physical space of the room. I remembered the space being grand and more college-like than a high school. If I was not reliving my own experience through my own memories, I was becoming so immersed in the data that the participant’s stories became my own and so I was living their memories and experiences as well. Later, I will discuss the important role “bracketing” played in my study. I bring it up in this section because through my research experience, I came to understand that there is a need for data immersion, but also for maintaining balance and perspective. I will write more about this later.

**Formal coding.**

I allowed the themes to emerge from the data, although a review of the literature provided me with an idea of what I might expect. For example, through a review of the literature, I found strong evidence that the issue of disrupted trusting relationships would surface as a theme for the participants as a result of the school closure experience. I brought the clean transcripts of participant one into my NVivo project. I began coding, sometimes putting sections of the dialogue into only one node, while other times assigning it to multiple nodes. An example of a time I would use multiple coding would be when the descriptions were specific to an event or time period, but also made reference to thoughts or feelings associated with the event or time period. In this case, the description would be coded into the node representing the event, but also into nodes
representing the social and psychological thoughts and feelings expressed. A specific example would be memories related to the actual closing of DeVilbiss. The time leading up to the closing, the announcement of the closing, and the time immediately after the closing all are descriptions that would be assigned to the node, “the closing.” However, weaved within the description of the closing would be references to other themes. Usually these would be socially constructed themes, such as grief and loss. Often when participants were speaking about the time of the closure, I would be coding that section of dialogue both to the node, “the closure” and to other nodes representing the sense of loss described that was associated with the closure. For example, the same section of dialogue might be assigned to the node named, “the closure,” as well as the node named, “no control/no voice.”

Multiple coding also occurred when the description pertained to two interrelated themes or subthemes. For example, I noticed that often if I was coding for “identity,” I might also be coding the same section for “adult relationships.” For the purpose of this section, it is important for the reader to understand that more often than not, I coded sections to multiple nodes. At one point, I came across a section that did not fit into any theme. It was unrelated to the topic of school closure and transition, even though I considered it to be powerful dialogue. I consulted with my dissertation chair and we decided to create a node for “unrelated but powerful.” This is where I placed dialogue that may be used for future research ideas. However, for this study, I set it aside.

When I finished coding my first participant, clear themes began to surface. Many of them related back to the research found in the literature review. I began coding for my second participant and one additional theme surfaced that had not emerged when coding
participant one. This theme had to do with “agency.” It was such a strong theme for participant two that I knew I had to go back and review the dialogue of participant one, looking for sections that may fit in the node, “agency.” I completed coding participant one in the area of “agency” and then moved on to the rest of the participants. No other new themes surfaced beyond participant two. In other words, the stories provided by participants three through five aligned with the existing codes, requiring no further additions as with “agency,” which surfaced in the transcripts of participant two.

By using NVivo 10.0 software, I was able to see the number of times each participant was coded for a specific theme. While there were similar themes across the participants, by quantifying the coding by node, I was able to quickly see the subtle nuances between each participant. I knew that these nuances were associated with the uniqueness of each individual and their lived experience. I was reminded of the importance of viewing qualitative data within the historical and social context (Ponterotto, 2005; Senge, 2007). I created an excel sheet in which I entered the number of times a participant had referenced a specific theme. I then ran it from the highest number of references to the lowest. Thus, I could see the theme most frequently referenced down to the one that was referenced the least often. I speculated that the number of references made to a specific theme spoke to what was important to each participant as they remembered their experience of school closure and transition. I also believed it said something about how they processed the experience and how they had come to understand the experience now as an adult. Each time I completed coding a participant, I summarized the individual’s “theme” data quantitatively and emailed it to my chair and methodologist. This allowed a big picture view of how the themes were
emerging as each participant was added to the NVivo 10.0 school closure project. I hesitated to disclose that I used a quantitative approach as a way to get an initial pulse of the data for analysis purposes. I was afraid that my instinct to look at the big picture by using quantitative data might add fuel to the classic textbook criticisms held by some researchers who fail to see the benefits of qualitative research (Ponterotto, 2005; Sullivan et al., 2010). However, I found it fascinating to view the development of the themes with a quantitative view, especially in terms of the amount of dialogue for each participant that was aligned to a specific theme. I began to get a big picture view of themes generally, but also as they related to the individual participants and the uniqueness of each.

**The themes.**

When using NVivo, it is important for the reader to know that a “node” refers to a code, theme, or idea (Creswell, 2007). I began coding themes to get the big picture. As I was completing the general coding for all the participants, I was also analyzing the results as I went along, noticing relationships between the nodes. I then created node hierarchies, moving from general to more specific coding of topics. The general or overarching theme is known as the parent node, while the more specific are referred to as the child node or children nodes (Creswell, 2007). An example of this is that I had general coding for the following topics: sense of belonging, socially segregated groups of students, social and human capital, and relational trust. After analyzing the general coding for the first three participants, I looked for ways in which the coded text related to each other. In the example above, I began to understand that “sense of belonging” was the parent node and that the others were “child nodes.” Another way I viewed the data was to consider it as an outline for a prewriting activity. In an outline, you have headings.
and subheadings. The headings are broad and the subheadings included within the heading are more specific. In terms of NVivo, the heading would be the parent node, and the subheadings would be the children nodes. Using this analogy helped me consider the part to whole conceptually. I looked for general, broader topics as well as more specific subtopics. From my initial data analysis, I organized my themes and subthemes, creating node hierarchies. This analogy also was helpful when it came time to actually write about the findings.

While I coded specifically looking for social topics related to the school closure and transition experience, I also coded for organizational purposes and for future research purposes. For example, I created a node for “critical quotes.” This was strictly for organizational purposes. It allowed me to crosscheck my data to make sure that I had included all identified critical quotes within themes and subthemes related to the study. I also coded for “memory” and “new awareness” only because my very first participant often made reference to the fact that she could not recall information. For example, she would say, “I think I remember” or “I think I blocked that out.” She also referred to our sessions as “therapy for her” and made reference to the fact that she had not realized how the school closure experience had impacted her until she participated in the study. Because I began coding for “memory” and “new awareness” for participant one, I continued coding for those nodes from the subsequent participant’s transcripts. However, “memory” and “new awareness” did not surface as a theme for participants two through five. For this study, I set aside “memory” and “new awareness.” Table 2 shows how I organized my themes and subthemes.
Table 2

*Themes and Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme (Parent Node)</th>
<th>Subtheme (Children Nodes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Belonging or Its Absence</td>
<td>Inclusive/Exclusive Environment, Social and/or Human Capital, Relational Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grief and Loss</td>
<td>No Control/No Voice, Identity, Place Identity/Place Attachment, Lack of Closure, Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Connectedness/ Pride and Tradition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DeVilbiss Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Receiving School Experience</td>
<td>The Rogers High School Experience, The Scott High School Experience, The Start High School Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Closing of DeVilbiss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Transition to the Receiving School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Quotes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Memory and New Awareness</strong></td>
<td>Note: “Memory and New Awareness,” was set aside because it emerged as a theme for only the first participant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis and Writing

The data analysis methods for this study were consistent with those used in empirical phenomenological research. Phenomenological data analysis involves the following: bracketing, intuiting, and describing. Bracketing means that the researcher suspends judgment, that is, refuses to allow her own experiences to lead to interpretations of the participant’s experience (Moustakas, 1994).

I began to summarize the experience of the participants by theme, beginning with “sense of belonging.” I shared my work with my dissertation chair, and she informed me of what I had sensed myself, which was that I was summarizing the study in a way that was more representative of a narrative study or a case study than a phenomenological study. I had to step away from the data and return my focus to my research questions and a review of phenomenological research. I also revisited my research paradigm, focusing on the following section:

The constructivist-interpretive paradigm accepts that there are multiple constructed realities due to the fact that reality is constructed in the mind of the individual, and meaning is often hidden and must be brought to the surface through reflection (Ponterotto, 2005). The primary goal of the constructivist-interpretive researcher is to gain an understanding of the lived experiences within a historical and social context (Ponterotto, 2005).

I believe it is my research paradigm, together with my extensive study of “systems theory” that drove my need to summarize the experiences of the participants comprehensively, first as individuals, so I could understand each one’s story in the historical and social context, then, as a shared experience between the participants.
Unfortunately, the way I first approached the process did not produce an end result that was true to the phenomenological method. I had not paid close enough attention to the need to “bracket,” not only my own experience, but also the information presented in the literature review by way of news articles that documented the time leading up to the closing of DeVilbiss through the transition year.

My methodologist also offered insight in response to my initial attempt at summarizing the themes. She sensed that I was equally interested in both the stories of the participants, and the interpretation. She introduced me to a fairly new phenomenological approach called, “interpretive phenomenological analysis” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). I spent time reading about this new approach to phenomenology and really connected to it. I knew I had to find balance between phenomenology in its purest form with the focus on the naïve descriptions of the participants, together with the interpretive aspect of the phenomenological method. After stepping away from the data and doing some reflecting, I was able to regain my focus. I realized that I had a personal need to summarize the participants’ descriptions as if I were preparing a narrative study. By approaching it this way, I knew I would have the discipline needed to be true to the naïve descriptions required in phenomenological research. I returned with a new plan, which was to first summarize the participant’s descriptions within the historical and social structure as experienced by each individual participant. Next, I would return again to my research questions and then pull from the summaries only the information that addressed the research questions.

In May of 2014, I began summarizing the narratives of each participant. In critical points of the narratives, I offered free-flowing reflections and interpretations. I
completed the process in July of 2014, and had accumulated 250 pages, single-spaced, of participant narrative summarized and organized by theme with researcher reflection and interpretation. This process may have been an unnecessary step for many researchers, but for me, it was needed in order to ensure the data analysis was comprehensive and viewed systemically within the social and historical context (Ponterotto, 2005; Senge, 2007). Lastly, the narrative summaries organized by theme served as a foundation for future research purposes. By July of 2014, I felt I had viewed the data vertically and horizontally, again, referring to the whole to part to whole concept explained in the previous section when I described how I coded for emerging themes. I had looked at it from the big-picture, to the most minute details and then back again as I returned my focus to the research questions. This is a skill I most likely developed through my work as a curriculum director; a skill required for aligning curriculum as well as master scheduling. This skill transferred easily and effectively to the work required of a researcher, especially in terms of data analysis. I had experienced the data from the perspective of the participants in the social and historical setting, and I had viewed the data from my personal perspective as the researcher and as someone with connections to the place and time of the setting of the school closure event. I had spent a great deal of time reflecting on the data with a focus on the need for “bracketing.” I looked for researcher bias in my reflections and interpretations and made note of any potential personal connection, memory, or experience that might influence my interpretation. Only when I had reached this point in my research, did I feel comfortable making reductions. The rest of the writing process consisted of several rounds of editing and reducing, periodically returning to the research questions to make sure I stayed focused on the
purpose. I was guided in my analysis and writing by theories discussed within the literature review, such as identification of types of social capital as narrated by the participant which presented during the time spent at DeVilbiss, and how the described social capital was effected as a result of the closing and transition experience. By returning to the literature review and the research questions throughout the writing process, I was able to reduce and edit in a manner that left me comfortable and confident that I had described the phenomenon of school closure and the long-term impact, while truly capturing the essence of the phenomenon as told by the participants. Throughout the stages of data analysis and the writing process there was ongoing interpretation of the research and opportunities for reflexivity.

**Bracketing researcher subjectivity.**

I have mentioned the need for “bracketing” in the phenomenological methodology several times in this dissertation. However, this is such a significant part of the data analysis process that I thought it deserved its own section. In my own situation, I had shared lived experiences with the participants. For example, I had worked over 20 years for the Toledo Public Schools and I had actually been a substitute teacher at DeVilbiss prior to its closure. While I would not state that I developed a “place attachment” to the building, I do remember how it felt to enter the school and walk its hallways. Like the participants, I believed there was something special about the physical structure of DeVilbiss High School. Years later, in the early 2000’s, I was in an administrative position with Toledo Public Schools and my office was located in the building that used to be DeVilbiss High School.
I have worked directly with school boards and have experienced first-hand the role of politics in the decision-making process. In addition to sharing memories of the physical space of DeVilbiss with the participants, I had shared experience in terms of the daily operations of the school system. I worked directly with many of the Toledo Public School administrators mentioned by the participants. Some of the stories they shared, I had prior knowledge of and had formed my own opinion or perspective. Because I had my own memories and experiences of DeVilbiss High School and Toledo Public Schools, it was very hard to “bracket” them.

I began to realize that just as there are individual learning styles, there are also individual styles in terms of how researchers organize and analyze data. Researchers have different approaches to how data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted (Ponterotto, 2005). I am not suggesting that everyone would have had to organize the data first in a narrative form prior to focusing on the essence of the experience, on the contrary. My need to organize the data in this way was innately driven, based on how I personally take in information and make sense of it. Viewing data in terms of whole to part to whole once again surfaced as a theme specific to me and speaks to my own individual learning style. Once the themes were summarized as narratives, I was able to focus on the research questions and the phenomenon of school closure. For others considering phenomenology as a methodology, I share this as a warning in terms of choosing to study a topic in which you have shared lived experiences. It may call for additional steps and add to your timeframe as you sift through your own memories and experiences and set them aside. If I had chosen to study a social system in which I had limited prior experience, I believe the process of “bracketing” would have been much easier.
Data triangulation.

The goal for authenticity, which is demonstrated if the “researcher shows a range of different realities in a fair and balanced manner” (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 631) was met by triangulating the data sources, as well as by establishing a thorough process for gathering and analyzing the data. I allowed the necessary time for full immersion in the data, making this study a high priority. Additionally, I utilized respondent validation by seeking feedback on my emerging themes from the participants (Merriam, 2009).

During the interview process, I restated or summarized the information of the participants, followed by a question regarding the accuracy of their description. In most cases, the participants offered minor adjustments as to how I was coming to understand their experience, often expanding on my summary by providing even richer text related to an idea. I did not move to the next interview question until I was sure I had captured the essence of their story.

Each participant was given the opportunity to review his or her transcript for validation of content, specifically checking to see if an authentic representation was made of their lived experience and conscious understanding of the experience. I did have one participant that requested a change in the transcript to ensure confidentiality in the workplace. We worked together to restate the description in a way that protected confidentiality, while also maintaining the essence of the description. Also, by including opportunities for researcher reflexivity and peer review, I enhanced the credibility of my study (Merriam, 2009).

Lastly, I am not sure that all qualitative researchers would agree with me that setting the context for the study through the viewing of the DVD of the last graduation at
DeVilbiss and the viewing of pictures from the last DeVilbiss yearbook would qualify as data triangulation; however, I believe that it does. The empirical phenomenology approach involves “a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). In hindsight, these visuals played a critical role in transporting participants to the time period specific to the study. These visuals triggered the memories of the participants, which then allowed for rich, thick descriptions that contextualized the study (Merriam, 2009) and allowed for a kind of multi-dimensional data triangulation.

**The Role of the Researcher in Data Collection**

For this study, I served as the key instrument in the data collection process, conducting all interviews with participants. Facilitation of the research process is a reflection of the researchers own interpretation based upon cultural, social, gender, class and personal politics (Creswell, 2007). It is important that researchers be upfront about their personal background that may impact subjectivity in order to minimize the marginalization effect upon their participants and the audience (readers) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009). For example, I have extensive experience working in large urban school districts with high rates of poverty. My work experience combined with my research concentration has formed my belief about how knowledge is constructed.

I believe the achievement gap that exists between students of poverty and students who are not from poverty has little to do with intelligence or ability, but has much to do with access to resources and opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gould, 1996;
Ravitch, 2010; Rothstein, 2004). I agree with Ravitch (2010) and Darling-Hammond’s (2010) viewpoint that the extreme consequences of the No Child Left Behind Act are discriminatory because they will never affect the entire population. Students and families who are living in affluent communities will never experience the most severe consequences of NCLB, such as being labeled a “failure” and then experiencing school closure or reconstitution (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ravitch, 2010; Viteritti, 2005). The rules regarding “Adequate Yearly Progress” impact students primarily living in areas of high poverty, which tend to be urban or rural districts (Rebell & Wolff, 2008). My interest in the subject of school closure is motivated by these beliefs. I am very concerned about the impact of school closure because it appears to be increasing at a rapid pace in the urban areas. I am concerned about the long-term effects of school closure on a population that is already marginalized. My strong beliefs had the potential to be translated into subjectivity within the study if I did not build objectivity/subjectivity checks into my research opportunities. At the same time, my experience offered considerable knowledge from which I could draw during the interview process when choosing probes, and assisted me in the interpretation of data which was critical for questioning in follow up interviews.

**Particular Ethical Considerations**

To ensure that I protected the welfare of the participants, I followed all legal and ethical guidelines regarding the area of research. This study was designed with supervision from a Cleveland State University professor/advisor. Additionally, the study was reviewed and approved by the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I took measures to ensure the confidentiality of each participant and I handled
confidentiality respectfully and professionally. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms in the research reporting. Any contextual details that may reveal a participant’s identity were changed. A thorough description of the study was provided at the first meeting so that participants understood what was expected of them. Written consent was obtained from the participants prior to collecting data. Any comments that were made “off the record,” were not included in the research. As a public school administrator and a licensed school counselor, I am well aware of the ethical and moral issues pertaining to the area of research. One of my oaths as a school counselor was to first and foremost, do no harm. Additionally, I was trained to inform clients upfront regarding their rights and responsibilities in regard to the process, as well as informed consent and confidentiality. As a licensed professional educator, I have taken these issues very seriously and have continued this practice as a professional researcher.

**Trustworthiness.**

In order for research to be accepted by the scientific community, studies must be rigorous and trustworthy. In order to determine the trustworthiness of a study, it must be viewed within the context of validity and reliability (Merriam, 2009). The criteria used to ensure rigor should be congruent with the philosophical assumptions in which the research is based. In this particular study, it was within the constructivist-interpretive paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Merriam, 2009). Therefore, I chose the criteria of credibility, consistency and transferability as appropriate for this research.

**Credibility and internal validity.**

Credibility deals with how congruent the findings are with reality; that is are the findings credible given the data presented? The goal is for authenticity, which is
demonstrated if the “researcher shows a range of different realities in a fair and balanced manner” (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007, p. 631). By triangulating the data sources, as well as by establishing a thorough process for gathering and analyzing the data, I strengthened the credibility of my research (Merriam, 2009). I allowed the necessary time for full immersion in the data, making this study a high priority. Additionally, I utilized respondent validation by seeking feedback on my emerging themes from the participants (Merriam, 2009). Also, by including opportunities for researcher reflexivity and peer review, I enhanced the credibility of my study (Merriam, 2009).

**Consistency and reliability.**

Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated (Merriam, 2009). It is important to note that because human behavior is not static, qualitative studies are not designed with the goal of having high reliability. Research findings will vary when qualitative studies are replicated due to the human element. Each study tells its own story and is specific for that time, event or phenomenon. The more important question relates to how consistent the results are to the data being collected (Merriam, 2009). There are four main strategies that can be incorporated to strengthen the consistency of a qualitative study: triangulation, peer examination, reflexivity, and the audit trail. Three have already been discussed in the context of credibility; however, the audit trail requires further review. An audit trail describes in detail how the data were collected, how categories were derived, and how the data were analyzed; this is usually in the form of a research journal or record memos. By using record memos stored within the NVivo software, I have a comprehensive audit trail, which I have described earlier in this chapter.
Transferability and external validity.

In terms of external validity, it is helpful to review the differences between quantitative and qualitative research. In quantitative research, external validity is of the utmost concern; the goal is that the findings will be generalizable. In qualitative research, the goal is not generalizability, but transferability. In other words, the findings are discussed in terms of how useful they are to others in similar situations, with a similar research design and questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Guba and Lincoln (1981) point out that transferability begins with the topic of investigation, it must be viewed as relevant; if there is no audience regarding the topic, the study is meaningless (as cited in Merriam, 2009). In order for an audience or a reader to determine if a study is transferable, the study must use rich thick descriptions that contextualize the study (Merriam, 2009). Another way to enhance transferability is to allow for maximum variation in the sample. This study was designed to allow for as much variation as possible within the targeted population of those experiencing the studied phenomenon, specifically in regard to race, gender, and social engagement. However, I did experience some limitations in this area that are discussed in the next section.

Limitations.

This study does have some limitations. There is the potential for researcher bias due to my past experience working as a teacher, counselor and administrator at Toledo Public Schools. I have no relationship with the participants in the study, but I do have a history with the school district. While I have taken precautions to minimize researcher bias, I am human. All humans have tendencies toward bias that can surface at the most
unpredictable times. While I was able to draw from my acquired skills as a professional educator, especially my experience as a school counselor, I am still a novice researcher.

Another possible limitation pertains to the relationship between the researcher and participants. The quality of the data collected is dependent upon my ability to form trusting relationships with the participants, as well as my ability to facilitate an effective interview. It takes time to form a close, trusting relationship with the participants. The limited contact I had with each participant may not have been a sufficient amount of time. This is especially true for participants Linda and Shaina, who were interviewed within a one-day period in two separate interview sessions with a break in between.

Lastly, I am concerned about the ability to maximize variation within the sample, thus increasing the transferability of the study. Ideally, the sample was to include an even number of students who transferred from DeVilbiss High School to each of the receiving schools, and within these groups, there was to be racial and gender balance. As noted earlier, in terms of race, the perspective that was not represented was that of a black male student. However, purposive sampling is often impacted by the accessibility of participants. I was unable to secure a diverse sampling, resulting in a limitation in terms of the transferability of the study.

**Reflective Writing**

**Introduction.**

This section touches on the role of reflexivity in qualitative methods. According to Morrow (2005), researcher reflexivity is an “opportunity for the researcher to understand how her or his own experiences and understanding of the world affect the research process” (p. 253). While working through the analysis, I often included
reflective thoughts. As I went through the reduction process, I pulled all of the reflective statements out and set them aside. However, it is important for the reader to understand the role reflective writing played in the data analysis process prior to moving into the data findings, which is why I included a sampling in this section.

**Examples of reflective writings.**

Written reflections helped with the data analysis in important ways. First, the reflections reminded me of where my thoughts were as I was writing particular sections, which strengthened the contextualization of the findings. In my mind, these reflections supported the audit trail. The reflections also spoke to new personal insight, which may be further investigated through future research. An example of this would be in regard to Shaina, who spoke about the culture shock for her as an African-American moving from an integrated high school to an all-black high school. In that particular data analysis section, I included a reflection that read, “Admittedly, prior to this study, I had given little thought about what it would feel like for a black student to go from an integrated school setting to a segregated, all-black high school” (Toneff-Cotner, 2014).

I was fascinated with the level of detachment described by Treva as she narrated her transitional experience to her receiving school. She recalled that she made a conscious decision to detach even before she entered Rogers High School for what would be her senior year. Other than the detachment, Treva remembered very little else about her senior year at Rogers. As an adult now, it bothered her that she appeared to have some memory loss in terms of her receiving school experience. While working on the data analysis for this section, which I had included under the subtheme, “relational trust,” I interjected the following reflection:
I had noticed a pattern with Treva in that she had difficulty remembering details of her year spent at Rogers. It was as if she had checked out for that year. I spent much time reflecting on the role that engaging relationships have on memory and decided to set it aside as a potential study at a later date. I saw this as having potential implications for research that pertains to teaching and learning.

(Toneff-Cotner, 2014)

Another example would be in regard to Stacey, who seemed to gain a new awareness of the impact of her own school closure experience as a result of participating in the study, specifically, the interview process. In the description below, Stacey began by speaking about how she felt that she had virtually no control over her life at the time of the school closure and transition experience. However, toward the end of the description, she transitioned into a narrative regarding the idea that she did have control over her grades and blamed herself for the fact that her grades declined at her receiving school.

Because I can control certain things in my life, but like I can’t control… even back then I couldn’t control them closing down the school or me going to Start, but I could have been able to control me keeping my GPA up or still continuing to try to do as well as I did at DeVilbiss. I had control over that portion of it, but I chose not to let that part grow.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

As I was working through the data analysis for this particular description, I included the following reflection in which I raised questions for consideration that may lead to additional research.
Stacey’s narrative suggests some tension between what she experienced in terms of school closure and societal discourse regarding the belief that an individual is able to overcome adversity. Taken a step further, the societal discourse suggests that if a person cannot overcome the adversity, the problem lies with that person. There is evidence within Stacey’s description that suggests students who go through school closure and transition run the risk of internalizing their experience and blaming themselves for the problems incurred as a result of moving through the process of school closure and transition. This is a question for consideration, along with the thought that perhaps students who are going through school closure and transition lack the ability at that time to view the experience holistically. It may be that it is only after time and distance that the student is able to view the experience systemically or holistically. Further evidence of this is the fact that there were times within the interview that participants appeared to be realizing things for the very first time, as if by stepping away and revisiting the experience had allowed them to connect the dots. I believe that Stacey was one of the participants who had such an “ah-ha” moment.

(Toneff-Cotner, 2014)

After I had completed the analysis for “sense of belonging,” as well as “grief and loss,” I began to see the interrelation of both of the themes. As a result, I wrote the following reflection:

As the analysis of social themes progressed, I began to see the interconnectedness of them. For example, “familiarity” and “shared experience” played a role in the subtheme, “identity,” which I viewed as a subtheme of the overarching theme,
“grief and loss.” However, “familiarity” and “shared experience” had also surfaced in the overarching theme, “sense of belonging.” Similarly, while I identified “relational trust” as a subtheme of the overarching theme, “sense of belonging,” undeniably, it also surfaced in the subtheme, “identity.” As I pondered the interconnectedness of themes and subthemes, I once again was faced with the complexity of social systems and the importance of viewing systems systemically and contextually (Senge, 2007).

(Toneff-Cotner, 2014)

I stopped writing long enough to create a visual representation of the conceptualization of the themes as represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Visual conceptualization of the interconnectedness of themes.

I used reflective writings to also help identify any subjectivity that may have surfaced during the data analysis. For example, I became melancholy at one point in my analysis and inserted the following description:

While working on the data regarding place identity and attachment, I was often reminded of my own experiences with death and dying. One of my most recent was also one of my most significant losses, my mother who passed away in 2008.
There were descriptions provided by the participants that reminded me of how closely my identity was connected to and defined by my mother. After her passing, I felt I lost myself for a while. I also struggled with my attachment to her physical things, especially the house in which I was raised. I think it is important to note this so that the reader understands my thought process in connecting identity issues and place attachment under the overarching theme, “grief and loss.”

(Toneff-Cotner, 2014)

This last example is a representation of the depth of the exploration in the interview, as well as an example of how the study was guided by social constructivism. In regard to the interview sessions, Treva stated, “It’s like therapy for me. I knew school closure affected me, but I didn’t really know how much. I knew something was missing, but I didn’t make the connection to why.” It was the act of going through the interview that helped Treva connect the feeling that something was missing to the fact that she did not feel connected to a high school and the role that the disruption of her senior year played in her not being able to have such a connection. This was a new awareness for her. At the end of our last interview, I thanked Treva and she responded by giving a closing statement that summarized what she learned about herself, given time and distance, looking back on the experience of school closure and transition.

No I… I want to say I thank you for this because I did not think that it affected…. I knew it affected me but I didn’t know, like, I guess how deep or how much. Because it did affect me but I think I just kind of went with the flow because I
knew I didn’t really have any choices, you know…now looking back we really didn’t.

Summary.

Treva’s narrative suggests that she experienced an important change as a result of participating in this study. I, too, was changed. I was on a journey with all five participants, one that often felt like an emotional roller coaster ride. Reflexive thinking and writing played an important role in that journey. Reflexive writing was key to the analysis process, the results of which follow in the next few chapters within which the key themes of the study are discussed. I have evidence of the depth of the impact of these reflexive writings due to the fact that I prepared my initial findings in 2013 as required for the David E. Clark Scholar Seminar. At that time, I was in the beginning stages of the analysis. When I recently completed this dissertation in the spring of 2015, I reviewed my initial findings from 2013 and compared them with my latest findings. There was no comparison in terms of the surface-level findings from 2013 to the mature, thoughtful analysis presented in the next few chapters.
CHAPTER IV

STUDY FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to understand the long-term impact of school closure among those who experienced the process of school closure two decades ago as an important and understudied phenomenon. In particular, the study explored the social and psychological dimensions of school closure, such as identity, social capital, relational trust, community connectedness and engagement, school and community pride, tradition, and the sense of belonging. The study investigated the experiences of students who lived through a school closure, who transitioned to a neighboring school, and who are now grown adults. The study also examined the nature of the transition experience of moving from one high school to another. The study used semi-structured interviews to explore issues related to the transitional experience. Of specific interest was how the participants make meaning of the experience of school closure, given time and distance from the event and now in the voice of mature adults with substantial life experience.
Additionally, the study explored if and how social connections were sustained after the closing of the high school, particularly those connections with individuals and groups nearest to the community in which they resided at the time the school was closed.

The principal research question for this study was: How do adults, who as teenagers attended a school that closed during their high school career, describe the impact of school closure on their lives? Embedded within this phenomenon were additional questions that required exploration in order to gain an understanding of the main research phenomenon of school closure in its entirety. Therefore, the following sub-questions were investigated:

1. How do adults, whose high schools closed while they were attending them, describe their experience of school closure and transition?

2. How have these adults sustained connections to their community, particularly in terms of maintaining a sense of pride, tradition, and identification to that community?

**Setting the Context**

The research paradigm for this study was constructivist-interpretive. Thus, an emphasis was placed on presenting the findings situated within the social and historical context as described by the participants. Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to allow the reader to view key themes as they emerged within the descriptions of the participants and to gain an understanding of how specific themes were associated with specific events related to the school closure experience. Once the contextual foundation is established in this chapter, I will present a detailed analysis of the key findings in subsequent chapters.
Due to the fact that this chapter emphasizes the need to contextualize the participants’ narratives, I begin with a reintroduction to the participant’s demographic data from chapter three, followed by a brief summary of each participant. Table 1 provides demographic information of each of the five participants for this study. They are listed in the order in which they were interviewed.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Receiving School</th>
<th># Years at DeVilbiss</th>
<th># Years at Receiving School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treva</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Rogers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dale</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stacey</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaina</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Participant Demographic Data*

Note: B=Black; W=White; M=Male; F=Female

**Treva.**

Treva graduated from Rogers High School in 1992. Prior to her senior year at Rogers, she attended DeVilbiss High School for three years. Treva attended both private and public elementary schools. Treva attended Robinson Junior High School in seventh and eighth grade. Treva is African-American. When the attendance zones were redrawn after the closing of DeVilbiss in 1991, Treva’s family resided within the Rogers High School attendance area. Treva’s neighbors who lived only “a couple blocks over” lived
in the attendance zone designated for Scott High School. Treva knew students attending Scott High School due to the fact that her neighborhood bordered on the Scott High School attendance zone and also because she had attended Robinson Junior High, the primary feeder junior high for Scott High School. She considered attending Scott High School, but her parents would not allow it. Treva narrowed her selection to either Rogers or Start, but ultimately, she chose to attend Rogers High School. After graduating from Rogers High School, Treva attended college and earned her teaching degree. She now resides in the City of Toledo with her husband and children. She is employed as a teacher for the Toledo Public Schools. Treva sent her children to an elementary in the Toledo Public Schools for Kindergarten through sixth grade. She chose to send her children to a private secondary school beginning in seventh grade.

Dale.

Dale graduated from Start High School in 1994. He was a freshman at the time DeVilbiss closed. He attended Old Orchard Elementary and then DeVeaux Junior High. Dale remembered the Old Orchard area where he resided being occupied by white middle-class families. Dale is white and he was at DeVilbiss for one year prior to its closure. He then transferred to Start High School, entering as a sophomore. At the time of the closing of DeVilbiss, Dale’s parents were middle-class professionals. Dale had a family member who was actively involved in the district as a member of the school board for a period of time that included the closing of DeVilbiss. Dale graduated from college with a major in political science. Dale no longer lives in the Toledo area, but resides in the eastern part of the United States. He is married with children and has a job that
requires him to have expertise in political, economic and legal issues. His children attend the public school designated for the area in which they live.

**Linda.**

Linda graduated from Start High School in 1993. Linda is white and resided in the Old Orchard area. She attended a private elementary school prior to attending DeVeaux Junior High. She discussed what it was like to go from attending a sixth grade that had 12 students to then going to DeVeaux Junior High, which she remembered as having a seventh grade class of 600 or more students. After completing eighth grade at DeVeaux, she attended DeVilbiss High School for two years prior to its closure. She then transferred to Start High School, entering as a junior. Linda described her neighborhood as being “adjacent to the University of Toledo” and consisting of primarily “middle class to upper class” families. At the time of the closing of DeVilbiss, her mother was actively involved in the parent and community organization, “Friends of DeVilbiss,” and was working diligently to save the school from closure. Linda’s mother was also a teacher for Toledo Public Schools at the time of the closure. Linda attended college out-of-state and currently works in marketing and advertising. Linda is single and has dedicated herself to her career, which has required her to move several times. She is currently located in the southern part of the United States.

**Stacey.**

Stacey graduated from Start High School in 1993. She resided in what is referred to as the Auburn-Delaware area. She moved out of this area in 2002, although her parents still live in their family home. Stacey described her neighborhood as being “nice back then” and having a lot of diversity within the population. Stacey is an African-
American. She described a real sense of community in her old neighborhood, stating, “Everybody kept tabs on everybody’s kids.” She attended both public and private elementary schools. She attended DeVeaux Junior High followed by DeVilbiss High School until the time of its closure. She spent two years at DeVilbiss High School, transferring to Start High School her junior year. Stacey attended college but did not earn a degree. Stacey is single and lives in the City of Toledo. She works two jobs; one is in retail and the other is in early childhood education.

**Shaina.**

Shaina graduated from Scott High School in 1992. When she attended DeVilbiss, she lived in the family home where her parents still reside. The home is located near The University of Toledo. Shaina is African-American. She attended Nathan Hale Elementary then DeVeaux Junior High. She was at DeVilbiss High School for three years prior to its closure. Shaina held a class office during her junior year at DeVilbiss. She then transferred to Scott High School for her senior year. She had most of her credits needed for graduation when she entered Scott, so she attended half days her senior year. Shaina majored in economics in college and currently is working in the insurance field. She attended a university in the South that is recognized as a historically black university. Shaina is married and lives in the City of Toledo. She lives in a neighborhood that is in the Rogers High School attendance area. Her children are enrolled in Toledo Public Schools and attend one of their K-8 specialty schools.

**The Themes**

In order to fully capture each individual’s experience of school closure, the participants’ stories had to be viewed historically and contextually. It is for this reason
that I chose to first discuss the themes that imply a chronological order and were associated with a specific event related to the school closure experience. Those themes are: The DeVilbiss Experience, The Closing of DeVilbiss, The Transition Experience, and The Receiving School Experience. After providing the reader with a narrative timeline that allows for a historical and social contextual view of the data, I present a detailed analysis in Chapter 5 of the social and psychological themes that emerged. Those themes are: Sense of Belonging and Grief and Loss. Within those primary themes, there were subthemes that emerged. The subthemes for Sense of Belonging are: Inclusive/Exclusive Environment, Social and/or Human Capital, and Relational Trust. The subthemes for Grief and Loss are: No Control/No Voice, Identity, Place Identity/Place Attachment, Lack of Closure, and Agency. Finally, in Chapter 6, I present the themes that were reflective and retrospective in nature and address the long-term impact of the school closure and transition experience. Those themes are: Community Connectedness/Pride and Tradition, and Impact on Life. Table 2 shows the themes and subthemes in the order that they will be presented and discussed.

Table 4

Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme (Parent Node)</th>
<th>Subtheme (Children Nodes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The DeVilbiss Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Closing of DeVilbiss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Transition to Receiving School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Receiving School Experience

Sense of Belonging or Its Absence

- Inclusive/Exclusive Environment
- Social and/or Human Capital
- Relational Trust

Grief and Loss

- No Control/No Voice
- Identity
- Place Identity/Place Attachment
- Lack of Closure
- Agency

Community Connectedness/
Pride and Tradition

Impact on Life

Data Analysis

Introduction.

This chapter continues with an overview of the following themes: The DeVilbiss High School Experience, The Closing of DeVilbiss, The Transition Experience, and The Receiving High School Experience. It is important to note that in this section in which chronologically ordered themes are introduced, I do not go into extensive analysis and/or interpretation. After each theme is presented with only the naïve descriptions of the participants, I follow up with a brief summary in which I draw attention to the social and psychological themes as they emerged at the various chronological stages.

The DeVilbiss High School Experience

Introduction.

“No year was like DeVilbiss.” (Dale, December, 2012)
In order to understand the impact that school closure and transition had on the participants, it is important to first understand how the participants experienced DeVilbiss High School. Each participant’s description was unique; however, there was much commonality in terms of the essence of the experience of the culture and climate of DeVilbiss High School.

**Integrated and diverse.**

Each participant described DeVilbiss as an integrated high school with racial diversity and viewed the experience of an integrated high school positively. Shaina, who is African-American, began describing what DeVilbiss was like by stating, “So we had a good experience and DeVilbiss was diverse.” Linda, who is white, stated, “We certainly knew kids from all different backgrounds.” Stacey, another black female participant, described her experience at DeVilbiss as being very “positive” and emphasized the fact that it was integrated.

Well, the main thing I liked about DeVilbiss is that it wasn’t an all-black school or all-white school or all…it was just such a good mix and just like in my picture [in the yearbook], you can hang out with anybody without it seeming like, “why is she hanging out with those people?” It was just such a good culture; it was just such a good mix of everybody. You know, it was not divided like, I guess like the kids of today are.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

**Welcoming, engaging, and intimate.**

Linda, who is white, did not recall any bullying taking place at DeVilbiss, in spite of the diversity of the population, stating, “I don’t remember kids getting made fun of for
being poor, or how they dressed or things.” Linda believed that one of the reasons everyone got along so well had to do with the amount of opportunity at DeVilbiss. The student enrollment was not as large as other high schools in comparison and so there was a lot to do for students. Linda described how the small student population at DeVilbiss impacted the student relationships, she stated, “It was just everybody kind of knew everybody and then it was really just still, from my recollection, it was very neighborhood based.”

When I asked Stacey to describe DeVilbiss, she stated, “Everything from my two years there was just really so fun and exciting because I was in all the different events and sports.” Stacey played volleyball, basketball and ran track at DeVilbiss. She was also in the choir and was an office helper at DeVilbiss. Table 3 provides an overview of the extracurricular activities each participant was involved in while attending DeVilbiss High School. In addition to the sports and clubs shown in Table 3, Linda and Dale, a second white participant, reported that that they were in honor’s classes and Stacey made reference to the fact that she made honor roll two semesters at DeVilbiss her sophomore year. Also important to note is the fact that Treva self-reported as someone who was “not a social person.” While she was not active in any sports or clubs, she did have a strong social network while at DeVilbiss, stating, “You get to school early just to sit there and talk to somebody, you know what I mean?”

Table 5

*Participant Involvement in DeVilbiss Extracurricular Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>DeVilbiss Extracurricular Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treva</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each participant used the word, “fun” when describing DeVilbiss. It wasn’t just their words that created a picture of the DeVilbiss culture back in 1991, I could also hear the “fun” in their voices as they spoke and I could see it in their facial expressions. Treva believed that DeVilbiss was very “welcoming” and laughed when she shared a memory of her husband who had graduated from a neighboring Toledo Public school. Treva explained, “My husband says that DeVilbiss was the fun school.” Treva referred to DeVilbiss as having a “family” feeling, adding, “People would accept you for who you were you know what I mean? It just seemed like everyone seemed a little bit open.”

Like Treva, Dale also described DeVilbiss as a “close, intimate family.” He remembered it as being a lot of fun, stating, “it [DeVilbiss] was a small place, it was a place where the adults try to recognize talent very quickly and get people involved.” Dale described how both the soccer coach and the cross-country coach contacted him over the
summer before his freshman year to recruit him for their programs. Dale, who had not shown much interest in sports in junior high, agreed to play on two fall sport teams.

So, I walked into the door, so I went to cross country everyday starting in the end of July, beginning August, I started soccer shortly thereafter, was in the locker room everyday with the football team.

(Dale, December, 2012)

**Tradition and academics.**

DeVilbiss was described by the participants as being a social school, rich in tradition and academic rigor with a caring and highly competent faculty. Dale believed that rigor was part of “the organizational DNA” at DeVilbiss and explained the role the staff played in supporting the academic environment, stating, “The best about DeVilbiss was it was a great school and it had thoughtful and caring adults, top to bottom.”

Stacy was proud of her academic achievement while attending DeVilbiss, stating, “I made honor roll two semesters, I made honor roll as a sophomore.” Shaina also referenced the academic rigor at DeVilbiss, stating, “The curriculum…. they were on us about our education you know that’s one thing about DeVilbiss.” In terms of traditions at DeVilbiss, Shaina shared a vivid memory she had about the 8th grade orientation experience at DeVilbiss and the sense of pride and tradition associated with the senior hallway.

I can remember when we went over as 8th Graders from DeVeaux; we had our pep rally at DeVilbiss … we were so excited to come to DeVilbiss High School … and at that time they had the senior hallway, where the upper classmen, the football players, the volleyball players, the track, they would all be in this hallway
and my girl friend and I were like, “Oh, we’re gonna have our lockers in this hallway” and we did. (laughs) All three years, we never ever moved our lockers.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

Tradition as a theme was not only evident in the school’s activities, but also in the generations of families that attended the school. Participants recalled family members who had graduated from DeVilbiss. According to Linda, her mother had graduated from DeVilbiss and was looking forward to having her daughter continue that tradition. Other participants spoke about their siblings who had attended and graduated from DeVilbiss. Shaina remembered, “I was so excited to attend DeVilbiss because all the older kids from our block were DeVilbiss graduates.” Her older brother graduated in the late 1980’s from DeVilbiss, and she stated, “It was like an exciting time.” Treva and Stacey also mentioned that they had siblings who had graduated from DeVilbiss.

The architecture.

The participants spoke about the physical plant of DeVilbiss, referring to the architectural design of the building. Dale was fascinated with the DeVilbiss physical plant. He described it as being “gorgeous and inspiring,” even though he remembered that there were places where the plaster was peeling. In the description below, Linda discussed the physical space of DeVilbiss, providing a vivid description of what it felt like to walk its halls in 1991.

The physical space … it was also enormous, its height, you know? It was built that way, with high ceilings and big rooms and windows everywhere. So, it was a big difference from being in a one story very spread out junior high to a two story, you know, grand building like that.
The music program.

According to Dale and Shaina, the orchestra program at DeVilbiss was perhaps the best in the city. Dale remembered the orchestra as having a large number of students as compared to the band, which he reported had few students. Participants identified the music program at DeVilbiss as a strength, specifically recognizing the choir director. From the perspective of the participants, the choir director was an exceptional teacher. Stacey really enjoyed being in choir at DeVilbiss and remembered the choir director with great fondness.

[The DeVilbiss Choir Director] was just so, he was just really genuine. He was just really into all of the kids, all of us. …It wasn’t just singing, you know we did moves and dances.

According to Stacey, the DeVilbiss Choir Director involved the students in the selection of the music. He also took the choir to a variety of places to perform, including St. Louis. Regarding the trip to St. Louis, she stated, “I still have pictures of that too. We all had our DeVilbiss T-shirts on at the airport. That was fun. We had a good time.”

Individual nuances.

Within the descriptions of DeVilbiss, there were some individual nuances worth noting. When I asked Dale to state the worst thing about DeVilbiss, he said, “The worst thing was I started as a freshman with 520 kids and I ended as a freshman with about 190.” I asked where all those students went and he stated, “They dropped out, they didn’t
transfer; they were just gone.” While other participants did discuss the low enrollment at DeVilbiss, only Dale raised the issue of freshman dropping out at a significant rate.

Linda was the only participant to mention any memory of school violence while attending DeVilbiss. Regarding gang activity, she stated, “I definitely recall some incidents of gang violence or being aware of gangs and people being on our campus that shouldn’t have been.” Linda mentioned not only gang activity at DeVilbiss, but she also recalled some fighting between the students. She stated, “So, those were the negatives, because as a small person from a relatively well to do [neighborhood], I had never seen that before.”

**Summary of the DeVilbiss High School experience.**

Participants described DeVilbiss High School as “open,” “intimate,” and “familiar.” Participants implied that they experienced a strong sense of belonging while attending DeVilbiss. Trusting relationships, both with peers and faculty, resulted in students having a strong sense that they belonged, with references to DeVilbiss as feeling like “family.” This culture of “care” played a critical role in the students’ adolescent identity development and formation. Students identified with the various social groups in which they belonged, groups that the students either self-selected by interest, or were assigned to by staff based on ability. An example of a self-selected group would be the “neighborhood-based” student groups described by Linda. An example of an ability-based group would be the sport teams as described by Dale, Stacey, and Linda. While there were groups within DeVilbiss that were exclusive, for example, the “honor” students, there were many more groups that were inclusive due to the low student enrollment, which allowed for students from various races and social backgrounds
opportunities to interact. Interactions between diverse groups of students resulted in shared experiences. Given time and distance, these shared experiences resulted in shared history as evident in the descriptions of the five participants. These points of intersection played a key role in the “family feeling” described by participants. Participants had a strong sense of community and respected the history and tradition associated with DeVilbiss High School. Participants expressed pride in having attended DeVilbiss High School. While the majority of the statements about DeVilbiss by the participants were positive, there were descriptions that implied the school had reached a stage of contraction, for example, the “low student enrollment.” One participant also mentioned “gang activity,” which may have been a symptom of decline within the neighborhoods surrounding DeVilbiss. In regard to the physical plant, one participant spoke about plaster peeling in various areas of the building. This would have been an indication that the building was in need of some repair.

The Experience of School Closure

Introduction.

While there was little variance between the participants in how they experienced DeVilbiss High School, there were subtle differences in terms of how they remembered the actual closing of the school. What follows are descriptions of how the participants recalled the events related to the closing, including how they first learned that DeVilbiss was chosen as one of the schools to be closed.

Prior to the closing announcement.

According to the participants, the timeframe for the closing announcement ranged from December 1990 to the spring of 1991. However, Dale was in the unique position of
having an inside view of district issues because of his relationship with a family member who was on the school board, stating, “I was kind of in the middle of just this whole activity.” Dale recalled, “January is kind of when everything started to happen.” Dale was able to provide some background regarding how the district reached the point of having to close schools.

There was this whole period of kind of, over winter break, because we had Issues Eight and Nine on the ballot in November of 1990. [Issue] Nine passed, which was the infrastructure bill like or ballot, I believe, and the operating ballot, which was [Issue] Eight, failed. So, they said, “We got to close two high schools” in the short-term aftermath of that, and so they kind of came up with a preliminary list, which was Macomber, Libbey and DeVilbiss.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Like Dale, Linda also remembered the district was having financial troubles, stating, “I think there was a levy that failed to raise taxes that would have kept extracurricular activities going. Well, that was the threat anyway.”

Stacey remembered that there were three high schools being considered for closure and that the school board was going to close two of the three being considered. Stacy recalled the candle light vigil that was held in the winter prior to the announcement of the closing in an effort to save DeVilbiss. She made a point of showing me the picture of her at the candlelight vigil that was in the DeVilbiss yearbook. According to Stacey, at the time of the vigil, she and her peers felt certain that DeVilbiss would survive the threat of closure. Two of the participants, Dale and Linda, provided descriptions of the public hearing held at the administration building. This hearing was for community members
from the three schools at risk of being closed: DeVilbiss, Libbey, and Macomber. Each community, including school staff and students, was allowed to plea their case for keeping their school open. It is within the participants’ descriptions associated with this particular time period when the participants first introduced the phenomenon of an “us versus them” feeling. Community members identified strongly with their neighborhood high school and once their school was targeted for closure, the other high schools in the district were viewed as the enemy. The potential school closing pitted one school against the other, as described by the participants in the descriptions that follow.

Dale remembered the community forum held at the Thurgood Marshall Building in which communities could come and plea their case for keeping their school open. He stated, “DeVilbiss was to go first and I do not remember the time, but we showed up and the whole place was full of Start High School parents and students.” Dale was not the only participant in the study to tell me about this incident. Linda had also been in attendance. Both Dale and Linda explained that the Start High School community was not on the agenda for the forum because Start was not one of the schools targeted for closure. The three schools targeted were DeVilbiss, Libbey, and Macomber. However, the Start High School staff and community members were represented at the forum. They arrived early and created such a presence that there was only limited seating available for the schools that were on the agenda. Ultimately, the school board had to intervene prior to the beginning of the meeting by asking the people from Start High School to vacate the seats. Dale offered his perception behind the motivation of the Start High School community.
They were ah...they did not want black kids from DeVilbiss going to Start and that is why they were there and they spun some line about, you know, “Oh! We heard rumors Start was going to close” and that is what one of the parents said in the news broadcast that night, and it was just totally bull.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Dale described the community forum and the behavior by the Start High School community as “the most inconsiderate thing” he had ever experienced in his life.

It was very hateful and hurtful and I will never forget it. So, then we start late and you know get all those yahoos out of there and they all had letterman jackets on, and to this day it is all I think of when I see a Start letterman jacket.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Linda also remembered the hearings held in which community members could make a case for keeping DeVilbiss open.

I definitely remember that there was a big hearing at the school board that for two of us… there was a big group representing DeVilbiss and there was a big group representing one of the other schools and it was like a tug of war for seats and everybody wanted to be heard and seen and have their presence known, because it was going to be an either-or [decision].

(Linda, January, 2013)

In her description, Linda refers to “two” schools that were being considered. Her reference is directed at DeVilbiss and Libbey, both of which were traditional comprehensive high schools. The third school being considered was a technical high school, Macomber. The participants explained that there was the belief that Macomber
was going to close no matter what happened at the community forum, leaving the two comprehensive high schools to battle it out. Linda remembered making signs to hold at the forum and recalled conversations that took place between the parents. She stated, “The problem was that DeVilbiss was [viewed as] an all-black high school, they [the larger community] didn’t really see it as integrated.” According to Linda, at the time of the closing, DeVilbiss was approximately 60% black and 40% white. However, because DeVilbiss had become a “black” majority, the parents she overheard conversing at the public hearing no longer considered it to be an “integrated” high school.

Dale remembered DeVilbiss as being first on the agenda, followed by Macomber and then finally Libbey. Dale explained that one of his closest friends who had spoken at the forum was featured in the news, stating, “The next morning, she was the lead on all of the late night news because she had a very emotional response.” Dale explained that he was not as emotional about the situation, stating, “but I could understand it, but the writing was on the wall.”

**Initial reaction.**

While the participants expressed varying memories pertaining to the facts around the closing of DeVilbiss, there was continuity in terms of their feelings and emotions. Each participant described anger and a sense of loss leading up to the closing, as well as after the closing was announced. Participants provided descriptions that spoke to the grief they experienced and the loss they felt, using words like “angry” and “sad.” Each participant described the anxiety they felt as they considered life after DeVilbiss.

Linda, who was a cheerleader for DeVilbiss, remembered vividly when she learned that DeVilbiss was definitely one of the schools chosen to close. It happened
during an away game at Start High School. Linda described what it felt like to receive that information while at a sporting event against their biggest rival, Start High School. She stated, “It was either during the game or right before the game, because we were, I remember us standing in their gym knowing that that [Start] was going to be our school next year.”

Stacey does not remember many details about the closing, but she does remember her emotional state. She remembered “a lot of crying” and recalled that “it did not feel like we belonged anymore.” Stacey’s comment alludes to the idea that there was an immediate impact on the school climate once the announcement was made. For Stacey, it resulted in a breakdown of her sense of belonging. Stacey remembered feeling as if she wanted to withdraw, stating, “It just didn’t feel...like it was over. You didn’t feel like, you know, you wanted to go to class.” Stacey described the day she heard the announcement.

I remember this day because everyone was really hoping that we could get through… that we could change things, but I think once they announced that everything was just so sad and there was a big decision, I knew I would have to make a move, I was going to have to go to Start because that would be the next, you know the closest school.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Friends and family members surrounded Shaina when the announcement was made on the news.

I will never ever ever forget when they told us that they were going to announce what schools were going to close, at that time, it was DeVilbiss, Libbey and
Macomber, and we knew out of the three, two were going to close, and we just knew it was going to be Libbey, we just knew it. So, I remember it was myself, my parents, my brother and just more classmates from DeVilbiss, we were all in my basement and we were watching the news, Channel 11, and they announced, that’s how we found out.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

After the announcement to close DeVilbiss was made, Shaina remembered that she had gone to Scott High School, which was to be her receiving school, to pick up her schedule for her senior year with two of her friends who also would be attending there. One of the displaced DeVilbiss students that went with her was a close friend of Shaina’s who passed away shortly after Shaina graduated. After picking up their schedules, Shaina recalled, “I remember going back to DeVilbiss and we just sat like in the bleachers. We just could not believe our school had closed. We were devastated, we were devastated.” Even after some time had passed and she had made plans to attend Scott High School, Shaina continued to have feelings of shock, loss and denial.

Treva described her initial reaction to the announcement of the closing of DeVilbiss as “anger” however, as she continued to explore her feelings, it became apparent that her anger was really driven by fear.

I think for me, I’m not a good person with change, even as an adult now, like you know what I’m mean? I’m not one that, you know, I just don’t like change, cause I always like to think like in the future, like, “ok what is it going to be like?” You know you try to think about all that other stuff and looking back, that could be
why I was so mad, like, “these [receiving school students] aren’t gonna be my friends, I don’t know them.”

(Treva, November, 2012)

Dale remembered being at the board meeting when the decision to close DeVilbiss was made. He described the aftermath of the announcement and its immediate impact on his family.

I was at the administration building when my [family member on the school board] voted to close it and [was very emotional]. My sister who was in eighth grade, who had her entire life planned in front of her and was looking forward to going to DeVilbiss was distraught and inconsolable … I mean that is all we talked about, really not all, but I mean, this was the enormous topic of conversation for months on end.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Dale shared a story about being the target of a harassing phone call due to his family relationship to one of the board members who voted to close DeVilbiss. The person on the other end of the phone threatened to beat him up. Dale remembered one of his parents listening in on the phone call, who then came down and talked about it with him afterwards. After Dale recalled what it was like to experience the closing of DeVilbiss, he stated, “At the end, I just wanted it to be over, you know?”

**Why DeVilbiss?**

Participants spent a significant amount of time talking about “why” DeVilbiss was chosen for closing. The financial hardship of the district and the money required to repair the DeVilbiss roof surfaced as reasons for the closure. Linda remembered
conversations pertaining to the roof repairs, recalling that she had heard the roof would cost “tens of thousands of dollars” to fix. There was also the idea, as noted by Linda and Dale, that it had become too integrated and was inching its way to becoming a majority black high school. From Linda’s perspective, the decision made was either a financial one or it was made in order to further segregate the district by closing an integrated high school. One participant, Dale, believed the declining enrollment of the student body contributed to the closing of DeVilbiss.

Treva also remembered the roof being discussed as a reason for the closure. However, in the description that follows, her question of “why” DeVilbiss had to close was much more personal.

It was, “Why did they have to close our senior year, why couldn’t they just phase it out?” You never think about the people behind you and that the cycle would continue and the same thing would then happen to them that happened to us, but you’re not thinking about that, you’re thinking, “Why me, why this year and why it couldn’t wait?” And they kept talking about the roof.

(Treva, November, 2012)

Each participant shared ideas about why DeVilbiss closed and each found him or herself still making a case for why it should have remained open. As Linda pointed out, there was much speculation about why DeVilbiss closed.

So, it was sort of this cross conversation always about, is it the money? Is it the racial make up of the school? Was it the economic make up of the school, like, you know? Everyone sort of had an opinion and assumptions.

(Linda, January, 2013)
**Change in school climate and staff morale.**

Once the announcement was made to close DeVilbiss, participants described a chaotic, disruptive school year that did not focus on teaching and learning, but on highly charged emotions and drama, permeating the school climate. Participants described the process of closing down the school year using words like “final,” “normalcy,” and “closure.” Their descriptions of the process were much like closing the estate after the loss of a loved one.

Treva described the school climate after the announcement of the closing was made, stating, “I remember people crying, I mean it was sad.” She described a depressed environment and a school staff that was unprepared for the news, adding, “I don’t think that even the staff at DeVilbiss even expected it.” Treva believed the closing of DeVilbiss caught the staff by surprise and that they were not prepared to handle the day-to-day operations through the end of the school year.

They didn’t know what to say either, because it was almost like the big elephant in the room, you knew it was closing, they talked about things, they did the yearbook, all of those different little things to have some form of closure.

(Treva, November, 2012)

Treva recalled that someone from the board office visited the school to discuss the closing, stating, “I remember that but I don’t remember why and they [the students] were yelling and screaming and saying different things… we knew his name as if he were just like another student.”

From all five participants, this was the only description indicating that any form of student-initiated protest occurred. Treva remembered that some of her friends in the
junior class at DeVilbiss rushed to get their credits for graduation to avoid having to transfer to another high school for their senior year. Her friend’s action to graduate early as a way to avoid transitioning to a new school could be viewed as a form of silent protest or agency in reaction to the disruption caused by school closure. Treva explained.

Because I had a couple of friends who went to night school and they did a couple of other different little things to try to rush to get the last couple of credits so they could graduate in that last class because they did not want to go from another school.

(Treva, November, 2012)

Treva had considered doing the same, but her mother would not support her in that decision. Treva and her cousin made a conscious decision to make the most of their junior year at DeVilbiss because they did not know what opportunities awaited them at their receiving school.

Um-hum because those types of things we’re like “we’ll go to Prom,” this is me and my cousin, “we’ll go to prom this year with all of our friends” all that stuff like those little things, “we’ll go with our friends” and it did not even phase me because I did go my junior year.

(Treva, November, 2012)

It is important to consider that earlier, Treva had stated, “I’m not a good person with change” and she had self-reported as someone who was not a “social person.” Treva was conscious of the fact that as a senior, she would only have one year at her receiving school, which from her perspective did not warrant a social investment. Consequently, Treva’s decision to enter her receiving school with an attitude of detachment was made
while she was still attending DeVilbiss High School. For someone who was anxious about change and new social situations, this was a form of protection.

Linda described the atmosphere at DeVilbiss once the closing was announced. There appeared to be an attempt to create a sense of normalcy, while at the same time, making the most of the limited time available.

You know we probably had a good couple or three months of school at least left to go, but I don’t remember, I mean, I think things went on more or less business as usual academics wise, with the arts departments, they kind of went into overdrive, I remember, you know we definitely wanted to put on the final DeViltries, cabaret or whatever they called it. So, those things kind of went overdrive, kind of trying to capture and document, you know, kind of the last days and the last events and all that kind of thing.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda remembered being in a school play and recalled that students were “you know trying to do as much as we could.” Linda creates a picture of the final days at DeVilbiss as everyone being on “overdrive,” trying to experience all the “last” things. While she refers to the fact that it was “business as usual,” her description alludes to the idea that the experience of school closure in its final days was really anything but normal. In fact, her narrative described events similar to those that occur after the loss of a loved one with those who are left behind struggling to settle the estate. Linda recalled a special memory she had of her choir teacher.

The only specifically different thing, that was so small, that I remember is there was a wall in the choir room, they called it the Hall of Fame Wall. The senior
show choir students would sign it when they left. I don’t know how long it had been there, but not that long, maybe only a few years. So, [the choir director] had all of us sign it at the end of that year.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Stacey noticed a change in the climate at DeVilbiss after the announcement of the closing, stating, “We did not see the staff as much.” Stacey stated, “I think people’s attitude changed. Well, my attitude, I do know my attitude changed.” Stacey reported feeling “really sad” and stated, “I didn’t want to go anywhere else.” She focused on her schoolwork and was able to finish the year without it having a negative impact on her grades. Stacey recalled that the staff appeared to be withdrawn and speculated that perhaps they also were trying to figure out their future.

I think some of them withdrew or some of them, I don’t know, I guess, I do not know if most of them withdrew or maybe they took more time off as that year slowly kind of ended. The counselor’s presence was not as seen. So I don’t know, if they were looking for other positions or if they had, some of the people maybe decided to go ahead and retire or I think the hall guard that we had at that time, [name of hall guard], she ended up retiring that year. I don’t think she even wanted to even try another high school after that.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Dale also remembered that the morale at DeVilbiss was significantly impacted once the announcement was made to close the school. He recalled that the staff and students had withdrawn and the overall attendance by the student body had fallen off. For Dale, this feeling accumulated and really came to a head on senior skip day. There
were so few students present on that day at DeVilbiss that Dale described the climate as “dying.” He was so distraught that he called over to Start High School and asked to transfer immediately just to “get it over with.” At that point, Dale would have chosen to transfer to his receiving school early just to avoid watching the slow death of his beloved school. This description is shared later in its entirety in the section, Grief and Loss.

Summary of the experience of school closure.

The experience of school closure for the participants did not begin when the decision was made to close their school; it began as soon as the larger community learned that the district was considering closing buildings. Participants were able to provide detailed descriptions of the events leading up to the closing announcement. According to two participants, a failed levy in November of 1990 set the ball in motion, ultimately targeting three existing high schools for potential closure, followed by the organization of school community groups that would find themselves both advocating to save their own school, while at the same time arguing to close the school of the neighboring community. Communities were fighting for the survival of their neighborhood high school, creating an emotionally charged environment that became a part of the school culture at DeVilbiss as early as December of 1990. A candlelight vigil was held at DeVilbiss as a way to protest the potential closing, but it was also an attempt by the community to persuade the school board to look at other options. There was a district-sponsored public hearing held at the administration building in which the communities representing DeVilbiss, Libbey and Macomber were provided an opportunity to make one last plea for keeping their school open. While the adults within those communities provided the leadership regarding community activism, students from those schools also played an active role as
evidenced by the fact that Dale remembered the “Start varsity jackets” that filled the auditorium. He also recalled students who spoke at the forum being shown on the local news channels. Additionally, Linda recalled that she made signs to hold at the public hearing.

Further evidence that students were actively involved in the fight to save their school was provided by Stacey who attended the candlelight vigil held at DeVilbiss. While the actual community action took place outside the school day, there is evidence that the threat to close DeVilbiss consumed the climate, impacting the day-to-day operations of the school. When Stacey pointed out her picture in the school yearbook of her at the candlelight vigil, the page dedicated to the vigil was located between pages of other school events, such as school dances and school plays. It is clear that students who were at DeVilbiss the year that it closed experienced school closure as a focus within the school climate as much, if not more than any other event occurring that would have been considered “normal” in any academic school year.

The threat to close DeVilbiss combined with activism within the larger community created an “us versus them” feeling between neighborhoods. Even schools who were not targeted for closure felt threatened as evidenced by the report that the Start High School community made a strong presence at the public hearing. For Dale and Linda, who both attended the public hearing and then ended up attending Start High School, the behavior by the Start community at the public hearing made a lasting impression. It also set the context for how they would view their transition into Start High School, for Dale in particular. When Stacey described the event held during the school day in which someone from the school board office addressed the students in the
DeVilbiss auditorium regarding the closing, she described angry mob-like behavior.

Stacey emphasized the disrespect being shown to this individual when she recalled that the students were treating this person “as if he were just another student.” This type of student protest in the wake of the announcement of the closing of DeVilbiss implies a lack of order and unrest in a school that had previously been described by participants as having a “feeling of family.”

Participant’s descriptions of the school climate at DeVilbiss changed drastically from the time period prior to the closing announcement to the time period following the closing. Once the staff and students learned that DeVilbiss was closing, participants describe a depressed climate heavy with grief. Their descriptions include words such as “angry” and “withdrawn,” while at the same time, expressing anxiety about what lay ahead. A once stable system began to break down at a rapid pace after the closing announcement. Prior to the closing announcement, participants presented descriptions that implied that they were functioning within a safe and supportive school environment. However, there was an immediate change after the closing was announced. Students described a depressed environment where sadness and fear permeated the school climate. The adults at DeVilbiss, who participants had once described as “caring” and “competent,” were reported to have become “withdrawn” and “absent.” Even as the morale of the students and staff declined, there were also descriptions that implied that those same students and staff were focused on the tasks that needed to be accomplished by the end of the year, for example, the “last graduation,” and the “last DeViltries” cabaret. Participants emphasized the “finality” of the situation and that there was an attempt by staff to bring closure to the process, for example when Linda described how
the choir director encouraged every student to sign the choir wall, a privilege that was previously exclusive to graduating seniors. As participants considered their future, they also emphasized an appreciation for what they had at DeVilbiss and a desire to “make the most of it” in their remaining time there. Treva and her cousin made a conscious decision to make the most of their time at DeVilbiss in anticipation that their social experience at their receiving school would fail in comparison. In essence, Treva made a conscious decision while still attending DeVilbiss to approach her receiving school with an attitude of detachment.

The overall theme permeating this time period was one of grief and loss. The experience of school closure was a process of letting go and moving on, this in turn impacted issues of adolescent identity development as reported by participants. How each participant experienced this process was unique to each individual. However, what is clear is that during the school closure experience, participants’ descriptions speak to a break down in their support system causing social and emotional issues to emerge. Their once stable school environment became disrupted by the school closure experience, resulting in an environment that is described by participants as being chaotic and out of control.

The Transition Experience and the Receiving School

Introduction.

The further away the participant’s descriptions moved from their time spent at DeVilbiss, the variation between their experiences increased. The participants had expressed many shared experiences and similar feelings when it came to describing the culture of DeVilbiss High School. While their memories of the closing of DeVilbiss
were less congruent, there were similarities in how they felt during the time period leading up to the closure and after. However, it is their experience at their receiving school where the descriptions really began to differ. This was anticipated since there were three different receiving schools involved in the study: Rogers High School, Scott High School and Start High School, each with its own school culture and climate.

The nuances of the school climates experienced at the three receiving schools emerged as the participants described their time spent at their new high school. The grade the students were in when they entered their receiving schools appears to have played a role in how they experienced the transition. Treva, who was a senior when she entered Rogers High School, explained that the closing of DeVilbiss was easiest for the freshman and most difficult for the juniors. In the following description, Treva described how students acquire social capital over a period of three years, with an accumulation of capital beginning with their senior year. Treva never was able to cash in her acquired capital at DeVilbiss.

At least if you were a freshman, you still had three years to get yourself acclimated to the new environment, even the sophomores, but for us, we were almost there, you know, you’ve inched up and inched up and inched up… Yeah, we were ready to think we were hot. (pause) But it didn’t happen.

(Treva, November, 2012)

Linda, who was a junior when she entered Start High School, described the phenomenon of how the displaced students from DeVilbiss that attended Start were drawn together, developing a bond so close that the lines between the displaced sophomores and juniors began to fade. Linda remembered that there were very few
displaced seniors from DeVilbiss as many had chosen early graduation as an option. She recalled feeling a void at Start due to the fact that she did not have those familiar seniors present at Start to look up to, which is partly why the displaced juniors and sophomores were drawn to each other. The focus of this section is on how the participants described their experience of the transition to their receiving school.

**The process for reassignment.**

Treva was a senior when she entered Rogers High School. Treva remembered that the district allowed her to have a choice in where she attended high school after DeVilbiss was closed. She recalled that the district extended this offer only to seniors who were caught up in the closure of DeVilbiss and Macomber in the spring of 1991. Treva remembered that the district redrew the attendance lines after closing DeVilbiss. She resided in a section that bordered on the Rogers High School and the Scott High School attendance areas.

So I think at one point, umm, like once we were given the like, the choice or whatever, I think it just started to sink in that like, “this is what’s gonna happen, this is where your going to be” and you kind of got used to it, you know what I mean? You just kind of went with the flow.

(Treva, November, 2012)

Entering seniors were given a choice in terms of what school they would attend. However, Dale, Linda and Stacey entered as underclassmen; thus, they were not given a choice of which school they would attend. All three were reassigned to Start High School. However, Shaina, like Treva, was a senior during the transition year. Shaina had the majority of her credits required for graduation when she left DeVilbiss and
transitioned to her receiving school, Scott High School. Consequently, she only attended half-days during her senior year. Shaina recalled that they redrew the attendance lines, but that she then was offered a choice in where she attended, stating, “They split us up. It was really weird, they told us what our district school was, but then they told us we were free to go to any school.”

**The reputation of the high schools.**

The perceived reputation of the remaining district high schools played a role in how participants came to choose their receiving school. Treva and Shaina were juniors during the closing of DeVilbiss and were allowed to choose the high school in which they would experience their senior year. Each of them lived near the Scott and Rogers attendance boundaries. Shaina did not want to attend Rogers High School, stating, “There was no way I was going to Rogers.” Based on what she had been told by others about Rogers High School, Shaina decided that Scott was a better school for her. Shaina stated, “I remember some of my friends say that their parents would not let them go to Scott. My parents, they never questioned it.” Treva explained that she chose Rogers over Scott because “it [Scott] could have been a litter rougher.” At the time of the DeVilbiss closing, Scott was the high school that was located in the heart of the inner city and it had the reputation for being a majority black high school.

It was not just the students and parents who considered the reputation of the school in regard to the transition experience; apparently the displaced staff did also. I learned this when Shaina was discussing the fact that from her recollection, none of the staff from DeVilbiss transferred into Scott High School. She recalled that many of the staff went to Rogers and Start, stating, “Scott was just like a bad dream to people.” For
those who were allowed to choose their school, the perceived reputation of the remaining high schools in the district influenced their decision. It is important to discuss the narratives pertaining to the reputations of Scott and Rogers because issues around school culture and climate surface later in the findings pertaining to transition, but also to long-term impact and policy. Neither Treva nor Shaina had any first-hand knowledge of Scott or Rogers, but made their decisions based on hearsay.

**No district-wide transition plan.**

“...it was kind of like you were just kind of thrown there, you’re on your own.”

*(Treva, November, 2012)*

Treva explained that other than allowing seniors to have some choice in where they would attend high school, the district did little else to help students in the transition process, stating, “Now looking back, it's like they did nothing. It was like, ‘here's your schedule’... And I don't know, they could have welcomed us you know, welcomed us in their newsletter or something like that.”

Treva became visibly frustrated when she discussed the fact that the district had made no effort to make her feel welcomed at Rogers High School. According to Treva, the district had no transition plan in place, leaving the transfer students and the receiving students to navigate the process of integrating. Treva’s frustration was directed at the adults in the building whom she felt did nothing to help her acclimate into Rogers High School. From Treva’s perspective, the adults did not draw attention to her in a bad way, but they also did nothing special to make her feel welcomed at Rogers or to give her a sense of belonging.
And it was like they were just kind of putting us there. I don’t ever remember there being any type of umm, transition period where we were even allowed to go and look at the school and get acquainted to the building. It was like, “come pick up your schedule.” I… just like everyone else… it was kind of like you were just kind of thrown there, you’re on your own.

(Treva, November, 2012)

Like Treva, Dale did not recall that there was a transition plan in place to help the displaced DeVilbiss students. Dale had no input into his schedule for Start High School, stating, “I think they just told us. I do not think I ever met with somebody before [from Start].” Linda reported that there was no transition plan initiated by the adults to help students move from DeVilbiss to Start High School. In the following description, Linda emphasized the fact that the receiving students also were unprepared for the transition.

From what I remember from talking to my friends who had been at Start the first two years, they weren’t really given much in the way of preparing. I think it was handled very administratively like, “oh this is going to happen and these kids are going to come here and this is how we are going to break the classes,” and it was all sort of very cut and dry and on paper. I don’t think anybody really thought about you are bringing two very disparate groups of teenagers into one building, because I do not remember there being any kind of transition effort.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda remembered trying out for cheerleader prior to attending Start High School in the fall. I asked her how she had learned about the tryouts, but she could not recall that information. She was certain that she had not learned about the tryouts through any
organized effort of the district or Start High School. In terms of the DeVilbiss student body, from her perspective they ceased to exist after the last day of school, stating, “No, I mean, from my recollection, DeVilbiss really went away.”

Disconnected, excluded and invisible.

When Treva arrived at Rogers, she felt a clear divide between the transfer students and the receiving students. Treva, like the majority of the participants, described a feeling of “us versus them” while attending her receiving school. Treva became emotional when she described how she stuck out from the “original” students.

I think now when I look back I don’t think that I wanted to be like, “oh, she’s from…” (anger) they knew, they knew, “did you come from DeVilbiss or did you come from Macomber?” Like some of the people, they knew…they knew you weren’t an original Ram or what have you, and they weren’t mean or anything you know? They weren’t mean, like the people that I came in contact with, it’s just, they were just kind of set in there own…

(Treva, November, 2012)

In the description above, Treva refers to the fact that Rogers High School was an existing system in which the displaced students had to navigate. Treva believed there was a clear divide between the original Roger’s students who lived in the neighborhoods surrounding Rogers and those who transferred in from DeVilbiss and Macomber. This was very evident during times when students were getting on or off the buses because the receiving students all traveled on the yellow buses, while the transfer students used public transportation buses, referred to as TARTA (Toledo Regional Transit Authority). Treva compared her own situation to forced desegregation of schools in the past and the use of
bussing as a way to integrate schools in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Treva appeared visibly shocked by this new awareness, stating, “Yeah, but I did not even think of any of that until now you’re asking me to reflect back … but when you really look at it, I’m like, ‘wow they let that happen,’ you know they just let it (pause) they let it happen.”

The best thing that came from Start High School, according to Dale, was the fact that he met his closest three friends while attending Start. He expressed a genuine gratitude to Start High School as he described those friendships, cognizant of the fact that they would not have formed had he stayed at DeVilbiss. However, Dale explained that they found each other through the honor’s track, which he felt was much more segregated at Start than at DeVilbiss, stating, “That was a lot more isolated I think at Start than it was in DeVilbiss too. They really kind of walled those [honor’s] kids off.” Consequently, the closed climate at Start High School, which “walled off” groups of students and provided limited opportunities for diverse groups to interact played a role in Dale finding his two closest friends. This speaks to the role that segregated settings play in encouraging student groups that are more homogenous in terms of ability, interest, race and class. After telling his story about how he found his friends at Start, Dale pointed out the similarities among them, specifically that all three came from “white middle-class families.”

Like Dale, Stacey also experienced the separation between the DeVilbiss students and the Start students, creating a feeling of “us versus them.” Dale and Stacey both reported feeling that the Start staff favored the receiving school students over the displaced students. Stacey remembered feeling that the staff treated the DeVilbiss students differently than they did the Start students. She felt they were less caring toward
the DeVilbiss students and spoke harshly toward them. Dale recalled that this hostile environment lasted the entire three years he was at Start, although each year it lessened.

**The exception.**

Regarding Scott High School, Shaina stated, “I want to say that, I felt welcomed over there.” She also remembered feeling special because she got to park in a parking lot across the street from Scott High School. Shaina was on a half-day schedule and had to drive to work in the afternoon. It impressed her that Scott High School was so accommodating to her needs.

I was especially privileged because I was driving and I got to park like in the a.m. photography parking lot across the street so people thought like I was a teacher, it was just weird but I felt extremely welcome when I went to Scott, I really did.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

Shaina recalled the staff from Scott High School with great fondness. She remembered the principal from Scott High School as being “the best principal ever” and Shaina still stays in touch with some of the Scott staff. She stated, “Yep. He [the Scott High School Principal] was just a good person you know? I think the staff over there was just excellent; they were excellent, yeah.”

While Shaina acknowledged that the DeVilbiss students were identifiable at Scott High School, she did not describe an adversarial dynamic between the two student groups as was described by those who transferred to Start High School or Rogers High School. However, Shaina shared a story about one of her close friends who transferred to Scott High School with her after the closing of DeVilbiss. This story is important because although Shaina did not fall through the cracks at Scott, one of her friends did. The story
speaks to how students moving into a school, especially as a senior, can get lost in the transition. In this instance, the student was lost at least in terms of his cumulative records. Students who go through a transition to a new school aren’t just experiencing their own transition, they are experiencing the transition of their closest friends. This is an important part of Shaina’s story about school closure and transition, even though it did not directly happen to her. She expressed deep emotion and outrage as she told the story of what happened to her friend.

Anyway, [name of student] was told that his credits did not transfer over from DeVilbiss so he could not walk at the graduation. We get to the graduation, of course he didn’t show up and they called his name. They called his name and we immediately called him like after the graduation. And he died a week later…. he was playing basketball, he had a heart attack. That was like one of my best friends.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

I expressed my own concern that something like that could actually happen and Shaina responded, “Um-hum, Yep, he was devastated that they called his name and he couldn’t be there.” According to Shaina, the school never explained why they initially thought he could not walk at graduation.

I don’t know, I just remember him saying that he didn’t have all his credits. And we all had our credits when we went over to Scott and they told him that…and he did not walk. They ended up mailing him his diploma but he was dead by then, so I don’t even think he got a chance to see it.

(Shaina, August, 2013)
Longing for familiarity.

“We were all kind of interlopers...” (Dale, December, 2012).

Treva explained that the displaced students from DeVilbiss and Macomber were drawn together at Rogers due to their shared experience of going through school closure and transition. She had a difficult time forming relationships at Rogers with the receiving students.

And so you didn’t really get to bond with anyone and plus they were already set in how they do things there, of course, every school does things different and so of course your coming in your senior year and they’ve all been together for at least three years, and then here you come. So we kind of bonded, well I kind of bonded with other people from Macomber cause we were like, “why are we here?” We made it through it but it was just....

(Treva, November, 2012)

In Treva’s description, she mentioned the fact that the seniors at the receiving school had “been together for at least three years.” The time spent together in those three years allowed for a shared history, as well as acquired social capital. Treva had neither when she entered Rogers High School as a senior. Since the Macomber students were in the same predicament, the DeVilbiss students were drawn to them. The procedural issues pertaining to transportation further exasperated the “bonding” phenomenon expressed earlier by Treva in terms of the displaced students forming relationships with other displaced students. Treva explained how she used to travel to Rogers from her home on the TARTA (Toledo Regional Transit Authority) buses.
Plus we [the displaced students] had to catch the bus, you know they provided TARTA bus for us to go there, so we caught the TARTA bus going back into the city, and they [the receiving school students] all caught the yellow bus, the school buses. So it was like…

(Treva, November, 2012)

Treva remembered that there were teachers from DeVilbiss and Macomber who relocated to Rogers High School, stating, “So it was some of their [Macomber] teachers… so it was kind of a mixture and we didn’t know who was who, we just knew the teachers that we had [from DeVilbiss].” Earlier, she had explained that part of the reason she chose to go to Rogers was because some of the DeVilbiss staff would also be going there.

Treva was the only participant to mention that she was transitioning in with Macomber students and staff. Treva was able to recall a few teachers from DeVilbiss who transferred to Rogers, but not many. She longed to have familiar adult relationships, someone who could help her navigate her unfamiliar environment. The lack of established relationships with the adults at Rogers was one of the things Treva felt was missing at Rogers; these were relationships she did feel she had at DeVilbiss. In particular, she missed the DeVilbiss guidance counselor she had worked with for her first three years of high school.

But I think that it [having adults from DeVilbiss at Rogers] would, like looking back now, umm, would've probably been helpful because you would have had that familiar face that was coming there like solely for you. Even though it was there for other people as well but you would've felt, I think I would've felt like,
“okay you know they're coming here for me, you know me and they're coming to see about what do I need here,” you know what I mean? It would've just made it a little bit better because….

(Treva, November, 2012)

Treva paused and so I said, “Because you didn’t feel special, you felt like…” Treva finished my thought by saying, “Yeah you, you were, you were just there. You’re just a body.” For Treva, who did not like change and did not consider herself to be a “social person,” the loss of the three years of shared history and social capital attained while at DeVilbiss was a significant loss. The closing of DeVilbiss disrupted those relationships and one year at Rogers High School would not have been enough time to repair the damage. Consequently, Treva chose to detach herself from the climate and culture that was Rogers High School. She longed for familiar relationships, but the closest she would come was the familiarity of the shared experience of school closure, drawing her to other displaced students from both DeVilbiss and Macomber.

Dale created a picture of Start High School that was cold and institutionalized. Dale was very reflective and analytical in his responses, often offering his own analysis in terms of making meaning of his experience. In the following description, Dale discusses structural issues within the Start High School administration that may have contributed to the lack of preparedness felt by the displaced DeVilbiss students.

I would like to add…you asked, “Were we welcomed into Start,” and the answer is, “no” and that was a problem. But to be fair in some small way, you know that Start underwent a new leadership transition of its own.

(Dale, December, 2012)
Dale believed that many of the problems he experienced his first year at Start High School had to do with a change in administrative staff, as well as an influx of staff throughout the building. He described a chaotic environment associated with a disrupted system.

There was churn all over the place, within the building, and so I do not think they knew what to do with us at all, and so while some of the families and parents, I think, and students had some contempt for us entering the building, I don’t think the administration necessarily did, but I just think they were disorganized.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Dale also described the phenomenon of the displaced students being drawn to each other at Start High School, stating, “we were all kind of interlopers and you know… I mean you know we were all aliens and so it was good that, you know, we had each other.”

Linda often made reference to a DeVilbiss administrator who followed her to Start High School. He had been the Assistant Principal of Activities at DeVilbiss. Linda remembered that it was comforting knowing that one of the administrators would be transferring to Start High School, stating, “I think you know we knew [name of DeVilbiss administrator] was coming with us.” She also remembered that there was some excitement around the fact that there would be students she knew from DeVeaux Junior High. Familiar relationships helped to ease her anxiety about the move to Start High School, stating, “So, there was a little bit of anticipation of that and I remember a bunch of us [students who had gone to DeVeaux Junior High]… now that I think about it, getting together over that summer.”
Her familiar peers, together with the DeVilbiss Assistant Principal following her to Start provided her with a significant support system, especially in terms of social capital. The example above also speaks to the degree of social capital Linda held while at DeVilbiss, but also in her neighborhood and community. This is evidenced by the fact that her existing social networks, which met over the summer prior to the first day of school, helped facilitate her transition into Start High School. This student-initiated transition experience was unique to Linda. It did not surface in the other participants’ narratives.

Stacey was a junior when she entered Start High School. She described herself as being someone who could get along with various groups of people. She did not feel she belonged to a “clique” but did express the comfort she felt when she was in the proximity of other “DeVilbiss” students. One thing that helped Stacey transition into Start High School was having some of the faculty from DeVilbiss there.

So, it was kind of nice to see a few familiar adults. So that kind of helped. You kind of felt a little bit, you know, at least somebody is here, you know that kind of helped a little bit as far as transitioning from DeVilbiss to Start.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey described Start as being a polar opposite to what she experienced at DeVilbiss. Like Dale, Stacey also experienced the separation between the DeVilbiss students and the Start students, creating a feeling of “us versus them.” This dynamic, the feeling of being excluded by the general population, is what caused her to bond with other DeVilbiss students.
It [Start] was like a flip, reverse from DeVilbiss. I don’t know. It was just okay for me. I guess the only good thing was like I said earlier, at least the students who I was with at DeVilbiss, we were at least kind of together at Start.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey explained that she had come to Start with certain expectations based upon her experience at DeVilbiss and was ultimately disappointed with what she found at Start High School. The best thing she could say about her experience at Start High School was that she was still able to function within some of the groups of students that had been her friends at DeVilbiss. At this point in the interview, I became uncomfortable with the seriousness of the discussion in terms of the journey we were on and the self-discovery that Stacey was experiencing in the process. I felt that by putting her through this interview, I was bringing her back to a sad time in her life. It showed in her face and in her voice. Stacey had reached a point in the interview where she was no longer talking; there was dead silence. It was as if she had connected the dots for the first time in terms of seeing a connection between her disrupted experience of school closure and how her life changed once she was at her receiving school. I broke the silence by talking about where we were headed next in the interview as a way to redirect her away from the sadness we had just discussed. I asked her to take a look at her Start yearbook for the next time we met and perhaps she might remember something positive. By this time, Stacey had transitioned back into her regular self and as a way to create a kind of normalcy for the rest of the interview, she laughed and said, “Right, it [Start] ruined my life.” There was a long pause. The smile on her face left and then she said, “It wasn’t, you know…” She shook her head and looked sad again. She never finished her
sentence, but it was understood between us. She was letting me know that Start was not DeVilbiss.

**Comparing the sending and receiving schools.**

As participants discussed the experience of transition and their receiving school, they often were moving between two junctures from their past. They could not help but look backward to their time spent at DeVilbiss and compare it to the receiving school. When their narratives were focused around a comparison of the two schools, it was a conversation about what was lost and what was gained. However, in most cases the conversation was significantly focused on what each participant left behind at DeVilbiss High School. In particular, dimensions such as physical space, differences in programming and teaching style, class size and the extent to which students had formed relationships with teachers. The participants had developed a sense of place identity toward DeVilbiss High School. If the receiving schools had been closely aligned with the school climate and culture experienced at DeVilbiss, perhaps the transition experience might have been easier for the participants. However, the participants found themselves at their receiving schools missing many of the supports that were a part of the culture of DeVilbiss, supports that were critical to their adolescent development. Consequently, the participants almost always viewed cultural differences between the sending and receiving school negatively. The following sections provide examples of how the cultural differences surfaced in the participants' narratives, resulting in a conversation that compared DeVilbiss and the receiving school in terms of what was lost and what was gained, if anything, as a result of the transition experience.
The enrollment/class size and resources.

Dale was a sophomore when he entered Start High School. At the time of the closing of DeVilbiss in 1991, Dale recalled Start High School’s enrollment as being “1300 to 1400” when he was there. Dale remembered DeVilbiss having about 900 students and so he left a school of 900 and entered a school with an enrollment of around 1400 students. He recalled Start as being one of the largest high schools in the district in terms of enrollment. Stacey noticed the difference in enrollment between DeVilbiss and Start High School. She preferred the more intimate setting she had experienced at DeVilbiss, stating, “A couple of our classes were overcrowded like my Science, my Biology. Yeah, a couple of the classes felt a little overwhelming like messes of people in this room.” Stacey described what it was like in the hallways during class changes.

I mean, everybody was just crammed in Start, like the hallway, you could barely like walk. It was just wasn’t even like comfortable, where even as far as walking from class to class, you had to just go. You couldn’t even like you know talk a little bit or go to your locker as much. You had to just be, you had to take more books because it was just too much. That was different.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

According to Linda, the larger programming and resources were the best things about Start High School. She viewed the larger student enrollment in terms of funding and opportunities.

A lot of the programs were a lot better and more participated in, especially the sport programs, they were bigger, they just had bigger teams, they had more kids
participating in them. I’m sure they had more money, as a school, I am sure the school had more money for those programs.

(Linda, January, 2013)

**The physical space/architecture.**

Dale held nothing back as he described his disappointing experience at Start High School, especially during the first year, stating, “The problem I always felt, started with the buildings themselves. DeVilbiss was this gorgeous inspiring building.” Dale could not discuss Start High School without referencing DeVilbiss in comparison. One of his biggest disappointments was in Start High School’s physical space.

Start [High School] was this unfriendly block that they drilled holes into that had this crappy layout of a campus and too many entrances and exits, and was just…the whole layout was bad. The whole layout was bad [at Start] and so, yeah, I mean, it [DeVilbiss] was an intimate fun family because it had to be at DeVilbiss.

(Dale, December, 2012)

When Linda first learned that DeVilbiss was closing, she was at a basketball game at Start High School. Upon hearing that DeVilbiss was closing, she remembered looking around the Start gym and realizing that she would be a student there the following school year. She remembered feeling a “very heavy sadness” in part due to the physical climate of the building itself.

Start as a high school looked like a prison. That building was very institutional. It was built in the 60s, I guess, or early 60s. So, it had that sort of architecture, it was all brick and linoleum, and you know, like we were used to wood and kind
of, you know, that had a little charm to it. So, that was very, I remember the feeling that night.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda and Dale used words like “prison,” “institutionalized,” and “unfriendly” when describing the physical structure of Start High School.

**Choir and show choir.**

“...it was like going from the major leagues to peewee.”

(Dale, December, 2012)

Show Choir and Choir had been a big part of Dale’s life his freshman year at DeVilbiss, as well as in junior high. When asked whether he stayed in show choir at Start, he stated, “I did and it was awful and I tried to get out of it as fast as I could.” He did not even stay for one year, dropping Show Choir his first year at Start.

I went from this, I got this incredibly charismatic…(pause) wonderful director [at DeVilbiss] who, you know, was a really good musician and then to two sisters that ran the music department [at Start]. Show Choir went from kind of you know throwing, you know batons up in the air, and you know, all this crazy stuff [at DeVilbiss] to… it was just a lot more regimental and it was a lot slower and it was like, it was like going from the major leagues to peewee.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Stacey did not enjoy choir at Start High School, stating, “Probably, I didn’t like the teacher.” She remembered the Start Choir Director as being unpleasant and “everything was just like by the book.” She had experienced choir under the direction of the director at DeVilbiss and could not help but compare him to the choir director she
experienced while at Start High School. She described her relationship with the DeVilbiss Choir Director and her admiration for how he engaged with students, stating, “We got a couple of choices where we would listen to the songs and, but with her [Start Choir Director], you don’t really feel like you had a like say so on anything.”

Linda maintained many of the activities at Start that she had enjoyed at DeVilbiss. However, she joined choir at Start High School and just like Dale and Stacey, she dropped it, stating, “Their choir was huge and their choir director was elderly and we had come from … a very mixed choir … and the choir that she did was just really old music, really standard, really boring stuff.”

The description above is interesting because it speaks to both the “intimacy” of the smaller choir at DeVilbiss versus the “huge” size of the choir at Start, but also the fact that DeVilbiss had a choir that was “very mixed.” Linda explained that the “mixed” choir, which was culturally and racially diverse, created a climate that encouraged “all kinds of music.” This is an excellent example of the educational benefit to having a heterogeneous versus a homogeneous group of students. This is also an example of how a teacher can incorporate the culture of a diverse student body into the curriculum as a way to engage and excite students. Linda went on to explain that the choir director at Start High School failed in comparison to the director they had while at DeVilbiss, who she described as being “very warm and very affectionate and bright.” According to Linda, the director from DeVilbiss and the director at Start were “polar opposites” of each other.

**Survival mode/biding time/helpless and hopeless.**

Throughout our interview, especially when we spoke about her time at Rogers, Treva became visibly agitated. Seeing her situation through adult eyes, now as a
professional educator herself, she appeared shocked when she remembered what she experienced as a result of the closing of DeVilbiss and what adults around her did or did not do as she navigated through this experience. Treva described her senior year at Rogers as if it were a holding place for her, as if she were a guest there, just trying to survive and get out. Treva explained that from a social aspect, her senior year really took place at DeVilbiss. She had minimal social interaction while at Rogers. Treva knew she was only going to be at Rogers for a short time and she approached her time at Rogers with an attitude of conscious detachment, stating, “I just abided by the rules… this is how they did things and I knew that once my year was up, like I was done and I never went back to that school ever for anything.”

The following excerpt provides an idea of where Dale’s thoughts were during his time at Start. It paints a picture of a very different Dale than the one that emerged earlier in the section that described his experience at DeVilbiss. I had the impression that Dale was in “survival mode” to a large degree. He described his strategy for how he progressed through the Start experience.

So yeah, I was active, but I was not… I thought pacing myself was the way to go… “I am just going to try and get through this as best I know how and not cruise, but not kill myself to do it, and not,” you know, I didn’t try and break any records. “Let’s just, you know, have a decent enough resume for colleges that I can go some place I want to go.”

(Dale, December, 2012)

Dale described his frustration with the bureaucratic procedures at Start High School. Earlier, Dale had mentioned the lack of intimacy at Start High School in part due
to the large enrollment. He explained that he had dropped show choir and taken large choir that met before the regular school day, this was a “zero hour” class. He explained that he was equally unhappy with large choir and initiated a request to drop choir altogether, stating, “It was miserable and the song choices, I mean it was just uninspiring in every way imaginable and I wanted to dump it.” The Start Assistant Principal would not allow Dale to drop the zero hour choir. Dale remembered, “I said, ‘What do you mean I can’t, I am like Zero Hour! I don’t have to go Zero Hour.’” This was another time when Dale became very frustrated, as if he were back in high school experiencing it in the here and now, stating, “Half the fricking building doesn’t go to Zero Hour. She was like, ‘no you cannot.’ I am like, ‘it is, it is an elective Zero Hour class, it is not math, it is not reading, it is not English.’”

Dale often described how he had no control over what was happening to him once the decision to close DeVilbiss was made. At DeVilbiss, he had some autonomy, perhaps this was due to the “intimate” setting and small enrollment. Start had a larger enrollment and the building itself had been described as a “prison,” lending itself to qualities associated with an institutionalized setting, such as limited to no autonomy within a bureaucratic system. This was a theme that developed not just in Dale’s description of the experience of school closure and transition, but it was prevalent in all the participants’ experience. Later, I will discuss how having no control interplayed with disrupted relationships and limited shared histories at the receiving schools. This will be presented in the section addressing the social and psychological themes.

**Conversations about racial issues.**

“It was not of Start [High School] and so the body attempted to reject it.”
Regarding the negatives about attending Start High School, Linda stated, “The worst things were the unfamiliarity and then the racial tension, there definitely was.” Linda referenced her neighborhood and the fact that it was not very diverse and then stated, “but this school [Start] had no diversity, I mean….”

Linda recalled that there were not many African-American students at Start High School, even with the integration of DeVilbiss students. She stated, “A lot of the black kids went to Rogers and that is I think partly a districting thing, but I mean, you know, when you look at DeVilbiss at that time, it was black by a large majority.” Linda pointed out that for the white students coming from DeVilbiss, transitioning into the Start culture was not a big deal; however, for the black students coming from DeVilbiss, she stated, “For them it was a whole other world.” In an earlier section, there is a description in which Linda explained that from her perspective, Start was being integrated for the first time and the district had established no plan for helping both the sending and receiving students navigate this process.

One of the areas that Dale and Linda had the hardest time adjusting to was the lack of diversity at Start High School and the prejudice views held by some within the Start community. In an earlier section, Linda referred to the “racial tension” as being one of the worst things about Start High School. Both Dale and Linda recalled an incident in which racial slurs appeared on the Start High School campus, directed at the DeVilbiss students. Dale’s description that follows begins with reference to the racial tension that surfaced at the public hearing prior to the closing announcement and then transitions into how those racial tensions surfaced his first year at Start High School.
Well, then those racial tensions spilled into Start and you know the first year I was there, there was a big incident of spray painting on the building by a bunch of Start students who had attended Start before DeVilbiss was closed saying all kinds of unbelievably, racially inflammatory… that was targeted basically to the DeVilbiss kids. So, those kids who did the spray painting got booted, so then that was this whole big thing and then all these parents were pissed off because they got expelled and you know…

(Dale, December, 2012)

Stacey, the only participant who was black that did attend Start High School, reported that she was unaware of the incident. She felt the DeVilbiss students were discriminated against, but did not remember feeling that it was racially motivated. However, even though she may not have been cognitively aware of the fact that race played a role in how she was being treated, there is evidence that she entered a racially charged environment at Start High School. It is likely that Stacey experienced a double form of segregation because she was identified both as “black” and a “DeVilbiss student.” The opposite may be true in terms of how Dale was treated because although he was identified as a “DeVilbiss student,” he was also identified as a student who was related to a board member. Still, Dale was personally impacted by the treatment of those around him, specifically, the black students who came with him from DeVilbiss.

Dale described himself as an activist at Start High School. He provided a detailed description of an event where he took control over a situation and effected change. So, interestingly, while he often found himself in the situation of not having control, he did seek to take control to effect change, particularly change that would impact others. The
example I am referring to had to do with the African-American Club that had existed at DeVilbiss, but not at Start High School. Dale had been identified for the Jefferson-Madison Leadership camp, a four-day workshop for students identified as leaders by their building staff in the Toledo area. At this camp, Dale raised the issue of racial integration at Start High School and questioned why there was no African-American club since it had been, according to Dale, “part of the organizational DNA of DeVilbiss.” Full excerpts of this experience appear later in the section that addresses, “Agency.” I refer to this incident here because I believe it is an example of the lack of consideration given to the displaced students from DeVilbiss who transitioned to Start High School. The DeVilbiss students were expected to conform to the existing culture, or as Dale stated, “DNA,” rather than a blending of the two school cultures. Due to the activism of Dale and others, Start High School did form an Afro-American Club. However, it was never a significant part of the culture at Start as it had been at DeVilbiss.

It was not of Start [High School] and so the body attempted to reject it. And so that is why I said it was kind of an appendage over the side and I do not know what became of it, other than it continued, but in a much, much smaller scale.

(Dale, December, 2012)

The student population at Scott High School, on the other hand, was predominantly African-American. Shaina provided an example of what it was like for the few white students from DeVilbiss who transferred to Scott after the closing, stating, “I went over to Scott with two white students, [name of first white student] was one and, it was a guy, I can’t remember his name, and they even had a good transition if I can remember.”
Even though she, herself, was African-American, Shaina mentioned that it was “culture shock” for her to go from an integrated student population at DeVilbiss to Scott High School.

So we had a good experience and DeVilbiss was diverse, and that was a difference when I went to Scott, I felt like, “wow this is culture shock to me” when I went to Scott because I had never been around an all-African-American setting like that. It was culture shock, which was good because it prompted me to go to a Black college. I would have never went to a black college going to DeVilbiss.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

Shaina and I speculated that recruiters for black colleges may not have known that DeVilbiss had a large African-American population in 1991. Shaina added, “Yep, yep, it was different, matter of fact, I can count on one hand the people that I know that went to DeVilbiss that went to a black college.” DeVilbiss students did not have the same access and opportunity as the Scott students in terms of college recruitment to historically black colleges. Shaina stated, “We just weren’t exposed to it [at DeVilbiss].” It is important to note that Treva, who is black and attended Rogers High School, made no mention of racial tension or racial discrimination. Like Stacey, she did feel that the DeVilbiss students were treated differently than the original students at Rogers. However, she never associated this with race.

**Social life.**

“I wanted things to be like how they were at DeVilbiss”

(*Stacey, February, 2013*)
Treva did not feel that she belonged at Rogers High School, consequently, she avoided any social activities at Rogers. I just didn’t feel like that [Rogers] was a home for me it was just a place for me to complete my last year of high school. I didn’t really get involved in absolutely nothing, no social no extracurricular, I went to school and went home…dances, did not go, Prom, nope, I went to Prom my junior year [at DeVilbiss].

(Treva, November, 2012)

She had no memory of the events at Rogers High School that might be considered significant to a graduating senior, for example, homecoming activities and believes she may have intentionally forgotten those kinds of events, stating, “I think I just kind of blocked all of that out.” Treva perceives her senior year, or at least the major activities associated with someone’s senior year, to have taken place her last year at DeVilbiss, stating, “I think what it was is my junior year I tried to do different things [at DeVilbiss].”

From her perspective, her social life ended at DeVilbiss. Her junior year at DeVilbiss was the closest she would come to experiencing all the things that are associated with a student’s senior year. I asked her if it was fair for me to say that basically her entire senior year was lost, at least the social aspect of a senior year? Treva replied, “Yep, the whole social aspect.”

Dale did not continue with soccer and cross-country at Start High School, the two sports he played his only year he attended DeVilbiss. He reported that Start did not have a soccer team and that he chose not to continue with cross-country. The three main activities that Dale spoke about at DeVilbiss, which were show choir, cross-country and
soccer, he did not continue while at Start High School. When asked to describe the activities he took part in while attending Start, Dale provided the following description.

What I did, well I was in German Club, whatever that was. I …. as a junior, I got in National Honor Society. I was… I did not do any other sports. It wasn’t my thing. I hated running and I did not want to play football, because I like, I wanted to be able to walk as an adult.

(Dale, December, 2012)

It is interesting to note that the German Club advisor was Dale’s German Teacher at DeVilbiss. She transferred to Start High School after the closing of DeVilbiss. Her name surfaced several times as the person at Start High School that Dale went to when he needed help navigating his new environment. Dale remained in honor’s classes at Start and continued his participation in the Jefferson-Madison Leadership Program.

For all the participants, relationships and familiarity surfaced as an important factor during the transitional period. For Stacey, in particular, it was a driving factor in how she navigated her two years at Start High School. Stacey went from being very active and involved at DeVilbiss High School to having minimal involvement in extracurricular activities at Start High School. Stacey recalled that there was no effort by the district to “welcome” the DeVilbiss students to Start High School. She does not remember any transitional activity to help bring the students together.

When I went to Start, I ended up not playing in sports initially because I wanted things to be like how they were at DeVilbiss. So, that was a little different to get used to a new, a whole new environment, and you didn’t feel like….welcomed or wanted or …so that was kind of tough.
Stacey did not try out for volleyball in the fall, but did play basketball her junior year at Start. I asked Stacey what her experience was like playing basketball at Start High School. In her description, it is apparent the critical role relationships played in her willingness to engage.

I liked the coach. I was JV [junior varsity]. I didn’t like the varsity coach. That’s why I didn’t do anything in my senior year. But my junior year, the basketball coach was nice. It is because of the school because all the girls from DeVilbiss you know we were all kind of reunited. So, we were able to still you know, connect.

Stacey reported that she did not do any extracurricular her senior year at Start High School. She did not play any sports and did not participate in the choir. I asked her to explain why. Stacey had room in her schedule to take additional elective courses, and she chose not to do so. She did remember that she took an extra English credit above the requirement for graduation. I asked her if she missed playing basketball her senior year, she replied, “Yeah, I did. I just didn’t like their coach. It was just different.”

Linda participated in many of the social activities at Start High School that she had participated in at DeVilbiss, for example, she continued to be a cheerleader. However, according to Linda, it was hard for her to wear the colors of the school that had been a rival to DeVilbiss. An assistant principal from DeVilbiss, had also transitioned to Start High School. This is the same administrator Linda referenced in an earlier section who had an “open” door to her when she attended DeVilbiss. She used to “hang out” in
his office and do her homework. Linda found great comfort from hearing him give the announcements at Start High School. Other than dropping out of choir, Linda’s social life appeared to remain pretty much intact.

Shaina also fared well in terms of her social life at Scott High School her senior year, stating, “It was the new friends I met, and I continue to still have those friends today.” Shaina would go off to college with some of these new friends from Scott High School, she stated, “I feel like we grew up [together].” While Shaina was able to make friends easily at Scott High School, she was also aware that she did not have a shared history with the Scott students. She sometimes felt left out of their conversations.

So it was a little strange for me on that level, I couldn’t be in their conversations. That was a little different, but other than that, you know, going to prom and homecoming, and just doing other things. I did the same things they did, but that was me, I have that personality. There were others who came over with me who didn’t do it. You know, I think all of our experiences of coming from DeVilbiss to Scott was different.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

The section addressing the theme, “sense of belonging,” will provide a more detailed analysis of the role that shared history played in developing and strengthening relationships. I will also discuss the idea that building relationships takes time, which is something that Treva and Shaina did not have as entering seniors.

**Academics.**

Treva did not feel her academics suffered at all while attending Rogers, and in fact, her Math ability improved due to taking Pre-Calculus.
I actually can’t believe, I can't believe I'm about to say this, it benefited me. I can tell you it was a benefit because it actually, umm, focused me just a little bit more I think, number one because the whole social aspect of the whole school was gone so I had nothing else to do but make sure I did my homework and this class. I didn't have that whole piece of…Yeah, “let me see what they're doing there on the hallway” instead of paying attention.

(Treva, November, 2012)

According to Treva, she focused on the academics at Rogers because she had no social distractions. Treva also shared that she most likely would not have taken this additional math class had she stayed at DeVilbiss. She did not need it to graduate. She explained that she would most likely have taken an elective of some kind that would have allowed her to be with her friends. Ironically, Treva’s attitude of conscious detachment played a role in minimizing any social distractions, which in-turn, helped her to focus on her academics. Treva had earlier described DeVilbiss as the “fun” school and provided a description about how she would get to school early just to socialize with her friends.

Stacey reported that her grades suffered at Start High School. She believes she would have been better off academically if she had been able to stay at DeVilbiss, stating, “Yeah. That dropped drastically at Start and I was just getting the ball rolling pretty good at DeVilbiss as a sophomore. I was on honor roll that whole year, I have never been on a roll before.” Stacey described a cycle of decline that was triggered by the transition and followed her into college.

I don’t know if I lost the drive or like the determination … I think that because sometime when you’re in an activity at least for one year you have to have a good
GPA to even be involved. So, I think those motivators you know I was not as involved at Start, then my grades slipped which meant I could not be accepted in as many colleges.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

In Stacey’s description, she addressed structural issues that supported her at DeVilbiss, specifically, a policy related to the minimum GPA requirement for maintaining eligibility as an athlete. From her perspective, the fact that her athletic career suffered at Start, she lost some of those structural supports, which impacted her motivation. In an earlier section, Stacey described how she was able to stay focused at DeVilbiss after the closing announcement and maintain her grades. While the closure announcement affected her emotionally, it did not have a significant impact on her persistence in keeping her grades up. In her own words, she lost the “motivators” that were intact at DeVilbiss once she entered Start High School. Dale also spoke negatively about the academics at Start High School. He missed the liberal arts curriculum that was part of the tradition of DeVilbiss High School. He believed the curriculum offered at DeVilbiss was rigorous and engaging, where Start’s was not. He also made reference to the fact that the students at Start who were in the honor’s courses were “walled off” from the rest of the student body. Linda, on the other hand, spoke positively about the academics at Start in terms of resources and program offerings. She felt that the facilities and resources at Start were more conducive to the academic needs. She also felt that because the population at Start was much larger, they were able to offer more variety in terms of course offerings, specifically stating, “they had more AP courses.”
One of the few negative things Shaina shared about Scott High School had to do with her experience with the curriculum and the need for rigor.

The curriculum…. they [DeVilbiss] were on us about our education you know that’s one thing about DeVilbiss, which was a little different when I went to Scott [High School]. I didn’t even have to go to school all day. Cause it was like, “OK I think I just need Government,” I just needed my core courses, then I went to work … So, we were a little more advanced (at DeVilbiss).

(Shaina, August, 2013)

I asked Shaina if the courses she took at Scott were easy for her compared to DeVilbiss. Shaina nodded her head, indicating that they were, she then added, “Yes, I will say that.”

**Summary of the transition experience and receiving school.**

The participants’ stories about the experience of transitioning into their receiving schools were personal and varied by individual. However, each participant’s story was one of looking backward at what they had experienced at DeVilbiss, while at the same time comparing it to what they experienced at the receiving schools. As participants told their stories, it often felt like they had a foot in two worlds, one in DeVilbiss and one in the receiving school. The memories of the experience revolved around a discussion of what was lost and gained by moving through school closure and transitioning to a new school. Of all the participants, Shaina was the one who experienced the smoothest transition with descriptions of her receiving school that were predominantly positive. Linda described a fairly even amount of both positive and negative experiences and outcomes related to the school closure and transition process. Dale, Stacey, and Treva
provided descriptions of their experience with school closure and transition that were predominantly negative.

Seniors were given a choice in terms of where they would attend their senior year and the reputation of existing schools played a role in where students chose to go. Other than the autonomy for seniors to choose their school, participants reported feeling they had no control or voice. All but Shaina described a feeling of having no autonomy, in which things were happening to them that they could not control. Shaina, who attended Scott High School, reported feeling welcomed there and was impressed with the individual attention she had received. Shaina was able to form critical relationships with some of the staff at Scott, including the principal. She also felt that Scott High School opened up opportunities for her that were not available at DeVilbiss, specifically, access to historically black colleges. These positive experiences helped Shaina to feel a sense of belonging at Scott High School. The only issue viewed negatively by Shaina had to do with the academic programming at Scott, which she felt was weak in comparison to DeVilbiss. However, because she was only on a half-day schedule at Scott, she did not feel personally impacted by the academics at Scott.

Shaina’s description about her friend who was not allowed to walk at graduation is also evidence of how the experience of school closure and transition is not exclusive to the participant, but extends to those around them. Participants were cognizant of how their close friends were experiencing school closure and transition, playing a role in the overall participant’s view of the experience. Another example of this phenomenon is the significant impact the spray-painting incident at Start that involved racial slurs had on both the white participants, Dale and Linda. While not directed at them, it was directed
toward friends from DeVilbiss who were black. This became a part of Linda and Dale’s experience of school closure and transition.

Participants describe the transitional experience as one of sadness beginning with the disrupted relationships from DeVilbiss and the struggle to fit in at their receiving school. The transition is described as a time of high anxiety and instability. Participants entered an existing system where roles were clearly defined and each had to find their place within the new system. Even Shaina, who did report that she had a positive experience at her receiving school, remembered feeling left out of much of the conversation due to her limited shared history with the receiving students. This phenomenon impacted participants’ identity formation and sense of belonging, both of which will be discussed in detail later. All but Shaina described an initial feeling of hopelessness and helplessness in terms of navigating their new environment and were functioning in a mode of survival. Participants expressed feelings of grief and loss and described how their social capital was impacted. Treva, who entered as a senior at Rogers High School reported that she lost three years of social capital and provided descriptions that supported the fact that she felt robbed of her senior year. Each participant suffered a loss in terms of their involvement in extracurricular activities at their receiving school.

There was no district-wide transition plan; consequently, only Shaina reported that she had attended an open house prior to arriving at Scott High School. The other four participants felt disconnected to the receiving students and staff, describing an “us versus them” feeling. Dale, Treva and Stacey described the phenomenon of experiencing staff at their receiving schools that treated the displaced students differently
than the receiving school students. They felt that staff favored the original students over
the displaced students, with Dale and Stacey describing what appeared to be a hostile
environment at Start High School. This hostility surfaced as early as the time of the
public hearing held prior to the decision to close DeVilbiss and followed the displaced
students into Start High School. Along with the hostility, came the racial tension, which
also had surfaced at the public hearing. This racial tension surfaced during their first year
at Start High School as described by Dale and Linda, specifically when referencing an
incident of racial slurs on the Start campus. All but Shaina provided examples of times
they felt disconnected, excluded or invisible at their receiving schools.

The sense of “family” participants had described while at DeVilbiss was due in
part to the small enrollment, but also to the opportunities at DeVilbiss for students from
diverse groups and backgrounds to have points of interaction. However, this was
difficult in their new settings due to the large number of students in the building, but also
the culture that participants described as being exclusive. Participants missed the
opportunities to interact with multiple groups of students from diverse backgrounds.
Participants left an environment at DeVilbiss that was described as “integrated” and
much like a “family,” and entered unfamiliar environments. The strong relationships they
had formed at DeVilbiss were disrupted and participants were left to navigate their new
environment in an effort to form new relationships. For Treva, she preferred to detach,
rather than even try to form new relationships for the one year she knew she would attend
Rogers High School. There was an overwhelming pattern of participants seeking
familiarity within their new environment. Participants made reference to the fact that the
displaced DeVilbiss students gravitated toward one another due to their shared histories.
Treva, who attended Rogers High School, was unique in that she was the only participant who remembered displaced students from Macomber. She experienced the phenomenon of being drawn to the displaced Macomber students, as well as the DeVilbiss students. While the displaced students from Macomber and DeVilbiss did not have a shared history, they did share the experience of being displaced from a closed school and having to transition into a receiving school. This shared experience helped the two groups of displaced students bond together. Linda also described a unique bonding phenomenon between the sophomores and juniors who had been displaced from DeVilbiss and transitioned to Start High School.

There were structural issues that surfaced in the experience of school closure and transition, which were steeped in school policies and procedures. Perhaps the most obvious issue pertained to the phenomenon associated with transitioning into a receiving school that had significantly more students enrolled as compared to the sending school. This often left displaced students feeling lost in the crowd, or as Treva stated, “you’re just a body.” Another structural issue that surfaced consistently among the participants centered on the fact that there was no transition plan and so many of the supports desired by the participants were not in place at the receiving schools.

However, there were also procedural issues that were specific to the receiving school that impacted the participants’ experiences. An example was the transportation procedure described by Treva in which the displaced students at Rogers High School were required to ride TARTA buses, while the receiving school students all rode the yellow buses. Such a policy contributed to making the participants feel even more isolated from the general student population. Another example would be the honor
classes at Start High School, which Dale reported to be “walled off” from the general population. How participants experienced academic programming at the receiving schools was also unique to each individual. For example, Treva viewed the academics at Rogers favorably. It is the only aspect of Rogers High School that she was able to describe as having a positive impact on her. However, she connects her academic success at Rogers to the fact that she had such a limited social life, which allowed her to focus on her studies. Linda was able to see positives and negatives, in the academic programming at Start High School. For example, the larger student enrollment allowed for more Advanced Placement course offerings. She also thought there were more resources available at Start High School, allowing for better equipment and materials. Dale, on the other hand felt the academics at Start failed in comparison to the rigor of the liberal arts curriculum, which was part of the tradition at DeVilbiss. Stacey, who had been on the honor roll at DeVilbiss, experienced a significant decline in her grades while attending Start High School. She felt she no longer had the motivation due to the fact that she felt disconnected to the adults at Start and because she was no longer involved in sports and therefore, she was no longer required to keep her GPA up for athletic eligibility.

The single most important support identified by the participants was a network of familiar adult relationships, in other words, staff from DeVilbiss who followed the students to the receiving school. For Linda, having the Assistant Principal of Activities from DeVilbiss relocated to Start High School made all the difference in the world to her, referring to him as her “guiding star.” For Dale, his German Teacher from DeVilbiss who relocated to Start helped him navigate some critical situations at Start High School.
However, it was the absence of such relationships that became even more evident. In Treva’s case, she longed for her school guidance counselor whom she had worked with for three years at DeVilbiss. In Stacey’s case, she removed herself from all extracurricular activities due to the fact that “she didn’t like the teacher” in charge of various athletic programs at Start High School. Each participant who had been active in the choir at DeVilbiss longed for the presence of their former choir director from DeVilbiss. The structural issues that surfaced during the transition experience will be examined in greater detail later.

**Summary of the School Closure and Transition Experience**

The purpose of this section was to provide a chronological overview of how each participant described the experience of school closure and transition. What is clear is that each individual experienced the school closure and transition process uniquely and personally. However, the shared experiences that occurred while attending DeVilbiss produced commensurate descriptions of the time spent at DeVilbiss in terms of its culture, as well as the experience of going through school closure. The descriptions of the participants began to vary greatly as they moved further away from their memories of DeVilbiss and their shared experiences.

There were three receiving schools that were attended by the displaced students, Start High School, Rogers High School, and Scott High School. Three of the participants attended Start High School and within their descriptions, surfaced some common memories in terms of the transition experience, as well as the school culture. Each of the five participants compared their receiving school to DeVilbiss, resulting in descriptions that presented the receiving school as a negative or a positive experience. The
participants only viewed the experience at the receiving school positively if they perceived themselves as being in a better situation than the one they left at DeVilbiss. Social and psychological issues, unique to each participant, influenced the participants’ experience. The themes that follow provide insight as to the factors that played a role in how each participant experienced school closure and transition.
CHAPTER V
STUDY FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of the previous chapter was to provide a background against which the data generated by the participants’ interviews may more deeply be studied. The purpose of Chapter Five is to present the social and psychological themes that emerged within the participants’ narratives of the school closure experience. The two overarching social and psychological themes were “sense of belonging” and “grief and loss.”

When participants described experiences that spoke to a “sense of belonging,” they often included subthemes that addressed “socially exclusive/inclusive groups of students,” “social and/or human capital,” and “relational trust.” In other words, a sense of belonging was associated with a school climate that provided inclusive settings in which diverse student groups had the opportunity to interact with each other. A sense of belonging was also associated with social engagement that was equated with social capital. Participants described specific social groups in which they belonged, impacting
their belief that they were valued and influential. Some of these social groups were associated with human capital, for example, honor classes or athletic teams. Again, issues pertaining to social capital and/or human capital helped participants establish and maintain a sense of belonging. Lastly, relational trust surfaced as a critical component for developing and/or maintaining a sense of belonging.

When participants described experiences of “grief and loss,” they included subthemes related to “no control/no voice,” “identity,” “place identity/place attachment,” “lack of closure,” and/or “agency/control.” A large portion of the experience of school closure was focused around the theme, “grief and loss.” The fear of losing DeVilbiss surfaced after the school levy failed in November of 1990. Emotions associated with grief surfaced as early as November and increased as the participants described how they and others tried to save DeVilbiss from closure, followed by the process of letting go of DeVilbiss and moving on once the decision was made to close the school. This section begins with a presentation of the findings related to the two overarching social and psychological themes, beginning with “sense of belonging.”

**Sense of Belonging**

The overarching theme, “sense of belonging,” was the most predominant theme that surfaced in the participants’ descriptions. I initially coded to the theme, “sense of belonging” when participants described feeling either welcomed or unwelcomed in their environment. For example, Shaina explained how she felt like she fit in at Scott High School, stating, “I think going over to Scott was like being a visitor at someone’s family reunion, and everybody welcoming you.”
At first, I coded “sense of belonging” as an individual theme. However, through the use of multiple coding, I quickly realized that it was actually an overarching theme made up of various subthemes. There were three subthemes that attributed to the overarching feeling of a “sense of belonging.” The first discussed in this section is “socially exclusive/inclusive groups of students.” I coded descriptions to this subtheme when participants described experiences of feeling isolated, excluded or segregated. For example in Dale’s case, he described a feeling of isolation from the Start High School students, “creating an antagonistic environment that resulted in opposing sides.” The participants often described this phenomenon as an “us versus them” experience. I also coded descriptions into this subtheme when the participants described times they felt the exact opposite: welcomed, included, or integrated.

The second subtheme under the umbrella of “sense of belonging” was “social capital.” When coding for social capital, I was looking for participant descriptions that implied an elevated status within the school culture. For example, Shaina was president of the junior class at DeVilbiss prior to its closure. All participants made reference to the idea that the DeVilbiss football team was held to the highest level of social status. Thus, any interaction the participants remembered having with the football team implied a degree of social capital. An excellent example of such social capital was when Dale explained that his social status increased when he began interacting with the football players in the locker room at DeVilbiss.

The third subtheme in this section is “relational trust.” When coding for this subheading, I was looking for descriptions that spoke to relationships among students, staff, and community. The importance of having existing relationships when arriving at
the receiving school surfaced as the single most important factor influencing the participants’ sense of belonging in their new environment. Interestingly, it was the relationships with the adults at both the sending and receiving schools that the participants most focused on when describing a sense of belonging, or in some cases, of not belonging. This finding has significant policy implications, which will be discussed later.

**Socially Exclusive/Inclusive Groups of Students.**

In the broadest definition, a “sense of belonging” is the feeling that one is wanted in one’s existing environment. Participants were more likely to experience a “sense of belonging” when they referenced an inclusive environment. However, participants were more apt to feel that they did not “fit in” when they were referencing exclusive settings.

When I coded portions of the transcripts to be included in the subtheme, “exclusive/inclusive,” I had in my mind a participant’s description that implied an “us versus them” climate. This climate was predominantly felt at the receiving high schools in terms of how the DeVilbiss students were treated by receiving students and staff. Participants often described feeling excluded, especially during their first year at the receiving school. Alternatively, some students narrated a feeling of inclusion broadly or instances of inclusion within a context in which they generally experienced exclusion.

In the next section are examples provided by the participants of policies and procedures that contributed to a system that either promoted exclusive or inclusive environments. Exclusive and inclusive settings are examined first within the neighborhoods in which the participants resided. These neighborhood-based descriptions are often associated with race and socioeconomic class. Next, participant descriptions are
presented that speak to the essence of how each experienced exclusive and inclusive settings within DeVelbiss High School and within his or her receiving high school.

**The experience of race and class within the neighborhoods.**

Toledo Ohio contained both integrated and segregated neighborhoods back in 1991. School segregation was not an isolated phenomenon, but represented the segregated neighborhoods that existed at the time. While DeVelbiss was considered to be an integrated high school, some of the elementary schools that fed into DeVelbiss were not. Dale and Linda both came from one such neighborhood referred to as the “Old Orchard” area in which Old Orchard Elementary was located. Dale and Linda described the neighborhood referred to as “Old Orchard” as being an exclusively white neighborhood. Old Orchard fed into DeVeaux Junior High, along with several other elementary schools that were much more diverse than Old Orchard Elementary. According to Dale, he was the only white male out of around 60 children in his neighborhood to attend DeVelbiss High School. He stated, “It was a time and a period when people transitioned and either moved to the suburbs or after DeVeaux [Junior High], started to go to Catholic schools.”

The Old Orchard area borders on the campus of the University of Toledo and is tucked up against Ottawa Hills, a wealthy community that is recognized for having an outstanding school district. While many of Dale’s neighbors did not choose to send their children to DeVelbiss High School, Dale and his parents never considered sending him to a high school other than DeVelbiss.

I did not consider it. It was all anybody talked about in junior high because nobody wanted to go to DeVelbiss because of racial attitudes basically, and not
subscribing to those racial attitudes, and then seeing them nakedly for what they were and believing that the reason people want to go Central or St. Francis or move to Ottawa Hills or whatever, it was because they did not want (pause) I was told that some of them did not want Sally to go school with Tyrone.

(Dale, December 2012)

Dale was aware at a very young age of the perceptions among some within his community regarding people who were different than them, racially or socio-economically. Linda, like Dale, is white and also resided in the Old Orchard neighborhood. Linda’s mother was a graduate of DeVilbiss. Linda remembered that her mother was looking forward to her daughter graduating from DeVilbiss, just as she had done. Linda described the Old Orchard community as being racially homogeneous consisting of “middle class to upper middle class” families.

Linda and Dale both transferred to Start High School upon the closing of DeVilbiss High School, along with Stacey. Stacey, who is African-American, lived in the McKinley Elementary attendance area and attended McKinley for part of her elementary years, as well as a private school. Like Dale and Linda, she attended DeVeaux Junior High and DeVilbiss High School. Stacey remembered her neighborhood as being integrated.

My neighborhood back then was, it was nice. It was mixed and different types of families lived there…. All of us, we all went to school together since elementary. So it was diverse and it was pretty nice. Everybody kept tabs on everybody’s kids.

(Linda, January, 2013)
Shaina, who is African-American, attended Nathan Hale Elementary, then DeVeaux Junior High and then DeVilbiss. She described her neighborhood as being diverse and remembered that there was a teacher from Nathan Hale Elementary who lived on her block. Shaina provided a more in-depth description of the community that surrounded Scott High School. She described the “inner-city” community and named some of the elementary schools that serviced that area, as well as the two junior high schools that fed into Scott High School.

Because usually, Scott was Fulton [elementary], the inner-city elementaries, I know Fulton was one, then there was Robinson [Junior High] or Old West End [Junior High], then it was Scott [High School]. Whereas we were Nathan Hale [Elementary], then DeVeaux [Junior High], then DeVilbiss. I think Robinson’s curriculum was totally different from DeVeaux, I forget at the time what that school was labeled, but there just was a difference.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

In the description above, Shaina provided a glimpse of what it meant to be an inner-city student who, unlike herself, lived in an attendance area that fed into the inner-city junior high schools followed by the high school, which was Scott. She mentioned that the curriculum at Robinson, which was considered to be the inner city junior high, was very different from the one she experienced at DeVeaux Junior High. She also referred to Robinson as being “labeled” something. In an earlier description, Shaina stated, “Scott was just like a bad dream to people.” This was in reference to the DeVilbiss staff who after the closing, chose to go to schools other than Scott. Scott was a racially segregated all-black school. However, its reputation, perceived or real, played in role in
maintaining its segregated setting. While Shaina did not attend any of the inner-city schools she mentioned, her description is important in that it alludes to the idea that there were vast differences between the schools that were considered to be the inner-city schools and those that were not, even to the extent that she used the word “labeled” to describe Robinson Junior High.

Treva lived on Elliott Street, which was not too far from Scott High School. Treva, who is African-American, was the only participant who did not attend DeVeaux Junior High. She was in the unique position of living in an attendance area that required her to attend Robinson Junior High. Robinson Junior High was considered to be a “black” school with the majority of the students feeding into Scott High School. Of all the participants, she was the only one who entered DeVilbiss with a limited degree of familiarity. She did not have a shared history with the students who had attended DeVeaux Junior High. She described fear and anxiety about having to attend DeVilbiss because she did not have the established relationships that the other participants appeared to have. As a result, she chose to align herself with her cousin who was considered to be more apt to socially engage. Treva’s story is important because it reflects an attendance area policy that kept her segregated from the students she ultimately would be in high school with at DeVilbiss. This policy also kept her in racially segregated settings until she enrolled at DeVilbiss, which was an integrated setting. Thus, she was less familiar with the racially integrated environment of DeVilbiss and perceived herself as lacking in this social system.
The experience of exclusive/inclusive social groups at DeVilbiss.

“... where people would maybe separated off, it is based on where they lived.”

(Linda, January, 2013)

As stated throughout this study, participants described DeVilbiss as highly integrated. Many of the participants used the word “family” when describing the school climate. Treva, for example, described DeVilbiss as being racially diverse, stating, “Yeah, I remember we had white friends, black friends, me, you know what I mean? You just kind of had them all mixed in.” Linda recalled the “senior hallway” and provided an example of how the culture of DeVilbiss allowed for various groups of students to intersect with each other. These points of intersection played a critical role in the climate that was DeVilbiss, described earlier by participants as “welcoming” and “fun.”

Then, I remember the pep rallies too. The pep rallies for the football games and there was that one long wide hallway, it was a senior hallway, that you know, at the end of the day there would always be like almost an impromptu parade through that hallway with some of the band members and some of the football… like it wasn’t organized by anybody, it was just all of a sudden, you know, it was loud and noisy and cheering, so things like that. So, there was definitely that kind of team spirit and you know sense of community and camaraderie among, you know, different social cliques.

(Linda, January, 2013)
As noted below, Linda’s response varies from Stacey’s in that Linda refers to patterns of separation within a generally integrated school setting. The segregated groups referenced by Linda emerged from shared experiences and functionality.

It was very neighborhood based. All of us that were (pause) kind of grew up in the same neighborhood or lived in the same area kind of stuck together, just as far as you know getting to school in the morning and study groups and we happened to be in some of the same classes and things like that, so that is definitely where I kind of saw, that is where people would maybe separated off, it is based on where they lived.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Since Linda and Dale both remember the Old Orchard neighborhood as an exclusively white middle to upper class neighborhood, then the neighborhood-based student group that Linda remembered within the walls of DeVilbiss would also have been exclusively white, middle to upper class. It is important to note that only Linda remembered neighborhood-based groups of students. There is strong evidence, however, that students were segregated in terms of human capital, which directly related to talent and ability. Dale and Linda were both in honor’s classes at DeVilbiss and made reference to the fact that because they were in honor’s classes, they were more likely to be recruited for sports and clubs. This is significant because Dale and Linda both resided in Old Orchard, an exclusively white middle to upper class neighborhood. Stacey, on the other hand, was only recruited for sports after some of “the coaches noticed how tall” she was. Stacey was black and resided in a neighborhood described as “diverse.”
Experiencing exclusive/inclusive social groups at Start.

“We were labeled as ‘DeVilbiss kids’” (Dale, December, 2012)

Start High School was described earlier as the “all-white” high school in the district. The stage for the transitional experience at Start High School was set well before the beginning of the 1991-1992 school year. The school board and central office administration had a glimpse of what was to come at their community forum held in January of 1991. Issues around “segregation” at Start High School began well before the closing of DeVilbiss was announced. Linda recalled a community forum held at the administration building documented in the archival review.

The problem was that DeVilbiss was an all-black high school. They [the community] didn’t really see it as integrated and it really wasn’t … but then at the time Start was an all white high school, but that sort of seemed to be the political opinion that everybody took.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda’s description suggests that at the time of the closing, the larger community viewed DeVilbiss as an “all-black” high school, when in fact, Linda remembered it being about 60% black and 40% white. The community viewed the racial makeup of DeVilbiss as “the problem” when in contrast, Start was viewed as an “all white” high school and the community did not consider that to be a problem. Dale also had attended the community forum in January. He remembered entering the auditorium only to find that the Start High School staff and community members had gotten there early and taken most of the available seating.
They were ah…they did not want black kids from DeVilbiss going to Start and that is why they were there and they spun some line about, you know, “Oh! we heard rumors Start was going to close” and that is what one of the parents said in the news broadcast that night, and it was just totally bull. It was like community redlining out of the 60s, I mean, it was like the housing neighborhood associations in northern cities they came out of, you know, they try to keep black families from moving in, you know, in the 50s and 60s, and that is what it was and that’s who showed up. (pause) So that was a real good start (sarcastic tone).

(Dale, December, 2012)

With the closing of DeVilbiss High School, Start High School was about to become racially integrated at an accelerated speed, a reality that Dale and Linda felt was overlooked by the school district. When asked to describe the worst thing about Start High School, Linda reflected, “the worst things were the unfamiliarity and then the racial tension, there definitely was [racial tension].” Linda and Dale both described acts of racial hatred that surfaced during their first year at Start High School. Dale stated, “Well, then those racial tensions spilled into Start.” According to both Dale and Linda, a few Start High School students spray-painted the building with racially inflammatory messages that were targeted at the African-American students from DeVilbiss. Those Start students ended up being disciplined, causing more divide within the community.

It is interesting to note that Stacey, who was the only minority participant that transitioned into Start High School, reported that she did not experience any racial tension. When asked about the racial graffiti incident, she had no memory of it. Stacey stated, “Where have I been? I just didn’t even know that went on.” Stacey explained
that she may have been oblivious to the racial tension because she had gone to DeVeaux and DeVilbiss, both of which were racially mixed schools. She had a lot of white friends at the time she transitioned from DeVilbiss. Stacey stated, “So the transition to Start wasn’t really like such a culture shock.” Stacey explained that it did not feel like, “Oh my God, the blacks against the whites.” She did acknowledge, however, that Start was almost completely white at the time and that “racial integration [at Start] really almost started with the closing of DeVilbiss.” Stacey explained that from her perspective, the staff at Start did not treat her as if “here come the black kids.” She felt they saw her and her peers as “the DeVilbiss kids.” That division, she did feel. Even though Stacey did not remember experiencing racial tension at Start, it is possible that her negative experience at Start High School was a result of the racially biased climate. The division between the DeVilbiss students and the receiving Start students and the mistreatment of the DeVilbiss students by the staff may have been the primary division, as remembered by Stacey. However, there is certainly evidence that the black students from DeVilbiss would have also experienced racial bias. It may have been difficult for them to isolate the motivation behind the mistreatment, which is why Stacey may not have been cognizant that she was indeed experiencing racial discrimination.

Stacey was not alone in her feeling that the students who had transferred in from DeVilbiss were treated differently than the receiving Start students. Linda and Dale also reported that there was an “us versus them” feeling that permeated the walls of Start High School. The DeVilbiss students who attended Start High School felt they were treated differently not just by the Start High School students, but also by the adults in the
building. Dale, in particular, expressed anger over the way the DeVilbiss students were treated at Start High School.

Well, things that I heard at least, yeah, I mean, and this goes from teachers to janitors to everybody, and a lot of it was racially insensitive or hateful and there should have been some leadership internally that said, “this is not acceptable, this is who we are moving forward, and these are our kids and we are going to educate them and serve them as best we can.”

(Dale, December, 2012)

Dale, in particular emphasized the idea that DeVilbiss students were stigmatized at Start High School. Dale believed the adults in the building should have made an effort to make the DeVilbiss students feel that they were welcomed, stating, “I mean there was no welcome. There was no nothing. It was just like, ‘oh great here come all these problems from DeVilbiss that we got to deal with.’”

Stacey reported that she felt the “us versus them” climate at first, stating, “I kind of felt like ‘we’re in their school’ kind of thing.” However, once she began playing on the Start basketball team, the two sides seemed to come together. Her description is an example of how two separate groups can become integrated if the environment allows for points of interaction.

Maybe, I probably thought that initially, but like I said, I did play basketball in my junior year, so once I kind of at least did something that are familiar with me, then I saw the DeVilbiss girls and Start girls then I kind of, then I did not feel as much as it was, then I felt more of a togetherness versus “us versus them,”

(Stacey, February, 2013)
Dale also reported that in time, he felt that the “us versus them” climate dissipated. However, from Dale’s perspective, it was a slow process that took multiple years. Dale stated, “We were labeled as DeVilbiss kids or what have you, I think that faded certainly after the first year.” Dale remembered being identified as being from DeVilbiss early on, adding, “but I think that faded and I think that by my senior year, most of the kids were pretty well integrated socially, culturally in all these things.”

The participants also experienced the typical exclusive student groupings at Start High School, similar to those described while attending DeVilbiss. These would be the groups formed due to similar talents, abilities, and interests. For example, Dale and Linda had described how being in the honor’s classes at DeVilbiss created an exclusive setting. This was also true of the honor’s track at Start; however, Dale felt that the honor’s students were even more isolated at Start High School, recalling, “They really kind of walled those kids off.” For Dale, who was highly aware of the privileges associated with his race, gender and class, he found himself in an unsettling position in which he was discriminated against due to his association with DeVilbiss, but yet able to reach a level of acceptance at Start due to his social status and political ties to a board member. Dale appeared to be hypersensitive to the fact that his fellow DeVilbiss students who were black were not able to reach the same level of acceptance. As a result, Dale spent much of his time advocating for those around him that were not as fortunate.

Linda described how the “us versus them” climate experienced at Start by the displaced DeVilbiss students encouraged them to self-isolate from the receiving school students. For example, Linda bonded with other students from DeVilbiss, including
those from the class behind her. They were drawn to each other because of the familiarity of each other and the feeling of belongingness.

Especially the kids from DeVilbiss that came with us that were freshmen that only had one year there and then got moved again, so they had gone, junior high to, you know, they had just been in constant transition in school until they got to their sophomore year at Start. So, we all stayed relatively close.

(Linda, January, 2013)

This bond was so strong that many of the DeVilbiss students in Linda’s class returned to Start one year after graduating to attend the following class’s graduation. Linda explained that she considers this group of students, who were one-year behind her, to be a part of her own graduation class.

**Experiencing exclusive/inclusive social groups at Scott.**

“I had never been around an all-African-American setting like that.”

*Shaina, August, 2013*

Shaina had a good experience at Scott High School. She never felt isolated from the receiving Scott High School students. Reflecting on the transition from DeVilbiss to Scott, she remembered the impact of going from an integrated setting at DeVilbiss to a segregated all-black setting at Scott High School.

DeVilbiss was diverse, and that was a difference when I went to Scott. I felt like, “Wow this is culture shock to me” when I went to Scott because I had never been around an all-African-American setting like that. It was culture shock.

(Shaina, August, 2013)
Shaina’s point is of significant interest because in many cases, the study of racial relations typically focused on the transition of black students moving from a racially segregated setting to an integrated setting, not the other way around. Because Scott High School was predominantly made up of black students, Scott was thought of as a “segregated” high school, a label often synonymous with negative connotations. However, Shaina never identified the lack of diversity at Scott as a weakness of the school. From her perspective, the homogeneity of the school population was considered to be a strength as it opened her eyes to institutions that provided black students opportunities for advancement, such as access to black colleges. Therefore, in Shaina’s case, her sense of belonging may actually have increased at Scott High School.

**Experiencing of exclusive/inclusive social groups at Rogers.**

“Wow, they let that happen.” *(Treva, November, 2012)*

Treva attended Rogers High School as a senior. Treva spoke frequently about the “us versus them” feeling experienced by the students displaced from not only DeVilbiss, but also those from Macomber. Macomber was the other district high school that was closed along with DeVilbiss. From Treva’s description of the transitional year, it appears that there were many students from Macomber who enrolled at Rogers High School. Treva indicated that she would have liked the adults in the building to have helped the DeVilbiss and Macomber students’ transition into Rogers. She became visibly agitated when she described what it was like when she entered Rogers her senior year.

I think now when I look back, I don’t think that I wanted to be like, “Oh she’s from…” (pause followed by anger) they knew, they knew, “did you come from DeVilbiss or did you come from Macomber?” Like some of the people, they
knew…they knew you weren’t an original Ram or what have you, and they weren’t mean or anything you know, they weren’t mean like the people that I came in contact with. It’s just, they were just kind of set in their own [ways].

(Treva, November, 2012)

Treva explained that she felt more like an observer than a participant. The school climate at Rogers was well established and unwelcoming to the newcomers.

Right, because I feel like things were already established. You know, like as far as friendships and different groups of, you know, people. And I think everything was already, “This is how we do things here,” and you either jump in or …but it wasn't like, “come on.” Not that I wanted anyone to say, “Hey, Treva come on jump in,” you know, “do this.” But it still wasn't…you didn't feel, I didn't feel like I was a part of that environment or atmosphere.

(Treva, November, 2012)

While the exclusion experienced by the participants who went to Start High School often appeared to be implemented with harmful intent, Treva described an environment at Rogers where it appeared to be benign neglect.

It wasn’t like a hostile environment but it just was different…I didn’t want to be there, but eventually it was fine…but I still didn't participate in anything, it was fine. It wasn't a bad place, it was just, I didn't want to be there.

(Treva, November, 2012)

For the first month or so, Treva was very much aware of the divide between those students who were “original Ram” (Rogers mascot) students and those who had transitioned from the closed schools. Like Linda, who found comfort in bonding with
other displaced students, so too, did Treva. Not only did those students share the experience of school closure, but they also shared the experience of being bussed to Rogers through the use of public transportation referred to as TARTA (Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority).

Plus we had to catch the bus. You know, they provided TARTA bus for us to go there. So we caught the TARTA bus going back into the city, and they [the neighborhood students] all caught the yellow bus, the school buses.

(Treva, November, 2012)

As she reflected on the experience of being bussed to Rogers High School on the TARTA buses, we discussed the similarities of the situation to that of the forced integration of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Treva paused to reflect and then became agitated, stating, “When you really look at it… I’m like, ‘Wow they let that happen,’ you know they just let it (pause) they let it happen.”

Social Capital

Social capital refers to a set of resources that surface in family relations and in community social organizations that are useful for cognitive or social human development. These resources differ between individuals and impact the capacity for developing human capital, especially in children and young adolescents. The relations of authority and trust are forms of social capital (Coleman, 1990), which may be present in or absent from institutions such as schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).

When coding for social capital, I was looking for participant experiences that implied an elevated status of worth within the school culture. In some cases, it was in
regard to having membership in an exclusive group, such as an athletic team. For example, Dale and Stacey both played on sport teams at DeVilbiss and Linda was a cheerleader. In other cases, it may have been a title a participant held, as in the case of Shaina, who was president of her class at DeVilbiss. For one of the participants, Dale, it was more about the social standing of his family within the larger community and how it translated into power and influence within the school building. In this section, I provide specific examples from the participants’ descriptions of how social capital surfaced first at DeVilbiss and later at the receiving schools.

Social capital at DeVilbiss.

“...so we were with all these upper classmen, you know?”

(Dale, December, 2012)

One of themes that surfaced around “social capital” had to do with the fact that at the time of the closing, DeVilbiss had low enrollment. I refer to this phenomenon as the experience of being a big fish in a little pond (Marsh, 2005). Dale described DeVilbiss as a small intimate setting, a place where the adults tried to “recognize talent very quickly and get people involved.” He explained that he did not do much socially in junior high, other than choir, but in the summer of 1990, his phone began ringing and on the other end of the line, much to his surprise, were DeVilbiss coaches.

I got a call from the varsity cross-country coach at DeVilbiss, and [he] said, “Hey, we heard you’re coming, how about you running cross-country?”... The soccer coach called and said, “Hey, I hear you are running cross-country, how about you playing soccer too?” [I said,] “That would be two varsity sports in one season.” [He said], “Hey that is fine, you know, come on, we don’t practice at the same
time it will work out.”...So I went to cross country everyday starting in the end of July, beginning August, I started soccer shortly thereafter, was in the locker room everyday with the football team.

(Dale, December, 2012)

For Dale, this translated into perceived social capital. In this description, the importance of the relationship between the adult and the student is apparent. If the adult had not reached out to Dale, he never would have considered joining an athletic team at DeVilbiss. That relationship played a critical role in terms of developing a perceived degree of both human capital and social capital. The theme, “relational trust,” will be discussed in depth later. However, I have mentioned it in this section only to point out that relationships do play a critical role in the acquisition of social capital. Even though this story occurred decades ago, I could still hear the pride in Dale’s voice as he recalled how the adults made him feel valued, special and welcomed.

Dale recognized that because a family member was on the school board, his degree of human capital and social capital increased significantly. He stated, “Again, my [family member] was on the school board. I had some kind of a visible marking I am sure.” He was astutely aware that his race, gender, socioeconomic status and perceived family status all played a role in his ability to navigate through school. In the following description, Dale discussed both his social and human capital held at DeVilbiss.

But again, I was the white male from the upper income neighborhood in the district that was going to go to the school and so I think people were just trying to invest in me and try and give me a good start and give me a solid foundation. I was tall for my age, which was good, and so I did not have any problems with
anybody. Again everybody on the football team, you know, “Oh yeah! That is Dale and he is on soccer” or whatever. 

(Dale, December, 2012)

The participants all alluded to the fact that the football team at DeVilbiss was held in the highest esteem in terms of social status. Dale’s association with the football team added to his own perception of social capital and sense of belonging. Dale was very proud when he spoke about how he was accepted by the football team.

You know, I was throwing up after cross-country, just like all the guys were throwing up after football. So, you know, when you're doing that together it's not bonding, but you are at least, you know you are in the same place.

(Dale, December, 2012)

In Dale’s example, it was the locker room that provided a common space where he interacted with the members of the football team. Without such interactions, the relationships would not have developed that allowed the participants to acquire a perceived degree of social capital. Just like common points of social interaction were important for bringing diverse groups of students together as discussed earlier in the section pertaining to inclusive and exclusive student groupings, creating spaces for students to connect also played a role in the participants’ attainment of social capital.

Dale mentioned his excitement when he joined show choir and found himself interacting with upperclassmen. He stated, “I was one of I think three freshman guys that got dragged into that from men’s choir and so we were with all these upper classmen, you know?” Several times throughout his interview, Dale spoke with excitement about how he was socializing at DeVilbiss with groups of students who he perceived as having
social status. He was integrating with the football team, the girl’s basketball team and according to Dale, he was “just this freshman honor’s kid.” He stated, “And so, again, socially it was like, ‘well, go hang out with the seniors because that is who is in this [club or sport].’” He recalled with amazement that he actually was getting car rides from seniors at DeVilbiss.

Like Dale, Linda also brought up social capital as it related to the upper classman. When asked if she felt she was popular at DeVilbiss, Linda stated, “Well, it is hard to say, because remember still I was a freshman and sophomore.” She believed the real social capital resided in senior status, stating, “So, that [being a senior] trumps everything in high school, you know?” Linda and Dale both remembered feeling that the other honors students were sought out by the adults at DeVilbiss. From Linda’s perspective, she remembered feeling “special” because she was in the honor’s track. She recalled feeling as if the DeVilbiss staff already knew who the honor students were even before the first day of school there, stating, “I mean, it was a big school, there was lot of kids, and it seems like they did [know us].”

Linda made several references to how the students in the honor’s track at DeVilbiss were given special treatment. Linda stated, “There was a different standard for us, I guess I would say, I mean I definitely know of kids who fell through the cracks and who weren’t paid attention to.” The issue of human capital surfaced in Linda’s description when she alluded to the fact that some students were perceived as worthy of time and attention, while others were not. She recalled that she was part of a group of kids that the adults at DeVilbiss knew and this special relationship allowed her some
privileges. In the following description, once again, the role that relationships played with the existing adults becomes clear in terms of social capital.

I recall using the vice principal’s office regularly for homework or to hangout, and so having that sort of oversight I guess…[and connections with] some of the teachers, especially in the like elective type things like choir … and even our cheerleading adviser who was the science teacher.

(Linda, January, 2013)

While Linda acquired her social capital primarily through her association with various clubs and activities, Stacey acquired hers primarily through athletics. Stacey was an athlete at DeVinbiss. Unlike Dale, coaches did not try to recruit her prior to her freshman year. Stacey’s experience was a little different. Her capital did not come from her family’s social status, but from her physical status. She was tall in stature and remembered coaches recruiting her for that reason. She played basketball her freshman year at DeVinbiss. She did not play a fall sport her freshman year and really cannot recall why, other than that she did not know about the try-outs. This may reflect a limitation of social capital in terms of her family, as well as herself. Her sophomore year she played both volleyball and basketball. Stacey reflected on how incoming freshman may have learned about tryouts for fall sports, providing an example of how students fall through the cracks if they are not part of the inner-circle. She recalled that it was “maybe word of mouth” and those who got the information “maybe they knew some of the girls [who] played for DeVinbiss.” This is an example of how social networks build capital (Coleman, 1988).
For Linda and Stacey, their social capital was dependent upon their involvement in athletics, clubs or activities. However, Shaina’s was associated with her outgoing personality. While attending DeVilbiss, Shaina was identified by her peers as a leader. She was president of her junior class. She attended the dances and when we viewed the final yearbook together, she seemed to know just about everyone. Shaina has described herself as someone who is outgoing in virtually any setting, making it easy for her to form the relationships necessary for acquiring social capital. This served her well when she transferred to Scott High School her senior year. It is interesting to note that Shaina was the only participant who reported having a positive transitional experience. The idea that her social capital was not directly tied to DeVilbiss, but rather came from within herself due to her self-reported outgoing personality is important to consider.

Of all the participants, Treva may have entered DeVilbiss with the least amount of social capital in terms of relationships with her peers. While the majority of the students who resided in the DeVilbiss attendance area also attended DeVeaux Junior High, thus, entering DeVilbiss with existing relationships among peers, Treva was one of the small number of students who attended Robinson Junior High. Additionally, unlike Shaina who considered herself to be outgoing, Treva described herself as “not a social person.” Treva had some anxiety when she entered DeVilbiss, stating, “So the beginning experience I thought was a little scary, but it was high school too so it was different.” Treva never described her experience in a way that demonstrated that she had a high level of social capital; however, she did appear to develop a comfortable social life.
I think once I got going and figured out what I was supposed to be doing and all of that and got my friends, we just got into a routine and used to everything, that I just kind of felt like it was more kind of like a little family.

(Treva, November, 2012)

In Treva’s case, it appears that her ability to acquire social capital may have been delayed by her personality, which she described as somewhat reserved. It was further limited by the fact that she did not have a shared history with most of the entering freshman because she had not attended the same elementary or junior high. Even though it took her a little longer than the other participants to acquire social capital, Treva appeared to have made many friends within the three years she spent at DeVilbiss.

I think DeVilbiss it was a social…that was the social spot. You get to school early just to sit there and talk to somebody you know what I mean? So when my daughters do that now, I remember and I’m just like…[My girls say,] “we have to get to school early” and I’m like, “OK.”

(Treva, November, 2012)

Social capital at the receiving schools.

“The only thing I did my senior year was gave blood.” (Stacey, February, 2013)

I mentioned earlier that participants described an experience representative of the big-fish-little-pond effect while they attended DeVilbiss High School. Their receiving schools, on the other hand, reflected the opposite phenomenon, which is the experience of being a little fish in a big pond. For example, one participant, Dale, thought he remembered the enrollment at DeVilbiss as being about 500 students, while Start High School was one of the largest high schools in the district with an enrollment of about
1400 students. Dale described what it was like for him from a social perspective transitioning from DeVilbiss to Start.

My high school years [at Start] could have been a little better socially just in terms of the mechanics. I went from a dating pool at DeVilbiss where I was largely unchallenged and I could have dated a lot, looking back and thinking about things, to going to Start where you know…just another guy walking down the hall.

(Dale, December, 2012)

All five participants experienced a loss of social capital at their receiving school, although Shaina’s loss was minimal at Scott High School. The displaced students who transitioned into the receiving schools had to contend with the social capital that had been acquired by the receiving school students and along with it, there often came a sense of entitlement. Dale provided an example of how social capital acquired by the original Start students influenced the faculty at Start High School.

You know there was some hold over, I would say, by some of the faculty members to have some preference for some of the Start students. Like we had a senior…I don’t know there was a bunch of awards, there was like top senior guy and top senior girl, and I believe they were both Start kids all four years.

(Dale, December, 2012)

According to Dale, the preferential treatment of the Start students lasted all three years that he attended. He felt it lessened with each year he was there, but never completely dissipated.
I believe in all three years the valedictorian of each three classes was a DeVilbiss kid and that incensed the Start people. They wanted like a bifurcated two things, you know, co-valedictorian, co-salutatorian type things.

(Dale, December, 2012)

I asked if there were any other instances where the Start community advocated for co-anything, for example, co-class presidents. According to Dale, they did not. He believed the reason they would expect to have co-valedictorians was “because they [Start students] could not win it on their own.”

We discussed the transition for the athletes who were displaced from DeVilbiss and were forced to transfer to another high school. From Dale’s perspective the “star” athletes had the human capital to make them welcomed at Start High School; however, they were few in number. For the others who were not exceptional athletes, but perhaps good athletes, they entered a sport’s program that was already established. The Start students held the key positions, while the DeVilbiss students were forced to fill in the gaps.

That was pretty well established. I mean there were kids, they were already kind of marked like, you know, “this is going to be the quarterback, this is going to be the,” you know, “this is the basketball team.” Not a lot of the DeVilbiss kids made the basketball team at Start.

(Dale, December, 2012)

According to Dale, a student would have had to be an exceptional DeVilbiss athlete to be put in a real leadership role on a team. He recalled one particular student athlete who was recruited prior to the closing. Dale remembered this young man as “the
best athlete DeVilbiss had” and remembered him being about 15 years of age when he was recruited by Start High School. Dale became visibly angry as he considered the fact that Start High School was recruiting students away from DeVilbiss prior to its closing announcement and added, “You know before they even decided to pick over the bones of the closed institution.”

At DeVilbiss, Dale was accepted in all types of social circles. However, once he enrolled at Start, he no longer played soccer or ran cross-country. He enrolled in choir but dropped it mid-year. He had told me that while at DeVilbiss he had enjoyed “hanging with the other guys,” the athletes. We discussed the fact that he lost that when he transferred to Start. He stated, “I did, I did. No, I was well on my way to being a jock at DeVilbiss, out of necessity. Because they needed me.”

If anyone should have had some social capital coming into Start High School, it would have been Dale. He had family connections through school board membership and social connections to influential people in the Toledo area. While his family name did help him on occasion in dealing with issues pertaining to the adults at Start High School, it was clear that in Dale’s case, his family name did not help him gain popularity or social status among his peers.

Linda reflected on the transition to Start High School her sophomore year and in retrospection she explained, “I am sure it must have been like, it must have felt like being a freshmen there again.” Linda was alluding to the idea that the displaced students had to start over in terms of social capital. Linda had been a cheerleader at DeVilbiss her freshman year. She was also in choir and took part in theater and musical events. She described how she had to try out for cheerleading at Start prior to the beginning of her
sophomore year and remembered how painful it was to have to put on shorts and a shirt in the receiving school colors. Her mother was a Toledo Public School teacher and was active in the Friends of DeVilbiss, an organization made up of teachers, parents and community members. Linda does not remember how she learned about the cheerleading tryouts but speculated that her mother had been made aware of the date for the tryouts. This reflects the importance of having a parent who is in the inner-circle in terms of acquiring real or perceived social capital.

When I asked Stacey what she had lost and/or gained as a result of the closing of DeVilbiss and the transition to Start High School, she responded that she did not think she lost or gained anything. However, in her descriptions about the closing of the school and the transition, it is apparent that she did experience loss in terms of her activities, such as basketball, volleyball, and choir. She had a rich social life at DeVilbiss, describing it as “fun” and that did not transfer to Start High School. When Stacey spoke about this time in her life, she would often throw in some jokes to negate the intensity of the words, but there was sadness in her facial expression.

Stacey had played volleyball and basketball at DeVilbiss. She had also been in the choir and show choir. She thought that she had developed some abilities at DeVilbiss that allowed her to navigate at the receiving school. She stated, “Well, I guess what kind of helped me was that my involvement in the past school helped me to be able to go into those other activities at the new school.” Stacey felt that she did not have to start completely “from scratch” as she would have if she had been a freshman. While her abilities developed at DeVilbiss allowed her to make the junior varsity basketball team at
Start High School her first year there, by her senior year, she had dropped all sports. I asked her why she did not play her senior year.

I don’t know. The only thing I did in my senior was gave blood. I didn’t do anything in my senior year. Well, I worked at the office because I had enough credit. I really could have gone home early for the second half of the day, but I worked in the office, you know.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey had plenty of room in her schedule to take electives, but chose not to do so. Instead, she worked in the school’s main office. While at DeVilbiss, she had been focused on her grades, even making the honor roll. In one of her descriptions, she explained that she wanted to do well for the staff at DeVilbiss, she did not want to disappoint them. Having a connection with the staff at the school mattered to her. Without those relationships at Start, she began to disengage. She explained that she liked playing junior varsity basketball her junior year at Start, but that as a senior she would have had to play for the varsity coach, a person she did not like.

I liked the JV coach. Plus when you’re on the varsity status, I think everything is about like records, they want to…I don’t think I was good enough, probably for varsity or probably even as far as like being aggressive enough or whatever and plus you have other people who already at that time already about to be seniors and stuff already, who had already been there probably since their freshmen year.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey’s use of “already” several times in this description was indicative of the key theme, “social capital” and was clearly linguistically present in her statement. What
this suggests is that she lacked the social capital and human capital to play varsity basketball. She did not feel she could have competed with the other seniors who had established themselves within the basketball program. When she was on the junior varsity team, she only had to compete with freshman and sophomores, primarily, who did not have as much history, and thus, as much acquired social capital.

Along with the issue of social capital, she also addressed the issue of competition and its association with human capital. She explained that she felt she did not have the abilities needed to make the varsity basketball team her senior year. Stacey’s narrative of her self-concept in terms of how she viewed her abilities academically and athletically, suggests this self-concept changed drastically at Start High School. She was much less confident in her abilities at Start then when she was at DeVilbiss and it appeared that she did not anticipate adult support or meaningful social relations with the varsity coach. Again, as mentioned earlier with other participants, Stacey experienced the change in supply and demand from going from a school with limited enrollment to a large school like Start. Additionally, just like the other participants who had been in choir at DeVilbiss and dropped it within their first year at their receiving school, so too did Stacey. By her senior year, she had withdrawn for all extra-curricular activities.

Shaina provided an example of how human capital surfaced in the study. Shaina, who transferred to Scott High School, wanted me to include one of her DeVilbiss classmates in the study. I explained that I had already checked into this particular person as a potential participant because his name had come up earlier, but after looking into it, he had actually been recruited a year prior to the closing of DeVilbiss by Scott High School. Shaina responded, “Could have been. Yeah, he ran track for DeVilbiss, I think
you are absolutely right, I bet he did get recruited.” This story was similar to the one told by Dale, who described how a star baseball player at DeVilbiss transferred to Start High School one year earlier than the rest of his DeVilbiss classmates. The issue of high schools actively recruiting students from neighboring high schools is one of human capital. Students who show a promising rate of return are viewed as those worth investing in. While social capital is directly linked to the process of building relationships, human capital is not. Human capital, however, is often needed for students to gain entry and access so that they can then begin building relationships needed for acquiring social capital. There appears to be a complex relationship between human and social capital.

Treva, did not fare well in terms of social capital at her receiving school, Rogers High School. After learning that DeVilbiss was closing and that she would have her senior year at another high school, Treva and her friends made a conscious decision to approach the remainder of their junior year as if it were their senior year. In Treva’s mind, she had her senior year at DeVilbiss and chose not to try to relive it at her receiving high school. Treva described herself as “not a very social person” and “someone who has a hard time with change.” Treva expressed a fear of the unknown when narrating her transfer to Rogers her senior year.

I think for me, I’m not a good person with change, even as an adult now, like you know what I’m mean? I’m not one that, you know, I just don’t like change, cause I always like to think like in the future, like, “ok what is it going to be like?” You know you try to think about all that other stuff and looking back, that could be why I was so mad, like, “these aren’t gonna be my friends, I don’t know them.”
It appeared that the vulnerability often required when forming a new relationship was something Treva was not willing or able to do. She made determined while still at DeVilbiss that she would not open herself up to developing a social life at Rogers her senior year. She approached Rogers High School as if she were a guest or a visitor who “would only be staying for a short period of time.” We spoke a lot about the experience of spending an entire year as an observer, rather than a participant. I asked Treva what it was like when she was expected to participate in something that required her to draw from student relationships, for example, the act of voting for homecoming queen. Her response implied that she has a limited memory in regard to social events related to Rogers High School.

You know, I don’t even know if I voted unless it was someone that I maybe had had a class with … but I can’t tell you that I remember even voting. A lot of it for some reason, I think I just kind of blocked all of that out.

Not being able to remember or consciously blocking memories out consistently surfaced throughout Treva’s description of her experience of school closure, displacement, and transition to a new high school. Just as social capital is intertwined with the act of developing relationships, it appears to me that memories are also dependent upon relationships and interacting with others who are a part of the shared social system. When I asked Treva if she went to the prom at Rogers, she reverted back to her memories of DeVilbiss.
I did go like, I tried, I think what it was is my junior year I tried to do different things that I just really thought that like I did go to the prom my junior year and different little things that were …

(Treva, November, 2012)

I pointed out that the memory she described was of DeVilbiss, not of Rogers, and asked if those were things she would have done her senior year at DeVilbiss if she had been allowed to stay there. She responded, “I'm sure I'm sure.” I asked Treva if it was fair to say that from a social perspective, basically her entire senior year was lost? Treva responded, “Yep, the whole social aspect.”

Treva hypothesized that by transferring to Rogers her senior year, she became more focused on academics because she did not have a social life to distract her, stating, “Because I had nothing. No extracurricular no, ‘I’ll do my homework and get it over with,’ you know like, like those types of …” We then discussed what it would have been like for a student to transfer to Rogers who had no interest in academics. We wondered what would motivate them to go to school every day. Treva stated, “nothing at all.”

Treva pointed out that the juniors and seniors were most likely the angriest about the school closure. She explained how social capital was achieved through longevity in the building.

At least if you were a freshman, you still had three years to get yourself acclimated to the new environment, even the sophomores, but for us, we were almost there, you know, you’ve inched up and inched up and inched up.

(Treva, November, 2012)
There were times in the interview that Treva really became animated and this was one of those times. Treva described her lost senior year at DeVilbiss as if it were a rite of passage that had been denied her. Listening as she spoke about how she had done her time at DeVilbiss and was eager to become a senior and bask in the glory of everything that went along with senior status, she spoke as if she had gone back to that particular time of her life. Treva stated, “Yeah, we were ready to think we were hot (long pause), but it didn’t happen.”

Relational Trust

Schools are social systems so it was no surprise that as participants spoke about their experience of school closure and transition it was often in relation to the people who moved within that system. When coding for this subheading, I was looking for descriptions that spoke to relationships among students, staff, and community. The importance of having existing relationships at the receiving school which provided participants with a sense of familiarity, surfaced as the single most important factor in terms of the participants describing a sense of belonging. The presence of existing relationships at the receiving school served as a bridge that supported each participant as they moved through their transitional experience. The absence of significant relationships that had been present at DeVilbiss, but no longer present at their receiving school also impacted each participant’s transitional experience.

Relationships with school staff.

“...the North Star guiding everything.”

(Linda, January, 2013)
Dale, Linda and Stacey had participated in the choir program at DeVilbiss and all three of their narratives revealed that each had formed a strong connection with the DeVilbiss Choir Director. They could not help but compare their experience at DeVilbiss to their experience with their choir director at the receiving school, each resulting in various degrees of disappointment. Linda joined the Start Choir, but did not stay in it for long. Linda recalled that at Start, they performed “just really old music, really standard, really boring stuff.” Stacey was not able to transition into the Start High School choir because, as she stated, “I didn’t like the teacher.” She had a strong relationship with the choir director at DeVilbiss, who she described as being “really genuine and into all the kids.” His demeanor was “more laid back” in comparison to the choir director at Start, who was described as utilizing traditional teaching methods. The DeVilbiss Choir Director was described as the kind of teacher who empowered students. He allowed them a voice in the decisions being made and he went out of his way to provide them with meaningful opportunities, like taking the DeVilbiss Show Choir to St. Louis. According to Dale, the DeVilbiss Choir Director left teaching shortly after the closing of DeVilbiss.

Linda remembered using the office of the DeVilbiss Assistant Principal of Activities to “do homework or hangout.” Linda spoke several times about the assistant principal from DeVilbiss that transferred to Start High School. He played a key role in helping her navigate the new school culture. She remembered him being in the Start cafeteria every day and that he did the announcements. She stated, “So, there was this familiarity. Yeah, I think, so that [the Assistant Principal from DeVilbiss that followed her to Start] was sort of like the North Star kind of guiding everything.” Linda recalled
that this particular assistant principal was the single factor that most helped her navigate the unfamiliarity of Start High School, stating, “It would have been an enormously different experience [without him].”

Stacey and Treva both made reference to the strength of the guidance program at DeVilbiss. Treva had three years at DeVilbiss working with the same school counselor and Stacey had two years with the same counselor. Consequently, over the course of a two-year or three-year relationship, each felt that the guidance counselor really knew them. Treva explained that the school counselor at DeVilbiss was one of the critical links missing at Rogers. She stated, “When we were in over at DeVilbiss, you kind of had this same counselor from the time you started, like that piece was I thought missing too [at Rogers].” Treva explained the lack of trust she felt working with her new counselor at Rogers, she stated, “And you didn’t really not necessarily trust them, but you didn’t know them.” Treva raised the issue of trust and the role it played in the development of relationships. For Treva, who described herself as an introvert and someone who did not do well with change, a trusting relationship required time and a shared history. Stacey also felt that the school guidance program at her receiving school, Start High School, failed in comparison to that of DeVilbiss, stating, “The staff at DeVilbiss were more…they were more hands-on and I think they made you believe that you really could go to any school, or any college and be able to be anything.” Stacey recalled that the DeVilbiss guidance staff arranged trips for the students to gain college access and information, stating, “And I don’t think that was really even an option I think at Start, you know to take trips to, you know, to school or do an activity like there as a group.”
If there were opportunities at Start to go on trips or to have some individualized attention from an adult, for example, help with completing a college application form, Stacey was not aware of such opportunities.

They were definitely more concerned about the student’s growth [at DeVilbiss] and about like where we wanted to go in our life and they made you like excited, you wanted to be in a school, you wanted to come, instead of “I got to come here,” yeah.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey felt that DeVilbiss motivated her and she cared about disappointing the staff. She compared the relationship between her and some of the staff at DeVilbiss to the relationship she had with her parents.

Oh, yes because it was almost, not really like the level of my parents, just about though, you felt like man, you know, because you just loved [named both the DeVilbiss Assistant Principal of Activities and the DeVilbiss Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction] and respected them so highly. It was like you know you almost kind of did it for them, not really for them, but your mind set was like, “I don’t want get a bad grade, I don’t want to in anything, I don’t want to get called to the office.” You know you always had that in back of your mind like you know they were rootin’ for me. You felt like they had your back.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Like Stacey, Shaina referenced her relationship with one of the DeVilbiss staff as feeling much like that of a family member, stating, “She reminded me of like a grandmother …I just remember that I just was… there was something about like, I was
pulled into her.” While Shaina was able to form special relationships with a few of the staff members at Scott High School, she entered there with no existing adult relationships. Shaina was unable to recall any staff from DeVilbiss coming to Scott, adding, “I think they all went to Rogers, and Start and Bowsher.”

Not only is it apparent in Stacey’s and Shaina’s descriptions that they respected the staff at DeVilbiss, what also is clear is that they perceived a genuine sense of care and concern for their well-being. The dynamics of the relationships described are very much like those between parent and child. Stacey continued with her description in which she explained that the students felt loved, she stated, “Their mindset even back then was just like, you know, I mean, ‘these people they really loved these students.’ They really looked out for us. I think that was different [than Start].” Relational trust is critical to supporting adolescent development and identity formation. The school closure process disrupted those trusting adult relationships and required displaced students to begin again at a new receiving school. However, Stacey was never able to reestablish trusting adult relationships at Start High School, at least none that left her feeling loved and cared for. Shaina’s narrative, however, did reveal that she was able to experience nurturing adult relationships during her senior year at Scott High School.

The size of the school’s enrollment may have played a role in Stacey’s ability to form relationships with the staff at Start High School. She stated, “Yeah. A couple of our classes were overcrowded like my Science, my Biology. Yeah. A couple of the classes felt a little overwhelming like messes of people in this room.” It must have been easy for a student to feel invisible in a school as large as Start High School, especially after being in a school like DeVilbiss in which participants described as feeling like a
“family.” Stacey mentioned that it helped having some of the DeVilbiss faculty follow her to Start High School.

I think some of the staff did join Start. So, it was kind of nice to see a few familiar adults. So that kind of helped. You kind of felt a little bit, you know, at least somebody is here, you know that kind of helped a little bit as far as transitioning from DeVilbiss to Start.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

When Treva spoke about her time at Rogers High School, it was apparent that she felt the loss of adult relationships she had formed at DeVilbiss. She stated, “Yeah you...you were, you were just there, you’re just a body.” For all intents and purposes, Treva was invisible. Treva’s experience of school closure and transition resulted in a loss of trusting relationships. She went from a social network at DeVilbiss where she felt she was recognized and valued, to an environment at Rogers in which she felt disconnected and anonymous.

Treva remembered having one teacher at Rogers who followed her there from DeVilbiss. Other than her cousin, she really had no other connections to her peers. Treva looked forward to taking science at Rogers her senior year because she knew the teacher who had transferred from DeVilbiss, stating, “It was familiar and I had had him at DeVilbiss for something, maybe biology.” She also referenced the comfort she felt in having both a teacher from DeVilbiss and students from DeVilbiss in the same classroom at Rogers, stating, “It was a nice mixture of people that were from DeVilbiss that it made it comfortable you know what I mean? Like it almost made it like, okay.”
Treva felt like she was “at home” when she was in that particular class because of the familiar relationships with the other displaced students from DeVilbiss and the teacher. In general, Treva struggled to remember details of her year at Rogers, and yet she reported that she “remembered it like it was yesterday” when she reflected on the class with the DeVilbiss science teacher and the mixture of displaced students from DeVilbiss. This implies that there is a connection between memory and the strength of relationships among people within an existing environment. Treva’s narrative revealed that she often struggled with the idea of not wanting attention drawn to her at her receiving school, while at the same time longing to feel special. At times, anger surfaced in her descriptions of Rogers High School and was directed at the adults in the building for the fact that they did not help her feel welcomed and cared for, resulting in an experience of benign neglect.

**Relationships with students.**

“...that is why it was so hard when we got split up.”

*(Shaina, August, 2013)*

Dale spoke about the importance of student relationships, both those formed at DeVilbiss and at Start. He described how he entered DeVilbiss already having formed student relationships, many of which were established in junior high. Thanks in large part to the adults at DeVilbiss who created opportunities for students to engage with one another; Dale was able to form new relationships with the upper classmen. When Dale spoke about his friendships at DeVilbiss, he acknowledged that most of his closest friends were females. It was Dale’s sophomore year at Start High School that allowed him to cross paths with three young men who would become his best friends.
Linda explained that Start High School felt strange to the displaced DeVilbiss students, stating, “It wasn’t what we were familiar with. We didn’t, you know, like I said, we had lost that familiarity with teachers and faculties.” Linda reflected on her relationships with other students from DeVilbiss and how they made her feel. She stated, “You know a lot of kids I went to school with had been together since elementary school.” Linda had a long history with many of the students in her class when she entered DeVilbiss. Linda’s narrative emphasized the idea that the act of building trusting relationships takes time, stating, “So, having that familiarity [with students] and then on top of that the administrators and teachers, I think was the best part, especially when I think about in comparison to the later two years [at Start].”

Student relationships were important to Stacy as well. She remembered that while at DeVilbiss, “you can hang out with anybody.” Stacey had many opportunities to interact with other students at DeVilbiss through choir and athletics. Like all of the participants, she also mentioned the importance of having other DeVilbiss students at her receiving school to help her through the transition. Treva also described the importance of “having familiar faces” at Rogers High School. What was unique for Treva, was that she found comfort at her receiving school in students from Macomber, who had also been displaced from their school. While the Macomber students did not share a history with the DeVilbiss students, they did share the experience of school closure and transition, which drew them together.

Shaina recalled the importance of transitioning into DeVilbiss with students she had formed relationships with, stating, “I was with people from my childhood, from Nathan Hale days from kindergarten, we all stayed together and that is why it was so hard
when we got split up.” Shaina, who was the most outgoing of the participants, described strong relationships with her peers both from DeVilbiss and from Scott High School. The best part of Scott High School for Shaina was that she had an opportunity to meet new people. She stated, “It was the new friends I met, and I continue to still have those friends today.” Shaina found it easy to make new friends, so while it was of comfort to her that she had some existing student relationships when entering Scott High School, she was not as dependent upon them as perhaps the other participants.

**Sense of Belonging Summary**

All five participants expressed a “sense of belonging” while they attended DeVilbiss High School. Each one provided descriptions of DeVilbiss that reflected a high level of relational trust both between students and staff. Each described a culture at DeVilbiss that allowed for an integrated experience between diverse groups of students. Lastly, each one described examples where they perceived themselves as holding a degree of social capital while attending DeVilbiss. Participants who experienced a strong sense of belonging at their school described a setting that was open and inclusive, perhaps not at all times, but there were ample opportunities for students to have shared experiences. This was the experience for all the participants while at DeVilbiss.

For the majority of the participants, this strong sense of belonging did not continue after DeVilbiss closed. Only one participant, Shaina, expressed a “sense of belonging” upon entering her receiving school, Scott High School. Treva, who enrolled at Rogers High School as a senior, never reached any degree of a “sense of belonging.” Dale, Stacey and Linda enrolled at Start High School and over time, reached varying degrees of a “sense of belonging.” For Dale and Stacey, however, it was to a much lesser
degree than what they had at DeVilbiss. The participants who enrolled at Start and Rogers had the opposite experience, in which little existed within their social system that allowed for them to connect with the receiving school students.

Participants who had a strong sense of belonging also provided examples of having social capital, or at least, the perception of having social capital. All participants experienced an acquired degree of social capital while attending DeVilbiss High School. All participants experienced a reduction of social capital at their receiving school. Lastly, within their descriptions, the participants emphasized the importance of the strength of the relationships among the students and between the students and the adults in the building. Participants that described strong relationships with other students and with staff members were more apt to report feeling that they fit in with their school environment.

The participants’ narratives reveal that a student’s sense of belonging is dependent upon his or her ability to build trusting relationships. The acquisition of social capital is also dependent upon a student’s ability to form relationships. It was also evident that the adults in the school play a critical role in facilitating the process that supports a student’s feeling of a sense of belonging. It is not just the direct relationship between the adult and the student that contributes to a student’s sense of belonging it is also the opportunities created by the adults to allow for students to interact. The adults at DeVilbiss provided common ground from which students could form relationships and develop a shared history. That shared history played a critical role among the displaced students once they were forced to move through school closure and transition. The fact that DeVilbiss had a low enrollment which allowed students to have ample opportunities
for adult attention, played a critical role in creating a school climate at DeVilbiss that
students described as “intimate,” “caring,” and “like a family.”

The participants were not able to experience a high degree of a sense of belonging
at their receiving schools. The conditions necessary to create a sense of belonging were
not in place at the receiving schools, at least not for the displaced students moving
through the transition process. There is one exception in this study and that is in regard
to Scott High School. Shaina did describe a strong sense of belonging at Scott High
School. Shaina was also the only participant who remembered her receiving school
holding an open house. Additionally, Shaina was the only participant to mention by
name, staff at the receiving school that did not transfer in from DeVilbiss, suggesting that
she was able to form strong relationships with the Scott staff in the one year she attended
there. Shaina was the only participant to recall that she felt welcomed by the staff and
students on the very first day of school at Scott High School. In direct contrast to
Shaina’s experience was Treva’s experience at Rogers. Treva’s fear of the unknown in
regard to existing relationships and future relationships caused her anxiety. Treva
believed her entire senior year was lost from a social perspective due to the loss of
existing relationships at DeVilbiss and her inability or unwillingness to form new
relationships at Rogers. It just was not within her character to accept change easily or to
socialize with people she did not know and so she entered Rogers as a senior with a
conscious decision to detach. Treva’s one year at Rogers High School did not allow her
the necessary time to develop a shared history with her peers.

For participants who were displaced from DeVilbiss and attended Start High
School, these individuals reported feeling unwelcomed and remembered that they
experienced an “us versus them” environment. All three participants reported that they were treated differently at Start High School than the receiving Start students who had a history in the school and community. Linda reported that she self-isolated, choosing to socialize with other displaced DeVilbiss students in the grade below her. Acts of racial hatred surfaced, which were specifically directed at the DeVilbiss students who were black, but which also impacted the white students from DeVilbiss. For Linda, Dale, and Stacey, the experience of school closure was deeply personal and steeped in connections between schooling and social mobility, with racial influences.

The participants had a difficult time adjusting to a racially segregated setting at Start High School, which was considered to be an all-white high school prior to the closing of DeVilbiss. Of the three participants, the two white participants recalled being sensitive to the racial segregation at Start. They were very aware of the racial prejudice, while the participant who was black seemed to be oblivious to it. However, as stated earlier in regard to Stacey, just because the black students may not have been aware of the racial bias, does not mean they did not experience racial bias. For them, the racial bias may have been concealed by the fact that they were also being discriminated against because they were from DeVilbiss. Academic tracking resulted in segregated settings; in fact, Dale felt even more isolated as an honor’s student at Start than at DeVilbiss. Participants reported that the “us versus them” climate dissipated over time. However, Dale, who spent the longest time at Start, reported that even at the end of his senior year, there was animosity from the Start community over the fact that the graduating class valedictorian was one of the displaced DeVilbiss High School students. This need by some within the Start community to erase memories of the culture and/or traditions
associated with DeVilbiss High School will be discussed in a later section that addresses issues pertaining to identity.

Grief and Loss

Introduction.

“...there was always this feeling that something was taken away from you.”

(Linda, January, 2013)

A second key social and psychological theme is that of “grief and loss.” When participants described experiences of “grief and loss,” they often included feelings or experiences that related to various subthemes. The following subthemes emerged: “no control/no voice,” “identity,” “place identity/place attachment,” “lack of closure,” and/or “agency/control.” Each of the subthemes will be explicitly discussed later. However, this introductory section provides the reader with a broad view of how participants experienced grief and loss, beginning with a reintroduction to the theory.

The five stages of grief and loss, according to Kubler-Ross, are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (as cited in Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). According to Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005), individuals moves through these five stages when they are presented with the loss of a loved one, or when they are threatened with the loss of losing someone. However, while a person may reach a degree of acceptance, something can happen in his or her life that triggers memories that transport him or her to any or all of the first four stages (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Reaching the last stage, “acceptance,” does not mean that a person’s sense of grief and loss is permanently over as such triggers can reignite the stages of grief at any time throughout a person’s lifetime. In theory, when this happens later in life, a person moves through the
stages at a much faster pace than when initially experienced. Since this study required a return to the experience and was structured in a way that would invoke strong emotions, it is reasonable to expect that the participants would express grief and loss when describing their experience of school closure and transition.

This study focused on how the participants came to understand the process of school closure and transition, and specifically, how they made meaning out of their experience. The answer, it appeared, was that in some ways the participants continue to struggle with their experience of school closure and their search for meaning, similar to when a person tries to make sense of loss associated with death. Stacey provided the following description that really reflected how all the participants progressed through the initial grieving process. In the following example, Stacey’s narrative captures the essence of the five stages of grief and loss: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005).

It definitely devastated me back then. I boo-hooed you know, but, you know, then it’s like, “we have to move on.” It’s almost kind of like a death, you know, the “dang I miss my school,” but then you know, you have to kind of, you got to, you know, get yourself together and you know, take care [of] what you need to do for your life.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

In the following example, Stacey described a sense of loss as she explained what she would have done differently if she had the chance.

I probably would have participated in more of the activities as I did when I was at DeVilbiss, instead of cutting most of the activities loose. I probably would have
went ahead and participated at the things at Start, instead of just being withdrawn and not wanting to do as much. That probably would have been one of the main things…continue with the sports or stayed active like I was at DeVilbiss for two years.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

In the examples by Stacey, the reader is able to view how Stacey was thinking and feeling at the time of the closure, but also in the second example, the reader is able to see how she is thinking and feeling now as an adult looking back on the experience. While Stacey’s narratives are pretty representative of how all the participants experienced school closure and transition in terms of grief and loss, there were nuances to each person’s story, serving as reminders of how unique the experience was to each individual. For example, while Shaina expressed feelings similar to those of Stacey’s description of how she worked through her initial grief, Shaina’s narrative given time and distance was quite different, stating, “Make new friends, explore different possibilities because I believe there’s something good in everything. So, yep, that’s all you can do.” So, while Stacey’s adult narrative reflects one of regret, Shaina’s is much more positively stated.

The descriptions in this section serve as examples that were coded to the theme, “grief and loss,” as well as the subthemes: “no control/no voice,” “identity,” “place identity/place attachment,” “lack of closure,” and/or “agency/control.” These subthemes are not to be viewed as stages; rather, they should be viewed as patterns that emerged within the participants’ descriptions of the grieving process.

The need for stability and a sense of control played a key role in how some of the participants navigated the transition process. Spencer (2005) defined place attachment as
“an affective bond or link between people and specific places,” which provides the individual with “a sense of stability amid change” (p. 308). This definition is important to consider, along with the work described earlier by Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005).

Participants recalled the experience of school closure and transition as a time of disruption and instability, with each longing for “stability amid change” (Spencer, 2005, p. 308). As participants narrated their experience of school closure and transition, each provided evidence suggesting that the disruption of their stable environment at DeVilbiss impacted their identity development and formation. In the following sections, I discuss in greater detail the individual subthemes that surfaced within “grief and loss.”

**No Control/No Voice.**

“...we were more or less still being told where to go and what to do.”

*(Linda, January, 2013)*

The feeling of having no control over what is happening is often associated with grieving as described through the process of death and dying (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). Similarly, the participants described times when they had a feeling of having no control or no voice in regard to what was happening to them during the school closing and transition process. Linda expressed a real sense of loss in the closing of DeVilbiss and a feeling of having no voice when she explained the power or voice that children often lack. Linda felt she had no control over decisions being made around her, she stated, “You know, we were still kids, I am sure we were more or less still being told where to go and what to do.” Linda described what it felt like for her when she learned about the closing of DeVilbiss while she was at an away basketball game held at Start High School. She remembered the heaviness she felt with the announcement, followed
by the reality of the situation in that she knew she would be attending the very school she stood in, only this time, she would be there not as a rival but as a member of their student body. She stated, “I mean, I remember that night. You know, we were all crying, everybody sort of felt like, it was just this very heavy sadness kind of feeling, and Start as a high school looked like a prison.”

It wasn’t just that the students felt they had no control over decisions being made that impacted them it was the fact that they viewed their environment at this time in their lives as having no order. Their lives were in upheaval resulting in an unstable system that was not conducive to an academic environment. Linda described how the DeVilbiss staff struggled to create some sense of order or normalcy after the announcement of the school closing.

I mean, I am sure that first week was… I am sure nothing got accomplished in any classes that first week, but I mean, you know, there were still… whatever time of the year it was, I wish I could remember that, but I am sure, there were still exams to take and things to do you know.

(Linda, January, 2013)

In the example below, Dale described his experience of school closure as a time period when he felt like he did not have a voice in what was happening around him.

The writing was on the wall. It was inevitable [that DeVilbiss would close]. I mean I just didn’t, I mean what am I going to do, you know bring back 50,000 jobs, you know bring back 20,000 kids to develop the district?

(Dale, December, 2012)
Dale believed that the district had declined to a level that could not be reversed as a result of poor economic conditions at the macro-level. Due to his family member’s position on the school board, he had access to an intimate view of the situation. Regarding his family member and others in a position of leadership in the district, he believed that they did not “create the situation” the district found itself in, rather that they “ inherited it.” This suggests that the district leadership itself felt they had little control over the system that they were in charge of governing.

There was a pattern within Dale’s narratives in which he often concealed his own feelings related to the school closure by focusing on the pain of others around him. He referenced the profound sadness felt by the member of his family who served on the board when voting to close DeVilbiss. He mentioned his sister who was in the 8th grade at the time and how she was so looking forward to attending DeVilbiss. He described how he spent the entire summer prior to entering Start High School pondering the question, “Oh God! What is Start going to be like?” Dale described a time in his life when things were out of his control, resulting in many unknowns. These factors resulted in him experiencing anger, fear and a great deal of anxiety. In fact, each participant’s narrative reflected the idea that she or he was experiencing the present, but also worrying about what lay ahead.

Treva described how she felt her life was spiraling out of control. She had a great deal of anger as she described what she was thinking and feeling shortly after the announcement that DeVilbiss would be closed, stating, “It was ‘why did they have to close our senior year?’” Treva explained that a few of her friends had chosen early graduation so they would not have to go through a transition to a new school. Treva was
only a few credits short of having what she needed to meet the graduation requirements for the district. She considered graduating early as a few of her friends did, but it was a brief consideration because her mother opposed early graduation. Treva stated, “So they went ahead and graduated and my mother was like, ‘there’s no need, you have your whole senior year.’” Treva’s mother had no way of knowing that Treva’s senior year at Rogers would at best leave her feeling stationary, and at worst deleterious.

The participants’ lives, which had been fairly structured and easy to predict, had become precarious. The unstable system created by school closing followed the displaced students into the receiving schools. In the next description, there is a sense of Linda trying to regain her footing. Linda appeared to be negotiating the act of both looking forward and backward, comparing the two schools and longing for some familiarity.

Okay. I mean, it [Start] definitely did not have the same, you know, there was always this feeling that something was taken away from you. So, it was foreign. We didn’t know hardly any of the teachers, only a handful of teachers from DeVilbiss.

(Linda, January, 2013)

These narratives suggest that not only did the participants feel that their lives had spiraled out of control at DeVilbiss once the closing was announced, but that they then entered a system at their receiving schools where they also had no control. In earlier descriptions, Stacey spoke about having no control in the decision to close DeVilbiss and then having no choice in where she would go after DeVilbiss. She even spoke about how she was placed into choir and given a schedule for Start High School without having any
Stacey noted she learned in high school that there were certain things she could not control. However, she learned to accept her situation, and work through it as best as she was able, stating, “You have to take the punches and go with the flow of what’s happening.” She blamed herself for her academic decline at her receiving school.

Because I can control certain things in my life, but like I can’t control…even back then I couldn’t control them closing down the school or me going to Start, but I could have been able to control me keeping my GPA up or still continuing to try to do as well as I did at DeVilbiss. I had control over that portion of it, but I chose not to let that part grow.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey’s narrative suggests some tension between what she experienced in terms of school closure and societal discourse regarding the belief that an individual is able to overcome adversity. Taken a step further, the societal discourse suggests that if a person cannot overcome the adversity, the problem lies with that person. There is evidence within Stacey’s description that suggests students who go through school closure and transition run the risk of internalizing their experience and blaming themselves for the problems incurred as a result of moving through the process of school closure and transition. This is a question for consideration, along with the thought that perhaps students who are going through school closure and transition lack the ability at that time to view the experience holistically. It may be that it is only after time and distance that the student is able to view the experience systemically or holistically. Further evidence of this is the fact that there were times within the interview that participants appeared to be realizing things for the very first time, as if stepping away and revisiting the
experience had allowed them to connect the dots. I believe that Stacey was one of the participants who had such an “ah-ha” moment.

Identity

“That’s really not my school.”

(Treva, November, 2012)

In this section, the role that “attachment” and “autonomy” play in identity formation is considered within the context of participants’ descriptions of school closure and transition. Before moving into the findings pertaining to the changes the participants experienced in terms of their identity, it may be helpful to revisit key information from the literature review. Identity formation is situational and highly influenced by the existing social system (Cicognani et al., 2011). Identity development depends on a two-way relationship, in which there is a desire for a person to be accepted by those in his or her environment, and also a desire for those moving within that existing environment to want to help that person belong (Erikson, 1968). The reciprocal relationship required between the participants and those within their social environment was evident in terms of identity formation. Participants found themselves either having to reestablish their identity at the receiving school, or in most cases, reinvent their identity. According to Milligan (2003), situational changes result in a feeling of loss and displacement, resulting in what is referred to as “identity discontinuity” (as cited in Scanlon, Rowling & Weber, 2007). For the participants of this study, “identity discontinuity” lasted at the receiving school at varying degrees based on how long it took participants to establish a sense of support and coherence in their new environments.
Issues around identity formation surfaced as participants described how they viewed themselves prior to the closing of DeVilbiss and how they viewed themselves at the receiving schools. As would be predicted, issues of peer relationships, as well as relationships with the adult staff played a role in identity formation both at DeVilbiss and at the receiving schools. When the relationships changed significantly at their receiving schools, so did the participants’ sense of identity. Participants described a time of identity disruption and identity confusion as they struggled to figure out who they were in relationship to their new school culture and social structures. When I coded for the subtheme, “identity,” my focus was on the social groups that each participant belonged to while at DeVilbiss and how those social groups helped to define the participant, as compared to their new social system at their receiving schools. Due to the fact that identity issues are so unique to the individual, I present the findings by participant rather than by common experience.

**Treva.**

Treva, the participant who felt the least amount of attachment while attending her receiving school, does not identify herself with Rogers High School at all. Treva provided an example of her inability to identify with Rogers when she described a community event she attended in which people from Rogers High School were asked to show their school pride. Treva stated, “They’ll say, ‘Rogers, do we have any Rams in here?’ I won’t even say either way.”

Treva reported that while she attended DeVilbiss, she did feel a strong connection. However, even though she experienced three years at DeVilbiss, the fact that she did not graduate from there has impacted her ability to identify strongly to DeVilbiss.
Consequently, from an alumni perspective, Treva feels as if she cannot identify with either high school. She stated, “Yep, and even now I’ll see people from Rogers and I’ll speak to them but it’s not like I can hold a conversation with them.”

Treva provided an example of identity development and what is needed for it to occur, or in her case, what was missing. Identity development is dependent upon a desire from each party to connect. By entering Rogers, having made the conscious decision to detach from the school culture, she limited her potential for reestablishing herself within the high school environment. She had negative preconceived notions about what Rogers would be like, and perhaps this resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy. She entered Rogers believing the receiving school students would not “be her friends.” She entered with the idea that she would detach herself from the general population at Rogers. In turn, Rogers did not disappoint her in that she did report that the staff and students did nothing to try to make her feel wanted. Treva lacked the ability or motivation to engage in her environment, and the environment lacked the ability or motivation to reach out to her and invite her to engage. Thus, she found it to be unwelcoming. Longing for a sense of familiarity, she gravitated to those with whom she felt she had commonality, other displaced students.

Treva felt like an outsider looking in while at Rogers. Since she was not going to make the first move in terms of forming relationships with students from Rogers, her only chance lay with the Rogers students and staff. In the following description, she explained that no one reached out to her and invited her to be a part of the existing school culture at Rogers. This would have been a necessary step in the identity development process.
Right, because I feel like things were already established, you know, like as far as friendships and different groups of, you know, people and I think everything was already, “this is how we do things here and you either jump in or,” but it wasn't like, “come on,” not that I wanted anyone to say, “hey Treva come on, jump in you know, do this,” but it still wasn't...you didn't feel, I didn't feel like I was a part of that environment or atmosphere.

(Treva, November, 2012)

Treva longed for someone to reach out to her, to invite her in, to make her feel special. It never happened at Rogers. Treva’s introverted personality was dependent upon “bridging” as described in the research of Putnam (as cited in Cobb & Glass, 2009), meaning that the adults at Rogers would have had to strategize ways to help create a bridge between the displaced students and the receiving students. Treva actually offered a suggestion that would have helped bridge her DeVilbiss experience to her experience at Rogers. In the following description, she explained that the district could have sent her school counselor from DeVilbiss to Rogers to check in on her periodically.

I think that it would, like looking back now, um would've probably been helpful because you would have had that familiar face that was coming there like solely for you, even though it was there for other people as well, but you would've felt...I think I would've felt like, “okay you know they're [the DeVilbiss Guidance Counselor] coming here for me you know, me and they're coming to see about what do I need here.” You know what I mean? It would've just made it a little bit better.

(Treva, November, 2012)
Instead, Treva spent her senior year at Rogers feeling as if she was not special, she stated, “Yeah, you, you were, you were just there…you’re just a body.” Treva recognized the importance of the receiving students in helping the displaced students feel welcomed. She offered a suggestion that might have helped with the merging of the distinctly different student bodies. However, her suggestion was dependent upon the adults at Rogers creating opportunities for conversation about the need to welcome the displaced students and creating spaces for interaction.

I think it would have been a little bit better but now I’m thinking back that maybe if they [the Rogers staff] would have talked to those [receiving] students by class to welcome [the displaced students]… just so that everyone…

(Treva, November, 2012)

Dale.

Dale’s sense of identity significantly changed when he entered DeVilbiss High School and significantly changed again when he enrolled at Start High School. Dale provided a story that suggested that identity formation is situational and highly influenced by the existing social system. During his one year at DeVilbiss, Dale identified with athletes and upper classman. He had a confidence in his voice as he described those relationships at DeVilbiss. That confident tone faded as he described his transition into Start High School. I asked him if he lost that connection to the athletes and upper classmen when he attended Start; he replied, “I did, I did. No, I was well on my way to being a jock at DeVilbiss, out of necessity,” quickly adding, “because they needed me.” This example supports the research of Erikson (1968), in that identity formation is dependent upon
interaction between individuals or groups of individuals, which requires willingness from all parties involved.

Even though Dale was forced to adjust his identity when he enrolled at Start High School, a part of his DeVilbiss identity remained intact and still defines him today, stating, “Again, it [DeVilbiss] allowed me to become who I am. The year at DeVilbiss defined me in ways that I just…is who I am and it gave me the social viewpoint that I have.”

Much of Dale’s adult identity is grounded in issues of social justice, something he associates with DeVilbiss High School. I asked if his parents influenced his social and political views as well; he replied, “Yeah sure, I think they molded me as best as they could and gave me some raw clay.” Dale remembered being “painfully self-aware” of the inequities associated with race and class, as well as the discriminatory treatment by the Start staff toward the displaced students. Dale had the autonomy necessary to advocate on behalf of those he felt were mistreated, while at the same time knowing he had the support of his parents. As Dale stated in an earlier section, he was “allowed a long leash.” Dale’s description addresses issues of attachment and autonomy, both of which are present in adolescent development.

**Linda.**

The physical boundaries determine to a large degree those with whom interaction can take place. Linda explained that cliques were often formed from the neighborhoods in which the students resided. She stated, “All of us that were kind of, grew up in the same neighborhood or lived in the same area kind of stuck together.” In high school, Linda was a cheerleader and was in honor classes. I asked Linda if she was viewed as
“popular” while at DeVilbiss. She really struggled with this question when I posed it and provided an explanation that translated into her making the case that she was not in a position to answer that question. She believed that students outside her social circle would need to answer the question about whether she was considered to be “popular.” However, in one of her narratives she made a clear divide between her social group and other social groups existing in her social system, stating, “You know, we certainly knew kids from all different backgrounds.”

In the description above, Linda refers to “we,” which is defined as the circle of friends she identified herself as belonging to. Linda provided a detailed description of the various groups she was associated with and how cliques were formed at DeVilbiss that appeared to be very separate from each other, but at the same time, often intersecting at points of commonality. Linda’s identity was closely tied to the clubs and activities she was a part of while at DeVilbiss, stating, “A couple of us were cheerleaders and a couple were on student counsel.” She also mentioned the groups she did not identify with, stating, “So, I mean there was, you know, stoners and burnouts, you know, there were definitely groups of kids that we did not interact with at all.” Again, Linda used the word, “we” in this description to refer to the group of students she closely identified with.

Linda did stay involved with cheerleading at Start but did not stay involved for very long in the Start Choir. The Start Choir did not match what she had experienced at DeVilbiss and Linda had difficulty identifying with the new social system that was Start Choir.

So, and then she [the Start Choir Director] was just the polar opposite of him [the DeVilbiss Choir Director], and so I think if I enjoyed choir at all it is because he
made it fun and then it wasn’t at all…so, I didn’t stay and I don’t remember how long, but maybe the semester or maybe the year.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda’s description above provides an example of the importance of both relationships and cultural expectations in terms of a person’s ability to identify with a particular social system. Her description also raises the question of the impact of identity formation when the new social system meets or exceeds our expectations versus falling short of our expectations. Like Treva, Linda referenced the need for familiarity. In terms of school closure and transition, participants spoke about “familiarity” in reference to people; for example, they found it comforting to see familiar faces of students and staff at the receiving school. However, in the example above regarding the culture discontinuity of going from DeVilbiss choir to Start choir, “familiarity” as it relates to cultural cohesion needs to be considered.

In an earlier section, Linda described a strong identification with other girls from DeVilbiss, especially those who were one year behind her. Linda explained that she felt this was unusual and that normally, as a junior class, they would have been more apt to bond with the senior girls from DeVilbiss, but there were few seniors who actually transitioned to Start. The fact that these two groups of girls from DeVilbiss, some who were sophomores when they entered Start and some who were juniors had a shared lived experience or shared history from DeVilbiss, drew them together.

So we were like stuck in the middle almost, you know, they were sophomores, we were juniors, the seniors were kids that had always been at Start and the freshmen were kids that didn’t know anything else. So, we were sort of this stuck
in the middle group, which I mean, I definitely never felt like excluded or like we didn’t belong or anything like that, it was just new. It wasn’t what we were familiar with.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Stacey.

While Linda described how she was drawn to the familiarity of the other DeVilbiss students at Start High School, Stacey described a situation in which she really had no choice but to gravitate to the other DeVilbiss students. Stacey identified herself as belonging to the “DeVilbiss” group of students that from her perspective, were singled out at Start High School, leading to an “us versus them” feeling. In Linda’s situation, she aligned herself with other DeVilbiss students because it was comforting, while Stacey did so out of necessity. This raised the question of the impact on identity formation when adjustments are made by choice, versus when a person feels forced. Linda provided evidence that she was invited into the existing social network at Start High School, which she did do to a degree.

There is evidence to suggest that Stacy was not extended an invitation to move within the existing social network at Start High School, leaving her no choice but to align with other displaced DeVilbiss students. This goes back to the earlier sections pertaining to “excluded groups” and “capital.” Linda was white and could pass as an original Start student more easily than Stacey, who was black. Linda also was a cheerleader and in the honor’s classes at Start, both implying a degree of human capital. The fact that Linda was white and entered with some human capital increased her ability to move within the existing social structure. Linda was able to retain a good deal of her identity from
DeVilbiss, while Stacey was not. Stacey’s social groups at DeVilbiss included three athletic teams, as well as choir and show choir. Stacey was on the honor roll at DeVilbiss, which she felt was in part due to the eligibility rule for athletes. By her senior year at Start High School, Stacey was no longer in choir, nor was she an athlete. Additionally, she did not keep her grades up as she had at DeVilbiss. These social changes resulted to drastic changes to her identity.

**Shaina.**

Shaina appeared to have a strong identity at the time of the closing of DeVilbiss and her identity seemed to remain intact while at Scott High School. If her identity changed at all at Scott, it may have been that her awareness of identity issues as they related to the African-American culture increased. Prior to Scott High School, Shaina had envisioned herself attending college in Michigan. Her mind changed at Scott in fact, she stated that her “mind opened up” at Scott in terms of college opportunities.

Because we had recruiters at Scott. There was this older gentleman, Mr. Porter King and he was recruiting for Black colleges and I didn’t know anything about it because [at] DeVilbiss when we had college recruiters come to our school, it was University of Toledo, Ohio State, Univ… it was just the Tri-state. So, I didn’t know any thing about it, I didn’t know anything about Central State, Wilbur Force, so when I got over there I was like wow! Whole perspective changed.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

Shaina’s narrative suggests that African American students at DeVilbiss had not identified with the historically black colleges like at Scott because they had not been exposed to them. Shaina stated, “Yep, yep, it was different, matter of fact, I can count on
one hand the people that I know that went to DeVilbiss that went to a black college.”

Much of Shaina’s identity is grounded in her relationship with her parents. Shaina recalled that when she was in high school, she was responsible for paying her father’s car loan. He would give her the money and she would make the payment. Shaina stated, “I think my parents made me responsible.” Stacey’s narrative suggests that she viewed herself as self-reliant, adding, “I knew what I had to do...same thing at work, you know what you need to do and you just do it.”

**Place Identity and Attachment**

“Well, I am addicted to this town called, Toledo Ohio.”

(Dale, December, 2012)

Participants’ narratives suggest a strong attachment to the physical space of DeVilbiss and to the people within that physical space. Displacement from DeVilbiss, particularly imposed by the school system, revealed the rupture from “an affective bond or link between people and specific places.” That bond or link provides the individual with “a sense of stability amid change” (Spencer, 2005, p. 308). Each participant described varying degrees of place attachment; consequently, each also described how the disruption of such place attachment threatened their self-definitions or identity (Spencer, 2005).

Since Treva reported having felt no connection to Rogers High School while she attended there, as well as no current identification with Rogers, it was not surprising that she provided no description that indicated she had any sense of place identity or attachment to Rogers High School. What was surprising is that she also reported having no current emotional connection to DeVilbiss High School, even though in her
descriptions, she provided examples of place attachment. In the following description, Treva explained that she would choose to take a tour of DeVilbiss High School, stating, “I think it would just be for the memories.” In fact, Treva had been at DeVilbiss recently to attend an in-service and she described how she and some of her colleagues took an informal tour of the building.

I was talking to someone… one of my colleagues like as we’re walking around and I’m thinking to myself, “shh I’m trying to think of where my locker was.” Because I know this one hall and when we were freshmen we had a locker… and Carlene… we were neighbors because somebody stole her yearbook. I mean I can tell you those types of things and that’s what I remember on that hallway.

(Treva, November, 2012)

According to Treva, she has no attachment to DeVilbiss because she was not able to complete her senior year there and graduate from DeVilbiss. This has left her with a feeling of being “incomplete.” However, within her descriptions there are examples that would be considered to be place attachment. Treva reported remembering those things about DeVilbiss “as if it was yesterday.” Treva was able to visualize the physical space of DeVilbiss, for example, the hallway that triggered specific memories. She continued with her description of her recent impromptu tour of DeVilbiss. In the following example, she expressed concern for the maintenance of the building.

I said, “who ever is keeping the maintenance up on the building?” I said, “okay certain stuff just needs to be redone.” Because they had the really tiny stalls and they had the sinks from the new buildings that… where you wave your hand. I’m like, “okay, who put this in here?” And this looks like, “okay, just either fix it all
up.” And the floor, still all of that stuff to me still looked the same. Like I don’t know when I walked in on the first floor was nice and shiny. I was like, “okay.” I can always remember you come back from break, you would come back to school and the floors would be so shiny. You know what I mean? And they look like that when I was there…that was a memory for me and I was like to me, it still looked the same.

(Treva, November, 2012)

Her narrative suggests that she feels some ownership in regard to how the building is currently maintained or renovated. Treva would like to go on an official tour of DeVilbiss with other classmates. She stated, “But I would go, and I think I would go with other people so we could say, ‘remember when’ you know you can share the memories.” Treva consciously denies feeling any connection to DeVilbiss; however, there was often a fondness or softness toward DeVilbiss that surfaced in her descriptions. Treva acknowledged that she did not achieve a sense of “closure” in high school due to the disruption of her senior year. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) discuss the idea that a “void” remains when a loss has not been addressed. Treva demonstrated some place attachment and some sense of belonging to DeVilbiss, but because she did not have that final senior year there, she fails to acknowledge it. Treva may not identify herself to DeVilbiss as an adult, but it would appear that she had a strong identification to it by the end of her junior year. It was strong enough to cause her to consciously detach from Rogers High School. It was as if her loyalty to DeVilbiss kept her from allowing herself to have any chance of experiencing the process of identity formation at Rogers and achieving a positive outcome. This is evidenced when she was speaking about how
“messed up” the situation was and she just decided, “I am not choosing sides.” There is the implication that she still considered DeVilbiss to be a part of who she was and that somehow, if she opened herself to Rogers, she was being disloyal to a school that no longer existed.

Through careful reading and rereading of her transcripts, I concluded that Treva did indeed exhibit place identity and place attachment to DeVilbiss High School. I considered the impact on place identification or place attachment in a disrupted situation, in which a person feels they have no control. There is evidence in Treva’s narrative that suggests a stagnation or dormancy in terms of her identity formation, occurring the one year she spent at Rogers High School.

Dale provided several examples of place identity and place attachment in reference to DeVilbiss High School and Start High School. It is important to note that both positive and negative feelings can be associated with place identity and place attachment. Dale had an affective bond with both high schools although his memories of DeVilbiss were more positive than his memories of Start High School. Dale was in awe of the architectural design of DeVilbiss and could not help but compare it to the physical space

Yeah I mean, it was an intimate fun family because it had to be at DeVilbiss, and look, I had all the freedom in the world. I mean you know, I was in there on the weekends. I was in there you know during the summer when, you know, sports stuff was going on. I very quickly realized that the bathroom key to the third floor bathroom also let me go up into its spire, and so you know to that, I mean, it
had those nooks and crannies and things, you know…that made it unique and different and worth exploring.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Dale described his own place attachment to the Toledo area in general, stating, “Well, I am addicted to this town called Toledo Ohio.” After describing his love for Toledo, he went on to say, “you know, look I could do something else, I tried to, I went to graduate school, I figured that would be the end of this, I figured that would be the end of my efficacy, and I will have to leave Ohio, but you know…” Dale made several attempts to establish roots in other states and cities, but his heart was always connected to Toledo. He admitted that when he is in Toledo, he has been known to go out of his way to drive by DeVilbiss High School. When I asked if he would ever take a tour of the school if given the opportunity, he stated, “Probably not, I’m not real big on nostalgia. I think the problem is I am…but I recognize it as something that probably isn’t really good for me.” I asked if he was afraid that it may cause some emotions to surface that perhaps he did not want to face and he stated:

I don’t really think so, I mean, no, I just, you know, it’s like [family member] went through there when they moved the administrators in, whenever that was, you know and [family member] had, just she was talking about like you know all of the goodbye messages that were still on the chalk boards and things and you know, I mean, I don’t know, I just…I don’t want to be 15-year-old me, and you know?

(Dale, December, 2012)
Could it be that for Dale the memories might be painful and return him to a time in his life when he felt vulnerable? As he continued with his response, he seemed to change his mind.

So I mean, if I went in for a tour of the building, I would want to go into the basement, which I never got to go in. I would want to go under the auditorium, which I never got to go in. I would want to go into the spire and go up in the roof and, you know, I would want to go see the nooks and crannies of the place. I would not want to walk and be like, “Oh! this is my English room, this is choir, this is”…I mean I know that.

(Dale, December, 2012)

I asked Dale if he believed he had an attachment to the physical building that was and is DeVilbiss. He responded, “Oh! I do… but I don’t…I have realized I need to reject it for my own sanity.” His response caused me to consider the work of Galletta and Ayala (2008) regarding the phenomenon of “erasure” and the desire to remove oneself from the physical space associated with painful memories. In Dale’s case, most of his memories of DeVilbiss were pleasant leading up to the closing. He then went on to share a story about his grandfather who died and his grandmother who did not believe she needed to visit his grave to feel close to him and to remember him. Like his grandmother, Dale’s father also does not visit the cemetery. Dale ended this section of the interview by saying, “I think I’m with [my grandmother], you know it is not (pause) my memories are with me and you know the box of crap I have, you know, and not in the tomb, which is really what it [DeVilbiss] is, you know.
Linda stated, “From my recollection, DeVilbiss really went away.” It was as if DeVilbiss was disappearing, soon to be a distant memory. Galletta and Ayala (2008) identified “erasure” as a phenomenon of school closure. In their research, however, erasure was viewed as a way to remove the stigma associated with a failing school. In the case of DeVilbiss, the participants did not view the school as “failing,” nor did they wish to see the school closed and its memories erased. Linda described her fascination with the physical plant of DeVilbiss High School. She was remembering her recent tour of the building.

There is this fantastic…in the choir room itself or whatever it is now, there is a stairwell that goes up to, there is like, there used to be a little library up there, so they used to have the Chinese Language classes and then you can go through there and then come back down across the hall. You don’t find that in schools any more, nobody builds anything like that anymore. So, it is more fascinating to me that way structurally, architecturally.

(Linda, February, 2013)

Linda does not feel a stronger connection to either of the high schools she attended, stating, “It all kind of runs together for me now.” However, she did feel a stronger attachment to the physical space that was and is DeVilbiss, in part because the building is still in tact. Start High School has been torn down and rebuilt. Linda stated, “I definitely have stronger emotional connection to DeVilbiss. The building is still there so that is a good start.”

Linda explained that it was hard for her to return to DeVilbiss as an adult. She did not take a tour of DeVilbiss at her 10-year reunion, stating, “I was really kind of
indifferent.” She reflected further on why she had not wanted to go back to visit DeVilbiss and stated, “I probably did need some distance from it, to be able to go back and you know and not think about how awful it was for a little while.” In recent years, she did take a tour of her old high school. The discussion about the recent tour of DeVilbiss triggered a memory she had of times she would go into DeVilbiss as a student during the summer. She described what it was like as a teenager to explore the physical structure that was DeVilbiss High School when school was not in session.

You know I mean, when you are a student in a school, there is only so many places you can go and things you can do. In the summer, when no one is in there I went everywhere. It is like having a backstage pass. I was on the stage and up…and there were parts of the building I didn’t know were there, like the balcony in the auditorium in the back. There were rooms, bathrooms, and stuff…all kinds of stuff.

(Linda, February, 2013)

While Linda verbalized that she was equally attached or unattached to DeVilbiss and Start, the essence of her narratives imply a stronger emotional attachment to DeVilbiss. Linda explained that she is still angry about how the school board handled the closing and also holds the city responsible for not protecting the building.

I mean I am still in awe of the building. So, I just think it is such a shame that…not just because of the students or because [we] were displaced, because it is such a phenomenal piece of architecture that it was even left to the school board, that the city did not even maybe make some effort to pitch in somehow or another.
And the upgrades and changes and things have happened anyway, when it was all said and done.

(Linda, February, 2013)

Stacey really did not speak too much about issues related to place identity or place attachment. When asked which school she felt most connected to, she replied, “Start” because it was her “last connection.” However, she did want to take a tour of DeVilbiss if it was available to “see the building,” stating, “I want to see like my old little locker and things and that will be fun.”

Place identity has to do with memories associated by individuals who view their memories vividly within the structure of a building or within the parameters of a specific place. It is important to discuss place identity as it relates to reputation, specifically in the case of Scott High School. Shaina often found herself defending the reputation of her alma mater. In fact, Treva, Dale, and Stacey all made reference to the perceived reputation of Scott High School at the time of the closing of DeVilbiss. It is interesting that Scott High School was the only school mentioned by the participants as viewed negatively in terms of reputation based on hearsay. The participants who might have considered attending Scott chose other options. Shaina was the only participant who actually crossed the threshold of Scott High School and experienced it first hand. According to Shaina, Scott’s reputation for being an all-black high school resulted in it being identified as a target school for historically black college recruiters. Shaina viewed this as a positive because it allowed her more options for college than she had if she had stayed at DeVilbiss. The perception of those on the perimeter of the existing system play a role in identity and can lead to stereotyping in regard to the reputation associated
with a person or place as evidenced in the descriptions by the other participants regarding the negative stereotypes associated with Scott High School.

It is of interest that participants provided descriptions of how those negative stereotypes influenced their decision to avoid Scott High School, while Shaina, the only participant to enroll at Scott, reported a very positive experience. A school’s reputation plays a role in how students come to identify themselves (Galletta & Ayala, 2008). The larger community accepts hearsay as fact and uses it to form their perception of the school and the students within the school. It is because Shaina does identify with Scott High School and did form an attachment to it that she still finds herself defending its reputation to her co-workers.

While Shaina did exhibit place identity and attachment to both DeVilbiss and Scott, she provided an example of students who did not form such an identity with their receiving school, specifically, Rogers High School. Shaina explained that she has had conversations with friends who chose to go to Rogers and reported that they all have detached themselves from any alumni functions sponsored by Rogers. This is interesting to note because the phenomenon she describes supports the descriptions by Treva who attended Rogers her senior year and detached from the environment both during her senior year and now as an alumnus. Shaina began her description by explaining that all of her friends who detached from Rogers only had one year there.

See, I only know the ones who only had one year. Cause I tell them I’m like, “no I had a good experience at Scott.” And they say, “I wish I would have went over there with you but my parents wouldn’t let me go.” And they all went to Rogers, every last one of them. They won’t go back to any reunions or anything.
Shaina has place attachment to Scott High School, even though she may actually have a stronger place identity to DeVilbiss. In the following example, she defends the reputation of Scott High School, “And I’ll tell people that Scott is not a bad school, even to this day.” However, Shaina recently attended an event for alumni from both DeVilbiss and Scott in which her place identity to DeVilbiss became evident. She explained that because she graduated from Scott High School, she sat on the Scott side. However, while she sat on the Scott side, she did not “walk through” the Scott side and mingle with people, stating, “but I thought, ‘I don’t know these people.’” She added, “but the DeVilbiss side, I did. You know what I mean? I talked way more to the DeVilbiss people than I did Scott.”

It makes sense that because Shaina had experienced three years at DeVilbiss and only one year at Scott, she would have more shared history with those from DeVilbiss, and naturally be drawn to the group of students representing DeVilbiss. I considered the idea that the more time invested in relationships within an existing space, the greater the chance of developing place identity or place attachment. I asked Shaina if she would return to DeVilbiss High School to take a tour. She stated, “Oh yeah.” I asked her why she would return, and she stated, “Just the memories. I think I’ve done that before…yeah I did, I did a tour before…. yeah, just the memories.”

Lack of Closure

“...something was missing...”

(Treva, November, 2012)
When coding for the subtheme, “lack of closure,” I was identifying times when participants actually referenced the idea that they did not reach a sense of closure in their experience. In other cases, the participants did not actually state that they lacked closure, but their descriptions implied a lack of closure. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) identify the last stage of grief, “acceptance,” as the stage in which a person experiences resolution. In this last stage, people have processed the initial emotions associated with loss and are able to come to terms with the permanency of the situation. In this stage, they are then able to start planning for the future and begin to re-engage in activities. However, a person can reach a level of acceptance, only to have an event trigger memories that result in a return to any one of the stages. Due to the fact that the study was structured in a way that required participants to return to the experience of school closure, I often saw participants move between the stages of grief, especially in terms of the last stage, “acceptance.”

It is this struggle of acceptance that implies that a degree of closure may be lacking. For Dale, Stacey, and Treva, the essence of their narratives regarding the experience of school closure indicated that they still struggle with acceptance. What follows are participant descriptions that pertain to a lack of closure, both in terms of when they were moving through the grieving process, and now, given time and distance. How participants either reached or failed to reach closure was highly personal; therefore, the findings are presented by each individual participant rather than by commonalities.

**Treva.**

Treva was the only participant who narrated having never reached the “acceptance” stage of the grieving process prior to graduating from high school. She
reported that she chose to disengage at Rogers High School, which resulted in
descriptions that reflected characteristics of a depressive state that limited her ability to
remember much from that time period. Treva believes her lack of engagement at Rogers
had to do with a lack of closure.

I think because I just didn’t have, I guess the closure of, you know what I mean,
having that final where I could be like, “well my senior year we did this, this, that
and the other.” It’s just like I didn’t do any of that stuff my senior year.

(Treva, November, 2012)

There were several times within her descriptions when she mentioned that
“something was missing.” She attributed her lapses in memory to the disruption that
occurred as a result of DeVilbiss closing and her transition to Rogers High School. Treva
alluded to a lack of closure when she responded to the question, “If you had been allowed
to graduate from DeVilbiss, do you think you would attend alumni events?” She
responded that she would have, stating, “I think I would have because I think I would
have felt a like a completeness … Or a little bit more of a loyalty to those people or my
classmates there because I did not have it for my classmates at Rogers.”

According to Treva, she feels there was a gap in her high school experience.
Many of her family members attended Scott High School and are all active alums. This
serves as a constant reminder to Treva of what she missed.

No, and my mother, she went to Scott though…[and] we have little cousins that
go there and we’ll go there and sing their alma mater and she knows it by heart
and I’m like, I missed that.

(Treva, November, 2012)
Treva’s lack of closure was also evidenced when she discussed alternative scenarios to her high school years. She spent a significant amount of time during the interview wondering how her life might have been different if she had been allowed to experience a school for all four years. This suggests that she had returned to the “bargaining” stage of the grieving process. In the following description, she expressed her mother’s regret for not sending Treva to a private secondary school, an opportunity that had been extended to Treva’s older brother.

And I’m not saying that there were regrets but my mother says, “I should have invested my money in you [by sending you to a private school] and sent your brother there [DeVilbiss],” you know what I mean? And so, when I look at it, “was it the school or was it me?”

(Treva, November, 2012)

Treva’s narrative suggests that cognitively, she is able to understand the decisions that were made, but emotionally, she still has anger that surfaced.

I’m trying not to hold that against [my mom], you know like, but I think I’m like “what would life had been like if I would have had that experience?” Not saying that DeVilbiss…I thought it was fun once I got there, but I reluctantly went there, you know what I mean?

(Treva, November, 2012)

Dale.

Part of what Dale struggles with in terms of finding closure in his experience of is that DeVilbiss was for the most part, not considered to be a failing school. He stated, “I mean the school performed, Libbey is a basket case, Libbey was a basket case until they
tore it down.” The fact that he sometimes fluctuated between speaking about the closure in the past tense and the present tense, was an indication that he still has some anger, and still struggles to accept the experience.

According to Dale, he could never understand why DeVilbiss was closed and Start was chosen over DeVilbiss when Start was in his opinion, a poorly constructed building. He said, “Yeah, I mean that…I am very pleased that DeVilbiss is still standing and Start has been torn down.” Dale was still visibly upset that when he was a student at DeVilbiss, the Start students would come to DeVilbiss to use one of the gyms. From his perspective, the fact that DeVilbiss had two gyms while Start did not was just one more reason that DeVilbiss should have remained open over Start High School.

I am pleased that DeVilbiss has been utilized. I was somewhat resentful that Start used its basketball court for practices and things because they bitched, bitched and bitched that they didn’t have a second gym, and you know, DeVilbiss has got two. “Why are you closing DeVilbiss?” And so you know just, I mean, some little petty things like that. It is a gorgeous building.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Dale displayed existing anger about some of the things he experienced through the closing of DeVilbiss. He expressed anger at the Start community for inviting themselves to the community forum when they were not part of the agenda. He was still angry at the Start staff for not doing more to help the DeVilbiss students feel welcomed and he was still angry for the hurt and pain directed at his family member who was a school board member at the time of the closure.
Linda.

Regarding the initial experience with the “acceptance” stage in the grieving process, the following excerpt by Linda is perhaps the best example of what it looked like and felt like to reach the last stage, “acceptance” when moving through the school closure process.

We had to go to [the] other school. We had to finish. So, I just sort of, because we were young and we could sort of accept…we are not getting it back. You know, we know even, like the school could reopen tomorrow, we’re still not getting it back.

(Linda, January, 2013)

This example is representative of how the participants describe the process of reaching “acceptance” in terms of school closure. It was reached because there was no other alternative. This aligns well with the work of Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) who define “acceptance” as reaching the understanding of the permanency of the situation and beginning to reengage. Linda was able to reengage quickly, but this was not true for all the participants.

Linda appears to have found closure in her adult years, stating, “I mean, I am sure I look at it differently now than I did then. I am sure it was much more emotional then.” In an earlier section, Linda explained that it was only recently that she was able to return to DeVilbiss to take a tour, stating that she needed “time and distance” from the event of school closure and transition.

Linda described how the staff and students were seeking closure by trying to make the best of the time they had left at DeVilbiss after the closure was announced. She
spoke about “things that needed to get done” and described a school climate that was grounded in the need for structure and normalcy. I was reminded again of place attachment and the research of Spencer (2005) who defined place attachment as “an affective bond or link between people and specific places,” which provides the individual with “a sense of stability amid change” (p. 308). The participants provided descriptions, which alluded to the idea that the DeVilbiss staff were trying their best to bring closure to the students, as well as to the institution. In an earlier section, Linda described how one particular adult provided closure to the students by providing a “rite of passage” opportunity to all the displaced DeVilbiss choir students by allowing them to sign the choir wall, a tradition that in the past was only allowed by seniors. According to Linda, her mother now has the plasterboard wall, stating, “So that is in the storage or somewhere with the other DeVilbiss stuff.”

In this example, the idea of having memorabilia to help bring closure is addressed in that Linda’s mother had the plasterboard with the signatures stored with other DeVilbiss memorabilia. There is some irony in this example in that such memorabilia may attribute to her own mother’s lack of closure by allowing her to return to the memories of the experience of the closing of DeVilbiss. In an earlier section, I discussed the idea that Linda struggles with the fact that she, herself, has found closure and resolution, while her mother still grieves the loss of DeVilbiss.

What I struggle with is that, it’s so important to her [Linda’s mother] and it’s not as important to me. So, I think she wants me to feel the same way about it that she does and I can’t, I don’t. Oddly, I mean, it wasn’t as big of a loss to me as it was to her. There was so much, it was part of her life from much longer than it
was for me and I was young and that is an easier transition kind of, you know I mean? You know when you are 15 or 16, everything is the end of the world and then the next week is it is not.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda continued by stating, “I did struggle for a long time with feeling like she couldn’t let it go or wouldn’t let it go, and that we had all moved on, because we had to.” This suggests that while Linda has reached a degree of acceptance, that initially, it was reached not by her own free will, but out of necessity. This raises the question in terms of emotional and psychological development: If acceptance was driven by external factors, was she able to reach a healthy resolution in terms of the closure? Linda’s description is a good example of how people move through the grieving process differently. Her narrative suggests that both she and her mother have reached the last stage of the grieving process, “acceptance,” but her mother may find herself revisiting the grieving process where Linda seems to have had less difficulty moving ahead.

**Stacey.**

Stacey gave conflicting messages in regard to the impact the closing of DeVilbiss had on her and the level of grief she may have experienced, or may still be experiencing. I referred to this in an earlier section when I mentioned that her words often did not match the level of emotion shown on her face, as if she were trying to convince herself that she had not been hurt by the closure. At one point in the interview, she referred to the closing as “almost like a death” and she acknowledged that she socially withdrew at Start, which negatively affected her grades. She also made the connection between the transition between DeVilbiss and Start and the lack of adult support available to help her
make the college transition, but still, in the description below, she maintains that the closing did not affect her in the long term. However, at the end of the description, there is a sense of a lack of closure and a wish for a chance to relive her high school years, only this time under the condition that DeVilbiss remained open.

Overall, the closing of my school was sad at that time. It was just sad at that time. You know kind of hard to, kind of let go of the memories of being in a school, but as an adult, I have kind of learned that, you know, you have to kind of take the punches and sometimes you have to just go with the flow of what happens. Yeah. Overall, it has not affected me. I guess because with me, I guess if it does not involve my family, I do not let it affect me or break me down to the point where I felt like I cannot go on. So, it was a nice school. I really liked, I really enjoyed going there and I liked it, (pause) yeah I wished they would not have closed it.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Shaina.

Shaina has described herself as someone who can “go with the flow.” She did not express any long-term grief in regard to the closing of DeVilbiss. However, there was one description that presented a lack of closure for her. A student from DeVilbiss had transferred to Scott High School with Shaina and was one of her closest friends. He was not allowed to walk at graduation because “he was told that his credits did not transfer over from DeVilbiss.” According to Shaina, his name was called at graduation after all. Shaina explained that he passed away shortly after graduation, adding, “They ended up mailing him his diploma but he was dead by then so I don’t even think he got a chance to see it.”
If there was one wound that perhaps had not healed, it was the story about her friend. In fact, this was really the only time Shaina presented a story that implied that she had not healed. Her friend did not die because of the closing of DeVilbiss, but his death is associated with the memories of the closing and the transition to Scott. Shaina’s friend, or at least his school records, got lost in the transition. Galletta and Ayala (2008) identify “casualties and survivors” in the experience of school closure and transition. In this example, Shaina’s friend was a casualty. There was an unspoken understanding between Shaina and me in regard to the disrespect shown to David and his family by the district, a disrespect that was amplified by the event of his death that followed so closely behind the day that he would have graduated.

**Agency**

“... let me control what I can kind of control.”

*(Dale, December, 2012)*

Agency implies action, requiring a person to engage. Agency connects to identity development in that those experiencing a healthy adolescent identity formation tend to feel more secure, which increases the likelihood of taking action or taking control (Spencer, 20205). When coding for “agency,” I was looking for descriptions that implied a perceived degree of control or a desire to take action. I viewed “agency” as closely aligned with “acceptance” in that there was a desire by participants to engage or reengage with their environment, sometimes motivated by a desire to affect change. This was especially true for Dale who was externally driven by a need to help others reengage. For some, like Linda and Shaina, the focus of engagement was personal and internally motivated. However, for Treva, her narrative suggests that she resisted the act of
reengagement while at Rogers High School her senior year. As mentioned previously, the participants also provided examples of how the DeVilbiss staff tried to re-engage after the closure announcement by focusing on all the things that needed to get done by the end of the year. In this section, I provide the participants’ experiences as they related to “agency.”

**Silent Protestor.**

Treva described herself as someone who was passive and accepting of decisions being made by those around her. She showed some “activism” in how she approached the closing announcement in that she and her cousin made a conscious decision to make the most of their junior year at DeVilbiss in anticipation that their senior year would not be fulfilling at their receiving school. In some way, her conscious detachment at her receiving school was a form of “agency” in that it was much like a silent protest of her situation. The problem is that no one but her seemed to be aware that she was protesting.

**Social justice for all.**

When I first started to code the transcripts, creating nodes as various themes developed, I quickly noticed that “activism” was a central theme of Dale’s, surfacing as early as when he was in elementary school.

I rode the bus everyday with kids, you know, who were from Old Orchard [Elementary] and you know most of those kids were black and you know I didn’t, it wasn’t my business to stand up for people, but you know I did.

(Dale, December, 2012)
Dale provided descriptions that spoke to the essence of his core values and what motivated him back in the 1990’s. The following description gives a glimpse of why Dale felt the need to advocate for marginalized groups.

Yeah, right, I mean, you know, I do not like exclusivity. I’m just not big on that. I am not big on people thinking that they have got something up on anybody. I am not big on private clubs. I am not big on country clubs or whatever, and so, you know taking an axe to that anyway I can.

(Dale, December, 2012)

When he arrived at Start High School, he was presented with many opportunities to stand up for the displaced DeVilbiss students whom he felt were underrepresented within the existing Start culture.

Yeah, you know one of the big things, which is in the [DeVilbiss] yearbook…I think it is called Afro Club or Afro-American Club, which is an enormous thing at DeVilbiss. It was a part of the cultural DNA of the school and there was an Afro-American Ball that was in the fall, I believe, that was equal to and rival to our homecoming.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Dale explained that the Start community would not consider forming an Afro-American Club, which had been a significant part of the DeVilbiss culture.

All of these [Start] kids were like, “Why don’t we create a White Club?” Or, “Why don’t we create an European Club?” And I am like, “Do you have that as any of your identity?” I am like, “Have you ever thought of yourself as an European? Where the hell are you in Europe from?”
While attending a session of the Jefferson-Madison Leadership Program, Dale made a public plea for forming an Afro-American Club at Start High School. He provided a vivid description of the conversation that took place regarding Afro-American Club at one of the Jefferson-Madison Leadership district-wide meetings.

Somebody said something about African-American Club, and I was like, “Jesus Christ! This again?”… I just said, “Hey! Anybody can join, you know there was nothing discriminatory about this, there was nothing in this organization that is in any way other than open and free and if you want to be a part of it, go be a part of it.”

According to Dale, the principal of Start explained why he was not comfortable with the idea of forming an Afro-American Club. Dale continued his story.

He comes up with some administrative gobbledy gook. He talked about, you know, “There are no discriminatory organizations in Toledo Public Schools and we would not have that in a high school,” and I said, “Oh really, John?” I said, “What about Zonta club, what about our Z club?”

According to Dale, Zonta is a national women’s service organization. Dale continued to question the Start principal about why the high school would support an organization associated with women, but not one associated with African-Americans. Dale listened to the principal as he explained why Start High School could not host an
Afro-American Club. After ten minutes or so, Dale made his case for why Start should host such a club.

I was like, “Look, I am a student. I am defending Afro-American Club. You know, to me it is Greek, but you are the one who is the administrator that includes an organization that is discriminatory and does not allow me to join as a member.” Yeah, I am like, “You have got to understand that, you know, you can’t be two-faced about this.”

(Dale, December, 2012)

Dale continued with his story, explaining that the person in charge of the Z-Club at Start was his German Teacher whom he also had at DeVilbiss. He spoke to his German Teacher and she encouraged him to attend the Z-Club meetings. Dale finished his story by stating, “So, at the next Z-Club meeting, I showed up with like 15 guys.” I asked if it was co-ed when he left and he said, “Yes, it was co-ed when I left. Yeah, I kind of forced it to. I integrated Z-club.” After he integrated the Zonta Club, it paved the way for organizing the African-American Club at Start High School. There are multiple examples of Dale demonstrating his “activism’ tendency. I included this example almost in its entirety because it was such a powerful representation of his activism.

Just get it over with.

Many of Dale’s narratives pertaining to agency had to do with other people, but he provided one example in which he took action to ease his own anxiety over the transition to his receiving school.
Senior’s Skip Day was not something I enjoyed a lot at DeVilbiss. The whole place was just empty. I mean it was just empty and the place is dying and shutting down…I mean, I don’t know how many kids were there, but it was handfuls.  

(Dale, December, 2012)

According to Dale, he went home that particular day and made the decision to call Start High School to request an immediate transfer. He recalled his phone conversation with the staff member from Start High School.

I said, “Hey they are closing…we are closing DeVilbiss anyway, nobody is showing up, how about I just transfer now out and get it over with?” And they were like, “Oh I do not know if that is a good idea, Dale.” And I don’t know how my mother found out about that. I assume that she walked in and I just told her what I did, so I think I had a meeting with them about that, because you know, I was just like…(long pause).

(Dale, December, 2012)

At this point in the interview, Dale became lost for words, which was highly unusual. His face had changed from being animated, to a look of sadness. I said, “You were probably thinking, why stay here?” Dale responded, “And I was just like, ‘I don’t need this (pause), we are going anyway, let us just go.’ ” I thought that was the end of his story, but then he became more agitated and defensive as he continued with his story.

You know, I mean I did not make the damn decision, but if the decision is made for me then you know let me control what I can kind of control…so that was just kind of me being a pain. So that was it, I mean that was my only interaction with
Start prior to [entering there], was kind of them saying, “yeah no, we don’t want you yet.”

(Dale, December, 2012)

This example is representative of several themes. I chose to put it in this section as an example of Dale’s need to take action; however, it also could have been placed in the section that dealt with grief. Dale described the slow death of DeVilbiss after the announcement of the closing. He addressed the fact that his life was out of control and he wanted to take control of what he could, resolving himself to the inevitable fact that he would be enrolling at Start. His fear of the unknown, which at this point in his life was Start High School, was causing him anxiety. Dale’s solution was to act quickly and get it over with. I found similarities between Dale’s situation and that of families with a loved one who is terminal. Sometimes the decision that brings the most peace is the toughest decision to make, the decision to let go. However, it requires action. I saw Dale’s description as his way of letting go of what he understood to be terminal, which was the closing of DeVilbiss High School. This kind of behavior would most likely surface in individuals who are action-oriented, like Dale. Agency, as it is considered in terms of social justice, was reflected strongly within Dale’s narratives. I considered the relationship between empowerment and activism. If power plays a role in “activism” and re-engagement, then certainly, Dale would have had an acquired amount of power, especially in terms of political capital. While his political capital may have been responsible for his ability to reach successful outcomes through his action, his narrative suggests that it was his astute awareness of social inequity that motivated him to take such action.
The adults let us down.

Linda was astutely aware of the fact that she was a minor and that the real power lay with the adults. In her descriptions, there was a pattern that surfaced in which she looked to those who were in control to do the right thing; however, she was often left feeling disappointed. Linda discussed the need for activism by the adults, both in the community and within Start High School in regard to the transition. Linda emphasized throughout her description the belief that DeVilbiss was closed because of the racial make up of the school and the fact that it held a lower socioeconomic status than Start High School. She was frustrated by the fact that no action was taken by the adults to help bring the two student bodies together prior to the opening of school in the fall.

So, at that time, you know, us being kids, our feeling was that it had to be with race, but you know, perspective and distance you can look back and say considering they did nothing to facilitate the integration of Start, I don’t see how that could have crossed anybody’s mind. I mean, they did nothing to prepare or kind of deal with the fact that you are bringing a whole lot of black students into a previously all white blue-collar high school.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda was in this unique space where she understood the limited power that she held, or that any of the students held at the time of the closing. However, her narrative also suggested that she understood that there was a need for agency, which she felt should have been initiated by the adults. In fact, her narrative suggested that she was so appalled by the fact that the adults did not take action to help with the transition process, that she rationalizes the inaction but stating, “I don’t see how that could have crossed anybody’s
mind.” Linda was not alone in her thinking. Treva and Dale also provided descriptions that alluded to the fact that the adults had let them down by their inaction. So, for a few of the participants, a theme of civic critique emerged that focused on the lack of structural supports that were necessary to help both the displaced students and the receiving school students adjust to the changes to their environment as a result of merging groups of students together; these were groups that had the potential for conflict due to both racial issues, and due to the fact that they would have been recent school rivals. This lack of agency on the part of the school board, administration and community leaders not only left the participants feeling disappointed and unsupported, but it impacted their ability to reach the “acceptance” or “closure” due to a lingering sense of betrayal and mistrust of those in the position of power.

In this next example, Linda questioned her own belief that race did play a role in the decision to close DeVilbiss because in her adult view now, it is unfathomable to think race was a part of that decision, and yet, no one addressed it in the transition process.

They [the adults] did nothing. So, to look back and say, oh they must have made the decision because of race that would have had to cross someone’s mind, so you know logic and perspective now make me think that it couldn’t be possible, but then you know, it was a very charged environment. People were saying a lot of things to rile and promote and you know, keep people involved.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Here, again in this example, Linda appeared to struggle with her anger with the adults who did nothing to help with the racial integration at Start High School, and her desire to believe that they did nothing because they were not consciously aware of the fact that
Start was becoming significantly more integrated with the closing of DeVilbiss. In her narratives, Linda moves toward and away from the idea that there was an aversion by the school district and community to address the racism and classism issues that emerged as a result of the closing of DeVilbiss.

Summary of Grief and Loss

Participants recalled the school closure and transition experience as a time period when they had no control over their environment. There was an awareness of their developmental age at the time of the experience and an acknowledgment of the limited power they would have had at that time as adolescents. During the school closure experience, their narratives spoke to the chaotic environment that resulted from a disrupted, unstable system. Participants described how DeVilbiss as they had once known it began to unravel before their eyes, creating a culture of shock and despair. Participants remembered feeling a great deal of anger, fear and anxiety as they watched DeVilbiss disappear and wondered about their future. The unstable system created by the closing of DeVilbiss followed them to their receiving schools as they tried to navigate an unfamiliar environment. Stacey, in particular, struggled with the fact that she did not have control over her environment at Start High School. In her narrative is also evident the societal discourse regarding the belief that an individual is able to overcome adversity. This resulted in her placing blame on herself when she could not perform at the level she had while attending DeVilbiss, where she had the necessary structural supports.

Each of the five participants referenced issues associated with identity disruption when DeVilbiss closed and they were forced to transition to receiving schools. The
identity formation process was disrupted by the closing of DeVilbiss, followed by an adjustment period through the transition process. How each participant adjusted his or her identity was dependent upon the degree to which the social groups changed from those at DeVilbiss to those at the receiving school. The experience of school closure and transition led to minimal changes to Shaina’s identity formation. However, for the other four participants, the experience of school closure and transition resulted in significant changes to each person’s identity.

Treva’s situation appeared to be the most serious in terms of identity formation in that it seemed to have not only been disrupted, but it stopped. According to Elkind (1981), when presented with critical situations, adolescents often become alienated and lonely, which leads them to believe that no one can relate to what they are experiencing (as cited in Everall et al., 2005). Treva’s narrative suggests that students moving through the school closure experience who are lacking in the lived experience necessary to understand that others have been through similar situations and have achieved positive outcomes are at a higher risk of having negative outcomes associated with identity formation. It is unfortunate that the adults at Rogers did not provide adequate support to Treva, which might have influenced her way of thinking.

The participants’ narratives of school closure related to identity formation reveal the critical role the adults play in the transition process. Participants’ narratives also drew attention to the role of attachment and autonomy in identity formation as related to the school closure experience, both of which are crucial to a healthy resolution (Everall et al., 2005). Autonomy and attachment are most associated with parental influence; however, the participants’ narratives suggest that it also applies to school staff that the
participants looked to for support and care (Steinberg et al., 2011; Woolley et al., 2008; Everall et al., 2005).

Each participant described varying degrees of place identity and attachment to DeVilbiss. Only one participant, Shaina, described a strong identification or attachment to her receiving school. While Treva’s narratives indicated that she did identify with and attach to DeVilbiss High School, she cognitively fails to acknowledge it due to the fact that she did not graduate from there, leaving her with a feeling of “incompleteness.” Participants’ narratives suggest that those with a strong place attachment and/or place identity are able to recall vivid memories of their physical surroundings given time and distance. These memories are not just the positive ones, but include unpleasant memories as well. This is evidenced by Dale’s vivid memories of Start High School, many of which were not fondly recalled. The recall of memories associated with a particular place can be limited by avoiding the physical structure, including visual reminders of the physical structure. This was evidenced as participants explained if or why they would, or would not, choose to return to DeVilbiss High School for a tour. For example, Linda needed time and distance to return to the physical structure because it served as a reminder of a time period that “was awful for a little while.” Dale also struggled with the idea of touring DeVilbiss but for the opposite reason, which was that his memories of DeVilbiss were so positive that he was reluctant to allow such strong emotions to surface. Participants’ narratives suggest that there is a relationship between the potential for developing place identity and/or attachment and the amount of time spent in a particular place.
It is evident that each participant was unique in how they moved through the grieving process at the time of the closure, as well as how quickly they were able to reach the “acceptance” stage. Shaina’s narrative, for example, suggested that she was able to reach the last stage of “grief and loss” prior to her first day at her receiving school as evidenced by her ability to engage with staff and students at Scott High School. However, Treva’s narrative suggested the exact opposite in that she spent her entire senior year at Rogers High School unable to re-engage. In the narratives of Dale, Linda and Stacey, it appears that they did reach the “acceptance” stage by the time they graduated from their receiving schools. As discussed earlier, for Linda, this happened fairly quickly; however, the process was not as easy for Dale and Stacey.

While the participants’ narratives provided evidence of how each moved through the initial stages of grief, reaching “acceptance” for the first time, there is also evidence that as Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005) suggest, that even after each participant was able to reach a level of “acceptance,” it was not a permanent stage. For participants taking part in his study, memories were elicited that resulted in a return to various stages of the grieving process. Most notably, was the “bargaining” stage in which participants spent a great deal of time discussing “why” DeVilbiss was chosen to close, while at the same time, making a case for why DeVilbiss should have remained open. So, while participants did show evidence of moving through the initial grieving process through examples of how they did reengage and begin to plan for their future, they also provided evidence that there are some memories of school closure that bring about highly-charged emotional affect.
Agency is closely associated with the subtheme, “no control/no voice” in that agency appears to be a reaction to the participants’ feeling of having no control. For some of the participants, agency was a way to take back control and regain their voice. For Treva, her voice remained silent in her agency as she consciously detached from the environment of her receiving school. Dale’s agency emerged in the form of social justice as he found purpose in advocating on the behalf of others and against what he viewed as an oppressive culture at his receiving school. Agency also surfaced as a way to ease the anxiety of the situation, as with Dale who just wanted to “get it over with,” referring to the inevitable transfer to his receiving school. Again, this was representative of the need for participants to regain some sense of order in their lives. There appears to be a relationship between the perception of having power or social capital and agency. Treva, who had a limited amount of perceived power, internalized her control by detaching with her environment. In contrast, Dale, who had described himself as having a significant degree of power, used agency at the macro-level to affect change. Participants’ narratives also spoke to a lack of agency as it related to the school staff, focusing on the lack of structural supports necessary to help the displaced students navigate their new receiving school environment.

Summary of Chapter

The previous chapter, chapter four, contextualized the experience of school closure and transition as narrated by the participants. The immediate impact of the closure emerged from participants’ narratives, steeped in social and psychological issues related to grief and loss, as well as sense of belonging. This chapter, chapter five, provided an in-depth analysis of the social and psychological themes that emerged,
focusing primarily on the short-term impact. In the next chapter, chapter six, the in-depth analysis continues with a focus on the long-term impact of the school closure experience.
CHAPTER VI  
STUDY FINDINGS  

Introduction  

The principal research question for this study was: How do adults, who as teenagers attended a school that closed during their high school career, describe the impact of school closure on their lives? While the previous chapter considered the short-term impact of the school closure experience, this chapter examines the long-term impact as described by the participants.

Community Connectedness/Pride and Tradition  

A goal of the study was to explore if and how social connections were sustained after the closing of the high school, particularly those connections with individuals and groups nearest to the community in which the participants resided at the time DeVilbiss High School was closed. This section focuses on how the participants have sustained connections to their community, particularly in terms of maintaining a sense of pride, tradition, and identification to that community.
Connections to the old neighborhood.

“The neighborhood is not the same.” (Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey resides in the City of Toledo and stays connected to her old neighborhood through her parents. They still reside in the family home and Stacey visits them regularly. Stacey spoke with genuine concern as she discussed some of the children in the neighborhood that she grew up with and how hard their lives have been.

But most of the people I went to school with who stayed in that area, they are not doing well … So now, most of them like, they look older than me. They just don’t look … they are not doing very well.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey continued to describe her old neighborhood in its current condition, stating, “Houses have been boarded up, the people do not like, you know, just different things like the area, it is just not…” Stacey described how incarceration and drugs have impacted some of the people she knew. She spoke about some of her old neighbors who are now “in the system” and how this life style has become the culture of the neighborhood where her parents still reside, stating, “Yeah, I mean they did something wrong. You know people make mistakes, but I mean they’re like felons. It’s like it’s just their life now.”

Stacey remembered that most of the people she was referring to were boys who had been friends of her brother. She remembered that most of the girls she had hung around with had chosen to leave the old neighborhood. This realization surprised her and she considered why that might be the case, that the boys would have remained and their lives as adults reflected the decline of the neighborhood, while the girls would have
moved away. Stacey, pondered her own question for a while, and then stated, “So, but yeah. It is not the same. The neighborhood is not the same.”

Stacey believes part of the decline has to do with the income of the families living there. Stacey would prefer not to stay connected with her old neighborhood. She has encouraged her parents to move, stating, “My brother and I, we told them we don’t want the house. We have already told them that. We joke about it, but we don’t want to be there.”

Like Stacey, Shaina still has contact with her old neighborhood because her parents also still reside in their family home. Shaina visits her parents every day.

Their block is still kind of normal. I am starting to see gang activity. I just told my mom and my dad that they need to get on the horn because I think it is this convenience store that sits on Bancroft that allows a lot of riff-raff and drug activity to hang around so I kind of get leery about sending my kids over there to play and stuff like that because that corner’s getting really bad. A lot of the original homeowners still live over there.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

Shaina indicated that her parents have no intention of leaving their home, stating, “They’re in a bungalow so everything is on the first floor, except their basement and laundry room. So, I don’t foresee them leaving.”

Treva currently resides in the Rogers High School attendance area, which is the same general area that she resided in when DeVilbiss was closed and she enrolled in Rogers High School for her senior year. While she lives in close proximity to her old neighborhood, she does not maintain relationships with the people who lived there, or
may still live there. I asked Treva to describe her current relationship to the community that she lived in when she was in high school.

Umm, I don’t live over there. My mom doesn’t live over there. So I guess it would be non-existent. So I mean I drive by there … but I don’t necessarily interact in it at all.

(Treva, November, 2012)

**Connections to Toledo.**

“... a few more heartbreaks than celebrations ... but we are still here.”

(Dale, December, 2012)

Linda no longer resides in the Toledo area. She described her connectivity to the Toledo community this way, “I have relationships with the people. I don’t think I really have had a relationship with the place.” In one of her descriptions, Linda had made reference to the things that “anchor” a person. In that description, I had asked if she had an anchor and if so, to explain what it was. She stated, “I don’t have one I don’t think.”

Treva has a connection to the Toledo Public Schools. She has been employed with the district for several years as a teacher. Treva’s children attended the public elementary school, which was associated with the Toledo Public Schools. Treva’s children currently attend a private secondary school in Toledo. Like Treva, Stacey also lives and works in the City of Toledo. She works in the field of early childhood education and has served students in the city for several years. The narratives of both Treva and Stacey suggest that they stay connected with the Toledo community through their direct services they provide to children and families residing in the city.
Dale does not reside in Toledo, Ohio but he does have a government job that allows him to stay connected with the Toledo area. Dale is passionate about the city of Toledo, Ohio. His interest in history, government and economics led him to a degree in political science. For several years after graduating high school, Dale lived away from Toledo, Ohio as he navigated his way through college and earned a degree. There were several examples in which he described how he tried to connect to other communities where he resided, but his passion for the Toledo area always stood in the way stating, “Well, I am addicted to this town called Toledo Ohio.” He and his employer have been trying to “make it everything anyone would ever hope it can be.” Dale’s work is associated with policy formulation that impacts urban centers like the City of Toledo. He believes there have been “a few more heartbreaks than celebrations.” Dale added, “but, you know, we are still here.”

Shaina lives and works in the City of Toledo, residing in the Rogers High School attendance area. She chose to send her children to a specialty elementary school, which is a magnet school within the Toledo Public Schools. Her plan is to send each child to a specialty secondary school in the district when they reach the appropriate grade.

Through her descriptions, Shaina appeared to be someone who is astutely aware of what is happening within her community. She seemed to have a grasp on the charter school movement and made a comparison between start-up charter schools and start-up churches.

These are charter schools. And they’re putting them in crap buildings. I’m like what? To me, it’s like a church, especially black churches, there’s one on every
corner. Why does everyone have to have a piece of the pie? Why can’t we all come together and go to one school and one church?

(Shaina, August, 2013)

Connections to DeVilbiss and/or the receiving school.

“I definitely have stronger emotional connection to DeVilbiss.”

(Linda, January, 2013)

Treva reported that she does not stay involved in any activities pertaining to either DeVilbiss High School or Rogers High School. Treva explained that she has a cousin who is active in DeVilbiss alumni events and tries to get her involved, stating, “She’ll be like, ‘DeVilbiss is having a party,’ and I’m like ‘ eeeeee’ you know what I mean?” Treva reported that she “just kind of decided” the closing of DeVilbiss and the loss of her senior year “messed things up.” Just as she chose to detach from her senior year at Rogers, she has chosen to detach from any alumni association, stating with some laughter, “And I’m not choosing sides.” Treva explained that she really has no strong feelings toward either DeVilbiss or Rogers. That lack of connection, together with her reserved personality has resulted in Treva not wanting to engage in social alumni events.

While Treva may not acknowledge having a connection to DeVilbiss, her feelings toward Rogers go much deeper in that she denies her association with the school. Treva has been at athletic events where the crowd is asked to cheer for Rogers and she will not participate. Part of Treva’s inability to connect with DeVilbiss or Rogers has to do with the fact that her senior year was interrupted and she never felt she had closure. She stated, “I guess maybe if I had gone there all four years, I might say to my girls, ‘you should go to Rogers, it’s such a wonderful place.’” Her three years at DeVilbiss were
pleasant, but they were interrupted. Consequently, Treva feels she really is not an alumnus from any high school.

When asked which school Dale feels the most connected to, he explained that when he visits Toledo, he goes out of his way to drive by DeVilbiss High School, stating, “Yeah, I mean that…I am very pleased that DeVilbiss is still standing and Start has been torn down.” Unlike Dale, Linda appears to harbor little animosity toward Start High School. In fact, Linda explained that she does not feel a stronger connection to one high school or the other and that her time spent at DeVilbiss and Start has “run together” for her now. However, she added, “I definitely have stronger emotional connection to DeVilbiss.”

Shaina has remained connected to both Scott High School and DeVilbiss High School. In the following description, she described an event that she attended referred to as “the cabaret.” Shaina expressed a loyalty to Scott High School and is proud to have graduated from there even though she shares a longer history with alumni from DeVilbiss. At the event, she noticed that she was drawn toward the DeVilbiss side of the room, stating, “The DeVilbiss side was on the far-right, and I just remember not venturing on the Scott side. I never walked through. I don’t know if I was scared, but I thought, ‘I don’t know these people,’ but the DeVilbiss side, I did. You know what I mean?”

Pride in school and/or community.

“And I am still all about Scott …” (Shaina, August, 2013)

While Treva does not feel a sense of pride in her old neighborhood or the high schools in which she attended, she is surrounded by family members who do. Her
husband attended St. Francis and Treva recalled how he still cheered for them at athletic events. Her mother and other family members show their pride for Scott High School, which serves as a reminder to Treva that she does not have a strong connection to the school she graduated from, Rogers High School. Treva recalled how a friend of hers, who also attended DeVilbiss High School, still wears clothing with DeVilbiss lettering or with the school mascot.

She will stand up and yell and scream. I mean and she has it for DeVilbiss and they have all type of reunions and little get togethers. Actually, I saw her not too long ago and she had a polo that said, ‘DeVilbiss’ that had the year she graduated and her name on this side, and she was like, ‘Do you have it?’ And [I’m] like, ‘yeah,’ but it just really, like, I just don’t feel like I have a connection to any, either one [DeVilbiss or Rogers].

(Treva, November, 2012)

Dale works in a governmental position and is often faced with negative stereotyping from his counterparts directed at Toledo. Consequently, he often finds himself defending the city in which he grew up. When I asked Dale if his love of Toledo was an obsession, he stated, “It is a passion and it is a job and luckily, it is a… I have a job where I can match that passion.” Dale often moved between speaking in the past to the present and from the present to the past when he recalled events that reflected his pride in his community.

So, I mean, you know, I have had this drive to try and improve my hometown and to try and make it more than it could be and what has in part driven me is the reaction I get from the rest of the world about what my hometown is, which was
the same experience I had with DeVilbiss as a school within my hometown. And so it [his passion and his need to defend Toledo] is just one massive chip on my shoulder, and [I] really need to get rid of [it], but you know it is a drive and you know, look I could do something else, I tried to, I went to graduate school. I figured that would be the end of this, I figured that would be the end of my efficacy, and I will have to leave Ohio, but you know…

(Dale, December, 2012)

In the following example, Dale described how he counters the negative views of other by giving credit for his success to DeVilbiss.

I have a long list of names [of people] who confronted me with other opinions, who weren’t terribly thoughtful, and I’ve taken it upon myself to say, “Oh, I guess DeVilbiss is a really a horrible place (sarcastic tone). You know I have a masters degree and work for [work name omitted for confidentiality].” I mean … it was a great place.

(Dale, December, 2012)

Shaina expressed great pride in Scott High School, stating, “At the time Mr. Woody, who I still talk to, was our principal. He was, to me, the best principal ever.” She felt equally as strong about the staff at Scott, stating, “I think the staff over there was just excellent, they were excellent.” Shaina is active in alumni events held for Scott High School, as well as DeVilbiss.

As a graduate of Scott High School, Shaina often finds herself defending the school, stating, “And I still am about Scott, when I hear people down Scott, I’m like, ‘seriously?’ They kind of do that here [at my work place].” When Shaina explained the
negative perception within the community in regard to Scott I asked her how she could fight that perception. She responded, “I just tell them, I’m a product of Scott and I’m a good person. I did well.” According to Shaina, when her coworkers hear her say she has to leave to put in volunteer hours at her children’s school, they ask her where her children go to school. They are surprised when she tells them they attend Toledo Public Schools. Shaina thinks highly of the public elementary school, stating, “That’s one thing that I love about (name of school omitted), excellent, excellent, excellent teachers and rules.” Just as Shaina often finds herself having to defend the negative stereotype associated with Scott High School, it appears that she also finds herself having to defend the Toledo school her children attend.

**Maintaining connections.**

“... we had e-mail from the minute we left high school.”

*(Linda, January, 2013)*

Dale’s job requires him to stay current on all news events happening in Toledo. He stated, “I read the Toledo Blade every day for the last 25 years. You know, I talk to people there dozens of times a day.” Dale also stays connected through friends that he still has who live in the city of Toledo. Dale explained that he feels like he lives in two different worlds, one where he resides with his family and the other in Toledo, stating, “I feel like I live in one and, you know, have a tether to another.” He used to visit Toledo frequently but now that he has children, the number of visits has been reduced. Dale knows that he may not always work in his current position, due that it is dependent upon the elected official he works for. This thought causes him some anxiety.
I feel very connected to it [Toledo]. It will be hard, I have thought about this a lot, I cannot imagine a job anywhere that isn’t there, that has more to do with it than what I have here, which has been very fulfilling for a long time.

(Dale, December, 2012)

When I interviewed Dale, he mentioned that he was going to have dinner with a friend of his from Toledo who had also experienced the closing of DeVilbiss High School. He described many of the things they had lived through together and how they have remained close friends. Dale presented the idea that going through the experience of school closure with her is part of why they feel so connected. From his perspective, sharing the experience actually strengthened their relationship. This close friend has ties to the Toledo Public Schools and so Dale receives some of his information about the school district from his friend.

Linda compared her own situation with her mothers as she discussed how her mother is tied to Toledo, but Linda does not feel that she has those ties. In her description, Linda discussed the role technology has played in helping people in her own generation stay connected.

I mean, all the people my mom went to high school with, a lot of them are still in Toledo. Some of them are far and wide and, you know, they have done different things than the others, but having their reunion is the thing that keeps them together, whereas, I think it is generational too. We don’t need that. I mean, we had e-mail from the minute we left high school. So, we had ways to keep in touch that weren’t face to face.

(Linda, January, 2013)
For the most part, Stacey does not stay in touch with any of her old classmates from DeVilbiss or Start. According to Stacey, she may run into one of her classmates and they might then “friend” her on Facebook. She will accept them on Facebook, but does not initiate any communication with them, stating, “They Facebook me, then I might do it once just to accept them, but I don’t keep up with them.”

Stacey acknowledged the role technology plays in staying connected with her friends, but she also explained that it is no replacement for face-to-face communication. Oh, yeah, because you had more face to face contacts [back then]. The relationships meant more I think back then. Because I think you almost felt like, “Oh my God, I will never see this person again” unless they went to the school I was going to. It was just different, but now you can’t see somebody for so long and you can just Facebook them or text them.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

**Summary of Community Connectedness/Pride and Tradition.**

There are three participants who still reside in the City of Toledo. None of the three still in the same neighborhood that they did at the time of the school closure experience. However, two of the participants maintain connections to their old neighborhoods through their parents who still reside there. Those two participants described their old neighborhoods as being in a state of urban decline as evidenced by “incarceration,” “drug activity,” and “gang activity.” Stacey, in particular, would like her parents to move out of the neighborhood. Shaina, explained that her parents would most likely remain in the neighborhood because the house was a “bungalow” style and is well suited to her parent’s particular life stage.
Two participants reside out-of-state, Dale and Linda. Of those two participants, Dale stays connected to the City of Toledo because he is in a job that requires him to maintain relationships there. Even if his job did not require it, he most likely would still maintain a connection, explaining that he is “addicted” to his hometown. Linda’s connection to Toledo is minimal. Treva, Shaina and Stacey live and work in the City of Toledo, which keeps them connected to the community.

In regard to connections that participants have with, or feel toward DeVilbiss and/or their receiving school, the descriptions varied. Treva has not stayed connected to either Rogers or DeVilbiss, although, she does receive information about both schools through her cousin. While Treva does not deny her association with DeVilbiss, she does deny any association to Rogers High School. Treva indicated that perhaps if she “had gone all four years” to Rogers, she may have formed a better opinion of it. The interruption of her senior year played a role in her inability to stay connected to DeVilbiss, even though her narrative suggests that she enjoyed her three years at DeVilbiss. While Dale only spent one-year at DeVilbiss, his narrative suggests that he feels a strong connection to DeVilbiss. Like Treva, who chooses to disassociate from her receiving school, Dale also has strong negative feelings toward Start High School, expressing pleasure in the fact that Start has been torn down and replaced with a new structure. It appears that Linda does not feel a stronger connection to either her sending or receiving high school, although Linda is kept abreast of DeVilbiss happenings through her mother who does maintain a strong connection with DeVilbiss. Shaina expressed a strong connection to both DeVilbiss and Scott High School, and appears to have great pride in both schools. Dale and Shaina both described how they are motivated by their
pride to defend their schools when they are faced with negative opinions, Dale for DeVilbiss and Shaina for Scott.

Participants described multiple ways that they maintain connections to the Toledo community and/or other alumni. Communicative and/or informational tools included: emailing, texting, using social media (Facebook), talking (by phone or face-to-face) and reading the local newspaper. Having parents currently living in the Toledo area and/or family home also played a role in maintaining connections to both the community and to the old neighborhood. The field of employment also played a role in how the participants maintained a connection with the community. For Dale, it was primarily through indirect service at the macro-level. For Stacey and Treva, it was by providing direct services to children and families living within the Toledo community.

**Long-term Impact of School Closure.**

Participants described how they were immediately impacted by the school closure and transition experience. The impact began with the failure of the levy in November, followed by the announcement that the school board would be closing one or more high schools. The participants addressed the short-term impact of school closure as they described their final year at DeVilbiss, followed by the transition to their receiving school through their graduation from high school. This section, however, is focused on the long-term impact of school closure and transition. The focus is on issues connected to the school closure experience that emerged after high school through the present.

**Identification to an alma mater.**

“It’s not like I can hold a conversation with them.”

*(Treva, November, 2012)*
Each participant expressed a form of identity confusion in regard to which school they currently feel most connected with now as an adult. The fact that they did not experience four consecutive years at any one high school appears to have had a significant impact on them. There is a sense of incompleteness that has impacted their ability to fully identify with their graduating high school, or their displaced high school. Even Shaina, whose narrative suggested that she had the most positive experience of all the participants at her receiving high school still experiences moments where she feels excluded or disconnected to Scott High School. For example, when she was helping to plan the ten-year class reunion for Scott High School, she remembered that she “kind of felt disconnected because they had memories from freshman year, and they had their junior high and they had elementary.” Shaina recalled that at her ten-year reunion, the absence of a substantial shared history caused her some discomfort, stating, “So it was a little strange for me on that level, I couldn’t be in their conversations, that was a little different.”

Shaina’s ten-year reunion would have taken place in 2002. However, she shared a narrative about a more recent alumni event in which both Scott graduates and DeVilbiss graduates were in attendance. While she sat on the Scott side of the room, she chose not to mingle with the people from Scott. Rather, she went out of her way to walk through the DeVilbiss side of the room, stating, “I talked way more to the DeVilbiss people than I did Scott.” This suggests that Shaina identifies with both Scott and DeVilbiss, although, she feels more connected to the people from DeVilbiss because of their shared history.

Shaina had friends displaced from DeVilbiss who like Treva, entered Rogers High School their senior year. According to Shaina, many of those friends now refuse to
associate with Roger’s alumni. Shaina shared one particular memory regarding a friend of hers stating, “I was like, ‘Shawn do you ever go to any Rogers functions or reunions?’ He just was like, ‘No, I’m here, this is what I do is DeVilbiss.’” The narrative shared by Shaina aligns with the narrative shared by Treva, who refuses to identify herself as belonging to Rogers High School. She really does not want to be associated with Rogers in any way, stating, “Yep, and even now I’ll see people from Rogers and I’ll speak to them but it’s not like I can hold a conversation with them.” Treva’s cousin tries to get her to attend alumni events, but Treva has no interest. Treva reported that she has no connection to either Rogers High School or DeVilbiss. While she speaks with sadness and anger when she recalls her sense of loss from the closing of DeVilbiss, she speaks with contempt when she references Rogers High School, stating, “It was just a place to complete my last year of high school.”

Participants described unique issues around if and/or how they currently identify with their receiving schools, as well as with DeVilbiss. For example, Linda’s narrative suggests that she identifies to both her sending and receiving school equally, which is interesting since she spent half of her high school years at DeVilbiss and half at Start. Linda stated, “It all kind of runs together for me now. I guess I don’t make a strong distinction.” Stacey’s narratives suggest that she had a stronger connection to DeVilbiss in terms of the relationships developed there as opposed to Start High School, however, she also identifies with Start, stating, “Because that was, like, my last connection.” The fact that she actually graduated from Start High School influences her sense of belonging there now as an adult. Interestingly, like Linda, Stacey also attended two years at DeVilbiss and two years at Start High School. This may be why each feels connected to
both schools, but yet resonates a lingering sense of interruption that is characterized by experiencing two very different high school environments. Dale, however, who had only one year at DeVilbiss, feels more of an emotional connection to DeVilbiss. His experience at Start was viewed so negatively that he expresses contempt for Start, much like Treva expressed for her receiving school, Rogers High School. Dale stated, “Start showed me who I didn’t want to be … it was kind of a place where teachers who did not really want to do a whole heck of a lot went within the district.” Dale had experienced “caring, nurturing” adults at DeVilbiss and was of the opinion that the liberal arts curriculum, which was part of the tradition of DeVilbiss High School, far exceeded the academic programming offered at his receiving school, Start High School.

Shaina, who was the president of her junior class during the 1990-91 school year at DeVilbiss, described how other displaced classmates recently approached her.

I was approached several times about getting our class back together, ’92, and pull everyone together that was split. And doing a reunion picnic and I’m really contemplating doing that next year because we don’t see each other anymore.

(Shaina, August, 2013)

The fact that decades later, displaced students from DeVilbiss would be approaching Shaina to organize a reunion for the DeVilbiss junior class of 1991, implies that there may be a significant number of displaced DeVilbiss students who still feel connected to each other and to DeVilbiss. The participants’ narratives suggest that displaced high school students are left feeling like they missed something due to their disrupted environment, resulting in a sense of incompleteness. This void appears to impact their
ability as an adult to view oneself as connected to and/or engaged with one particular high school.

**The building: Is it intact or torn down?**

*The building is still there so that is a good start.*

*(Linda, January, 2013)*

Of all the high schools mentioned in the study, only DeVilbiss remains primarily unchanged. While Scott High School was renovated, it was restored so that it looks much as it did when the original building was erected. Both Start High School and Rogers High School were demolished and replaced with new buildings. The participants addressed the relationship between the physical space and memory. Linda reflected on her visits to the Toledo area and stated, “I definitely have a stronger emotional connection to DeVilbiss. The building is still there so that is a good start.” Linda referenced the fact that the disappearance of the physical plant that was Start High School makes it easier for her to disconnect from Start High School, while the fact that DeVilbiss looks much like it did at the time of the closure, helps keep her connected.

For Dale, it was more personal in that his narrative suggested that he viewed the fact that Start High School was no longer standing as a kind of vindication for DeVilbiss. I believe this has to do with the “us versus them” environment that existed during the time of the closure in which school communities were pitted against each other in an effort to keep their home school open. This was especially true in the narratives pertaining to DeVilbiss and Start High School. Like Start, Rogers High School has also been torn down and rebuilt. According to Treva, she finds some comfort in the fact that the building as she experienced it, is no longer there to serve as a reminder of her
experience. She stated, “But I don’t think about it [Rogers] that often. Plus it’s torn
down so I don’t even necessarily have to look at it.”

**Mistrust of authority/policy makers.**

*“We were asked absolutely nothing. We had no control.”*  

*(Treva, November, 2012)*

There is evidence in the narratives that participants have been left with a mistrust of those in decision-making positions when it comes to public policy. Much of this mistrust has to do with the time period leading up to the school closure announcement. Each participant was left with doubts regarding the real reason DeVilbiss was closed. Even Dale, who had an inside view, was left believing that DeVilbiss was closed primarily because of the racial makeup of the building. He believed the declining enrollment and building disrepair, which were the reasons presented by the school board for the closure, were secondary to the desire to re-segregate the district as a way to stop the white flight.

There was this narrative pertaining to the “roof” and the fact that the cost to repair it was far beyond what the district could afford. However, this narrative lost credibility due to the fact that DeVilbiss was reopened and is still in use today. Shaina speaks to this issue in the following description.

I think that the lame excuse they told us was like a shield because I remember them say[ing] that the reason they were closing DeVilbiss was because they could not afford to keep it open because the roof was leaking. I remember that, and when they opened up like three years later with the same roof, I’m like, “are you seriously? What was that all about?”
Treva struggled with the question of why DeVilbiss had to be the school to close. She had heard that the roof was in need of repair, but the fact that the school was reopened a few years later, as an adult looking back, she finds it hard to believe the roof played a role in its closure, stating, “I was just over there and I was thinking, ‘This building has still been open and they said it needed a roof.’” Treva believes that many of the decisions made in regard to the closing of DeVilbiss were made prior to the public hearings. Now, in her adult life, she has experienced a similar phenomenon as a teacher and parent of students in the district. This is especially true for the recent K-8 grade reconfiguration in which she stated, “The plan was already there. They should have asked them [students and parents] before.”

Treva is hypersensitive to top-down decision making due to her own experience with school closure, and because she is a teacher in the same school system in which she experienced school closure. Reflecting on her school closure experience, Treva stated, “We were asked absolutely nothing. We had no control.” Treva often would fluctuate between her experience with being displaced from DeVilbiss to the more recent K-8 transformation plan that required students to be displaced from their middle school and returned to their elementary school. She added, “I’m partial because it happened to me, it happened to me. So I don’t know if my mind is open enough to see beyond it, but I just think it’s a disservice to them [the students now].” Treva apologized, stating, “Sorry I’m bring it up, but it just reminds me of the whole, the same thing really because they didn’t have a choice, they had to go back to their elementary school, or whatever.” The fact that Treva chose teaching as a profession and ended up working in Toledo Public
Schools seems to have impacted her own school closure experience in that her working conditions serve as a trigger for her own memories of school closure. In her narrative, her wounds seem fresher or more recent than as compared to the other four participants.

Linda demonstrated that she has become mistrustful of those in decision-making positions. For example, when she described the transition in cheerleading from DeVilbiss to Start, as she recalled the story, she postulated the idea that the adults at Start were directed to accept all the DeVilbiss students into clubs, stating, “Do you think they were just sort of told to let the DeVilbiss kids in whatever they wanted to do?” Linda continued with a similar hypothesis regarding choir.

I just remember that everybody that went out for their choir got in, everybody that went out, and they just seemed like, logistically that wouldn’t be feasible unless there was some sort of organizational decision or order or whatever or however you call it, to let the kids from DeVilbiss in all of those programs.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda provided a description of how the closing of DeVilbiss now influences her trust in the government or at least in elected officials, stating, “You know, then there is sort of this general distrust of government that comes with, you know, a school board of people you didn’t vote for, getting to make this decision that completely upends your life.” Linda believes that her experience with the political issues associated with school closure has impacted her perception of politics today.

But yeah, maybe that is where the independence comes from though. Like all those people having that control over this, what otherwise would have been you know the big aspect of your life. So, now I guess, I kind of think my own way.
Linda feels her need for independence was influenced by her experience of having other people making decisions about her life for her. As an adult, she now minimizes the amount of control others can have over her by staying informed and thinking independently.

**Regrets.**

“I should be at a different point and place.” *(Stacey, February, 2013)*

The participants often were navigating between looking forward and backward as they described their school closure and transition experience. This resulted in some discussions about regrets they may have had, now looking back given time and distance from the event. It would be expected that the participants who expressed the greatest losses as a result of the experience would also have expressed the most regrets. This proved to be the case in that Stacey and Treva expressed the most regrets, often focusing on what they would do over if they had the chance. Shaina, and Linda who experienced the least amount of loss in the experience of school closure and transition expressed the least amount of regret. Dale, who actually did experience a significant amount of loss, expressed very little regret. Even though his narrative suggests that he still harbors anger over his school closure experience, he is also able to recognize that everything leading up to the present played a role in the person he is today, stating, “I don’t think there is much I would have done differently.” Although, when Dale considered what his academic life would have been like for him if he had remained at DeVilbiss for four years, he stated, “Yeah, college would have been different, I think college probably would have been a little bit better.”
Treva spent a great deal of time discussing regrets. Treva still struggles with the decision her mother made to send her to DeVilbiss rather than the private school her brother had attended, stating, “What would life had been like if I would have had that experience?” Treva stated that she “tries not to hold that against” her mother. In regard to her receiving school, Treva wishes she would have chosen a school other than Rogers High School for her senior year, but acknowledged that any other high school would have had the same issues pertaining to loss of social capital and sense of belonging, stating, “Everyone’s been together then along you come at the last minute.” Nevertheless, Treva spent a significant amount of time discussing the fact that she wished she had gotten to go to the private secondary school her brother had attended, adding, “or even if I had started at Rogers, what would my life had been like?” This really speaks to her disrupted senior year and the fact that she had no sense of belonging while at Rogers. This is at the core of why now, as a teacher, she advocated for her own students when they were forced to move between buildings due to the district’s recent grade reconfiguration, and why as a mother, she has taken steps to ensure that her own children will not have a disrupted secondary school experience by making the decision to enroll them in a private high school. According to Treva, she and her cousin still have conversations about what their lives would be like had DeVilbiss remained open, stating, “We talk about it all the time.”

Stacey’s narrative about regret is strongly connected to her academics. As an adult now looking back at her life she stated, “I don’t think I have done enough. I don’t think I have done anything. I should be at a different point and place.” Stacey believes her life would have been different if she had kept her grades up while at Start High School. The two years at Start did not set her up for a successful college experience.
Stacey blames much of her academic decline to the fact that at Start High School, she was not engaged in any extra-curricular activities. She explained that this then negatively impacted her transition into college.

And I just did not, was not as active at all at Start and then I think that because sometime when you’re in an activity at least for one year you have to have a good GPA to even be involved. So, I think those motivators … you know I was not as involved at Start, then my grades slipped which meant I could not be accepted in as many colleges. So, all of those kind of things I think kind of played a part.

Yeah, I think I would have definitely, my GPA [at DeVilbiss] would have been really nice for me to be able to have more choices as far as where I wanted to go as far as college.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey was never able to complete an undergraduate degree, which emerged as her biggest regret in life. She stated, “I wish I had the degree, not to have a degree for financial gain, but you know something kind of under me.” According to Stacey, she feels she disappointed her mother, who does hold a college degree. Stacey recalled a conversation with her mother, who stated that she wished Stacey “had done more…a little more.” Stacey’s narrative suggests that she had a difficult time moving on from DeVilbiss and reestablishing herself at Start. Throughout her narrative, there were times when she referenced Start as “different” or that “it wasn’t DeVilbiss.” Looking back, she wishes she had approached the transition to Rogers as if it were just a natural transition, similar to moving from elementary school to junior high, stating, “Everything is really to get you to another level even if it is, you know, you go from elementary to junior high,
you know all of those are different stages of life you just go through.” In hindsight, Stacy wishes she had been able to view the transition to Start as just “another level.” She had academic goals her sophomore year at DeVilbiss. She had staff at DeVilbiss with expectations for her to go to college. She lost those relationships when she transitioned to Start and she lost her motivation to work hard. This loss and regret surfaced in her statement when she was asked about advice for others going through school closure and transition in which she stated, “Do not let that experience change your mindset about like what you want for your life. If you still want to be, you know, whatever your goal is, continue to keep your goals.”

**Long-term impact unique to individual participants.**

**Shaina.**

“I’m a good person. I did well.”

*(Shaina, August, 2013)*

Shaina described herself as “someone who makes friends easily.” In her adult life, she has stayed connected with friends from both DeVilbiss and Scott High School. In terms of academics, Shaina was well prepared when she entered Scott High School, attending half-days. She acknowledged DeVilbiss for proving the “foundation” for her academically that helped her to be successful both at her receiving high school and in college. Scott High School allowed her access to college recruiters from the historical black college that she attended, which would never had happened at DeVilbiss. At the time of the closing, DeVilbiss was approximately 60% black and 40% white and apparently was not a targeted high school for black college recruiters. She went to college with other students from Scott and met her husband through those friends at her
college. In retrospect, Shaina’s transition into Scott High School resulted in life-changing outcomes, all of which are viewed positively by Shaina. Her narrative suggests that she believes she is in a better place now as an adult for having transitioned into Scott High School.

Shaina works with several other people who graduated from Scott High School. According to Shaina, they find themselves having to defend the reputation of Scott High School. Shaina stated, “And I still am about Scott, when I hear people down Scott, I’m like, ‘seriously?’” According to Shaina, many of her coworkers have come from the suburbs of Toledo or graduated from private high schools. Shaina explained how she defends her alma mater, stating, “I just tell them, I’m a product of Scott and I’m a good person. I did well.” She also finds herself having to defend the reputation of Toledo Schools, specifically, the magnet school her children currently attend. She stated, “When they hear me say [at work], ‘oh, gotta go, we have volunteer hours,’ they say, ‘where do your kids go to school?’ I say, ‘Toledo Public.’ They can’t believe it.” Shaina’s narrative suggests that she is proud of the fact that she attended both DeVilbiss and Scott High School. It also suggests that she has trust and confidence in Toledo Public Schools.

**Treva.**

“I don’t know who my real friends are … I keep moving from place to place.”

*(Treva, November, 2012)*

Like Shaina, Treva was also a senior when she entered her receiving school, Rogers High School. Unlike Shaina, Treva described herself as someone who does not make friends easily, stating, “I’m not a social person.” Treva provided descriptions that suggested that her personality was not suited to transitional experiences. Treva explained
that she does not do well in new situations, stating, “I’m not a good person with change, even as an adult now.” When she attended college out of state, she returned the first year and enrolled in a local college, stating, “I was homesick, it was too far from home.” According to Treva, the recent loss of her phone number that she had for years, resulted in her experiencing a high level of anxiety. She still uses her old phone number for her pin, stating, “I’m not gonna change it, that’s my phone number.” Treva stated, “I do not like change, I do not.” I believe it is critical to stress the personality traits as narrated by Treva in order to understand why the experience of school closure and transition affected her so negatively. Treva’s narratives suggest that she was a very sensitive adolescent at the time of the closing of DeVilbiss and continues to be now in her adult life.

Treva currently resides in the Rogers area attendance zone. She also is employed with the Toledo Public Schools. This puts her in a very unique position as compared to the other participants. Additionally, in her teaching role, she has experienced school closure as an adult. She was working as a teacher in one of the Toledo Public School buildings when the district decided to close it. In her career as a teacher, she has had several transitions, stating that she “moved from school to school to school.” This is due in part to the closing of the Toledo Public School building she worked in, but also due to the fact that she services special education students and the district moves special education units frequently.

As she moves through transitions, Treva tries to protect herself. She stated, “And I don’t know if that could be a part of why, in terms of social settings, I’m not real open” adding, “because I don’t know them [unfamiliar people].” Treva listens, but she does not
share much about herself, stating, “Because it is like a protection because I don’t know who my real friends are because I keep moving from place to place.”

Treva learned to protect herself in the closing of DeVilbiss by detaching. Due to the high mobility in her job, she also finds herself detaching, not wanting to get too invested in any one school because just like her senior year at Rogers, she anticipates that she will not be at any one school for too long. According to Treva, every May, for the last several years, she worries about what teacher is going to get cut due to declining enrollment.

Treva is hypersensitive to student mobility, stating, “I think that’s a hang up for me, because I have cousins who move their kids from school to school to school, and it rubs me the wrong way.” Treva’s experience with school closure and transition has influenced her need to protect herself, her students and her own children from transitional experiences that are imposed and often arbitrary. Her narrative suggests that she has a mistrust in the district policies and procedures, as well as a mistrust of those in the position of decision-making, stating, “I think that, with my daughters, that’s something I feel like I can control, so I want to make sure this happens, because I just know the outcome of change.” In order to protect her own children from experiencing a disrupted school experience, Treva and her husband chose to send them to a private secondary school. According to Treva, she has some discomfort knowing that she works in the public district, but sends her children to a private school.

The school closing experience has made her much more aware of others going through transition. Treva provided a description in which she reflected on the impact of a recent district-wide grade reconfiguration that resulted in her students having to
experience transition. It was very hard for Treva’s narrative to stay either in the past or the present because to her, the two situations, the DeVilbiss closure and the recent grade reconfiguration, were so similar. The emotion and pain was fresh, it was new, and it was in the present. Treva stated, “Sorry I keep bringing it up but it just reminds me of that …of the whole …the same the same thing really because they didn't have a choice.”

Treva stated, “Just like that whole transformation plan, they threw all those kids back into the elementary buildings and I said, ‘no one ever asked the kid anything.’” Because Treva is close to the social system in which she experienced school closure and transition, she appears to relive her own experiences as past memories are triggered by current policy and practice related to school closure. In particular, it is the idea that the students had no voice in 1991 and have no voice in the current reform initiatives. Treva added, that her students needed to “count on something.” Her mistrust of that system is exacerbated by her adult experience in her teaching role with school closure and reform policies and practices that leave students and families feeling powerless and increases the likelihood of mobility issues.

Treva expressed a feeling of “missing something.” This surfaced multiple times throughout the interview process. She would often speak about how she “must have missed out” on something or how she “must have blocked out” something. She struggles as an adult with the limited memories she is able to recall from her high school days, especially in comparison to others close to her who have vivid memories from that time period, stating, “I don’t really think about it much, but when I am around people and I see them connecting from high school, I just feel like, ‘You’re out there.’” Treva explained
that in retrospect, she believes that she missed a lot while going through high school, stating, “I missed something... and that is now just being older reflecting back.”

Linda.

“My circle of friends has changed with every major transition.”

(Linda, January, 2013)

According to Linda, the absence of many of the displaced DeVilbiss juniors and seniors drew a group of students together at Start High School and influenced the degree of “closeness” among them that continued into adulthood.

So, I think because of that because of the, especially the kids from DeVilbiss that came with us that were freshmen that only had one year there and then got moved again, so they had gone, junior high to, you know, they had just been in constant transition in school until they got to their sophomore year at Start. So, we all stayed relatively close.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda explained that she bonded with the DeVilbiss students at Start who were in the sophomore and junior classes, stating, “It seems to me that it is very unusual how there really isn’t the separation of ‘it’s our class.’” According to Linda, her class was so close with the class behind her that when planning the next class reunion, she and her classmates want to include the class behind them, stating, “We want to make sure we incorporate some kind of event where we can say, ‘if you are in the area, you are around, you know, come be part of our reunion,’ so it was that close.”

After graduating from Start High School, Linda entered a college culture that was similar to what she had described at DeVilbiss. She attended a college out of state that
“was a very small school and a very big city.” She compared her experience in college to that of DeVilbiss, one in which she was able to form close relationships with students and faculty, stating, “I kind of had the same relationships there that I had had at DeVilbiss.” According to Linda, her college experience felt familiar because it reminded her of DeVilbiss in that she had an environment where she felt safe and that had the closeness of relationships with students and faculty, while allowing her to continue growing into her adulthood.

Linda expressed some guilt in the fact that her mother, who is a graduate of DeVilbiss, is so attached to the school, while she, herself, is not. Linda spoke about the things that “anchor” a person, specifically speaking about ties to a person’s hometown that keeps them there. Linda’s mother is strongly anchored to Toledo and actively involved in the DeVilbiss High School Alumni Association.

I mean my mom is still; her closest best friends now are people from DeVilbiss and from UT [University of Toledo]. Mine aren’t. My circle of friends has changed with every major transition. So I don’t keep in touch with anyone I went to college with really.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda is motivated by change, stating, “So, I think that it is change that keeps me going, not anything rooted or anything like that. It’s that there is different possibilities always on the horizon as opposed to the same.” This is reflected in how she has lived her adult life, moving away to college and staying in a job for a few years and then moving on to a new one. Linda came to the conclusion that change was a motivator for her after reflecting on her life since graduating from Start High School.
Linda has experienced many significant closures or transitions, including DeVilbiss. In fact, prior to the closing of DeVilbiss, Linda had experienced the closing of her private elementary school. She also recalled that the place her dad worked, along with the place she-herself had worked as a teenager, were now closed. She recalled the physical changes made to her college and to the new Start High School, making both almost unrecognizable. In retrospection, Linda explained that she believed all of these significant life transitions played a role in her inability to feel “anchored” to her community, stating, “So all of these things that kind of anchor people to their hometown, I have had none of them, I have had none of them.” Consequently, she has embraced change. It may be that her need for change is a result of Linda’s disposition combined with her lived experience, which allowed her to practice making transitions between spaces. Interestingly, of all the significant places mentioned by Linda that have either disappeared or changed significantly, DeVilbiss High School remains virtually unchanged.

But I guess, you know, I guess it would be one thing if I had gone all the way through and stayed there [at DeVilbiss] and had known all the same people and it is sort of like the butterfly effect. You know, I can’t say what would have happened, but I think there’s a stronger chance I wouldn’t have maybe been so eager to leave, to go out of state for school or anything like that.

(Linda, January, 2013)

Linda explained that she is active in reunions, both associated with Start and DeVilbiss. When she would return for alumni events, she was offered the chance to tour DeVilbiss High School, which she would always decline. She explained that she was
almost 20 years out of high school before she could bring herself to visit DeVilbiss, stating, “I probably did need some distance from it to be able to go back and you know and not think about how awful it was for a little while.”

**Dale.**

“I am going to challenge anything that needs to be challenged.”

*(Dale, December, 2012)*

Dale’s understanding of the world in terms of race and socioeconomic class was largely shaped by his year at DeVilbiss, stating, “There were some interracial friendships that were very genuine.” At the time of the closing, the student population at DeVilbiss was approximately 60% black and 40% white. Dale explained how attending an integrated school setting helped him form an understanding of the social inequities that exist between race and class, stating, “DeVilbiss just crystallized it all, I mean DeVilbiss just showed me that the world isn’t equal, that there are have and there are have nots.”

According to Dale, his parents raised him to be socially aware of diversity and inequity within his community. DeVilbiss helped solidify his worldview and influenced his ultimate decision to major in political science. Prior to entering DeVilbiss, Dale identified himself as being “just this honor’s kid.” Up to that point in his life, he had not engaged in any extra-curricular activities. However, his social life took off at DeVilbiss and he found himself interacting with the athletes and upper classman. He explained that he did not like school prior to, or after DeVilbiss. However, according to Dale, that one year he experienced at DeVilbiss “was like no other.” Dale’s narrative suggests that for one year, and only one year, he enjoyed school. He felt he was “needed” at DeVilbiss. However, he lost all of that when he transitioned to Start High School, further adding to
his dislike of school. In reference to Start, Dale stated, “It just wasn’t where I wanted to be.” Dale believed his three years at Start High School set the stage for his inability to have a smooth transition into college, stating, “That [his negative experience at Start] then bled into college, which is why I took nine years.”

Dale believes it was a combination of parental influence and DeVilbiss that resulted in his career choice, stating, “[The closing of DeVilbiss] certainly made me look for something deeper and more meaningful in terms of what I would do with myself and it, being public policy, it being government, it being education.” According to Dale, until he experienced the year of school closure at DeVilbiss, he was most interested in a career that would have involved filmmaking. That year at DeVilbiss helped him to view the world differently, at the macro-level. Regarding the school closure experience, Dale stated, “It was just a realization of a lot of large issues I think, and the realization that you know what you want, you do not necessarily get, and that is a good lesson to learn.”

Dale developed a passion for social justice due to his experience at DeVilbiss, in which he interacted with students who came from diverse backgrounds. He experienced community activism first-hand, as well as the politics associated with school closure. Being the son of a school board member during this time gave him a unique view of how public policy is shaped and decisions are made. All of this had an astounding impact on Dale.

It allowed me to become who I am. The year at DeVilbiss defined me in ways that I just… is who I am and it gave me the social viewpoint that I have, and I mean, which was largely already in place, but you know kind of tailors with my political viewpoint.
When asked directly how the closing of DeVilbiss impacted his life, Dale provided the following statement.

Well, I mean there are a lot of lessons in there, life’s not fair, you know being…. organizations, that are exemplary with the assets they have, aren’t necessarily rewarded for those good works (referring to DeVilbiss), if there are other factors in play that people think are more important, you know I learned that … this was a macro issue and this was an issue that the entire community was facing because of suburbanization of white flight, of you know people wanting to get out of Toledo Public Schools, I mean as they were closing high schools in Toledo, they were building high schools in [the] suburbs, and so it wasn’t as if there was some big exodus out of metropolitan Toledo, there was just a big exodus out of TPS, and so Perrysburg grew, Sylvania burst at the seams, Springfield grew a ton, and Monclova, it is still growing and so you know, I mean again, I got to understand to learn how things were interrelated and how they play at the macro level and you know that’s certainly helped me develop a world view in a vantage point that effects what I do around here every day.

When asked how his life would be different if DeVilbiss had remained open, Dale’s sense of humor came through, stating, “I would have been the most sophisticated good-looking guy for… for dozens and dozens of girls to, you know, admire.” He then became serious again and said, “Yeah! I gained my three best friends [from Start], you know, and look everything happens for a reason.” Dale paused a moment and added, “I
wouldn’t be here if I hadn’t gone to Start, you know? Some variation of me might, but who knows.”

**Stacey.**

“I guess I let the closing of the school kind of change my whole mindset…”

*(Stacey, February, 2013)*

When asked about the impact the closing had on her, Stacey did not feel that it significantly affected her, stating, “You know, that was, you know, so long ago.” However, when she considered how her life would be different had she stayed at DeVilbiss for all four years of high school, Stacey provided a response that suggests that she was significantly impacted by the closing of DeVilbiss.

I’m not saying I will probably be more prosperous, but I would have had more opportunities as far as my education and that would have taken me further instead of me being stagnant and only doing the bare minimum just to graduate. I think staying in DeVilbiss [I] would have gained … I would have been interested in more things in my future as far as, even as far as colleges, maybe I would have wanted to go, and maybe even I would have got accepted to a bigger school, which would have motivated me to you know study more and have better study habits instead of just. I guess I let the closing of the school kind of change my whole mindset even as far me wanting to go to college.

*(Stacey, February, 2013)*

The fact that she did not complete college and earn a degree remains an open wound. Stacey stated, “I stayed a year [at the University of Toledo]. That was awful. I need to go back to school. That’s a topic my uncle keeps having with me. I did not go. I
did not stick to it.” Stacey explained that the staff at DeVilbiss kept her motivated, stating, “It’s like you were doing it [working hard] for them.” She also mentioned that she did not want to “disappoint” the staff at DeVilbiss. Similarly, in her adult life, she is aware that her mother and her uncle had and perhaps still have the expectation that she earn a college degree. Her narrative suggests that she continues to feel that she disappointed her mother and uncle.

Stacey longed to have the college experience that for her, meant living away from home. However, instead she attended a local college and lived at home with her parents, stating, “I just felt like a child again. I didn’t get to experience like college because I was at home.” The original plan was that she would attend Kent State, but it didn’t work out. Stacey explained the series of events that attributed to her inability to complete college.

I just was not focused, and then my grades got bad, and I was getting those loans, and all that. I didn’t finish school. I only ended up having 36 credit hours. So, I never finished, and then I stopped going to UT [University of Toledo], then I started working, and then I ended up going to Owens [Community College], but I still didn’t ….if I could be consistent and like finish, you know what I mean?

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey explained that her parents expected her to pay rent while living with them if she was not going to school. Given that ultimatum, she decided to move out on her own, stating, “I’ve always worked two jobs, even right now I work two jobs.” Her debt continued to accumulate, stating, “Then I incurred such big a loan, you know what I mean?”
Stacey explained that the only thing she really gained by the closing of DeVilbiss was that she learned many lessons about life, which she believes has helped her be resilient.

If anything, I guess I gained, like I guess, a new attitude about how life works, change. I didn’t really gain anything as far as I mean, I didn’t want to go to another school. So, I didn’t gain anything as far as that perspective, but it was kind of a life lesson pretty much is what I gained. You know, things are not going to always go your way. You have to be ready for change because I don’t like change. I like consistency especially when things are going well. When things are disturbed or broken up, you know that’s not good for me. So, I guess that was like a major change that could not be avoided. That was pretty much, “they are closing your school, you have got to get up out of here.” So, if anything it taught me, you know to be able to accept things … like you know when trouble things come your way, you know to accept to them and you know, try to work them out as best as you can and everything is not always going to be a positive experience, but yeah.

(Stacey, February, 2013)

Stacey feels that this lesson helped her in her current job, which is going through a significant transition, stating, “Yeah, because I just like even with a situation here at Head Start, I guess it kind of helped because I don’t dwell on everything. Everything is not such a big deal.” When asked at the end of the interview if she had anything else to add, she gave a brief closing statement.
So, it was a nice school [DeVilbiss]. I really liked, I really enjoyed going there and I liked it, yeah I wished they would not have closed it. It was a nice community. It was just a nice place to be, nice place to go, but that has not affected me negatively or you know as far as how I treat people or how, you know, I was still able to function and be able to move on at Start as well.  

(Stacey, February, 2013)

It would take a crystal ball to look into the future to see what Stacey’s life would have been like had she remained at DeVilbiss. In reality, no one can say for sure that her life would have turned out any differently. What can be said is that Stacey had a stronger support system in place to set her up for success in college while she was attending DeVilbiss. What Stacey knows to be true is that she “wished they would have not closed it [DeVilbiss].”
CHAPTER VII
DISCUSSION

Introduction

The closing of schools is not only on the rise in the United States and elsewhere, but it has become a prescribed intervention for school reform as outlined in federal legislation, specifically, The No Child Left Behind Act and Race to the Top (Peterson & West, 2003; Ravitch, 2010; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Viteritti, 2005). School closure as a model for school reform may make sense to policy makers when viewed only within the context of fiscal and academic accountability; however, the phenomenon of school closure is situated within a system of complexity reaching far beyond just financial and academic issues (Fullilove, 2004; Henig, 2008; Senge, 2007). Furthermore, in order to determine the effectiveness of this policy, researchers must understand not only its short-term but also its long-term consequences (Senge, 2007). There is a paucity of information pertaining to the long-term impact of school closure on students (Kirshner et al., 2010).
Objectives or Purposes

The purpose of this research was to understand the long-term impact of school closure among those who experienced the process of school closure two decades ago as an important and understudied phenomenon with the intent that this research would provide insight to school leaders who are faced with the task of closing schools. In particular, this empirical phenomenological study explored the social and psychological dimensions of school closure such as identity, social capital, relational trust, community connectedness and engagement, school and community pride, tradition, and the sense of belonging. Through an archival review and semi-structured interviews, the study investigated the experiences of students who lived through a school closure in 1991 in one Northwest Ohio urban community, who transitioned to a neighboring school, and who are now grown adults. The study also examined the nature of the transition experience of moving from one high school to another. The study used semi-structured interviews to explore issues related to the transitional experience. Additionally, the study explored if and how social connections were sustained after the closing of the high school, particularly those connections with individuals and groups nearest to the community in which they resided at the time the school was closed. Of specific interest was how the participants make meaning of the experience of school closure, given time and distance from the event and now speaking in the voice of mature adults with substantial life experience.

The principal research question for this study was: How do adults, who as teenagers attended a school that closed during their high school career, describe the impact of school closure on their lives? Embedded within this phenomenon were
additional questions that required exploration in order to gain an understanding of the main research phenomena of school closure in its entirety. Therefore, the following sub-questions were investigated:

1. How do adults, whose high schools closed while they were attending them, describe their experience of school closure and transition?
2. How have these adults sustained connections to their community, particularly in terms of maintaining a sense of pride, tradition, and identification to that community?

**Perspectives or Theoretical Framework**

The framework for this study was constructivist-interpretive with the goal of understanding the lived experience of the participants within the historical and social context of school closure (Ponterotto, 2005). The research that informed this study primarily included recent qualitative studies of school closure, as well as social theory grounded in identity development. These studies and theories lead one to the conclusion that left unchanged current school closure policies and practices offer inadequate support to those marginalized students who often comprise the majority of students impacted by school closure (Galletta & Ayala, 2008; Goldin & Katz, 2008; Kirshner et al., 2010; Ravitch, 2010; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Rothstein, 2004; Steinberg et al., 2011).

**Methodology**

Empirical phenomenology was chosen as the most suitable methodology for this research. The study used purposive sampling and included five participants. Participants were students in grades nine through eleven at DeVilbiss High School during the 1990-1991 school year. They experienced the process of the closing of DeVilbiss High School
in 1991, followed by assignment to a receiving area high school. The closing of DeVilbiss High School in 1991 was documented through an archival review of newspaper articles, the school yearbook from 1990-1991, and a videotape of the final days of DeVilbiss High School. Semi-structured interviews provided multiple opportunities for participants to explore and describe their experiences (Creswell, 2007). The data analysis methods for this study included bracketing, intuiting, and describing (Moustaka, 1994). NVivo software was utilized for the purpose of managing and analyzing the data.

**Key Findings Related to Research Questions**

Through an archival review and semi-structured interviews, this exploration of school closure in one Northwest Ohio urban community seen through the eyes of alumni who are now grown adults offers to contribute important attention to two key areas. First, the study reveals the impact of school closure at the individual level. Here, we see the importance of relational factors, not easily captured in quantitative studies. These “intangibles” contributed to the participants’ long-term view of themselves and their school experience. Second, the study reveals the impact of school closure at a broader level, where individuals interact with public institutions. These broader contextual issues are explored in terms of educational policies related to the school closure experience. Implications for long-term impact are considered in terms of individuals in relation to systems of public governance.
Impact in Terms of Intangibles Affecting Individuals Uniquely and Personally

Relationships matter.

Leonard (2011) found that “the developmental needs of all students are larger than what a school can address alone” and that “these needs are met through relationships we hardly notice between teachers, parents, peer groups, and other members in microsystem settings” (p. 1007). This again, speaks to the “intangibles” mentioned earlier that support the social and emotional needs of the students. The participants’ narratives suggest that relationships formed between students and with staff were the most critical support for acquiring a sense of belonging to their environment. Relationships also played a key role in acquisition of social capital, as well as identity formation. The absence of existing relationships surfaced at their receiving school and played a critical role in student’s inability to fit in. Having familiar adults from their sending school transition with them to provide structural supports as they navigated their new environment also was important. Participants entered an existing system where roles were clearly defined and each had to find their place within the new system. The single most important support identified by the participants was a network of familiar adult relationships, in other words, staff from DeVilbiss who followed the students to the receiving school. With the exception of one participant, they all remembered times they felt “invisible” at their new schools. The issue of relationships also surfaced as students reflected on their transition year and grieved for the loss of relationships with friends who were not assigned to the same high school, feeling torn apart by the process (Fullilove, 2004; Kirshner et al., 2010).
Only viewed favorably if in better situation.

As participants discussed their losses and gains as a result of going through the school closure and transition experience, it became clear that they only viewed the experience as positive if they found themselves in a better situation than the one they had left. An example of this phenomenon would be the choir program at DeVilbiss High School. Participants’ narratives suggest that they experienced an extraordinary choir program at DeVilbiss under the direction of an outstanding director. This director not only appeared to be highly qualified in terms of content and instructional delivery, but also in terms of how he cared for and nurtured his students. All three participants who transitioned to Start High School spent a great deal of time discussing their disappointment in the Start High School Choir, especially, the polarizing qualities associated with the Start Choir Director and the DeVilbiss Choir Director. The cultural norm for a high school choir was established for the displaced students at DeVilbiss and their receiving school choir experience failed in comparison. For them, it was a step backwards. To use Dale’s analogy, it was like going from major league baseball to peewee baseball.

In regard to their overall experience of school closure and transition, only one participant was able to view her experience positively, and that was Shaina. That is because she was able to identify clear factors that resulted in positive long-term, life-changing affects of the school closure experience. The other four participants had the opposite phenomenon in that they considered the overall impact of the school closure experience as having negative short-term and long-term affects. This finding is similar to the study by Galletta and Ayala (2008) in which they identified “casualties” and
“survivors” of the school closure experience. However, given Shaina’s school closure experience and the outcomes related to the receiving school experience, it appears that there may also be “thivers” of the school closure experience.

Each participant’s experience was unique.

The interplay with issues around race, class, gender, socioeconomic status, social capital, human capital and personality traits interplayed resulting in unique experiences of school closure. The participants’ narratives were very similar in how they recalled their experience at DeVilbiss, as well as the events leading up to the closure. However, once their narratives focused on the receiving school experience, they became much more diverse due to the fact that there were three receiving schools included in this study, each with its own climate and culture. In the case of one participant, Shaina, there was a coming together of an outgoing personality and a receiving school that was strategic in its response to displaced students. Furthermore, as an African-American student, Shaina may have found the critical mass of black students in a predominantly black school provided a cultural bridge. However, Shaina reported that the white students felt welcomed at Scott High School, which suggests that the staff and students played an important role in making everyone feel welcomed. The fact that Scott High School was the only school reported by the participants as having an open house prior to the displaced students arrival, is further evidence that helping the displaced students integrate smoothly into the Scott High School culture was a priority of the adults in the school. It appears that creating a culture of cohesiveness was not left to chance, but was a conscious strategy. This has significant policy implications.
The remaining participants, to varying degrees, did not feel welcomed in their receiving schools. The experience ranged from negligent indifference, which marginalized the displaced students, to a bias within the receiving school that favored receiving school students. Structural procedures also played a role in isolating students from one another. Displaced students attending Rogers High school were required to ride TARTA buses, while the receiving school students all rode the yellow buses.

Two factors may have contributed to the different experiences among the students. One relates to the differences in their personalities as self-described. The second factor relates to the extent to how participants felt welcomed or unwelcomed at their receiving schools, often reflecting difference in school cultures between the receiving schools. Within a welcoming school culture, there is greater possibility of building trusting relationships and acquiring social capital, which are critical to students developing a sense of belonging at their school and has policy implications.

**A boundless/borderless experience.**

Given time and distance from the event of school closure, the participants’ narratives indicate that there is no clear beginning or end to the experience. While the school closure experience has been presented in this study as a historical overview, the participants do not speak of school closure as a compartmentalized process made up of incremental stages. For the participants, the story of school closure and transition is all one event. The other interesting thing is that for the participants, the experience is still present and is a part of them. This phenomenon is grounded in issues associated with grief and loss, as well as place identity and place attachment (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005; Scanlon, et al., 2007; Spencer, 2005).
**Disrupted/unstable system.**

Each of the five participants referenced issues associated with identity disruption when DeVilbiss closed and they were forced to transition to receiving schools. According to Cicognani et al., “the physical environment where we live has an important role in creating a sense of meaning, order and stability in our lives” (2011, p. 34). A change in environment may result in “feelings of loss, of displacement and subsequent identity discontinuity” (Scanlon et al., 2007, p. 228). When students make transitions to new environments they must form a new situated identity.

Over the course of a person’s development, he or she experiences “predictable psychosocial crisis,” such as an adolescent’s awareness of impending loss of childhood (Hayes, 1981, p. 369). Participants recalled that neither the staff nor the students expected DeVilbiss to be chosen for closure, making this experience an unpredictable psychosocial crisis. An example of a predictable psychosocial crisis would be “senioritis,” which presents itself as “a lack of enthusiasm, fits of irresponsibility, and a general depressed effect” (Hayes, 1981, p.369). In an earlier section, Dale referenced the fact that the seniors at DeVilbiss had pretty much disappeared by the end of the school year. This suggests that the psychosocial crisis for those seniors was magnified by the fact that DeVilbiss was closing. However, in the example of school closure, the psychosocial crisis is not predicted, further exacerbating what would be considered normal or expected changes to adolescent identity. This has significant implications for districts considering school closure, but also implies the need for further research in this area.
The overall theme permeating this time period was one of grief and loss (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). The experience of school closure was a process of letting go and moving on, which in turn impacted issues of adolescent identity development as reported by participants. According to Thomas (2011), the teen years focus on “defining an integrated identity that essentially seeks to answer the question, ‘Who am I in the world?’” (p. 14). How each participant experienced this process was unique to each individual. However, what is clear is that during the school closure experience, participants’ descriptions speak to a break down in their support system causing social and emotional issues to emerge. Their once stable school environment became disrupted by the school closure experience, resulting in an environment that is described by participants as being chaotic and out of control.

Communities were fighting for the survival of their neighborhood high school, creating an emotionally charged environment that became a part of the school culture at DeVilbiss as early as December of 1990. The threat to close DeVilbiss combined with activism within the larger community created an “us versus them” feeling between neighborhoods. The sense of order began to break down in the Toledo community once there was a threat of closing schools, creating an either/or outcome that pitted one community against another. While the actual community action took place outside the school day, there is evidence that the threat to close DeVilbiss consumed the climate, impacting the day-to-day operations of the school. The drama surrounding the discussion around which high schools would be closing became a focal point for the DeVilbiss students, staff and community. The participant’s descriptions of the school climate at DeVilbiss changed drastically from the time period prior to the closing announcement to
the time period following the closing. A once stable system began to break down at a rapid pace after the closing announcement.

The closing of DeVilbiss resulted in an increase in school disruption and a destabilization of schools receiving displaced students (Herold, 2011). This was evidenced by the angry mob-like behavior at DeVilbiss shortly after the closing announcement, as well as the decline in attendance by both staff and students at DeVilbiss. This is also evidenced by the racial graffiti incident at Start High School resulting in disciplinary action.

**The closeness to or distance from graduation is significant.**

Based on the narratives of the participants, it appears that the grade level that a student was in at the time of the school closure played a role in their transitional process. This was evidenced when participants referred to their ability, or most often their inability to acquire social capital at their receiving school. Socialization was left to the extracurricular activities so if students were not involved in extracurricular activities, they entered with no social capital and reported feeling like a freshman again. Participants’ narratives suggested that the school closure experience was hardest for the in-coming seniors and easiest for the in-coming sophomores. This finding speaks to the role that “time” plays in developing relationships necessary to acquire social capital. For example, Shaina, who had been a class officer at DeVilbiss, could never have transitioned into a receiving school as a senior and regained a class officer position.

It appears that graduating seniors experience school closure stressors that are unique from those experienced by the underclassman. Hayes (1981) found that the senior year is a critical milestone in adolescent development in which graduating seniors must
say goodbye to their high school and turn their focus to their next milestone, which would be college and/or their career. The closing of the school adds additional stressors for graduating seniors. This was evidenced by the description of the changes to the staff morale at DeVilbiss and the break down of what had been described as a stable environment. Graduating seniors, who experience their own form of grief given a normal school year, were left to deal with additional grief related to the permanency associated with closing a school, in addition to the grief experienced by the staff and underclassmen.

**Bonding and bridging.**

Participants made reference to the fact that the displaced DeVilbiss students gravitated toward one another due to their shared histories. In school closure, it appears that when displaced students are left to their own accord they are naturally drawn toward each other due to familiarity and shared history and common experiences. This implies that the receiving staff plays a critical role in helping the displaced students move between various social networks by creating shared spaces and opportunities for interaction between the displaced and receiving school students.

**Social/emotional/psychological issues surfaced.**

The experience of school closure, displacement, and transition results in many of the same psychological reactions and processes as those that surface when people grieve the loss of a loved one. The fear of losing DeVilbiss surfaced after the school levy failed in November of 1990. Emotions associated with grief surfaced as early as November and increased as the participants described how they tried to save DeVilbiss from closure, followed by the announcement and finally, the process of letting go of DeVilbiss and moving on. As the participants moved through the grieving process, they experienced a
lack of control or voice, often expressing how things were happening to them in which they had no input.

Because identity is impacted by the relationships within the social system, once those relationships began to break down at DeVilbiss due to the depressed environment after the closing was announced, the participants experienced changes to their identity. Issues around place identity and place attachment began to surface and continued at the receiving school. While at the receiving school, participants struggled to regain a sense of control or autonomy, again, impacting their identity formation. For Dale in particular, he regained this sense of control through “agency” or activism. Agency appears to be closely associated with the subtheme, “no control/no voice” in that agency presented as a reaction to the participants’ feelings of having no control.

One of the ways teens come to know themselves is in relationship to others. The loss of a loved one in their lives can result in the loss of a person who had been their “mirror,” reflecting back to the student and providing them information about who they are (Thomas, 2011, p. 14). Participants referred to the staff and students at DeVilbiss as “like a family.” Participants also suggested that they had formed strong bonds with the DeVilbiss staff, comparing their relationship to one of “a parent” and suggesting that the staff “really loved” the students. This study suggests that the loss of loving, caring relationships played a critical role in the grieving process. This study also suggests a relationship between the participants’ ability to reach closure and the strength of adult relationships at their receiving schools.

In addition to “grief and loss,” a large percentage of the dialogue that occurred around school closure and transition centered around the theme, “sense of belonging.” In
order for participants to feel that they belonged, they needed to have established relationships within their social system, whether it was at DeVilbiss or later at their receiving school. The ability to form or maintain relationships was influenced by the other two subthemes, “exclusive/inclusive groups of students” and “social capital.” Students were better able to develop and sustain relationships if the social system supported an open, inclusive environment and if the participants had a perceived degree of social capital. Figure 2 provides a visual of the interconnectedness of the subthemes attributed to participants’ having a sense of belonging.

Figure 2

Figure 2: Factors Associated With Participant’s Sense of Belonging

When participants described a sense of belonging, it was grounded in overtures of existing relationships. The adults played a key role in helping students feel safe and supported, as well as in creating situations in which students could engage with each other. However, the relationships that formed among and between students were also of significance. Familiar relationships were described as the most critical structural support in terms of helping participants navigate through the transition into the receiving school.

Participants often described how they felt they had no control in the decisions being made that impacted them. They also provided descriptions of how their identity
formation was affected due to the closing of DeVilbiss and the transition to the receiving school. There were descriptions that alluded to participants having place identity and/or place attachment to either or both of their high schools. Participants spoke about things that were left unfinished either at DeVilbiss or at their receiving schools, which often was associated with regret. This reported feeling that things were left undone closely aligned to the grieving process in terms of the lack of closure often expressed by survivors after the loss of a loved one. Lastly, there was a pattern among some of the participants in terms of the need to take action in some way that would result in a reemergence of a sense of control.

By being action-oriented, participants placed themselves on a trajectory in order to reclaim their identity and to redefine their purpose. The perception of having control played a key role in how some of the participants navigated the transition process. Spencer (2005) defined place attachment as “an affective bond or link between people and specific places,” which provides the individual with “a sense of stability amid change” (p. 308). This definition is important to consider, along with the work described earlier by Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2005). Participants recalled the experience of school closure and transition as a time of disruption and instability, with each longing for “stability amid change” (Spencer, 2005, p.308). As participants narrated their experience of school closure and transition, each provided evidence suggesting that the disruption of their stable environment at DeVilbiss impacted their identity development and formation.

**Impact in Terms of the Broader Context of Public Systems and Governance**

Social, emotional, and psychological changes occurred as a result of the school closure and transition experience and presented uniquely within each individual’s
narrative. However, there was also an impact on how each individual made meaning out of the broader contextual issues related to the school closure experience. The participants remembered having an up close and personal view of the policy and procedures associated with governance, specifically, the relationship between school boards and public school systems. How they experienced this highly-charged political climate has impacted how they currently view public institutions and governing entities.

**No transition plan.**

*You don’t know what baggage people bring with them and in today’s time, it can be dangerous to integrate kids that way without a transitional experience before the first day of school.**”

*(Dale, December, 2012)*

There was no district-wide transition plan. Only one high school offered an open house prior to the first day of class, which was Scott. None of the other high schools had a strategy for reaching the general population of displaced students. One participant formed a social connection with her receiving school prior to the first day of school because she made cheerleader in the spring prior. However, there was no strategic effort made by the district to help the displaced students navigate their new environment. A significant culture shock for the participants was the experience of moving to a receiving school with significantly higher enrollment than DeVilbiss. Marsh (2005) refers to this phenomenon as the “big fish little pond effect.” The students were not ready for the cultural differences between DeVilbiss and their receiving schools.

Students who enrolled at Start High School, a receiving school that was made up of a majority of white students, reported racial issues the first year. Racial graffiti
surfaced on the outside of the school building, leading to disciplinary action against white students. This caused further dissention within the Start community and even more hostility directed at the newly enrolled DeVilbiss students.

**Mistrust in the process.**

The participants’ narratives suggest that students and community members will trust school management more if they feel that they were provided honest communication and that they had a voice in the decision-making process. There is evidence in the narratives that participants have been left with a mistrust of those in decision-making positions when it comes to public policy (Fullilove, 2004). The narratives suggest that the participants who felt they had no voice in the decision-making process at the time of the closing of their high school, developed a mistrust of elected officials and/or those in the position of decision-making. Intertwined in dialogue pertaining to the experience was a sense of lack of control and power by participants as decisions occurred from the top down and forced upon the stakeholders. The rapid speed in which the decision was made to close DeVilbiss High School left stakeholders feeling devalued, believing that the administration had made its mind up to close the school well before the initial announcement that DeVilbiss High School was being considered for closure (Kirshner et al., 2010; Galletta & Ayala, 2008; Gustafson, 2009). This supports the research associated with disaster capitalism in that when decisions are made under duress, it undermines the collaborative process (Saltman, 2008; Klein, 2007).

**Connectivity.**

“I just abided by the rules, this is how they did things here and I knew that once my year was up, like I was done and I never went back to that school ever again for anything.”
The experience by the students who transitioned into Start, Rogers and Scott played a role in whether they stayed connected in alumni activities, as well as impacting their current view of the Toledo Public Schools. There were many factors influencing the participants’ level of connectivity with their old neighborhoods; however, the most significant was whether or not their parents still reside in their family home. This was the case for three participants. Place attachment also influences connectivity, this is especially true for Dale who stated that he is “addicted” to his hometown (Cicognani et al., 2011). Two of the participants have school-aged children who have attended or currently attend the Toledo Public Schools, which keeps them connected. Participants’ narratives also suggest that their careers keep them connected to the Toledo area, either by working within the Toledo City limits, or working outside the limits but in an area that requires direct contact with Toledo. Participants described multiple ways that they maintain connections to the Toledo community and/or other alumni. Communicative and/or informational tools included: emailing, texting, using social media (Facebook), talking (by phone or face-to-face) and reading the local newspaper.

The interruption of Treva’s senior year plays a role in her inability to stay connected to DeVilbiss, even though her narrative suggested that she enjoyed her three years at DeVilbiss. Her negative experience at Rogers resulted in a level of contempt that has made it impossible for her to have a connection with the school or alumni events. Marcouyeux and Fleury-Bahi (2011) found that individuals do develop place attachment relationships despite the poor image of that place. For Treva, images of Rogers High School trigger negative emotions, indicating a place attachment.
Like Treva, who as a grown adult chooses to disassociate from her receiving school, Dale also has strong negative feelings toward Start High School, expressing pleasure in the fact that Start has been torn down and replaced with a new structure. Marcouyeux and Fleury-Bahi (2011), found that students who evaluated the place’s image as negative were more likely to report lower place identity. This is why Dale appears to have a stronger place identity to DeVilbiss than Start, even though he spent the majority of his high school years at Start. Dale appears to have place attachment to both DeVilbiss and to Start, one triggering positive memories and the other negative. He expressed pleasure regarding the fact that the physical structure that was Start High School has been torn down, which supports the findings of Galletta and Ayala (2008) in that he views it as a way to erase the negative memories associated with Start, which in turn, allows him the chance to disassociate from them.

Given the research of Marcouyeux and Fleury-Bahi (2011), it was not surprising to find that Shaina, who viewed her school closure positively, narrated the strongest connectivity to Toledo Public Schools, including a sense of pride and tradition. The narratives of Treva and Stacey suggest that they experienced the greatest losses in the closing of DeVilbiss. Consequently, each chooses to disassociate themselves with their receiving schools.

The fact that the participants did not experience four consecutive years at any one high school appears to have had a significant impact on them. There is a sense of incompleteness that has impacted their ability to fully identify with their graduating high school, or their displaced high school (Hayes, 1981; Marcouyeux & Fleury-Bahi, 2011;
This limited connection to either high school influences the participant’s engagement in alumni events.

**Summary of Impact in Terms of Intangibles and Broader Contextual Issues**

In this section, two major implications surrounding the experience of school closure were discussed. The first pertained to the immediate and long-term impact of school closure resulting in social, emotional and psychological changes. These are referred to as “intangible variable” because they often go unnoticed. There is a strong indication through the narratives of grown adults who experienced school closure decades ago, that these “intangible variables” have not been given serious consideration when examining the impact of the school closure experience. In addition, there appears to be a clear relationship between the immediate or short-term experience of school closure and how these students come to view politics, governance, and institutions now as adults. In this study, only one participant remembered her experience of school closure and transition as a positive experience. This same participant provided narratives that suggests that she has pride and trust in her community and within the public school institution. The participants who associated negative memories with the school closure experience appear to have developed a suspicious view of the democratic process.

**Recommendations**

There are many policy implications that emerged as the participants recalled their individual experiences with school closure. The most obvious issue is that it appeared as though the district had no transition plan to support the displaced students and to support the receiving schools. This speaks to the timeframe the district was functioning within and the urgency that is often associated with closing schools, often resulting in a focus on
operating standards and procedures, while deemphasizing the social and emotional supports needed to minimize both the short-term and long-term damage associated with the experience. This section focuses on the policy and procedural recommendations that surfaced as result of this study of school closure.

**Minimize the disruption of relationships.**

The policy implication that would have the greatest positive impact has to do with the disruption of the relationships between students and adults. Students who are navigating through school closure and reassignment may benefit greatly through a strategic, concentrated effort made by management and community to prioritize reassignment of teachers, building administrators, and school counselors to the receiving schools. If there is a teacher’s union/association, this may require a “memorandum of understanding” that takes precedence over existing contractual rights as they pertain to displacement of staff and bidding rights.

According to the study’s participants, the district had a “gem” in the DeVilbiss High School Choir Director. Shortly after he was displaced from DeVilbiss High School, he left the district, as well as the teaching profession. Retrospectively, it would have been to the benefit of the students, management, and the community to look for innovative ways to keep this particular teacher in the district as a high school choir teacher, specifically working with some of the students who were displaced from DeVilbiss High School.

**Receiving schools should be prepared and supported.**

School management must do more than force students to transition to another school and hope for the best. The receiving schools must be prepared to welcome and
embrace the displaced students. There is something to be learned by the one participant who actually did report a sense of belonging at both DeVilbiss High School and her receiving school, Scott High School. She was able to transition smoothly when compared to the other participants because of the “welcoming” environment at Scott High School. She reported that Scott High School held an open house for displaced students prior to the beginning of the school year and compared her first few days there as “feeling like a long lost relative at a family reunion.” In contrast, the other two receiving schools appeared to approach the displaced students with either hostility or negligent indifference. If the adults are not willing to do the work required to ensure a successful experience at the receiving school, then the displaced students will most likely be harmed by the closure and transition experience. This is counterproductive to the school improvement process. Through this study as well as other emerging research, policy makers and those in the position of making decisions about school closure are able to identify specific variables that strengthen the support system for those who must experience school closure and transition to a new school. As with any school reform initiative, school closure must be approached strategically and systemically (Senge, 2007).

**Support specifically targeted toward seniors.**

The participants’ narratives suggest that the juniors, soon to be incoming seniors are the most vulnerable when facing the closure of their high school. Those who face the transition experience their senior year are navigating two major transitions, one pertains to their new school environment, the other to the transition into the adult world, which usually equates to entering college, the military and/or the workforce. The participants’
narratives spoke to the familiarity of adult relationships, especially those related to the school guidance staff at DeVilbiss. There is evidence that displacing juniors and forcing them to transition to a new school as seniors can have a negative impact on their academics, as well as their lives after graduation. The most severe example was the friend of Shaina’s who was not allowed to walk at graduation even though he actually did have enough credits to graduate. Seniors don’t have the time element on their side. They will not receive a “do over.” Due to this critical milestone year for seniors, districts need to take strategic steps to compensate for the unstable environment created for seniors by school closure. Treva made a suggestion that would have helped her at Rogers, which was to have a DeVilbiss counselor assigned to the seniors who would travel between the receiving high schools to help bridge the transition and continue their career planning. This would have also helped with the incident at Scott regarding the student who was told he could not graduate.

**Public trust: Voice/choice/communication/relationships.**

The participants’ narratives suggest policymakers and those in the position of decision making run the risk of alienating their stakeholders when decisions are made abruptly. When facing the possibility of school closure, districts will fare better if they begin discussions regarding the reasons for potential closing of schools as early as possible and provide multiple opportunities for community involvement and input. A community that must go through school closure will view the experience with less negativity if they feel they had a voice, or even better, a choice of options. According to Bryk et al. (2010), “Some of the most powerful relationships found in our data are associated with the effects of relational trust and how it operates as both a lubricant for
organizational change and a moral resource for sustaining the hard work of local school improvement. Absent such trust, it is nearly impossible for schools to develop and sustain strength in the essential supports” (p. 207). Steinberg et al. (2011) studied school safety and reported a similar finding, “What comes out most clearly is the importance of social relationships and cooperative work for creating a safe, orderly environment” (p.47). It must be acknowledged that the urgency in terms of the timeline that districts are often faced with when considering school closure often undermines the ability to have a collaborative process. But to ignore the powerful impact of collaboration can have long-term implications with the potential to create a level of mistrust of the democratic process and even causing stakeholders to disengage.

**Display humanity.**

Districts that approach school closure with innovation and humanity will consider qualitative and quantitative data before making final decisions, both in regard to the closure of a building, but perhaps more importantly in design of the transition process that takes place not just over the summer but continues throughout the entire first year. According to Senge (2007), a devaluing of this human element, or intangibles, within an organization leads to a failing system. It is hard to measure the social loss or the psychological hardship these students experienced by being forced from their school. When making reform decisions, policymakers need to understand that they must consider every child within the system, which requires not just looking at one particular group of students and how they might benefit, but looking at the academic performance or potential performance among all students from all social classes who will be impacted by the closing. Any action has both intended and unintended consequences. Questions
which should always precede a school closing but appear to be rarely considered include:
What will be the effect on the student who must be assimilated; what will be the effect on the receiving students; and what will be the impact on the neighborhoods surrounding the schools that are affected?

**Student agency/advocacy.**

Weiston-Serdan (2009) believes that solutions lie at the grassroots level, stating, “Students should be required to create their own movements around issues of significance to them, preparing and training them to be active members of democracy” (p.407). The two participants in this study who fared the worst as a result of school closure and transition also entered their receiving school with the least amount of social capital. The one participant at Rogers chose to completely disengage in an environment of negligent indifference. The one at Start High School made an attempt to fit in and was met with hostility from the staff. This was the same participant whose narrative suggested that she was brought up to respect authority at all costs. Her narrative also suggested that “playing the victim” was not an accepted practice. These polarizing beliefs held by this participant left her in a situation where her only choice was to quietly recoil and in doing so, she disengaged from the culture of the receiving school as much as possible. In contrast, the only male participant entered his receiving school with a great deal of social capital associated with his family. He was empowered to take on the role of advocate, seeking fair treatment for the displaced students as well as cultural cohesion, specifically targeted around issues of race. This resulted in the Afro-American Club at Start High School, as well as the integration of the “Zonta” club, which was single-gender specific when the displaced students entered Start High School. The students themselves must be
empowered to advocate for the right to receive a quality education. The students who perceive themselves as having no power are the ones most likely to experience further marginalization at the receiving school.

**Future Research**

**Additional perspectives.**

At the time of the closing, participants made reference to the school staff and the fact that there was a change in morale. This implies a need to study the impact of school closure and transition on DeVilbiss staff who were caught up in the process of the closing. Participants discussed the role of the receiving students in the school closure and transition process. They implied that the receiving students were not prepared to bond and/or bridge with the sending school students. There was also the implication that the sending school students looked to the receiving school students to initiate the bonding and bridging dynamic. A qualitative study that focuses on the perspective of the receiving school students would add to the contextualization of the school closure experience, similar to the previous suggestion regarding the perspective of the staff from the closed school.

Additionally, the participants’ narratives suggest that the receiving school staff played a key role in the transition process. Participants recalled being stereotyped by the receiving school staff, marginalized by the receiving school staff, and disappointed in the fact that adults at the receiving school did not make a strategic effort to help displaced students integrate into the receiving school. This suggests there is a need for future research that provides the perspective of the receiving school staff with a focus on the relationships between them and the displaced students.
**Issues for study that are unique to the school closure experience.**

There appears to be a unique dynamic associated with student mobility related to school closure in that the experience is situated within the larger community, which loses a significant anchor, its local school. In reality, the community is experiencing identity changes, while at the same time, individual displaced students are experiencing their own personal changes to identity. The outcome is that displaced students are experiencing identity changes both at the macro and micro level. Additionally, this study raised issues regarding voluntary versus involuntary disruptions, as well as predicted versus unpredicted psychosocial crisis. A research question might focus on the students at failing schools who report a strong connection to their school and what happens when that connection is lost due to consequences associated with school reform and accountability. Is it possible that a student’s social and emotional needs are being met at a failing school? Current school reform policy would not take that into consideration, as it only uses quantitative data when making decisions regarding interventions and consequences. This phenomenon is related to Stacey, who blamed herself when she could no longer perform at the same level as she had at DeVilbiss. An examination of the supports that help students socially and emotionally might help revise policy that currently operates under the false assumption that all students from failing schools will improve academically if the school is closed or if the school is reconstituted. Such studies may further expose the social and psychological damage experienced by the students and communities, all in the name of school transformation.
Scientific or Scholarly Significance of the Study

“All world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail”

President Obama in his June 2009 speech in Cairo (Duncan, 2010)

President Obama’s statement is in reference to “world order;” however, it should also be considered within the framework of the current stratified educational system that exists in The United States. One of the consequences of our current economy is that there is a growing income inequality; in fact, America has the most unequal income and wage distributions of any high-income nation (Goldin & Katz, 2008). According to a 2011 Brookings Institute report, the 2000s marked the first census decade on record in which real median household income declined (Frey, Berube, Singer, & Wilson). The typical household earned $50,046 in 2010, down 8.9 percent from 2000. The share of people living in poverty, nationwide, reached 15.3%, the highest since 1993. The report states, “With unemployment projected to remain high for some time, many parts of the country will confront higher fiscal and social burdens associated with poverty, including concentrated poverty, for the foreseeable future” (p. 10). Increasing residential segregation by income has led to increasing school segregation by income resulting in a country where schools have become more economically segregated so that students from affluent families are less likely to have classmates from low-income families (Altonji & Mansfield, 2011). Educational policies that further isolate poor students and/or students of color are more likely to leave them worse off than just doing nothing (Cobb & Glass, 2009).
Fundamental economic and social changes are greatly disrupting the structural system of the nation, creating stress across the country, states, cities and neighborhoods. Simultaneously, the nation’s public school system, the institution that has historically provided stability during times of social and economic volatility, is also undergoing fundamental systemic challenges that may significantly reduce its ability to offer the most marginalized populations a sense of hope and purpose. It is for this reason, that it is imperative to study the impact of school closure. As a result of this research study, school leaders will better understand the experience of students who are removed from an environment that they know and catapulted into a world of unknown.
Conclusion

When schools are closed, the transition experience can only be viewed favorably if students are actually assigned to a school that is significantly of higher quality than the school they left (Galletta & Ayala, 2008; Kirshner et al., 2010). What constitutes “higher quality” depends on the perception of the individual student; in some cases, it may refer to the academic programming, but in most cases, it is likely to be associated with the social-emotional environment they find themselves in when the dust settles. However, current federal school reform policy does not require accountability measures related to social variables. Implementation of the “blow it up” theory of school reform results in schools being closed based on one single quantifier, which is standardized high stakes tests. The social and emotional damage done to those involved in the “blow it up” process is considered to be an acceptable and necessary outcome.

School closure as an intervention for increasing academic achievement of students from failing schools is not based on scientifically based evidence. It is a desperate act by policy makers who are looking for an easy solution. By dismantling the failing school, the “problem” goes away and is absorbed by other systems. If policy makers can no longer see it, then the problem no longer exists. This conceptualization of “erasure” adds an additional layer to those involved in the school closure experience, specifically, the phenomenon surrounding the idea of erasure is connected back to those who set the ball in motion, the policy makers. Once the school is closed, policy makers no longer feel an obligation to study the root causes of historically low performing schools. This phenomenon played out at the macro level implies a theory of action that requires students and staff to be in a constant state of motion so that root problems can never be
identified and treated. By solving one problem, others are created as evidenced by the destabilization of the receiving schools often impacting academic, social, emotional, and psychological student development (Herold, 2011).

School reform is at a critical juncture in the United States. Do policy makers want to continue to ignore the social and emotional issues related to school closure and accept the false narrative that a problem that is not observable or measurable is not there? If a tree falls and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? In the current school reform era of high stakes accountability, the answer is “no, it does not.”
References


commitment to equity will determine our future. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.


Company.


New stadium to be opened. (1934, September 14). *The Toledo Blade*. Copy in


Study center grant ok’d. (1967, April 13). *The Toledo Blade*. Copy in possession of author.


West Toledo High School site acquired. (1929, February 5). *The Toledo Blade*. Copy in possession of author.


APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Project Title: Transformation or Tragedy?
A Retrospective Study of School Closure from the Student’s Perspective

Date:
Time of Interview:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

General Information/Background Questions

What year did you graduate from high school?
What high school did you graduate from?
How many years did you spend at DeVilbiss?
Where did you reside at the time of the closing of DeVilbiss? (address)
If you are no longer living in the DeVilbiss area, when did you move out of the area?

Interview Questions

Beginning

Describe your neighborhood you lived in at the time DeVilbiss closed.
Tell me about your experience at DeVilbiss?

Prompt: What was the best and worst about DeVilbiss?

Describe your experience, from the time you learned DeVilbiss was closing, to the first day of class in the new school.
Tell me about your experience at the new high school?

Prompt: What was best and worst about the new school?
As you transitioned into the new high school what helped you the most?

Prompt: Did any of the DeVilbiss staff follow you to the new high school? If so, what role did they play in the transition experience for you?

Middle

Describe the significant events that have occurred in your life since graduating high school.

What has played a significant role in how you have navigated through life since graduation?

Closure

How do you think your life has been impacted as a result of the closing of DeVilbiss?

When you think back on the transition experience, what would you have done differently? What would you have liked the school to have done differently?

Describe your current relationship to the community you lived in (when in high school)?

Prompt: How do you stay connected with classmates?

Prompt: Which high school do you feel more connected to presently?

How would your life be different if DeVilbiss had remained open?

Prompt: What did you gain by DeVilbiss closing?

Prompt: What did you lose by DeVilbiss closing?

If you were given an opportunity to return to DeVilbiss High School to take a tour of the building, would you go? Why or why not?

What advice would you have for students today who must experience the closing of their school and reassignment to another high school?

What advice would you have for school administrators or school boards that must close a school? What would you suggest they do to make the experience better than what you experienced?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the closing of your high
school and how it has affected you?