ACCOMMODATING AMISH STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:
TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON
EDUCATIONAL LOSS, GAIN, AND COMPROMISE

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ACCOMMODATING AMISH STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL LOSS, GAIN, AND COMPROMISE (210 pp.)

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The United States Supreme Court’s decision in the case Wisconsin v. Yoder et al. (1972) created a special provision for Amish and Old Order Mennonite families by allowing their children to end formal schooling at age 14. The assumption was that these Anabaptist families were preparing children adequately to live “full lives” in their communities without a high school education. Most of these children attend small private Amish schools, but some public school districts, like those at the center of this study, have successfully attracted a significant number of Amish students to their schools. Through philosophically-oriented qualitative research, this study explores how educators in these public schools view their aims and influence in educating young people who are not destined for formal education beyond the 8th grade, or work that requires a high school diploma. The author identifies a peculiar agreement between families and educators in which Amish families extend a measure of trust and flexibility within their own values, and the educators deliver substantial accommodations in school access and curriculum to keep the schools open with a sizeable number of Amish students. The study examines the actions and agreements that maintain this settlement and the ways educators make peace with compromise in an effort to serve all students.
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Chapter 1: “Where Slowing Down is Second Nature”

Picture gently sloping hills, narrow creeks winding through flat valleys, cattle grazing in small herds along fence lines, white-painted farmsteads in tight congregation, horse-drawn buggies rolling slowly on the roads, small signs advertising furniture, produce and other handicraft. This is what I see when I travel through the Creek Settlement, a large concentration of Amish\(^1\) in a Midwestern state.\(^2\) But these Amish residents in the Creek region aren’t left alone to plow their fields in solitude. Besides buggies, one will encounter cars and buses filled with tourists coming to the area to purchase Amish-made items, to eat Amish-style food, and to encounter Amish people. The tourism center of Creek County knows this very well. Visit their website, and one is greeted by images of Amish people (or those in traditional Amish clothing) walking down a road, an older woman in typical Amish clothing making a quilt by hand, and a flashing headline that says: “Where slowing down is second nature.”\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Mark Dewalt, *Amish Education in the United States and Canada*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), 8. The Amish are part of the Anabaptist Christian denomination with roots in sixteenth century Europe. Anabaptists today primarily exist in North America as the denominational affiliations of Mennonites, Amish, Brethren, Apostolic Christian Church, and Hutterites. Though my exploration of educational philosophies applies broadly to the congregations under the Anabaptist umbrella, for this study, I will reference mostly the Amish in the United States, specifically those groups who live in the Creek Settlement in the Midwest of the United States, the geographic and cultural region of my research. The Amish are typically the more conservative or traditional of the Anabaptist sects. According to educational researcher and Amish scholar, Mark Dewalt: “[The] key components of the Amish culture include the wearing of plain clothing, the use of Pennsylvania Dutch as the primary language of the home, travel by horse and buggy, the use of horses in the fields rather than tractors, the use of homes for worship services, the use of German Bibles, no modern electrical appliances, no participation in sports leagues, and the limit of formal education to the eighth grade. The Amish culture stresses kindness, humility, and the importance of the group rather than the self,” Dewalt, 8.


\(^3\) Citation removed to anonymize locations and names.
This slowed-down county is the setting of a showdown between a school superintendent, the district school board, angry Amish families, and the state Department of Education. The story was relayed to me by one of the protagonists: “Bruce,” the superintendent. When he told me this story, he had already retired from the district job and had taken a position with a small private school in a nearby city. His former district, Willow Run Schools, is in the heart of “Amish Country,” with some of the elementary schools enrolling nearly all Amish children.

The story, in short: A few years ago, an Amish girl was taking a state-issued standardized test which gave her reading comprehension questions based on a science-fiction story prompt. It was the tale of the “Omnichip,” a computer chip implanted in the brains of children so that society could monitor and manage the behavior of citizens. This premise was familiar to me, as it sounded much like Kurt Vonnegut’s “Harrison Burgeron” or Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* – dystopic stories aimed at encouraging young readers to think critically about the role of citizens in relation to state control. The test-taking child of the story was very bothered by the content of “Omnichip,” and at the end of the day relayed the story and prompt to her parents. The parents contacted the Superintendent with the concern that their daughter was required to read stories in school about governments implanting objects in the bodies of people, something that was, according to the Superintendent, inappropriately exploring futuristic science fiction when the purpose of the test was reading comprehension. The Superintendent agreed that the

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4 Pseudonyms are used for the names of all study participants, schools, districts, towns, and other identifiers.
test material and questions were inappropriate for these families in his district and contacted the state Department of Education by phone, and then in-person, to represent his constituents’ request to prevent inappropriate testing content from reaching students in the future. According to the Superintendent, the State Department of Education representatives were at first bothered by the request, but soon sided with the now numerous families’ concerns regarding unnecessary content on the tests. Since this incident, the Willow Run School District has been granted a representative on the test content creation committee from each grade level in the district for any future standardized tests distributed by the State.

The Educators of Amish Children

Public school educators⁵ are charged by the state and local districts to instruct children according to an agreed upon set of standards and curricula. In this state, the Department of Education mandates that each grade, from Kindergarten to 12th, attend to “Learning Standards” for each subject area; in addition, teachers are regularly assessed based on their teaching practice and the performance of their students.⁶ And though it is the district’s responsibility to outline a specific curriculum for its schools, the state sets a general “standard” so that no matter what public school a child attends, the diverse materials used, the methods encountered, experiences with different teachers align

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⁵ I will use the term “educator” and “teacher” synonymously. I see many people in the formal schooling setting fit for the title of “educator,” from classroom teachers to librarians to nurses and administrators.

⁶ “Information on Teacher Evaluation,” State Department of Education, May 2017, citation removed to anonymize names and locations. Teacher performance at public schools in this state is based on an evaluation system which outlines an “original framework” for evaluation based 50% on teacher performance and 50% on student academic growth measures. Additionally, there is an “alternative framework” which allows for other categories to be included in the assessment.
similarly across the counties within a state.\textsuperscript{7} As the state 2016 standards revision documents promote: standards are the “… ‘what’ of learning – they explain what students need to know and be able to do to enjoy success in college, careers, and life.”\textsuperscript{8}

Though it may be important to dissect the actual and potential issues of standardizing learning goals and measuring such standards across school districts, that is not the dilemma I address in this study. Rather, my line of inquiry is aimed at the educators in the schools in which regular accommodations are made for an insular group like the Amish. What happens in the relationship and exchange between an educator and student when the child’s aspirations or options for the future\textsuperscript{9} are discordant with the state’s perspective on “…success in college, careers, and life”\textsuperscript{10}? Specifically, my research question for this study has been: Considering that the Amish have been granted the freedom to end formal schooling after 8\textsuperscript{th} grade, how do public school educators in the Creek Settlement view their approach and impact on the development and future-oriented outlook of their Amish students?

\textsuperscript{7} “Standards in Your State,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed July 16, 2016, http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/. The Common Core, initiated by the Council of Chief State School Officers in 2009, sought to create a nationally standardized curriculum across the United States. As of August 2015, 42 states, Washington, D.C., and four U.S. foreign territories had adopted some level of the Common Core. It should be noted that this is a decrease from 2013’s count of 45 participating states.

\textsuperscript{8} “Standards Revision Summary,” State Department of Education, accessed December 2016, citation removed to assist in anonymizing names and locations. The state 2016 standards revision document reads: “(the state) Learning Standards are the ‘what’ of learning – they explain what students need to know and be able to do to enjoy success in college, careers and life. (The state) Learning Standards emphasize skills like critical thinking and problem solving — qualities most sought by today’s colleges and employers. Standards also help the state measure performance of schools. We do this, in part, by measuring student performance on state tests each year that are based on these standards.”


\textsuperscript{10} This reference’s wording from the state’s 2016 standards revision document.
Purpose of the Study: Whose Children?

The purpose of this study is to better understand how public school teachers view their aims and influence in educating young Amish children who are not destined for formal education beyond the 8th grade nor work that requires a high school diploma or other degrees. Over the past century, the United States Supreme Court has addressed and provided guidance for impasses that surface regarding schooling and personal liberties and schooling and religious accommodation. The Supreme Court’s decision on the case Wisconsin v. Yoder et al. (1972) created a special provision for Amish and conservative Mennonite families by allowing their children to end formal schooling at age 14; the assumption was that these Anabaptist families were preparing children adequately to live “full lives” in their communities without a high school education. The Amish are the only group in the country with such an exemption. At the time of that 1972 decision, many Amish children were attending small private Amish schools, which have continued

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12 Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971) established a three-point “test” when legislating bodies considered school funding and religious entities; Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education (1989) did not grant (by overturning a lower court ruling) families the ability to exempt their children from curricular participation based on religious beliefs; this was perhaps not on the mind of “the Superintendent” of the story opening this paper.

13 Joel Feinberg, “The Child’s Right to an Open Future,” 134. Chief Justice Warren E. Burger wrote in the majority opinion for the ruling: “The value of all education must be assessed in terms of its capacity to prepare the child for life. It is one thing to say that compulsory education for a year or two beyond the eighth grade may be necessary when its goal is the preparation of the child for life in modern society as the majority live, but it is quite another if the goal of education be viewed as the preparation of the child for life in the separated agrarian community that is the keystone of the Amish faith.” Joel Feinberg, “The Child’s Right to an Open Future,” 134.
to flourish and grow in the years since. Similarly, some public school districts, like those in the Creek Settlement, attracted a significant number of Amish students, with some classrooms filling each seat with an Amish child.

What is it like to be a teacher, charged with maintaining district and state “standards” for “success in life,” in a classroom of children who are destined for specific roles or trades, not high school or other potentially option-introducing formal education environments? Considering Amish distrust for high school education, how do these educators talk about goal setting for students, and learning about and functioning in the world? To what degree do these teachers work to appease the particular religious values of Amish families in selecting learning content, material, and delivery? To these teachers,

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14 Mark Dewalt, 4-5. From their arrival in the eighteenth century and well into the first decades of the 1900s, Amish families across the country were dependent upon and comfortable with sharing the rural one-room schoolhouses with “English”/non-plain/non-Amish children. The Amish didn’t raise issue with public schools until the twentieth century district consolidation movement across the country began closing many rural schools and busing students to different, out-of-community locations. Starting first in the state of Delaware in 1925, Amish parochial schools expanded in many states in response to the closing of these local, rural one-room schoolhouses; Amish families encountered more and more court cases, fines, and jail sentences for their non-participation in public schools, primarily for not enrolling their children beyond the eighth grade.

15 According to former Willow Run Schools superintendent, Bruce, some classrooms of the elementary schools in the district have 100% Amish children. One such school, Burton Elementary, is the workplace of two of my study participants, Roy and Barbara.

16 Mark Dewalt writes: “To the Amish, high school was a place that encouraged competition, self-improvement and individualism. They felt these values were in direct contrast to their belief system based on cooperation, humility, and servanthood.”

17 I use the word “world” intentionally and cautiously here. I intend to use this as Hannah Arendt does when discussing the role of the teacher as one who introduces “the world” to a child. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 186. According to Chief Justice Warren Burger in 1972, the Amish had a particular world or “life” which was not usefully mainstreamed, but better separated from the majority of Americans. The Amish and English in the Creek Settlement are hardly segregated in life, similar to what Charles Hurst and David McConnell recorded in an Amish Settlement in Ohio where 80% of men (in 2010) were in non-farming occupations which brought them into regular contact with the English world, Charles E. Hurst and David L. McConnell, *An Amish Paradox*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 176.
what counts as reasonable accommodation, and for what reasons are accommodations provided?

**Significance**

I intend for this study to contribute to a body of literature that debates the aims of education through formal schooling. A number of philosophers have explored the role of the state in relation to the child/student, and the state in relation to religious accommodation. Though most of these authors write about the impact of *Wisconsin v. Yoder* through philosophical analysis, there is little using a method of philosophically-oriented qualitative research to better understand how the state’s provisions through *Yoder* are impacting actual teachers in their approach to educating Amish children.

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18 Stephen Macedo writes that some “powerful” religious communities “ensure laws are designed to accommodate their needs,” which may assist the group to “resist basic civic values” but places the child in a potentially detrimental position with few options for their future. *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000), 150. Macedo references the illustrative partial dissenting opinion of *Yoder*, written by Justice William O. Douglas, in which the Justice writes that an Amish child “…may want to be a pianist or an astronaut or an oceanographer. To do so, he will have to break from the Amish tradition…If a parent keeps his child out of school beyond the grade school, then the child will be forever barred from entry into the new and amazing world of diversity that we have today…If he is harnessed to the Amish way of life by those in the authority over him and if his education is truncated, his entire life may be stunted and deformed.” Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust*, 236.

19 Some of the authors referenced in this study include: Stephen Macedo, Joel Feinberg, Shelley Burtt, Walter Feinberg, Robert Kunzman, Paula McAvo, Sigal Ben-Porath, Harry Brighouse, Brian Warnick, Dena Davis, Eamonn Callan, Susan Moller Okin, Judith Suissa, Rob Reich.

20 Though this study is not an ethnography, I was partially influenced to blend philosophy and qualitative research by Walter Feinberg’s practice of *applied philosophy* or *philosophical ethnography* “…a philosophy of the everyday and ethnography in the context of intercultural discourse about coordinating meaning, evaluation, norms and action,” in “Philosophical Ethnography: or, How Philosophy and Ethnography Can Live Together in the World of Educational Research,” *Educational Studies in Japan: International Yearbook*, no. 1 (2006), 5.
Research Design: Conceptual Summary

For this study, I was influenced by various philosophy of education literatures exploring autonomy facilitation, philosophical challenges to the pluralist liberal state, multiculturalism vs. liberalism, and cultural accommodation in state-sponsored activity. These conceptual approaches not only helped me develop a research agenda and specific research questions, they were also considered throughout the data collection and period of analysis as sources that grounded my inquiry. Though qualitative research in public schools regarding the education of Amish children is not prevalent, it was important that I positioned my work in the efforts of those ahead of me who have contributed significantly to existing bodies of literature.

Research Design: Methods Summary

The empirical portion of this study used a qualitative interview approach to gather data from 10 public school educators of Amish children on their thinking regarding goals in teaching, cultural accommodation, and their perceived influence on the lives of their students. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: they were educators (e.g. teachers, librarians, coaches, administrators); they worked in public elementary and middle schools that enroll a significant population, if not majority, of Anabaptist children; they had a willingness to spend time exploring the purposes of

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21 These concepts are explored to varying degrees by the authors listed in the footnote above.
23 These numbers can be identified through generally understood populations in the district, but also tracked through state-gathered data that identifies languages spoken in the home; a signifier of Amish or Anabaptist families is that English is not the primary language of the home. Rather, these families typically speak Pennsylvania Dutch in the home.
formal schooling through a conversational dialogue. From January to July of 2017, I
interviewed 10 participants 1-3 times for 2-3 hours each session. Most significant for my
analysis was the perspectives of six of my participants who I felt contributed the most to
the study’s line of inquiry. I identified the participants through a referral and “snowball
sampling” method.24 Most of the interviews were audio-recorded, and all interviews
were transcribed and analyzed considering the framework detailed in the Conceptual
Framework section of this study.

24 Nigel King and Christine Horrocks, Interviews in Qualitative Research (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
Publications, 2010), 48.
Chapter 2: Conceptual Frameworks:  
Teaching for Autonomy and Open Futures

The Role of Autonomy

For political liberals of the ilk of John Rawls, an essential purpose of education, from the state's perspective, is to "...foster a set of civic skills and allegiance in all citizens in order to ensure the endurance of ideals of equality and freedom." Accordingly, for citizens to properly exercise their individual freedoms, they need to have a healthy sense of personal autonomy. Harry Brighouse writes that autonomy shouldn't be seen so much as the end aim, but rather a possible vehicle through which one lives a "flourishing life."

Autonomy has a range of definitions, and could involve “…self-legislation of moral laws, self-creation, self-authorship, the Socratic examined-life, self-determination, sovereignty, authenticity, integrity, freedom from outside influence, freedom from obligation, independence, individuality, simple freedom, simple agency, or the basic capacity to make choices.” For the sake of this study, I use an overview and a basic definition of autonomy from the aforementioned. What is unique to these definitions of autonomy is the emphasis on individual development. Immanuel Kant described autonomy as being a variety of moral awareness in which one would develop their own orientation towards a universal reason.

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27 Reich pulls this list from Walter Feinberg and Gerald Dworkin, 96.
28 In a chapter on minimalist autonomy, Reich references Kant, 96-99.
theorists simply define autonomy as the ability to conceive one’s own idea of “the good.” From these perspectives, autonomy’s purpose is individual-oriented, and though there is the conception of freedom and sovereignty, within these definitions is a relation to the rest of the world. These autonomous individuals are learning about and expressing their own free will autonomously, "emplotting" their own identity—but this is never far from their relations with others.

Considering a population of children from a comprehensive community, in which the child’s life is not to be opened to a variety of potential futures, but rather limited to a specific set of opportunities that fit within the value-structure and goals of the community—what role does a teacher play in a formal school setting in such a community? One of the assumed goals of formal schooling in the United States is to help the young develop skills that may make them fully informed and able to participate in a society as adults. This is laced with an inclination toward participation in a democratic society, a practice children may be introduced to early in their school lives. This civic- or citizenship-orientation takes the process of building autonomy for the self, described above as an individual relating to society, to the individual learning how to exist in

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33 Ibid.
community, and in relationship with others.\textsuperscript{35} This process of learning in a social environment that may replicate the future world in which they may live is what John Dewey advocated in his design of schools.\textsuperscript{36} The assumption is that children are practicing, in small-scale, for life as adults – a world they have yet to fully inhabit. Children do not yet have the rights to exist fully free in that world.\textsuperscript{37} This process of learning how to come into the world is not without a dimension of socialization, as learning in community also has a socializing effect.\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{The Comprehensive Community: Where Futures Are Open Enough}

Sigal Ben-Porath defines comprehensive cultural communities, "...sometimes referenced in the literature as 'encompassing,' 'societal,' or 'non-reflective' communities..." as those "...whose laws, institutions, and practices regulate the full range of their members' activities."\textsuperscript{39} Some of these groups include the Fundamentalist Church of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS), "certain Jewish Orthodox communities in the U.S. like the Satmars, and the Amish."\textsuperscript{40} These groups live comprehensively with varying degrees of commitment. For instance, a sect of the FLDS may live on a secluded compound where all the needs of the members are met and there is little encouraged communication with those outside the community.\textsuperscript{41} However, others, like most Amish, do not fit this

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Dewey, \textit{The School and Society}, 25.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Joel Feinberg calls these “rights in trust,” in “125.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Ben-Porath, 1023.
  \item \textsuperscript{40} Ben-Porath, 1023.
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Joanna Walters, “‘Deprogramming’ from the FLDS, Warren Jeffs’ secretive cult.” \textit{Al Jazeera America}, March 17, 2015.
\end{itemize}
description because they typically live in regions populated by English, or non-Amish, families in addition to their own church brethren.\textsuperscript{42} In fact, many Amish work in sectors that are owned by or cater to the needs of the English,\textsuperscript{43} making the Amish economy and life more integrated than a compound-oriented comprehensive community. Amish children in this area attend public schools with English children, and teachers in Amish areas may find themselves with a partial or near majority population of Amish children in the classroom.\textsuperscript{44}

In general, comprehensive communities are seeking to raise children within a context that provides continuity in a belief system without obstruction from other potentially damaging influences (from the perspective of the community). In writing to defend an education for “cultural coherence,” Michael Merry states that: “To speak of cultural coherence, then, is to refer to the shaping of one’s identity by a particular group. Coherence with one’s group’s identity denotes the psychological congruity that enables an individual to make sense of the world, relate to others and make evaluative judgements \textit{from within a particular conceptual matrix} (emphasis added).”\textsuperscript{45} The belief that one’s community values should be protected and supported by institutions surrounding the community was at the heart of the \textit{Mozert v. Hawkins} U.S. Circuit Court case in 1987.\textsuperscript{46} Though the judges did not favor adding additional protection or

\textsuperscript{43} Hurst and McConnell, 185.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 160.
\textsuperscript{45} Michael S. Merry, “Cultural Coherence and the Schooling for Identity Maintenance.” \textit{Journal of Philosophy of Education} 39, no. 3 (August 1, 2005), 480.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Elections}, 827 F2d 1058 (6th Cir. 1987).
exemption for students from mandatory reading in the school curriculum, the case raised important questions about the degree to which cultural values of particular communities should be accommodated in schools.\footnote{I believe the “Omnichip” story which opens this study is a great test for the *Mozert* level of accommodation. One might argue that Bruce, the superintendent in the story, provided too much accommodation to a family due to the family’s personal, cultural, or religious preferences.}

**Back in School**

Though many children from comprehensive communities may attend private or home schools, in the Creek Settlement, a significant number of Amish children attend local public schools.\footnote{Hurst and McConnell, 153.} I was curious as to the degree the classrooms with a mix of English and Amish could be settings for practice in pluralism, or sites of “autonomy facilitation”\footnote{Unlike Eamonn Callan’s use of autonomy promotion by voicing that education should be "dedicated to specific ideals of character," (Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 3.), Brighouse seeks to support "autonomy-facilitation" in schools. Autonomy-facilitation encourages an openness to multiple ways of living as options, not as directions for the young to explore (Brighouse, *On Education*, 21-26).} as outlined by Harry Brighouse. He writes that "an autonomy-facilitating school will be composed of both children and adults who come from a diversity of backgrounds and who have differing outlooks on the world and how to live their lives. A school with Muslim, Hindu, atheist, Roman Catholic, and Jewish children will do better, other things being equal, than one in which all the children are Roman Catholic."\footnote{Brighouse, *On Education*, 21.} As highlighted earlier, some may consider such schools with high cultural diversity as the perfect scenario for the pluralist project. Perhaps this assumes a bit too heavily that all that is needed is the space and opportunity for multiple views to be expressed, and the risk of combustion is minimal. Walter Feinberg argues, perhaps too simply, that what
may seem like "radical incommensurability" between belief systems can be accommodated by attention to pluralism in schools.\textsuperscript{51} David Labaree contends that Americans place too much faith in the power of the schools to solve our social ills,\textsuperscript{52} and Merry skeptically states that not all cultures foster difference equally.\textsuperscript{53}

When considering the environment of the schools in which my participants worked, I sought to better understand how these educators would foster environments of “autonomy facilitation” à la Brighouse. I was curious as to how educators of Amish children would understand such a charge, and further, if they engaged in such facilitation, to what they attribute such a purpose. Additionally, I sought to better understand how these educators identified the forces of student culture, school *ethos*, talk of diversity,\textsuperscript{54} and community values, and how these educators articulated their own role in such complexity.

This project does not address whether education serves a civic good, but rather how a particular group of educators identify what is good for children from a defined group of the citizenry. It is in this space, in the interpretation of how these educators envision the impact and potential of the formal educational experience, where I have aimed to find insight. Specifically, I wanted to better understand how educators describe

\textsuperscript{51} Walter Feinberg, *For Goodness Sake*, 41. David Labaree would most likely disagree with this position, saying that too much faith is being placed in schools in order for us to assume that they are suited to solve problems. But, more often, the educational system in the U.S. has developed dependence, a near sickness, from what he calls the *school syndrome*, described as “…enduring faith in school reform…” and “…continuing inability to make the system they created work…” (Labaree, 43).

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} "To wit: if autonomy, in some piecemeal form, entails the capacity to identify from the inside with a set of beliefs, values and norms, then an education for cultural coherence that has the well-being of children as its central aim is likely to satisfy the other conditions of autonomy upon which liberals insist. The trick is discerning the cultures that foster the requisite openness from those that do not." Merry, 494.

\textsuperscript{54} Brighouse, *On Education*, 22.
processes for autonomy-facilitation, and whether these follow a proclivity towards group autonomy, as prescribed by local Amish bishops, or individual autonomy development, as outlined in Brighouse’s supportive school ethos concept. If there were elements of both in the school, I aimed to better understand the role of the educator in designing experiences which encourage or discourage concepts of autonomy exploration.

The Comprehensive Jam

And thus, I entered this study assuming the educators in these schools were in a bit of a bind. If a public school teacher of children from a comprehensive community wanted to encourage a future of engaged and informed citizenship, were there dangers of contradicting a student’s home/family value system in a school curriculum and ethos? The Amish child won’t attend school beyond the eighth grade. Instead, they pursue trades which necessitate apprenticeship outside of school, thus making some of the exploration in subjects beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic seemingly superfluous to the families. In this scenario, would the teacher invite the sharing or living out of their cultural practices to promote a more pluralistic classroom? Does the teacher ignore the Amish children culturally, further alienating the students from the classroom? How does

55 Brighouse writes that autonomy-facilitation can be achieved through three aspects of school life: the composition (diversity in student body and staff), curriculum (traditional content with critical thinking emphasized), and ethos (encourage safety, and genuine engagement between children and with adults), On Education, 21-24.


58 Brighouse, On Education, 22.ff
the teacher present and acknowledge various cultural perspectives without endorsing some beliefs or cultural norms over others. This is a predicament.

**Exit Rights: Can the Children Leave?**

For political liberals, the ability to exit from one’s group of origin defines whether or not there is adequate awareness of rights. Sigal Ben-Porath states: "Both the right to exit one's cultural group and the commitment of dominant liberal-democratic society to enable such exit are key aspects of democratic theory today." Paula McAvoy writes of William Galston’s argument that a “just liberal state must ‘pursue a policy of maximum feasible accommodation’” for individuals to exit their commitments. However, McAvoy continues that Galston recognizes that “children do not freely enter the groups they are born into,” nor do they, according to Merry, “…enjoy even a formal right of exit from the associations into which they were born.” Thus, at the center of this understanding of exit rights is the argument for the general rights of children, and the rights of the parents over their children. There are numerous examples of children finding paths of exit by exposure to others, such as McAvoy’s “Emily” being introduced to books and films that demonstrated a life outside of the comprehensive community in which she was living. Davidman and Greil share the experiences of “Leah” an ultra-

60 Ben-Porath, 1022.
61 Ibid., 1021.
63 Ibid., 539.
64 Merry, 483.
65 McAvoy, 540-545.
Orthodox Jewish girl being exposed to secular cousins, as she says: “…it was so interesting to see that they were living with sin but without dying or something…So I thought that maybe what we had been told was a little wrong or something, or maybe that there is just a delay in the punishment.”

Though these two examples demonstrate how individuals find their own way out of community commitments, Ben-Porath argues that without state sponsored “entrance paths” into other ways of living for those in comprehensive communities, individuals will not be successful in knowing the proper ways to exit from their communities.

In this study, I was curious what examples would surface in which the educators played a part in encouraging exploration outside of the Amish community. Many Amish practice *Rumspringa*, a period of “running around,” which usually begins when children are 16 and ends when they marry and officially commit themselves to raising a family in the church. During this transition, teens spend a great deal of time socializing with their peers and even experimenting with activities which are unacceptable when they are adults in the church (e.g., driving cars, wearing baseball uniforms, and owning televisions). Steven Mazie states that it is unlikely that, as proposed by Ben-Porath, the state will offer adequate exit exploration, and thus, traditions such as *Rumspringa* appropriately offer that opportunity.

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67 Ben-Porath, 1024-1025.
68 Ben-Porath, 1024; Davidman and Greil, 201-202.
69 Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, Steven Nolt, 212.
70 Ibid., 214.
71 Ibid., 214.
72 Steven V. Mazie, “Consenting Adults? Amish Rumspringa and the Quandary of Exit in Liberalism,”
When considering the promotion of exploration, the public school educator of Amish children could see their role as precarious. According to federal law, the teacher needn’t adjust materials due to the values of the child’s family; however, like with the “Omnichip” story, accommodations are made to build trust between district/teacher and family. When it comes to facilitating autonomy, any teacher who identifies with the importance of preparing students as future citizens ought to build a space of learning which allows for multi-faceted exploration of the child’s own ideas and potential. This goal can be approached by maintaining sensitivity to the individual student’s cultural background. Like Brian Warnick, I believe that public schools can represent the common school vision of collaboration and trust: “…the common school vision of students from different backgrounds coming together and learning from each other may seem overly romantic, and in many cases, it is...But there are reasons to take the educational potential of the common school seriously...Schools have a special characteristic in that they should promote civic education….“ I also agree with Brighouse’s assessment that the ethos of a school is incredibly powerful. For this study, I aimed to explore through interviews the ethos of these schools, how teachers and administrators in a school understand and describe a school ethos, and how they embody a particular “persona” which corresponds or conflicts with a school ethos. Further, as Warnick references, I wanted to better

Perspectives on Politics 3, no. 4 (December 1, 2005), 756.
73 Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Elections, 827 F2d 1058 (6th Cir. 1987).
75 Brighouse, On Education, 60.
76 Ibid., 59.
know how and if these educators were using a public school platform to promote civic education and citizenship beyond the children’s comprehensive community.

Another Form of Comprehensive: Conceptions of the Good

Early in this proposal, the word comprehensive was attributed to a community, meaning a group which provided identity and meaning for the “...full range of their members' activities.”77 In liberal theory, there is another use of comprehensive, attached to the notion of John Rawls’s “comprehensive conception of the good.”78 A “comprehensive conception of the good” (or CCG) represents, according to Judith Suissa, “...the diversity of conceptions of the good characteristic of plural societies is not something to be tolerated or overcome, but a desirable and necessary aspect of the liberal democratic polity.”79 Suissa explains that the faith in a CCG, though “crucial to the Rawlsian edifice” is “...used fairly loosely in the literature on education derived from these Rawlsian ideas...”80 Suissa challenges us to consider exactly what is a comprehensive conception of the good – have you ever known anyone to embody this? Have we experienced believing in what is good from several different perspectives? And further, can schools really accommodate this pursuit? Suissa claims that schools are not adequate realms to examine comprehensive conceptions of the good, as they provide “illusory” accounts of diversity, and that families may be better suited to provide a

77 Ben-Porath, 1023.
78 Eamonn Callan, 14.
80 Ibid., 588.
CCG. This account makes me consider the lives of Amish families in seeking to relay their own values to their children in relation to a world that is intentionally foreign. How does the schoolteacher in the picture act as a bridge-builder to other conceptions of what is good, or do they leave that entirely to the family?

In the introduction to *Grappling with the Good*, Robert Kunzman shares a story that illustrates the ethical jam an educator in this situation may experience. In the story, a student named Cheryl openly states religious views regarding scientific research during a class discussion. He found himself dodging the student’s comment, something which felt unhelpful to the exploration of perspectives for his student, but perhaps the “safe” decision: “If an administrator had been observing my class, she probably would have complimented my deft handling of a potentially volatile subject. But it didn’t feel like a fine pedagogical moment.” Kunzman is describing the line that an educator walks when they seek to create safe, un-“volatile” spaces, but also want to build potential for breaks in understanding and perspective-awareness. When, if ever, should a teacher “intervene” in the value-set of a child from a comprehensive community? Does neutrality, or the skirting around sticky issues, like Kunzman’s actions with Cheryl, suppress the child’s right to an open future? Does teacher temperance with students

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81 Suissa, 596.
82 Kunzman, *Grappling with the Good*, 1.
83 Ibid, 2.
prevent the child from becoming more fully engaged in opportunities that are otherwise ignored in their home-life?\textsuperscript{85}

\textbf{The Home, the School, the World}

If the Amish place such emphasis on the understanding of their religion, why not let that be taken care of by the private school? In general, the Amish feel that the home and church care for what is most sacred: learning about the family unit and faith. They tend to leave the remaining bits to the schools, even the parochial schools that cater to and are run by Amish communities. Though the home and church are highly regarded as important sites of learning (especially about faith and language), the Amish are only just recently building interest in a homeschooling experience for their children.\textsuperscript{86} Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt write that the Amish see schools as carrying out the significant task of teaching children “...collaboration, cooperation, and the importance of fitting in with a group larger than their family. In this way, Amish schools socialize students for adult life in a collective ethnic community.”\textsuperscript{87} The authors also highlight how the Amish distinguish between “...schooling as (‘book learning’), which teaches skills, and education (wisdom), which inculcates values. Although they permit children to be

\textsuperscript{85} Dena Davis, “The Child’s Right to an Open Future: \textit{Yoder} and Beyond,” \textit{Capital Law Review}, 93 (1997). Davis writes that the state, through school, must go further than Joel Feinberg proposes in “The Child’s Right to an Open Future” when he says that the “neutral state” would act to “let all influences...work equally on the child” and the “chief determining factor in the grown child’s voice of a vocation and lifestyle will be his own governing values, talents, and propensities.” Davis says: “The problem with this is that, as I understand the Amish way of life, being Amish is precisely not to make one’s life choices on the basis of one’s own ‘talents and propensities,’ but to subordinate those individual leanings to the traditions of the group. If one discovers within oneself a strong passion and talent for jazz dancing, one ought to suppress it, not nurture it,” 97.

\textsuperscript{86} Charles E. Hurst and David L. McConnell, 161.

\textsuperscript{87} Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, Steven Nolt, 267.
schooled by 'outsiders,' they have never allowed them to be 'educated by the world.'

In *Experience and Education*, John Dewey writes the classic trope “…not all experiences are genuinely, or equally educative…” and that with experience there is a chance for “miseducation.” This separation of experience which is beneficial from experience which is lesser so, or even harmful, aligns with the Amish opposition to valuing what is outside of the formal school or the family. Though many Amish may expect interaction with the non-Amish, perhaps they anticipate that their children will not look to that realm of interaction as a source for understanding their own values and behavior. Like Hannah Arendt’s identification of “the four walls” of the family home acting as the most important and foundational element of any child’s life, the Amish, too, make central the family and church as *the source* for the child’s identity. Arendt writes:

> Because the child must be protected against the world, his traditional place is in the family, whose adult members daily return back from the outside world and withdraw into the security of private life within four walls. These four walls, within which people’s private family life is lived, constitute a shield against the world and specifically against the public aspect of the world. They enclose a secure place, without which no living thing can thrive. This holds good not only for the life of childhood but for the human life in general.

The four walls metaphor could apply to Amish anxiety that the young attending school with English children could develop appreciation for and identification with that which is not Amish. Back in 1897, as small local schools were folding in favor of new district consolidated schools, Amish teacher Samuel Guengerich argued against the public schools because he said they were designed to "ensure earthly success," and "make

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88 Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, and Steven Nolt, 253.
90 Arendt, 186.
91 Ibid.
good citizens for the state"; he argued that good education only counted "in the eyes of God," and no other measure.\textsuperscript{92} “Good” education is also counted by other entities, including state boards of education. And though individual state standards in education apply to all schools, including parochial/private schools, they may not be universally enforced.\textsuperscript{93} Again, similar to Arendt’s philosophy that the teacher’s role is to gradually introduce “the world” to students,\textsuperscript{94} educators of Amish children are to fill a role in introducing particular skills and concepts to children, but they undoubtedly encounter the responsibility of identifying the boundaries of the Amish world. This study aims at better understanding how some educators of Amish children understand the limits of their role in relation to the Amish distinction between schooling and education, and in relation to the Amish sense of what is and what is not within the purview of the public school.

**The Creek County Settlement: A Schooling Paradox?**

One may assume that in present day, with Amish families continuing to place their children in an ever-increasing number of parochial schools, there may be a dearth of Amish students in the public schools of Creek County. Based on the 2005 state *Amish Directory*, just over two-thirds of Creek County Settlement Amish families send their children to parochial schools\textsuperscript{95} and parochial schools can be seen as “more directly

\textsuperscript{92} Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, Steven Nolt, 269.
\textsuperscript{93} Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, “Old Order Amish Education: The Yoder Decision in the 21st Century,” *Journal of Plain and Anabaptist Studies*, 3(1):25-44., (2015), 37-38. Though many parochial Amish schools are led by a three-man board (and yes, they must be men, and are typically fathers of the schoolchildren), their interpreted charge is to ensure the best arrangement they see fit for their children, not the attendance to state educational guidelines.
\textsuperscript{94} Arendt, 189.
\textsuperscript{95} Citation removed to anonymize names and locations.
supportive of the lives [students] will lead as Amish adults." McConnell and Hurst note that the fear-instilling pre-\textit{Wisconsin v. Yoder} image of Amish children running into the cornfields to escape from federal agents does not represent the current regard for public schooling among the Amish in places like the Holmes County Settlement.\footnote{Ibid., 238.} Similarly, in the Creek Settlement there is strong Amish support of elementary public schools, with some classrooms comprising entirely of Amish students.\footnote{Citation removed to anonymize names and locations.} To understand why Amish families may discreetly choose the public school option for their children, one first must address that Amish life is actually at odds with the English stereotype of the Amish as homogeneous, and their life as timeless and agrarian.\footnote{McConnell & Hurst, 237.} McConnell and Hurst claim that 42 percent of families surveyed in one settlement stated that the primary reason for sending their children to the public school was for non-Amish interaction and English language mastery.\footnote{Ibid., 245.} In reference to Kraybill and Nolt’s work, McConnell and Hurst state an example of the importance of diversity in experience can be found in the figure that nearly 80 percent of men in one settlement in Ohio work in an occupation other than farming;\footnote{Ibid., 237.} this "lunch pail work" brings many men, and a growing population of Amish women, off their family homesteads to work in factories, construction, restaurants, and other non-Amish businesses.\footnote{Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, and Steven Nolt, 291-292.} Johnson-Weiner notes that the idea of competition and preparation surfaces in the parochial schools as “…the Old Order
schools along the Michigan-Indiana border reflect these changes, offering curriculum that prepares children to compete economically with their non-Old Order counterparts on a playing field that may be marginally, if at all, in the Old Order world.”

Besides preparing their young to encounter a diverse and perhaps increasingly English economy, the Amish in the Creek County Settlement are also encountering other factors that contribute to the presence of Amish children in public elementary schools. Families “push” their children to Amish elementary schools, the public school districts try to “pull” the students through accommodations and ease of transition in order to retain or increase their headcounts and income from the state. Also, as mentioned above, it is a well-established practice to have mostly young Amish women, with little or no teaching credentials, as the teachers in the Amish parochial schools. For better, or perhaps worst, McConnell and Hurst claim that most of the schools in their study of an Amish Settlement are “a magnification of [the teachers’] own biographies,” and in addition to wanting a mainstream-world encounter, Amish families cherish “highly-qualified teachers” with credentials.

This complexity in how the Amish interpret the purpose and function of education can be very important to better understanding how the Amish are to live and survive in contemporary American society. Johnson-Weiner writes that John Hostetler’s revered research of Amish schools, which weighed heavily as evidence in Wisconsin v. Yoder,

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104 Citation removed to anonymize names and locations
105 McConnell and Hurst, 245.
was flawed in that it painted the Amish “monolithically”\(^{107}\) and staid on “bucolic” and unchanging farms.\(^{108}\) As Garrett Epps writes, what Chief Justice Warren Burger "rhapsodized about" in the Wisconsin v. Yoder decision, portraying the Amish as "simple, harmless, and unchanging in a mutable world--is...erroneous...."\(^{109}\)

These perspectives emphasize what we now find in the Amish school landscape as a great deal of diversity. One may encounter conservative Amish schools in which children learn to seek a “singular, correct answer to questions,”\(^{110}\) where "Children do not study why they do things in particular ways, but they learn that there are particular ways in which things must be done."\(^{111}\) In the same region, one can visit a progressive Amish school in which children learn a variety of subjects, about world and religious diversity, where they sing, read the Bible, and pray.\(^{112}\) Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt reference Amish progressive, or “change-oriented” schools that have electronic copy machines.\(^{113}\) The Yoder decision afforded agency to the Amish to tell school officials to “back off” of their plans to educate their children in a way that fit their values.\(^{114}\) However, as Johnson-Weiner maintains, the impact of the Yoder decision may now only benefit those affiliations that seek to be as separate as possible from the non-Amish

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 230.
\(^{108}\) Ibid., 30. In the transcript of the court proceedings, the defendants’ lead attorney, William Ball, regularly uses the terms “Old Order Amish” and “Old Order Mennonite” to describe the Amish in total.
\(^{112}\) Ibid., 233.
\(^{113}\) Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, and Steven Nolt, 261.
For most other Amish, they are interacting regularly with the non-Amish and perhaps should be prepared in the best fashion possible. “Ironically, however, the agency afforded the Amish by the Supreme Court’s decision in Wisconsin v. Yoder, et al. means that, as the Amish increasingly engage with the mainstream, education has for many become less about isolating children from the world than it is about shaping their interaction with it.”

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115 Ibid., 29.
116 Ibid., 30.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

Research Procedure

From January to July of 2017, I interviewed ten participants/conversational partners 1 – 3 times for 1 - 2 hours each session (see Appendix B for Timeline of Participant Contact). Initial contact and clarifying questions were conducted with participants via email (see Appendix A), but most of the material I analyzed for this study was based on in-person interviews. These interviews were mostly audio-recorded and then transcribed by the author and a transcription service. The interview days, times, and locations varied depending on what was most convenient to the participant. Locations included offices and classrooms of the participants, school breakrooms, available classrooms, cafes, restaurants, and one participant’s living room.

Data Management and Analysis

After each interaction with a participant, I journaled thoughts and reflections on the interview and prepared ideas for future consideration or conversation with participants. I transferred the hand-written notes to a document saved on a USB drive and password-protected Google Drive; if there was an audio-recording, I transcribed it (10% of interviews) or paid one of two transcription services (90% of interviews) to transcribe the interviews. The audio-recordings and transcriptions were saved on a password-protected Google Drive. I uploaded the transcribed files to my home desktop computer using QDA Miner Lite, a qualitative data analysis software. I created a master Microsoft Word document of all transcribed interviews and interview notes to read all material on paper. I spent two months reading the transcriptions on paper and noting
emerging themes from the data. These hand-written notes revealed a list of 40 themes. Using QDA Miner Lite software, I coded the digital version of the interviews based on the themes. Once I had the interview quotes and sections coded, I identified six large themes, and 26 smaller sub-themes. In QDA Miner Lite, I “retrieved” each thematic code, gathering all responses by code into unique Microsoft Word documents. Once in the Microsoft Word documents by theme/code, I scrubbed the documents of any mention of names of people or schools/districts. These sections of codes with affinity or larger theme became the foundation of the chapters of this dissertation.

To protect the confidentiality and privacy of my participants, I aimed to anonymize the names of people and schools/districts. It was difficult at times to remove a reference to their names in the recordings if their name was stated out loud. Otherwise, my pseudonym list and a password-protected email account were the only record of the names of the participants and their schools/districts. Additionally, three participants at one occurrence each asked that I not repeat or write about something they had told me. This would be presented to me as: “I hope that you don’t write on this part I am about to tell you.” In these situations, I turned off the recorder or removed from the transcribed notes the information that they had asked that I not use in my study. To further protect my participants, I was advised by members of my dissertation committee to remove any reference to the state or region in which this research is situated. I also removed citation and bibliographic information if the resource provided telling information about the schools or location of The Creek Settlement.
The Participants

The ten study participants will be described in more detail and nuance in the following sections of this study, but for the sake of introduction, I am providing a short summary of each below.

“Andy”117 – Currently a district administrator who acted as a gatekeeper or “insider”118 source for suggesting participant names and contact information. I contacted Andy unprompted by any other source, and mostly because of his supervisory role in the district.

“Bruce” – Former superintendent of Willow Run School District, now an administrator at a small private school in the region. Bruce acted as an early sounding board regarding the project and was an essential gatekeeper in helping me identify participants for the study. A scholar cited in this study suggested I contact Bruce as a lead generator.

“Richard” – Retiring principal of Burton Elementary School, acted as a gatekeeper to assist in connecting me to participants in his school. Andy suggested I contact Richard.

“Neil” – Currently a principal for two elementary schools in the Willow Run School District, briefly acted as a sounding board for this project along with Richard. Andy suggested I contact Neil.

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117 Pseudonyms are used for the names of all people, schools, districts, towns, and any other identifiers.  
118 King and Horrocks, 31.
“Jean” – Currently an administrator at a county-wide resource school and center. Jean is a 64-year-old white woman with adult children. She has been working as a teacher, principal, and administrator for over 25 years in Creek Settlement schools. Jean is well-known throughout the region, as she was referenced by multiple people when I began the inquiry for this project. Jean was the first female principal in one district and seems to have a reputation as an innovator. Jean comes from an Amish family who left the church when she was a child. Her parents became evangelical Mennonites, and she is to this day a member of a Mennonite congregation. Because she was raised Amish, she speaks Pennsylvania Dutch. Jean is calm, soft-spoken, articulate, and has a warm, hospitable demeanor. Bruce and a scholar cited in this study suggested I contact Jean.

“Mary” – Currently principal at Myers Elementary School. Mary is a white woman, 60 years-old, with adult children and had been a teacher and principal in both Crestview and Willow Run School Districts. She has been a successful administrator, as two of the schools at which she served as principal have attained eligibility for a national award from the U.S. Department of Education. Mary is outspoken, a bit loud, enjoys humor, and was rather fun to be around. Her speed of speech and enthusiasm remind me of a high-energy coach. Mary seemed to me curious and regularly asked questions of me. She was also the only participant to write down some of the topics we discussed for her own individual exploration. She talks about the education of children as a process of continuous improvement and mentions the tactics and curricula she likes to introduce to motivate her teachers. She is from the school district in which she works, is a Christian,
and speaks as if she knows many people in the area. A Crestview School District administrator not referenced in this study recommended that I contact Mary.

“Jeff” – Currently a teacher of social studies in a 4th and 5th grade class. He is a white man in his 50s, father of teenagers/young adults, and has been teaching for 25 years, with most of those years in this same district and school. He has taught Amish kids in different classroom arrangements for most of his years and taught in each grade from 3rd to 8th. Jeff is a matter-of-fact, straight-forward talker with a quick response to all questions. He is thoughtful, however, and was rather reflective with my questions about his teaching practice of Amish kids. He is an openly devout Christian and tends to speak of the world in terms of morality and choices. Additionally, he is a coach of multiple sports outside of his classroom duties. Mary suggested I contact Jeff.

“Roy” – Currently librarian, and music and German teacher at Burton Elementary, an all Amish student school. He is a white, new order Amish man in his 60s, with adult children, and involved in multiple projects throughout his life. He owns a few small businesses and speaks of his 17 years of working in the schools as a second career chapter in his life. He says he loves working with children, he enjoys travel, and has an encyclopedic knowledge of multiple subjects, especially history. Bruce and Andy suggested I contact Roy.

“Barbara” – Currently serves as social studies teacher for grades 6-8 at Burton Elementary, an all Amish school. Barbara is a 60-year-old white woman who has been teaching for 20 years. She was raised Amish, but her family left the church for an evangelical Mennonite church when she was still a child. She is Christian, has children
and grandchildren, speaks Pennsylvania Dutch, and speaks of her job as a “privilege” to teach Amish children. Bruce, Dan, and Neil suggested I contact Barbara.

“Curtis” – Currently a district administrator in the Willow Run School District. Curtis is a white man in his early 40s with teenaged children. And though English, and not fluent in Pennsylvania Dutch, he was raised in the area and grew up with Amish families. He has been a teacher, principal and administrator in this district for 15 years. Though the youngest of my participants, and only a district administrator for a couple of years, Curtis displayed the experience and intellect of a tactful administrator. He discussed the ins and outs of the schools and their educative mission and struggles quite reflectively. Curtis was easy to laugh and make light of his work but displayed seriousness for the charge he was given as administrator. Bruce and Andy suggested I contact Curtis.

**Recruiting Participants**

I contacted participants/conversational partners initially via email invitation, through which I introduced the project and requested a reply with them stating interest (see Appendix A for recruitment script sample.) The letter provided general information on the purpose of the study and offered invitees the opportunity to have additional questions answered via email or phone. Invitee names were gathered by contacting *gatekeepers* in districts and schools that enroll a significant number of Amish children, particularly former and current superintendents, district administrators, and principals.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ These numbers can be identified through generally understood populations in the district, but also tracked through state-gathered data that quantifies, by school, languages spoken in the home. A signifier of
From the *gatekeepers*, I established an initial list of invitees. Once invitees agreed to participate, I allowed the participant pool to grow somewhat organically based on referral, or “snowball sampling.”\(^\text{120}\)

In her text on qualitative research methods, author Sharan Merriam shares a field research story about her surprise and lack of preparation for aspects of Malaysian culture, and the effects these elements had on her inquiry process.\(^\text{121}\) One surprise component was the communitarian culture of the people she was interviewing; this took her some getting used to and concessions of her preconceived ideas of how qualitative research should go.\(^\text{122}\) Once Merriam was able to become comfortable with how Malaysian relationships and trust were established, she encountered less self-imposed blocks to her data collection.\(^\text{123}\) Hurst and McConnell relay a similar experience in using the group endorsement mentality of the Amish to gain access to interviewees from the very conservative Swartzentruber Amish:

> Within the Amish community, our reception and access varied somewhat by affiliation, as might have been expected, given the clear difference to openness to the outside world that exists between orders among the Amish. At one extreme were our attempts to talk with Swartzentruber representatives. We once received permission for an interview with a group of Swartzentruber church leaders, only to have it rescinded and then granted again. But even though the interview was granted, and ten leaders were present, almost all responses came from one Swartzentruber bishop, an obvious leader and spokesperson in his community.\(^\text{124}\)

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Amish or Anabaptist families is that English is not the primary language of the home; rather, these families will primarily speak Pennsylvania Dutch in the home.

120 King and Horrocks, 34

122 Merriam, 59.

123 Ibid.

124 Hurst and McConnell, 291.
Though the authors had intended to manage the interview into their sample in a way, the processes of the church leaders dictated not only the timeline, but also the context and tone of the interview. Schram reminds us that our participants are not static entities for us to capture, nor are we static, and how we are received by the community may not be in our control: "Experienced researchers will be the first to tell you that the role you play in the field is not strictly and exclusively of your own choosing. Irrespective of your declared aims, participants in a setting naturally develop their own explanation for your presence."125 Though I was seeking participants whose contact information was publicly displayed on the school district websites, I still thought it important for school leaders to be informed and for me to lean towards the invitation to work in the community. In the two school districts in which I worked, I notified the superintendents and, subsequently, building principals before reaching out to any teachers. The superintendent of Crestview Schools provided prompt support via email and supplied contact information for a principal and other teachers, who I was encouraged to contact. The superintendent of Willow Run Schools and I met in person; he informed the board of education members, and then he gave me affirmation by email, along with the names of two principals I was encouraged to contact. Though it was a consideration of mine, neither superintendent requested that I inform the “parent advisory boards” that counsel each individual school. These boards are comprised of parents,

125 Schram, 140.
usually men, of children at the school and mirror the same advisory boards that monitor and manage the Amish parochial schools in the area.

**Methodological Approach: Theory and Impression Management**

Though I have encountered qualitative studies on Anabaptist communities which employ *informal, formal, and standardized* interviews,\(^ {126}\) I thought that for someone just starting out, it would be most effective to dwell in the informal and formal realm of questioning, as I did not want to have overly scripted interviews. I believe the informal approach allowed me to comfortably ask questions that were fruitful and unobtrusive. Rubin and Rubin suggest this approach to qualitative interviewing as being very effective at describing social and political processes, or “how and why things change.”\(^ {127}\)

Following their guidance to build comfort with interviewees, or “conversational partners” as they like to say,\(^ {128}\) I started initial interviews in an “unstructured” style, and then led into “semi-structured” or “focused” follow-up interviews.\(^ {129}\)

For this study, I drew particular inspiration from educational philosopher Walter Feinberg, who has written about the approach of *philosophical ethnography* or *applied philosophy*: “…a methodological hybrid that uses interviews and observations to identify normative issues, to map out the meaning systems—rules, common *intra*-cultural understandings, shared aims, etc.—in which they are imbedded, and, where necessary, to

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\(^{127}\) Rubin & Rubin, 3.

\(^{128}\) Rubin & Rubin, 79.

\(^{129}\) Rubin & Rubin, 4.
help unblock cultural road-blocks to coordinated action.”

He writes that this method can be particularly useful when one is seeking to understand the situation of a “…single person who is committed to two different and conflicting systems of meaning and beliefs and must decide upon a course of action that seems inconsistent with one of them.”

Examples of individuals in this space of conflict abound. I think of the qualitative study of “Jermaine,” a child observed and interviewed by Thomas Hébert and Teresa Beardsley in their work: “Jermaine: A Critical Case Study of a Gifted Black Child Living in Rural Poverty.”

The authors regularly interpret the on-going predicament for a highly creative and academically-motivated student who receives significant influence and support from a family network who regularly struggles with vulnerability and “chronic adversity.”

The boy navigates and creates identity between the worlds of systemic poverty and formal educational success.

The study of “Jermaine” is an example of a qualitative study participant who is committed to two different systems between which there is regular conflict. I was anticipating difficulty in ascertaining how conversational partners would identify understanding or negotiation based on conflicting systems of meaning. In a reflection on her study on spirituality and emancipation, Elizabeth Tisdell writes of the potential for the researcher to confuse such attribution:

In listening to this story [from her participant], and having grown up Catholic, the story seemed a familiar one; to me it was story of Catholic

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133 Ibid., 213, 226.
guilt. But much later in the interview, when I asked Anna [the participant] a clarifying question about that particular story, she noted: ‘That wasn’t about guilt! That was about being black in an all-white space!’

Tisdell assumed that one meaning system was the source of conflict when it was confirmed to be another by the conversational partner. To combat this to some degree, in my follow-up interviews and communication with participants, I reviewed their responses to questions, as Tisdell demonstrated, aiming to clarify and avoid mis-attribution. I believe that I established a constructive rapport with the participants by seeking input and reaction to perspectives or situations which seemed to conflict with another stated value or opinion.

With my field methods, I also sought to employ caution when working within the Anabaptist community. Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt write that one must attend to the Amish value of Gelassenheit or "yieldedness" in communicating with this community: "An aggressive handshake and a curt greeting disclose an assertive self that does not befit Gelassenheit. Rather, a gentle chuckle or hesitation before a response embodies a spirit of humility. Likewise, a slow and a thoughtful answer, deference to another's idea, and a simple silence are signs of the Amish way.” Schram aptly calls this attention to how one presents themselves in the field “impression management.”

Even though all but one of my participants were non-Amish, or English, I still aimed to

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136 Schram, 138.
“manage an impression” of gentleness and humility in all of my early communication with participants.

**Digital Audio Recording**

I employed the use of an iPhone recorder application, Voice Memos, to record most of my conversations with participants. When starting out, I knew that a recording device present during interviews could create a potentially negative distraction for a participant/conversational partner,137 and I was certain to receive consent before recording anything. Adkins acknowledges there is always "power and privilege" that comes with use of digital technology, and an additional layer of consideration is necessary when working with the Amish:

> It is crucial that scholars strive not only to be aware of the privilege and power obtained from digital technology but also to be sure that they do not abuse this privilege and power. On the other hand, researchers must realize that in some communities, access to digital technology creates skepticism and distrust. More and more, these technologies and the values surrounding them must inform methodological approaches.138

Though the use of digital technology with a group who may typically shun ownership of such devices could raise alarm, I was interviewing mostly non-Amish educators in public schools, places where such technology is somewhat common. I did not anticipate encountering much discomfort, but did have one instance where one participant, Barbara, requested that I shut off the recorder. We had initially started out with no recorder. I introduced the machine with her consent and within a few minutes

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137 King and Horrocks, 44-45.
she said that it was making her nervous, so I shut it off immediately. We continued without disruption and I took notes for the remainder of the two-hour interview. Besides Barbara, with all but one of the other participants, the first interviews were conducted without the use of the recorder. When I introduced the recorder on subsequent interviews, all the participants were agreeable, including my one Amish participant. I believe I erred in the introduction of the recorder with Barbara, as this was our first (and only) interview. She was one of the last people for me to interview and, perhaps, I had become comfortable with introducing the recorder (with Curtis, the district administrator, I recorded all interviews). That was not the case with Barbara. In situations where I only took handwritten notes, following the interviews I would promptly transcribe what I had written while the interviews were still fresh in memory.

Understanding the Community

There are two central pillars in Amish life: a separation from the world, and a spirit of selflessness or meekness in the eyes of God. The Amish live according to Christian scripture in a way that encourages them to live in this world, but not of this world. In essence, they seek to be informed by their family and church values, not the non-Amish experience outside of their community. And though many communities may interact regularly with the non-Amish, they purposefully seek separation from the world which may take them further afield from their Christian faith. For the inspiration of this active separation, Amish leaders may regularly cite Christian scriptures: “Love not

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139 Hurst and McConnell, 18.
140 This is another reference to the Christian bible’s scripture, Romans 12:2. Hurst and McConnell, 18.
141 McConnell and Hurst, 57.
the world, neither the things that are in the world” (3 John 2:15); “Whosoever...will be a friend of the world is that enemy of God” (James 4:4); “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (2 Corinthians 6:17); and the Apostle Paul’s admonition: “Be not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2). This dualism in life, the us/them thinking, is essential to the Amish, as they seek to keep their community focused on what is right and wrong according to their congregation’s values, “…such as the distinctions between obedience and disobedience, hard work and idleness, purity and impurity.” The Anabaptists’ resistance to conform to the greater culture’s dress, dependence on particular technologies, language, military service, and taking of oaths has made them the recipients of persecution through the centuries. And though there have been dangers to not conforming, they are directed by another pillar, and that is the pursuit of selflessness. The Amish aim to practice Gelassenheit, or "yieldedness" to God’s way, not their own personal way and gain, in nearly all aspects of their lives. Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt write that Gelassenheit contrasts "modernity's penchant for individual achievement."

Through interviewing participants (Amish, other Anabaptist, or English) who work in this community, I was curious as to how they would embody the greater community’s penchant for “yieldedness.” For the sake of this study, I hoped participants would comfortably disclose their woes, individual goals, and aspirations in relation to

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142 These scripture selections are detailed in Hurst and McConnell, 73.
143 Ibid., 18.
144 Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, and Steven Nolt, 73.
145 Ibid., 98-99.
146 Ibid., 100.
their roles in the schools. I did not want to achieve this primarily for the sake of a “gotcha” moment in understanding their lives as educators, but for the sake of more closely attaining a level of trust and comfortability, signaling that we were having an open, honest dialogue about important issues. Going into this study, I knew I had to be aware of how my ambition would weigh with a population who may reflect the general population’s proclivity for being guarded with their opinions. J. Amos Hatch writes about the importance of ethical interaction and respect for one’s research participants; he states that a qualitative researcher may find it easier to see the benefits of the research to themselves than they do to the participants.147 In some of the qualitative studies on education I respect and enjoy, I have sensed that the researcher has been allowed “insider access” to the personal stories, thoughts, and insights in ways that are quite illuminating.148 I was prepared to recognize how my interviews would push participants to discuss their work and local Ordnung, or the Amish church rules, behavior, and expectations. I wanted to know how these educators accepted what local Amish bishops promote, and in what ways the educators validated these local social expectations through their curriculum design, student interaction, and building of school ethos.149 And, in contrast, I hoped to better understand how these educators created spaces in the school that explored concepts that are in opposition with what local church leaders advocate and, if so, for what purpose and from what source they attributed an interest in so doing.

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147 Hatch, 66.
148 Here, I am considering works such as Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labour*, Jay MacLeod’s *Ain’t No Makin’ It*, and Shirley Brice Heath’s *Ways with Words: Language Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*.
With my group of participants, I didn’t encounter a throng of English educators in a *Dead Poets Society* moment, raging against the machine of conservative Amish values in a pluralism-inducing educational intervention. I may have uncovered moments of such rebelliousness, but certainly not characters who desired this in all their teaching. Tension exists, albeit inconspicuously to a passerby; however, I was somewhat surprised by the kinds of compromises or lack of notice paid to practices which did seek to propel a fairly conservative Amish-inclusive agenda. I was pleased to find insight into how educators in these schooling spaces deal with these tensions.

An additional goal of this study is to better understand how these educators interpreted the significance of their own identity to their pupils. In *Colormute*, Mica Pollock’s study of how race is discussed and acted upon in a school, the author writes of how the district intentionally hired black teachers with the assumption that they would better connect to black students.\textsuperscript{150} I was curious as to whether such pairings by profile existed for teachers of Amish children. And if so, how would the educators sense that their own background had relevance to the child’s understanding of themselves? Further, I hoped to understand how a public school educator with a master’s degree considered themselves a role model for children who would end formal education after the eighth grade. In sum: how would Anabaptist educators feel an amplified connection to Anabaptist students? And like the example in *Colormute*, would these educators feel as

though aspects of their identity had been capitalized upon by administrators to “better reach” the students?

**Establishing Openness and Trust**

I aimed in previous sections to detail a confident understanding of the Anabaptist community in which an expression of “yieldedness” would lead my communication and presence in the school and local community. Though a gentle approach to conversation and introductions was important, beyond this, I knew I was raising some potentially disruptive questions and content with my participants. Questions about the appropriate role of religious teachings in public school, the interpretation of equity of opportunity between girls and boys, the importance of knowledge of science and sexual health – these are hot-button issues in most educational institutions in the United States but potentially more disruptive in a conservative community like the Creek Settlement. I was prepared to not only explore these difficult issues with participants, but to also be very clear about the uses of these data. I informed each participant that I aimed to not just have productive conversations, but to use this material for a doctoral dissertation. Besides one participant requesting that I not put in my study some personal information about a spouse, I did not find any hesitation from the participants about the use of these interviews for scholarship purposes.

In the second edition of her ethnography of middle and working class families, *Unequal Childhhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*, Annette Lareau writes about
returning to her studied communities ten years after the original research.\textsuperscript{151} Besides reaffirming many of her conclusions from the original study, one surprise to me as a reader was that some families were disappointed in the way the Lareau had portrayed them in the book. She had tried to represent the work in honesty and her version, whether “accurate” or not, damaged established relationships.\textsuperscript{152} And though I did not intend to purposefully make and then break participant and community relationships, I understand that in qualitative inquiry, one embarks on work that is embedded with real people and real social dynamics. Maxwell writes that research designs should be like “rubber bands,” they should bend, but not so much that they break.\textsuperscript{153} Before I began this study within a “high trust society,”\textsuperscript{154} I was curious as to whether I would be fully available to my participants. I believe that in making contacts and in conducting interviews, I was mostly successful. I have stayed in touch with my participants via short email notes of update but have yet to share any of my reflections which are found in this study. Though not promised to the participants, sharing some of the results of this work may be a positive step in maintaining a more partner-oriented relationship with the participants.

\textbf{Reflexivity / Know Thyself}

The field work scenarios I reference above from Merriam, Hurst and McConnell represent how researchers must exhibit their own kind of “yieldedness” in approaching

\textsuperscript{152} Lareau, 10.
\textsuperscript{154} Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, and Steven Nolt, 108.
their participants and community in which they are embedded. Researcher brazenness can lead to miscommunication, or worse: a loss of trust and access to the people. As Schram writes, an appropriate amount of reflexivity or “…self-questioning reminds the qualitative inquirer that making perspective and assumptions explicit serves to inform not undermine a study’s credibility.”155 This questioning of one’s motives and actions does not just occur at the onset of the study, but rather throughout, making room for regular assessment as to how one’s presence in the situation may be affecting the environment and data. Hatch writes:

Being reflexive places qualitative researchers in a distinctly different position than that of the ‘objective scientist’ usually present in more traditional research activities. The capacities to be reflexive, to keep track of one’s influence on a setting, to bracket one’s biases, and to monitor one’s emotional responses are the same capacities that allow researchers to get close enough to human action to understand what is going on.156

In his book on religious schools and democracy For Goodness Sake, Walter Feinberg offers an example of keeping “track of one’s influence on a setting,” and the subsequent reflection he wrote about regarding how his religion was affecting the space and community he was researching.157 He finds that his presence, as the only Jew in a classroom of Christians, made the teacher change the tone of the lesson regarding early Jews and Christians.158 As an example of understanding one’s influence in a setting while collecting data with the Amish, Hurst and McConnell mention their “walking a tightrope” between two identities: “Walking the tightrope between being outside analysts

155 Ibid., 9.
156 Hatch, 10. In this section, Hatch is referencing the work of Lincoln & Guba, and Walsh, Tobin, & Graue.
158 Ibid., 157-160.
and participant observers, as outsiders inside, we have tried to view Amish culture through Amish eyes while trying to maintain somewhat of an objective stance.”

As mentioned earlier with Thomas Schram’s example of the researcher not always being in control of the role they end up serving, another aspect of preparedness in qualitative inquiry is the general anticipation of attention. Hurst and McConnell had a difficult time landing the interview with Swartzentruber church leaders, but that wasn’t because they were unknown; they were *known strangers* or outsiders. As outsiders, or guests, it may be rather difficult to assume that one will hide in a chair in the corner to observe the life of the group. And even though the attention may be unwanted by the inquirer, it is all a part of embedding oneself in the community. Adkins writes that it was a struggle for her to accept the attention paid to her by Amish folks regarding her history and family background:

> Even though I understand that, as Shirley Brice Heath and Brian V. Street say, 'the ethnographer is the ultimate instrument of fieldwork,' my training in ethical research made me initially uncomfortable with all this attention on me and my life. But [Andrea] Fishman argues that familiarity creates a sense of authority and trustworthiness in the Amish community, and familiarity is an especially important source of credibility, second only to the Bible. Before I entered the field, I paid heed to these pieces of advice in knowing that I was stepping into a realm as an “outsider inside.”

Further, I hoped to gather advice that would not only help in the data collection, but also provide ideas for me to be more reflexive during the research. In the former category, I also knew that the timing of my interviews was important, as I hoped to catch the participants at a time of day when they

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159 Hurst and McConnell, xii.
160 Schram, 157.
161 Adkins, 46.
162 Hurst and McConnell, xii.
were not rushed nor distracted. David McConnell speaks of afterschool chats with teachers being “goldmines” for data.\(^{163}\) I found this to also be true for the classroom teachers, though I did conduct some interviews before the school day, or on days off at cafes and restaurants. For the school administrators, I interviewed them in their offices during different times of day which suited their schedules.

For the latter goal in providing space for reflexivity, I followed the advice I had seen in numerous qualitative research texts and journaled throughout the data collection period. During interviews, I would make short side notes observing my own behavior and emotion responses; following the interviews, I would enter these notes on a separate journal document. I considered these observations as points of reflection on which I would write additional questions about myself and how my response to the interviews was affecting the data collection and the interpretation of the participants’ responses. This was a fruitful exercise in that I believe the self-reflection better prepared me to re-enter the field with confidence, especially with an awareness of “bracketing my biases.”\(^{164}\)

**Considerations for Success in the Research Process**

For this study to be successful, I knew I needed to build trust in the community (e.g. school, district, town) and rapport with participants.\(^{165}\) I anticipated that such rapport would not manifest automatically and given that my contacts in the community were limited, I depended on *gatekeepers* in the community. King and Horrocks describe

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\(^{163}\) D. McConnell, personal conversation, May 10, 2014.

\(^{164}\) Hatch, 10.

\(^{165}\) Ibid., 34.
gatekeepers as those who have “…the authority to grant or deny permission to access potential participants and/or the ability to facilitate such access.”\textsuperscript{166} This approach was successful. By first contacting superintendents, principals, and veteran teachers, I was able to gather a suggested list of participants quite easily. This list included 15 people, mostly teachers, whom I was advised to contact regarding participation in the study. While all the administrators were responsive, I did find that some teachers were not. From the list of 15, four teachers never replied to my email inquiries. Before the study began, I was anxious that some administrative gatekeepers would overtly or passively deny access to participants. This also did not happen, though after an initial meeting with one administrator, he requested that I not begin my contact of participants in the district until the school board read the recruitment letter describing my study.\textsuperscript{167} After one month, the administrator gave me the green light with no reservations. Besides some delay in replying to my email introductions, I did not encounter any issues gathering interest in meeting me to learn more about the study. Though the interviews commenced without dispute, I was still concerned that if I didn’t treat my participants kindly and with courtesy, I could lose not just the acceptance of one, but perhaps others in the school and district. As Sharan Merriam writes in her reflections on research within a close-knit community, if distrust develops in a small community, it could spread, since "everyone knows everyone else's business."\textsuperscript{168} I believe I had few obstacles because I pursued openness and transparency in communication with participants and worked through

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 31.
\textsuperscript{167} See Appendix A
\textsuperscript{168} Sharan B. Merriam and Assoc., \textit{Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis}, 1st edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 58.
gatekeepers to allow potential participants to comfortably understand the purpose and scope of the research. J. Amos Hatch writes that it is imperative for researchers to fully disclose the research interests to participants: "Being sensitive to their [participants'] potential vulnerability is essential." In addition to Hatch’s advice, I considered my developing relationships with participants according to what Rubin and Rubin describe in their writing about the qualitative interviewing approach to research, where one should know that the intent is not just learning a topic but also learning what’s important to those with whom you partner.

In remaining chapters of this study, I present the themes that emerged from my research. The chapters on “Accommodation” and “Trust” explore the actions which keep the keel even in the Willow Run and Crestview districts. In “Tension” and “Open and Closed Futures,” I introduce the dilemmas that bubble under (and at times, over) the surface of the relationship between Amish families and the educators/districts. To start the discussion of retaining Amish students in the schools, it is important understand the accommodations made by teachers and district officials to placate the interests of Amish families.

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170 Rubin & Rubin, 15
Chapter 4: Accommodation

Curtis: And I kind of think it’s one of, I don’t wanta say we use it as a bartering tool but one could almost say well, you do that to keep them in your schools because they know you’re offering that. They like that. That’s what they want. And kinda build it that direction… ‘Do you like PE? Maybe you don’t. We won’t offer it to you.’ I’m not sure what [the state Department of Education] is gonna say about that but…

Earlier in this study I referenced the period in American history when the Amish were forced out of local one-room school houses and into consolidated districts. I often associate this tumultuous time with a 1965 photograph of Amish children running into an Iowa cornfield to escape the wrangling of law enforcement.171 The argument over what types of school and to what grade children must attend came to a head with the ruling of the U.S. Supreme Court in Wisconsin v. Yoder (1972) when, in a unanimous decision, the Court held that an individual’s interests in the free exercise of religion superseded the State’s desire to compel children to attend high school.172

In some Amish settlements across the United States and Canada, children attend only parochial, one-room schoolhouses.173 In the Creek Settlement, Amish parochial schools abound, but it is also common for Amish children to attend the local public schools. With multiple options there is competition, and the public schools and districts actively vie for the enrollment of Amish children. With a high percentage of Amish living in the district boundaries, some districts in the Creek Settlement are providing significant accommodations to attract and retain children in the schools. The term

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171 This photo and the reaction to it publication were revisited by USA Today on the 50th anniversary of the photograph’s publication in the Des Moines Register. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/05/12/amish-lost-schools-iowa/27204767/
173 Dewalt, 43.
accommodation in the formal education setting is often associated with teaching those with special needs. From my interviews, I ascertained that the public schools in the Creek Settlement pay significant attention to the needs of this population; however, here I use the term accommodation in the general sense of providing an adjustment or variation for a defined group. In this case, recipients of these accommodations are not just children in the classroom, but the families, the local bishops of Amish churches, and advisory boards operated by community members.

Through interviews with my study’s participants, a clear theme emerged about these accommodations – with some actions decades old and other accommodations regularly amended or changed as internal and external forces transformed. For children and families, I saw the districts and schools providing three kinds of accommodations: structural, language, and curricular. In addition to these, I took notice of the adjustments made to placate external audiences, or those in the community who were not families or students, such as local church bishops, business owners, and community member advisory boards.

The participants in this study were all to some degree generating, negotiating, and delivering accommodations to Amish children and families. In hearing how they considered taking care of these families, I was most struck by the perspectives of Curtis, an administrator in the Willow Run School District, a district with some elementary schools made up entirely of Amish students. Though he was born, raised, and educated in the community, he demonstrated a strong self-awareness about his work and the peculiarities of the district. He spoke knowingly about the district-wide decisions that
were uniquely designed to target Anabaptist and Amish families; when talking about tradition or a district decision, at times he laughed while prefacing his point with phrases such as: “it might seem insane,” or “and others may think this illegal….” Curtis made it clear that a great number of decisions in the district centered on one evident goal: to get the children living in the district enrolled and educated in their local public school.

Curtis: You know…the way I always present it to (the state Department of Education), is my goal first and foremost is to keep as many of those Amish kids in formal education with us as I possibly can. Because it’s best for our community in the long haul.

In describing what is “best” for the community, Curtis spoke of the positive impact of public schooling as it ensured a certain level of quality and preparedness which he did not expect to find in the parochial schools. He saw attendance in the public schools as good for the children, but also necessary for the preservation of the district. For district staff to stay employed, and for the schools to remain open, they needed children in the seats.

Curtis: Interestingly, I think for the most part…I think the staff gets the fact that okay, a better part of our district is made up of Amish students so we really need, in order to maintain employment, we need to work with that population and make certain that what we’re doing doesn’t cause them to do a mass exit and I think that’s kinda how everyone’s tied together. Because it’s, it’s the common good of the whole district.

Curtis mentioned a neighboring school district also in the Creek Settlement that did not work as his district had to retain its Amish population in recent decades, and those Amish children left for parochial, or private, schools.

Curtis: Ashfield [School District] hardly has any Amish left in their district. When I went to school, probably about 30% of your population was Amish. There’s hardly any [now]. They’ve all gone parochial. Over the years, Ashfield’s another interesting district. I won’t say they chase the Amish off but, you know, like hopefully in chatting with me, you’ve seen some of the adaptations we make.
Though there are Amish children enrolled in the Willow Run District schools, keeping enrollment high was difficult. Many of the buildings report small enrollments. During the course of this study, it was announced that one of the elementary school buildings in the Willow Run School District was merging with a second. Maneuvers such as merging, closing, and opening schools anew to adjust to changing enrollments and aging infrastructure may be common for school districts. But with Willow Run’s ongoing effort to retain families in a schooling experience that was familiar, Curtis expressed to me the importance of keeping schools in their district as small and local as possible.

Curtis: I don’t think we’ll ever see the day that we have, here’s the elementary building and here’s the high school building [showing by hands buildings next to one another]. As a whole, Amish, English all inclusive, out here, want a small community school. Like that’s, so there’s some things that we can do to combine. So, like for example, Cardinal, Hawking and Brush, you could almost count them as one building in three distinct locations. Because they’re all the same families. Sibling wise. So, I think the Cardinal kids going to Hawking would not be that big of a deal to the families because in most cases, the parents are probably saying, good, my kids are only the enrollments are small at these schools, there is still a great interest in providing a small school, even family-like experience in the school. To an outsider, an English person in two buildings instead of three. And kinda working through that way. So, I think there may be some tweaks we can make on those lines but as far as a bottom up, follow the state movement to big large campus, everything kinda together, I don’t think that’ll ever go. I do see if we continue down the path we’ve had with levies and so forth, that that, I mean if they expect us to get another 30 years out of a… levy was passed in ’92. I think they may be forced with some tough decisions as far as, okay, I mean, let’s face it. Running all these small schools, it’s exorbitantly expensive…

174 “Search for Public Schools.” National Center for Educational Statistics, accessed 9 April 2018, website withheld to ensure anonymity of school district. The elementary schools in the Willow Run School District have enrollments of 319, 242, 185, 159, 117, 92, 58, and 45 students.
Amish church congregations in the Creek Settlement aim to keep their members connected by living in proximity. To an Amish family rooted in a small community in which all members are a short walk or buggy and bike ride away, a school larger than one-room may seem like a lot. An “Amish” public school\(^{175}\) in Willow Run may only have 100 children enrolled. As Curtis explained, though, Amish families with children attending the larger schools were demonstrating interest in their children increasing interaction with English children. It is a trade-off, or both “good and bad” as Curtis described:

Curtis: [Some Amish families seek]…more connection with the English kids, just kinda working their way through. The other thing and this is kind of interesting, too, and it works both ways. It’s good and it’s bad. This [Newton Elementary] is our largest elementary, okay, so I know most people will drive by and they think that’s nothing compared to….

Ryan: a big city

Curtis: Exactly. But for Amish families, that is a huge school. That is so big. And it kinda puts the kids in a totally different atmosphere. So, the thought is expose them to as many things as you can and kinda keep it running. Sometimes, it’s a little bit overwhelming to the kids and we’ve had kids drop out because they just can’t handle the…the size of the building, the, you know

Ryan: How many kids total, there?

Curtis: Total in this building, there’s like 3, 360, 350, somewhere in there, and if you go back to their home buildings, probably a large building for them is like 100 kids.

Curtis said it is very difficult to keep the small (mostly Amish) public schools operational. As an administrator, he said it was a drain on resources to operate numerous

\(^{175}\) Throughout this study, I will use the term “Amish” public school and “English” public school, as my participants did. This signifies a school whose population is a majority Amish or English (non-Amish).
small schools, though the families may be more comfortable in such a localized community.

Curtis: [In one school] there’s a class up there of seven kids.

Ryan: A split class? ¹⁷⁶

Curtis: There’s one grade level up there that has two kids in it. That’s it…Yeah, so from a public point of view, it’s kinda like… I think maybe we should reorganize a little bit, you know. Take the neighboring school and maybe combine those two and then we have an entire building that has like 43 kids in it.

The size of the school is only one piece of the structural accommodations for students in a building. Additionally, the district has worked at keeping an Amish or English majority or identity at the different elementary schools. However, the school jurisdiction lines do not cut evenly between Amish and English communities, as both groups reside with even distribution throughout the district. Thus, the district busses children to an appropriate English or Amish school, even if it is not the closest. Curtis said that he knew this might seem to be “illegal,” but was part of the strides they took to ensure comfort and security at the local schools.

Curtis: Yes, we bus English kids past Amish buildings and vice versa to keep them segregated out and I know that sounds horrible but as a district, in order for us to maintain those kids in our school system, we have to.

To recruit Amish families to consider the public schools in the first place, Willow Run district offered an early reading program for families with pre-school aged children. Hosted at Newton, one of the largest elementary schools, families brought in their three-

¹⁷⁶ In this study, the term “split class” refers to classrooms that have more than one grade. Often this is one teacher teaching two grades.

In assigning children to a school, family requests were considered, but the district ultimately required a child to attend a specific school. To understand how to place a child, the district conducted a kindergarten readiness assessment in the first weeks of kindergarten to determine their English language ability. If a child had limited English language ability, and mostly spoke in Pennsylvania Dutch, they would then be placed in the Kindergarten Readiness Program housed at one of the elementary schools in district.

Curtis: If a kid comes to kindergarten registration, for example, and I have a couple of these on the roster this year, refuse to participate, no English, could not talk, etc., those kids are almost an automatic on the list.

Ryan: Would they even, but the program doesn’t start until when?

Curtis: Program doesn’t start, we try to have it up and running by the end of September, maybe the last week of September is when it really kicks off and gets going. It gives us the opportunity to, okay, we have their registration info. Let’s start the class. Let’s see how they operate socially. Let’s see how they operate academically, verbal skills, all those pieces and then from there, we recommend. So it’s probably about a four week period of time where we’re sifting and just trying to determine.

Ryan: Wow. So I wonder, for some of these, do you surmise that it’s the kids that are perhaps showing up and would be good to qualify for that, that it’s mostly language or you think it’s also just kindergarten skills, kinda kindergarten readiness?

Curtis: For this particular program, I would say we have a higher percentage of kids struggling with English.

Though all students retained a “home” school, they attended the Readiness Program until they were at an appropriate level of English proficiency. Once at that level, they returned to their home schools. Though all schools used the same curriculum, the Amish and
English elementary schools’ kindergarten programs did not meet the same length of time. Curtis said that to appease the Amish families’ interest in not immersing the children too deeply into school, the Amish elementary school kindergarten met every other day of the week, and every other Friday. In the English buildings, they had all day kindergarten, five days a week. This was just another example of the structural accommodations for the youngest children through school placement and length of school day. There are structural accommodations made for each grade, all the way up to an Amish student’s final days in school as an eighth grader.

**Structural Accommodations – The 7/8 Program**

Because of low enrollment in some the elementary schools, certain classes were run as “split” classrooms, where there were both 2nd and 3rd grades together with one teacher. One reason to split a classroom was due to low enrollments in two successive grade levels. However, another example of a split classroom option was introduced to retain Amish children in the schools, and that is of the splitting of the 7th and 8th grade classroom in an elementary school. The local districts traditionally housed kindergarten through the 6th grade in the elementary schools and, according to the administrators I interviewed, it has been unproblematic to keep the local Amish children enrolled. But with the only option after 6th grade being the sole district middle school, a site that was assumed to be too mainstream and full of English temptations, 177 Amish families were leaving in droves to place their children in parochial schools for grades 7 and 8. To

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177 This was told to me by participants Jean and Jeff.
combat this loss of enrollment, districts in the 1990s introduced a new 7/8 classroom in their predominantly Amish elementary schools, catering specifically to Amish children. These models first started in the Crestview School District and were then adopted by number of other elementary schools in Creek Settlement. In one district alone, three of the Amish elementary schools had a 7/8 program. Of the teachers and administrators I spoke with regarding this model, none of them could recall an English child attending this 7/8 classroom option; it only attracted Amish children, even if being considered Amish was at times an unclear designation. This was the case because of the significant diversity one found among the Anabaptist churches and denominations in the Creek Settlement. Some “Mennonite” denominations were thought to be more conservative than some more liberal “Amish” denominations. Consider the “Beachy Amish” – they drive cars, wear store-bought clothing, can have internet in their homes, and don’t adhere to usage of Pennsylvania Dutch. Curtis talked about this group pushing the boundaries of being included in a way that made it difficult for the district.

Curtis: Now, within [all of the 7/8 programs in the district], we also have, they’re called Beachy Amish and that particular group, it gets kinda sticky for the district because they’re just English enough that they’re not really Amish but yet and so oftentimes, we have some of those kids that try to transfer out of these buildings and go to [an Amish elementary] for 7th and 8th and then claim we’re Amish and they’re done. Which doesn’t totally gel because they’re not really Amish. I mean, they are but they’re not.

Jean, the longtime building principal in both Crestview and Willow Run districts spoke of the 7/8 option being good for the “more liberal” Amish families who wanted their kids to

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178 Citation removed to anonymize names and locations.
179 Hurst and McConnell, 32.
“just get their diplomas,” as in, just finish the 8th grade and be done with school. Having an option to keep these kids in the school with which they were familiar was a benefit to these families. Additionally, completing 8th grade in these programs began to embody the finality that came with completing high school.

Jeff: One year, a girl comes up and asks if they could take their class's bake sale money and use it towards a graduation from 8th grade. They wanted to buy their own caps and gowns. And they did it! For years…At the Awards Ceremony, they get framed certificates of 8th grade completion, there is music, a parade in, photos, tears.

**Language Accommodations – Speaking English**

In these two districts, English and Amish children were often segregated via bussing and different middle grades experiences. These efforts to keep children separate became even more pronounced if the child was taking advantage of English Language Learning (ELL) resources. On the registration forms, if the family wrote that the child had a primary language other than English on the registration form, then the child automatically qualified for ELL assistance. For each child who qualified, the district received significant Title III funding from the federal and state departments of education. These dollars went far in offering language assistance to children in the district, and Curtis saw this as bread and butter money due to their significant numbers of children who primarily spoke Pennsylvania Dutch at home.180

Curtis: In your little educational circles, you’re smart enough to figure out, okay, you’re the big goose this year because you’ve got, you know, this population. Years and years ago, we were the big ones for it. Because basically, when it originally started, all Amish kids counted as ESL.

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180 Census Reporter, accessed January 5, 2018, https://censusreporter.org/profiles. According to recent census records, the Willow Run and Crestview School Districts respectively had 71% and 47.5% of families who spoke a language other than English in the home.
The enrollment form identification was not always an accurate measure, for some families who spoke Pennsylvania Dutch at home were also thoroughly immersed in English culture and language, and the child would not necessarily need the ELL assistance. Nonetheless, the money would flow from the state. And though there was money to hire teachers, the resources didn’t always match. Mary spoke of the mandate according to English Language Learning guidelines, one being that each child was to be issued a dictionary in their home language. For the two Ukrainian children she had as the school, it was easy to supply a dictionary for their English language exploration. But for the hundreds of children who had also been identified as ELL because they spoke Pennsylvania Dutch at home, there was no such resource. At the time of our interview, the schools were not provided age appropriate Pennsylvania Dutch / English dictionaries for children because such a resource did not exist.

Though English was the language of instruction in the schools, Pennsylvania Dutch did not stop at the school steps. Fifth grade teacher Jeff Ashby spoke of the issue with his upper elementary and middle grade students speaking Pennsylvania Dutch to one another. He said he knew the families wanted their children to improve English proficiency, especially the reduction of an Amish accent. He said he had to regularly ask some children to not speak Pennsylvania Dutch to one another, and that the push to master English was not always supported at home.

Jeff: And I was frustrated one day. I was like, “I don’t understand. I am on you guys, all the time, I don’t understand. You guys speak English perfectly. It’s not like when I speak with you, you are fighting to find the words, you are fluently speaking English with me.” I said, “Don’t you, you guys speak English at home, why don’t you…” “Nah, we don’t speak English at home.” And that was kind of an
eye-opening experience for me, the English button turns on and off when they get to school. All of the conversations they have at home and with their parents, is NOT in English. And so, you know, I started, and that’s part of becoming culturally relevant is understanding that. And that took a while. And so one of the things I learned, and over time, especially once the trust has been built up, if I don’t know, I ask.

When I first learned about language use and accommodation in these schools, I wasn’t too surprised. It made sense to me that the district would aim to benefit from available government support, while genuinely aiming to build English language mastery. I was surprised by the degree to which qualifying for such monies made educating Amish kids a cash cow. Curtis spoke of the dangers of losing federal Title III monies as the standards for qualification changed, and his district wouldn’t have enough in the typical budget to support these programs. He said that if they lost some of their Kindergarten Readiness or ELL support programs “there would be a riot” and “we would have war on our hands,” referencing the potential displeasure that would surface with the Amish families in the district.

**Language Accommodations – Speaking German**

I thought that since there were so many children who spoke Pennsylvania Dutch at home, there would be some Pennsylvania Dutch used in the classroom to celebrate or more easily connect the children’s home experience with the school. This was not the case. From my participants who knew Pennsylvania Dutch (Roy, Jean, Barbara), they said they used the language to communicate more directly with families and to potentially catch kids in side-conversations. I did not hear of any formal use of Pennsylvania Dutch in the curriculum. I was told that this was because the educators were teaching in and assessing learning in English, and that Amish families were
intentionally choosing the public schools for children to master English. What I did discover, to my surprise, was the teaching of German in all the Amish elementary schools.

In grades 5-8 in the Amish elementary schools of the Willow Run District, students received German language instruction of up to 45 minutes a week. At first hearing, I thought it was a tremendous inclusion in the curriculum, having assumed that the purpose was for the study of foreign language and culture, a primer for future language exploration. After some examination, I learned that the offering of German in the schools was established as an accommodation for Amish children. It’s what Curtis, the district administrator, called another “give and take” between the Amish community and the school district.

Curtis: German’s been offered for quite a while. Historically, it was 7th and 8th [grades]. The problem is, and I know this is kind of, it could be viewed as that’s their [the Amish families’] problem, they need to take care of it, but a lot of the kids can’t read the true German Bible and so what’s happening within their church is okay, this is going to become very, very problematic down the road because we’re going to have a whole population, none of them can read out of the German Bible. What are we gonna do? So a little bit of a give and take was put into play because they do not accept phys ed services at all. They don’t want it. Keep it out of our schools.

Ryan: …that is the same question I’ve wondered about German, why…for religious purposes? They’re not training the kids to go work at Luk [a local German-owned manufacturer], you know? That’s not, that’s not like for a skill base. The skill is very specific so I’m wondering….

Curtis: Right, right. The best answer I can give you is that it probably goes back to the 1950-ish mentality of we’re a small community. We all believe in this. Our churches are talking to each other. So yeah, ‘I think it’s a great idea that our church goes in and does whatever.’ And I think it’s just, it’s always kinda been that but I don’t know, you kinda brought to light something I hadn’t thought a whole lot about and that is the, just the desire to spread that all of a sudden and why is that?
Curtis also mentioned the usefulness of German competency when the children put on the Christmas program, the annual performance hosted by each school for families and community members. He said that “some songs and some recitation” were in German, and that it helped the attendees to hear Christmas hymns or readings in the language of their Bible. He said it allowed for “access to a mass amount of people.” I asked Curtis about the English elementary and middle schools and whether he had ever been asked to provide German in those schools. “Nope,” was his answer.

Curtis: We will hear on occasion ‘the parochial schools do a lot more with like Bible memory.’ Or a lot more with German and music, just some things like that. Which I’ll be brutally honest, we do accommodate them. In the Amish buildings, grades 5 through 8 receive 40, about 45 minutes worth of German instruction a week. So that’s something we add.

Staffing the position of a German teacher was also a job outsourced to the community. Originally, it was the bishops from the local churches who would go into the schools and teach the German classes. It then became the job of the parent and community member Advisory Board of each school to find a teacher. Roy, one of the study participants, was one of those people sought out by the Advisory Board to work in the school. At first, he was hired to fill a role as an Amish male “presence” in the school as hall monitor and classroom aide. He then transitioned to teaching German, music, and running the library at Burton Elementary School. The person in this position didn’t have to be a licensed teacher, and Curtis favors the arrangement, as it relieves the district from having to staff the three positions across the district.

181 Though Pennsylvania Dutch language has its roots in German language, I was told by three participants that pronunciation is different enough to make it difficult for children to comprehend and read “high” German without instruction and study.
Curtis: So it gives them [the Advisory Board] a little bit of ownership and it doesn’t bother us because honestly, I don’t know who’s going to teach German. Who would do a good job with that? I don’t know. Here’s what I do know, you don’t want me doing it…The other thing that’s tricky about that is it’s hard to find an Amish person that’s willing to come in and teach it. And I’m trying to think. We went through two or three German teachers when I was principal down there [one of the elementary schools] and it finally got to the point, it was impossible for me to find someone so what I did is I gave it to the advisory board. And I just said you’ve got to find somebody to do this because it’s, I’m beating down doors and everyone’s looking at me like, I’m not coming over there to do that. Are you kidding me? Well, do you like…Well, absolutely, I want my kids to have that program. Well,

Ryan: Is it always an Amish teacher? It can’t be an English person teaching German? Because it’s gotta be kinda biblically based or what?

C: Originally, it had to be the bishop of the church, that’s how it started. Now over…

R: Why would it have to be… why would it have to be in the school? I don’t get it.

Curtis: I think just simply from the avenue that at some point in time, it was a program that we said, okay, we’ll do this.

R: Yeah. And it’s not like you’re getting certified German teachers, right? These gotta be people who come in kinda ad hoc basis and teach.

C: The real shocker here a couple years ago, our regular German teacher was ill and he had to be off for the year and we had to fill that with a 19 year old Amish girl. And that was kind of interesting because it’s always a male position. At least down there.

R: Did she have her GED?

C: No.

R: That’s amazing. Is she a teacher?

C: But I’ll tell you what. There was a lot of concern because they thought, oh, I don’t know how the boys are gonna react to her. All this and I just kept saying, you know, it kind of is what it is. We need to fill it and if this is important, she’s the one doing it and if you don’t want her, it’s gonna be me and they’re gonna learn nothing because I don’t get it. So she came in and I’ll tell you, she did a fantastic job
Curricular Accommodations – Keep it Simple

In addition to German language as an offering, there were other provisions in the overall curricular experience that appear to be designed to placate the interests of Amish families. According to my participants, the essential components of a satisfactory schooling experience included: a Christmas program, no homework, no physical education, no or minimal standardized testing, no contradictions to religious teachings, a demonstrated importance of family over school obligations, and a basic and foundational curriculum. Considering the curriculum, there was a marked acknowledgement from the participants that they were delivering the nuts-and-bolts. Each of the participants talked about teaching and learning with great fondness. I relished the stories they told about how schooling had an impact on their lives, and it was evident that these educators believed in the power of formal education to transcend ordinary thinking and experience. However, I was told by nearly every participant that this was not the expectation of most Amish families. The Amish families wanted school to be straight-forward and without embellishment: reading, ‘riting, ‘rithmetic.

Curtis: I mean, the goal, I would think, if you ask any Amish parent the goal of their particular school, it’s give them the basics. Just if it needs to be the 50,000 foot view, then so be it. You know, as to where in some of your other buildings, I think we’re still locked into, okay, that looks like that could be a physician over there. We need to hit this.

Traditionally, in Amish parochial schools there is also a basics approach to the schooling experience, and sometimes with curricular material that is specifically made for Amish

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182 Dewalt, 71.
I heard from participants that the school was expected to help the child improve in basic concepts, to help them complete their federal and state requirements via the government, but not to become a place where children explore complex ideas or develop critical thinking.

**Curricular Accommodations – Physical Education**

One class that is universally seen as extraneous is physical education. In buildings where there is a significant English population, they still hold a “gym” class. During one of my interviews at Myers Elementary School on a frigid February day, a class of students was blasting pop music while running laps around the gymnasium. In the Amish schools, there is no physical education class. Instead, the elementary children have extra recess (and German), and have a track tournament one day in the spring at the high school. With the middle grades of the Amish elementary schools in the Willow Run School District, the kids play softball. The Amish are known to avoid competition and highly competitive sports, though baseball and softball are the exceptions in the Creek Settlement. In this area, adults compete in local leagues and are known to be very good, as Jeff could attest:

Jeff: The Amish will get an Amish team together and they’ll play against the English teams. They kill them. I had a guy that is a good, great softball player said,

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183 Pathway Publishers is a publishing house in Ontario, Canada which caters to Amish and Mennonite reading interests. According to the publisher’s website: “Many Amish and Mennonite church schools, as well as homeschool families, use Pathway’s popular Pathway Readers series, which span from preschool children through the eighth grade. Pathway also publishes numerous juvenile and adult fiction titles, as well as books on marriage, family life, and Amish beliefs and way of life.” “Pathway Publishers,” Accessed 9 April 2018, [http://pathway-publishers.com/](http://pathway-publishers.com/).

184 Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, and Steven Nolt write: “It is rare for Amish people of any sort to attend professional sporting events...When it comes to playing sports, volleyball is the game of choice for all but the most conservative Amish groups. Most view it as the perfect form of Amish athletics: it involves teamwork, cooperation, and a sizable number of players; both men and women can play with little training or expensive equipment,” 111.
he just kept shaking his head. I said, ‘What?’ He goes, ‘I had a tournament again this weekend.’ He says this every week. ‘Damn Amish, we cannot beat them.’

In the middle grades of 5 – 8, children in the Amish buildings played softball against each other in a spring tournament across several Fridays, leading up a championship playoff. According to Curtis, that counted as their physical education. I was told that both boys and girls played hard with great seriousness. I saw them playing when I visited Barbara at Burton Elementary School. She was at the end of the hall inside the glass door holding a bat, looking out at the kids on the diamond. It was cold outside, but the kids were still at it. There were no uniforms, though everyone had their own glove. The children were playing in the usual clothes that they wear, traditional Amish clothes, except for one kid. This boy was decked out in the latest Under Armour sports shirt and pants. His hair was cut short, not like the Amish boys. I learned later from Barbara that his family recently left the Amish church. He was the only non-Amish kid in the class. He stood out.

I learned from Mary and Jeff that there were some families who had “jumped the fence”\(^\text{185}\) or left the Amish church for a Mennonite congregation or other church so that their child could play organized sports through school. If they stayed Amish, the opportunity for the children to play organized sports was limited to softball games through summer leagues.

Jeff: And you’ll say to yourself, at least I do, look at all the amazing Amish athletes that will never play. Like Crestview [high school] sports are good, or bad, whatever, depending upon the year and you say to yourself, how good could they be if the Amish could’ve stayed in school and played.

\(^{185}\) This term was used with trepidation by a few participants. It is seen as slightly derogatory, but was nonetheless a common term to describe the practice of leaving the Amish church.
Ryan: Yeah. So do you have, have you had kids come up to you and say like, hey, Mr. Ashby… I’d love to play. I mean, I’m sure they’re playing at recess, aren’t they?

J: Well, yeah.

R: They’re in 6th grade and 5th?

J: You should see the Amish kids play softball.

R: Right. Well, there is, doesn’t softball still kinda retain…

Jeff: Yeah, they have Amish teams and stuff. But they’ll never play for Crestview. And the girl softball players are unbelievably good. The boys, baseball players are unbelievably good.

The inclusion of some sort of physical education via softball may be a deviation from “the basics” for some families, but according to these participants, there was little argument. Again, these children represented some progressive Amish families, not the conservative groups who would only send their children to parochial schools. For me, the permitted play of sports but not a physical education class exemplified how some concepts were sometimes difficult to categorize. For the umpteenth time, I found myself unsuccessfully trying to draw a clear line between what was acceptable and what was not. Why was it acceptable to teach German for Bible reading inside the school, sometimes by local bishops, and not teach physical education in the schools where there are trained professionals whose field is child health and wellness? I will explore this more in a subsequent chapter of this study.
Curricular Accommodations – No Homework, Plenty of Vacation

When I asked Curtis about the purpose of German in the schools, he said, “it’s just the unspoken agreement” and shrugged it off. He knew it was an unusual arrangement, but it was “just the way it was.” However, in the category of voiced disagreement, teachers heard plenty of feedback about homework and vacation. Families expected there to be little homework and no qualms about children liberally missing school days. I sensed frustration from participants in that when families would leave for weeks or a month at a time to travel, it diminished the importance of school. From some, I sensed more of a disappointment in the decision-making of the parents than perceived detriment to the education of the children. Time for family cohesion trumped school work.

Jeff: …for these families, school is important. Buumuut, it is ¼ of their lives. They have other important aspects of their lives. When they are HERE, in school, they work. But, outside of school, no homework, family vacations, other family orientation takes precedent.

As Jeff described, these participants were more resigned to the understanding that children would disappear for lengths of time, even if they thought it undermined the child’s progress in school. They shook their heads but didn’t talk about convincing families to put a higher priority on school attendance. However, there were times when a child had too many absences due to vacations, and both Jean and Mary spoke of their duties as principals to notify families that a child was approaching a violation of district and state policies. The mention of truancy officers usually settled the families’ arguments, and they both said that they did not have to report many families. According
to Mary, the family pushed the limit in terms of acceptable excused absences, and the teachers adjusted.

Regarding homework, there was constant and regular feedback from families. Curtis said that if there were no Christmas program or an increase in homework, the district would surely lose Amish students. He read to me one of the responses from the end-of-year surveys that families complete; he said it was a classic example of what they hear if homework finds its way home with children:

    Curtis: …okay, this will give you a little sampling. It’s not the exact one. ‘Every time,’ and this is exactly as they entered it [on the survey], ‘every time we fill our survey, we have complained about too much homework. Nothing much has changed. Our son begs to go to parochial school just so he doesn’t have homework.’

Curricular Accommodations - The Land Where the Dinosaurs Did Not Roam

    The accommodations provided by reducing or removing homework and ensuring a Christmas program did not surprise me. I have witnessed multiple public school winter/holiday concerts which had both secular and religious songs and performance. It was the following accommodation that seemed to become much more actively precarious than the others: the censoring of book and curricular material. In Willow Run, they have for years removed subject material from textbooks that Amish families may find objectionable or contradictory to their faith. According to Curtis, this is especially true of science.

    Curtis: Let’s say in the new science series, I know that Chapter 7 is objectionable. And maybe not every point in Chapter 7 is but the vast majority of it is, so Amish teachers [teachers of Amish children], instead of doing Chapter 7

\[186\] Here, Curtis is using “Chapter 7” as an example of a potentially controversial subject, not as a real chapter in a real textbook.
which maybe is prehistoric something, we’re gonna go this route. You’ll still do prehistoric things but we’re gonna kinda create our own little prehistoric unit. And in the kids’ books, chapter seven is removed. It’s just not even there.

Ryan: But then I’m picturing actual books. You’re saying the chapters have to be physically removed?

C: Yes. In the, the way the science is set up right now, the kids get a consumable book every year, so in the summer, my office goes through. Prior to that, when we had the hard bound, I would go through and razor blade stuff out.

R: You and a team of people?

C: Typically, there’s about four of us that go around as the books come in and we work to get those pages removed.

At another interview time, Curtis listed the kinds of subjects that would preferably be entirely absent from the curriculum:

Curtis: …they [Amish families] don’t want to see anything with snakes, dinosaurs, dating of the earth, all those pieces so literally, every summer, I go through, because science books are all consumable, and I remove all those pages.

I asked Curtis if he ever received any backlash from teachers who thought that it was inappropriate or unfair to avoid some lessons in science classes.

Curtis: Yeah, I’m not particularly aware of anything. I mean, some science standards in that direction and I think I mentioned last time that we take books or pages out of books and so if there’s anything in… I was thinking, 7th and 8th grade, it actually came up this week, mitosis, meiosis, some of those things, we were chatting a little bit because the teacher felt that the kids were going to see questions like that on their AIR assessments [the annual standardized test]. ‘How should I handle that?’ and it’s a first year teacher. In an Amish building. I said, ‘you can’t handle that. Like you just, you’ve gotta let it go.’ It’s one of those things. What if they ask… I understand, hey, they can put 10 questions on, our kids unfortunately are gonna miss those. Just, that’s kind of the way it goes.

I asked Curtis if this stance was fair to the teacher. If the children missed questions on the annual standardized tests, which in this state are now the American Institute of Research (AIR) assessments, it could have direct consequence on the teacher’s evaluation.
on efficacy. He said that he has had those conversations with teachers, and they “work it out as it comes up.” He said, “It’s a lot easier than totally making a whole group angry and then you’ve got a mass riot on your hands.”

Though there was significant selection, if not censorship, of textbooks, Curtis praised the improvements in recent decades. He said that for a while, there were two separate curricula, one in the Amish-majority schools and one in the English-majority schools. He said it was “a nightmare” for the district to support two systems. They now have one universal curriculum for each grade, no matter the school. Depending on the percentage of Amish children at the school, they remove a certain degree of potentially objectionable material.

Curtis: This school [an elementary that has majority English students], for the most part, we don’t remove a lot of pages. Woodhull School is an interesting one because it’s 50%, almost 50%, like 46% Amish and the balance is English. So that one’s a little more.

The subjects that received the razor tended to be in the sciences. In Barbara’s 5th and 6th grade social studies and English classes, in which all but one of the students were Amish, she used a variety of reading materials. She assigned novels such as Johnny Tremaine, To Kill a Mockingbird, Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry, The Bronze Bow, The Indian in the Cupboard, and the Redwall series. She also used pieces from the Heritage Readers, printed by Pathways Publications for Amish parochial schools. Barbara said she not only liked some of the older poetry selections from this book (e.g. Longfellow, A.E. Housman), but she also tried to connect her classroom to the Amish classroom, acknowledging something they may have read in the parochial schools.
Though some of the content in Barbara’s list of books could be construed as controversial, I found her approach tempered, but inconsistent. She played *Ben-Hur*, including the bloody scenes. She showed *The Sound of Music* but skipped the part when Rolfe and Liesl sing “Sixteen Going on Seventeen” because she thought the sexual overtones were too much for her students. She loved teaching *To Kill a Mockingbird* and thought that the children were old enough to understand that the trial at the center of the book regards the crime of rape. Through this, I became unsure if the children would know what was to be deemed appropriate and what was not. In terms of knowing which books were off-limits, there seemed to be no standard. I ascertained that it depended on the principal of a building whether certain books found their way to the shelves of the school library. Mary, as principal at Myers Elementary School, allowed the Harry Potter series in the library, while the former principal did not. Mary said she was aware the series revolved around a world of witchcraft, something anathema to Amish Christian beliefs, but said the Amish kids did not check them out of the library. She said it was important for such books to be available to the English kids, and that the real world was filled with temptations for all children, including the Amish.

*Mary:* I don’t have a problem with it [the Harry Potter series] because when all those Amish kids go out into the real world, they’re going to encounter drugs and tobacco and alcohol and R-rated movies and porn. They’re gonna encounter all that stuff and they have to make a choice on whether or not they’re going to pick it up. So, the book is no different.

**Curricular Accommodations – Religious Preservation**

I learned from Mary and Curtis that one could find the Harry Potter book series on the library shelves of a school with English kids. However, at the all-Amish schools,
Curtis said “You wouldn’t find it. No Way. No Magic. No Witches.” And no Halloween. And no snakes. Jean shared a story of her days as a principal when a traveling animal exhibit came to display different critters to the children during an all-school assembly. It was to be a real treat. Jean caught word that the zoologist had brought a snake, and she put in a last-minute request to not show the animal, out of nervousness that some of the Amish families had a perception of snakes as a representation of the devil, or of evil.\textsuperscript{187} She said: “Could you believe it? A serpent in this school? I would have had a lot to answer to from the parents.”

Even though there were no jack-o-lanterns, candies, or costumes in celebration of Halloween, other holidays did have a presence. Ascension Day, the day that Jesus Christ is assumed to have physically ascended to heaven, is the biggest celebration of the year for Amish in the Creek Settlement. On that day, many, if not most, children will be absent from school, though school \textit{is} in session on the district calendar. Additionally, secularized religious holidays like Valentine’s Day and St. Patrick’s Day were celebrated with enthusiasm. The first day I arrived at Burton Elementary School, I was greeted by the principal and had a great chat with him and a principal visiting from another school in the district. Burton was made up of nearly 100 percent Amish children, and I saw them walking busily about the hallways like a normal day. It took me a few minutes to realize that the children were dressed unusually and that this was a special day. Typically, the Amish in the Creek Settlement wear plain materials of limited colors. The day I visited

\textsuperscript{187} The belief in a snake or serpent representing evil originates for the Amish in the book of Genesis in the old testament of the Christian bible, in which the devil appears as a serpent and tricks the original humans Adam and Eve.
was St. Patrick’s Day and most children were not dressed in typical blues and whites, but in multiple shades of green.

Of all the accommodations for religious purposes, there was no stronger than the need for the Christmas program. Three participants highlighted the necessity of all schools to put on such a celebration for the families. Jeff said these were not simple affairs, as hundreds of people from the community attended the annual program.

Ryan: Christmas, does anyone say like how do we get away with doing so many Christmas things? This is me, this is me with my foreigner hat on…

Curtis: Yeah, that’s okay. That’s all right. It is very much expected that

R: Right. That’s what I’ve heard. We better, like ‘our kids can come if there’s a Christmas program’

C: It needs to be a Christmas program. In your Amish buildings, actually even the English buildings, I mean, we’ve done things with Christian themes. In the Amish buildings, that’s expected. So, you can do the cutesy things, with the cookies and so forth but at some point, something in that has to reflect the nativity. You know, a song or, definitely has to be Christian-based. And then usually at the Amish buildings, the program concludes with everybody, parents included, singing Silent Night. That’s how it’s closed out.

R: do you ever have families who will call the district [to complain?], and I think we talked about this a couple times ago about, you know, the atheist family

C: I think the neighbors would shout them down.

When I spoke with Jeff about Christianity in the classroom, he was very open about how he taught social studies. He said he tried to be sensitive to the differences between his students, but there was rarely anyone but a Christian in his classroom. He said he once had a Wiccan family, but that was the singular exception. He said that as he introduced subjects to the students, he would sometimes have them consider concepts as Christians.
Jeff: And so you’re going to have to teach things in history and in science that are theories. They’re gonna go against totally what they believe in. So, you’re talking about the Big Bang Theory, about how the earth was created.

Ryan: Which you’ve taught…

J: I’ve taught. I’m sure you’re gonna have to teach it. It’s part of…

R: It’s part of the state curriculum.

J: Right. And you know you’re talking to a group of kids that don’t believe a hoot of it. So what I have learned is I have, cuz I’ve gotta be really careful also with, maybe not so much but I don’t want to cross the line between separation of church and state. I’m a Christian. I go to church every Sunday. I was at church on Wednesday. I totally agree with everything that the Amish would read in their Bibles because I read it in my Bible, but I’m also the teacher so I can’t be sitting there saying, hey, guys, let’s, let’s forget all this. Let’s talk about really the way it is.

I challenged Jeff on how he made the distinction between what he felt compelled to discuss and what he felt was important to impart as a teacher. On multiple occasions, I sensed Jeff embodying a patriotic agenda, that he was an agent of the state bringing to children a sanctioned curriculum that he “had to cover.” Within that, he had flexibility to dwell on some concepts longer than others, but that the children could not escape the mandates of the curriculum.

Jeff: No. No. And I just said, you know, and I’ve been pretty honest with them. I said, if you don’t wanna learn about that stuff, you can go to a Christian school and you’ll not hear about it. There’s other options but I said we’re here. And we have to teach this. And you’ll be asked about it. And I can’t say, well, because you read the bible and don’t believe in it, I’m not gonna talk about it and then you have two questions on the AIR test.

The other thing, too, is I want to model for them that you have to operate within the confines of the United States of America. Just because I have Christian beliefs and I have my own thoughts about how the world was created doesn’t mean I’m gonna violate what the United States says I need to be teaching in a public school. And so very early on, I explain to them that human beings have not been alive forever. And there are segments of science and in history that we
have no written record of. And human beings by nature are curious and want an answer to things. We’ve got some answers you can find in the bible.

I asked Jeff to talk more about a child in the classroom who wasn’t Christian, or potentially did not share their parent’s Christian beliefs. In what ways did he accommodate that student?

Ryan: Have you, I mean, in your decade of teaching, have you had kids that are, this seems very unlikely, that are coming from like a Hindu family or…

Jeff: I’ve had, I told you the strangest one is I had a girl claim that they practiced like witchcraft and stuff. Their mom and dads were Wiccans.

R: So did you change like your sensitivity to say like okay...

J: Yeah, you know, but we don’t, like I said, I have to kinda filter my discussion of Christian stuff. And I usually do that by saying, using the Bible as another reference book. We don’t get it out but I’ll say, all right, those of you that are Christians have a book that can go through, like the Bible. If you read the Bible and you’re a Christian, it’s got a whole other version of how the earth came to be…so this is just one theory. The Christian religion’s got… And that’s about as far as I go with that cuz I don’t wanta say this is what I believe. But I alluded to enough where they can.

R: They can make a connection

J: Oh, yeah. So I never had to filter it a whole lot. I always found it very strange and wondered how this could happen when parents were that way. Witchcraft? And at the Christmas program, they got their daughters in there singing about the baby Jesus. And I wondered, is that just killing them? You know, are they really mad about this?

Jean spoke of working with Amish families to ensure that their religious identity was not only supported, but potentially affirmed in the public school education. This accommodation in the face of tension echoes what Curtis described in the plan to get Amish children in the school as “comfortable as possible.”
Jean: Yeah. And a deep respect on my part for… I would say to them ‘I am not here to try to make sure your children are in our public schools. If they are in our public schools, my goal is to help you maintain your faith and your church.’ It’s a partnership both ways. So they would come to me, ‘How can we be better at our parochial schools?’ But I would come to them and say, ‘How can we serve you better in our public schools. How can you be comfortable in our public school, knowing we have mandates, we have to do this, where do you draw the line?’ There was this constant dialogue.

Barbara said that she “cherished” the Amish children and their faith and talked of them being bearers of a faith that ought to be “preserved” and respected. She aimed “not to threaten” their way of life by stating inappropriate questions or presenting concepts that would disrupt their upbringing. She said: “I pray…every day, I pledge, don’t make me undermine these kids.”

When I was conducting this research, the Willow Run District had been approached by supporters of a Released Time Education program. For decades in the neighboring Ashfield School District, there had been a Released Time Bible Education program for children grades K – 12, during which students had the opportunity to leave school property during the school day to study the Bible at a nearby location. For one school in Ashfield, it took place in a small building, quaintly called a Sonshine Cabin, constructed on privately owned land that was adjacent to school property. In that district, children were “released” for a period during the school day, and they would walk over to the building for a session of Christian education. Curtis went to one of these cabins when he was a student in Ashfield Schools:
Curtis: [These programs] actually started in the ‘50s\textsuperscript{188} in the Ashfield School District.

Ryan: Is that, is that where the concept started, too, do you know? Wow. That’s so interesting

C: It is. I don’t know the whole ins and outs of it. But for the most part, the churches over that direction have, I guess what I would call a better relationship than most. It doesn’t so much matter that you’re the Mennonite church and you’re the UCC and you’re the…Brethren church. They kind of, they kind of meld maybe better than what most areas would. But they have donors that came together and what they did is they purchased a tiny little piece of property adjoining to the school. So, Ashfield, for example, the building I went to, it was literally just a portion of this house’s backyard that they bought. Just a little square and it was just big enough to get their Sonshine Cabin put up on it. And then every week, for I think it was like 30 to 45 minutes, you had to have permission from your parents. If you didn’t have permission you just stayed at the school, in the office, and I don’t know what they did but I’m assuming they had something they had to do. But you walked off school property right into the little cabin and you had your religious ed and then back you go.

Curtis discussed how administrators had been approached by a Released Time Education advocacy group about starting Sonshine Cabins in the Willow Run School District. He didn’t believe it would fly, mostly because those behind the push were from more evangelical Christian groups, and he anticipated this would not gel with what the

\textsuperscript{188} The start of “Release Time Education” or “Released Time Education” dates back seventy years. Until the late 1940s, public schools across the country allowed religious instruction during the school day in public school facilities. This practice was permitted until the U.S. Supreme Court case of \textit{Illinois ex rel. McCollum v. Board of Education of School District No. 71, Champaign County} (1948) when Vashti McCollom was supported in her argument that her atheist child should not have to be ostracized for not attending religious classes in school. In their ruling, the justices declared that public schools could not offer religious classes on “tax-supported property” grounds during the school day, “Illinois ex rel. McCollum v. Board of Education of School District No. 71, Champaign County,” Oyez, accessed 20 January 2018, https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/333us203.

In the subsequent case of \textit{Zorach v. Clauson} (1952), the Supreme Court established that school districts could allow children to be released from the school day for a period during which they could pursue religious education off the school grounds, “Zorach v. Clauson,” Oyez, accessed 20 January 2018, https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/343us306. It is this ruling that inspired a movement of “Released Time Education” advocates across the country for many denominations, such as the active organizations School Ministries, Inc., https://www.releasedtime.org/; Fellowship of Christian Released Time Ministries http://www.rtce.org/; and National Committee for the Furtherance of Jewish Education, http://www.ncfje.org/.
Amish taught in their local churches. The Amish did not typically mix their exploration of faith with others.\textsuperscript{189} He also had received a presentation on the proposed Sonshine Cabin curriculum and bristled at the “canned” nature of it:

Curtis: When I went through, it was not a canned curriculum.

Ryan: It was homegrown from…

C: It was homegrown so I envision Anna [his elderly Sonshine Cabin instructor] probably spent time around the kitchen table, ‘all right, I’m gonna pull this Bible verse out and here’s a little craft that we’ll do that goes with that.’ You know, it was very 1950ish.

R: Yeah, and I can see how the canned stuff, maybe a little bit of the evangelical piece would really scare some families.

C: I think that’s probably the hang-up out here. I don’t think it’s so much religious ed. I mean, that’s, so what? That’s fine. It’s more what’s in that and even probably on some fronts, a little skepticism of, ‘what’s this about?’

He said that to understand if this proposal would be acceptable, the next step would be to bring it to the building advisory boards.

Curtis: Because they [Amish families] really wanta be, I don’t know if control is the right word but they wanta have a huge part in what those kids know from a spiritual level. And so, one of the questions lingering out there is would the Amish like that or would they be really offended by it?

**External Accommodations – The Advisory Boards**

The Parent/Building/Amish Advisory Boards were a concept that I learned of very quickly in my interviews with district administrators. This was a group of parents or community members who volunteered to consult the school principals on how to successfully manage the school with an Amish population. They were not elected, nor

\textsuperscript{189} Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, 74.
legally mandatory, such as district school boards which still existed to hire and fire personnel, identify curriculum, and balance budgets. Though in existence for decades for the Amish parochial schools, Curtis said the model of an Advisory Board for the public schools for the had been around for over 25 years, and originally had to be made up of two farmers, two businessmen, and two people of the principal’s choice.

Curtis: There were no bylaws or anything, but it was very much tradition. And I think the goal of that was your business people were gonna be maybe a little more worldly because they were interacting with customers, clients, you know, etc. Your farmers were gonna represent probably the population that just, okay, we’re on the farm. We’ve got work to do. We don’t have time to get involved in all this rigmarole which is a little more, I don’t know if secluded is the right word. Just true rural living. And then the other two could be whatever.

Advisory Board members were volunteers, often parents, and typically held some position of influence in the community. Some of the participants called them “Amish Advisory Boards,” as I learned the primary function was not to get a sense of what parents thought, but rather how the school would better work with their Amish families and students. In regular meetings, principals and administrators brought business to the Advisory Board that may be of interest. Some topics revolved around potential changes to curriculum, programming, classroom use, or technology. Curtis, Barbara, and Jean spoke of the importance of not only informing the Advisory Board, but of providing them a chance to give feedback. These boards were the primary distributors of information regarding potential changes, but they were also the ones to first challenge potentially disruptive issues, saving principals and district officials some political capital. Examples of working with the Advisory Boards abound, but one area of significance was that of new technologies. In the Creek Settlement, most Amish intentionally avoid use of
machines that depend on grid-based electricity. Curtis outlined an example of working with his Advisory Board regarding the introduction of SMART Boards (digital interface projection and writing boards) in the elementary classrooms.

Curtis: …for the SMART boards, for example, that idea first hatched with that group [Parent Advisory Board]. So, you run everything through that group, ‘here’s what I’m thinking but I need your help. Talk me through it, what do you like, what don’t you like?’ Kinda that give and take, work on a progression here and we would lay it out into a plan and if they felt it was agreeable, then we’d take it to the next step and kind of have a parent meeting and just lightly unveil it. Okay, this is kinda what we’re thinking. Kinda work your way through. So very slow incremental but deliberate and well-planned pieces.

Another function of the Advisory Boards was to find people for hard-to-fill positions. Earlier, I mentioned that the German instructors originally were local bishops, or people found by the Advisory Board from the local Amish community. Roy, the Amish librarian, was first approached to serve as a classroom aide by an Advisory Board. Curtis discussed how transition from one principal to the next was also best rolled out slowly with the Advisory Board playing an important role. When he was a building principal and was offered a district administrative position, he wanted to make the transition smooth by working with the group:

Curtis: But one of the deals was that I met with the advisory board and I told them kinda what was gonna happen, what we were looking to do and of course, they weren’t jumping for joy but it ended up that two of them, myself and the superintendent did all the interviewing for the next candidate as part of the handoff which is probably kind of strange to the outside world, that you’d allow basically two parents to sit in on the interviews.

External Accommodations – Go to the Families

Jean and other participants spoke of the importance of having access to the local Amish church bishops. In the Amish communities, it typically is bishops of the churches
who set the standards of behavior and group values, or the *Ordnung*. One bishop may condone a behavior, such as using mobile phones for business, while another may not. Since the bishops are so essential in spreading the word about the local schools and getting “buy-in,” it is important to actively cultivate those relationships. If a bishop is not serving on an advisory board, meetings would be arranged. Jean discusses how she leans on the bishops regularly and establishes collegial relationships with them.

Jean: When I was in Crestview… I had direct relationship with those bishops… And they had kids in my building, and I knew them well. So I have them sitting in my office when we talk. Or we go to sit on their porches in the summer to go talk… but, yeah, a little different relationship.

All the participants who were principals spoke of this need to be available, not only to the bishops, but also to the families. Having an open-door policy at the school was not enough, as for some families’ buggy travel to the school could take a while. Thus, these administrators took to the road all year long by making home visits. When I interviewed Curtis, he had been a district administrator for two years, but he spent more than 10 years in the classroom and as a principal of some Amish schools in Willow Run Schools. As principal, he tried to “be in your house.”

Curtis: One of the biggest things I was an on the road, in your house kinda principal. So they are very traditional so they still want the home visits. So I would just swing in, how are things going? I noticed dadada about junior. You know, can we work through that? So I did a lot of that. The other piece that we had down there is six fathers that were elected to basically about a four-year term and they would sit on what we would call the advisory board.

Curtis also stated that if he wanted to meet with a number of families, he would spend time at a local (and popular) hardware and home good stores: “[If face-to-face time was difficult to come by]… to fix that, all’s I need to do is go a couple Saturdays down to
Keim Lumber. We’re all good. My wife is like ‘I’ll be in the car.’ Be out in a couple hours.”

When principal of an elementary school, Jean also tried to present her school as a community resource which worked with and along the local Amish parochial schools. She ended up developing a reputation as a consultant and would be asked to visit new or struggling parochial schools to help them succeed.

I encountered the theme of “going to the families” regularly through conversation with the study participants. It was an important additive to the trust necessary in the give-and-take nature of keeping the Amish families appeased and their children in the schools. The purpose was not just to inform families of the goings-on at the schools, but to also listen to them and learn about their lives and situations. From this, a principal could gather quite a lot.

Curtis: So you know, we did kinda give through, and that’s another avenue where as a principal, I was able to support some of those families. So I’d say for probably about a two year period, there was a family, I bought their allergy medication. Just because it was, they had 12 kids living on a farm, trying to make everything go.

Ryan: How did you hear that need? You just knew?

C: I knew. But I think that comes from knowing your families and one thing that I was really big on was doing home visits and I know that sounds absolutely ridiculous.

I found the attention principals paid to families a very interesting concept. These folks were not sitting on porches or chatting in the housewares aisle with families to address grievances. I heard from several participants about how the Amish families were not demanding, hardly making calls or complaints to teachers and principals. As Jeff said, if there was no homework, a Christmas program, and generally no inappropriate material,
“everyone was happy.” There was “no helicoptering,” as Barbara put it, “…no parent barking ‘My children need to be challenged!’”

Though there were few demands, the principals still felt compelled to pay significant attention to the families. If they didn’t, they may lose them. Jean put it clearly in a phrase she stated more than once: “They don’t go away mad. They just go away.” And that was in droves. The reason bishops were kept “on board” was because one conversation on a Sunday could spread quickly through an entire church community, and suddenly dozens of kids would unenroll. An Amish exodus from the school would put districts like Crestview or Willow Run in a serious bind. These educators needed to keep the information flowing but did not expect much in response. Administrators may not know that a family was dissatisfied until there was the absence of a child when school began in August. Sitting on the porch steps with families and inviting bishops to serve on committees didn’t always provide a steady flow of information, either. Families were not direct with details on whether their child was returning to the public school. This made predicting headcounts for a classroom difficult for administrators.

Mary: Are the families informing of us of their plans? Not always. I’ve learned that the hard way…I’ve learned to say what are you doing next? What are you doing next? Sometimes, in informal conversations, you know, have you ever thought about, blah, blah, blah. You know, stuff like that, yes.

If a roll-out of a new program was in the works, administrators would prepare numerous open meetings to educate families on pending changes. This was the case with significant curricular changes, such as the introduction of a new standardized test, Common Core, technology adoptions, and the consolidation of two schools.
It was made clear to me by the participants that significant accommodations were made in schools to satisfy and not offend the interests of Amish families. Concern about students leaving public schools was obvious, shared with me by every participant, and most keenly expressed by principals and administrators. Though this illustrates the relationship as one-sided, with school officials seemingly working beyond expectations to placate families, there were other factors at play. In the following chapters I would like to present the level of trust that is established between the educators and families that keeps an insular group of people like the Amish enrolled in the public schools. Additionally, I will discuss ways that this trust can be broken, or precariously handled through tense situations between schools and families.
Chapter 5: Trust

Jean: And they [Amish families] looked to me for answers. But it boils down to that trust, they trusted I wasn’t trying to… Yeah, be devious in the ways… Yeah, I mean. Truly, there is a love for those people. They are still trying to figure out how to maintain their cultural structure, their faith, how do they pass that on to their next generation, ummm… and I guess, they didn’t see me as a threat to that.

Trust as Settlement

As the list of accommodations was described to me, I developed a picture in my head of a very imbalanced relationship between the district and family. To retain these children in the schools, principals and teachers seemed to yield to every interest of Amish families. As Curtis said jokingly about satisfying the interests of families: “Do you like PE [physical education]? Maybe you don’t. We won’t offer it to you.”

But school districts in this area did not always play nice. The history of Amish schooling in the Creek County Settlement in the 1950s includes stories of officers forcefully removing “truant” children from Amish homes. And though an understanding of that history may exist in the minds of the educators in the area, I did not encounter a single reference to this from the participants. What I did find was the description of a complex relationship between the schools and families, one more akin the “push” and “pull” described by Hurst and McConnell, or the “give and take” as

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190 Citation removed to reduce identifiers of names and locations. In one article account of the local atmosphere in the 1950s (before the Yoder decision), there is record of a sheriff and local welfare director entering the homes of Amish families to take children into state custody for not attending public schools. This situation led to a state Appellate Court decision in the late 1950s that the child in question was “neglected” by the parents, and that they had no right to refuse education to the child due to religious conviction. Their freedom to worship freely was seen as separate from the state law to educate children in appropriate schools until the age of 16.

191 Hurst and McConnell, 156.
Curtis would call it. This was a regularly negotiated settlement between the two parties of school and family.

Since the first paragraph of this study, I have used the term “settlement” to describe the area in which this study is situated. The *Creek Settlement* is the place where eighteenth century Anabaptists purchased land and raised buildings and families. Here I would like to introduce another use of the term *settlement*, and that is of an agreement or pact regarding the coexistence of the school districts and Amish families in the Creek region. What I see at the heart of this settlement is a significant measure of trust between both parties. The school administrators and teachers are trusting that the families fill the rosters; the families trust that the schools care for the children’s education while not pulling them too deeply into the English world. Without trust, the settlement does not work.

The participants in this study often spoke of the concept of trust, mentioning the word itself twenty-eight times in the process of interviewing ten participants. I became very curious as to how this concept of trust was exhibited. It was seemingly essential to the settlement between families and schools, but difficult to quantify and measure. In their study of trust in schools, scholars of educational policy, Megan Tschannen-Moran and Wayne Hoy, reference philosopher Annette Baier’s description of trust as “…so ubiquitous we hardly notice it. ‘Most of us notice … trust most easily after its sudden
demise or severe injury. We inhabit a climate of trust as we inhabit an atmosphere and notice it as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted.”192

And though my participants were most apt to pinpoint when trust was scarce, or lost entirely, they could also identify ways in which they were intentionally working to gain and maintain trust from their Amish families. Two areas in which I believe the participants were most active in developing trust was through care and communication. In return, I noted stories from these educators where the families would demonstrate flexibility with the educators. In that balance, where the school personnel demonstrated care and transparency and families exhibited flexibility from traditional insular Amish norms, a space of opportunity, a lacuna, would emerge. In this space, educators could potentially fill an Amish child’s day with a great deal of information that would veer significantly from the parochial school recitation of reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmatic. However, it was imperative for these educators to understand the fragility of this opportunity and to not expose the children to too many ideas, lest they disrupt a child’s, family’s, or congregation’s pre-determined set of beliefs and expectations. Hurst and McConnell write that the balancing act that is needed to manage this relationship in the schools can be tricky.

To some extent, Amish parents recognize and accept the fact that public schools will not conform to their system. Nevertheless, there is a fine line that public school teachers and principals may cross only at the expense of angering their Amish clientele, who always have the option of leaving if their concerns are not met. The result is a high degree of border work required of faculty and staff, who must be sensitized to Amish issues.193

193 Hurst and McConnell, 160.
This border work is not an easy exercise that anyone with goodwill or ambition may undertake. It can be established through work, such as Curtis explained in his efforts as a principal and now administrator in the district: “This trust is earned over about a 4-5 year period of time and takes a lot of effort in building relationships. This started, for me, by planning a wide range of school activities promoting the family, numerous home visits, and open leadership within an advisory group of fathers…Working in these ways, while demonstrating a sincere care for each family, ensured the level of trust remained high.” Background and upbringing also helped, as each of the participants talked about the “advantage” of being raised in the area helping them to better ascertain local customs and values. Mary grew up in the district, lived down the road from the school, and had years of interaction with Amish families. Jean and Barbara were both raised Amish, and mentioned their ability to speak Pennsylvania Dutch provided them substantial credibility and access. Curtis said: “As for knowing what was acceptable or to what degree, growing up in the area and working closely with the Amish through my grandparents business, I had a little bit of an advantage.” This reiterates the lack of boundaries between the Amish and English. Though some Amish in the area, perhaps the lower order conservative churches, live a more enclaved existence, the rest of the Amish live, work, and communicate with English neighbors, clients, customers, and friends.

**Building Trust Through Care and Communication**

To make the families comfortable with the schools, I found that the principals and some teachers in the study identified the importance of establishing an impression of familiarity and comfort with families. As mentioned earlier, all the principals I
interviewed had stories of making themselves available to the families, sometimes just for conversation, and other times to ensure that the families knew school officials were caring for their children.\(^{194}\) Mary spoke of taking children home when they were sick; Curtis mentioned buying and delivering allergy medicine to a poor family whose situation he knew through conversations and home visits. He called it a “security net,” perhaps unique in a community where the church cares for so much in the community.

Curtis: …even within the families of poverty, I mean, I’m gonna be honest, we, we have those families, the Amish that are just in poverty. The church will pick up and assist. Nine times out of ten, there’s other family around that there’s always that security net. That’s the best way I know to put it. And you know, yes, we’re gonna do what we can to promote wellbeing of our family, etc., but if push comes to shove, that net is there.

The demonstration of care was seemingly easy for Mary, as she described her role as very rooted to families. As the principal, she said she had a duty to care for the children, and she wanted the families to know it. She said that families also trusted her presence in their lives because she was a local. She grew up in the district, attended the school in which she was principal, and lived a mile down the road.

Mary: I realize now that one of my strengths is I can come in and I can build community. My teachers matter. My kids matter. You matter as a parent. I don’t care how educated you are or not. Where you come from. Do you know how many homes I’ve gone into and people are sitting and hugging me, sobbing and crying and pouring their hearts out. How many times people come in here, Amish or not Amish, and they sit down and they just start… Because they feel comfortable. They feel welcome. You’ve got to create that and make people feel like they are valued and they are important.

\(^{194}\) The action of “care” I speak of here could potentially fall within the “ethic of caring” as conceptualized by Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2013), 4. However, I do not speak of “care” as a process of moral obligation nor moral education, rather “care” here is simply the expectation that school personnel attend to the well-being of the students.
Here, I think it should be noted that these administrators were not just uniquely sensitive English folks who knew how to understand the needs and perspectives of the Amish. All my participants were from the area and now worked in these two school districts for a range of 12 – 30 years each. Some were raised Amish and spoke Pennsylvania Dutch, others grew up in businesses that catered to the Amish, and all demonstrated knowledge of a network of English and Amish folks across the region. As mentioned in the beginning of this study, the Creek Settlement of Amish is not a bordered region of Amish who come out for schooling and material goods. Rather, the Creek Settlement is a multi-county area that is inhabited by an even distribution of English and Amish families. Though living in some multi-house settlements, Amish families will have English neighbors next door and down the road. Thus, for these English educators, though they may not be Amish (except for Roy), I could understand how their capacity for credibility was possible due to their upbringing and years of work in the schools.

Though these educators could be seen as accepted locals, demonstrations of care were not sufficient to maintain trust with families. The principals and administrators also referenced the need to keep families informed through regular communication. In meetings, mailings, and updates through advisory boards, the administrators appeared to be informing parents of any changes that may surprise. This communication was not requested by families, nor was such transparency on the district’s behalf reciprocated by families. Typically, teachers would not receive contact from families regarding expectations for their children. There was no feedback loop. Barbara said her families
had simple expectations of a “minimal level” of education for their children, and not much else. Jeff also spoke of the surprising lack of inquiry on behalf of the parents:

Ryan: But do you have some families that would come back with a curricular suggestion, less like ‘Mr. Ebert, can you not teach that’ but more of, ‘hey, are you going to cover this?’ Have you ever been surprised that a family has requested something and you’re thinking ‘you want to learn about that?’

Jeff: Not, not as, no.

R: Or does any family make requests?

J: No. I mean

R: English or Amish?

J: No, Myers Elementary is so unique. It is very different. I’m married. My wife Lori teaches at Piketon [a neighboring school district]. It’s got no Amish in it and her dynamic, when she comes home and talks to me about her day and the families she deals with is so different than mine. She is the gifted teacher out at Piketon, so she gets overwhelmed. You think what a great job. She gets overwhelmed by families wanting their kids… how can I get my kids into the gifted program?

Barbara laughed gaily about being spared from the “helicopter” parents that plagued other schools. She felt a degree of bliss being left alone to instruct her students. From the perspective of the current rhetoric on family involvement in schools, the lack of attention paid by families could be a sign of dysfunction, but these teachers said they did not expect the flow of information to be a two-way street. The families trusted that a standard level of education was being achieved, and that was enough. Perhaps this is where the Amish characteristic of Gelassenheit, or “yieldedness” and submission surfaced. The Amish were not known to raise a stink. Some criticisms would surface on the annual surveys in Willow Run, but Curtis said that it was never an inundation of feedback. Occasionally, he would receive a complaint. For instance, he said that if a
child found a book on the Bookmobile (which catered to children and adult readers in the county) that may be potentially inappropriate, he would find the child in his office the next day with a post-it note stating from a parent: “Would you please review and give me a call?” But that was the extent. Parents would rarely call meetings, submit requests for more information, or ask for additional time with teachers.

Though there was not a significant flow of information from the families, I gathered that the information was still expected to flow to the families. This was especially true when a school or district was rolling out a new program or process. The more transparent with families, the better:

Curtis: From mentioning it to demonstrating it to having those parent nights where they can come in, pose questions and interact with it, all those pieces. So the more transparent we can be with them, nine times out of ten, the more apt they are to say, okay, this is okay.

**Respecting “The Expert”**

An ironic facet to the relationship of trust between families and school officials was the perception of authority. Though the Amish demonstrated “yieldedness” and purposefully lived simply, participants talked about the level of respect one would receive from the Amish due to position and status. Though an Amish family would not encourage their children to pursue education beyond the 8th grade, physicians, lawyers, principals, and others in such credentialed positions would undoubtedly receive respect.

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195 In the situations where a family was asking for action, Curtis stated that he would always follow up with families to ensure that they knew their concerns were heard. However, beyond a mere mention of a concern, there was not an extensive process to be followed. I ascertained from Curtis that a single mention of a concern may be the extent of feedback from a family and that his staff wouldn’t expect more of a conversation to develop. I was given the impression that the staff were expected to know how to react.
Jean shared examples of people who gained instant respect due to a credential or stated position:

Jean: Well what happened was… My [school] psychologist, he liked, he really liked the Amish population. And he was seeing some things and some trends. And he was becoming much more astute in the area of, especially, ADHD, the hyperactivity and in many of these children that was what you are seeing. They didn’t want the medications. So what they came, and they talked with us. I started getting him involved. I said, “You know what, gentlemen [of her advisory board], I’d like for you to meet our school psychologist.” And I talked to him about would you be able to talk would you be open to talking with them. And he so started, this all mushroomed into house-meetings that were packed just like you were having church. Dan, who was the psychologist, he would go in and do full evening sessions on ADHD, ADD, on learning disabilities… He was revered. He had a psychology degree.

Jean spoke of how this reverence would be difficult to understand from an outsider’s perspective. She listed the different examples of those whom the local Amish have trusted due to their credentials, and the ironic lack of interest in the families encouraging their young to aspire to fill such roles in the community:

Jean: So if there is a trust that is developed with that expert, they cling to every word those people say. Dr. Wong [a genetic disease expert who operated a local clinic for the Amish], the guy walks on water around here…He is an expert. For many of them, they can also be swayed by one family who has found success by going to Michigan or going to wherever that isn’t local. And they will jump on this bandwagon. “We’ve got to see this in Michigan, he’s an expert in this area.” I had families here who maybe once or twice a year, they will take their very handicapped child here for this guy who has maybe has convinced them that a certain…

Ryan: Therapy or something like that?

J: Therapy or juices or… They are so vulnerable to some of that because that guy is “an expert” up there. Okay, and that’s word of mouth…In a local practical setting, if you want information about law, the Mennonite attorney because there is a trust factor. So, if they want to find our educationally about this or that, they’ll go to a, or if the teacher is very trusted, they’re degreed. There is a reverence, they’ll say you know better you’ve been educated in that.
R: That’s what I find so interesting that there comes a point that there’s reverence, but there’s no assuming that they’re going to feed that pool.

J: Yes. Yes.

R: That their son who seems to be very clever at reading, and can debate and has incredibly good writing skills, maybe they should go to law school. Ya’know?

J: That’s not their goal.

R: But there is a dependence on these experts. They need an attorney to close that real estate deal.

J: Exactly, to help them get this business started.

Ryan: But they would never come from my family.

J: Right, right, right. Hmm, because there’s an understood difference in priorities. They’re not looking for their son or daughter to be that doctor or to be that attorney, or to be that administrator, if that becomes their goal, they’re going to lose them in the church. So, you don’t have Amish attorneys, you don’t have Amish doctors. We understand we need them, but that’s not, that’s fine for those people but for our son and daughter, how can we maintain our faith, and our church and our culture? And use the God given talents of my son and daughter within the cultural boundaries here.

I found Jean’s use of the phrase “within the cultural boundaries” fascinating. She was right, I heard others speak of the Amish respecting and depending on doctors and lawyers, but one would not hear of that same Amish family encouraging a child to be such a professional. It was out of the realm of possibility. But that didn’t mean there were no aspirations for any professional development. For instance, the one educational credential that did have value for some New Order or more liberal Amish was the G.E.D., or the General Equivalency Development. As local businesses and employers put emphasis on hiring employees with high school diplomas, young Amish workers saw a reduction in their options for employment with only an eighth-grade education. Thus, if
approved by the local bishop, more and more Amish folks, young and old, would seek this option.

**Family Flexibility**

I developed the impression that most teachers and school officials were in that class of respected authority. And since the families did not exhibit a regular pattern of inquiry into the goings-on of the classroom, once trust was earned/secured, a school could accomplish quite a bit that could potentially stretch the boundaries for a typical Amish family. Consider the use of technology in the schools. In Amish homes, one would not normally find electronic technology such as computers, phones, internet service, etc. However, these forms of technology were ubiquitous in the schools in the area. I discovered some of the participants said the families were OK with such forms of technology since the schools were using it, and they had trust that the school was employing the technology wisely.\(^{196}\) To get SMART Boards approved and installed in some of the schools in the Willow Run District, Curtis held numerous family and advisory board meetings, a practice he reiterated as essential at keeping relationships active and in determining the interests and goals of his constituents. He said that the families were dubious of the technology until they learned to trust the school’s usage to display material already deemed appropriate; though he could have made the decision without consulting and informing the community, his reputation for being trustworthy was always on the line. He said: “If you’ve done it for years and got away with it, fine,

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\(^{196}\) Curtis explained to me the “wise” use of technology at an Amish school in his district: videos could be played in the classroom, but children were not to be on computers; in another school, children could use a computer to practice keyboarding, but there was no access to the internet.
but here’s the problem. I’m the liaison that needs to answer for that so if we have one angry population, it’s gonna be me in front of them and not you and it’s not a risk I’m willing to take.”

In some situations, if the principal had enough trust from the families, they could “get away” with many boundary-pushing measures. Mary spoke of initiating a Veteran’s Day celebration at her school, even though the former principal had avoided the holiday so as not to offend the pacifist Amish and Mennonite families who made up most of the community.

Mary: …sometimes, if I’m supposed to do something, I do it. So, I incorporated the Veterans Day program and I talk about that. My first couple years, you know, now that the community’s really embracing it and we bring in grandpas and uncles and friends that are military and we honor them in some special way. We talk about that, is that because of these veterans, you’re able to have religious freedom. You know, we’re honoring them. We’re recognizing them. You know, and so it doesn’t mean you have to go out and join the Navy. Or go into the military. That’s not what we’re saying. We’re acknowledging.

Through such levels of comfort, the lacuna would appear, and new and interesting things could occur. Such pushing of boundaries could potentially be normalized, or even generated from a child. I was told stories of Amish children, on their own, pursuing an experience that would be abnormal within the Amish community, but was accepted by families due to the school’s support. The account I found most interesting was of an Amish boy who was enrolled the 7th/8th grade program at the elementary school, but wanted to go to Washington, D.C. with the children from the English middle school. Mary was surprised that the child’s parents let him go:

Mary: Our middle school, our traditional, our traditional middle school goes to DC for three days
Ryan: So he went with all the other middle schoolers?

M: He did. Doesn’t go to school with them all year long but he had the balls

R: That’s amazing.

M: I thought it was fantastic. I went, Jacob, you really went to DC? He was like, yeah, and I had a great time. He goes ‘everybody was really nice to me,’ Blah, blah, blah, I was like wow.

The Nudge

I believe that Mary, and the other educators in this study, were always managing two competing forces: peace with families, and the urge to educate their students for a wider world. These educators spoke of celebrating the moments of breakthrough for a child (e.g., the Amish boy going to Washington D.C. with only English children, the Amish girl who earned a GED in order pursue an accounting position at a local company). The participants would relish these stories. But how did they encourage these students while not compromising the trust of the parents? When the opening appeared, the opportunity was inviting to these educators, but they had to play their hand very carefully. They could not always openly encourage the students to push the limit of ability. The risk of losing the audience was too great. A gentle nudge was sometimes the extent of the encouragement.

The options for education and training after 8th grade were limited. No Amish family was sending a child to high school, but some more liberal Amish may consider a GED or other vocational program. Curtis spoke of the importance of a trusted
relationship through which he could hint at educational opportunity when the timing was right.

Curtis: Now, what I have been prone to do is really play up the vocational programs [available in the county to high-school aged residents] that are offered. And so, I have mentioned to a father maybe in passing like hey, junior would be excellent in that program. You might want to consider that. And just kinda drop the carrot. But it’s still their choice. We have had some businesses in the past that have been looking to take some students and run them through a training program per se. And we had a relationship going for a while with one company in particular that the 8th grade year, they would have us bring the kids [all kids, English and Amish] over to their corporate office and then they would have a little ceremony. They’d feed the kids lunch and then they would, they were big into math and science because that’s what their business was kinda built on and so they wanted anyone basically in 8th grade that carried straight As in math or science. They’d recognize them.

Mary said that suggesting educational opportunities after the 8th grade was not easy nor did the effort produce predicable results; a nudge or hint could quite easily backfire with families developing confusion, anger, or an outright loss of trust in the school and principal.

Mary: If there was a situation and I felt, and there was an opportunity to share, I knew there was an interest in something or I did see, if you had the potential, if you really excel in a certain area, and I felt that this job would be beneficial to you, I would say something, Amish or not Amish. I would say something. But typically, I feel my job, I judged once and it bit me in the butt. I made a judgment call, I guess I didn’t think I was making a judgment call. Looking back on it, it was a judgment call. I thought I was sharing a piece of information that was useful to the parent and it came back to bite me in that you’re judging my child and trying to make them into something they’re not. Because everybody sees things differently. Everyone sees, sometimes parents and other people on the outside see the gifts of someone differently. Does that make sense?

Jeff was probably the most brazen of the participants, as he said his aim was to educate the children equally. If he felt that there was a life conversation to be had, he thought he
was trusted enough by the families to have it, regardless if it might be unusual for the

Amish children in the classroom.

Jeff: You know, I think what it really comes down to for me, a lot of those
conversations I can have because of a trust issue. First of all, I’ve been here a
long time but secondly, I can have talks, conversations with my kids about these
things because they know I care about them. I mean, I have a relationship with
them. So, I never single out a student to say this is what you have to do. But I do
frequently say there is a right way to do things. And I try to model that for them
all the time… And so even when it comes to talking about education and careers,
I, I don’t like to have conversations that are focused on the minority. I don’t
wanna talk about how unimportant schooling and college and career choice is
because I have half my class being Amish. Because even though I respect the
Amish community, 90% of the world does not operate that way and you are in a
public school, so I’m gonna talk to you about what real life is like. Because yes,
if you’re gonna stay Amish all your life, then your real life is gonna be very
different from what I talk about. But all of you are gonna have to leave this
building and go out into the real world and the Amish life is not the real life for
90% of the world…

Breaking Trust

In her lectures on “Trust and Its Vulnerabilities,” Annette Baier outlines Thomas
Scanlon’s principles of trust, one being the “fidelity principle.”\(^\text{197}\) Baier states that this
principle “…requires us to do precisely what we assured [the other] we would do.”

Further, she says that “Real trustworthiness, like real trust, involves feelings, beliefs, and
intentions - which sometimes can be faked.”\(^\text{198}\) Thus, if trust is to be maintained, it
cannot be based on a single agreement or action. In fact, it must be reinstated by both
parties. It cannot be automatic, for even such expectations reduce the ability for
attendance to well-being to exist: “Turning to automatic pilot is not often a serious

\(^{197}\) Annette Baier, “Trust and Its Vulnerabilities,” Delivered at Princeton University, The Tanner Lectures
on Human Values, (March 6-8, 1991): 114. https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/documents/a-to-
z/b/baier92.pdf.

\(^{198}\) Ibid., 112.
possibility for those whose goal is the good of another — or even when their goal is their own good.”\textsuperscript{199}

I was curious how the two parties of educators and families communicated such expectations, whether explicitly or implicitly. The participants in this study gave me the impression that the Amish families didn’t say much to educators, but that families were always listening. It is not that the Amish were silent, it’s just that they spoke mostly within their community and congregations. As Jean said, there is an incredible “pipeline” or “Amish network” that passes information amazingly well for a community abstaining from phones and internet. If the district or an individual did something that was perceived as improper, news of the incident traveled quickly, “like wildfire” said Jean. When judgments were adopted universally within a church group, I could see how a single instance of broken trust could lead to the loss of confidence from a whole community. Jeff recounted the incident from a few years back when a Crestview district administrator threatened to close the 7\textsuperscript{th}/8\textsuperscript{th} grade program (which catered to Amish children) unless the residents of the district voted to pass the school levy. Jeff said that this administrator made the threat rather publicly. A levy hadn’t passed in the district in over twenty years, and it didn’t pass that time around. The administrator carried through with the promise and dissolved the program, citing the expensive nature of operating a special 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} grade class in the elementary schools when the same grades could be accommodated in the middle school. It was a hit against the Amish families.

Jeff: …when the [7/8] program had been around for 15 years and it’d gotten to the point where the Amish families believed it was permanent and then when

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 118.
money hit the road, you showed them they’re disposable. There’s a trust broken there that is not easily rebuilt and the problem they’re having right now is that Dovetail Academy [an area charter school] stepped in and served the need for them. So, you tell me, who are the Amish people trusting at this point? The school system that now is backing up on its heels and wanting you to back? Like a bad breakup. Girlfriend wants you back now.

Jeff used the “girlfriend” breakup metaphor regularly in his description of how the school district behaved with Amish families. He said that they had been burned by the removal of a program that was uniquely designed for them, and that the ever-important ingredient of trust was missing from the school and family relationship in the Crestview School District.

Jeff: The administration back then looked at money first and did away with a program that was awesome, and we put money over relationships and we were so wrong to do that. That will never come out of any administrator’s mouth. But if your ex-girlfriend had a conversation with you, said, hey, listen, I made some major, major mistakes and here’s the reasons why. It should never have happened. It will never happen again. And this is what I’m gonna do to show you it’s never gonna happen. Then you sit down and say, you know what? 7th, 8th grade is being put back in these schools and it’s not gonna [inaudible]. I mean, that’s what needs to happen but it will never happen. And you can see by the enrollment how, are the Amish families buying into it? We’ve got four [students now in program].

“They don’t go away mad, they just go away.”

Jean stated a line more than once which captured the way they would lose Amish families in the school: “They don’t go away mad, they just go away.” Unlike English families who may state grievances openly and regularly with school officials, the Amish families would privately talk within their community. Once some families of significance decided, others would follow suit. A relationship of trust that took years to build could dissolve in a month. Jeff said that the difficulty of a student unenrolling in
their small school meant that often the siblings would go, as well. And once the families were gone, it was incredibly hard to woo them back.

Because of this delicate process of maintaining a positive, trustworthy relationship with families, I could understand why districts would spend so much time informing the families of potential changes. Advisory boards, special meetings, porch chats, conversations at the store -- it was through these touch points that school personnel could assert the school’s message. Curtis would shake his head describing lengths at which district administrators would go to inform the community. But they knew that if they did not do this relational work, the trust would dissolve, and children would leave without warning. He spoke of the controversy regarding the use of and testing related to the Common Core:

Curtis: So, it was kind of tough and I think through the process, a lot of parents, I think because of all the controversy, if we could’ve just had the building meetings, discussed it with them rationally and moved forwards, I don’t know that it would’ve been as big of a deal as it was. But I think because there was this huge outburst, to them, okay, we’re just, we’re gonna shut down. Like this is not, and I think that ended up snowballing and turning it into something that just was out of sorts.

In discussing “when trust goes wrong,” Baier states “What we risk are not just mutually lethal betrayals and breakdowns of trust, but exploitation that may be unnoticed for long periods because it is bland and friendly. The friendly atmosphere — the feeling of trust — is of course a pleasant thing, and itself a good, as long as it is not masking an evil.”200 For the participants who hinted at the superintendent removing a program that catered to the Amish as an effort to punish, perhaps there was an element of evil to this

200 Ibid., 111.
maneuver. Or maybe he was just making a decision that seemed to be based on budgeting: the program was expensive; it had to go. Regardless of the intent, I think this situation highlights Baier’s reference of a “feeling of trust,” something that appears potentially “bland” and transactional, as opposed to an activity based on genuine goodwill and interest in the wellbeing of the other.\textsuperscript{201}

The next chapter explores the complement to trust in this study: tension. Though the participants may have described their efforts as transactional, it was highly relational and prone to regular and highly subjective reasoning and response. I intend to present the manifestation of tension in several areas, from common educational “hot button” issues such as standardized testing, to the ever-veiled discourse on the rights of women and girls in this community.

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 111.
Chapter 6: Tension

Standardized Testing: A Mixed Message

“What is over-talked is tests! Standardized tests. The district cooked its own goose on this one.”

Barbara said this “cooked goose” line about the Willow Run District’s unveiling of Common Core standards and the associated Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Pearson standardized tests a few years back. In the first year of implementation of the testing regime, numerous issues surfaced. For the district, the release of new curriculum and standards was not new; it followed a year or more of outreach and education to families on the purpose and value of the changes. Introduction to these standards was not going well in the beginning. Implementation of Common Core became associated with standardized tests, seemingly unwarranted, according to Jean:

Yeah, the Common Core, such a misconception on that. And you have the Amish bishops who were influenced by different people who said ‘You’ve got to fight against this Common Core’ while the school was trying to give them explanations of what it is and how they are working with it. They couldn’t fight it, it was too great. It depends where that voice is coming from.

In “cooking its goose” Barbara was referencing the displeasure of families that the new testing regime was adding a whole new layer of rigidity in the education of students in public schools. If you recall in the opening of this study, there was the story of the “Omnichip,” set in a futuristic world where the government controlled the brains of children. The use of this story in a PARCC Pearson standardized test question caused major disruption in Willow Run and added to mounting distrust of standardized tests within the community. To fan the flames, an anti-testing activist group from another part
of the state began attending school board meetings to speak out against the testing process, stating that it was hindering local control.\textsuperscript{202} Families began opting out of the tests, and the district eventually endorsed opting out by issuing a release to families describing the steps needed to opt a child out of standardized testing.

After one year of the testing regime, the Willow Run district abandoned the PARCC Pearson tests and instituted a new test, the AIR (created by the American Institutes of Research). Roy said that the AIR test was “better,” but I sensed that all the tests were seen as reducing flexibility for instructors. The educators I interviewed spoke about standardized testing as a powerful influence on the decisions made in the district, school, and even classroom. They were experiencing less freedom to teach what they pleased, and with schools and teachers being evaluated (in part) by the students’ scores, teachers could not just let the Amish students skate by without teaching to the test. Jeff said:

\begin{quote}
What the test has done… it has forced you to teach stuff! The catering to the Amish, the stuff, I couldn’t do it now. The stuff they want to do for the 7th and 8th grade, to try to attract kids there and keep them there. Like introduce industrial arts and cooking classes.
\end{quote}

Jeff had been a teacher in the early days of the 7/8 program and said he knew the lengths they would go to make the Amish families comfortable with the school by offering subjects such as carpentry and home economics. Further, since the children taking the tests were assessed by the state in aggregate, it now mattered that all kids tried to do well.

\textsuperscript{202} Epps, 268. Regarding local control, the Amish, perhaps akin to other conservatives in rural areas, are dubious of organizations and entities (governmental or not) influencing the lives of those aiming to live in community under their own rules. Many times Roy mentioned that Amish people in his community were generally suspicious of actions by state and federal government, and other big organizations like testing agencies.
He said that the State saw these kids as “numbers” on a test, and if they didn’t know the whole gamut of the social studies standards, he wasn’t preparing them properly.

Jeff: You’re gonna have an AIR test and they’re gonna ask you about Hinduism. Unless you know it, you’re gonna be ignorant about it. You’re not gonna know anything about it.

Ryan: And do you have to, I mean, do you say that?

J: Yes…I just say, I say this seems strange so you know, you might be thinking why do we gotta learn about this? I said here’s the reason why. First of all, what kind of school are you in? You’re in a public school. If you do not wanta learn about Hinduism, go to an Amish school. You will not hear about it there. What kind of test are you gonna take in two weeks? A state test. Do they know you’re Amish?

Jeff, Barbara, and Roy each referenced how a teacher’s performance was being evaluated by the results of the tests, and how this weighed on the decisions they made in selecting material and methods of instruction. Regarding what is important in the schooling experience of Amish children, Jeff said that he and other teachers at Myers Elementary would receive “mixed messages”:

Jeff: On the one hand, you’re telling me I’m going to be evaluated and I’m gonna get a grade as to whether I’m a skilled teacher, an accomplished teacher, whether I need to be on an improvement plan and it’s going to be based off of not only my observations but the student test scores and whether I make a year’s growth with them. How am I gonna do that when you are incorporating everything that is not curricular into my day.

Ryan: Because there’s not a single question on that test…

J: About German classes. About cooking.

R: And you’re thinking, well, that just reduces the ability then to talk about geography and language arts.

J: I’m just saying you’re sending me a mixed message. You’re gonna tell me your test scores are bad and then I’m gonna tell you, and let’s count up how many hours during the day we’ve wasted on stuff that’s not even Common Core. And why are we doing it?
The tension regarding testing didn’t only exist in the design and use of a curriculum; the tension existed in creation of the test itself. After the “Omnichip” situation, the State granted the Willow Run School District special representative status on advisory committees that critique and edit the tests. Roy, the Amish German teacher and librarian, was one of the representatives attending the annual test critique, first for PARCC Pearson and then for AIR tests. Roy spoke of the experience as both unique and frustrating. Roy opined about the poor management and quality of the PARCC Pearson process, saying that the district was in much better position associating with the AIR tests. He said that at the annual PARCC meeting, he thought that the company kept “making the same dumb mistakes” regarding silly stories and weird content (like the story about a featherless chicken which he thought was “stupid”). Mostly, though, he just stuck to correcting punctuation and grammar.

These trips also introduced him to a diversity of educators from across the country, with some easier to relate to than others. He said he demonstrated a greater appreciation for how culture in his district needs to be respected and preserved.

Ryan: You’ve done enough PARCC-Pearson stuff to know that they way public schooling is done in your district is really unique, and that it’s so culturally sensitive, that the district is making decisions that really try to keep the families happy and keep them connected.

Roy: Connected to the culture. And you almost have to. If you take, if you want to level out culture, you lose a color of life. And so I think, that’s where the push right now and that what I think some of the people are happy about is push education back to the states more and get the federal government further removed from education. Because one-size-fits-all, like the federal government would like, is not a melting pot of people like America. It’s just not.
Ryan: You probably experience... that melting pot, all that diversity. When you would go to those testing meetings and see the concerns of these people. And you’re thinking, wow those aren’t our concerns from our district.

Roy: No, and I really thought about this one women from up in Connecticut or New Jersey, one of those two. Flew out in Denver, this is a school teacher. At breakfast, they’re sitting around the table and laughing and saying that ‘I bought some of them marijuana brownies last night. I called my son and said,’ my fifteen year old son and said, ‘I bought some of those marijuana brownies.’ He said ‘mom take it easy on them, don’t overdo it.’ And I thought, why? What do you expect from that kid? What kind of lecturer, what kind of atmosphere does she generate in the classroom?

The examples of Roy’s frustration and disappointment with other educators only seemed to solidify his interest in keeping alive the accommodations in the Willow Run District. It was outside of this environment where folks like the woman buying pot brownies existed, and that was not of interest to him. It should be noted that Roy has traveled the world, having been many times to the continents of Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean. He has seen the world, enjoys travel, but did not have an interest in the “east coast” thinking that he was exposed to in these testing meetings.

**Teaching on the Grid**

As mentioned previously, a source of perpetual tension in Amish communities is the use and evaluation of new technologies. As a number of scholars on the Amish have described, the use of technology is often divisive and controversial within the community, and downright enigmatic to the outsider.\(^\text{203}\) Appropriate conduct for the Amish is dictated by each church’s *Ordnung*, or the rules of behavior outlined by the church bishop for those within the district. The *Ordnung* details appropriate conduct for

\(^\text{203}\) Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt, 52; Hurst and McConnell, 204-210.
members from dress to church fellowship to buggy decoration to the use of new
technology. Though mostly consistent, these rules need regular attention as new
technologies or needs/interests change in the community. The basic tenet of being in the
world, but “not conformed” to it204 is interpreted in various ways by different Amish
churches. Most have a provision which limits the use of technology that might establish
a dependence on grid-sourced electricity, while some orders use batteries or solar
powered electricity significantly.205 As new technologies surface, their use is evaluated
by bishops and church leaders leading to varying directives.

Jean said that the kinds of parents who are progressive enough to send their
children to a public school expect that their children will need to learn how to use
multiple forms of technology to be successful in a modern economy:

Jean: And I, ya’know it’s one of those, the parents know they need technology,
many of their businesses depend on technology, many of their businesses depend
on that. So it’s ummm… That doesn’t seem to come up in Willow Run as the
number one thing. Now they may want their children to not become as familiar
with the technology. I think they want word-processing, the hard-drive stuff,
rather than the internet things.

Curtis spoke of the rather high-tech jobs that can be had in the area, and that if the
students do not have familiarity with such technology, they will be left behind. He spoke
of an automotive part manufacturer in the area that was started by a man who converted
from the Amish church. This business owner “traveled the world” working “on the latest,
greatest presses, die cut machines, etc. I mean, just super high tech.” I could tell from
Curtis’s expression that he thought this was impressive work for which his Amish

204 This is from Christian bible scripture Romans 12:2.
205 Hurst and McConnell, 216 – 218.
students would be good candidates. However, Curtis said that if students didn’t learn how to use the foundations of these technologies, they would not be hired.

Regardless if the school was seen as a place to prepare children to use technology in future jobs, Mary said that the every-day function of Myers School just made some technologies a necessity: “…everything we do is online now. From the get-go, even in kindergarten, we use a diagnostic called iReady and those kids in September have to be able to use a Chrome book with a mouse and take a test.” Additionally, Mary spoke of the need for children from what she called a “sheltered” community to experience and engage in material that expanded the boundaries of their understanding. To do so, she said the school was highly dependent on video and the internet.

Mary: …a lot of them [Amish children] have a limited exposure to pieces. Thank God for YouTube. Thank God for United Video streaming. Because [the teachers] constantly bring up, [and the children] don’t have any dots to connect something to. So do our teachers have to provide different, you know, they have to, they have to supplement a lot. Okay, we’re talking about blah, blah, blah, blah and a tsunami. What’s a tsunami? You know, oh, here, let me show you. Boom.

Jeff, a teacher at Myers, gave more examples of how he introduces the world to his students by regularly using video as a resource. When he teaches world geography and societies, it helps tremendously to have video about Buddhism, or to demonstrate the sacred in Hinduism by showing students how cows move freely through parts of India or Nepal: “I have to show them…First of all, if you just talk about it, it’s really easy for them for them to say, you know, ‘you’re just telling me a big story. That’s not true.’”

Curtis said that in Willow Run schools, it wasn’t possible to have a district-wide standard for technology-use based on what fit best for a universal curriculum. Depending
on the school, and Amish population therein, the district administrators had to be careful of pushing certain forms of technology into the classroom.

Ryan: What about when the kids are on, are using computers in school for particular activities? That’s must be introduced at certain levels and this is the only way we can get to this program is to use this computer.

Curtis: Right. In the three buildings down, our district we kinda divided north and south...And the southern parts, those would be our most conservative, absolutely really not interested in computers at all. So down there, each teacher has a laptop, kids never touch computers. You know, now they can get the laptop to get on the SMART Board and you got at work through, but they’re really limited to just our curriculum. So math, drag this, drag that. Those kinda things. Eddings Elementary is coming along. They’re a little less, they’re cautious. So we did add a computer lab over there this year. And I don’t have like the specs on how much it was used but it’s there and we’re slowly starting to get them on board. Surprisingly, our most progressive Amish building is going to be Burton.

For the schools in his district that were open to new technology, he had slowly introduced SMART Boards, or digital interface projection and writing boards for the classroom walls. This technology is nowhere to be found in the schools in the Amish-heavy area of the district but are found in the more predominantly English schools. It was the local Amish Advisory Board that helped him introduce the technology.

Curtis: And so we would have regular meetings with [the Advisory Board] and if anything came up in between, I had some contacts that I would call or go out and see them. But like for the SMART boards, for example, that idea first hatched with that group. So you run everything through that group, here’s what I’m thinking but I need your help. Talk me through it, what do you like, what don’t you like? Kinda that give and take, work on a progression here and we would lay it out into a plan and if they felt it was agreeable, then we’d take it to the next step and kind of have a parent meeting and just lightly unveil it. Okay, this is kinda what we’re thinking. Kinda work your way through. So very slow incremental but deliberate and well-planned pieces.
Curtis also explained how difference in parent perception of technology could not be understood only by location, district, or church affiliation; he said that one needs to understand generational difference, as well:

Curtis: There’s definitely, here’s what I’m noticing. The older parents who most of their kids are through school, they wanted the very traditional, we send them to school, we don’t want a lot of homework. We don’t want any technology. Get them in for their eight years, educate them the best you can in reading, writing and math, those are their big concerns, and let the pieces fall where they may. Now, interestingly, the younger parents, who have kids that are just starting anywhere from kindergarten to 2nd grade, maybe 3rd, their whole view is changing. It’s more what opportunities are out there for my kid. I grew up this way, but I want, I want something different for my kid. And different in the aspect that it’s not, you know, we’re leaving the Amish or whatever. It’s more, I want my kid to have some opportunities. So what kind of things can you offer us? What kinds of things can you kinda put in front of them? They’re hesitant on the technology but they are more willing to kind of explore. So in my final year as principal down there [at a conservative Amish school, before he became a district administrator], kinda had to do this backwards. But we started in the primary grades, adding SMART boards and I know to your general population, SMART board, whoopee. I had to literally have evening parent meetings, demonstrations, this is all we’re planning on doing with it. Kinda ease them into and they agreed that, okay, we’ll start with this class and as that class moves through, we’ll continue adding those into the classrooms. You know, they did not want a, great, they’re here, they’re here for everyone. It was very concerted, and it took, I mean, probably two years prior to that, I had started the conversation.

I was curious about the process of introducing new technology in the schools and thought that Curtis’s process sounded rather strategic. If there was a lot of lead time, I assumed that these administrators could introduce significant changes regarding access to electronic technology in the schools. When I asked him what projects he was unable to introduce, he laughed, saying that it would surprise me.

Curtis: The one thing I have never been able to get through is typing. And it’s an interesting thing because I had done some research and there was a device I was set to purchase for the buildings. Wasn’t really a computer but it wasn’t really a typewriter. It was kind of an in between where they could, maybe like an old word processor…
Jean said that the only way the districts were able to reduce the tension regarding technology was to continue to work on the level of trust with the families. Jean said: “I got the sense there is a sense of trust, using some technology with some families. They say, that’s okay, that’s in school. It must just take an incident or two to say that’s too far and… it’s too accessible and it’s not helpful.”

**Religion and Combating Ignorance**

As mentioned in the previous section, I encountered a great deal of Christian overtones in the descriptions these educators gave to their interaction with the children and curriculum. Jeff said that while teaching about the world, he regularly made it known to kids about Christian perspectives in comparison to the secular texts and resources. There was also the annual Christmas program that each school would put on for the families in the community, and as Curtis said, this program was so important that if anyone (like a disenfranchised non-religious family) complained about that program, “…I think the neighbors would shout them down.” Not all Christianity was accepted though, as mentioned previously with the Sonshine Cabins. According to Curtis, the evangelical Protestant approach of this Release Time program made Amish families nervous. While I was interviewing him in 2017, the district was weighing how and why they would institute a release time program that used the Sonshine Cabin model. He said it was “tricky”:

> Curtis: One of the things, I guess, our discussions here in Willow Run have centered around is it’s not that anyone is against [Sonshine Cabins], it’s just how do you work that into a schedule, first of all. Knowing expectations that are on you. And then the second factor is with the Amish. Okay. Lot of rural buildings [as in more Amish, more traditional populations], first of all, but secondly, would the parents go for that? Because they really wanta be, I don’t know if control is
the right word but they wanta have a huge part in what those kids know from a spiritual level. And so one of the questions lingering out there is would the Amish like that or would they be really offended by it?

Ryan: Have you gotten feedback?

Curtis: I don’t think we’ve approached anyone as a district yet. What we would probably do is start with the building advisory boards and just say, all right, here’s what they’re looking to offer and kinda see what goes.

I found Jeff to exhibit great confidence in embracing the tensions that surfaced in his classroom. In addition, he said he didn’t shy away from introducing Christian faith in the classroom, and he believed that most (if not all), of his students were Christians.

Jeff: If you don’t have, in my belief, whether you’re a Christian or whether you’re not, what the Christian religion does, if you base a lot of your life on that, then a lot of the chaos that happens in your house goes away because it kinda falls things in line. If you don’t have any foundation at all to base anything on...What’s marital life gonna be like? What kind of parenting and discipline skills are going on?...What kind of respect is there going on between... I mean, for me, it’s really easy for me to sit down and say all right, what’s the bible say about honoring your parents?

Jeff mentioned the state educational standards with great regularity, highlighting how seriously he took the charge from the state. With these standards set by the state, he said it was his obligation to teach material that might stretch the limits of understanding for the children. But he also spoke about another charge—to inform his students morally, as they had decisions to make as adolescents, soon to be adults. He felt that if he didn’t reach them at this stage of middle school, the last years of schooling for most of his students, they may not approach this kind of understanding. He said he was combating “ignorance.”

Jeff: Ignorance is not knowing. And so I always stress to them, whether you believe in what I’m gonna say, whether you believe in what we learn about, whether you believe in college or what not, I don’t want you to leave here being
ignorant. Cuz you’re gonna hear about this stuff. And you can then form your own opinion about it but you’re not gonna be ignorant. So when you leave this school, if you ask me, one of the hardest things for me to do because I am a Christian and I go to church on Wednesday and on Sunday, I very knowledgeable about the Christian beliefs and it’s very hard for me to know the opposite line. Like when do I not bring up the Christian perspective of it? You’re talking about how the universe began. How the earth and planets came to be. All right. We can talk about all this other stuff. How do you dance around the separation of church and state and then when I know a good portion of them are Christian.

Of the participants in this study, it was Jeff who was most vocal with his opinions being a non-Amish teacher of Amish children. He was proudly and openly a Christian, with that he had some connection with his Amish students, but beyond that, he identified much difference. In the way he spoke of his values, Jeff presented to me a deep appreciation for critical thinking, higher learning, and patriotism – values that are not always associated with the Amish. And Jeff knew this, as he talked about not softening the learning experience for his Amish students. As a patriot, but also as a public school educator, Jeff spoke of his duty to present material and challenge to the children in his classroom. He would say that he was “obligated” to teach certain subjects, and though he would reference this as “testable material,” I sensed that he felt more compelled to teach some material because he wanted to combat what he called “ignorance.” Jeff is a middle-aged white man working and living in the same rural community in which he was born. However, he was attuned to justice, identifying the prejudices of his Amish students (even calling them “racist” for making remarks openly about lower order/more traditional Amish). I sensed that Jeff saw the subject of the social studies as a vehicle to bring conversations about law, justice, and obligations of the citizenry to his young charges. To me, Jeff represented a conservative philosophy that respected social order and playing
by the rules of law. And though the Amish had the right to live freely and according to their own religious identity (thanks to the First and Fourteenth Amendments, I can almost hear him say), I believe Jeff thought that the Amish were by no means deserving of more privileges than others. He said:

I just think it’s my responsibility that, you know what? They’re in my class and they’re in, they chose to be in a public school? Then your little narrow vision is gonna be here because that’s not the way life works. Doesn’t mean you can’t go back and be as Amish as you wanta be but I want you to be sensitive to the fact that everybody isn’t like you.

Jeff seemed to present an interest in a general respect for all, and the Amish fell within that scope. In this interpretation, I may be presenting Jeff as hard-nosed individual, but note that he has made a career out of teaching Amish children for over two decades.

**Allegiance to What Worlds?**

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution states a clause that protects the free exercise of religion, and another clause prohibits the establishment of religion by law. The separation of church and state was a concept that I encountered regularly in conversation with these participants, though I didn’t detect strong critique of the presence of Christian messaging in the Willow Run and Crestview districts. Jeff expressed comfort in knowing how to toe the line of what was appropriate in the schools regarding church and state. He said he would reference the Christian Bible as a textual resource with which most students were familiar. In this situation, it is possible that he was only referencing multiple perspectives, but I believe in referencing “you all have your own books” when discussing the origins of life on the planet, he was reinforcing the “correct”
way to interpret the world. Curtis shared an example of a tradition in some of the schools in his district that outlined for me a difference in adherence.

Curtis: …in Eddings and Newton, I’m not sure about Brush, but those two buildings, as the buses are dropping kids off and the kids are coming in in the morning, it’s Christian music over the PA system and that’s just…

Ryan: Like every day or during Christmas?

C: Every day. Just the way it is.

R: But never a pledge of allegiance, right?

C: No…That’s probably the quickest way to get yourself out of a job is to…

R: Is to talk about having the pledge.


Though Mary spoke about the need to understand and respect freedoms, she felt that it was necessary to be sure to include material that covered some national understanding for the students. As mentioned earlier, in her school students experienced a Veteran’s Day program, even if past principals in the Crestview District did not believe it was appropriate for a student population of Anabaptist pacifists to spend time revering military service and war. She said presenting many concepts to children was important, from school-wide events to books in the library. She said this was “discovery” and good for the children in “developing tolerance” for multiple perspectives. I sensed from Mary that it was her established position of leadership and level of perceived respect that allowed her to unveil programming or policies in her school that would stretch into the fringes of what might be acceptable for their community’s population.

Mary: Yeah, and then there was the piece where, you know, [a book] talks about gays and, you know, I went through it and I’m like there’s nothing there. There’s
nothing, people were like groping and stretching and so, cuz we always go back to these are the standards, this is what we teach. You’re allowed to disagree with something. You know, we’re not saying, we’re not trying to tell your child, if you don’t believe this, then you’re not gonna pass or if you don’t believe this, you can’t go home tonight. You know, we’re not doing that. This is the information, you know, and when you get into like science and health and social studies, it’s an exploration. You know, it’s discovery. It’s understanding the world around us and developing tolerance, you know, and now we’ve got social justice which is a whole new path in life that we, you know, that we have to embrace as educators. So, so yeah, that, that piece just, you know, you look at that and go this is America and the reason that you can be Amish, and I don’t have to be is because we live in America. You know, we have that religious freedom.

Jeff was even more direct with his explanation of why he emphasizes the teaching of American national history and citizenship.

Ryan: Yeah, one of the things that I’ve heard you say a number of times is kind of placing the kids, they’re in a little school, in a rural community in [this state] but you, I get a sense you have this kind of like national charge. We’re a part of the United States and we’re under these rules and we’re under this history and you’ve gotta know this…

Jeff: I do. I feel passionate about the fact that they need to understand that because they’re Amish doesn’t separate them from being a U.S. citizen. That there is, there are rights and privileges of being a part of the United States and they need to be aware of that. Because so many times, well, I know for a fact, their parents don’t talk about it. And they, because they are so isolated, they can live their life almost separated from citizenship.

For Jeff, the study of citizenship was not only an exercise in covering the standards of the social studies curriculum; he said it was imperative to explain the world of options to group of children who lived a sheltered and insular life. He wanted them to wake up and engage in the world around them.

Jeff: For our country to be great, we have to do for our country and not always ask, with our hand out, hey, what are you gonna do for me. Go get a job. Go to school. Learn something. Go read a book. Go volunteer. Do something nice for somebody. And don’t expect anything back. And so we have a lot of those conversations. The reality of it is what we’re all talking about is they need a role model to teach them how life is supposed to work. And how life really is because
I’m not part of the Amish community. I’m out in the, I’m sensitive to the Amish community. I respect the Amish community but I’m out in the real world and I think in general they yearn for somebody to show them what is the right way to do things.

Ryan: Otherwise, they wouldn’t be in that school anyway. They could go to one of the local parochial schools if they wanted to.

J: And they would be taught this much [bringing his hands closely together]. This little narrow slit through the needle, that’s what we’re gonna talk to you about.

R: Yeah. That’s been my impression, reading, writing, arithmetic and

J: And how to be an Amish person. And I just, I just think it’s my responsibility that, you know what? They’re in my class and they’re in, they chose to be in a public school? Then your little narrow vision is gonna be here because that’s not the way life works. Doesn’t mean you can’t go back and be as Amish as you wanna be but I want you to be sensitive to the fact that everybody isn’t like you.

R: Right. So what about more of the national stuff. Is there a pledge at school?

J: There used to be. We used to say the pledge of allegiance every day together. We don’t anymore

For Jeff, he said he was providing an education to Amish children to help them see “what was important” in the world. He said that he didn’t believe Amish families discussed the topics of American independence, revolution, or general history of the country. He said their central focus was religion and community. And for the Anabaptists, that has been one of the defining facets of the denomination: adherence to a Christian worldview over rules or laws made by humans or governments. Though we didn’t talk about this, I am certain Jeff was aware of this religious perspective of the Anabaptists. Still, he seemed bothered by the lack of attention to civic duty in his students.

J: They just happen to be Amish that live in America. Let me ask you this thought-provoking question: Do you think the Amish families would be fine living in another country if they could be Amish?
I don’t think my response surprised Jeff. He was emphasizing the opinion that what the Amish wanted more than anything else was a space to be separate, “to be Amish” as he would say. And, I also know that the Amish live in settlements and enclaves throughout Canadian provinces. They are still Amish, without being American. These identities were mutually exclusive. Additionally, Jeff talked about pushing the children to understand that they were grounded in their own perspectives, and that their worldview was not representative of others across the state, country, or world. He wanted them to be open to multiple perspectives, and maybe even pick up a bit of national identity or patriotism along the way.

Jeff: I respect your decision and your family’s decision, community’s decision to be Amish, but if you want that respect, you need to respect people that aren’t Amish. And they just need to be shown that and I think they need to be taught where that belief comes from. That it’s not just a me thing, that it is a United States. That’s what we’re built on. I think that it’s important for them to even like all the controversies with Donald Trump, I bring those things in. I said are you aware of what’s going on?

Ryan: Yeah, so even through the election or all last year [of 2016], were they coming in, saying hey, Mr. Ebert, I wanta talk…

J: Oh, they’re very opinionated about, especially during the presidential election, about Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton

R: Is that, is that like families talk about views at home, do you think?

J: I, yeah, you know, and they’re, once again, they’re young so they’re uneducated so they get… why do you hate Hillary? Other than she’s a woman. And I hear mom and dad say that they can’t stand her either.
Jeff said in another interview that he has a clear goal of wanting his students to have self-awareness and a greater awareness of the world and options around them.

Jeff: I want, yeah, I want them, I’ll be honest. I want them to get to the point where they are proud and respect where they came from but don’t think they are locked in to where they came from. You know, I want to get that kid in my class whose parents never went to college to say doggone it, I’m going to college. And I want, I want the Amish kids who will never go to college to say, you know what? Even though I’m not gonna go to college, I’m gonna be a little bit more informed and aware than my parents were. Cuz that bothers me. It bothers me that I’ve never been one to like using excuses. Well, mom and dad were this way so that’s the way I am.

“Chapter 7” and Intentional Ignorance

Jeff’s presented himself as one who worked at cracking his students’ rigidity of being “locked in to where they came from.” What complicated my understanding of Jeff’s perspective was not that Jeff, and Mary for that matter, spoke about combating “ignorance,” a term they both used when talking about teaching Amish children. Rather, it was the boundary of what new and greater perspectives were embodied in the way they spoke of their actions. Theirs was perhaps not presenting a great diversity of thought as suggested in Brighouse’s normative autonomy-facilitating school;206 these educators wanted more for these Amish kids, and potentially a heck of a lot more, but these expectations were still bound by a nationalistic and paternalistic understanding of what it meant to be an educated person. Thus, what appeared as openness and flexibility could also be perceived as a singular, additional perspective, not openness to all.

These two participants did not mention any challenge from the local bishops to their approach towards civics and citizenship. Families expected that there was to be no

stating allegiance to anything but God, but talk about the United States in the public school was, as Jean put it, “expected” by families who sent their kids to these schools.

However, other subjects, such as science, did draw criticism from Amish churches, making it more difficult for the teachers to bridge secular subject material to their religious charges. As mentioned in the previous section, the teaching of science concepts in schools put the Willow Run District in a mode of perpetual censorship and accommodation. Even in an effort to reduce the likelihood of dispute, tension remained.

As described earlier, Curtis led an annual effort to reduce the presence of objectionable material in the district’s selected textbooks. He said it was an “understanding” by the families that certain material would not surface in the classroom: “…they don’t want to see anything with snakes, dinosaurs, dating of the earth, all those pieces, so literally, every summer, I go through…and I remove all those pages.” I asked Curtis to give an example of how they make the determination to remove material. For example, if there was a “Chapter 7” with something deemed inappropriate, what would they do? He said: “…instead of doing Chapter 7 which maybe is prehistoric something, we’re gonna go this route. You’ll still do prehistoric things but we’re gonna kinda create our own little prehistoric unit. And in the kids’ books, Chapter 7 is removed. It’s just not even there.”

As mentioned earlier, issues could surface for teachers skipping concepts that then appear on a standardized test – the results of which are used in evaluating a teacher’s performance. Though potentially damaging for the teacher, Curtis said he would “settle it”: 
In an Amish building, I said, you can’t handle that [teaching a particular science concept]. Like you just, you’ve gotta let it go. It’s one of those things. What if they ask [kids will miss those questions on the standardized test]… I understand, hey, they can put 10 questions on, our kids unfortunately are gonna miss those. Just, that’s kind of the way it goes.

Mary said that determining what material to cover depended on the building. With more conservative “Amish” buildings, there was higher potential for a phone call or note from a parent about inappropriate material being taught. With a school like Myers Elementary having both Amish and English children, she said she wouldn’t hear complaints.

At the time of my interviews with Jeff, he was teaching 5th and 6th graders social studies and math. When he was the sole teacher in the 7/8 all Amish student program, he taught every subject in a middle grades curriculum, including science. Compared to other participants in this study, I found Jeff to be the one who spoke the most about tension between the state’s expectations for children (state standards) and what he thought the students could handle. In ascertaining what subjects, and to what degree, I am certain he was running this through a filter of what his own Christian convictions deemed important for children. There was not always a smooth agreement between these forces. Regarding science concepts, he said that he tended to present most as “theories,” with as much weight as other theories the children may have encountered in their lives:

Jeff: And so you’re going to have to teach things in history and in science that are theories.

Ryan: Right

J: They’re gonna go against totally what they believe in. So you’re talking about The Big Bang Theory, about how the earth was created.

R: Which you’ve taught.
J: I’ve taught. I’m sure you’re gonna have to teach it. It’s part of

R: It’s part of the state curriculum.

J: Right. And you know you’re talking to a group of kids that don’t believe a hoot of it. So what I have learned is I have, cuz I’ve gotta be really careful also with, maybe not so much but I don’t want to cross the line between separation of church and state. I’m a Christian. I go to church every Sunday. I was at church on Wednesday. I totally agree with everything that the Amish would read in their bibles cuz I read it in my bible, but I’m also the teacher so I can’t be sitting there saying, hey, guys, let’s, let’s forget all this. Let’s talk about really the way it is.

**Behind the Curtain / The Birds and The Bees**

As I heard about Curtis’s process for removing material from the eyes of children, I thought that there must be instances where these educators encountered children who wanted to learn more about a concept that the teachers were intentionally ignoring. I wondered how these educators handled such situations. Did teachers go rogue?

Ryan: This makes me think…there must, do you get kids that are like, hey, I want to know what’s in Chapter 7?207 The teacher’s like, I’m English, I don’t care. Like I’ll tell them.

Curtis: Yeah, sometimes and that, that’s an interesting piece that we kinda have at grade level meetings. How are you adjusting for the fact that Chapter 7 is gone? You know, what are the kids saying? What should our response be? Nine times out of ten, we just say it’s something culturally that we don’t feel you need and instead, we’re gonna go this route. And for the most part, the way they’re raised, it’s like, oh, okay. Good enough. You know, so we don’t, I guess, really have the push of this is ridiculous. You know, it’s, they’re a little more laid back on it.

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207 Again, this is a fictional chapter that Curtis and I discussed, an example of an objectionable chapter that might be removed.
The explanation that material could be excused away from the standards because of “something culturally that we don’t feel you need” made me pause. Where did it end? I think of Brighouse’s argument that for individuals to identify opportunities for flourishing, multiple perspectives and skills ought to be presented to children; he says: “…children should have the opportunity to learn the skills with autonomy and that parental preference is not sufficient reason to deny them that opportunity.”208 In the Willow Run District, a group of educators interpreted a charge from the State Department of Education, a “standard” for all children, as inappropriate due to the children’s culture; it was something that they didn’t “need.”

Science was not the only subject to get the knife. Through these interviews, I ascertained that if you were in an English or mostly English school, you would have some introduction to sexual education, potentially through a single lesson in health education or with a fitness instructor or visiting health professional. If you were in an Amish school in the Willow Run District, you didn’t receive any instruction in sexual education or health. Related, instead of physical education classes in the Amish schools in the Willow Run District, the students played a spring season of softball on Fridays. Curtis told me that with the absence of physical education in the schools, the additional time was dedicated to the offering of German classes. In Mary’s English and Amish mixed school of Myers Elementary, she said that sexual education was present.

Mary: [Sexual education is taught] in the district, actually 5th grade and… 5th grade, we do it in 5th grade and we separate the boys and the girls, and we do the

talk. And yeah, that’s never been an issue that I’m aware of. It’s never, it was never an issue when I was at Fredericksburg and it’s never been an issue here.

Ryan: No kids have, families have exempted the kids?

M: No, I never have and what we do, I mean, what we do is communication. We inform the parents we’re going to do it beforehand. I think they sign off on it and that’s what we do…It’s the whole communication piece.

R: Yeah, you’re giving them a head’s up.

M: Yeah…Surprise is not good.

Jeff, who teaches at Myers, provided more on what is “covered” in sexual education.

Jeff: I generally do not do it [the sexual education class]. The school nurse does it with the girls and it’s not like a full curriculum. It’s one class.

Ryan: One class in like a, which grade?

J: 5th grade.

R: And that’s kinda like the year? Not like a 6th grade, 7th grade component?

J: I think they probably do 5th grade and 6th grade. I don’t know whether there’s a difference, but they probably do it two years in a row. The gym teacher usually does it with the boys. I had to do it last year just because he was not around and they asked me to do it. So it’s just a DVD. You put a DVD on and they watch it and then when they’re done, any questions? I give them a book to take home. So it’s not…

R: it really is one class. One intervention class. We’re doing this now…

J: It’s like, almost like, I feel like it’s almost like well, this is a requirement. We have to document that we got a class in and here it is.

R: I mean, what’s your impression? The way you talk about it, you make it seem like it’s kind of superficial or do you feel like that also is enough for us. Let’s…

J: I would say this, the overall feeling I would think, it’s, at Myers, is parents will wanna pretty much handle that themselves. So they can have more control over what was said, how it was said, how in-depth are you gonna go.
R: Are you nervous, not nervous, that’s not the right word, but you play a DVD. I mean, you talked about the power of video to introduce concepts. You’re like, I’m gonna take you to India right now. Kids say ‘what?’ Do you think that’s similar with that curriculum where the kids that might go home, like I never thought of that. I never thought of bodies being…

J: I don’t know. I really never, I don’t know. I think in general, clearly, 5th graders and 6th graders are very uncomfortable with the whole thing

R: of course.

J: So at least the one day that I did it, very quiet. Certainly no question. Just go home. Glad it’s done.

Even with a mix of both English and Amish children, Myers is the most Amish school in the Crestview School District. The other elementary schools have mostly English populations of students. It made sense to me that there was some kind of requirement regarding sexual education. In the Willow Run District, where the most English schools were still about 30 – 40 percent Amish, it was a different story. Curtis said that there was no sexual education in the “Amish” schools, and a standalone unit in the “English” schools, like what Myers School follows.

Ryan: …but related to curriculum and gender, I forget if I asked you this before but sex ed. How is, I don’t think we asked… How is that done?

Curtis: We don’t do anything with that. Actually. My understanding is that within the church, when you’re of that age, there’s some printed materials, what have you.

R: Really?

C: That’s a church and home thing. And they will make no bones about it, they want it that way. Do not…

R: Don’t teach sex education

C: Nothing. So it’s kind of a varying thought there. I get it and I’m not questioning that. But I did go through a couple classes where the parents had not
explained things, particularly with the girls. And that creates kind of a sticky situation at school. Because it’s like…

R: Absolutely. These girls need to know.

C: Right, right. So we did have a couple that failed to get that message across timely.

R: And I don’t, so is that, so what about for English kids? English kids get sex ed or is that still taken care of at home?

C: English kids, the school nurse, local physicians will come in and just do a general, not horribly in depth, just enough to kinda get them on the same page there but that only happens at Newton and Eddings [Elementary Schools]. And it’s by permission so if you have someone that, no, we’re gonna take care of that at home.

R: So they would opt out or

C: They can opt out of it.

R: Does that mean a parent has to send a form in or something?

C: Typically what they’ll do, we’ll fill out papers and just sign if you want your kid to go. If the paper doesn’t come back, that means okay, you’re opting out. That’s fine. We’ll just come up with alternative plans for those kids. And kinda go from there. When you get to the high school then, there’s obviously a more in-depth courses.

R: I bet at the, too, there’s, is there curriculum there?

C: The middle school doesn’t do much with it.

R: Really, so it’s the high school…

C: Yeah, it’s mostly aiming over at the high school. Sophomore year, I think it is. Right around there

R: Out of a health class?

C: out of a health class. And surprisingly and this is kind of interesting to me, that health class gets way more in-depth than I would think our local area would allow it to.
R: Oh, really. Even, you’re saying even by English standards?

C: Nothing’s said, it’s just kind of okay, whatever. So I mean, they’re, trying to think, it’s usually right before prom, I don’t know if that’s planned or what the deal is but…They have a video where they watch a live birth and just all kinds of things like that. So it’s kind of, I don’t know.

R: Yeah, but that’s probably, that’s where the kids would get that most exposure in terms of the school would be at that sophomore year.

C: Right. Otherwise, it’s pretty superficial.

According to the Collaborative for Comprehensive School-Age Health (CCSAH), this state does not have any health standards from the state level.209 Any health courses or standards are developed by the district; thus it is appropriate for Crestview and Willow Run Districts to create what they deem appropriate for their schools. They have that right. Curtis said that they “…just do a general, not horribly in-depth, just enough to kinda get them on the same page” form of curriculum on one day, and perhaps not at all in the Amish schools. It seemed as if Curtis was not receiving pressure from families to do a more comprehensive review of health and sex for the children; in fact, he called it a “church and home thing.” Jeff reiterated his impression of the role of families to “cover” health and sex concepts in the home. When he taught in a more urban district as a young teacher, before he came to the Crestview District, he said that they had the “totally opposite” approach for sexual education:

Jeff: They had an agency hired. I’m trying to think or remember what the class was called, “Art of Personal Living”? APL maybe. That was all year, once a week.

Ryan: Really? Was that taught by a health teacher?

J: Yeah. Mrs. Glick, I think was her name, she would come in and there was no bones about it. 5th grade. Everything. All year. Anything you can think of…

R: Those kids were gonna walk away [with an in-depth understanding] … Were you part of the discussion where people were saying why is this so deep? Or were they just saying…

J: No, this was just the way it was. I mean, I never had any parents there, I mean, they had notebooks out, put notes on the board. They took it. It was freely talked about.

R: What about in your staff meetings that you have at school or talk with teachers, is there some of that like 8th grade girls and boys, someone’s getting pregnant. Does that kind of conversation happen or…

J: Not in our staff meetings. No, not a whole lot. I think more of the, because I teach the older kids and [another teacher] does, there’s discussions like privately, concerns about especially girls. You worry about them.

The Second Sex

In the above dialogue with Jeff, and the earlier conversation with Curtis, there were two points when their discussion of sexual education led to what I perceived as anxiety about what they were doing for girls. Jeff said that “You worry about them.” Curtis referenced a “sticky situation” and a “failure” in communicating sexual education.

Here is that exchange again with Curtis:

Ryan: …but related to curriculum and gender, I forget if I asked you this before but sex ed. How is, I don’t think we asked… How is that done?

Curtis: We don’t do anything with that. Actually. My understanding is that within the church, when you’re of that age, there’s some printed materials, what have you.

R: Really?
C: That’s a church and home thing. And they will make no bones about it, they want it that way. Do not…

R: Don’t teach sex education

C: Nothing. So it’s kind of a varying thought there. I get it and I’m not questioning that. But I did go through a couple classes where the parents had not explained things, particularly with the girls. And that creates kind of a sticky situation at school. Because it’s like…

R: Absolutely. These girls need to know.

C: Right, right. So we did have a couple that failed to get that message across timely. (emphasis added)

At the moment of this conversation with Curtis, I sensed that the in-depth talk about sexual education had run its course in the interview. I felt he was becoming slightly uncomfortable because he was demonstrating a lack of knowledge beyond what he already explained. He even said “I may be showing my naiveté as a second year [district administrator]” regarding the subject of sexual education. When he spoke of “a couple that failed,” I figured it was a pair of students who had become pregnant, students who failed to receive the message about sexual education; perhaps they didn’t know how body mechanics worked, and that that there was an undesired result. However, the more that I read this quote transcribed, the quote took on new meaning for me. Perhaps there were a couple of teachers who failed to get the message of sexual education across in a timely fashion. Who failed? The children or the teachers?

It is in that area of ambiguity that I would like to explore the tension that revolves around gender in this study. In these conversations about sexual education, it became clear that participants thought about sexual education as a concern for girls, as
demonstrated in Jeff’s and Curtis’s quotes. Jeff even went on to talk about how girls
needed to be prepared because boys were “clueless until they are 20” about relationships
and obligations.

Before this study, I read enough about the Amish and the Creek Settlement
community at-large to know that I would encounter traditional expectations for girls and
boys. This was reinforced by the participants, too.

Curtis: So I think from the setup, the kids are basically taught if you’re a girl,
you’re going to cook, clean, sew, raise a family. That’s your main expectation. And
if you’re the guy, you’re going to go out and secure that job and be the
breadwinner. And so they kind of lean that direction. When you get into their
churches, they obviously sit ladies on one side, men on the other. It’s never the
families together. Lunchtime, the men will always file through the lines first.
Women will pick up the tail end and kinda go from there. So from an early age,
the kids coming to us have that engrained. That’s just the way it is.

Gender segregation was described to me in other instances. I was familiar with the
separation of girls and boys210 into separate groups for sexual education concepts and
classes, but I didn’t know that would be the case in other settings like music and language
arts. Barbara, a teacher of a classroom of nearly all Amish children, was firm on the
strategy of separating girls and boys into different groups if the material or situation made
it necessary to her. If she wanted to assign a book that had some sexual innuendo or
situations about girls’ maturation, she would only issue it to the girls in the class, and
never the boys. She said: “If they [girls] are ready for the book, they would react to it

210 I use the term “boys” and “girls” to reference the way schools traditionally identify and potentially serve
students as either “boy” or “girl.” Though not referenced by my participants, I would wager that there were
students in both districts who would not identify their gender as “boy” nor “girl.” This study does not
make space for the pursuit of understanding how the districts were serving the populations of children who
do not fit into binary categories of male and female. However, I do anticipate highlighting how some
educators in these districts project a gendered understanding of positions, roles, and expectations for their
students.
differently if they read the book in a mixed group of boys and girls.” She also separated the students in choral music class, the “same way they do in church.” She put the girls on one side and the boys on the other side, facing one another, not mixed as other choral groups do. She said she “…doesn’t have interest in pushing the kids into uncomfortable situations.” When I asked her to explain the potential issues that would surface if the children were mixed together as a choral group, she said singing certain songs about love became more complicated and silly when they are in close proximity to one another.

Having men or women present in the schools as a gendered role model was also evident in other decisions. Roy said that he was first approached by the Amish Advisory Board in Willow Run Schools to work in one of their public schools because they thought the Amish boys needed to have an Amish male presence in their school. After significant prodding from the Advisory Board, he accepted the position of hall monitor and classroom aide. He replaced a female staff member and received praise that he was making a difference. He said: “I had parents that came to me and said our kids came home and what a difference,” and that “they said she was in over her head.” I inferred that some of the difficulty had to do with gender, as the Advisory Board was telling him that they needed another male authority in the school.

Curtis commented on the importance of having a male presence in certain situations. When the Amish schools first started to offer German classes, the instructors were often local bishops, or at least Amish men from the community.

Ryan: Are there other things, that’s a whole other area of just kinda like gender expectations. Is there, are there other teaching positions that people, you might get advised, that should probably be, that should be a female teacher, that should be a male teacher?
Curtis: What we try to do on the whole with our Amish buildings is make sure that we have at least one male teacher in every building. Maybe not so important in the primaries but as you start reaching, 5, 6, 7 and 8, the kids start pushing a little more and for what, culturally, the way they’ve been raised, you’re not a guy, I don’t have to listen to you. So they’ll start steamrolling some women. Not all. You know, if they pick up that someone’s maybe a little weaker in being not assertive, you’re not doing it, knock it off, they’ll try to steamroll them. So we do try to, not that we limit positions to, okay, you know, that 8th grade has to be a man. I mean, it doesn’t but we always try to have that male presence. So that, if things start to get out of control, we can have that conversation and I guess the guy gets to be the heavy and just go over and basically say, look. And nine times out of ten, that’s the end of it.

Curtis mentioned other situations where there was a male “heavy” to talk to families about their son’s treatment of girls and women in the school. He said:

…there are some scrapes here and there. I’ve went out to houses before and just had to say, look, your son is just way too overbearing. It’s gotta, he’s gotta cool it type thing. And typically, those are met with, well, absolutely. We’ll make sure that we get that back in check and kinda go from there. So culturally, it’s not, it’s just the way their system is set up. I don’t think it’s meant to be like a rude system to anyone. It’s just, that’s their tradition.

But not everything was an effort to corral boys and limit their negative effect on girls. I asked Curtis about school disrupting the traditional expectations for boys and girls. He said that even though they do seem to run into problems with the way that boys act out or become “over-bearing,” school mostly just “rocks their world.”

Curtis: School kinda rocks their world. Because we, we don’t, we don’t follow those [traditional gender divisions]. When they come to school, on the whole, we attempt as a staff, they’re all equal. They all have a valid, you know, we let them share equally. We take turns. We mix things up. So it’s kind of interesting to watch that, a little bit of a mix-up because their preconceived notion is well, this is the way it is and they come to school and it’s no, it’s not. Why? Wait a minute? Why did the girls go through lunch line first? Or you know what have you. So we kinda challenge that a little bit, starting in the primaries. And they adapt pretty well. And I would say you go through a lull there, where it’s not a big deal. When you start approaching like 5th and 6th grade, particularly, some classes by 7th grade definitely, they start to maybe become a little more aware
that, hey, I’m the guy here and what I say should go. The girl’s just gonna sit down type thing. So you start kind of battling that with, with the kids as they’re coming up through. But by and large, as a staff, we teach obviously to [the state’s] learning standards so that is the goal for every kid. Whether they’re male, female, what have you.

I interpret the “battle” that Curtis spoke of to be the process of working with boys and girls in presenting an alternative to the way that they are told to be “culturally,” or how “their system is set up.” He is battling the “tradition” of having boys and girls learn a series of behaviors and norms that are challenged by seemingly simple activities such as getting in line for lunch in the cafeteria. In On Education, Brighouse states that the school is aptly arranged to present multiple methods of equality, girls can go before boys just as boys can go before girls. And though there is a significant understanding of tradition in these districts, I found participants talking about how gender-based expectations are changing. Mary said that traditionally in this community, there was a singular expectation for women: “stay home and have babies.” She said that for both Amish and English, there has been “progress.”

Mary: …I still see that this is the male gender path, this is the female gender path. It’s, I mean, and the path is ‘I will get married, I will have babies.’

Ryan: Right. What about in the English, do you see that similarly? That there’s still that, that gendered path? These girls, not that they, but they have their own kind of like girl goals.

M: Yes, but I see the percentage of it dropping further where there is, it’s bigger than it used to. Like I’m 60. When I was 18 years old, my dad looked at me and I was not Amish. I was not poor. We were probably middle of the road. And my dad looked at me and said, I said ‘I wanta go to college.’ My dad looked at me and said, ‘women don’t go to college.’ They get married and have babies.

\[^{211}\text{Brighouse, On Education, 73.}\]
Mary did go to college, and then earned a master’s degree. Her children went to college; one daughter earned a Ph.D. and is now a stay-at-home mother. Mary said that such an arrangement was unthinkable a generation ago for anyone in her community. But for the Amish, are there significant advances in options for girls? What about that girl who shows significant ambition and intelligence? What options do they have for work after they complete the 8th grade? Mary spoke more about the general “change” that has happened in the community and sarcastically claimed that the 8th grade education was still a significantly limiting factor for women. Perhaps if their families own a business, they can get a bookkeeping job. If not, there are few options.

Mary: …it’s changed for everyone and at the same time, the Amish people, now, okay, so okay, so Hannah [a former student who is the accountant for her family’s company] is not the norm. Most of our kids don’t come from families of businesses. There’s a few but majority of them [Amish boys] are either gonna go out onto a crew, mason, they’ll work in a carpenter shop, a cabinet shop. Girls? We’ve got lots of choices: Waitressing, waitressing, maybe working in a store, waitressing, working in a store. I mean, what else is there? What else is there?

Ryan: What about doing a little bookkeeping for a small company?

M: If, yeah. No, I bet you no. There’s no way. You let somebody come in and do your books? With an 8th grade education?

I had the impression from these participants that it was rather difficult for Amish girls and women to stem from the norm. The expectations from the churches were that women would take care of the home. The sarcastic waitressing joke from Mary had a lot of truth in it. The options for young women, outside of the home, were few. And even if a woman had a job, once she was married, she would be expected to quit and stay home. Roy had a poignant story about one woman he hired when he owned a restaurant.
Roy: I think I hired her in 1992 when she was seventeen… She was very, very business-oriented. I had her as my HR person. She was in-charge of hiring, replacing people and I gave her quite a bit of responsibility. She had a boyfriend and she started joining the Amish church. One day she said I need to talk to you, so we went in the back.

Ryan: Was she at another church before that?

Roy: No, she never…

Ryan: Didn’t grow up in a church?

Roy: Yeah, she grew up in the Amish church… But she had not been a member, and so she was taking instruction for baptism to become a member. She had said, she sat there and bawled, she said I can’t do it. I said, what can’t you? I can’t do this, I cannot. Go to a little house and spend the rest of my life in there doing what Amish ladies do. So she didn’t, but she paid a heavy price.

Ryan: Really?

Roy: Well, I don’t know how it would have worked had she been an Amish woman with her husband. But she had… let’s see, here’s then…

Ryan: So she didn’t get married?

Roy: She got married.

Ryan: She got married and said, ‘I’m working’?

Roy: Well she didn’t get married Amish then. She quit, she quit joining the Amish church.

Ryan: And her husband didn’t care I guess?

Roy: No, he said fine with me. But because of her abilities, and business smarts, there was constant friction. She always had… Somebody is going to be top dog, it doesn’t matter where you are. Scripturally the husband is the head of the house. But if the husband does his part, and treats, loves his wife like Christ loves the church, gave himself for it, there’s not a problem. When there is, and she was

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212 One of the central tenets of Anabaptist faith, and what defined the group as unusual in Europe in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, was the practice of baptizing adults, not children. This ritual of baptism comes after adults, of their free will, ask to join the church.
really quick-witted and sharp tongued and strong willed. They split, he divorced her.

Ryan: You think because of that? He couldn’t…

Roy: They were just not compatible at the business level. Had she… there’s a prime example of had she gone that route and shown that respect, I think she probably would have been a lot better off.

Ryan: Right, so it sounds like she wasn’t… It was almost against her own better judgment. But if she maybe went that route and was a bit more respectful of her husband, but your saying you’d think she’d still be working at the restaurant? Or do you think she’d be at home?

Roy: She would have been at home, she wouldn’t have been allowed to work at the restaurant.

Ryan: Do you think she still likes her work though?

Roy: Oh she does, but she’s forty years old now, almost forty-one. Ya’know. Is that a heavy price to pay? I don’t know

Ryan: Does she seem happy?

Roy: No, not really.

This conversation with Roy really stuck with me. He seemed to be sad about the situation of his former employee. She was potentially living a life that was unsatisfying. As he told the story, I thought he would have ended by saying that this strong-willed and talented person was able to retain her position of employment and marriage, learning how to stretch the boundaries of what was expected of her. However, he seemed to indicate that she erred in not giving in to the church, and that she chose employment over a steady marriage. Thus, a failure.

I was also surprised by a comment made by Mary regarding the role of women. In our meetings, she exuded nothing but confidence. She could list all the
accomplishments she’d had through her years as a teacher and principal, but she said she was always aware of her position as a woman. And though a principal, and she said others saw her as a leader in the community, she would always be viewed as second to men. Remember that Mary is not Amish, though a Christian woman raised in a community in which conservative Christian values dominate.

Mary: Yeah, and for whatever reason, God gave me leadership skills that have just gradually, you know, been polished through the years but when I sit at that business meeting, I’m smart enough to know as a woman that I am second. I mean, that their place is different than mine but I also know that men need to be respected. And you have to show them respect and when you do that, then they will accept you and they will share, and I feel very comfortable with the group of guys that I meet with, those businessmen. I feel very, very comfortable with them. And I, and I’ve learned to choose my words carefully, you know. It is, it is difficult, I’m gonna be honest with you, when we have our programs, and we have big gatherings and there’s men, I have to go out of my comfort zone to walk up and, you know, I wonder in my brain, am I overstepping the boundary here. To shake a hand. You know, or sometimes I know it’s not cool to shake a hand...You don’t wanna come off as like too headstrong, as like the leader of the place. Because, because the Amish community is, and even, and I’m gonna be honest with you, even being married almost 40 years, I know that I have very, very strong leadership skills but my husband is the head of our home. And I’ve had to learn to bite my tongue. I’ve had to learn to step back. We’re a team. We’re a really, really good team but there are times I had to, I’ve had to learn to do that. Men have a place, women have a place. They’re different. And even though I am a strong leader, I’m learning and still learning to polish that, how to stand side by side.

Ryan: Right, right.

M: And not be labeled a bitch

R: Yeah, of course. That’s right.

M: Cuz it’s reality. Because, because [a former high school principal] and he and I used to, we did a lot of work when I was at the middle school and he would tell me, he goes ‘If I was in your shoes and I did it, they would tell me I was doing my job. If you do it, as a woman…

R: You’re overstepping
M: …you’re a bitch.’ So even in any walk of culture, you still have that, as women, we still have that fight. I don’t wanta go down that path of women’s rights thing but you still, there is still that piece anywhere.

When relaying this story, Mary exhibited disappointment at the situation and the environment in which she lived. I thought it important that Mary spoke first about her role as a leader of consequence in the community before discussing underlying misogyny. She didn’t tell the story to describe why she was walking away from the community or aiming to immediately disrupt the social order. Rather, Mary was discussing compromise; she sought to move her community forward (e.g. introducing concepts of social justice in her school’s classroom) while recognizing what hurdles exist.

These situations which dwelt in tension demonstrated for me the quandary of compromise, uncertainty, and loss for these educators. In writing about the predicament of humans pursuing universal truths, philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin describes that we are “doomed to choose” and to live with the inevitable loss of a decision:

The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable — that is a truism — but conceptually incoherent; I do not know what is meant by a harmony of this kind. Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss.213

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Mary wanted her students to realize new potentials, even while she would at times be recognized as secondary due to gender. Recall Curtis’s story about informing a science teacher that they needed to remove lessons about cell division:

Curtis: …it actually came up this week, mitosis, meiosis, some of those things, we were chatting a little bit because the teacher felt that the kids were going to see questions like that on their AIR assessments [the annual standardized test]. ‘How should I handle that?’ and it’s a first year teacher. In an Amish building. I said, ‘you can’t handle that. Like you just, you’ve gotta let it go.’ It’s one of those things. What if they ask… I understand, hey, they can put 10 questions on, our kids unfortunately are gonna miss those. Just, that’s kind of the way it goes.

When Curtis told me this story of telling a teacher “you gotta let it go,” I sensed determination and self-awareness. I believe that he felt it wasn’t worth the potential controversy of teaching a concept that may challenge Biblical understandings of the world, but that the decision sounded slightly absurd to me, an outsider. Though Curtis disclosed this story with little hesitation, I do not think these decisions that dwell in omission or censorship were made lightly, nor swiftly. I often sensed from these participants an awareness of the potential loss and potential regret that comes with compromise.
Chapter 7: Open and Closed Futures

They believe that education’s aim should be the life of goodness, not the life of the intellect, the making of a good man, not the making of a good American life…

Therefore, they reject what many or the rest of us accept in a world of knowledge and they believe that the education in writing and reading and arithmetic which a child can acquire up until the time of adolescence is sufficient education, particularly in view of the fact that Amish life is not concerned with technical and technological achievement and development…

They do not cast their burden on the community.
They do not have people on relief or welfare.
They do not have their aged and public funds for the aged.
I think that we are talking about here are really great achievers.
They have been in the education business for 300 years. 214

On December 8, 1971, William B. Ball, a constitutional lawyer and religious freedom advocate representing the respondents in the Wisconsin v. Yoder case, stated the above in his closing arguments in front of Chief Justice Warren Burger’s United States Supreme Court. Though six months earlier the same court issued an 8-1 decision against Mr. Ball’s position in Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971), 215 his fortune was about to change.

After hearing his arguments for the religious freedom of the Amish and about the potential damage of high school for Amish adolescents, the Court ruled in his and the respondents’ favor. With a unanimous decision, Chief Justice Burger wrote the following

decision, echoing Ball’s sympathetic portrait of the Amish’s “adequate” offering of education and opportunity to their young:

Aided by a history of three centuries as an identifiable religious sect and a long history as a successful and self-sufficient segment of American society, the Amish have demonstrated the sincerity of their religious beliefs, the interrelationship of belief with their mode of life, the vital role that belief and daily conduct play in the continuing survival of Old Order Amish communities, and the hazards presented by the State's enforcement of a statute generally valid as to others. Beyond this, they have carried the difficult burden of demonstrating the adequacy of their alternative mode of continuing informal vocational education in terms of the overall interest that the State relies on in support of its program of compulsory high school education. Considering this showing and weighing the minimal difference between what the State would require and what the Amish already accept, it was incumbent on the State to show with more particularity how its admittedly strong interest in compulsory education would be adversely affected by granting an exemption to the Amish.\(^\text{216}\)

Though he voted with the majority in favor of Yoder et al., Justice William O. Douglas provided a partial dissent of the decision. He did not argue against the perception that the Amish were living positive lives, but rather that the rights of children were being reduced by attending to the rights of the parents:

On this important and vital matter of education, I think the children should be entitled to be heard. While the parents, absent dissent, normally speak for the entire family, the education of the child is a matter on which the child will often have decided views. He may want to be a pianist or an astronaut or an oceanographer. To do so he will have to break from the Amish tradition. It is the future of the student, not the future of the parents that is imperiled by today's decision. If a parent keeps his child out of school beyond the grade school, then the child will be forever barred from entry into the new and amazing world of diversity that we have today. The child may decide that that is the preferred course, or he may rebel. It is the student's judgment, not his parents', that is essential if we are to give full meaning to what we have said about the Bill of

Rights and of the right of students to be masters of their own destiny. If he is harnessed to the Amish way of life by those in authority over him, and if his education is truncated, his entire life may be stunted and deformed. The child, therefore, should be given an opportunity to be heard before the State gives the exemption which we honor today.217

This point of Justice Douglas’s partial dissent provides an introduction to this section of the study. Clearly from his vote with the majority, a vote to endorse the Amish expectation that formal school need only require foundational substance of writing, reading, and mathematics, Douglas did not want to paint the Amish as agitators against the free state of democracy. However, he issues a warning. If, in his words, the child is “…forever barred from entry into the new and amazing world of diversity that we have today,” what potential are we “stunting?” In my observations of how the educators in this study spoke of their role in educating Amish students in their classrooms, the children are fulfilling the prediction of Justice Douglas, and of William Ball: they are not discovering the variety of diversity that would potentially be introduced through a high school education, but they are also thriving within a world as prescribed by their community.

In the first section of this study, I reference the Rawlsian political liberal view of the essential purpose of education from the state’s perspective to “…foster a set of civic skills and allegiance in all citizens in order to ensure the endurance of ideals of equality and freedom.”218 Accordingly, for citizens to properly exercise their individual

218 Reich, 4.
freedoms, they need to have a healthy sense of autonomy, personal self-legislation, self-creation, or the basic capacity to make choices. Amish families sending their children to public schools must know that their kids are exploring content and a world that exists beyond their own backyards; however, as explained to me by the study participants, there is no overarching goal to facilitate a sense of autonomy which would draw the child outside of the church or God’s wishes. There is less self-creation and more existing as God’s creation. Thus, I see these educators as guiding the children in an exploration of a world aligned within a prescribed array of experiences, or a limited spectrum of opportunity and promise.

William Ball, the lawyer representing the Yoder et al. party in the 1972 Yoder case, said that the Amish were “really great achievers” who took care of the elderly, are not on welfare, and do not “cast their burden on the community.” In presenting support in the Yoder case, Ball brought in an “expert witness” account from professor of education Donald Erickson, who defended the model of Amish education as potentially the envy of others:

Many public educators would be elated if their programs were as successful in preparing students for productive community life as the Amish system seems to be. In fact, while some public schoolmen strive to outlaw the Amish approach, others are being forced to emulate many of its features.

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219 Reich, in reference to Walter Feinberg and Gerald Dworkin’s writing on autonomy, 96.
221 Donald Erickson, “Showdown at an Amish Schoolhouse: A Description and Analysis of the Iowa Controversy,” in Compulsory education and the Amish: The right not to be modern, ed. Albert N. Keim (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 61.
The justices agreed. The grass on the Amish side of the fence seemed green enough, if not greener. And though not raised in detail in the *Yoder* arguments, the Amish also defend the value of *Rumspringa*. As Steven Mazie writes, this practice of “running around” outside of Amish rules before young Amish commit to the church through baptism is seen as an adequate opportunity for exit from the community. Isn’t that enough? As Jean stated, Amish parents sending their children to the public schools in the Creek Settlement were already “opening the door” to opportunities for new and expanded learning outside of the traditional Amish understanding of the world. They knew what they were getting into. Barbara played secular films; Jeff talked about patriotism; Mary led the school in a Veteran’s Day celebration.

**Career Planning: A Very Small Lacuna**

In the educational setting for these participants, an opening for the exploration of new and different perspectives would appear, but perhaps only ephemerally. The participants said they would discuss careers, but it tended to reinforce the status quo or a limited spectrum of opportunities. Recall Principal Mary’s sarcastic quip about career options for Amish women: “We’ve got lots of choices: Waitressing, waitressing, maybe working in a store, waitressing, working in a store. I mean, what else is there? What else is there?” Justice Douglas warned that the 8th grade education was not going to be enough to prepare students for the “new and amazing world of diversity” we have in the United States. In his dissenting opinion, he cautioned that if the student wanted to be a

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222 Mazie, 756.
“…pianist or an astronaut or an oceanographer. To do so he will have to break from the Amish tradition.”

To further understand this situation, I think that Roy provides a unique perspective on what is lost in the basic introduction of career opportunities to Amish children who may demonstrate interest. The second time I interviewed Roy was in his home, a sizeable two-story house with a large barn and out-buildings on a lovely piece of farmland in a real estate market where property is expensive. In addition to being the Burton Elementary School librarian, Roy taught music and German. He also owned a bed and breakfast, a feed store, a real estate business, and tutored children on the side. Roy doesn’t have a high school diploma, but he has a G.E.D., something he needed to secure to qualify for his real estate license. Beyond this assortment of businesses, Roy has a passport full of stamps from his travels around the globe. Even with a passing introduction to this man’s life, I assume one would say that he has been living a successful life. He had goals to own a restaurant, to travel…I would say that Roy was flourishing, even into his 60s. He said he has been “very blessed.” But there are some things that Roy cannot do. He said that he loves teaching but could not hold a position as a full-time teacher since he doesn’t have his teaching license. The story of his severance from formal schooling as a child is not recalled fondly. As a child, he said he “loved school,” and as he neared the last months of 8th grade, “a black cloud hung around my head.” He knew his schooling experience was coming to an end, and he wasn’t done. “I was a dreamer…thinking, ‘What if I could go to France?’” He felt drawn to pursue his studies but saw the spectrum of options in front of him as limited. He said he could have
easily been a farmer, like members of his family and surrounding community. But he said he was “an awful farmer.”

Roy: I would have loved to be a doctor or a certified school teacher. That is one thing that I begged my parents to let me go to school. But…

Ryan: They weren’t having it.

Roy: Oh, no way. Nineteen sixty-four, there’s no way.

Roy recalls his own thinking and the reaction of his parents in the mid-1960s, but what about his teachers at the time? I don’t have Roy’s insight on this, but I did see a parallel to the participants in this study when they spoke of “watching students go by,” or of knowing an Amish student who could be very successful in schooling beyond the 8th grade not consider such options. I couldn’t help but think of a young Roy dreading the end of his formal schooling.

Curtis: That is probably one of the hardest things to watch. I’ve seen the accountants come through. I’ve seen the, you have everything it takes to be a teacher. You have everything it takes to be the accountant. You could easily be a physician. I mean, ‘you’re brilliant’ type thing. And you see them coming up through and in some instances, graduation’s both happy but for the staff, it can also be sad.

Ryan: Really?

C: Because you start thinking about, oh, wow, you know, I wonder what great thing you could’ve done if you had that opportunity. To kind of move on and it’s almost like it’s just that’s it, it’s done. Move on.

Mary spoke about Joseph, a former student who stayed in touch with her, sometimes coming over to her house to use the internet. Mary said he could “literally” do anything he wanted. At the time of our interviews, he worked with a construction business.

According to Mary, he talked about studying in college, an experience that she says
would probably never happen for him: “…that is not what the Amish community…that’s not what they promote. They, they live in that small boundary community where you just, you stay here and you get married and you, are you gonna have a business or are you gonna do a job?”

I did hear a few stories from the participants about Amish children going on to become professionals without severing significant ties with their Amish communities:

Roy: There was an Amish girl in Pennsylvania that said she wants to be a registered nurse. She wants to take the education to do it.

Ryan: Is this somebody that you know or…?

Roy: I just heard this story, talked about… and she talked with the ministers and talked and talked. They finally agreed, okay, we’ll let you do it. So, she went to school, she became the nurse. But then it also brought other things, like how are you going to work on Sunday? And all of a sudden, even though… so ultimately what it all got boiled down to or pinned on was well, education, if she wouldn’t have had the education, she wouldn’t have never been dealing with those issues.

Ryan: Right, it’s like the gateway to so many other potential problems?

Roy: Potential problems.

Ryan: And the church wasn’t going to say, oh the *Ordnung* changes because you want to become a nurse.

Roy: Oh, we’re not going to change our rules and the Bible does say keep the Sabbath holy… or… So you get into the discussion of what is holy. And you know that the nursing homes have to have people working Sundays.

Ryan: Right.

Roy: But it seems at a lower-level entry job there, it seems almost more permissible.

Separately, Roy shared a story of a local boy leaving the Amish church to become a doctor:
Roy: You will have the occasional kid that after… see the goal, most of those are those are so, I’d say so indoctrinated, within the fact that at eighth grade you’re out of school.

Ryan: There’s no option, that’s it.

Roy: Now you’re out there, your own boss, you can do what you want. You have to get a job. But for some of them, I think after a year or so of that. And I have seen it. Oh, I could of done this, I could of done that. There’s Jonas Miller from Sugarcreek, an Amish boy who after going through that said, you know what, I would have loved to be a doctor. Well, now he is. Amish kid who is a doctor working in one of the hospitals up north.

Ryan: What happened to… I’m assuming his family were his family okay with him having to go back to… that’s some serious schooling?

Roy: Well yeah, and his family obviously supported him.

The examples of Amish children who went against the grain of expectations in careers were promising. And though impressive, I soon learned that these examples represented unique outliers, individuals who could be counted on one hand. These individuals did not represent examples of entrance onto other paths of employment; rather, they were extra-ordinary, or even unsubstantiated, like the “nurse from Pennsylvania” whom Roy had only heard of, but not encountered. The predominant story was one of status quo. The Amish children in these schools of the Creek Settlement were facing the end of schooling after 8th grade, just like young Roy in 1964. At 14 years of age, they were walking out of school for the world of work.

**Entering the Workforce at 14-Years-Old**

I asked all the participants about the job outlook for Amish children in their schools, and I ascertained certain kinds of opportunities that were waiting for the children after they “graduated” from 8th grade. The participants didn’t express nervousness about
unemployment or the children lacking a career path. Jeff said he spoke about jobs and careers all the time in his classroom, and I gathered it was to keep in the fore the idea that these children were entering the world of work after the 8th grade. Kids knew that a role was waiting for them in the workforce. Jeff said that for the most part: “a good portion of my students already kinda know what their job is gonna be by the time they leave school.”

Jeff: You know, 5th grade’s a little early but you know, I would think by 5th grade, the talk has already been started, that Dad’s got a lumber business and ‘I’m a boy and I’m gonna help Dad in the lumber yard’ and ‘I happen to be daughter and I’m gonna eventually help in the office’ and like the daughter won’t be out in the lumber yard but if Dad’s got a successful lumber business and she’s smart, she could then be into the office.

As referenced earlier by Jeff, some of the Amish schools’ curricula had at times catered to Amish preferences for vocational preparation, such as classes in home economics and construction. Mary said that it could be difficult to work with the older 8th graders, especially boys, who demonstrated a kind of “senioritis,” shirking the obligations of schoolwork and standardized tests. By contrast, the participants mentioned palpable excitement from graduating children for future work opportunity.

Mary: So it’s interesting. So if it’s changed for us, it’s changed for them. Now, the piece though, too, is that they don’t have those farms to go back to work. And they’re, oh, Joshua was the young man that finished 8th grade with the girls cuz we had four girls finish 8th grade here, then we had him up from Roseburg Elementary School and we did like a little dinner for them and they did a presentation and it was really nice. They shared their dreams and their goals and what they wanted to do in life.

Ryan: Oh, from this recent [8th grade] graduation?
M: Yeah, yeah. And he was all excited because he was gonna go work in a cabinet shop, you know, and he was just real excited about being able to do that, you know. And have that opportunity. You know, so they’ve gotta find

R: Yeah, so, but you’re saying, he’s really pleased, that’s his dream and he’s excited about it

M: But what else do you when you only go to school to the 8th grade?

R: But stick with that argument. I mean, that’s, but what’s wrong with like, so the options are limited

M: Right. They are because you’re only, what? 14 years old. You’re only 14 years old.

In 1972, when William Ball argued, and Chief Justice Burger decided the case for Jonas Yoder et al., the judgement assumed that the children of Amish and Old Order Mennonites would find satisfying work in fields of agriculture and home business. In the Creek Settlement, fewer families make gainful employment from the agriculture industry, aiming their sights on the multifaceted services and manufacturing industries. Hurst and McConnell write about this phenomenon in Holmes County, Ohio: “…despite the heavily rural nature of Holmes County, 93 percent of the 26,897 employees in the county in 2005 were nonfarm wage or salary workers because of the high cost of land; only about 7 percent of employees worked on farms.”

223 Hurst and McConnell, 176.

The educators in the Crestview and Willow Run Districts knew the reality of work for their students. Mary said that among the Amish families in Myers Schools, there were only a handful of families who made a living from agriculture; the remainder worked in various Amish- and English-owned industries. The child celebrating his future
in the cabinet shop in Mary’s graduation story was not unusual, as many children were
going right into a position of employment after the 8th grade. To make the transition
more promising, the district would lobby the children’s families to consider the county
career center or training programs for which the 14-year-olds were eligible. Additionally,
the Willow Run District partnered with local employers to introduce work settings and
jobs via information sessions and company visits. Curtis said that unemployment was
very low, and local companies were regularly looking for a pipeline of talent to populate
their ranks.

Curtis: A lot of our larger employers down here, there are certain skills and
subsets that they want the kids to have and it’s almost to the point, and I can’t say
this as a blanket statement but if you were educated in a one room, with an 8th
grade educated teacher [an Amish parochial school], you’re not overly interested
because when, and it’s not that they don’t have a fine work ethic and all that but
when they come to us, there are so many things we have to teach them. And in
the public school, you’re already working on some of those things. You’re
getting them into projects, they must stand up and speak on different things. You
know, it’s not monumental things but just, okay, they’ve had some training in
how to approach this.

Curtis also spoke with pride about the efforts by the Willow Run District to connect
business needs with the interests and abilities of their students entering the workforce.

Curtis: Now, what I have been prone to do is really play up the vocational
programs that are offered. And so, I have mentioned to like a father maybe in
passing like ‘hey, junior would be excellent in that [career prep/vocational]
program. You might wanta consider that.’ And just kinda drop the carrot. But
it’s still their choice. We have had some businesses in the past that have been
looking to take some students and run them through a training program per se.
And we had a relationship going for a while with one company in particular that
the 8th grade year, they would have us bring the kids over to their corporate office
and then they would have a little ceremony. They’d feed the kids lunch and then
they would, they were big into math and science because that’s what their
business was kinda built on and so they wanted anyone basically in 8th grade that
carried straight As in math or science. They’d recognize them.
Curtis described these trips to introduce students to companies and vocational programs available to all students, English and Amish. And though the English children could learn from the primer on local work, they still had two years, or more, of schooling beyond the 8th grade. Thus, these school-to-job pipeline experiences targeted the Amish children who were about to complete the 8th grade and enter the workforce. Curtis was making it clear that the public-school system was taking care of career readiness at a higher standard than the “one room” Amish parochial schools.

In describing the public schools’ edge in career preparation for their Amish students, Curtis, former superintendent Bruce, and others referenced a unique career center program in the area, specially designed for Amish students. Typically, career and vocational education centers in the state operate programs for high school students or for adults who have a high school diploma or GED.224 With a population of children who are neither in high school nor in a GED program, the Willow Run School District needed a unique solution. Thus, for 25 years, a regional career center operates a “satellite” program on a separate campus, offering business training (in computing and accounting) and carpentry to students who were “graduates” of the school system. By qualifying “graduates,” students at the age of 14 could take advantage of the program. According to local administrators, the center mostly attracted girls, but was bringing in more Amish boys to programs in both carpentry and technology.

Local manufacturing positions have traditionally been available to boys. As Mary emphasized, girls had fewer options, and might find work in bakeries, restaurants, markets, home cleaning, or light office work in businesses. According to Roy, these girls and young women worked in good employment until marriage, when home and family management become the priority. Until then, girls could “work their way up”:

Roy: Industries are growing, you look at all the big shops. It is like… you’ve got girls coming out of school who get a job at Bontrager bakery, or Stolz bakery or the ground-level. They’re out of the eighth grade and they’ve got their first job. This is gung-ho, all of the sudden this old stuff. You’ve found a job at Weaver Leather or here or here or we’re going to work at the restaurant…

Ryan: Work their way up?

Roy: Work their way up. You see that happen. Of course, the girls they get married and they’re out of the workforce, so they’re dropping back out.

Though Mary sarcastically said that girls have “plenty” of options of “waitressing, waitressing, or waitressing,” she did say that a difference existed for girls of families with businesses. These girls could have an opportunity to work in, manage, and eventually own the business. Jeff said that girls had fewer options than boys, though he had seen families assess their children’s ability to work in the family business based on aptitude and not gender.

Jeff: You know, I kinda look at the families and they say, ‘All right. Here are my children. Here’s, this one here probably can go to college.’

Ryan: Have people said that to you?

J: No. They probably know it. They probably know this girl is smart enough to go to college. She’s not, clearly not gonna go to college, so from an early age, they say ‘This girl’s gonna take over my business from me. And then she’s gonna run the books and she’s gonna be on the phone and line up, line up customers. She’s gonna… This is my son. He can barely do nothing. He’s gonna be in the
back and he’s gonna be around me and I’m gonna tell him to haul this to me, hold this up, bring this to me.’ And they figure that out. This is what they do.

**The Expectations of Work**

In this state, children aged 14 – 17 may work if the child, a parent, and the employer abide by the state Department of Commerce’s Minor Labor Laws.\(^\text{225}\) There are significant restrictions with a minor work permit, prohibiting them from working with power saws, ladders, manufacturing, loading or unloading trucks – all forms of labor in which many Amish boys and men are employed. The Willow Run School District found a slight workaround by supporting a local Work Permit process, using a template from the state, and organizing the applications and agreements with local employers to accept an “Amish Work Permit.” The form for this work permit is found on the school district’s website. Curtis gave me the “inside track” to the process:

Curtis: “…when they get their certificate of attendance or their ‘diploma,’ as we call it, they also get their work permit. And they file through. So over the summer, all those kids, boys, girls, everyone, they’re probably gonna go grab a job somewhere.

R: Who’s issuing the work permit?

C: That’s another interesting piece.

R: I have not heard about this. I have no… Is this totally naïve of me, not knowing?

C: No, no. It’s not. You either have the inside track or you don’t.

I: This is clear. What? Tell me about this.

C: Okay. This is where it’s kind of an interesting thing and there was a debate a couple years back between the state and I guess you could say the schools and the

Amish as far as are these legal? Are they not legal? Like what’s the deal on this? And I think the state just decided ‘We’re staying out of this.’

R: Oh, really? Let the district figure it out.

C: ‘We [The State] are leaving it alone.’

R: Oh, interesting

C: So what it ends up being is there is one Amish gentleman in the area and he works with the public schools and the parochial schools and he basically, I don’t even know how this got started but it has nothing to do with the state whatsoever. It’s a work permit that’s made up, this Amish gentleman keeps tabs on all of it. So it’s kind of an Amish work permit system. But there are no ties to the state whatsoever. So when they go through, they get a card and basically, the card is, I guess, is the application so they fill everything out on this card and they mail it and this guy will turn around and produce a work permit document for them. And he keeps all of those on file…and I think, I’m not 100% certain on this and I don’t even know who to go to ask…It’s the underground thing that, okay, it exists

R: everyone knows

C: …but I don’t know how it came to be and I don’t know why we’re doing it. But we are. And then I think a lot of the businesses then, if they get hired at, say a Keim Lumber, they’ll file that. They went through.

Mary’s assessment of job prospects was less rosy than Curtis’s. She said that though employment was low, she still struggled to understand how children would know what they wanted to do as teenagers:

Mary: Who in the hell knows what they’re gonna be when they’re 18 years old?...When you’re looking at a child that’s 13 or 14 years old, a child, and it’s like ‘What are you gonna do next?’... Kids, developmentally, people don’t even really start to think about what they might wanta do until they get to be about 16 or 17 years old... I’m sure it looked different 200 years ago. 200 years ago, we were living the way the Amish were living, you know. But, but people were just, they’re doing different things to go what are my talents? What gifts have I been given? What do I wanta pursue? What, what would I even have an interest in? You know, it’s going through those different sports, activities, theatre, music, you know, community service projects. You know, being exposed to different options and careers and being able to be taken out and like if you get to, if you have the opportunity to go to a school where they actually take them out and they take you
into work places, like Luk [a local manufacturer] and here’s what Buehler’s [a local grocery store] looks like behind the scenes and here’s what this looks like and then it’s like, ‘Oh, I never thought about that.’

Mary was principal at Myers Elementary, and though educating a student body that was half Amish, the Crestview District Schools in which Myers was situated enrolled mostly English students. I could ascertain a difference between Mary’s standard with what Roy, Mary, and Curtis explained in the more Amish-dominant Willow Run District Schools. Jeff, teaching at Myers in Crestview Schools, tended to make use of the “openings” in which he could dwell on the exploration of career and life with his students. He said he wanted his students to understand and be ready for different careers and even understand what a college education could present:

Jeff: That’s why you go to college. How many people wanta go and choose, how many people wanta go choose the job you have or how many wanta just go get a job? So we talk about how college allows you to go, cuz I said we’re all gonna go through a period of life where you have to, you have to work. You’re just gonna take a job cuz you need money to have a job. Then we talk about it. I said education allows you to go get a job you want to have, not a job that you have to have. And so even the Amish kids hear this and so we talk about that. That’s the purpose of school. So you can go get a job you want, not a job you have to have. Some of them do that and some won’t and so you know, we talk about, I ask, ‘How many people kinda already know the job you’re gonna have cuz your parents own a business?’ and you’re just going to weasel right into there. You know, you’ll know, and I said, ‘But you know what? Some of you are going to get something else. Some of you might say you know what? I don’t wanta do furniture. I wanta do something else.’ I said, ‘School helps you do that. School helps you go get something you wanta have. Now, if you stop after 8th grade, then you know, you gotta learn. You gotta learn. You gotta learn how to handle your money. You gotta learn how to fill out a job application. You gotta learn how to talk to people in an interview.’

Intrigued by Jeff’s cavalier approach to discussing college and career, I asked him whether he had different goals for each population as he taught both Amish and English kids in a classroom.
Jeff: Well, you know, 5th grade, they’re pretty young. So as far as asking about specific jobs, no, not so much. What you try to do in 5th grade is just, in 5th grade, and like I said, I’ve told you before, I don’t really filter my discussion or cater my discussion in class to well, I have, half my kids aren’t gonna go to college. Because this is a public school. And believe it or not, there’s a part of me that thinks, you know what? I may inspire an Amish kid here or there to say ‘You know what? I’m gonna go farther in my education than 8th grade.’ So the most that I do in 5th grade is just explain to them why school is so important.

Though Jeff stated that he may hope a child would be inspired to go to school beyond the 8th grade, on some occasions, he stated how unlikely it was for his Amish students to pursue studies after they leave Myers Elementary. But, he still had aspirational goals for them, specifically related to the experience of learning in his classroom. He said that the parents of Amish children “…don’t have a desire, regardless of how smart their kid is, for them going beyond 8th grade. If you ask what your life goals are for your child, they will say for them to be a good person, a responsible adult, have a good job and be able to live on their own, a responsible adult, have a family. It is not go to college, get a degree.”

Jeff adopted part of that philosophy for his outlook of his students’ futures. He wanted them to think about their lives differently by considering a variety of options in their station, no matter their upbringing or cultural expectations therein.

Jeff: [He wants the kids to think that:] ‘I don’t have to be like mom and dad. I can be kinda like mom and dad. I can pick what I like about mom and dad and what I valued but I’m educated enough to say this is gonna be better for me. That’s where I want to go.’ Even whether you’re Amish or whether you’re…

Ryan: …it doesn’t matter.

J: Doesn’t matter. I want you to be like that girl Eliza who has the Amish accent, she will never go to college, but I want her to be a good mom to her kids. And I want her to raise kids that are smart and aware as she is. Or better. Because she’s able to do that. And my challenge is to get her to want to be that mom. ‘I wanna be that mom. I wanta be that Amish mom.’ And that is how you get the kids to do well in school. If you can get them to want to be that mom or dad.
In Jeff’s scenario, all the children in the classroom heard the same inspirational message, but his expectations for how they would internalize the message varied based on whether they were Amish or English. This difference in expectation for each group was reiterated by other participants. I detected an interest by the educators in inspiring all their students, but that the horizons appeared at different distances depending on the students’ cultural upbringing and church affiliation. I asked Mary about attending to this kind of difference, and she said the goal was to “teach the whole child.”

Mary: So you’re going back to teaching the whole child and you’re teaching the whole child and I’m gonna talk to you entirely different because I know that you are not Amish, and that your parents want you to go to school or even if they don’t want you to go to school, you have the ability to go to college if you wanted to and you could be anything that you want. Do you realize that I see this gift in you and you can pursue this? You probably have other gifts that you don’t. And so it’s just having those conversations. If you’re Amish, I am trying to get every child to be the best person that God created them to be. No matter what their culture is. So the conversation might, you might not put college on the table because that’s not something their family is supportive of but when you’re talking about that, it’s like, it’s like any other community or school where you’ve got different cultures, whether it’s Amish or Asian or Latino or Chinese, everybody has their own… Gosh, even like non-Amish, even with what we call the English, everybody has their own set of values and beliefs as a family so we have to, in my mind, personally, I have to respect that as an educator. My goal is to go, look, here’s all the opportunities in life but it’s also important for you to work under the umbrella of where your family is. You have to get your parents’ blessing to go off and do something, unless you’re an adult. So it’s, it’s present, you aren’t specifically going, ‘Oh, you’re Amish, so you can’t do this, and you are this, so you should, you will be a great mechanic and you should do.’ It’s trying to expose them to as many pieces and different seeds as possible because you never know which ones gonna start growing.

**Comprehensive (Communities’) Conceptions of the Good**

In her exploration of the Rawlsian notion of “comprehensive conceptions of the good” (CCG), Judith Suissa challenges those in the debate over the role of schools in a
liberal democracy to carefully consider those in a child’s life who are best suited to introduce CCG. Suissa claims that schools only provide an “illusory” account of diversity and that parents may be better at helping children identify difference and diversity from the family’s unique perspective. One of my interests going into this research was to better understand a teacher’s standpoint of their role in introducing diversity and autonomy to their young charges. Based on the interviews, I believe these educators in the Creek Settlement were presenting a cursory experience in diversity and pluralism, one that was not significant enough to allow for robust “autonomy facilitation” as described by Harry Brighouse. Brighouse argues that schools can be well situated to contribute to society by making spaces where children are presented multiple perspectives on living, and that development of autonomy, or self-direction, is an ingredient to developing a more flourishing life. Consider just a few of the “breaks” or opportunities for perspective-broadening mentioned in this study: Curtis’s lunch line protocol interrupted gender boundaries; Mary’s school hosted veterans and celebrated the military; Jeff’s social studies class explored world religions; Barbara’s literature class examined racism and the civil rights movement. Compared to Amish parochial schools, where the 3Rs reign, one might see how a public-school experience for an Amish child “blows their mind,” as Curtis said. But when I asked these educators about Amish students who would then take flight from such introductions, perhaps identifying new and self-designed paths beyond 8th grade, the examples were few and barely substantiated: the

226 Suissa, 588.
227 Ibid., 596.
228 Brighouse, On Education, 21.
229 Ibid., 15.
boy who became a doctor, the boy who became a lawyer, that one girl who became a nurse.

To sustain cultural diversity in liberal democracies, Sigal Ben-Porath states that individuals in society need not just the “right of exit” from a community, but obvious “entrance paths” to flourishing life options away from the community. Ben-Porath writes that liberal democrats promote exit rights from cultural groups as an indicator of “an expression of personal choice” for minority groups in a liberal democracy. But the option to exit for children is not sufficient, Ben-Porath argues, for if individuals from cultural minority groups are to thrive in the dominant society, they ought to “…expect to encounter a range of practices, institutions, and structured opportunities designed to facilitate her entrance into dominant society, if not positively to welcome her there.” To the Amish, Rumspringa may represent the comprehensive community’s most formal “exit right,” though the tradition is not uniformly practiced, nor experienced with significant depth for some congregations. From the participants in this study, I heard of a few “entrances” into English society, and those were mostly through the decisions of Amish families to “jump the fence,” and leave the Amish church. I didn’t find out if the families left the church because of a child’s interest in an English life, but I doubt that, knowing how difficult shunning from an Amish community can be once an individual or family leaves.

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230 Ben-Porath, 1024.
231 Ibid., 1030.
232 Hurst and McConnell, 67-69.
233 Kraybill, Johnson-Weiner, and Nolt write that shunning is often a practice to prevent deviance and not a punishment. But for those who do leave the church, shunning or excommunication can be used by some Amish leaders as a “tool of retaliation.” 167.
In his essays on liberty, philosopher Isaiah Berlin makes a distinction regarding “choice” which I find apropos to an interpretation of the Amish practice of Rumspringa. Berlin writes about the “negative” and “positive” concepts of freedom, with the former representing freedom from constriction and the latter representing the kind of liberty in which decisions “…depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind.”234 I believe Berlin’s concept of genuine “positive freedom” would identify Rumspringa as somewhat suspect, in that this practice could be no more than a façade of “positive freedom,” a temporary exercise in “running around” designed by those in authority. In his essay, Berlin further explains his notion of “positive freedom”: “I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men’s, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer—deciding, not being decided for…”235 In his introduction to Berlin’s essays on liberty, book editor Nigel Warburton writes that Berlin’s concept of “positive freedom” should be understood as “…a matter of the doors that you can actually pass through, not just of those that lie open: it is what you can actually do. The notion of positive liberty derives from the wish to be one’s own master.”236 Curtis observed the Amish experience in his schools as “blowing their minds,” in terms of exposure to new and different ways of thinking. I don’t doubt his observation. But, in considering Ben-Porath’s and Berlin’s critique, offering the “right of exit,” or of doors that are not only open but those through

236 Warburton, on Berlin’s essay, 158.
which one “can actually pass through,” I wonder if such freedoms have been made apparent to the Amish students in these schools. From the stories of the administrators in Willow Run and Crestview Districts, I believe there existed a concern that if more metaphorical doors of opportunity and exit were introduced by teachers, the families would depart through the literal door of exit from the school, potentially permanently.

When “The Advantages Become Infirm”

As expressed earlier in this study, the debate over religious accommodation and religious freedom in U.S. schools is more than a century old, and far from settled. In 1994, the Supreme Court heard the case of Board of Education or Kiryas Joel Village School District v. Grumet, in which they ruled against a state of New York statute that established a school district entirely within an enclave of Satmar Hasidic Jews, an insular, comprehensive community. In their ruling, the justices said that using state dollars to support a public school district which solely served the children of a religious group went against the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. In 2007, the University of Michigan-Dearborn came under fire for installing foot-bathing sinks in campus bathrooms, a provision made for Muslim students (10% of the student body) who practiced wudu, the ritual washing of the hands, feet, and face before performing prayers. Though the situation never made it to a judge’s bench, the court

238 Ibid.
of public opinion the 2000s reacted negatively to what appeared to be a special provision for a religious group.240

In the accommodation section of this study I detailed some practices which were specifically designed to accommodate a religious group: a 7/8 classroom, German classes, the removal of evolutionary science concepts, no physical education classes. Though it is tempting for me to turn investigator and seek a “case” against the districts in their over-placation of a religious group, this was not the purpose of the study. Instead, I was interested in how educators who value the aims of formal education inhabit their position with a group who actively exclude themselves from any dividends of formal education after the 8th grade.

When I posed this conundrum directly to the participants, they were nonplussed. They seemed to love their roles as teachers, as they talked about “making a difference” in the lives of students, or “inspiring” children. I asked that if they would encourage one (English) child to pursue advanced math classes or high school, why not the (Amish) child next to them? They would say that “it’s cultural” (Jean), or, “that’s just the way that it is” (Jeff). Mary said: “it seems crazy, right?” with an air of self-consciousness. It was evident that these educators and the schools in which they taught were making efforts to placate and satisfy the interests of the Amish, and this was done through an unwritten agreement, a settlement. This covenant was reminiscent of the Amish church’s Ordnung, the individual church’s unwritten but known rules of behavior. The insiders to the Ordnung know what is acceptable and what is not; outsiders, like me, are not privy to
the code and may be appropriately mystified. The accommodation of the Amish in the public realm of the schools seemed so normalized, it would have been unthinkable, or “war on the hands,” according to Curtis, if the English dared to challenge the efforts made at ensuring Amish comfort in the schools. I believe Judith Lynn Failer, in writing about the Kiryas Joel community’s relationship with the democratic aims of school, identifies a parallel to the settlement made between the schools and the Amish families in the Creek Settlement:

When the Satmars retreated into their own village in Kiryas Joel, they were not aiming to create a more perfect democracy. Nevertheless, constitutional democrats have good reasons for letting them alone in their enclave. Their experiment in democratic governance contributes to the larger polity’s knowledge about the scope and nature of democratic politics. Their religious beliefs include religious duties that the larger polity has a duty to respect, even if the occasional need to encroach on their religious practices disables the polity from honoring that duty to the full extent that the Satmars need. They are enjoying the value of self-government even if that is not their aim. For all of these reasons, the Satmars' enclave group seems relatively salutary for the larger democracy.

But when they aim to control public education, its advantages become infirm. When enclave groups, such as the Satmars, emerge from their retreat, they cannot do so on their own terms if those terms are inimical to the larger polity. They may want to make their own lives as little democratic as possible. But they may not insist that democracies become less democratic, or they risk creating citizens who are unprepared for life in the larger democracy. When it comes to public education, enclave groups must be willing to receive their education on the public's own terms.241

Failer’s mention of the “duty to respect” the Satmars is certainly paralleled by the protections and support the educators in the Creek Settlement provided for Amish in their district boundaries. But, unlike Failer’s portrayal of the Satmars in the Kiryas Joel

village, the Amish families and Amish Advisory Boards in the Willow Run and Crestview Districts don’t seem intent on “controlling public education.” They are not advocating for their own public-school district; rather, they are participating within the framework of an English-run system of education. Further, as evidenced by the volunteer Advisory Boards, the decent numbers of Amish children enrolled, and the successful fundraisers in which Amish families donate significant amounts of money to better programs in the schools, I don’t believe the Amish families aim to be “inimical” or hostile to the larger public through schools. Faier writes that the danger of the arrangement for the Satmars in the Kiryas Joel Village, in which the community worked to create a public schooling system managed by and for its own minority group, was in keeping them too introverted and “…creating citizens who are unprepared for life in the larger democracy.”242 In the Creek Settlement, Amish children in the public schools are being prepared for life in the community, but not as active participants in a larger democracy. To William Ball, the attorney for the Amish families in the Yoder case, that’s good for the Amish and society. Ball emphasized that the Amish not conforming to the world as a matter of biblical principle was not only to be protected, but celebrated:

I think that we are talking about here are really great achievers…The state has thought loosely about the disease of ignorance and opening the gateways of opportunity to these children. We introduced positive evidence which shows that Amish education produces good people… They are a peaceable people and an asset in our society, not in terms of gross national product or the building of missiles, but certainly in of the goodness of that they have afforded as an example for the rest of our society.243

242 Ibid.
Ball’s stance was alive and well in the conversations I had with my participants. Though he struggled with some dimensions of Amish culture, Jeff said his Amish families were “good”; Jean said they were “peaceful and generous”; Barbara said the Amish were “doing it right.” As Barbara said when asked about her worries for the future of her graduating 8th graders: “None are on welfare. They will find partnerships. They will be OK.”

Failer states that “When it comes to public education, enclave groups must be willing to receive their education on the public's own terms.”244 As I detail the perspective of the educators in these districts, it is hard for me to determine “the public,” as referenced by Failer. If it is the judgement of the public school administrators and educators in these districts, the schools seem to be successfully incorporating into a public space an otherwise introverted and insulated community. But if “the public” is more interested in the comprehensive liberal goal of autonomy-promotion, the arrangement for these Amish children falls short.

I think it is here that Stephen Macedo may help us come to terms with the arrangement of public education in these Creek Settlement schools. Macedo writes that, “While we should put aside matters about which reasonable people disagree, we should also be resolute in facing up to the fact that no version of liberalism can make everyone happy.”245 With this, Macedo argues for “political liberalism with spine,” or the notion that some minority groups can be determined to be more or less congruent with the

244 Failer, 402.
overall goals of the society.  He writes specifically that the Amish should not be judged in the same way as religious groups who aim to proselytize: “…being Amish is not a growth industry: the Amish pose no threat to the health of the wider liberal society. Protestant fundamentalists are far more numerous and powerful and are often highly politicized and hostile to at least some liberal values.”

I believe Macedo’s argument for tolerating or even supporting “unthreatening” insular groups like the Amish is finding proof in practice in the Creek Settlement. Therein, the Amish and English work, live, and even school together. The public schools are an extension of the settlement within the community to live and let live. The educators I interviewed were complicit in the agreement, working to not only satisfy the Amish families, but to go to great strides to ensure an understanding and acceptance of the Amish perspective as one that needed protection.

**Reinforcing “The Four Walls”**

The *Yoder* case solidified, indefinitely, a preference into practice: Leave the Amish alone. They are obeying a Christian God above all other trappings. They care for themselves. “They do not cast their burden on the community. They do not have people on relief or welfare,” as William Ball testified. Let them exist freely, that was the decision in *Yoder v. Wisconsin*. In U.S. public schooling, the Amish are uniquely protected as a special class of citizens, even a model minority. In *Between Past and

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246 Ibid., 469-470.
247 Ibid., 472.
Future, Hannah Arendt discusses the concept of the “four walls,” which I believe aptly describes the relationship between the Amish home and the public schools in this study:

Because the child must be protected against the world, his traditional place is in the family, whose adult members daily return back from the outside world and withdraw into the security of private life within four walls. These four walls, within which people’s private family life is lived, constitute a shield against the world and specifically against the public aspect of the world. They enclose a secure place, without which no living thing can thrive…This may indeed be the reason that children of famous parents so often turn out badly. Fame penetrates the four walls, invades their private space, bringing with it, especially in present-day conditions, the merciless glare of the public realm, which floods everything in the private lives of those concerned, so that the children no longer have a place of security where they can grow. But exactly the same destruction of the real living space occurs wherever the attempt is made to turn the children themselves into a kind of world. Among these peer groups then arises public life of a sort and, quite apart from the fact that it is not a real one and that the whole attempt is a sort of fraud, the damaging fact remains that children – that is, human beings in process of becoming but not yet complete – are thereby forced to expose themselves to the light of a public existence.248

Arendt uses an example of famous parents allowing the public “glare” to “penetrate the walls,” and I think Amish families may concur with these sentiments. The home is to be protected, and the children therein as well. Thus, what I submit in this evaluation of the educators in this study is that they are part of a system which aims not to represent a public that “penetrates” or “floods” the private Amish lives, but largely reinforces the “four walls” of the Amish existence, by acting as an additional “shield” from mainstream English, plural life. These teachers are part of the system, an Ordnung, that does not represent “the world” writ large, but rather the world in doses appropriate to exist within the walls of Amish existence. With both educators and families fearing the child’s over-

248 Arendt, 186.
exposure to the world, educators play it conservatively, working to retain the trust, and
the families, in the fold of the schools.

Indeed, this arrangement is not always in perfect balance. Sometimes the walls
shake or even break. But Amish existence is not always steady, as evidenced by the
stories from the participants of families in the Creek Settlement leaving the Amish church
(sometimes for the children to play sports) for an English church and/or life. And though
this study outlined ways that Amish families extended flexibility to exist or tolerate the
public school, I wager that the educators in this study did more than the families to
maintain peace, and that it wasn’t always a balanced give-and-take. However, recall that
a number of these classrooms and schools are not for Amish children alone, as some
schools have a fair mix of both English and Amish children in the seats. In the process of
limiting access to material and some experiences for the Amish children (e.g. sexual
education, health education, science education, foreign language, athletics), the English
children in the schools potentially miss out on forms of development which may be very
appropriate for their participation in the larger society. The *Public School Ordnung*
ensures a loss for both the Amish and English children, and I believe this was a point of
reflection for the participants.

The educators in this study existed in what Smagorinsky, Lakly, and Johnson may
call a “hybrid classroom” of accommodations between curricular expectations and their
own values.249 Sometimes the educators spoke of their values meshing with what they

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249 Peter Smagorinsky, Andrea Lakly, and Tara Star Johnson, "Acquiescence, Accommodation, and
Resistance in Learning to Teach Within a Prescribed Curriculum," *English Education* 34, no. 3 (2002), 203.
did in the classroom and school (e.g. Barbara feeling that she teaches in “Eden”), and
other times the arrangement challenged their instincts (e.g. Mary holding her tongue on
recommendations to Amish children to further their studies). The risk for Mary and the
others in not accommodating the Amish children is a potential fissure in the relationship
of trust which fuels the settlement between families and the schools. “Trust is,” as Curtis
said, “a huge key to the whole system.” The ultimate danger is that families would depart
the schools due to a specific or even vague impingement on their values or perceived
rights. Brian Warnick writes that the educational potential of the common school to
promote civic education is lost entirely if the families opt out of the schools due to lack of
accommodation, as was the result with the families at the center of the Mozert v. Hawkins
County Board of Education (1989) case.250 To exist in this balance, all of these educators
embodied a particular persona that, to me, represented a perspective which made existing
in this unique educational setting possible. “This district isn’t for everybody,” Jeff said,
speaking of Crestview Schools. In the next section of this study, I will explore what I
found to be unique traits which made these educators appropriate stewards of the
settlement between the Amish families and schools.

The Persona / Thriving Within the Four Walls

Barbara: One time at a graduation for the 8th graders, an English man standing
next to me said ‘Doesn’t it make you sad knowing that they won’t continue with
school?’ I replied ‘No. None are on welfare. They will find partnerships. They
will be OK.’

250 Warnick, 20 – 21.
Based on what I learned from the participants in this study, the children in the Crestview and Willow Run districts were experiencing a uniquely curated education due to their cultural upbringing. Political liberals could challenge this form of education as “truncated,” to borrow Justice William O. Douglas’s words in his partial dissent of the *Yoder* decision: “If he is harnessed to the Amish way of life by those in authority over him, and if his education is truncated, his entire life may be stunted and deformed.” I would say that the participants in this study were much less accomplices in an intentional deforming of the education of these children, and more teachers just trying to reach children in the best ways they saw fit. The participants in this study were first and foremost educators of children. They had each been in a career of teaching and school administration for 15 years, 20 years, 25 years, or more. Their motivation was truly in the promotion of learning, and certainly beyond simple reading, ‘riting, ‘rithmetic. Mary celebrated having conversations about her scientist role models with kids as they sat in her office; Roy relished the discussions about decision-making in life; Jeff enjoyed showing videos of far-away places.

In this study, I have come to term the agreement between the educators in the schools and the families as a *Public School Ordnung*, or a “settlement.” I hope I have outlined how there is significant compromise between the two parties, in what appeared to me to be equal parts “Amish Flexibility” and “English Educator Accommodation.” However, expressing this arrangement between these parties as an equation potentially narrows the relationship to something merely transactional. Though there was a real need to appease the Amish families to retain adequate enrollment, this was not the sole
motivator for these educators to work at helping their Amish students thrive in the schools. These educators demonstrated not only a commitment to education, but also a sense of happiness and joy in the responsibility.

Of all the participants, perhaps Barbara most embodied a kind of joy at existing within and reinforcing “The Four Walls” of an Amish public schoolroom. She said that not a day goes by without her thanking God for being able to “teach in the Garden of Eden.” She said: “My purpose is to never, never undermine the parents of these children… I pray every day, I pledge ‘Don’t make me threaten these kids [with inappropriate questions or content].’” She felt that the Amish were living in a state of wisdom that continues to evade English society. She talked about the Amish as representing a more kind, polite, simple, and genuine life compared to that of English society. When discussing other children, like her own grandchildren, she found that Amish kids were getting a better footing to “what is important in life” such as “family, respect, and humility.”

Curtis spoke about the community being caring, in which people took care of one another. He said didn’t make house calls to Amish families because he wanted to please the Amish, he did so because the community was based on care for one’s neighbor. He said he learned this having grown up in the community and having observed how his parents and grandparents operated their respective businesses with their neighbors. He said an indicator of this type of care can be observed with the way Amish churches care for the poor in their communities – there’s always a “safety net.”
Curtis: And even within the families of poverty, I mean, I’m gonna be honest, we, we have those families, the Amish that are just in poverty. The church will pick up and assist. Nine times out of ten, there’s other family around that there’s always that security net. That’s the best way I know to put it. And you know, yes, we’re gonna do what we can to promote wellbeing of our family, etc., but if push comes to shove, that net is there.

A Local Disposition

All the educators in this study were originally from the Creek Settlement, and though some taught in other districts outside the Settlement, they found themselves back in their home region for most of their careers. Jeff said that he has always felt a sense of belonging and commitment because he is from the Crestview District.

Jeff: I’ve been walking around that high school since I was about six, seven years old. So when I’m coaching basketball, I’m grabbing a broom and I’m sweeping the floor and I’m the last one out to turn the lights off, it doesn’t feel like I’m doing it at some place foreign to me. It’s the right thing to do because this is where I’ve grown up. When you take a look at the wrestling coach, won a state title and he’s been there for so long, I went to high school with him. I went to elementary school with him. So when he’s the one late at night, mopping the mats, why is he doing it?

As Curtis spoke about interviewing candidates for positions within Willow Run Schools, he said it wasn’t a priority for someone to be from the area, but there had to be a demonstrable level of comfort with the rural nature of the district. He said those from the outside do not always fit, not because they are outsiders, but perhaps because they have difficulty reading the local cues, values, and conduct.

Curtis: That’s created some challenges because you’re kinda working with a different frame of reference. You know, and some things that they [teachers from the outside] view as very innocent, if you wanta stay around, you can’t keep doing that. It’s kind of some of those pieces. I actually had a little bit of a leg up. My grandparents owned [a business in a neighboring town] for years and years and years and all of our farmers were Amish. So from that high on, it was just a part of the way it was and Grandpa speaks fluent Penn Dutch…
Mary said that there were past principals in Crestview Schools who didn’t always fit, and the programs at the schools suffered because of the lack of understanding. She said these “outsiders didn’t friggen get it.” In responding to a question about ascertaining suitability for the district, Curtis said it was important to identify who may be a good fit in interviews, though one cannot flat out ask questions that may be impractical or illegal.

Curtis: It’s not that we ask things that are unkosher, but I don’t know how to put it into words. You know, there’s certain attributes that we need and so, for example, okay, this might be one. It certainly would help you in that building if you were a person of faith. Now, obviously, that’s not an interview question…But okay, let’s try to figure out, how do we gauge this on, without blatantly asking or knowing anything about them, where do we put them on that scale? Is it gonna work or isn’t it? Because the reality is much from the parents’ point of view, I don’t wanta put someone down there that’s gonna make them miserable but I also don’t wanta hire someone that’s just gonna be, oh, my gosh, because you know as well as I do, if you have a miserable teacher, instruction is awful.

It wasn’t a surprise to me to hear Curtis list “being a person of faith” as important.

Without prodding, at least six of the participants in this study discussed being a “person of faith.” Moreover, Curtis said that just hiring local people didn’t always guarantee a good fit:

Curtis: …we had an individual that grew up in [the rural part of this state], not this area. It was a catastrophe. And to me, I would’ve expected the opposite. Like rural, okay, you kinda, you at least have that attribute down. Now, we just need to add the cultural piece. So I don’t know. I don’t know what the secret there is but there’s definitely something that… maybe part of it’s just an internal drive of intrigue, so I’m gonna take the time to learn everything I can and kinda go from there. But staffing can be very problematic.

**Different Seeds, Different Tending**

And though these educators would at times reference shortcomings in their efforts to provide comprehensive education for their Amish students, I did not sense resignation.
What I did detect was a degree of awe and appreciation reminiscent of attorney William Ball’s support of the Amish way of life in the *Wisconsin v. Yoder* (1972) court proceedings: the Amish were a group who potentially “had it right.” They were something to be preserved. As some of the *Yoder* testimony presented, the Amish could even be considered the envy of others.\(^{251}\) Barbara called the Amish children in the public schools in her district “free range” and “not oppressed.” She said that if we had doubts that Amish children were not being provided adequate, appropriate, and healthy preparation for life, we ought to really compare their situations to those children being raised “by helicopter parents.”

Though at times in our conversations the participants might nervously chuckle or blush at the mention of girls and women having different (and potentially fewer) opportunities than boys and men, the idea that “they will be OK,” as voiced by Barbara, surfaced again and again. Curtis said with pleasure that “in their own society…they will be something.”

Curtis: It’s hard because I mean, obviously, you want everyone to do the fullest potential possible, but I think that’s where growing up in the area has helped me. Because you just gather that understanding that okay, you need to step back for a minute. That’s a choice that they’re making, and you need to be okay with that. Now, within their particular society, they’re still gonna be something. You know, it’s not like you’ve thrown in the towel, like given up on them, whatever. I mean, they’re still going to, to make those ventures. And they have the skills to start up your own business. It’s just, it’s not what I thought they should do or what I thought they were capable of.

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\(^{251}\) As “educational expert” in the *Yoder* case, Donald Erickson, testified: “Many public educators would be elated if their programs were as successful in preparing students for productive community life as the Amish system seems to be. In fact, while some public schoolmen strive to outlaw the Amish approach, others are being forced to emulate many of its features,” Erickson, 61.
Mary spoke of her students as seeds, and that seeds are all different, with potential to become different things. She needed to be “respectful of culture,” and that “God only knew” what the potential may be for each child, but that she had excitement for all children, English and Amish, to discover what the future would hold.

Curtis: I am trying to get every child to be the best person that God created them to be. No matter what their culture is. So the conversation might, you might not put college on the table because that’s not something their family is supportive of but when you’re talking about that, it’s like, it’s like any other community or school where you’ve got different cultures, whether it’s Amish or Asian or Latino or Chinese, everybody has their own… Gosh, even like non-Amish…everybody has their own set of values and beliefs as a family so we have to, in my mind, personally, I have to respect that as an educator. My goal is to go, look, here’s all the opportunities in life but it’s also important for you to work under the umbrella of where your family is. You have to get your parents’ blessing to go off and do something, unless you’re an adult. So it’s, it’s present, you aren’t specifically going, oh, you’re Amish, so you can’t do this, and you are this, so you should, you will be a great mechanic and you should do. It’s trying to expose them to as many pieces and different seeds as possible because you never know which one’s gonna start growing.

Curtis: They’re going to make it and I think that’s probably what makes it a little different from let’s say an inner city [child] that just falls off the map after 8th grade. Okay, what happened to that kid? Where are they going? They may not have the family support, the tight knit community that’s gonna try to keep them progressing ahead.

On the wall in Mary’s office hung a photograph of Albert Einstein. She said that Einstein was a hero of hers, going against the odds of being called “stupid” or unteachable as a child, but then becoming one of the most influential scientists of the twentieth century. I asked Mary about how that poster might inspire her students, seeing that some students may be encouraged to study physics, while others will not.

Mary: I hear what you’re saying, not everyone can be Albert Einstein, but you’re choosing because of your culture, it’s a choice not to go there, not to go that path. And so and I thought you were gonna ask me something different because I can
hear, I can see what you’re saying, I can see where you’re coming from in that why am I saying that you’re a little poor boy and you can do anything, you can be anything you want. You can do it. You can be anything, but I got little Dinah over here going, okay, you’re all done with 8th grade. See, while they’re here, even though we know they’re gonna be done in 8th grade, I’m still gonna push you to be the best person that you can be. I’m gonna push you academically. I’m gonna push you socially. I’m gonna push you, you know, physically. You’re gonna get pushed because I need you to hear. The sad part with that, the reality is though, is that when we’re pushing them, we, I mean, if you’re Amish, I’m not gonna say you can go to middle school if you want to…

Mary described the importance of an “educational mindset” that suited the group or culture. She said for herself, and the English staff in her building, they had expectations that their own children would go to college, but that was not an expectation that passed onto the Amish children in the building. She said her staff had expectations that the children would live fulfilling lives, but it would not be through the means of formal education beyond the 8th grade. Mary was confident that in their elementary education, especially as they were able to introduce so many social concepts, such as the importance of “social justice.”

Mary: School has to be the place to hear [about the concept of social justice] because like any home, whether you’re Amish or not Amish, whether you’re poor or you’re rich, or middle class, parents and families talk, and their prejudices come out and children take those on. It’s just what we do. It’s what we do. Because we, we walk what we, what we’re in and that’s all they know…You know, tolerance has evolved into social justice. And social justice to the point that we need to recognize people’s norms. We need to understand their differences and embrace the diversity and learn the tolerance and if it, education has always been the place where if there’s a change that’s needed in society, it starts here.

Early in this study, I stated an interest in better understanding what kind of ethos I might find in the way these teachers described the environment of the schools. Mary’s

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excitement at being an instigator of conversation regarding important concepts, such as social justice, reiterated for me Warnick’s assertion that the common school is not just a good place, but a uniquely situated setting, for the promotion of civic education. And though Mary stating that she was satisfied to “push” her students to be “the best person” they can be, no matter if they were Amish or not, I sensed delight in the way she spoke of inspiring her Amish students. She said it was a privilege to serve the community.

**Taking Them to Hanover**

Barbara spoke of her role as a teacher with great pleasure for the opportunity to lead children into conceptual and real worlds that were beyond the students’ familiarity. While reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she took her all-Amish class to the county courthouse where a judge spoke about the rule of law and local practice. Daily she discussed national and global current events. Barbara said she was trying to provide the Amish students in the middle grades with a “liberal education” in the sense of the liberal arts. She called this method “Taking them to Hanover,” named after a visit she once had to a commencement ceremony at Hanover College in Indiana. A relative was graduating and she spent the afternoon in awe of the physical and aspirational atmosphere of a school dedicated to the liberal arts. She said that while she was sitting in that commencement ceremony on the green of the quad, she realized that it was that kind of experience she was seeking to provide her 5th and 6th graders. She wanted to “take them to Hanover” through their exploration in learning.

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253 Warnick, 21.
It wasn’t lost on me that Barbara’s analogy for her purpose in the classroom was named for a college, something that likely none of her Amish students would ever experience. But, like a classic baccalaureate education, these final grades in the elementary school represented the formal educators’ last efforts at reaching the student before they were propelled into the world. And for this, I really admired Barbara’s sense of personal mission and satisfaction in her work. And it wasn’t just this one educator. Whether it was the qualities of the gentle but firm coach (Jeff), the prodigious advocate (Jean), or the welcoming sage in the library (Roy), each of the educators participating in the study embodied a buoyancy or appreciation for their calling to educate. These educators were pushing the boundaries of what was possible for the children. As I documented the concepts and curricula that were absent due to the Amish presence in the schools (e.g. earth science, foreign language, health, sexual education), these educators celebrated other examples of significant exploration for the children: Jeff enjoyed playing videos of people of many races and creeds; Roy appreciated highlighting history through stories of his international travels; Curtis excitedly introduced electronic technology in the classrooms; Mary cleverly encouraged young girls to participate in vocational classes after the 8th grade.

Though seemingly small when listed here, these accomplishments had the potential to be “mind-blowing” (to borrow Curtis’s term) moments of learning for the Amish children. All the participants exuded satisfaction with the progress they were making with their students, and I even sensed gratification at the contributions they were crafting for society. None represented this better than Mary, the principal of Myers
Elementary School. For our last interview, we met for over two hours on a quiet June day. We were both enjoying the conversation but ended it hurriedly so Mary could keep an appointment elsewhere. At the time, I didn’t quite hear one of the last things Mary said as we exchanged thanks and handshakes at her office door, though it captured my attention as I re-read the transcriptions months later. With a voice of great confidence, and referencing the pride she had in her work, she said that school:

…has always been the place where if there’s a change that’s needed in society, it starts here…You know, it happened when, I didn’t realize this, you know, getting people to brush their teeth. That happened in schools. It didn’t happen out in the world. It started in schools. I was like, seriously? I didn’t know that. There’s a bunch of other, those kinds of things in the 1940s and 50s that happened because there needed to be a change and so what better place for it to start than here where their minds are young, to try to plant those seeds and provide experiences and pray to God that it’s going to make a difference down the road.

Mary’s emphasis on “it starts here” referenced sweeping shifts in the social and political landscape in the United States in which schools were a catalyst, like children’s health programs or desegregation via Brown v. Board (1954). Although she didn’t mention her school as a vanguard in the movement for social change, she did say for the training of her teachers and the school’s curriculum, the topic of “social justice” and exploring a life with others “beyond toleration” was becoming more common. And, considering their Amish families, I believe Mary and others at Myers Elementary were making strides in a model of cultural accommodation that didn’t have a rulebook. Educating the Amish is not a topic that seems to hit the education journals nor teachers’ professional development conferences. Regardless, this group of educators were regularly working at a model of cultural accommodation that was not based on assimilation nor a replication of Amish parochial education, theirs was effort to maintain
the status quo of English and Amish harmony in the schools. And it is this kind of harmonious coexistence that seemed to model an expected way of life for the English and Amish in the community surrounding the school: we must live and work together for mutual benefit. In the following chapter, I will explore more on what losses are incurred in this delicate balancing act of pursuing mutual benefit.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

The Future of this Research

If provided the time and resources to pursue this topic further, there are two groups of people whom I think would contribute significant perspective to the understanding of the relationship between public school districts/educators and the Amish in the Creek Settlement. First are the educators who are defeatist or negative about the accommodations provided by the schools for Amish children and families. When asked bluntly about people who found it difficult to teach in an environment that was heavily Christian, or so accommodating to the Amish, I heard from participants that “they wouldn’t last” or “they would be unhappy.” All participants exhibited enthusiasm for their role in teaching in these districts, albeit with some reservations. What I did not encounter were educators who were cynical, doubtful, or hostile towards the accommodations. Though my participants indicated that these negative-thinking people were few and far between, I am certain they exist. I found it telling that some of the people I reached out to multiple times by email regarding this study never responded. Potentially, as most classroom teachers are, they could have been overwhelmingly busy. Or, after reading about the approach of this study, they were apprehensive about sharing negative viewpoints out of anxiety about their future in the district. When Curtis spoke about the Willow Run District’s practice of removing science curriculum from the books, I asked if he ever received complaints from the teachers. He said that yes, every year one teacher contacted him to complain, and Curtis mentioned this person with dismissal in his
tone while rolling his eyes. I would like to track down that teacher, and potentially interview others with dissenting opinions.

The second group worth pursuit are graduates of the Crestview and Willow Run School Districts, both Amish and English. I believe we have a lot to learn from Amish young people who graduated from the school systems in the eighth grade regarding their perspective on experience, exposure, accommodation, and autonomy. And from the English children who went onto public high schools, we have a lot to learn about their exposure to the same content and accommodations as their Amish peers. Did they feel “prepared” for what they would experience in the upper grades and in life? In what ways was the arrangement in the elementary schools limiting? What did they think of learning alongside Amish children? There is much to explore with the two groups. From the participants in this study, I was given names of people whom I could contact if an extension of this work were to occur.

Beyond an empirical extension of this study, I would find value in revisiting the philosophical literatures on cultural accommodation, autonomy facilitation, and the relationship between the state and its people, especially when considering the challenges presented by comprehensive communities. The arrangement I encountered in the Creek Settlement presents much to examine when considering how we are to exist and educate in a pluralist society, and for what aims we designate formal education in serving the citizenry. Further, I believe there is worth in continuing work that combines normative educational philosophy with an empirical understanding of how educators interpret their roles in everyday practice.
The Future of the Settlement: Serpents, Worms, and other Threats

In the previous chapter, I aimed to bring into focus the ramifications of the arrangement between the Amish families and the educators in the Willow Run and Crestview School Districts. These two parties, the Amish families and the public-school educators, to a degree are fulfilling the expectations of the Supreme Court Justices in the *Yoder* case from over 40 years ago. The Amish families are not necessarily quietly living on secluded farms, but they are potentially “thriving” if measured by increased Amish population, high rates of employment, and little dependence on state assistance. Like Barbara said: “None are on welfare. They will find partnerships. They will be OK.” If this measure of success is adequate, William Ball, defense attorney in the *Yoder* case, was spot-on in his argument to provide the exemption from high school for the Amish. And for the foreseeable future, the settlement between these two parties remains in balance: the districts accommodate, and Amish families enroll. As mentioned in the Tension chapter, there is potential for this arrangement to be tenuous; but as I heard from these participants, they were intent on maintaining the balance. This might be the “best case scenario” for these two parties involved in the settlement.

Barbara said she thanks God every day that she gets to “teach in Eden” where the Amish community appreciates the slower pace of life, where there are fewer distractions for the children’s attention, and where there aren’t snooping “helicopter parents.” Eden: the storied paradise designed by the Abrahamic religions’ God for humans to enjoy free from sin and immorality. But just as Adam and Eve’s “fall” in Eden was due to an
interloper, the devil manifest as a serpent, the Eden of Barbara’s enjoyment in Willow Run Schools is also under threat from forces external.

“Worms in the Amish Software”

Public school educators in the Creek Settlement are regularly negotiating appropriate implementation and use of technology in the schools. In Willow Run Schools, Curtis said they implement electronic technology and computers at varying levels, depending on the percentage of Amish children enrolled in a school. The more Amish in the school, the less computer usage. And with every new adoption, Curtis is sure to run the initiative past his Amish Advisory Board. New technology seems to require regular attention, but I didn’t know how much of a threat this could be to the Amish until I heard about “the worm.”

It was a warm June day and I was sitting in a huge auditorium on the Elizabethtown College campus listening to foremost scholar on the Amish Donald Kraybill provide a conference’s plenary address. Kraybill has been researching and writing on the Amish for over 40 years, but his words that day seemed freshly animated with new concern about a threat most pressing to the Amish way of life. He called it the “worm in the Amish software,” and this menace is the smartphone.

Kraybill has been writing on the Amish use and regulation of technology for years and pointed out the Amish have been negotiating changes in technology for as long as they set the original Ordnung in a church conference in the sixteenth century. Should the horse-drawn buggies use rubber? Should bicycles have pedals? Should plastic reflectors mark our vehicles? Could we use tractors if they are only borrowed and not owned?
Should we allow ourselves to take public transportation? Could we use telephones if only for business? Could we use electricity if only powered by the sun or battery? And on and on. The *Ordnung* adjusts as new concerns arise. But, Kraybill predicted in that conference address that the Amish would not be able to simply make rules that would easily contain the influence of something like a smartphone with its embedded internet capabilities. It is not just a portable phone for business; it is also a personal computer that penetrates the solitude of the Amish by providing a world of resources, perhaps all the world’s encyclopedic knowledge, in reach at all times in a farmer’s trousers. To Kraybill, the mobile smartphone was a “worm” because the Amish “software” did not have protections against it. Kraybill predicted in his address that day that the smartphone would dig its way into Amish life, potentially degrading its culture and standards.

I can see Kraybill’s prediction of disruption, and indeed I can understand how the schools could be seen as promoters of such technologies. Initiatives exist to improve connectivity of schools, and the off-the-grid districts in the Creek Settlement may have difficulty hiding in the corn. More and more teachers manage material online; districts communicate by email and text messages; standardized tests are predominantly web-based. And though the influx of new web-based technologies may cause a stir in the Amish community, and scholars thereof, I do not believe this is something district administrators in the Willow Run and Crestview School Districts can’t handle. As I heard of the methods by which new technologies were examined before implementation in the Amish elementary schools, I believe that the walls that prevent such worms from penetrating are intact. Willow Run already has Amish schools which use word
processing computers with no internet access, and administrators have demonstrated an interest in keeping electronic technology to a minimum.

**Autonomy-Promoters**

There were probably people in the audience of the conference on the Amish that concurred with Dr. Kraybill’s assessment that Anabaptists were about to experience their greatest challenge. Perhaps there were others who heard the influence of pervasive technology as an awakening of the options for young Amish children. I think of the subjects of Paula McAvoy’s article “‘There Are No Housewives on Star Trek’: A Reexamination of Exit Rights for the Children of Insular Fundamentalist Parents.” McAvoy writes of young people raised by fundamentalist religious families realizing ways of existing outside of the sect through option-introducing materials like books and television shows. These experiences may be what Curtis called “mind-blowing” moments when the Amish and English interact in the same spaces. This is good to those interested in promoting opportunities which allow individuals to develop increased autonomy, or options for future identities and existence; this is dangerous territory for those interested in keeping communities comprehensive and separate from the mainstream.

In addition to encroaching access to technology, there could be a school reformer lurking who catches wind of the public school arrangement in the Creek Settlement and would want to make it a project to expose the Crestview and Willow Run School Districts accommodations for Amish children as an overreach at the expense of English children and the assumed standards for curriculum and career readiness. Maybe these
reformers are already at work in the region, though I didn’t hear a single participant mention such a threat.

The reason I believe these districts won’t be taken to court to reverse their practices in accommodation has less to do with a lack of evidence than a lack of interest in the state wanting to lose a population from the fold of public engagement. At present, the districts in the Creek Settlement are keeping a peripheral population involved in a public enterprise. Stephen Macedo makes the case that there are “powerful” religious communities that aim to “ensure laws are designed to accommodate their needs,” while resisting “basic civic values.” But he says the Amish are not one of those groups, and calls the Amish an “unthreatening” group who are not evangelizing and disrupting democracy. Further, as Brian Warnick warns, if the state or other interlopers aim at challenging these fringe groups’ participation in public schools, we may lose them entirely as they opt for private school options, as was the result with the families at the center of the Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education (1989) case.

Though a court case challenging the “settlement” in these districts is possible, as outlined above, I do not see this as an impending threat. The more pressing danger waiting in the wings is the general absence of funding. Though the people in the Creek Settlement are not poor, the school districts are not flush with resources. Many of the buildings are old and require expensive upkeep. When I was visiting Tim’s classroom in

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254 Macedo, Diversity and Distrust, 150.
256 Warnick, 20 – 21.
the dead of winter, he had the windows open at 8:00 a.m. in anticipation of the heat from
the boiler reaching 70 degrees before the children arrived for the day. He said it always
felt like an oven, no matter the time of year. I asked if he thought a levy might pass to
give the schools funds to update buildings such as his. He laughed, stating that the
residents of the Crestview District, Amish or English, would see a request for additional
funding from the school as a sign that the District “was using resources inefficiently.”
Both districts haven’t had levies pass since the early 1990s.

In Willow Run, Curtis said private individuals and companies have been
generous, especially as athletic boosters to the high school and middle school. The
district has been gifted new artificial turf fields, contracted companies to maintain the
fields, scoreboards, and golf simulators. In contrast, the elementary schools have been
privately gifted two pianos and a set of Chromebook laptops. He said he was
appreciative of the gifts to the elementary schools, but it is out of the control of the
administrators and teachers in the District. What they needed was building upkeep and
teaching material updates. In fact, while writing this conclusion, a front-page article of a
major newspaper in the state where the Creek Settlement is situated published an in-depth
analysis of the physical condition of public schools in the state. While some wealthy
districts thrived on updated and modern campuses, many districts were operating out of
old and dilapidated buildings.

An aging physical plant wears on the population, but so does aging curricular
resources. Curtis said, “The kids need to know that The Gulf War happened,”
referencing some schools that were working out of history texts that pre-dated the 1990s.
I asked him what it would take for a new levy to pass in the district. He said: “An act of God. You think I am kidding.” He wasn’t kidding. Additionally, gone were the days of the “cash cow” of federal and state dollars. Curtis lamented the loss, stating that there used to be years when they would have an abundance of resources to use with great discretion: “I remember the Title Director calling and saying, ‘can you please find $25,000 of things to purchase for your school?’” Now there is less federal money coming into the District with which they could support language programs, technology advancements, classroom aides, and curricular materials.

While these unique districts may suffer unique threats as outlined above, I found through my research that the most imminent threat to the districts is a common and contemporary predicament for rural districts in the state in which the Creek Settlement is situated. There is never enough money. Alas, they make do. Jeff continues to open the windows in his century old classroom; Barbara fast-forwards through the gazebo scene in “The Sound of Music” on her VHS player; Roy thumbs through his library’s card catalogue before pulling a magic trick off the shelf to show a curious first grader. For now, as Barbara said, “the kids will be OK.”

**Living with the Losses**

When Barbara termed her classroom situation as “teaching in the Garden of Eden,” I relished in her joy. She likened her position of educating a group of Amish children in a small classroom of Burton Elementary to ex an experience in paradise. Specifically, she was referencing the freedom to explore with her eager-to-learn students
exempt from the pressures of “helicopter parents” or a teach-to-the-test culture. I am sure this is a situation many educators across the country would envy.

The more I dwelt on the arrangement of Barbara’s classroom in the context of the whole of what I was learning about public schooling the Creek Settlement, the more I thought about what might be lost or ignored when one exists in Eden. The Garden of Eden of the Abrahamic religions’ Book of Genesis remains for Adam and Eve only if they recognize a covenant with God to not eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”257 They could enjoy the wonder and delight of all the creatures and fruits God made available, but they were told by God to not let their curiosity lead them to the tree, nor the forbidden fruit on its branches. Alas, their curiosity was too strong; they ate the forbidden fruit; they became hindered with self-awareness and humanity’s first sin.

Each participant in this study stated a need for restraint because of their Amish student population, mentioning the “trade-off” or the “give-and-take” they had to make to keep these children in their classrooms. This mutually understood settlement between the families and schools is much like the Ordnung the Amish families follow to stay in the congregation, or the covenant between the first humans and God in the Book of Genesis: to avoid a fall (or The Fall), some knowledge or experience needs to be avoided so that a greater good is maintained or reached. And though there is no temptation like “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” planted in the center of Barbara’s or others’ classroom, I am sure curiosity abounds: a child wants to know what is said between Liesl and Rolf in

257 Gen. 2: 15-17 (New International Version). Across the Abrahamic faiths, there are a multitude of versions of this story in the generically titled Book of Genesis.
the skipped scene in *The Sound of Music*; an Amish girl in Mary’s office says that she wants to learn more about what Albert Einstein studied; an English child in one of Curtis’s elementary schools wants to understand dinosaurs or cell division.

Though the children, both Amish and English, may have interest or noted “potential,” the participants in this study could only hint or nudge students towards skipped or taboo subjects; they knew better than to direct some of these children to new ways of knowing or being in the world which were incommensurate with the local religious way of life. These educators were complicit in satisfying the prediction Justice Douglas, as he warned in his dissenting opinion in the *Yoder* ruling of 1972, that limiting public schooling will ensure children are “…barred from entry into the new and amazing world of diversity that we have today.” From our conversations together, it was made clear that the educators in this study not only recognized their actions in providing an intentionally restricted education, but they were fully aware of the consequences or the losses incurred by acquiescing to the local. I am certain that if it were not for the significant presence of Amish children in the Creek Settlement school districts, these educators would have a broader, more encompassing curriculum or educational plan for all the children. But since the districts are bent on maintaining peace and numbers, some educational experiences and opportunities were restricted, removed, or ignored. Those are the losses due to the arrangement to educate Amish students in the public school system.

To contrast, when thinking of the benefits of educating Amish and English students together, there was no easy way to quantify the gains. How to measure the
success of the Crestview and Willow Run School Districts in maintaining a number Amish families in the fold of a public institution? Additionally, how to gauge the benefits of English and Amish children learning together, sharing their perspectives and home cultures in the classroom, gymnasium, and softball field? Maintaining a balance sheet of the gains and losses of this experiment in integration is inadequate, if not impossible. So, is the arrangement permissible? The kids may be “OK,” but should the educators abide?

Earlier, I quote philosopher Sir Isaiah Berlin on his work *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* regarding our predicament of choice:

> The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable — that is a truism — but conceptually incoherent; I do not know what is meant by a harmony of this kind. Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss.\(^{258}\)

Berlin reminds us that pluralism in society is difficult. When competing interests collide and we must choose “among the Great Goods,” there will be losses to some, if not all involved. The educators, district administrators, and families (both Amish and English) in these districts have settled, perhaps implicitly, that they are willing to live with this schooling arrangement as it stands. Recall that the study participants were unable to identify any significant complaints from families (English or Amish) about the quality or aims of the educational experience in these schools. If the Amish families were disappointed, they would just leave. Interestingly, at present, many stay. And the

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educators are the bearers of the arrangement, teaching whichever kids walk through the door to the degree that suits the community.
Appendices

Appendix A   Recruitment Script for Study Participants

Sent via Email

Dear Mrs./Mr. _____________________,

Hello, my name is Ryan Ozar, and I am a doctoral student in the cultural foundations of education program at Kent State University. I am seeking participants for a research project related to public school teachers in Amish/Anabaptist communities. *I was given your name by _____________ as someone who may like to participate or would have names of others who would like to participate.

Allow me to explain a bit more about the project. The purpose of this research is to better understand how public school teachers of Amish children talk about and view their role as a teacher, adult, and role model. I may ask about your path to teaching, what people or material influences your teaching strategies, how you make decisions in the classroom, how you consider the local community and values in your teaching, your approach to establishing rules and rapport in the classroom and school, and how you talk about your influence on children and the community as a teacher. I am asking participants to meet with me for 3 – 4 interview sessions, each session lasting about one hour. We would meet over a period of 3 – 8 months and at locations and times convenient to you. Of course, there is no obligation to participate in this study.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you would receive no compensation. One benefit may be the opportunity to reflect on your teaching practice through the interview sessions.

The interview data will be used for my doctoral dissertation and potentially for future publication in education journal articles or book chapters. Please know that false names or pseudonyms will be used for participants, schools, and locations, in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Please reply regarding your interest or inability to participate. If you have any questions, you may contact me at 330-605-7614 / rozar@kent.edu or my research advisor at Kent State University, Prof. Tricia Niesz at 330-672-0591 / tniesz@kent.edu.

Thank you,
Ryan Ozar

*This sentence can be added if seeking participants via reference from other participants, and to detail how I received their contact information.
# Appendix B  Timeline of Participant Contact and Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Date of Contact</th>
<th>Method of Inquiry</th>
<th>Purpose of Inquiry</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
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<td>Interview, build contacts</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2/7/17</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Check-in, update on research</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Update on research</td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>Check in, update on research</td>
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Appendix C  Glossary of Terms

_Gelassenheit:_ Yieldedness or submission to God; a behavior exhibiting humility for the Amish

_Ordnung:_ For Amish and Old Order Mennonite congregations, the specific set of rules for behavior in public and private life, as outlined by a church bishop or congregational leadership

_Pennsylvania Dutch:_ A high-German derived American language developed by seventeenth and eighteenth century immigrants, spoken by nearly 400,000 contemporary Anabaptists in the United States and Canada
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