AN EXPLORATORY STUDY EXAMINING THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM; HOW IT FUNCTIONS ON A DAILY BASIS; AND HOW IT MAY BE IMPROVED

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to make transparent the current National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The first mission of this project is to clarify how the NSLP functions on a day-to-day basis in Columbus, Ohio. Columbus is used as a sample city, yet the aim of this research is to be transferable to other locations.

The second objective is to gain a clearer understanding of the NSLP from the perspective of those who work in the field, and how they would like to improve the Program.

This study employs qualitative inquiry through the use of individual interviews and observations to measure the participants. The approach is naturalistic, which encourages the researcher to interact with the sample in their natural environment. The perspective is that of eleven individuals working for the National School Lunch Program. Through a guided interviewing process these participants spoke of their experiences in the current nutritional model, and gave suggestions of improvement. Their stories on nutrition, hopes of better food, and equitable lunches were audio-recorded, and the data were analyzed and coded in a final report.

The results from this investigation reveal that the National School Lunch Program is a spike, or a foreign object inserted into an environment, having little interaction with the community. In addition, those working in the National School Lunch Program often did not see problems with the initiative (even in the face of growing obesity, inattentive
disorders, and mood issues). During the interviews it became apparent that many in the NSLP see the benefits of bringing in more local, fresher foods for the students, but they could not imagine going against the hierarchy of the NSLP. In response to the first research question, how the NSLP functions, the most frequent response was through near total control. Indeed, this faltering program, one that the USDA has hopes of making healthier, sees itself as unchangeable.
This work is dedicated to my father, John Campbell Bereza
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I would like to thank all of my friends and family who helped me during these past three years at Ohio State. To all those anonymous people out there who made sure that I was loved, warm, and cared for—thank you. Thank you to The Bennies for staying with me all these years. To my family who checked on me and encouraged me, thank you. And to my internship site for allowing me the time to gather this data and complete my dissertation (and look for a job), thank you. Thank you to Dr. Miranda for taking a chance on me and this project. Thank you to the Office for Disability Services for funding me during my first two years of Ohio State. I will never forget all of your help, and I feel very fortunate to be where I am at this moment.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ................................................................. ii
Dedication ................................................................. iv
Acknowledgments ......................................................... v
Vita ....................................................................... vi
List of Tables ............................................................. ix

Chapters:

1. INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 1
   Purpose of the study ............................................ 8
   Research questions .......................................... 9
   Definitions of terms ........................................ 10
   Limitations ...................................................... 12
   Significance ................................................... 13

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ........................................... 16
   History of the NSLP .......................................... 17
   Requirements for school lunches .......................... 23
   Foods of minimal nutritional value ..................... 25
   Looking ahead ............................................... 31
   Theoretical orientations ................................ 34
   Grounded theory method ................................ 35
   Ecological systems theory ................................. 39
   Critical theory ............................................... 42

3. METHODS .......................................................... 47
   Design .......................................................... 48
   Site selection ................................................ 53
   Subject selection ........................................... 57
   Recruitment .................................................. 60
   Schools studied ............................................. 60
   Coding procedures ........................................ 68
   Triangulation, trust, and ethics ....................... 71
   Data analysis visual organizer ....................... 75
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>FINDINGS</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant introductions</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme emergence</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 1: Control</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 2: Corporations dictate the NSLP</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 3: Students dictate the NSLP</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 4: Atmosphere and attitudes</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 5: Loyalty</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 6: Local food issues</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 7: More poor students=more money</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theme 8: Labor is to blame</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcomes as viewed by theory</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing research question one</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Address research question two</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Directions for future research</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disconfirming data</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project conclusion</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A. Participant demographics</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. Interview script</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Consent to participate</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D. Recruitment letter</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E. Findings shown in circular organizer</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Between district comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Theme frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Income guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Central themes with subthemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>NSLP Hierarchy flowchart</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nutrition has the potential to affect the entire body, including mood and behavior. While consuming food is an activity shared by all people, nutrient intake varies due to personal preferences, cultural influences, and the ability to afford supplies. These variations cause differences in how we function internally and externally. For example, children who eat a healthy breakfast and lunch achieve academically higher than those that do not (Taras, 2005).

The relationship between proper nutrition (as defined by the American Dietary Association) and elevated academic achievement has been thoroughly researched and, for the purpose of this study, is accepted as a causal. Regardless, modern students are offered a myriad of foods, many considered to be “junk,” or Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV) in schools. These items are extremely popular, with 98% of public schools having some sort of FMNV vendor (GAO, 2004). These FMNV lack proper nutrition and are linked to behavioral and developmental concerns, such as inattention and obesity (Sears, 1999). Due to congressional legislation and pressure from corporations, the National School Lunch Program, once based on sound principals and practices, has become riddled with Foods of Nutritional Minimal Value.
Originally, the USDA recommended that school children not receive more than 30% of their Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) of fat calories from their school lunch (USDA, 2007). This recommendation was based on information from various organizations, such as the American Dietary Association (ADA). The RDA is included in this investigation as research clearly indicates that diets high in fats, especially saturated fats found in fast-food, increase obesity and inattentive disorders, and lead to poor food choices later in life (Benton, 2007).

**NSLP prevalence.** The United States Department of Agriculture’s National School Lunch Program (NSLP), in conjunction with local school districts and School Food Authorities (SFA), provide 29 million lunches to 13,000 districts at a cost of 7.6 billion dollars (USDA, 2006). The NSLP has remained popular since its inception in 1946. In Columbus City Schools, Columbus, Ohio, for example, over 72% of the student population receives a free- or reduced-price lunch (Columbus City Schools, 2008). The National School Lunch Program touches millions of students in America, however, the program’s oversight agency, the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), recognizes that the initiative is deeply flawed and in need of modernization (2003).

To better understand how this enormous school-food program affects the physical and mental health of millions of children each day, the following section will briefly highlight the internal and external effects of nutrition.

**Nutrition and Development**

**Obesity.** The Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention report that early childhood, childhood, and adolescent obesity have increased 14, 18, and 17%
respectively since the inception of the NSLP (CDC, 2008). It cannot be said with confidence that the National School Lunch Program is causing the rise in obesity levels, yet the NSLP does feed 29 million students every day, and therefore this possible relationship should not be discounted.

*Mood and nutrition.* “Regular consumption of breakfast cereals has, in experimental studies, been shown not only to lead to positive mood, but also to improve memory and…performance” (Lien, p. 422, 2006). In addition, eating breakfast, even a minimal meal of cold cereal can reduce stress and infection levels in children.

The previous study concentrated on two cohorts of fifteen and sixteen year olds. The independent variable was how many times a week students ate breakfast and how often they suffered from mood disturbances. The findings indicated that students who ate breakfast during the week had lower amounts of mental distress (2006).

In purely physical terms, eating breakfast improves mood by decreasing cortisol levels while increasing glucose. Cortisol is a steroid hormone released during stressful situations, and the lack of this hormone defines a low-stressed body. Secondly, eating breakfast injects glucose into the system, which is missing due to the normal fast between dinner and breakfast. “Glucose is essential in the formation of tryptophan, a precursor protein in the synthesis of serotonin, which regulates mood and memory” (Lien, p. 425, 2006).

*Aggression and nutrition.* In further support of the link between nutrition, hunger, and psychological functioning, researchers report that children identified as hungry on the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project were significantly more likely to
suffer from aggression and anxiety (Kleinman et al., 1998). The authors state that low-income respondents are particular at risk of being hungry, and therefore disproportionately suffer from aggressive and anxious disorders.

Some studies also suggest that children who consume vitamin and mineral supplements are less likely to act in aggressive and antisocial ways (Sears, 1999), and that multivitamins (a cornerstone of micronutrition) and the reduction of fatty acids in childhood diets decrease certain behaviors (Franklin, 2006). In the medical profession there is further support that students who consume poly-unsaturated fats are less violent than those who consume saturated fats (Benton, 2007). One exhaustive study suggests “a decrease in aggressive tendency following supplementation with the omega-3 fatty acid DHA was demonstrated using meta-analysis” (Benton, 2007, p. 767). There is growing evidence that fats, not sugars, affect behavior.

Lastly, research suggests what and how often a child eats affects externalization of behaviors. In support of this, one study notes that date violence in adolescents is correlated with higher rates of disordered eating. The author defined disordered eating as eating poorly, sporadically, or not at all (Ackard, 2001).

*Inattentive behaviors. The link between nutrition and attention disorders has gained considerable notoriety in schools and at home. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is the most often occurring neuro-biological diagnosed issue in children. More disturbing, current estimates reveal that between 3-7% of children in the United States suffer from ADHD or another inattentive disorder. Comorbid conditions*
are prevalent, such as learning disabilities, oppositional defiant disorder, and conduct disorders (Isaacs, 2002).

While the National Institute of Health declares that foods and behavior do not have a causal relationship, researchers continue to take up the matter. Most noteworthy is the work of William Sears, M.D., and Martha Sears, R.N. This family has researched and authored numerous books on raising children and proper nutrition. In *The Family Nutrition Book*, the authors write cautiously about the link between food and behavior. In particular, the researchers are careful to note that some studies suggest strong relationships, while others find no correlation. However, the studies recognize that intuitive feelings parents have about food and behavior are consequential, and in the research finds that children with deficits in omega-3 fatty acids are significantly more likely to demonstrate behavioral problems. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in certain fresh vegetables (dark leafy greens) and fish such as salmon (Sears, 1999).

Two other fats linked to behavior are docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and arachidonic acid (AA). DHA and AA are called brain fats, and are primarily found in breast milk. Researchers hypothesize that children who breastfeed longer have lower rates of attention disorders, and because of this, promote a DHA/AA-ADHD relationship.

*Academic achievement and diet.* In contrast to the increase in school-age obesity, American achievement scores in math and reading are declining. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the US Government has investigated why achievement scores remain flat in the United States, with certain subjects showing significant declines (such as math and science). The Center for Education Reform reports that the US spends
$11,000 per student annually, which is the second highest expenditure in the world, yet the US ranks twenty-one out of twenty-nine leading nations in math scores (2006). Again, it cannot be claimed with certainty that the National School Lunch Program causes this discrepancy, but its daily influence on millions of children should not be explored. The following section will highlight how this program operates to properly feed students.

The NSLP, FMNV, and School Lunches Today

NSLP requirements. The National School Lunch Program is as close to a universal food initiative as available in the United States, and affects a great number of our citizens. The USDA requires that publicly funded school lunches must not contain more than 30% of an individual’s caloric intake from fat. No more than 10% of the calories from each lunch can be from saturated fats. In addition, school lunches must provide one-third of the American Dietary Association’s Recommended Daily Allowances (RDA) of protein, vitamins A & C, iron, and calcium (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007).

Currently the NSLP works with the ADA to implement and improve nutrition in schools while investigating progressive programs to better the system. Unfortunately, the US General Accounting Office, which oversees the NSLP, reports that only 25% of schools are in compliance with NSLP/ADA guidelines on nutrition and fat intake (GAO, 2004). These data were collected in the GAO’s most recent series of school lunch surveys.
The General Accounting Office shares its concerns about how NSLP foods are affecting children. The GAO notes that 15% of American public education students are overweight (GAO, 2003). Indeed, the GAO recognizes that weight proportional students achieve better in school. In their statement, the GAO calls on districts to limit Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value and competitive foods sold on campuses (including fast-food outlets and vending machines). In spite of these recommendations, there has been little progress in fighting deteriorating lunch quality, with nearly 75% of schools out of compliance with NSLP/ADA nutritional recommendations (2003).

Regardless of the federal mandate passed in 1946 by the National School Lunch Act (NSLA) to provide students with healthy foods in schools, the NSLP is wrought with challenges. Due to pressure from vending and fast-food corporations, Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value continue to be sold on school campuses during the school day. In 2004, 98% of high schools and 74% of middles schools in the United States had some type of vending or FMNV on campus (GAO, 2004).

These vendors are popular with students because of status, familiarity, and ease. In addition, they are accepted by school administrations as every dollar earned by a vendor, a percentage goes to the host school. This extra revenue provides everything from band uniforms to books. Unfortunately, FMNV are not regulated by the USDA, thus allowing corporations to serve foods with high fat and additive contents on campus and in competition to the NSLP (2004).

The federal government and local communities are concerned over this information as obesity now affects nearly two-thirds of all US citizens. As obesity
increases, so does our intake of fast-food (by 50%) and sugar (by five more pounds per person each year). Obesity will become the single most preventable cause of premature death in the United States, a title historically held by smoking (Barret, 2007).

*The community response.* Chefs, farmers, activists, educators, and students have asked what can be done to change this system. Recently, people from a variety of fields have suggested one way to address the increase in childhood obesity, health in the schools, and poor quality lunches, is to integrate whole and local foods into the NSLP. In response to this, there has been a growing call for changes in the way we feed millions school children through the National School Lunch Program.

*Conclusion.* From obesity to achievement to aggression, the medical and educational fields have demonstrated that poor nutrition equals unhealthy behaviors, bodies, and feelings. With twenty-nine million students eating from a program that is largely out of line with its own nutritional mandates, researchers must ask if the NSLP is beneficial. While a great deal is known about how the program is failing our students, researchers have been negligent in asking about its daily functioning and in what ways it can be improved. Historically these question has been posed in the context of medical interventions with very little time and effort given to preventative measures. This study aims to illuminate the current state of the NSLP, and how those in the field view program, its challenges, and possible improvements.

*Statement of the Research Problem and Purpose*

The purpose of this qualitative study is to make transparent the current National School Lunch Program in Columbus, Ohio. As noted, the parent agency of the NSLP, the
US Department of Agriculture, is investigating suggestions for improvement within the initiative. Local activists, chefs, parents, and concerned citizens are doing the same. However, initial field observations and interviews have exposed unanswered questions about the NSLP and its practices. The first mission of this study is to clarify how the National School Lunch Program functions on a day-to-day basis in Columbus, Ohio. Columbus is used as a sample city, yet the aim of this study is to be transferable to other locations (see Chapter 3, Methods).

The second research problem of this study is to gain a clearer understanding of the National School Lunch Program from the perspective of those who work within the field, and how they would improve the NSLP. This study will strive to understand the perspective and advice of those who cook for and administrate the NSLP. It is a goal of this investigation to involve those who fully comprehend the program, and what changes must occur to properly feed our students.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are based on this writer’s field observations within the NSLP, a thorough review of literature, preliminary interviews, and personal experiences. Introductory observations have highlighted the confusing state of the National School Lunch Program and call for a clarification of the initiative. In addition, the admitted disarray of the NSLP by the GAO suggests there may be a more efficient and beneficial manner in which to run the program. The two major research questions follow with clarification prompts bulleted by letters:

1. How does the National School Lunch Program operate on a day-to-day basis?
a. Who is responsible for overseeing this program?

b. Where does NSLP food and supplies come from?

c. How is this program paid for in a school district?

d. What is the relationship between the school and food-producing community?

e. What makes a good school lunch?

2. What are the perspectives of those who work for the National School Lunch Program and how could it be improved?

a. Is this program effective?

b. Is the NSLP providing nutritious foods?

c. Do children prefer NSLP or FMNV?

d. Is the NSLP fair and popular with students?

e. What would make a better school lunch?

Definitions of Terms

This investigation will refer to several federal and local programs in acronym form. In addition, the study will cover medical, dietary, and culinary information. The following list of terms is meant to be used as a quick reference to aid in the transferability of the data and methods (Somekh & Lewin, 2005).

- NSLP: National School Lunch Program. Originated from the National School Lunch Act (NSLA) of 1946. The NSLP is synonymous with “school-lunch” when used in context of students eating USDA-provided food in school.
• FMNV: Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value. Any food served on a school campus and sold in competition to the NSLP. These foods are often prepared and served by fast-food corporations or are purchased from vending machines. Due to congressional legislation, these foods are not required to meet dietary guidelines and not be regulated by the USDA. They cannot be sold within view of the NSLP, but this does not preclude their sale in separate areas of campus.

• ADA: American Dietary Association. Long-time advocate for student nutrition. Influenced the original language of the NSLA of 1946 to include basic dietary requirements.

• RDA: Recommended Daily Allowance. Minimal nutritional values set by the American Dietary Association (see proper nutrition, below).

• Proper nutrition: Also known as Sound Nutrition. Term used to describe ADA guidelines of food that does not contain more than 30% of an individual’s caloric intake from fat. No more than 10% of the calories from each lunch should be saturated fats. School lunches must provide one-third RDA of protein, vitamins A & C, iron, calcium, and calories.

• Malnourished: Biological state of not meeting proper nutrition.

• GTM: Grounded Theory Method: Theoretical orientation put forth by Glaser & Strauss in 1967. General components of GTM are that the researcher grounds conclusions and hypotheses in the data being collected. GTM asks the researcher to evaluate what the data are saying about the particular subject studied and form conclusions from them (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
• EST: Ecological Systems Theory primarily supported by Bronfenbrenner in 1979. General component of ETS are that humans develop and function in reaction to biological needs as well as input from their environment. This includes the Microsystem (such as family and school), the Mesosystem (education and learning), the Exosystem (neighbors and media), the Macrosystem (ideologies of culture), and the Chronosystem (transitions over the lifetime). ETS explores how these systems continue to affect our actions into adulthood (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Study Limitations and Delimitations.

Limitations. This study will be limited by geography and time. These two areas are outside the control of the researcher. The time frame allowed to study the subject is one school year (approximately 185 business days). During that time this researcher will conduct observations and interviews as well as analyze data. One school year will not allow for student involvement, focus groups, or additional surveys of the field.

Due to time constraints and resources, this study will be limited by geography. It will not be possible to travel beyond central Ohio to study the proposed subject. This limitation could affect transferability of data in that central Ohio is an agricultural region with a long tradition of local food production. A question would be whether this study could be transferred to areas without arable land, adequate irrigation, or developed agricultural systems.

Delimitations. This study will not show causation between nutrition and achievement through experimentation. The medical and educational communities have
demonstrated this correlation, which is outlined in Chapter 2, Review of Literature. This study will not be experimental, nor will it contain pre- and posttests to demonstrate causality.

This investigation will be delimited by the researcher to study adults who work in the NSLP. This delimitation is set by the researcher to meet the objectives of the study’s research focus: to produce a document, guided by first-hand knowledge from those who understand the NSLP, on how the program functions and what improvements are warranted. It is felt that student data would not contain the organizational and functional information consistent with the research questions (e.g., how does the NSLP run on a day-to-day basis; how could it realistically be improved).

Significance of the Study

Research on the National School Lunch Program has indicated gaps in two areas: how the program is currently run, and what suggestions people within the field have for improvement. These under-studied sets of data led to the present research questions.

Study of the NSLP focuses overwhelmingly on obesity and behavior. Recently, with progressive programs such as the Davis Farm Market Salad Bar, Davis, California, and the Edible Schoolyard, Berkeley, California, community members have begun asking how the NSLP could be run in an ethical and beneficial manner. This study will add to existing data by interviewing people who are involved in the NSLP on a daily basis as well as shadowing and observing the participants in their field. These data could expose models of sustainable and nutritious school-food programs for others to investigate.
The methods of this study will also add to the body of knowledge in regards to the NSLP. During a review of literature, no qualitative inquiry studies were found with similar goals and assumptions. This document will serve as a guide or template to those interested in completing firsthand qualitative inquiry into a variety of settings and purposes.

Lastly, this study will add to the field a method of employing three theoretical orientations: Grounded Theory Method, Ecological Systems Theory, and Critical Theory. These theories will be described extensively both in Chapter 2, Review of Literature, and Chapter 3, Methods. GTM requires that the researcher ground conclusions in the data gathered (Dey, 1999). Ecological Systems Theory illuminates how systems (such as the NSLP) react to their environment and biological needs, while Critical Theory questions equity and power of the system examined. The triangulation of three theories will add to the general fund of knowledge by examining a phenomenon through the lens of grounded data, the ecology in which it grows, and how those being served view the NSLP.

Perspective of the Researcher

This study is designed through qualitative methods to understand how the National School Lunch Program operates. The researcher has several years of experience in foodservice as well as farm-work and holds two general biases:

1. That the National School Lunch Program relies on substandard food commodities from the USDA and allows FMNV to sell in competition to the NSLP. Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value are affecting both internal (mood, self-esteem) and external (aggression, inattention) functioning of our students.
2. Progressive farm-school programs can be implemented and run in competition or in support of the National School Lunch Program. Initiatives such as the Davis Farm Market Salad Bar, Davis, California, contain fresh fruits and vegetables grown and served locally. The researcher believes similar programs can be established in areas with comparable land and water availability. In addition, the researcher believes that by using local and whole foods in the NSLP, the program will address nutritional, behavioral, and cognitive concerns of students in a positive manner.

These biases are to be taken into consideration during the study. To remain objective, the researcher will give equal attention to disconfirming data throughout the study and report upon it fairly (Ary, 2006).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To understand the literature surrounding the National School Lunch Program is to undertake a historical analysis of the times in which the initiative developed and the people and agencies involved. To state this simplistically, the National School Lunch Program was a child of many movements, governments, and individuals. The NSLP was created to better the United States during a time of national vulnerability and need for modernization of social programs. This discussion will focus on the historical precedents leading to the creation of the NSLP; the requirements of the program; how it is administered; and current movements within in the NSLP.

In addition to understanding the NSLP by examining the literature, this section will also review three theories that guided and structured this study: Grounded Theory Method, the Ecological Systems, and Critical Theory. Each theory will be explored by reviewing pertinent literature, historical perspectives, and how the philosophy fits within this project’s research questions.

Introduction

The United States struggles to produce a citizenry both educated and healthy at the public’s expense, without impeding civil rights or becoming financially burdensome. This review of literature will explore and discuss the history of the National School Lunch Program...
Lunch Program; the requirements set forth by the US Government in relation to nutrition; how these programs are monitored; and examples from various school nutritional models.

In addition to reviewing the literature pertaining to food, achievement, and behavior, this chapter will cover the study’s theoretical orientations. As this research comes from a Grounded Theory, Ecological Systems, and Critical Theory-triangulated stance, each topic will be covered from the perspective of how they guided and influenced this study.

*History of the National School Lunch Program*

The National School Lunch Act (NSLA) of 1946 did not occur in a vacuum without influence from other nations or agencies. The NSLA, which eventually passed the US Congress with bipartisan support, came to light because of compulsory education and the domestic effects of World War Two. Compulsory education was a dramatic event for several reasons, one being that it exemplified the malnourished state of American children in the early half of the century. The second contributing factor to the passage of the NSLA was World War Two, and the need for healthy citizens to serve in the armed forces (Martin, 1996).

*Compulsory education and social nutrition.* American history is replete with tension between citizens and the government regarding education. Within education are several components: location, supplies, staff, and student health. While deciding upon an agreeable method of educating our future citizenry, the United States took examples from England and Europe. A common thread among these nations was the idea that a nation must educate children that can be educated. For example, England purported that hungry
and tired children did not achieve as well as those who were fed and clothed (Gunderson, 1971). This aim, to prepare children for education, became one of the essential foundations of the American public school movement. At the center of this debate was the question of hungry children.

The concern over feeding the public is rooted in industrialization. As nations industrialized in the early 1900s, they faced immense immigration, poverty, and hunger (1971). The engine of industrialization was fueled by access to large numbers of workers, often toiling in hazardous conditions for little pay. The result was a movement in the United States to increase the standards of living for the working class. One extremely popular mandate was compulsory education.

In part, the United States sought to end societal problems by passing compulsory education laws (Fagan & Wise, 2000). The government theorized that educated people would reduce crime, unemployment, and the poverty plaguing 20th century cities. Once passed, compulsory education laws required individual states to nurture both the student’s mind and body. In addition, immigration rose in America, causing concern of how to house, feed, and care for incoming citizens (2000).

To address the needs of the poor, social programs began in eastern industrial cities, including The Children’s Aid Society of New York (1853), the Starr Center Association of Philadelphia (1894), and in 1908, the Boston’s Women’s Educational and Industrial Union (Gunderson, 1971). While these programs addressed the individual needs of particular cities, none came close to mandating federal food assistance to the growing public education movement. As individual states passed compulsory education
laws, such as Ohio’s mandate of 1877, the federal dialogue over school nutrition began in earnest. By 1918 all states had agreed to educate elementary-age school children (Fagan & Wise, 2000). The question became, must the state only educate, or educate, feed, and house students?

Between 1918 and 1946 school lunch programs were local and at-will (Gunderson, 1971). If states offered school children food, it typically was sold at cost, excluding the poorest students from nutrition and health programming. This factor led to an increase of diseases in children linked directly to malnutrition.

The focus of lunch programs in the 20th Century was to eradicate nutrient-deficiency diseases. In particular, the government was interested in halting diseases related to the malnutrition of protein, vitamins, and iron. The government felt an effective strategy to feed many developing Americans was to create a program in the fledgling public schools (Martin, 1996).

The school lunch movement and WPA. The birth of the National School Lunch Program was closely tied to the economic situation of the United States in the 1930s, specifically the Great Depression. During this era of severe economic downturn, the US Government created the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to deal with hunger in schools and poor communities. At the time of the Depression, Congress noted that:

there were unemployed, needy women in nearly every city, town, village, and rural community of the country, [and] the preparation and serving of school lunches became a very ready area of employment to which such women could be assigned. (Gunderson, 1971, p. 16).
The matching of WPA staff and the budding school nutrition movement seemed to be a natural fit. Unfortunately, for many reasons, World War II changed the direction of the school lunch initiative.

*World war two and nutrition in public schools.* The advent of World War Two had significant effects on the WPA and the developing school nutrition program. During the war effort, the WPA was drained of personnel and funding to staff and pay for the wars in Europe and Asia. A casualty of this reallocation was the school lunch program and the women and men who ran it through the WPA. In early 1943, with World War Two in full force, the WPA closed its doors and school food programs withered (Roberts, 2002). Unfortunately, as these projects ceased, so did the little public nutrition they provided to our most vulnerable citizens—students.

*The passage of the national school lunch act.* The National School Lunch Act of 1946 was influenced by the successes and failures of World War Two (Martin, 1996). During the war effort, the armed forces complained that recruits were typically underweight, weak, and malnourished (Salisbury, 2004). Many young men and women were turned away from the war effort for being unfit for duty (Martin, 1996). To deal with this, Congress enacted the federal School Milk Program in 1943, and later, funding for the National School Lunch Act (Gunderson, 1971). In 1946, with bipartisan support, the National School Lunch Act was passed by Congress and set into motion. The goals of the program included:

*Meals served will meet tested nutritional requirements; meals will be available to all children without discrimination regarding their economic*
or physical condition; programs will be operated in an accountable
manner; and funds will be provided to support the program’s

In addition, the US Government turned to the American Dietary Association (ADA) for
leadership on how the NSLP should be structured. The ADA had been concerned for
decades over instances of nutrition-based disease, and eagerly took part in this initiative
designed to benefit public education students. The ADA suggested the following
guidelines for the National School Lunch Program:

All children should have access to a nutritious noonday meal; for some
children, the school should consider providing breakfast; there should be a
bridge between the classroom and the cafeteria, which should be a
learning laboratory; the program should operate as an integral part of the
school; the program should be operated on a businesslike level and with
sound financial management; the manager should be as well trained as the
classroom teacher; all children should be served regardless of their ability
to pay; only those foods that contribute to positive food habits should be

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was put under the supervision of the
Secretary of Agriculture, and housed in the USDA. The USDA established nutritional
guidelines for the individual states, as well as a nationalized menu of three types of
schools lunches: A, B, and C (Gunderson, 1971). Heavily scrutinized, these lunches
contained whole milk, protein-rich foods, raw or canned fruits and vegetables, bread, and butter. The only differences between A, B, and C were portion amounts.

*The national school lunch program grows.* After World War Two the United States amended the NSLA to improve funding and distribution of goods to schools (Salisbury, 2004). This was largely a reaction to the Cold War and the United States’ desire to remain competitive. One way to do so was by nurturing future scientists and industrialists. From the onset, the government understood the link between nutrition and achievement and hoped to capitalize upon it through the National School Lunch Program (2004).

In 1966, Congress amended the NSLA to encourage the consumption of domestic food stores, while providing grants-in-aid to state governments, and foster the nutrition-achievement link (Gunderson, 1971). In addition, the first school breakfast programs were launched in hopes of improving academic performance.

*NSLA amendments.* During the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Congress reviewed its policy on nutrition, poverty, and hunger in schools. In response to the society changing, Congress and the President set in motion research projects to further study the link between nutrition and performance. Indeed, both qualitative and quantitative studies concluded significant correlations between nutritious school food and academic achievement (1971). As a result, the National School Lunch Program became a fixture of our public system.
Daily Nutritional Requirements and the NSLA

At the heart of the NSLA of 1946 is the question of nutrition. Since the passage of the Act, the American Dietary Association, US Department of Agriculture, and other organizations have struggled with what it means to provide a nutritious lunch to a diverse nation. The following section will explore how the NSLA is administered today.

Currently the USDA requires that school lunches supported by public funds must not contain more than 30% of calories from fat. Less than 10% of the calories from each lunch should be from saturated fats. In addition, school lunches must provide one-third of the Recommended Daily Allowances of protein, vitamins A & C, iron, and calcium (United States Department of Agriculture, 2007).

The calculations of a Recommended Daily Allowance are beyond the scope of this investigation. However, it is important to understand the RDA’s influence on school lunches. Most importantly, how the National School Lunch Program demands that lunches include research-driven nutrition. This should be noted as testimony to the relationship between nutrition and academic achievement (Goldberg, 1998).

While the USDA, under the supervision of the Secretary of Agriculture, oversees nutrition in school lunches, this does not imply that each meal served in a public school complies with set guidelines. The NSLA intentionally gives power to the local school districts to decide what foods meet the RDA for their students. This was done to promote consumption of local produce as well as placing menu control within home districts.
How NSLP is Administered and Monitored

School lunches are prepared, served, and supervised by the local School Food Authorities (SFA), who is an agent of the district (2008). It is the responsibility of the SFA to use the reimbursement given by the USDA to provide nutritious meals. However, this has proved difficult for many school districts around the nation. A most evident concern is that the USDA reimbursement rate is woefully low. Currently, cash reimbursement for free lunches is $2.47; reduced-price lunch is $2.07; and paid lunch is $0.23 (USDA, 2007). The USDA notes that higher reimbursement rates are in effect for Alaska, Hawaii, and low-income districts. Regardless, schools complain that they cannot serve student meals that comply with the Recommended Daily Allowance on the present reimbursement rates.

The secretary of agriculture. The United State Department of Agriculture’s Secretary is ultimately responsible for monitoring and recommending changes to the National School Lunch Program (USDA, 2004). Statistics from local districts are compiled and recorded by the Secretary and periodic reports are presented to Congress.

The oversight board of the NSLP is the US General Accounting Office (GAO). The GAO periodically visits random districts and gathers first-hand information on the NSLP. In addition, the GAO uses the Secretary of Agriculture’s statistical reports to issue official updates of the Act. In 2003 the GAO noted that three-quarters of the schools sampled did not meet the RDA/saturated fat rule set by the ADA (GAO, 2003). When the GAO asked the districts why they were not in compliance, many cited finances. School districts are timid to introduce healthy foods for fear the children will not buy them,
resulting in loss of income (2003). The GAO data show that only one-quarter of USDA-supported school lunches are in compliance with the original mandates of the National School Lunch Act.

Compliance issues. The financial stresses of preparing foods that students want to purchase in school prompted Congress to pass Offer vs. Serve legislation of 1976 (Martin, 1996). Offer vs. Serve allows districts to display a variety of RDA-approved foods to students instead of serving one meal that may or may not be popular. Prior to Offer vs. Serve, schools were required to serve a plate of food containing all five RDA components (milk, protein, fruit, vegetable, and bread). The risk of preparing quantities of these meals and not selling them was financially ruinous to districts, and eventually led to a legislative change (1996).

In addition, districts around the country have stated that competitive foods, or foods that are sold on school premises yet not regulated by the USDA, have altered and impeded the National School Lunch Program. These foods are often referred to as Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value (FMNV).

Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value and Competitive Foods

The FSLA of 1946 was a landmark in public health and nutrition. It altered how the nation thought about social nutrition, and fostered a link between performance and achievement in schools. However, in 1972 Congress amended the National School Lunch Act, limiting the power of the Secretary of Agriculture to restrict Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value. FMNV commonly include soda, juices, and candy bars (Fleishhacker, 2007). Anything served in schools outside of the NSLP is termed competitive foods.
The power struggle between Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture is complicated and beyond this investigation. It should be noted, though, that during the 1970s, Congress limited and later re-authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to restrict FMNV. The final arrangement is that the Secretary of Agriculture may control when and where FMNV are sold, but not prohibit them altogether. Competitive foods often come from vending machines and fast food outlets on campus and cannot be sold “at the same time and place as the non-profit program in schools,” (Fleischhacker, 2007, p. 149).

The decision to limit the sale of competitive foods on school property has been extremely unpopular with district administrations. The GAO notes that schools often rely on a portion of the money from vending machines and outlets to fund extra-curricular activities, uniforms, and school trips (2003). In addition, school districts complain that they simply cannot fund proper school lunches on the low reimbursement rates provided by the USDA.

To make up for these shortfalls, districts sought revenue by entering into contracts with soft drink companies and other food vendors. Ultimately the questions of whether these foods and contracts could be approved were not decided in Congress, but in the judicial system. The role of the courts in response to the National School Lunch Program has been sizeable. Essentially, the producers of soft drinks felt that schools were an untapped market and in the late 1960s began aggressively marketing to this population. In response, Congress implemented the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 that gave the Secretary of Agriculture the ability to regulate FMNV. This decision set off over fifteen years of
appeals. The following is a chronological history of the court cases and legislation affecting the NSLP:

1966: Child Nutrition Act states the Secretary of Agriculture may limit FMNV.

1972: Congressional reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act allows money from FMNV to be redistributed to host districts.

1977: Congress amends Child Nutrition Act stating that the selling of FMNV is to be regulated by the Secretary of Agriculture. The Secretary then attempts to classify all FMNV into four categories to be restricted.

1980: The National Soft Drink Association files suit in US District Court against the Secretary of Agriculture, stating he had overstepped the original intent of the Child Nutrition Act.

1983: The National School Lunch Program wins the “time and place” ruling by the US Court of Appeals, noting that FMNV can be sold but not in the same time and place as the NSLP (Stallings, 2007).

These court cases have left their indelible mark on the NSLP. Today FMNV is nearly universal, with the lines of “time and place” blurring quickly.

*FMNV and junk food on campus.* A common complaint found in this research is that schools are serving junk food to public education students. Vendors come into the districts selling hamburgers and pizzas without oversight as long as they do not occupy the same place as the USDA-funded school lunch. Allowing FMNV on campus acclimates students to the taste of fatty foods, and often districts feel the need to compete with vendors by cooking and serving hamburgers and pizza in their own cafeterias.
(Salisbury, 2004). This is may be one explanation as to why only 75% of the GAO-sampled schools are out of RDA/saturated fat compliance.

The popularity of FMNV and competitive foods is staggering. Salisbury notes that one-fifth of all schools serve some type of name brand fast food at least once a week. In addition, 92% of schools offer a la carte options including French fries and hamburgers. Vending machines are the most serious offenders: 98% of high schools and 74% of middle schools receive funds or revenue for school activities by having vending machines on campus (2004).

The rise of FMNV and competitive foods in public schools has had another negative effect on education: the stigmatization of the free lunch. The USDA, in its report *Foods Sold in Competition with USDA School Meal Programs: A Report to Congress*, notes that children with money are able to buy foods from in-school fast-food outlets. Children without extra funds must rely on the National School Lunch Program. This has led to a negative view of students who receive a reduced-rate or free lunch. As a result, districts report that students who are eligible for the NSLP are rejecting it because of the associated stigma. This situation leaves children hungry, as well as robbing schools of revenue otherwise gained by selling school lunches (2001).

Competitive foods and FMNV are harmful to everyone involved: they reduce the number of students participating in the National School Lunch Program, sending less reimbursement money to districts. Furthermore, they bring foods into schools with enormous advertising budgets, expecting districts to compete. While doing so, these vendors sell foods on school campuses that are not regulated by any dietary oversight
agency and do not meet the Recommended Daily Allowances. Lastly, Congress has passed legislation stating the USDA Secretary cannot scrutinize food vendors if they do not sell their product in the same space as the National School Lunch Program. It would seem that at once the government wants children to eat a healthy lunch and simultaneously consume fatty foods from corporations (2007).

The National School Lunch Program is a delicate institution with an ever-increasing mandate to feed public education students. In the next section, the NSLP from a multicultural standpoint will be explored.

*The NSLP in a Diversity of Districts*

The National School Lunch Program is offered in every willing public school to students who wish to participate and those who do not. There is no federal requirement that students who meet eligibility must eat a government lunch. In 2004, the NSLP served twenty-nine million school lunches daily at a cost of 7.6 billion dollars. To be eligible for a free- or reduced-fee lunch, a student must come from a household with an income less than 185% of the federal poverty limit. Another immediate qualifier for the NSLP is if the family is eligible for, or receives food stamps or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (USDA, 2006).

*Across cultures.* In its 2006 study of the NSLP, the USDA wrote in *Profiles of Participants in the National School Lunch Program: Data from Two National Surveys,* that African American, White, and Hispanic students were just as likely to receive free lunches. However, this is not the case with reduced-fee lunches. White students were much less likely to be eligible for a subsidized lunch. The majority of students buying
reduced-price lunches were African American and Hispanic students between the ages of 8-13 (2006).

*Popularity of the NSLP.* Regardless of the benefits of the National School Lunch Program, data from the 2004 USDA national survey suggest that the program is culturally inequitable in popularity. One arm of the survey indicated that while the likelihood of buying a reduced-fee lunch was equal among diverse cultures, the prospect of receiving a free lunch was very unpopular and unequal among the races. The NSLP found that 79.7% of white students paid full price for their lunches while only 9% of African American and 7% of Hispanic students did so (2006). These data suggest that the majority of White students, regardless of socio-economic status, shy away from the National School Lunch Program. Indeed, the NSLP concluded that income was a factor and poorly divided among the races. “While full-price meal recipients are predominantly White, [this] reflect[s] the higher average incomes for the latter group,” (USDA, 2006, p. 16). It would seem from the data that if a student can opt out of being seen with a free- or reduced-price lunch, they do so.

*The urban school district.* Urban districts face financial dilemmas throughout the United States. Schools receive sizeable portions of their revenue from local property tax and funds from the government for free and reduced lunches. In an urban environment, property values are generally lower than those of affluent suburbs, leaving city centers with lower rates of revenue (Kopetz, et al., 2006). This has a direct impact on the quality of instruction and nutrition in those buildings. Increasingly, schools rely on revenue from vending machines and competitive food vendors to make up for lost income.
Poor districts are falling behind. Public schools in the United States are not broken up into equitable districts. The urban centers and rural schools often take the hardest of economic downturns. When the GAO revisited the National School Lunch Program and found that the majority of school districts were not within the basic fat content guidelines, they made certain recommendations. The first was dealing with nutrition as education in the poorest of schools (urban and rural schools). In their declaration, the GAO found that the act of educating students in nutrition was presently neglectful: the average amount nutritional education a child received was thirteen hours per school year (GAO, 2003). The GAO quickly moved to ask school districts to increase this time in attempts to educate students as to what they were eating and why.

Looking Ahead: The USDA Restructures the NSLP

The United States Department of Agriculture is aware of the inadequacies of our school lunch program and is investigating remedies. In a search for better school lunch models, the Secretary of Agriculture has turned to progressive legislation coming out of individual states to fix a system overrun by competitive foods and Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value.

The USDA is again turning to the American Dietary Association in redesigning the NSLP. The ADA has remained a critical advocate of the NSLP, and issued updated Dietary Guidelines in 1995. The USDA incorporated this information into its investigation to better the school lunch program. The ADA suggested that healthy foods not only be sold at school, but that students be given enough time and space to explore new (and perhaps healthier) foods. In addition, the ADA suggested schools increase the
time devoted to teaching students about food and healthy alternatives to FMNV (Martin, 1996).

*Progressive school-food legislation.* The USDA is monitoring innovative legislation such as the Better Nutrition for School Children Act (BNSCA) of 2001 and the Improved Nutrition and Physical Activity Act (IMPACT) of 2003 to evaluate alternatives to the current situation.

BNSCA was introduced into Congress as a response to the limitations set upon the Secretary of Agriculture by competitive food companies. The focus of BNSCA is to “prohibit the sale, donation, or service without charge of foods of minimal nutritional value on school grounds during the time of service of food under the school breakfast program or the school lunch program” (Salisbury, 2004, p. 343). This restores to the Secretary of Agriculture his or her original mandate of regulating all foods sold on school property and the times those foods can be served. BNSCA also focuses on the increasingly individualistic needs of students in our city centers and the financial burdens placed upon those districts to feed, educate, and shelter students during the day (2004).

IMPACT is legislation proposed in California to address the dietary needs of students during the day. Specifically, that state’s legislature is interested in fighting childhood obesity in and seeks to encourage better nutrition and physical fitness. Under IMPACT, food and health educators receive the same training as primary teachers, helping students to make better dietary and exercise decisions. Furthermore, IMPACT aims to influence nutrition in the lunchroom from becoming a “school only” activity to a
lifestyle change. To do this, the California legislature recognizes that IMPACT needs ample time to achieve nutrition goals in schools (McCormack-Brown, 2004).

The third program the USDA is pursuing to address the nutritional deficits in the NSLP is the Small Farms-School Meals Initiative. The philosophy behind this program is to incorporate local farmers into the school lunch community as producers and educators. Under this model, farmers would sell directly to the School Food Authority, giving students local and fresh produce while cutting down on transportation and storage costs. The focus behind this is the USDA’s desire for schools to serve fresh produce while lowering expenses. Indeed, the leading complaint by districts is that they cannot afford fresh foods and often turn to prefabricated meals. The Small Farms-School Meals Initiative intends to alleviate these issues (USDA, 2000).

In addition, Maine and California have passed legislation designed to boost their local agricultural economy while providing students with fresh produce. These programs range from using milk produced in Maine in regional schools; limiting the sale of carbonated drinks; and in California, advocating for a plant-centered vegetarian school lunch alternative (Edible Schoolyard, 2008).

Conclusion

The programs addressed above have attempted to improve nutrition in public school districts across the United States. Each project has unique, and often beneficial, aspects in response to growing behavioral concerns and adolescent obesity. However, districts continue to lag behind national mandates for sound nutrition. In essence, it is a question of economics: districts cannot afford to let go of vendors and vending machines
who give the schools revenue from items sold on their campuses. This income is figured into school budgets and regularly sends students on field trips, purchases books, and funds extracurricular activities. The United States Department of Agriculture cannot compete with this type of revenue.

The National School Lunch Program, especially in our urban centers, appears nutritionally negligent. The rate of reimbursement is out of line with costs of living, and few small districts are able to serve a decent hot lunch meeting the Recommended Daily Allowances for $2.47 (USDA, 2007). The Program, however, is under scrutiny to change. It is now up to the US Congress to determine how intensive they feel the changes should be to our National School Lunch Program.

Overview of Methods and Theories

In determining how to address and answer the research questions of this project, the focus changed from conducting a quantitative study to one of a qualitative nature. Qualitative inquiry provides the ability to gather and observe rich data in the field. This is essential in understanding how the National School Lunch Program functions on a daily basis. In creating a qualitative study, the following theories were selected to guide the project, view the problems through a theoretical lens, and add to the triangulation and constant comparison of data. To best understand these three theories and how they add to this study and the body of literature, a review of theoretical orientation will follow.

This research employs three theories: Grounded Method, Ecological Systems, and Critical Theory. Each orientation was chosen for specific reasons, described below, along with the ability to protect this study from faltering in its methodological aim of truly
representing the participants’ data (please see Chapter 3, Triangulation). To understand the importance of each theory and why it is included in this study, a brief introduction will be provided. Further in-depth detail of how the theories developed and influenced social sciences will be treated in Chapter 3, Methods.

*Grounded theory method.* Grounded Theory Method (GTM) has long been established as a postulation with an affinity for qualitative studies, in particular social research. GTM attempts to build theory out of data gathered in the field. Through this method the researcher attempts to describe and better understand the behavior and thinking of others as it occurs in their own environment (Creswell, 2003).

While GTM does not rest upon a priori theory, it bases itself on what the data are saying from the field, and makes conclusions upon them. GTM is a flexible process, and one that is comfortable with outcomes based on genuine and transparent interactions between the researcher and participant (1998). These outcomes, or conclusions, become the foundation of theoretical formation. “Grounded Theories…are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to understanding” (Corbin, 1998, p. 12).

GTM grew from the work of two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Initially their research was conducted on hospital patients and done in a quantitative approach. What came from their work became first known as the Constant Comparison Method, then later Grounded Theory. GTM eventually moved from quantitative methods into what is arguably today the most common qualitative approach. Grounded Theory has
become an alternative to a priori in the explanation of phenomenon, hypothesis testing, and data collection.

Grounded Method, or constant comparison, originally referred to the manner of conducting a piece of research—an interview for example, then comparing these data to another interview or data set. The constant aspect of GTM occurred as the researcher continuously compared until theory development became apparent (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher then went on to code the data, leading to further understanding of the subject.

Grounded Theory seeks to understand and use emergent themes rather than test hypotheses, which is a tenet of quantitative methods. Instead of walking into a situation with an idea of what may occur, or what may be driving the phenomenon, the GTM researcher focuses on the process of ideas emerging from the subject (2005). Qualitative methods, and Grounded Theory in particular, highlight the interpersonal relationships that occur while doing research (O’Donoghue & Punch, 2003). GTM grew in popularity as a response to scientists wishing to enter into deeper contact with participants and understand phenomenon through their experiences. Previously this was not available to science, traditionally guided solely by a priori research and hypothesis testing. A priori studies allowed only for the researcher to measure an occurrence through statistics during a controlled and limited amount of time. Grounded Theory gave license to students to enter new environments, in some cases live among participants while understanding data in a richer, more in depth context.
Grounded Theory follows a certain data collection schematic, presented below (Dick, 2005).

1. Data collection
2. Note taking
3. Coding/Memoing
4. Sorting and Writing

Data collection and Grounded Theory Method often come in the form of interviewing and focus groups (2005). This particular research project relies heavily on interviews, as explored in Chapter 3, Methods. Interviews allow the researcher to conduct informal conversations in the respondent’s environment to gather data and feedback (Kvale, 1996). In comparison to other theories, including Critical and Ecological Systems, GTM permits the researcher to fully interact in the world of the subject, collect data in conversational ways, and form a theory from the interaction.

Note-taking is a highly debated area of Grounded Theory. Traditionally, early qualitative researchers avoided tape-recording data, even while taking detailed notes. The sentiment was that note-taking inhibits rapport, which begins to form between researcher and participant at the initial stages of a study (Dick, 2005). However, without taking notes or recording, researchers realize that a level of accuracy may be lost in the analysis phase of the project. Therefore, recording key-word notes during interviews and later converting these statements into themes may be one alternative.

Coding occurs after observing and interviewing subjects. At this point, the researcher may begin to see themes in the data and need to employ a method of organizing these groupings. Coding comes in three forms: open, axial, and selective...
Open coding refers to the analytic process by which data is understood through its existence in the sample. Axial coding is a method of linking categories to subcategories within the data already collected. Selective coding is the final method of refining the data and arriving at a theory as to why the phenomenon occurs (1998). At the coding stage of analysis, it is important for the researcher to continually ask what is occurring, what is the situation, and how is the participant reacting? (Dick, 2005). Grounded Theory then develops into an approach in which the researcher begins writing memos about the data, whereupon larger themes become visually recognizable (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As GTM expanded from a method of interacting with participants to a guided manner of gathering information and applying codes for comprehension, it also became a system of gathering enormous amounts of “real” data. These data often took the form of interview transcripts, notes, codes, and impressions. GTM therefore rests on a final stage in which the researcher must take data and present them into a model accurately expressing the theory being developed. This task takes place during the sorting and writing phase of Grounded Theory. By the time the researcher has completed the interviews and coding, there very well may emerge an organized, quasi-presentable package of data (Lyons & Coyle, 2007). The goal of GTM is to arrive at a theory derived from the data and transferable to other projects. While quantitative research strives to be replicable in similar situations, qualitative data, along with Grounded Theory, works to be transferable. The notable difference is that transferability allows the process of GTM
to be understood and used in a general sense in other situations, rather than being followed as a rigid schematic in mirrored environments.

The influence of GTM on education and psychology would be impossible to summarize in this limited space. Growing out of a response to the inflexible and a priori theory-driven research of traditional science, GTM has given modern researchers and this project a schematic of how to conduct qualitative inquiry; become part of the participants’ world; code data; and develop a theory as to why phenomena occurs.

*Ecological systems theory.* This project also looks to Ecological Systems Theory in attempts to understand the influences behind the data. This study is grounded in data from the participants as described in the GTM section. However, it would be shortsighted to view this particular data set (those working in the National School Lunch Program) without taking into account environmental conditions. For this reason, a theory tying the person, environment, and the system was desirable. As a result, Ecological Systems Theory (EST) is an essential tool in understanding the NSLP’s history, functioning, and future. At the heart of this project is the question: how does the environment (and workers) affect the National School Lunch Program?

*Entity development vs. child development.* The focus of this study is to understand and make transparent the National School Lunch Program. To comprehend the NSLP one must recognize the people and institutions growing alongside the program. To categorize and understand these outside influences, EST is used, replacing child development for NSLP development. In Chapter 2, Review of Literature, the classic view of EST is
explored, yet for purposes of this project, child development will be substituted for NSLP to understand how the lunch program developed in context of its environment.

A developmental theory also allows the researcher to see systems through the lens of interaction, maturation, and change. Traditional developmental theories merely see environment as something in the background. It would seem the human mind, in all its capacity, could develop adequately without the interaction of others or the environment. EST rejects this stance, stating nothing develops in isolation.

The National School Lunch Program does not exist without the input of shared experiences, history, and outside influences. Development occurs progressively over time, becoming more complex as the child, or entity, grows in its environment. This complexity comes from an individual interacting with its surroundings, learning new lessons, and taking along developing ideas, morals, and ethics (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Ecological models have increasingly become popular in the understanding of development. In particular, many psychologists now view environment as something actively influencing and interacting with a person (Serafica, 1982).

Ecological Systems Theory also questions the quality and quantity of the experiences shaping an entity (Peck & Roeser, 2003). For example, does the urban school environment develop a distinct National School Lunch Program? The same question may be posed for suburban and rural districts struggling to meet the nutritional needs of their students. One way to study these disparities in human and entity ecology is through demographics. Demographics are known as “the simplest way of viewing the human community…as a statistical aggregate” (Hawley, 1950, p. 70). In this way human
ecology may be regarded as a set of finite units. This practice of categorizing human information is something integral to this research project. Ecological Systems takes into account personal demographics (i.e., race, culture, economics) when considering such questions as development in any given environment.

Classic view of EST. Ecological Systems Theory proposes that people are closely tied to both their environment and biology. In essence, the child develops in relationship to their environment, and the excesses and limits of their body and heritage (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Specifically, EST notes that children, and later adults, exist in and react to separate systems: the Microsystem, which encompasses the body of the person and biology; the Mesosystem, which contains influences from school, family, and religion; the Exosystem, pertaining to community and culture; the Macrosystem, which refers to global influences upon the individual; and the Chronosystem, which defines the patterning of life and transitions over time (1979).

Each system influences the person directly and indirectly throughout life. For example, family structures from the Mesosystem continue to guide the child regardless of being at home or in school. EST is designed to understand how both biology (e.g., genetics, physical limitations) and surroundings guide how an adult working in the NSLP will react to their environmental needs, excesses, and constraints.

EST emphasizes that it is important to see where and with whom the subject spends his or her time. This indicator gives us the ability to comprehend influences and experiences to which entities are exposed. These close experiences are call proximal, or near interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1998).
The same question may be asked with whom does the NSLP spend time, and with what agencies? It is certain the Program grew primarily from a social work initiative to better serve, educate, and feed immigrant children at the turn of the 20th century. At that time, the budding initiative was loose and unregulated, with no mandate to feed students. It simply served those it could. Today the NSLP is firmly rooted in the United States Department of Agriculture with a directive from the federal government to not only feed public education students who meet eligibility, but do so properly. The change in attitude from a civilian-manned program to a highly regulated system can be seen as a result from moving from social work to bureaucracy.

Ecological Systems, along with Grounded Theory Method, guides the researcher to see data in the environment in which it occurs. From that stance one is able to better understand the subject or sample. However, neither GTM nor EST speak to the nagging question of why inadequacies exist in the NSLP, and how they may be remedied. To gain this clarity, Critical Theory is used employed, not only for guidance but triangulation of interpretation.

**Critical Theory**

Social Critical Theory, better known as Critical Theory (CT), and not to be confused with Critical Theory of Literature, goes beyond an attempt to understand or explain a subject, but challenge it (Horkheimer, 1947). CT has a long tradition in education and psychology by critiquing what has come to be viewed as dogma. A great deal of present theoretical groundwork in psychology is accepted as an explanation as to
why phenomena occur. Critical Theory seeks to stop the basic acceptance cycle and challenge what exactly is happening in a given situation.

Critical Theory is an essential philosophy when working in educational settings. Interestingly, “a central tenet of critical pedagogy maintains that the classroom, curricular, school structures teachers enter are not neutral sites waiting to be shaped by educational professionals,” (Kinchole, Chapter 1, 2008). Critical Theory, as it relates to this study, demands certain questions, such as who shapes the National School Lunch Program?; Does the USDA enter a school and mandate what lunches should look like and how they should taste?; or do the students, historically perceived as the served, shape how the NSLP looks?

Critical theory and history. Critical Theory grew out of the dynamic and philosophically charged atmosphere surrounding the Weimar and post-Weimar Republic era of Germany, an academic atmosphere known as the Frankfurt School (Rush, 2004). During these years, approximately 1919-1933, Germany produced a deluge of critical thinkers who continue to influence a myriad of fields. Among these philosophers was Max Horkheimer who wrote the influential Traditional and Critical Theory, thereby laying groundwork for a new understanding of how the world operates, and how to view this world. Along with Pollock, Marcuse, and Adorno, this era put forth a vast body of literature on critical thinking. In essence, Horkheimer (and later students such as Habermas and Honneth) used a critical approach to the world by entering an environment and asking why it operates as it does, who holds the power, and how it can be changed? (Rush, 2004).
CT was born from what Karl Marx first termed Critical Theory meaning to understand and criticize domination and power (Stirk, 2000). Horkheimer, however, took Critical Theory from Marx and rooted the school of thought in not just criticizing current structures, but actively changing them. “It is a way to instigate social change by providing knowledge of the forces of social inequality that can, in turn, inform political action aimed at emancipation,” (Rush, 2004, p. 9).

Indeed, during the expansion of Critical Theory during and after World War Two, governments were adjusting to new power structures. The world quickly became polarized between the developed and the developing, the rich and the poor (Stirk, 2000). The United States and Great Britain emerged from WWII as the victorious, with much of Europe and the southern hemisphere either ravaged by war or fallen into the depths of poverty. In this type of arena a philosophy questioning wealth, equity, and eventually capitalism, was bound to grow in popularity. However, CT actually was a line of thinking criticizing the culture that grew within the victors—especially in capitalist societies of the West (Malpas & Wake, 2006). These new theorists viewed CT as a means to understand and deconstruct how Western bourgeois “culture industry” strips us of our energy and our very want to change. The Frankfurt School felt that modern media, entertainment, and culture had replaced the Opium of the Masses (what Marx originally termed religion) to placate us; to inhibit us from seeing the world as an inequitable situation; and prevent us from overthrowing the powerful.

Today Critical Theory has grown from the Frankfurt School to one of the preeminent theories of modern time (Rush, 2004). CT spread around the globe and
inspired many schools of thought such as Postmodernism and Queer Theory, as well as fanned the Marxist and neo-Marxist revolutions of the post-World War Two era (Hohendahl & Fisher, 2001). CT has now moved beyond criticism and instigation, to a theory that is taking on contemporary social and political events (2001). One of these events is education.

If the foundations of Critical Theory state popular structures are in place to placate, then it is not difficult for this way of thinking to seep into modern educational systems. Education today is largely ruled by ideology. Ideology dictates that educational institutions are “[comprised] largely [of] unquestioned dominant beliefs and values,” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 66). Today in the United States, schools are charged with educating citizens with a Free and Appropriate Public Education. However, there is nothing in our constitution guaranteeing this freedom. The very nature of public education in the United States is ideological, or, it is based on a set of beliefs that may or may not be true (2005).

Critical Theory is essential in understanding the National School Lunch Program because today’s citizens feel that every student has the right to a Free and Appropriate Education including a nutritious school lunch. The National School Lunch Program has become a fixture of public education. This research’s goal is not only to understand the NSLP, but to make it transparent and interpret how those working within the Program wish to improve it. Critical Theory was not placed in this study to view whether the school lunch in one area (such as a wealthy district) was equitable to that of a poor school. Rather, Critical Theory provides a lens to view contemporary structures keeping those working in the NSLP from truly changing the system.
As this research relies on three theories, it is important to note that Critical Theory is the only method of thinking requiring the researcher to constantly pose two questions: 1.) Is what I am seeing, hearing, and feeling assumed or real? and, 2.) What purpose does this item being studied truly serve? Indeed, as this study progressed, these question became unavoidable and obvious.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

A review of literature of the National School Lunch Program indicates a gap in data concerning the daily functioning of this faltering initiative. The National School Lunch Program and its oversight agency, the United States Department of Agriculture, are searching for ways to make the NSLP healthier, equitable, and more appealing to students (USDA, 2007).

The USDA is undergoing a review of the NSLP due to the immense popularity of Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value in schools. Nearly 98% of schools have some sort of vendor or distributor of FMNV (Martin, 2004). As these foods have gained in prevalence, so has obesity in children and adolescents. The USDA has been left to compete with foods that may be contributing to unhealthy students.

This study accepts that sound nutrition leads to improved internal functioning and external behaviors as well as elevated achievement (Taras, 2005). However, the National School Lunch Program, which affects millions of children each day, seems to be failing in its mandate to produce a properly fed population (PCRM, 2007). This study will attempt to clarify and make transparent the NSLP as it runs today, by asking those in the field how they would improve upon it.
Rationale

This study will add understanding of how those working in the NSLP view their field and how they would make improvements. The USDA has stated that the lunch program must change to remain healthy (2007), and this study will lend data to that goal through first-hand investigations of those who best understand the NSLP. In addition, these data will be helpful to local agencies and groups working to understand and improve school nutrition.

Research Design

The approach to this qualitative study is naturalistic, which encourages the researcher to interact with the sample in their natural environment. Within the naturalistic approach is ethnography, described as the study of “intact cultural group[s] in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily, observational data,” (Creswell, 2003, p. 14). However, pure ethnography asks a researcher to live among the sample, which was not possible in this study. Instead, this investigation borrows ethnographic observation, or, observing an intact cultural group (i.e., adult workers in the NSLP) in their environment (Sunderland, 2000). For purposes of this research, the setting is the school kitchen and cafeterias of three districts.

This qualitative study focuses on the perspectives of eleven people from three school districts and one state agency who work for the National School Lunch Program. Through qualitative inquiry these participants spoke of their experiences in the current nutritional model, and also gave examples of how they would build their own school lunch program. Their data on nutrition, hopes of better food, and equitable lunches were
collected through interviewing and audio-recording. These data were analyzed and collated into a final report, with the goal of being a model plan to improve: a.) how public schools administer a healthy (local, whole foods) school lunch program; b.) the management of Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value.

**Paradigm Rationale**

This study employs qualitative inquiry through the use of individual, taped interviews and non-recorded observations to measure the participants. A brief outline of the necessity of these measures is covered below.

*Qualitative inquiry.* Qualitative inquiry is a term used to describe several methods in research such as ethnography, naturalistic inquiry, case studies, fieldwork, and participant observations. Furthermore, qualitative inquiry is nearly always bound to the context in which it occurs. The highest goal of qualitative inquiry is to understand the subject’s world as viewed by that individual (Ary, 2006).

In this research project qualitative inquiry is employed through field study, specifically in the form of interviews. Eleven NSLP-related adults were selected and interviewed in their work environment, to best understand their experiences in the National School Lunch Program and how they would like it to change. In addition to utilizing interviews, this researcher observed each participant when possible, using these field data to fill in the picture of how a school nutritional program functions.

*Justification for qualitative inquiry.* Qualitative inquiry is used because it is efficiently transferable, comfortable for participants in their natural setting, and transparent. One of the foundations of research, whether quantitative or qualitative, is to
ensure that the method is fully understandable to all involved. Transparency brings a study into the light by its own merits, therefore making it public and approachable. (Schweigert, 1994). In addition, qualitative inquiry is a common method of research in educational settings. Interviewing is routinely utilized in schools and human service industries, both by teachers and administrators. This familiarity allows the researcher and participant to uncover rich data in the field. Lastly, qualitative inquiry is justified in this setting due to the desire to understand the perspective of the interviewee. Limited information could be obtained through a survey or pre-and posttest scenario, but the focus of this study is to comprehend all of the participants’ perspectives, including the feelings, hopes, and wants for a better nutritional model. Qualitative inquiry asks the sample what their experiences are, and what has it been like working in their environment. The breadth of this topic justifies a method that gathers data in a semi-directed yet flexible manner.

_A Blend of Three Theories Guide This Research_

A section on theoretical orientation is included in Chapter 3 to understand how theory guides and clarifies this project. In addition, the three theories are investigated in relation to triangulation and trustworthiness, two areas of utmost importance to a study’s methods.

This qualitative study is based on three theories: Grounded Theory Method (GTM), as developed by Glaser and Strauss, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (EST), and Critical Theory. Theoretical orientation is not just a philosophy in conjunction with this study, but a guiding force behind qualitative inquiry. GTM, Ecological Systems, and Critical Theory all support the qualitative researcher and attempt
to aid in interpreting data gathered in the field. Each philosophy is explored in depth in Chapter 2, Review of Literature. In addition, the theories are presented below as they relate to methodology, specifically, how does each theory guide and protect this research?

*Grounded theory method.* Grounded Theory Method (GTM) guides this study by suggesting an open framework to enter three sample districts in and around Columbus Ohio, and the National School Lunch Program at-large; select participants; interview them; and form a theory about reasons for behavior and actions based on the data. Grounded Theory Method “refers to the grounding of research in life-world data and the development of a theory of the subject matter from analysis of those data,” (Fischer, 2006, p. 60).

Grounded Theory Method encourages the researcher to enter a study in the place in which it occurs, observe, and develop an idea as to why the action is taking place. To arrive at this end, GTM asks the researcher to accurately record each line of data, code it, and analyze it for emerging themes. These data are then compared with previous findings to piece together a larger understanding. In essence, theory emerges from data while using Grounded Theory Method, and strives to explain the situation observed (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). In this way, GTM looks at what the interviewees are saying about the National School Lunch Program, and how it could be bettered. From these data will emerge themes, and later a theory as to motivations within the NSLP.

GTM is not the only theory relied upon in this study. While the Grounded Method allows a researcher to formulate theory directly from data, this investigation increases validity by also employing the Ecological Systems Theory.
Ecological systems theory. The Ecological Systems Theory (EST) fills in the holes left by Grounded and Critical Theories through examination of participant experiences via their own culture, belief system, and environment. While Grounded Theory allows the researcher freedom to arrive at conclusions based solely on data, it does not consistently identify outside influences having significant effects on the respondents. These environmental factors affect the sample’s decision-making processes as well as the National School Lunch Program as growing entity.

The Ecological System Theory is influenced not only by outside factors, but biology of the individual and entity (Santrok, 1997). This study primarily deals with food, nourishment, and performance, and some of the most important aspects to understand are how the participants view their environment, work, and health. Ecological Systems Theory aids in understanding how each of these influences are at work within the sample, and the NSLP as an entity.

While Grounded Theory and Ecological Systems guide in looking at the field data and cultural influences, they do not address the questions of power and equity in the National School Lunch Program. To help meet this goal, Critical Theory is employed.

Critical theory. The National School Lunch Program is as close to a institutionalized food program as known in the United States. Every school day twenty-nine million students eat from the NSLP, which is regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture. Through qualitative inquiry, it has become apparent that the NSLP is regulated, audited, and monitored with very little question from within or from the community. Critical Theory is utilized to guide this study in questioning, in fact
challenging, whether the NSLP’s nutritional decisions being made are in the students’ best interest, or in the interest of cost and corporate relations? (Horkheimer, 1982).

On the balance scale of Critical Theory are two sides as it pertains to this study—a.) the National School Lunch Program as it functions in the three districts, and b.) students who eat from the NSLP. Critical Theory guides this research by giving a framework to question the sample whether the NSLP is truly fair; could it be bettered; and who holds power in the program. In this way, Critical Theory does not let the researcher rest on the participants’ initial responses, yet calls for in-depth investigation whether the NSLP is simply a food program, or a level of nutritional enslavement.

Site Selection and Participants

Site selection. This project takes place across three school districts, yet all involved are tied by a common theme: each participant has an active role in managing, purchasing, organizing, or preparing food for the NSLP. As this investigation examines how the NSLP currently functions, and how it may be bettered, the settings vary to gain essential data in making the Program transparent and understandable. In this way the setting of the study research on two levels: how the NSLP is functioning today, and how those who work in the field would like to see it perform.

Primarily, this project used School District 1 (SD1), Columbus, Ohio, as a “home-base” district. SD1 served as a place of extended observations of staff and those involved in the National School Lunch Program. As this writer was on-staff at SD1 during the school year, it served as a place to establish and nurture contacts within the NSLP community. In addition to SD1, this study measured participants in SD2 and SD3. Each
district will be briefly examined to highlight the differences in site selection and participants.

*Site selection and maximum variation.* The three sites selected offer the greatest variation in income and academic achievement available in the greater-Columbus area. Economically and academically, SD3 comes out higher than SD1 and SD2. SD1 offers a “middle” example of a district with mixed economies and performance. SD2 is an excellent example of a major urban city district that highlights the challenges unique to the cosmopolitan setting. The chart below highlights differences between each district. Followed by this chart a brief introduction will follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic descriptor</th>
<th>SD1</th>
<th>SD2</th>
<th>SD3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Affluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure per student</td>
<td>9,336</td>
<td>11,919</td>
<td>12,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>21,606</td>
<td>55,235</td>
<td>9,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free and reduced enrollment</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>&lt;50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic standing</td>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation rate</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student to staff ratio</td>
<td>9:1</td>
<td>6:1</td>
<td>5:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size in square miles</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority student population</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>&lt;10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property tax collected</td>
<td>67,189,802</td>
<td>319,000,000</td>
<td>77,775,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total district income</td>
<td>188,215,603</td>
<td>645,000,000</td>
<td>112,067,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total district expenditures</td>
<td>185,300,189</td>
<td>688,082,000</td>
<td>112,000,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foodservice budget</td>
<td>8,085,000</td>
<td>25,000,000</td>
<td>3,367,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food dollars per student</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full price lunch cost</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Between district comparison chart of 2008 data.

54
**School district 1 (SD1).** SD1 is a large, urban district serving the greater Columbus, Ohio, area. The district is unique as it comprises urban, suburban, and rural areas of the greater-Columbus, which lends credible data to this study on the actual day-to-day functioning of diverse school system.

As for educating students, SD1 has not yet met adequate yearly progress as rated by the Ohio Department of Education (Ohio Department of Education, 2008). The Ohio Department of Education rates all Ohio school districts and gives three overall measures of performance: the number of state indicators met out of thirty; a Performance Index Score (0-120); and whether adequate yearly progress been made. The performance index is based on a series of benchmarks, including test scores and value added education (2008). In 2007-2008, SD1 met 16 out of 30 academic achievement benchmarks, and earned a performance index of 90.1, which falls in the Effective range. SD1 did not, however, meet adequate yearly progress.

SD1 School District educates 21,000 students and encompasses a 126 square mile area in and outside of the city limits. This district is the 6th largest in the state of Ohio and educates children from Columbus, Grove City, Galloway, Urbancrest, and Georgesville. SWSD maintains 36 school buildings and staffs 1,265 teachers (SWSD, 2008).

SD1 is one of diverse class and culture: nearly 42% of households are economically disadvantaged (Standard & Poor’s, 2008). In addition, 77% of students are White, 12% Black, 7% Hispanic, 2% Pacific Islander, .3% Native American.

SD1 is made up of 48,400 households with an educated family base: 90% of parents hold a high school diploma. In regards to education, it should be noted that only
25% of family adults hold a bachelor degree. As for in-district academics, SD1 reports that 76% of their students are proficient in reading, while only 71% being proficient in math.

SD1 offered the opportunity to interact with the NSLP on a daily basis while observing what factors motivate culturally and economically diverse students in regards to food choices.

School district 2 (SD2). As an example of how a large, urban district administers the National School Lunch Program, SD2 was chosen. This district relies on property tax for 51.7% of its operating revenue (SD2, 2008). With the population exodus from urban centers, this city district must be ever concerned over a decrease of revenue.

As for educational performance, SD2 fares quite a bit worse than SD3 and SD1. According to the Ohio Department of Education, SD2 met only 6 out of 30 achievement benchmarks in 2007-2008. Furthermore, the SD2 performance index was 81.7, and did meet yearly adequate progress. This index places SD2 in the Continuous Improvement classification of achievement (Ohio Department of Education, 2008).

SD2 operates 128 school buildings, with an enrollment of 56,151 students. The district is culturally diverse, with African American students accounting for 62% of the population, while 28% reported as White. SD2 expends $11,919 on each student’s education, with $5,565 coming from state aid. Of these students, nearly 72% of students receive free- or reduced-priced school lunch (2008).

Currently SD2 offers free breakfast to all students regardless of income “to ensure that every student starts the school day off right,” (SD2, 2008). As for lunch prices, at the
elementary level they cost $1.75 full pay, $0.40 reduced. Middle and High School prices are $2.00 and $2.25 respectively for full price, $0.40 for reduced lunches.

*School district 3 (SD3).* This is a district encompassing twenty square miles of northern-Columbus suburbs. This compact school system was chosen as it represents a diverse, yet affluent district. SD3 notes on its website that 90% of the 2007 graduating class planned on going to college (WCS, 2008). This distinction highlights the divide between SD2 and SD3, and provides diversity on how the community views education, nutrition, and vocational planning.

SD3 educates over 9,000 students, with less than 10% of the student body being classified as a minority. In addition, SD3 employs nearly 2,000 teachers and staff members (WCS, 2008). The residents of SD3 also highlight a difference between SD1 and SD2: in SD3, 32% of the residents hold a college degree.

SD3 did the best job of the three districts in educating students as measured by the Ohio Department of Education. During the 2007-2008 school year, SD3 met 28 out of 30 academic benchmarks and earned a performance index of nearly 102. This index score falls in the Excellent classification of school performance. SD3 did not, however, achieve adequate yearly progress.

*Subject Selection*

This study focuses on eleven adult participants from three school districts in and around Columbus, Ohio, described above. As explained, each participant was professionally linked to the National School Lunch Program in some fashion. The eleven subjects are considered the qualitative sample. One goal of this study was to gather a
sample which best purveys desired information. To obtain this end, purposeful sampling was employed, and the following will be a two-tiered explanation of site selection. The first tier is a general explanation of purposeful sampling, the second level explores the specific sites selected and why they are included in this project.

*Purposeful sampling.* The sample is actively employed or involved in the business of feeding school-age children in the United States through the National School Lunch Program. To find this group of participants, this study employed purposeful sampling. A fundamental distinction between quantitative and qualitative studies is the use of sampling. While quantitative studies rely on probability to generalize to the population, qualitative research seeks out a sample that is data-rich (Patton, 1990). This study searched for a sample that gave the deepest data from that particular field with the goal of a.) best understanding and making transparent the NSLP, and b.) to gain suggestions for a better NSLP.

Purposeful sampling may take many forms such as pulling a sample from extreme cases; those from maximum variation; homogeneous groupings; stratified samples; critical cases; or opportunistic sampling. For the purpose of this study, snowball or chain sampling was selected. Chain sampling is an approach to locate critical cases by asking around in the selected field of study.

This is an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases.

The process begins by asking well-situated people: who knows a lot about ____? Who should I talk to? (Patton, 1990, p. 176).
This sampling plan was effective when beginning the study at SD1 Schools. At that
district, this researcher asked those leading questions of the staff and administration to
locate an appropriate and knowledgeable sample. As the chain-sampling progressed, or
snowballed, this researcher was able to actively select a sample that gave data needed to
complete the study.

Participants. This research focused on those working in foodservice as it relates
to the National School Lunch Program. As discussed above, this study employed
Purposeful Sampling to find the eleven participants. Purposeful sampling, however, is a
theoretical guideline, not an actual list of subjects. In order to locate a varied, rich sample
this writer practiced purposeful sampling and chain-sampling beginning in the autumn of
2008.

The following scenario is how chain-sampling proceeded in SD1. During this
writer’s first week at SD1, there were several meetings with building principals and
supervisors to ask them who would know about the National School Lunch Program.
From these initial conversations this writer contacted various kitchen managers, who in
turn told of foodservice workers with rich histories in the NSLP. These people were
sought out in SD1, and eventually in SD2 and SD3. Ultimately, this researcher gathered
eleven data sets, with each falling into one of the four following categories:

1. Director of Foodservice. This individual was essential in gaining a better
   understanding of the overall administration of the NSLP. The director was suited
to explain the systemic challenges, and possibilities for change.
2. Kitchen Manager. This office had data on purchasing, distribution, and logistics of supplying the NSLP. The kitchen manager also understood the front-of-the-house functioning of a school cafeteria as well as human resource issues.

3. Foodservice Worker. This participant was able to speak of the daily habits, functioning, and popularity of the National School Lunch Program in a public education school. This individual interacted with students as well as those delivering food to the kitchen.

4. Ordering/Purchasing Agent of the School. This participant delivered food and supplies to schools. This individual understood the operations of acquiring and moving large amounts of product throughout the greater Columbus area. This participant also understood what is necessary logistically in terms of transportation and food to supply an urban school district.

Recruitment. This study attempted to gather a sample that accurately represented the industry (foodservice) while providing purposeful data (Schweigert, 1994). The following is an exploration of how the individual schools and foodservice workers were chosen in each district. This information is provided to give transparency to the study as well highlighting how chain or snowball sampling works in schools. Discussion of the interviews and the data collected will follow in Chapter 4, Discussion.

The SD1 Schools Selected for this Study

High school. High School is one of SD1’s largest and most diverse schools. As this study was guided by Critical Theory, specifically as it relates to class, a diverse
school was needed. To address this issue, and whether rich and poor students receive equal lunches, High School was chosen and compared against other sample sites.

During initial purposeful sampling conversations at SD1, this writer asked a supervisor which school was large, diverse, and offered a variety of educational and social activities. He responded that High School met the criteria. While attending a crisis intervention session at High School, the assistant principal talked about the school’s food service operation, the students, and the equity of the program. She stated that Jean would be a key person with whom to speak. The vice principal accompanied this researcher directly to the cafeteria’s foodservice office to meet Jean, the Director of Foodservice. While meeting with Jean this researcher observed the cafeteria and noted a mix of cultures, sexes, and presumably, classes.

*Little elementary.* After completing the interview with Jean, this writer sought out a solid understanding of how elementary school food programs functioned. An interview at the elementary level was desired to highlight the difference between school levels. Jean suggested Ruth at Little Elementary, who is that school’s Kitchen Manager.

Little educates approximately five hundred students from kindergarten through the fourth grade (2008). The staff is quite small, with thirty-three teachers and one administrator. This level would offer data from an “intimate” setting, where students and staff know one another on a personal level. Demographically, Little offered a rich cross section of students, as High School did, which is located within a mile of the other school. During Ruth’s interview, it was noted that the staff and children indeed enjoyed a
more casual, close relationship offered by the small school. In addition, there was a rich variation of cultures and classes.

*New high school.* In order to confirm and/or disconfirm data collected from Jean at High School, Jean and Ruth suggested interviewing at an outside district or New High School. New was chosen for two reasons: first, it is SD1’s central food storage area, and second, this writer was interning at that school during the data collection period. Interviewing a worker within the cafeteria and central stores would give rich data on the district-wide functioning of the NSLP while adding the perspective of an affluent high school. Jean suggested speaking with Ann, Director of Foodservice at New High.

New is a large high school, educating over fifteen hundred students from grades nine through twelve. The facility is six years old and called state-of-the-art by those working within the district. The school employs over ninety teachers and forty staff members with five administrators (2008). Demographically, New sits in the more affluent section of the SD1, between Grove City, Ohio and the rural sections. Surrounding the school are suburban housing and apartment developments.

After meeting with Ann at New High, this writer observed the lunchroom, flooded with light and graced with high ceilings. The students indeed appeared more homogenous both in race (White) and class (upper middle class).

*New high school (second interview).* This researcher then set sights on finding a foodservice worker with a firm knowledge of student preferences and appetites. This writer was seeking the perspective of someone who daily works with the students, speaks...
with them, and understands their needs and feelings regarding the NSLP. Ann suggested interviewing with Lee.

Lee is a Foodservice Worker at New High School. Foodservice Workers are considered part-time employees of the district. Typically they arrive to work just before lunch begins to prepare food, and then serve lunch or operate the cash register. This writer met with Lee in the New High cafeteria and spoke with her about the NSLP from a student’s perspective.

The SD2 Schools Selected for this Study

Director of foodservice operations. During initial research of the National School Lunch Program this writer spoke with Dudley (spring, 2008) at SD2’s foodservice central office. At the time he talked about the NSLP and how it operates in general terms. Dudley invited this writer to contact him with any further questions, and after gaining Ohio State Institutional Review Board approval for this study, set a time with him for a formal interview.

SD2 was central to this study from the genesis. SD2 is one of the America’s largest, most diverse (culturally and economically) city school districts. This arena provided a deep level of data leading to the understanding of how the NSLP operates in poor schools and schools in danger of academic emergency.

This researcher met with Dudley in his office at SD2 and spoke about the unique position of his district in regards to the National School Lunch Program. This data emerged as absolutely necessary to confirm and/or disconfirm data collected from SD3 and the SD1 District. Dudley was able, through his position as a Director of one of

63
America’s largest school districts, to give an overview of operations. In addition, he had
the knowledge to compare data to other similar and dissimilar districts as he had worked
across the field. Lastly, Dudley (along with Ann in SD3) had the authority as the School
Food Authority to approve budgets, oversee programs, and discontinue contracts if
needed.

*Alternative school.* A personal acquaintance works for SD2 at Alternative and
enthusiastically referred this writer to Rosie, the Foodservice Manager. He reported that
Rosie would understand the perspective of a diverse, urban school. In addition, Rosie had
longevity in the NSLP and could relate data over a considerable span.

Alternative educates 395 students with 15 full-time teachers. The school is
termed alternative as it has pre-kindergarten students through the fifth grade, which is
more grades than a typical elementary school setting. At Alternative 43% of the students
are eligible for a discounted or free lunch, and 88% of the student body is classified as
African American (School Digger, 2008).

This researcher met with Rosie in Alternative’s kitchen office. Alternative is a
new building and has extremely modern facilities. This data proved invaluable
concerning class, the NSLP, and the question of what makes a good school lunch.

After meeting with Rosie this writer returned to speak with Judy at Alternative.
Rosie stated that Judy worked directly with the students and suggested her as a candidate
with an expertise on student and staff relations.

*Foodservice worker, Alternative school.* Judy is a Foodservice Worker at
Alternative, similar in scope to Little at SD1. This writer met with Judy in the cafeteria
and spoke about working with the students on a daily basis, how she sees the NSLP, and if she had any suggestions for its improvement. These data collected from Judy were essential in understanding the unique issues facing a school in a diverse neighborhood.

The SD3 Schools Selected for this Study

Street elementary. This researcher was an adjunct instructor at Columbus State Community College, Columbus, Ohio, in the Hospitality/Culinary Program. During the spring of 2008, one of this researcher’s students was Kay, a Foodservice Worker for SD3. After a lecture, Kay enthusiastically volunteered to participate in this study. This copasetic meeting was agreeable as SD3 offered a view into the most affluent neighborhoods in Columbus, Ohio.

Street Elementary is quite similar in size and atmosphere to Little Elementary in SD1. Street educates 415 students with 26 teachers. SD3 is the least diverse district studied, with 91% of students being classified as White (City-Data, 2008).

Director of foodservice operations, SD3. Kay suggested this researcher speak with Ann, the Director of Operations at SD3 to best understand the managerial and fiscal system at work in that district. This researcher met with Ann in her comfortable suburban office to interview about SD3 and the NSLP. Ann was a key figure in this study as she was able to answer questions regarding allocation of money, student counts, and regulatory processes. Full explanation of her input is found in Chapter 4, Discussion.

During the conversation Kay mentioned an elementary school principal who was interested in starting a school garden and had expressed progressive ideas concerning
food in schools. She felt the principal could provide data that had not been encountered: a liberal, environmental voice working within the schools.

*River elementary school.* River is a kindergarten through sixth grade elementary school in SD3. The 19 full-time teachers educate 332 students in a suburban atmosphere. For SD3, River is diverse with 71% of students classified as White, and 38% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch (Schooldigger, 2008).

River was chosen because the principal, Fritz, had an interest in school gardens and environmental concerns of the school district. This perspective was desired to give a progressive voice to the study, standing in comparison to the Foodservice Directors and Workers previously interviewed.

*Ohio Department of Education*

*National school lunch consultant.* On Monday, October 6, 2008, this researcher took part in the Ohio Department of Education’s (ODE) public program entitled The National School Lunch Program Basic Training. This seminar was conducted by one of ODE’s Foodservice Consultants, Mr. W. The attendees learned about Ohio’s perspective on the implementation and structure of the NSLP and how the Department of Education monitors that initiative.

These data were pivotal in understanding how the Ohio government views the National School Lunch Program and administers this enormous entity.

*The Data Ladder: An Overview in Understanding This Information*

After sample selection, recruitment, and interviews were complete, the researcher was left to the task of transforming data into a usable and understandable package. This
study employed a data ladder to make sense of field notes and report them accurately. The following outline was used as a data guide.

1. data collection
2. coding and categorization of data
3. assertions and warrants
4. narrative vignettes/examples from field notes, quotes
5. interpretation through theory
6. visual organization chart (Erickson, 1986)

Data collection. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and observation of participants. Members of the sample were interviewed and audio-taped in their work environment, at a time suitable to them. While questions were formulated before the interaction (please see Appendices for a sample script) and grounded in data gleaned from initial observations, the focus of the interview was more conversational. The questions were flexible as they guided the participant to stay in the realm of the NSLP, but not limit the conversation when talking about other relevant topics. Qualitative interviewing should allow the subject to explore their own topics as well as those of the researcher (Seidman, 2006).

Following the interviews the participant was observed at work when possible to add illustrative information. This approach is often called fast-access anthropology or ethnography (Sunderland, 2000). Ethnography can be conducted in short periods of time, in as little as six weeks of observation and an equal amount of analysis. This fast-access technique calls for conducting the interview and shadowing the interviewee in their daily
routine. It was the goal of this study to not only gain information through semi-structured interviews, but also fill in the picture painted by the participant by viewing their world with them.

To accurately record data for later transcription, the semi-structured interviews were audio-taped with permission, but not videotaped. Audio-taping was selected for its subtle physical presence and reliability, in addition to the ability to audio-tape with little or short notice. Audio-taping was less conspicuous than videotaping and easier to conduct given space limitations of the kitchens and offices.

After each interview and shadowing experience, the data was transcribed and saved on a word processor. Transcription was done solely by the researcher and guided by a process driven by theory while remaining representational to the participant. The transcription document represents the event, or experience in working with the sample (Lapadat, et al., 1999). The transcribed data was then coded and analyzed for data pieces, themes, and categories.

**Coding.** After the observations, interviews, and shadowing sessions, data was transcribed from audio-tape using software. Data was entered into a Microsoft Word document using line numbers for quick reference.

After transcription came a complete data review of the field notes. From this review arose emerging themes, and lastly the formulation of codes. Transcription is theory driven (Lapadat, et al., 1999) and with this in mind, this researcher looked Grounded, Ecological Systems, and Critical Theories to guide and question the emerging themes.
Coding occurred in stages: preliminarily this took place on a sample interview transcript, noting thoughts and impressions. From these thoughts came themes, and lastly, the development of the codebook. In essence, a researcher looks for data pieces, themes, and categories. From these pictures, the writer creates codes that can be applied to a clean copy of the transcript (Ary, 2006). Lastly, the researcher reduces data in summary to give the reader a sense of large themes from study; what they could imply based on a theoretical stance; and what studies may need to occur in the future.

To further understand and accurately code, a researcher should develop a codebook grounded in the data on three levels: open, axial, and selective (Bowen, 2008). Open coding occurs from the notes, transcripts, and thoughts, looking for emerging themes of data. Axial codes seek to capture the essence of the data and abstract themes. Selective codes then encompass the central core of the data. The three levels of coding guided this study and appeared in the following formation:

Open Codes:
- T: Transportation
- F: Food
- W: Waste
- P: Profit
- E: Enjoy the NSLP
- D: Dislike the NSLP

Axial Codes:
- PO: Popularity
- H: Health
- C: Change (of the system)
- F: Frustration
- Fl: Follow
- I: Parental Involvement
- L: NSLP Loophole
- Q: Quality (of food and atmosphere)
Selective Codes
H1: Control
H2: Corporations Dictate the NSLP
H3: Students Dictate the NSLP
H4: Atmosphere
H5: Loyalty and Longevity
H6: What’s Local Produce?
H7: More Poor=More Money
H8: Labor Is to Blame

Data storage and organization. Data was stored both electronically and in hard copy. As described, guided transcription occurred first, then coding on paper, followed by a more formal procedure of placing information into an electronic document. To aid in this task, NVivo 7 organizational software was employed. NVivo allowed the researcher to enter data into a word processing document while applying codes, sorting themes, counting words, and creating visual organizers. This tool assisted in the organization and facilitation of coding and interpretation.

Reporting the data. This document uses quotes from interviews to illustrate points of interest and clarify settings. In addition, this research utilizes narrative vignettes of the data collected to elucidate and give dramatic weight to data. Vignettes give research vivid examples of the sample, illustrated through documentation and observation while bringing the data to life by passionate detailing (Ericson, 1986; Smith, 1987).

Upon conclusion of this project, it will be available to those working in the NSLP and to any agency local or otherwise who wishes to use the data to better their school lunch program.
Triangulation and Ethics: Toward a Trustworthy Study

**Triangulation.** A central goal of this study was to be transparent and credible. By conducting interviews, coding data, and analyzing them, this study gained a clearer understanding of the National School Lunch Program and how to improve upon it. However, no study is beyond the need to remain trustworthy and credible. The first tool in establishing this goal was to triangulate the research between three theories and several methods of qualitative inquiry.

Triangulation is often associated with the mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure outcomes are representative. However, triangulation in qualitative research alone adds other dimensions of data and techniques (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Examples of this procedure are explored below.

In this study triangulation was not relegated to one theoretical standpoint, but to several layers. First, this study employed qualitative inquiry to get at the heart of the research questions. Qualitative inquiry, as described earlier in this investigation, is a highly credible method of educational practice. By engaging in this method, it is expected that this study captured firm data and an end product that is usable to the participants and researcher.

Secondly, three theories guided this study as a measure of safeguarding—Grounded, Ecological Systems, and Critical Theory. Triangulating two or more theories allows the researcher to develop a better understanding of the questions, while also providing a framework to compare and contrast the data discovered (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991).
Lastly, the data itself was triangulated after interviews and observations were complete. The data collected was constantly compared against fresh information. This constant comparison served two functions: it highlighted disconfirming data and maintained a high level of awareness within the researcher. Constant comparison is an ongoing method, continuously driving the researcher to look at data, compare, and member/theory check the information. Are the data theory driven? Are the data member driven? (Dye et al., 2000). Triangulation is one manner to increase the credibility of a study. Another way is the building of trust, or how members of the community view with faith that a study is speaking truth about the data.

*Prolonged engagement.* To increase trustworthiness, this study utilized prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement requires the researcher to study the subject over time, therefore investing in the process. This gives not just one picture of the sample, but a protracted understanding (James-Brown, 1995). Prolonged engagement, or investing in the participants, fulfills central goal of naturalistic inquiry—by working in the natural environment the researcher is able to make hypotheses about cause from data gathered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through prolonged engagement the researcher demonstrates trustworthiness by not simply entering a field, taking data, and leaving without investment. This researcher spent one school year working with and researching in the districts listed to meet prolonged engagement of research.

*Member checking.* Member checking is the act of inviting study participants to review data and give feedback about the study’s progress and methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking is a powerful tool to increase trustworthiness as it asks
participants if the data presented are accurate of participation. Intermittent member checking allows a study to slow down and evaluate with all those involved whether data are correct and the aim of the study is being met. This researcher employed constant member checking during the interview process and transcription to accurately capture respondents’ message.

Transferability. Qualitative research focuses on rich data provided by cases in the field. At times these cases are personal interviews, other instances come in the form of document analysis. However, the essence of qualitative research is to discover and report rich data gained from investigation, not to generalize from one case to a population (Creswell, 2003). In qualitative inquiry it is acceptable and widely practiced to look at data in terms of transferring, or seeing how it exists in the fittingness of the world. This fittingness is described as the “congruence between sending and receiving contexts,” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124). In this way, qualitative inquiry is focused on enhancing the researcher’s ability to transfer data between like cases. For example, this study’s methods may transfer well to qualitative inquiry regarding another aspect of the school district, such as the school breakfast, snack, or garden initiative.

In conclusion, transferability demonstrates that the study is not a phenomenon. Transferability allows the audience to view the research, and if desired, transfer the data and methods to other projects with equal success. It is hoped other researchers may take some parts of these methods to study other aspects of schools and nutrition.

Rapport, community engagement, and personal strength. An important aspect of this qualitative study was to properly follow a sampling plan giving the richest data
desired. To do so, chain sampling was utilized, yet this did not guarantee those selected would want to participate. One danger of doing research in some communities is appearing exploitive (Hermes, 1998). In exploitive studies, the researcher presents in a certain field (usually of different culture or having little first-hand knowledge of the sample), conducts research, and leaves to use the data for academic advancement.

This project aimed at not being enigmatic or mysterious. A central goal of this study was to understand the experiences of those in foodservice and how to improve upon the National School Lunch Program. The finished document is available to the community in which the writer works. These clear methods serve as structure and a guide to support the study’s credibility. In addition, the researcher’s personal strength and history in foodservice was utilized to build rapport while interviewing and observing.

*Rellying on personal strength in foodservice.* As a student of the culinary arts and an experienced cook, this researcher entered the field of school nutrition with a closer level of involvement and expertise. This writer has knowledge of growing, ordering, and daily production of food in cafeterias, banquet halls, and non-commercial foodservice properties. This history aided in building rapport with the interviewees as well as in analyzing data themes.

*Ethics*

This study focused on adults over the age of 18, and was of minimal risk and invasiveness to the sample. The inquiry methods described above did not involve personal questions, surveys, or any other manner of gathering information beyond open-ended interviewing. However, this study worked with various members of the
foodservice community, some under contract with districts and others who had allegiances and obligations to vendors. Taking this into account, the study relied on the involvement of the gatekeepers, in this case school officials and foodservice managers (Seidman, 2006). Their participation made clear the research goals, time length, commitment, and any other factors influencing the process in school.

In addition, the researcher maintained updated training through The Ohio State University’s Institutional Review Board, as well as seeking that agency’s full abetment in the research. Indeed, The Ohio State University’s IRB granted full support of this project in the summer of 2008.

Lastly, to ensure this study met ethical standards consistent to psychology and education, the researcher adhered to the principles set forth by the American Psychological Association in regards to human subject research and reporting.

Data Analysis Graphic Organizer and Timeline

The use of visual organizers was central to this study, from reporting data and categories, to collating tables and charts (please see appendices for examples). An example of a visual organizer is presented below as a timeline of research occurring at each station of the study:

1. Met with school administration to explain project, early autumn
   a. Began chain sampling and investigations, autumn
   b. Narrowed interview pool to eleven participants, autumn

2. Gained gatekeeper permission and participation, late autumn
   a. Conducted interviews, late autumn

75
b. Shadowed when possible, *late autumn*

3. Transcribed data, *winter*
   a. Framed questions for follow-up interview, if needed
   b. Began thinking about emerging themes

4. Coded data, *winter*
   a. Theme development
   b. Similarities and differences

5. Reduced data, *winter*
   a. Read transcript in full, finding central themes

6. Categorized, *late winter*

7. Summarized, *late winter*

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from eleven interviews and observations completed in three districts regarding the National School Lunch Program. This chapter will focus on the themes that emerged from the data, specifically in how the National School Lunch Program functions on a daily basis and how those working in it seek to better the initiative. Before those themes are explored, however, a brief introduction of each participant will be provided. This background information will situate the reader in both the time and place of the interview and observation, giving a clearer view of the interviewee’s work and world (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As stated this study focused on employees of the National School Lunch Program and posed two questions:

1. How does the National School Lunch Program operate in a sample school district on a day-to-day basis?
   a. Who is responsible for overseeing this program?
   b. Where does NSLP food and supplies come from?
   c. How is this program paid for in the school district?
   d. What is the relationship between the school and growers?
2. What are the perspectives of those who work for the National School Lunch Program on how could it be improved?
   
a. Is this program effective?
   
b. Is this program providing nutritious foods?
   
c. Do children prefer NSLP or FMNV?
   
d. Is the NSLP fair and popular with students?

These two questions framed the study, and from them came the semi-structured interviews. During the interviews this researcher was careful to cover each question, but allowed for the discussion to follow paths unplanned for and eventually very welcomed (Sunderland, 2000). These data were then analyzed, as discussed in Chapter 3, Methods. Here the findings from those interviews and observations are introduced by brief introductions of the participants. The introductions are grouped by school districts and in no particular order of importance or rank.

Participant Introductions

Dudley. Dudley is the Director of Foodservice operations for SD2 Schools, or was up until his interview was conducted. Upon meeting, Dudley informed this writer that he was being re-assigned due to health concerns. He was a twenty-year veteran of the foodservice program with experience both in SD2 and another large, urban district. He impressed as a compassionate, caring man with a profound knowledge of the realistic workings of the NSLP. His office was quite bare and gave the feeling of a long-time worker packing his belongings on his last day of work. This is not prose—it became increasingly clear that the decision to leave SD2 was not altogether amicable. Dudley
expressed his genuine concern for the children of the district by feeding them properly, and talked genuinely about what is best for SD2 and the NSLP in a time of change.

**Rosie.** Rosie is the Kitchen Manager for Alternative in SD2. During our meeting Rosie was extremely helpful and exhibited what can only be described as “down-home” hospitality and care. Upon arrival, Rosie offered to supply this writer with a portion of the apple crisp baking in her oven. She impressed as a warm, nurturing worker and manager, and indeed her kitchen reflected these characteristics. The facility was airy, warm, and smelled wonderful. Rosie is also a twenty-year veteran of the NSLP with experience at various levels.

**Judy.** Judy is a Foodservice Helper at SD2. She retired several years ago from another profession and was hired by the district as a Helper. This is her sixth year in SD2. Judy was a smiling, wise woman who spoke genuinely about enjoying her work with the students in the lunchroom. Indeed, Judy’s position is one of direct service—Kitchen Helpers do prep work before lunch and then serve children or operate the cash register. Judy stated this was the highlight of her post and enjoyed the opportunities to brighten her students’ lives. Judy was candid during her interview, unafraid to state exactly how she would improve the NSLP.

**Fritz.** Fritz is an elementary school Principal for SD3. He conducted his interview by telephone, as it was not possible to meet with him in his office. Fritz is one of the younger of the sample and impressed as a Principal with progressive ideas concerning food and academic achievement. His story was quite unique: his school garden
“happened”—they mistakenly grew thirty sweet potatoes on school ground and the students and staff took this on as a pet project.

Ann. Ann is the Director of Foodservice for SD3. She met this writer in her extremely tidy office at the district’s service center. She has been working in the NSLP for twenty-five years. Ann stated she was “old school,” believing that when a person took a job they took it for good. Her face lightened as the conversation moved to the students and she spoke with firm compassion for their care and nutrition. Ann gave the impression of a woman who knows her job very well and a manager who can direct others with little hesitancy.

Kay. Kay is a Cook Manager for SD3 at the elementary level. Kay impressed as a jovial, hardworking woman with a genuine interest in being a part of this study. As a Cook Manager Kay often works alone in the kitchen. That means Kay orders, prepares, cooks, cleans, and manages the kitchen. In addition, Kay has direct contact with the students and talked fondly about her time with them during the day. Kay has nearly ten years of experience in the NSLP—five of those years the high school in which she worked served un-NSLP regulated lunches. This was because the high school continued to sell FMNV in competition with the NSLP.

Ruth. Ruth is the Kitchen Manager for an elementary school at SD1. Ruth conducted her interview in the kitchen office that doubled as a dry storage unit. It was quite hot yet Ruth made every effort to make this writer comfortable and answer each question with great thought. Ruth was quick to laugh and talk about the true nature of the NSLP in an urban environment. She also gave the impression of enjoying her position of
seventeen years. Ruth was very interested in talking about aesthetic considerations in relation to the NSLP. She was recommended as an expert on the lunch program and she indeed met that title.

Jean. Jean is a Kitchen Manager at one of SD1’s large high schools. Jean met with this writer in her office and conducted a clipped, controlled interview. Jean impressed as a manager with a constant eye on detail and irregularities in her kitchen. Indeed, the interview and observation was conducted with an air of suspicion concerning this writer. Her desk was quite busy and there were several interruptions as Jean got ready for the busy lunch service. Jean seemed to directly control each aspect of the kitchen, which was orderly and clean. She has worked in the NSLP for fifteen years.

Anne. Anne is a Kitchen Manager at SD1’s central stores and the New High School cafeteria. The facility is six years old and what would be called modern. Anne’s kitchen has the privilege of being the only school in SD1 to offer “open-market” foodservice. Open market refers to food stations or areas, for example, a sandwiches bar, entrée line, and other specialties. Indeed, Anne appeared to be the most trend-minded of the interviewees, giving rich data on current fashions within the NSLP, student tastes, and possible remedies for the ever-present FMNV. Anne has worked for the NSLP for twenty-six years and spoke with confidence and care for the students.

Lee. Lee is a Foodservice Worker at one of SD1’s high schools. She conducted her interview at the end of her busy lunch shift and was quite forthcoming about the NSLP and suggested improvements. She has been with the Program for eighteen years and works daily with students on the line and at the cash register. She spoke with
confidence about how the program is running and gave an interesting perspective of how the students view the NSLP.

Mr. W. Mr. W. is one of the Ohio Department of Education’s National School Lunch Program’s Consultants. As a Consultant Mr. W. is responsible for a sector of the state, and within his area makes sure that the schools are complying with NSLP directives. Mr. W. is also responsible for conducting the Department’s quarterly Training Program for the NSLP. This program welcomes new schools, gives information on compliance, menu planning, and how to run a financially viable kitchen. Mr. W. spoke with casual authority on the subject, often joking about the students and the program. His perspective on nutrition seemed to be based solely on media and the mandates of the USDA and Ohio Department of Education.

Theme Emergence

As discussed in Chapter 3, Methods, analysis of data took the form of a three-tiered system: Open, axial, and selective. Open codes came directly from the notes, transcripts, and thoughts, while keeping a mind on emerging themes. Axial codes denoted deeper aspects of data and captured abstract themes. Selective codes then encompassed the central core of the data (Bowen, 2008). After coding, this researcher reviewed the manuscripts, line by line, and took from them data pieces, themes, and lastly categories (Ary, 2006). Each piece of data was given equal weight in initial coding, only later reduced to include themes and categories.

This chapter will report on the themes found during the research. These themes are the direct results of eleven interviews conducted during the 2008/2009 school year.
From data analysis, eight categories emerged as eminent in the participants’ responses with several related subthemes. They are, in order of frequency: 1.) Control (subthemes: hierarchy and menu control); 2.) Corporations Dictate NSLP (subthemes: FMNV and limited suppliers); 3.) Students Dictate NSLP (subthemes: fast food influence and the desire for recognizable foods); 4.) Atmosphere and Aesthetics (subtheme: attitude vs. space); 5.) Loyalty (subthemes: the NSLP is running fine and longevity); 6.) Local Food Issues (subthemes: local vs. domestic and local not being legitimate); 7.) The More Poor Students the More Money; and, 8.) Labor is to Blame.

To ensure accuracy, this researcher relied on member-checking and constant comparison as described in Chapter 3, Methods. For example, themes were cross-referenced between schools and levels of service (such as comparing a SD1 Food Service Worker against a Foodservice Director in SD3). In addition, this researcher asked the participants for ongoing verification that the data analyzed was true to their intentions (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). After complete analysis, data were categorized into the following eight central themes.

Presentation of Findings

The focus of this study was to explore and make transparent how the National School Lunch Program functions and how those working in the system would like to improve upon it. The presentation of qualitative data continues to pose certain questions for the researcher. Primarily, are the data saying what the participants’ intended? Further, is the researcher interjecting personal opinions and philosophies on the data? (Seidman, 2006). As described, this study adhered to member checking, constant comparison,
prolonged engagement, and professional affiliations of ethics in attempts of participant protection and representation.

After arriving at a point where the researcher feels comfortable with the data, themes must be presented. In this section eight central themes will be explored through narrative speech, quotes, summation, and direct observations. As these data come from audio-taped interviews, the researcher has taken care not to alter the language of the participant. This was done to insure the nuance and richness of the data shine through. In addition, directly quoting subjects to support themes increased this study’s trustworthiness and impact (Patton, 1990).

While quotes are used to reveal themes in this project, they are not intended to be punitive or show the sample in a poor light. To protect the sample’s anonymity, names, school districts, and job titles have been changed. Careful attention has been given not to physically describe participants outside of general terms (i.e., sex, age). Even these descriptors have been scrambled to protect the sample.

The goal of this chapter is to accurately present the eleven interviews conducted over three school districts and one state agency. The themes are ordered in occurrence of word frequency. Nvivo qualitative software was employed to count words, categories, and themes within each interview transcript.

*Nvivo software.* Nvivo software is specifically designed to analyze qualitative data. Transcripts are downloaded and the researcher, with the software’s assistance, scans for themes, categories, and word frequencies. The categories described below are in order of frequency. Word frequency in qualitative data does not suggest causation, yet merely
points the researcher to an area consistently mentioned in any given study. The themes are presented across school districts and job titles in order of frequency, shown below in chart form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>SD1</th>
<th>SD2</th>
<th>SD3</th>
<th>ODE</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. hierarchy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. menu control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporations Dictate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. FMNV</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. suppliers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Dictate:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. fast food</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. recognizable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. attitude vs. aesthetics</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. longevity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. nothing wrong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Food Issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a. local vs. domestic</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. not legitimate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Poor Kids=More Money</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Is to Blame</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Chart presentation of theme frequency.

*Theme One: Control*

Control, in a variety of forms is the most frequent theme in this data set. Over the course of eleven interviews, Control appeared forty-nine times, nearly double the frequency of any other theme (please see above chart). Within Control are two sub-
themes, including a.) school hierarchy, and b.) menu control as a result of management and/or administration.

While interviewing, it became evident that the NSLP is a tightly controlled program. Without exception, all respondents talked about some form of Control. As mentioned, control took various shapes—from menu to state oversight. It should be noted that at no point did this researcher feel that the kitchens were monitored in a punitive fashion or that workers were worried about their personal privacy. In fact, the opposite was notable. Workers in the NSLP most often presented as content, satisfied members of the NSLP.

Regardless of worker attitudes, Control as a theme, was prevalent, and detrimental to the progressive agenda set forth by the USDA and ADA (complete interpretation in Chapter 5). The theme of Control will be described as told by the participants.

School hierarchy. School hierarchy was the single most frequent subtheme of the eleven interviews conducted. School hierarchy refers to the rigid order of the kitchen, starting at the “top” by means of a Kitchen Manager, and moving down to the Foodservice Worker. Respondents (both managers and workers) most often said that the NSLP functions as a controlled, tightly monitored program with very little room for creativity.

As Rosie stated, “I’m a foodservice manager and run a team in the kitchen.” This sentiment was heartily resounded by other schools and districts. In this way, the kitchen, like education, is not a collaborative entity but more dictatorial. Ann stated, “I coordinate our seventeen schools. I do the menu planning, the state reporting, oversee…paper work,
and all the technical aspects with administering the NSLP and breakfast.” As Director of Foodservice at SD3, it became apparent that a good deal of responsibility and power sits with one person. Ann supported this position, stating “we follow the menu our director puts forth that meets the nutritional requirements for the NSLP.”

The feeling of following the menu and doing as management demands was prevalent. When asked if Foodservice Workers could take liberty on menus, Ann replied they could, but only on desserts as they were considered extras and outside of the NSLP’s nutritional guidelines. More often participants said they took creative liberty when cooking for staff.

Anne, the Kitchen Manager at SD1 also reported that she “do [es] all the menus, ordering and helps out when they need something.” Anne is the Kitchen Manager of a large school, yet she again is the point person for the NSLP and holds a great deal of power. From her report, very little responsibility, outside of cooking, cleaning, and serving, is given to Foodservice Workers. The Workers are not participants in menu development even though they interact with students daily.

Jean at SD1 also talked about having a high level amount of control over “her” kitchen and “her ladies.” Jean: “I do the inventory and all the ordering myself…[there] are ten ladies here.” Jean works in one of the large kitchens, yet the staff was admittedly not involved in the development of the NSLP menu or program.

Only Ruth at SD1 gave a somewhat dissenting view of control as it relates to school hierarchy. Ruth did not respond by saying “I order, I manage,” but rather “we pretty much order all the food…” Ruth was the only manager who talked about the
kitchen as a collaborative effort. In fact, Ruth talked at length about the interaction of teachers, parents, and administrators, a subject that is explored in the Atmosphere theme.

Menu control. The second subtheme of Control is Menu Control. When speaking with the Foodservice Workers of the National School Lunch Program it became apparent that not one school was able to create or implement their own menu. Kay from SD3 was one of the most illustrative members of the sample to talk about menu control:

I’m the cook manager at the elementary school and we follow the menu my director puts forth that meets the nutritional requirements for the NSLP. We basically follow the menu with some liberties. We go on a five week menu cycle. The only thing we make from scratch would be the spaghetti and mac and cheese…Ninety to ninety-five percent is brought in.

Kay explained that her menu is delivered to her by the Director, and when this writer asked who gives the Director the menu, Kay produced a large product list from one of the national food purveyors. Kay mentioned that menu control is ultimately a matter of corporate control of the NSLP, which will be dealt with below.

Anne from SD1 stated that menu planning was quite simple. “Every week we turn in an order through the computer and they send us a list what is available at the warehouse.” To Ann the process of menu development was very much mechanical. When asked if there could be substitutions or additions, all workers cautioned that they were highly regulated in order to meet the Recommended Daily Allowances.

Jean from SD1 also reported that menu development was a mechanical procedure not to be altered. “We have an ordering guideline book and menu that we use, and then I order what we need off what we are going to serve everyday.” Every school and kitchen
interviewed had similar set menus that rotated on a cycle. Jean noted that her Director at Central Office sends her a set menu, and the Kitchen Managers simply follow the directives. Jean: “I make sure we stay within the guidelines and serve what they want us to serve instead of going out and finding something in a catalogue.”

Ruth also noted that “we have the set menu and lunch counts.” In Ruth’s case, the menu and lunch count is so tightly set and regulated that there are rarely leftovers from lunch. This becomes problematical as if one extra teacher buys food it could throw off supplies and ordering.

At SD2 Rosie had no difficulty in identifying menu control:

We receive a monthly menu and different vendors and purchasing agents and they have to be approved to order from them. We order from vendors that have been chosen by our bosses and we get in those foods for the menu they gave us. [They food is] mostly commodities due to cost. Rosie, however, was much more cavalier in her approach to cooking under a set menu. On the day of her interview, Rosie was baking “off-menu” apple crisp from scratch. The kitchen aroma was wonderful—fresh apples, cinnamon, and butter. When asked how this met the RDA, Rosie stated “[it’s] part of today’s fruit and vegetable menu.”

SD2 had the most intense amount of menu control due to their cantina style of cooking. At SD2 the central kitchen cooks every meal for all eighty elementary schools, sending them out to be consumed (known in the industry as cantina style). This is the ultimate method of menu control: take the cooking out of the schools. As Dudley stated, “Today’s meals are prepared here for
tomorrow’s meal…You prepare here and ship out.” Only the high schools at SD2 cook food onsite, leaving it up to the Manager to order and execute the set menu.

Ruth at SD1 offered a bit of a contrasting view on menu development, stating “Our Foodservice Director comes up with the menu. We are on a five week calendar. We are responsible to the Director. We meet once a month…it’s a collaboration between us and the director.” This was the only member of the sample to talk about having a direct input on menu development.

The State of Ohio also participates in menu control. During the training session for new school programs in the NSLP, Mr. W. gave each participant two binders. The first, titled *School Food Service: An Integral Partner in the Education of the Child*, spells out the NSLP and its guidelines. Technical in scope, this tome directs new programs to the USDA and State Department of Education in order to apply for and properly receive the correct re-imbursement rates. The second binder, titled *A Menu Planner for Healthy School Meals: To Help You Plan, Prepare, and Market Appealing Meals*, instructs districts in how to order and create menus in the school setting. It should be noted that on page one of this menu binder, the USDA clearly states that there is a relationship between sound nutrition and academic achievement. It goes on to recommend many of the American Dietary Association’s original suggestions for the NSLP, such as: a.) Meet the dietary guidelines; b.) eat a variety of foods; c.) get enough exercise; d.) eat whole grains and limit fats; e.) watch sugars and salts; f.) and (curiously for the school age population) moderate alcohol consumption. In
theory this progressive menu planning binder is taking strives to meet proper and sound nutrition, replete with color photographs of fresh food and smiling children. However, the first binder, which spells out how schools truly receive foods, notes that the higher the school’s reimbursement rate, the higher the amount commodities received. Commodities, as explored, are donated foods from the USDA, and are most often are in the form of dairy, fats, and meats. In this research study, it was found at SD1 and SD2 commodity-type foods (i.e., not fresh) were the norm. This paradox highlights the confusing state of the USDA regarding school nutrition—while it advocates an ideal, it continues to supply needy districts with highly processed and fatty foods.

**Theme Two: Corporations Dictate the NSLP**

Corporate control appeared in the interviews twenty-eight times across three school districts. While analyzing these data, two subthemes appeared: a.) corporate control via FMNV, and b.) a limitation of suppliers. Corporate Control of the NSLP was not the most frequent theme in this study, but it did illicit passionate feelings from the sample. Several workers and managers discussed this theme with genuine contempt for cooking to the bottom line (i.e., saving money over producing quality food) and purveyors hard-selling foods made to look and taste like FMNV.

*The presence of FMNV.* Lee set the tone on FMNV for this study by stating “they should not be allowed in schools, particularly pop. I think soft drinks are very bad for kids.” Anne from SD1 was equally appalled by the presence of
Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value in the schools. Her cafeteria had dry vending machines open for business at all times as these foods are considered to be nutritional. Across the hall from the cafeteria was a store selling name-brand candy, soda, and notebooks. Anne stated the store was a classroom experiment and therefore was somehow exempt from NSLP. Anne: “It’s a class, a marketing class. They buy the food from a fund that gets them started and they undersell me on lots of items.” While the store did not sell candy during lunch periods, it can sell soft drinks. In addition, the dry vending machines are available for use during lunch as candy bars with peanuts are considered to have enough nutritional value to meet some aspect of the RDA.

Writer: Dry vending sells candy? 
Ann: Yes. It has to be chocolate with nuts for a nutritional value.
Writer: Sold during lunch? 
Ann: Yes, but soda, no. Dry yes, soda, no.

It should be noted that the dry vending machines not only sold candy bars but chips and other FMNV items and “junk-food.”

While interviewing Ruth at SD1, this writer noticed a rack of fried corn and potato chips behind her ready for selling to elementary age students. “We sell chips, Sun Chips, granola bars, healthy snacks, no soda (except for teachers).”

Writer: Do you feel your meals are nutritious? 
Ruth: Yes, I do.

Ann at SD3 was just as disappointed with the pervasiveness of FMNV. “We have a vending contract with a soft drink company unfortunately, but the vending machines are controlled by the athletic department.” Ann stated that the machines
are turned off during lunch, but she finds herself “policing” the machines constantly. Kay confirms that SD3 had a soft drink issue, noting that machines had to be taken out of the high school to gain entrance into the NSLP.

Only SD2 avoids Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value altogether. In that district, there are no soft drink or dry vending machines available to students. In his original interview, Dudley stated that the district was on a five year improvement plan and did not feel FMNV had a place in SD1.

_A limitation of suppliers_. The second way in which corporations dictate the NSLP is by limiting food suppliers. During the interviews, only two corporations were mentioned when the sample was asked “From where do you get your food?” These two conglomerates were Gordon Food Service and Sysco. Ann noted that SD3 belongs to a buying cooperative supplied only by Sysco and GFS. The district is limited to ordering from these two multi-national corporations, and at the mercy of their set menus.

Writer: Where do you get your food?
Ann: We belong to a buying cooperative. They represent over 140 school districts in central Ohio.

This buying cooperative serving 140 school districts, therefore, is also supplied only by GFS and Sysco. The remaining food items were supplied by governmental commodities. Ruth at SD1 noted that “the Government gives us food like flour and baking mix, cherries.” Jean stated that “we use a book that lists all our products we can use from our distributors.” Moving outside of these
limited distributors was unheard of, and the corporations took on a parental air during the interviews.

Rosie stated that SD2 also relies on Sysco, GFS, and commodities exclusively.

Writer: Where do you get the food?
Rosie: Commodities due to cost, mostly. Lot of good things from government commodities. Then we use Sysco and GFS.

Across the school districts, those who work in the NSLP reported that corporations dictate the NSLP by limiting the availability of suppliers. Further, these purveyors are left to set whatever control they feel necessary to sell their product. Many of these suppliers offer foods from FMNV corporations.

**Theme Three: Students Dictate the NSLP.**

The third most frequent theme in this study is Students Dictate the National School Lunch Program. This theme occurred seventeen times across the districts studied. Within this category are two subthemes, a.) students want fast food in schools, and b.) students shape the NSLP by demanding recognizable foods.

*Students want fast-food in schools.* The Ohio Department of Education’s consultant Mr. W. stated that “meatloaf and mashed potatoes don’t go in schools anymore. The kids won’t eat it. Kids want what is popular outside of school—fast-food.” Indeed, this sentiment was pervasive during the study. The notion that students are dictating how the NSLP runs by imposing their taste for fast food was popular. This way of thinking was common in all districts researched.
Rosie said that “we try to almost make our food look like [FMNV] so they recognize the food…Our French fries crisp up in the oven to look like McDonalds.” In fact, school districts must compete with the expansive media campaigns and advertising of corporations. This leaves schools feeling that it is wise business sense to make their lunches look like FMNV.

Ann agreed. “Children are now used to fast-food and finger-foods.” She feels her meals must also accommodate these tastes to be sold. While SD3 is by far the most affluent district studied, there were other issues in this subtheme. “We have an Asian bar in secondary schools,” she reported. This was due to students eating more Asian foods at home and in the community.

At SD1 the sentiment that lunches must resemble fast-food was no less obvious. Anne reported that pizza, burgers, French fries, and meatball subs are on the menu everyday. “My [student] participation is wonderful. It’s like a mall, they have their food courts and this is what they are used to. And mine is a food court.”

*Students demand fast-food in schools.* Students indeed seem to dictate how the NSLP functions on a daily basis by bringing their tastes and influences from the community into the schools. All of the districts reported that students are asking for foods they see in the community. Every school reported that their lunches strive to appear and taste like fast-food in order to sell.

*Theme Four: Atmosphere and Attitude*

Atmosphere was the fourth most frequent theme occurring in this project. The sample put forth fifteen instances of Atmosphere when responding to the
research questions. Within Atmosphere two subthemes became apparent: a.) staff attitudes, and b.) aesthetics.

*Attitude vs. aesthetics.* The way in which adults greet and serve students was highly important to this sample. Across each school there was a common sentiment that the way in which NSLP workers interact with students was as important as meeting the Daily Recommended Allowances. Attitude accounted for the majority of the Atmosphere theme and highlighted a curious dissonance between Foodservice Workers and management: those working closely with students saw attitude as more important than nutrition (this will be fully explored in Chapter 5, Discussion).

At SD3 Ann noted that “appealing” food sells better, and must be “served with a lot of kindness because…the atmosphere has a lot to do with [lunch].” Ann was the only Foodservice Manager to mention Atmosphere as a contributing factor to the NSLP. She expressed, however, a common theme: when the staff is nice to students, the children are more willing to purchase school lunches.

Anne, the Kitchen Manager for SD1 stated that Atmosphere and Attitude were second to nutrition. This was more typical of Kitchen Managers—they more often saw straight nutrition as the guiding force of the National School Lunch Program. Anne described the power of Attitude in the kitchen. “If you are in a bad mood and they [the high school students] pick up on it…one thing about high school kids is you get back what you give out.” The following example between Anne and this researcher highlights the importance of nutrition vs. atmosphere:
Writer: What makes a good school lunch?
Anne: FIVE (emphasis added) food groups…a fruit and a juice. I think they are good if they get that.
Writer: What else?
Anne: Oh yes, my girls’ attitude, they way they treat students.

Compare that data to the following, supplied by Lee, a Foodservice Worker at SD1:

Writer: What makes a good school lunch?
Lee: Happy servers, good food…I give them a smile and say something nice. Sometimes this is the only place they get a kind word or meal.

Ruth at SD1 agreed that nutrition and attitude are important, but it must be regulated (Ruth is a Kitchen Manager). “I make sure they [Foodservice Workers] are nice to children because I think that has a lot to do with a child wanting to come in and eat.” This point highlights the Attitude subtheme: Managers desire aesthetic cafeterias so kids will buy lunches, while Workers feel being amicable to students (Attitude) is an important ingredient in a school lunch.

Here is another Foodservice Manager, Rosie, explaining what makes a good school lunch: “Smells good, looks good, and in the end tastes good. It’s no good unless the kids eat it.” Her first response was one of aesthetics. If the food is pleasant, more will sell. Rosie went on to state “the people involved also make good school lunch. Are they friendly and care about the kids?” This interaction suggests another manager putting marketing and aesthetics above attitudes.

Judy at SD2 best highlights this distinction. When asked what part in education she plays, Judy replied
“Well, I’d rather see a sermon than hear one any day. Children are little people and they come in here and see how we act and then they go out and act that way too. They watch us and learn and we are models, so I act like a good role model, respecting them and being friendly…I think we teach good manners in school lunches.”

It is unclear why those who are near (Foodservice Workers) the children in the NSLP feel that attitude is more important than nutrition. This subject will be analyzed in Chapter 5, Discussion, but could it be that students are somehow communicating to those close to them that attitude is more important than nutrition? If so, what would this mean to the United States Department of Agriculture, now trying to revitalize this food initiative?

Theme Five: Loyalty

The theme of Loyalty occurred fourteen times in this study, just one instance below Attitude vs. Aesthetics, and three occurrences behind Students Dictate the NSLP. Loyalty was an area this writer was not expecting, yet one that appeared in every district studied. It seems that working for the National School Lunch Program induces not only longevity, but also a sense that the program is extremely sound (even in the face of rising obesity and FMNV in schools). Loyalty is divided in two subthemes, a.) longevity, and b.) the NSLP is just fine.

Longevity. The average length of service in the NSLP from this data set is over twenty years, which is considerable in today’s workforce that is increasingly transient. When this writer asked Dudley, the Director of Foodservice, why longevity persists at the Foodservice Worker level, he answered that the staff is unionized and paid on a teacher’s calendar. In addition they are offered generous
benefits and work five hours per day. Dudley himself had been in the NSLP for twenty years, working his way “up” the management ladder.

Rosie was also in her twentieth year of service to the NSLP. When asked about longevity across the school districts, she answered “I think it starts with the fabulous hours. Also you get the school vacations and you are off with your kids. I can’t think of anything I’d rather do. I stay because I like it.”

Anne at SD1 had been with the district for twenty-six years, working at all levels. Lee was in her eighteenth year. Jean at SD1 had been with the NSLP for fifteen years while Ruth was in her seventeenth year. At SD3 it was no different—Ann had been in the program for twenty-five years. She explained longevity this way:

I am a person from the old school. I take a job and stick with it. I am a graduate of SD3 and giving back to the school and it’s a wonderful school district. The staff is great, and includes a lot of mothers and the hours are good. It’s a job people want to stay in for a long time.

Whatever the reason for the longevity, staying with the National School Lunch Program was popular across all districts studied. The second part of Loyalty, however, suggests the true functioning of the NSLP on a daily basis.

*The NSLP is running just fine.* The second subtheme of Loyalty is the notion that there is nothing wrong with the NSLP. The research question asks How Would You Improve the National School Lunch Program? Curiously, there was only one suggestion to better the NSLP (increase quality of hamburger). Kitchen Managers and Workers alike gave testimony that the NSLP is running as
well as it could or should, regardless of the increases in student obesity, inattentive disorders, and FMNV on campus.

Rosie gave a response that resonated with the sample on the daily functioning of the NSLP: “I think it’s going very well. There’s always things, but with schools you have to change a lot with the times.”

Lee at SD1 said “I think it [the NSLP] is doing a good job feeding the students and giving them choices.” Lee said this even though she complained about the student-run candy shop selling in competition with the NSLP. Jean thought the Program was “running fine,” even though there were several dry vending and soda machines placed in the cafeteria.

One of the most curious responses came from Ruth at SD1. When asked how she would change the NSLP, she responded “our school runs pretty well. I don’t have any ways it could improve…maybe updating equipment.” Behind Ruth was a rack of fried corn and wheat chips and other dry vending.

Ann from SD3 was a little more forthright about the NSLP, stating that she feels “the bottom line appears more important than the service. Other countries do that and we haven’t gotten there yet—putting kids first.” Other than that, Ann did not have suggestions to better the Program.

Kay also supported the NSLP, but stated she could not eat it on a daily basis. “I’m a picky eater,” she said as she laughed, “so probably no, I wouldn’t eat it everyday.”
At the onset of this study this writer assumed that each respondent would overflow with suggestions to change the NSLP. In fact, the opposite was true. In Chapter 5, Discussion, the question as to why those working in the NSLP see it as a viable program will be treated.

Theme Six: Local Food Issues

The sixth most frequent theme in this study is another surprise and falls into two categories: a.) the number of Foodservice Workers and Managers who did not know the difference between local and domestic food production, and b.) the portion of the sample that felt local products were illegitimate or not viable. This theme occurred ten times throughout the eleven interviews.

In each session this writer asked interviewees if they were able to buy local foods for their lunch program. Ten times the sample reported “yes, all of our produce must come from the United States.” It is significant to the study as this writer was curious if local schools were able to buy local produce as progressive programs are doing. The finding is significant for two reasons, a.) it highlights the degree to which local schools do not interact with local agriculture, and b.) that some of those operating our school kitchens do not understand that local foods (i.e., Franklin county or a fifty-mile radius) are vastly different from domestic production (i.e., grown in the United States).

In addition, several respondents noted that local producers were either not large enough to fulfill requirements, were unreliable, or as one respondent alluded, illegitimate. Both subthemes will be treated below.
Local produce vs. domestic. When asked about local produce in schools, the sample was more often than not to respond that yes, all NSLP schools must buy from domestic producers. This is true to a point—the United States Department of Agriculture does require that the NSLP purchase only domestic food products. However, the interview question was not concerning domestic production, but local foods. In some instances the writer specifically included clarification of local vs. domestic production with limited success. The following response is seen as typical and constant to the interview question:

Writer: Do you get any local produce from Ohio?
Respondent: Oh yes, it has to be from the US.

Another interviewee responded similarly.

Writer: Have you ever heard of anyone buying local produce or whole foods?
Interviewee: We have a program through the federal government where we get our fruits and vegetables from them…stuff that can be purchased in the United States.

SD1 had the most difficulty of any district when looking at the local vs. domestic issue. This researcher asked one Kitchen Manager if she served local foods and she responded “we have to buy from within the United States.” It should be noted that this manager did mention that she would like to buy local produce, but could not due to the NSLP hierarchy. “That is outside of my realm…It would be wonderful to use Ohio vegetables,” she concluded.

The second subtheme under Local Food Issues is that local foods are somehow inadequate, untrustworthy, or illegitimate.
The following discussion was between this writer and Dudley. It is being included in whole to illustrate why a large, urban school district feels it cannot use local growers to supply produce.

Writer: how hard would it be for you to bring in local produce?

Dudley: here’s the thing—I get asked this. You serve 13 million meals a year, 600,000 dollars on fresh produce from around the country and world like bananas. Local product is lettuce, cabbage, carrots, beans, and peas when they are ripe and in season. Sweet-corn and apples. There’s not one supplier around that could handle 60,000 meals a day even if it’s staggered. I would buy that but the apple I’m buying times 23,000 a day and then pre sliced and packaged. I was raised in Madison, Ohio, a farming community, my grandfather was dairy, cattle, and hog. The concept is good if we could pick a few buildings and do that, but there again everything we handle is heat and serve, and you have to add labor to the process. We used to make 6 tuna salad sandwiches for $1.25 for staff, but the sandwich costs $6.25 to make with labor. Every dollar I spend out of general funds should be going to books and services. We try to make an even cash flow.

One of the most telling responses appears below, illustrating the sentiment that small growers are somehow illegitimate:

Writer: If a farmer, a local county farmer…
Interviewee: [Shakes head]. No. They [the school district] go with only reputable companies. We get government dollars and they tell us what produce companies we need to use.
Writer: Conglomerates?
Interviewee: Yes.

Throughout the study it became apparent that school districts were unable or unwilling to consider the idea of using local and whole foods for a variety of reasons. The implications of these statements and philosophies will be discussed in Chapter 5, Discussion.
Theme Seven: More Poor Kids=More Money

How does the NSLP function on a daily basis? That is the first research question of this project. Eight times over the course of eleven interviews the sample answered that it functions better if there are more poor students on their free and reduced lunch rosters. This writer would caution that in no way did any interviewee suggest that they would prefer to have an increase in poverty in their schools. The answers below simply illustrate that free and reduced price students bring more money to the schools.

To be eligible for reduced price lunch, a student’s family must earn within 185% of the government’s standard of poverty. To receive a free lunch, the child’s family must be within 135% of the poverty limit (USDA, 2008). The table below illustrates what income levels fall within these guidelines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Size</th>
<th>Annual Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>59,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>65,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional children</td>
<td>+6,660</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 Chart of income levels for Reduced-Price Lunch (USDA, 2008)
Dudley noted that you should “find the highest number you can establish,” when it comes to the school’s free and reduced roster. This is due to the fact that the USDA, Title One, and other grants are written and awarded on the amount of free and reduced price students in each district. The federal government uses free and reduced guidelines to establish the socio-economic status of public districts, and therefore, awards supplemental aid on that data (2008).

Ann at SD3 supported this view:

**Writer:** What part does free and reduced rosters play in the NSLP?

**Ann:** We get reimbursed for the lunches we serve. If we served a paid lunch we get however much we charge from the state plus 24 cents; reduced lunch we can charge 40 cents capped and we get 2.17 from the state; free meal we get 2.57. So the benefit to having a high free/reduced population would be that you are guaranteed in selling more meals because the kids get the meal for free and want to eat instead of packing paid foods. Our free and reduced is going up, it’s over 50 percent here at SD3.

To the Kitchen Manager or Director of Foodservice, the more poor students the district educates, the more money the schools receive for lunches. In each district there were reports of schools relying on poor students to receive extra income. However, in SD2, Rosie noted that if her free and reduced rosters were low she was not penalized as a small district would be. “I’m not held separate because I have a lower rate. A big district absorbs that. It does make it a little harder because you don’t have a captive audience.” Rosie noted that in a smaller, wealthier district may struggle because students are not buying from the NSLP at high rates, and therefore not generating supplemental grant and Title One aid.
Regardless of the free and reduced roster, the Kitchen Managers and Workers overwhelmingly exhibited a desire to feed students without looking at their socio-economic status. For instance, Ruth at SD1 stated “some schools have a cut-off line [or financial guideline], we don’t. If a child comes in hungry, we feed them.” This area seemed one of the few domains of freedom in the National School Lunch Program: the ability to feed a student regardless of the ability to pay.

*Theme Eight: Labor is to Blame*

The last central theme to be discussed, Labor Is to Blame, occurred five times throughout the interviewees and is included because it directly affects how the National School Lunch Program functions on a daily basis. During the research it became apparent that each district, except SD3, was experiencing financial hardship. When asked about the state of funding and why schools could not spend more money on nutrition education or progressive lunch programming, five times the sample responded because the cost of labor consumed too much of their budget.

Ann noted that labor cost had increased dramatically. “One [reason for this increase] is labor. It has gone up and we have tried to find ways to keep this down.” Ann was answering a question about how the NSLP has changed and what barriers exist to new food programs.

The state of Ohio also recognizes that the cost of labor and food has had an effect on the NSLP. Mr. W., the ODE Consultant, noted that kids want foods that look and taste like fast food. This requires people to cook and serve these
specialties. “All good food costs more,” Mr. W. stated, referring to fast foods influencing the tastes of students. This somewhat confusing sentiment will be explored fully in Chapter 5, Discussion.

Dudley also found that the cost of labor directly affected his lunch program. When describing why all of SD2’s elementary schools are cantina-style, Dudley responded “it’s cheaper to buy fabricated food and ship it to the schools than it is to pay twenty dollars an hour [to prepare it].” Dudley was referring to the fact that in all three public school districts studied, Foodservice Workers and Managers were considered full time if they worked over five hours a day, guaranteeing them to receive health benefits and a teacher’s calendar.

Writer: Where’s the NSLP money going in SD2?
Dudley: The biggest area is rate of pay. SD2 exceeds Los Angeles. Our employees get twenty-one dollars an hour plus ten thousand dollar benefit package. 193 paid days and they work 176. You can’t afford to give the benefits [and have an adequate lunch program].

The interviewees said five times during this project that the cost of labor is inhibiting schools from administering the Program as they would enjoy. In Chapter 5, Discussion, this theme will be examined in relationship to progressive programming already in place (and functioning successfully) in other areas.

Summary

The preceding is an account of the eight themes and subthemes gathered from the eleven interviews conducted across three school districts and one state agency. The information was obtained and analyzed using coding, Nvivo qualitative software, and constant comparison until themes emerged. The findings
were presented in order of frequency, with sample responses to highlight ideas and points of interest. In the following section, these findings will be discussed in relation to the research questions, along with theoretical analysis and implications for further study.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to discover how the National School Lunch Program functions on a daily basis and how those working in the program would implement change. The foundation of this project came about because of the writer’s interest and research into the link between nutrition and academic achievement. As stated, this relationship is considered to be causal by the medical and psychological fields (Sears et. al., 1999; Taras, 2005). However, a gap in the research was discovered in how nutrition is administered, particularly in American public schools. Therefore, the following questions arose: If there is a causal relationship between sound nutrition and high academic achievement (Powell, 1998), shouldn’t we know more about a food program that feeds twenty-nine million students each school day? Further, is that program (the NSLP) providing sound nutrition? Could it be bettered?

The study then moved into three public school districts in central Ohio to conduct qualitative inquiry through interviews. Eleven interviews were completed and data analysis showed the emergence of eight themes, followed by subthemes:
Table 5.1 Central themes in order of frequency with subthemes.

The themes that emerged were intriguing and at times surprising, but what they mean to this study and to the two research questions is the focus of this chapter. In this section, the findings will be discussed through the lens of Ecological Systems and Critical Theories, the research questions, and the body of literature. This segment differs from
Chapter 4, Findings, in that the study’s outcomes will be interpreted to explore a deeper meaning of the NSLP’s daily functioning and suggestions for the program’s improvement.

*General Outcome*

This study finds that the National School Lunch Program is a highly controlled initiative with little chance for change from within. The United States Department of Agriculture has dedicated research and resources to discover ways to make the NSLP healthier and more efficient, yet paradoxically hinders this growth by limiting the autonomy of schools (even to the point of inhibiting suggestions). The general outcome of this study is a question: Who ultimately is controlling the NSLP, a program responsible for the nutrition of twenty-nine million students daily?

*Outcomes Through the Lens of Critical and EST Theory*

This study was guided by three theories—Grounded, Critical, and Ecological Systems. Grounded Theory aided in the formulation of themes and ideas during initial stages of this research, and guided this writer to formulate conclusions. The task of GTM is complete at this phase, having found theory in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; O’Donoghue & Punch, 2003).

This project’s summary theory is that the NSLP has become institutionalized, and will be very difficult to change. The exception would be a directive of Congress or assistance from the FMNV producers. Now, this study will look at these data from a Critical and Ecological standpoint to further comprehend the message.
Ecological systems theory looks at the NSLP. The National School Lunch Program grew out of a need for a healthier population during World War Two (Martin, 1996; Salisbury, 2004). At the time, students were graduating from public schools with nutrition-based deficiencies, and the US government charged the Department of Agriculture with the task of properly feeding students. Ecological System Theory looks at how children develop in relation to their environment, but in the case of this project, the child is substituted for NSLP as a growing entity. How does the NSLP interact and react to its environment and what kind of influences does it hold upon the Program?

The NSLP functions today, with few exceptions, exactly as it did in the 1950s. The one exclusion is that students are now offered food choices instead of being forced to purchase a set entrée or go hungry. While the world and nutrition and food studies have changed dramatically since the 1950s, the NSLP remains a strict, tightly controlled entity. Further, the USDA continues to govern as a rigid parent, allowing for little dissent let alone change. It would seem that by its behavior that the NSLP has never left childhood. It is a top-heavy program, with the USDA monitoring each action, along with supervision from state agencies, School Food Authorities, consultants, and Foodservice Directors. At the bottom of this chain are students and the community. In each of the eleven interviews conducted no one ever mentioned interacting with the community or local growers except for Fritz in SD3.

If the National School Lunch Program were reacting to modern culture there would be local produce in every school capable of doing so. At the beginning of this study the price of unleaded gasoline was over four dollars per gallon. This research has
found that the average food item in the United States travels over two thousand miles (Kingsolver, 2007). Economics would suggest that the NSLP, which relies on food products mainly from California, Texas, and Florida, to be unsustainable. And yet the NSLP continues to function and grow, feeding ever more students with foods from around the country. This is contradictory to Ecological Systems Theory, that states a child or entity will react and change to accommodate its environmental influences (Hawley, 1950). Regardless, the National School Lunch seems to function in a vacuum.

Another paradox between the NSLP and EST is the manner in which the community (i.e., parents and guardians) has little to no control over how the school lunch program is administered. Not one interviewee mentioned meeting with parents, talking to them by phone, or mailing surveys. Traditional Ecological Systems relies on the interaction between the growing child or entity and the caregiver (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). While it cannot be said that parents and guardians should be or are the caregivers of the NSLP, it is their children who consume the food. And nutrition, both positively and negatively, is directly related to the internalization and externalization of behavior. It is reasonable, therefore, that caregivers should have a voice in the nutrition of their student. However, this is rarely the case in the NSLP as it functions today. It would be confusing and difficult for a parent to understand how to communicate and effect change in the Program, as there are no mechanisms in place to receive this information.

In the Ecological Systems context, the National School Lunch Program exists in its own time and space within communities in central Ohio. It functions as a spike—an
object driven into a foreign place that remains set alone. While students do eat from this vast program, they do not nurture it, grow it, or change it.

Critical theory and the NSLP. A basic tenet of Critical Theory is that there are power structures that have been widely accepted by the population without question (Brookfield, 2005). This could not be more apparent in the National School Lunch Program as viewed by this research’s sample. The list of controllers is long in the NSLP: The USDA Secretary of Agriculture, FMNV corporations, state departments of education, school boards, School Food Authorities, Foodservice Directors, and Kitchen Managers. Each step of the NSLP, from food ordering to setting menus, is tightly controlled by one of these entities. Yet the Department of Agriculture is publishing directives lauding progressive programs such as Farms to Schools (USDA, 2008). Their 2002 Farm Bill provided substantial grants to communities to address the matter of students not getting enough foods that increase health and performance (such as fruits and vegetables).

Contradictions within the NSLP become apparent when viewed through Critical Theory. If the USDA was totally committed to the principles of the 2002 Farm Bill in finding progressive alternatives to a faltering system, why are FMNV corporations given favored status in schools? For example, why does the USDA uphold the agreement between soft drink companies and the NSLP that allows for FMNV to be sold in competition to lunches?

Another piece of disconfirming data is the near total reliance the sample districts had on two food conglomerates. The 2002 Farm Bill charged states and communities in
finding new paths to sound nutrition, yet every one of the districts studied stated they solely trade with Sysco and Gordon Food Services. In Critical Theory it is left to the researcher to ask these questions: if only one corporation administers a list of foods available and you must choose from that document, are you (the school district) creating a menu that is in compliance with the RDA or is the corporation? Additionally, are corporations required to meet Recommended Daily Allowances? Lastly, who regulates corporations? It should be noted that producers of FMNV are in no way obliged to meetRecommended Daily Allowances, nor are they monitored by the USDA.

In each school studied, there were no suggestion cards, no forum for the public to interact with the Kitchen Manager, or overt dissent from the school lunch program. There was, however, rebellion from FMNV control in SD2. In that District, the administration had taken out all of the soft-drink machines while embarking on a five-year “health” plan. This district, by far the poorest and most diverse, was the only to shun FMNV.

Regardless of SD2’s stand, Critical Theory does warn against the mandated becoming the “opiate” to subdue resistance (Giroux, 2001). In a society where childhood and adolescent obesity is growing, why aren’t teachers, students, and parents questioning the FMNV candy shop that is open during school lunch hours? When those working in the NSLP were asked this question, the most common answer was that children and families do not question the NSLP because it is serving foods the students recognize and prefer at home.
Addressing the Research Questions

Research question one: How does the NSLP function on a daily basis? The answer to this question is at once extremely simple and complex. The NSLP functions as it has since the day the National School Lunch Act was passed in 1946, through tight federal, state and local supervision. That is the simple answer, explored above through the lens of theory. However, the NSLP is also a multifaceted system operating in a hierarchical fashion, as described below.

The NSLP flowchart. The following inverted pyramid shows how power in the NSLP moves. In typical foodservice operations, the customers dictate what the property sells and by how much through sales. For example, a chef may have a good idea for a daily special and put it on the menu. That is her decision. However, if no customers buy the special, over a period of time the chef (with hope) would remove the entrée and find something that sells. The NSLP does not function in this manner, which is contrary to economics and basic communication.
Table 5.2 NSLP hierarchy of power.

At the top of the pyramid is the National School Lunch Act of 1946, solidifying through law the mandate from Congress to soundly feed public education students. Below the NSLA are the USDA and the American Dietary Association, setting procedural and nutritional guidelines for states to carry forth. In addition, this level organizes the reimbursement rates other fiscal responsibilities. The USDA is also the governing body over surplus foods and commodities.

Under the USDA are the state departments of education, responsible for auditing and guaranteeing that the NSLP is carried out in accordance with the NSLA. Interestingly, only one of the eleven interviewees was scrutinized by the USDA. The
remaining districts underwent Ohio Department of Education audits. The ODE does not check in anyway to see if foods are meeting the RDA; they only audit fiscal documents and bureaucratic functioning. Beyond ODE audits, there are no mechanisms to regulate nutritional values or whether a lunch meets the RDA. This highlights a major gap in the safeguarding of student nutrition.

The School Food Authority is below the state department of education and is often the same person as the district’s Director of Foodservice. This office negotiates with food conglomerates and sets a rotating menu. The menu is driven by what the conglomerates have available, mostly FMNV-appearing foods such as pizza, hamburgers, French fries, and processed chicken. One school SFA told this writer at one time the school supplied milkshakes to students. Once approved, the SFA sends the menu to the Kitchen Managers.

The Kitchen Manager is under the SFA and is responsible for executing the daily menu. The Kitchen Manager typically cooks along with the Foodservice Workers and is in control of scheduling and other administrative duties. They have less interaction with students and typically viewed the NSLP as flawless.

The Foodservice Worker is at the base of the NSLP pyramid. Being at the base does not imply power, but the opposite. This person has the most contact with the students, teachers, and community, but the least amount of influence in regards to menu development. It is at this level that change should begin—by gathering the wants of students and the community to set a local and sustainable menu.
The USDA and Change.

There is a state of confusion as to why the USDA is not changing the NSLP as it has updated other initiatives. The United States Department of Agriculture is an expansive organization responsible for many facets of daily life—especially those involving food and production. Innovation and change are essential to the evolution of any organism, and the NSLP is no exception. One only needs to look at another USDA-run program, the Food Stamp Program (now called Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), to understand that the Department of Agriculture is indeed capable of growing a program for the better.

Supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP). SNAP is the updated name of the Food Stamp Program (FSP), directed by the Secretary of Agriculture. This initiative began and grew in a similar manner to the NSLP—both were in reaction to domestic needs. While the NSLP responded to World War Two, SNAP addressed poverty following the Great Depression. The Secretary of Agriculture implemented the first Food Stamp Program in 1939 as the nation reeled from the effects of financial turmoil. The program lasted four years and assisted poor citizens in purchasing commodities. In 1961 food stamps returned to address growing poverty and social inequities and has been a fixture of our society since that time.

The Food Stamp Program was never static, yet innovative, and in 1964 the Food Stamp Act was passed into law. The wording was provocative, speaking to the prohibition of discrimination based on culture or beliefs; prohibition of FMNV; and division of state and USDA responsibilities (USDA, 2008). Reviewing the 1964 Food
Stamp Act demonstrates a progressive, socially minded law. It leaves a citizen to ask why the National School Lunch Act lacked the same spirit of innovation?

Throughout the life of the FSP it grew easier for participants to access and utilize benefits. For example, in 1977 the Act was overhauled and people could apply over the phone or by a home visit. The USDA realized that those needing stamps would not have transportation, and therefore workers would go into the community to help citizens complete necessary documentation. This progressive approach became a hallmark of the program. Do we give the same space and aid to recipients of the National School Lunch Program?

Lastly, the FSP went paperless in 2004 with debit cards instead of traditional paper notes. In the 2008 Farm Bill, the USDA renamed the SNAP and granted it to use electronic signatures; bilingual services; address civil rights; and provide nutrition education to help recipients make the most of their aid (USDA, 2008).

Again, SNAP seems to be an innovative, ever-changing program responding to the digital age and dynamic cultural shifts in America (such as language). From a review of literature, it does not seem that the NSLP has taken cue from the Food Stamp Program, and remains stagnate.

*How Does a Program Change?*

The USDA is capable of modernizing a large, public program as demonstrated by the case of SNAP. Through the use of electronic debit cards, telephone applications, and home visits, one could say the USDA’s SNAP program is innovative. Perhaps an
interesting discussion would be how does an entity become innovative? If researchers understood this, perhaps change within the NSLP could be forthcoming.

**Innovation.** Much of the research into innovation comes from business management. Classically, innovation research grew out of industrialization and technological development. Innovation was considered an act of transformation, basically following four general steps: idea generating, transformation into an innovation project, development, and innovation. One essential component, however, is that innovation must introduce a new element or a combination of old elements (Schumpeter, 1934). One can see this response in the USDA’s SNAP—the addition of the electronic debit card for greater security and ease. This alone is an innovative idea unknown to the National School Lunch Program.

Modern innovation theory is much more aligned with the works of Peter Senge. The focus of Senge’s work is that entities become innovative through learning. The transformation from production and static operations to a business that actively evaluates and changes is essential. At the heart of innovation is the concept of Systems Thinking, or the ability for an organization to understand how it relates to, and ultimately affects is environment. With this in mind, the entity is more careful of the actions taken and philosophies expounded (Senge, 2006).

This angle on innovation theory is timely for the National School Lunch Program. Only once during the research did a participant talk about deviating from the norm (SD3; River Elementary). Even in this instance, it was not a result of Systems Thinking, but an afterthought. Through the lens of Systems Thinking, the NSLP is wholly inconsiderate of
how it affects its immediate and extended environment (i.e., FMNV; reliance of foods from around the nation; possible link between NSLP and obesity). Therefore, Systems Thinking would see the NSLP as a non-innovative entity, whereas SNAP has actually thought about its time and place and responded to change.

**Summary.** In conclusion, there was very little room for creativity and innovation in the NSLP as functioning in the three districts studied. The one exception was River Elementary School in SD3. River Elementary happened upon a school garden and was given permission to continue. It should be noted that River Elementary never had a garden plan—their program developed quite passively. The remaining districts did not express the ability to act independently or creatively. The NSLP, as studied in this project, lacked idea generation, innovation plans, and development of progressive answers to the issues plaguing school lunches. In comparison to SNAP, the NSLP is static and unwilling to allow new elements into the initiative.

The NSLP does have positive attributes. It is well maintained, extremely clean and aware of current sanitation practices, and seemingly well funded. And nowhere in the course of this research did any participant complain that the children were not being fed enough food. However, the Program was wholly negligent of the philosophy of terroir, community, customer input (outside of perceived student preferences), and culture.

**Terroir.** This French term is historically used in reference to wine. Literally, it means soil, and denotes the ground in which the vine grows and the environment as a whole. Terroir has gained expanded notoriety in the culinary and nutrition world as a philosophy of tying food to the place in which it grows and is served. This movement
encourages local foods, education of those foods, and community participation in their planting, harvest, and production. Communities engaging in these types of activities are either naturally agricultural and/or local-focused (such as Third World farming communities). Some have long-standing local food traditions (i.e., France and Spain), or programs that exist in complement of other communal arrangements (San Juan, 2006). The National School Lunch Program, as studied, does not accept the importance of terroir. This is evidenced by relying solely on foods grown in California, Texas, and Florida instead of produce from central Ohio.

Research question two. What suggestions do you (i.e., a worker in the National School Lunch Program) have for its improvement? At the onset of the project, this writer guessed that participants would have a multitude of ideas of how the NSLP should be changed for the better. One of the researcher’s assumptions was that the NSLP was replete with problems and the disgruntled workers, tired of serving and promoting FMNV, would be ready for drastic changes. This could not have been farther from the truth.

In all of the interviews and observations, only one participant had a suggestion for improving the NSLP: Please give us better quality hamburger. This comment was an isolated incident, unsupported by the rest of the sample. Apart from this statement, no one in the program clearly stated that the NSLP is problematic; is causing childhood obesity; or needs to alter its path. These statements were made in the face of rising fuel costs; dramatic increases in childhood and adolescent obesity; and the USDA’s directive to modernize and make the NSLP healthier.

123
To interpret this silence, this study again turns to Critical Theory. During the interviews, two Directors of Foodservice stated the NSLP workers have safe, and lucrative, positions. They work on a school calendar with generous amounts of paid holidays, health benefits, and protection from the district’s bargaining unit. As one participant indicated off-tape, “What’s not to love?” Indeed, the vast majority of the sample was female (82%), and the majority of the female sample talked about having children in school at one time and how the NSLP schedule gave them the flexibility to spend time at home and at work. This is essential in understanding why the silence on the NSLP and how it can be improved—being a mother raising children and working five hours a day in that school can be seen as copasetic.

In a critical stance, one may ask if the sample, particularly women with children in school, are being placated by comfort? Perhaps the schedule, the benefits, and the pay are guiding NSLP workers into a direction where dissent is viewed as “rocking the boat.” Why would workers want to rock a boat that until recently has been so lucrative?

It would be curious to understand the perspective of the NSLP in a school district that employs contractual food workers. This type of out-sourcing is popular in some areas to reduced labor cost and administration. Contract workers are often paid at or just above minimum wage, do not collect teacher benefits, and are administered by a corporation. In addition, contract workers may be required to work throughout the year instead of the school calendar. Would a contract worker say that the National School Lunch Program is functioning as best as it could, or would there be more dissent? A contract worker certainly would have much less to lose than a protected, benefited Foodservice Worker.
Lastly, the hesitation of change may be due to pluralistic ignorance. Each of the respondents noted that the NSLP is tightly controlled, to the point of being institutionalized. While obesity and other childhood diseases increase and achievement declines, Foodservice Workers are shy to say the NSLP is to blame. Pluralistic ignorance is a social psychological axiom stating that people will continue behaving in ways against their logic and moral code because they feel other people are doing the same (Smith & Mackie, 2007). In this instance, participants may be seeing similar school districts and workers going along with the hierarchical dictates and falsely believing they are in agreement with the management, USDA, and fast-food corporations.

Conclusion. The National School Lunch Program feeds twenty-nine million students ever day in America. American math and science scores are falling, childhood and adolescent obesity are rising, and inattentive disorders are the most common neuro-biological diagnoses in schools. While there is no way to imply causation between these symptoms and the NSLP, the Program should not be removed from the list of possible culprits. The sample was unable to address these issues for reasons of placation, comfort, and possible intimidation. Regardless, if the NSLP is running without problems, why do students continue to internalize and externalize nutrition-influenced mental and physical ailments?

Limitations of the Study

The single most limiting factor of this study is that no students were involved. This limitation was part of the design, as the project committee agreed in determining how the NSLP functions on a daily basis and how it could be improved from a
perspective of adults working in the Program. This was done to fully explore the NSLP and make it transparent.

Another limitation of this study is that it cannot show causation between obesity, internalized or externalized issues, and the NSLP. As mentioned over the body of the research, the medical and psychological professions have demonstrated that sound nutrition increases childhood performance and cognition. However, due to the nature of the research, it is extremely difficult to show causation between the NSLP and the above issues. To do so, one would have to select a randomized sample from public schools, control their diet, and tightly monitor their behaviors (i.e., eating patterns) outside of school. This level of research is too invasive for the helping professions, and therefore rarely seen in the United States.

One final limitation of the study is that no rural school district (i.e., Amish) was studied. This was due to a constraint of resources and time placed upon the researcher. However, a rural or primitive district may have provided insight and comparison into local agricultural practices and their effect on health and wellness. For example, would students who get more exercise from working in agriculture suffer the same levels of internal and external issues common in NSLP schools? As the study wore on, it became apparent that not only was nutrition having an effect on the student population, but also the sedentary lifestyle of the American teenager.

Recommendations for the NSLP

The following section will be divided into three areas: a.) suggestions for the NSLP hierarchy, b.) directions for NSLP workers engaged in direct service, and c.)
suggestions for the community. This part of the research is based on the analysis of interviews and observations and presents an organized, data-based set of actions that could be taken to improve the National School Lunch Program.

*Suggestions for the NSLP hierarchy.* It is this researcher’s assumption that energy will increasingly become scarce, thereby driving food and commodity prices higher, possibly to unsustainable levels (Kunstler, 2005). This assumption was put to test throughout the study—at the beginning of the project fuel prices were over four dollars per gallon, yet mid-way through the year they had dropped to under two dollars. Regardless, food prices continued to increase. The National School Lunch Program must reorganize, as the USDA has directed, to remain viable. What would be the affect of five or six dollar per gallon diesel fuel (used by food and dairy farmers to produce and ship their goods) on the NSLP?

The NSLP’s longstanding disregard for community organization, terroir, and local produce must end. To do so, the strict direction of the NSLP hierarchy must evolve into something much more collaborative. One suggestion would be to create parent-school boards that advise on food, nutrition, and implementation of services. For too long the NSLP has functioned as if food *simply occurs.* It does not. Produce, especially in receding economies, becomes an enormous investment with concerns over selection, transportation, and sustainability.

The NSLP hierarchy could also begin to audit the school lunch program in terms of nutrition. Currently, state boards of education monitor the NSLP solely in fiscal ways. Only one interviewee talked about any agency actually inspecting the NSLP food for
quality or RDA requirements. The sample consistently reported that school food is not scrutinized and state agencies assume what is on the menu is nutritional. This places an enormous amount of trust in the two food conglomerates that control the NSLP’s menus.

The NSLP hierarchy, workers, and communities could do with questioning the health of the food coming from the two conglomerates mentioned in this study. Has their food been independently analyzed for nutrition and fat content? What is their preservative to product ratio? Do they use any local or whole foods? Typically conglomerates have headquarters away from their customer base and spend enormous amounts of money on lobbying and media. Regardless, a school district should be able to know with confidence that a coated, fried chicken patty from Sysco has a nutritional value (or not).

Lastly, the NSLP hierarchy could become more open to the Foodservice Worker. This person has the most amount of student contact in the NSLP. The majority of Foodservice Workers reported that students prefer homemade, from-scratch cooking. This is in direct contradiction to Mr. W. at Ohio Department of Education and the Foodservice Directors of SD2 and SD3. It suggests that those working closely with students understand that they do not necessarily want FMNV for lunch. This contradiction also tells that FMNV corporations have influence over the Directors and Managers who make menu decisions.

*Directions for the NSLP foodservice workers.* As mentioned, these employees interact with students more than any other station in the NSLP. Foodservice Workers prepare lunches, clean the line, and operate the cash register. They are more often to know students by first name, their families, and culture. They often reported engaging
students in conversation about their studies and social life. As one Foodservice Worker indicated, they are part of the student’s education. Also noted, these Workers reported a different scenario than Directors or Managers: Foodservice Workers more often noted that students enjoy homemade entrees—in direct contradiction to the State of Ohio and both Directors interviewed.

It is suggested that Foodservice Workers continue to advocate this point to their Managers, state consultants, and Directors. Currently, the top of the NSLP hierarchy is under the impression that students will only buy and eat foods that appear like fast-food. FMNV corporations wholly support this notion and reap financial rewards for this misconception.

_Suggestions for the community._ It is suggested that parents and guardians talk to their students and ask them what type of foods they are eating at school and what they would like to consume. The community, through taxes, is funding the National School Lunch Program and deserves to know nutritional and financial workings of the initiative. Being a publicly funded program, the NSLP should at no time be clouded or hidden from the public view. Parents should be able enter the school and the cafeteria and directly question the district over food choices, menu development, and the role of FMNV corporations on campuses.

In addition, the community has the power to limit the exposure students have to FMNV. Is the community willing to let fast-food corporations operate in any area or are there restrictions on their growth? Does the community do enough to provide alternative nutrition programming such as community gardens and cooking clubs? As noted,
children growing up in families that make sound nutritional decisions make better food choices throughout life.

Lastly, the community can begin investing in sustainable and local food to school relationships such as VTFEED in Vermont (VTFEED, 2008). This program matches school children with local farms to increase whole nutrition and agricultural involvement. It is an assumption of this study that communities engaging in food to school programs are experiencing growth in achievement and positive behaviors. In addition, children exposed to sustainable food systems may go on to influence choices and menu development in the National School Lunch Program.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are many aspects open to researchers interested in understanding the National School Lunch Program. It is with hope that future researchers may use this study as a methodological template and study its other systems with positive results. The aim of the project was not to generalize, but to make transparent the NSLP through interviews and qualitative inquiry.

Student involvement. One area of future research is how the student body views the National School Lunch Program, and what suggestions they have for its improvement. This research could be a natural compendium to this study, with between-case comparisons highlighting similarities and disconfirming data. In addition, students may be less inhibited to talk about processed foods, fast-food, FMNV, and aesthetics of the school lunch environment. This may add a fresh perspective to the existing body of literature.
Study school gardens. Another suggested direction of research is to follow Fritz’s plan for the school garden at SD3. He, at the time of this project, was organizing ideas for a garden and was talking to the administration about possible directions. It would be interesting to understand in a qualitative way the effects this garden has on students, staff, and the community. Do the students look forward to participating? Do they feel ownership? Do school garden foods taste better?

The obesity-FMNV-activity link. Future research must also be conducted in obesity and childhood diets and activity levels. The body of research is currently impressive with studies on childhood disease, but very few studies can conclusively state that our school lunch program is affecting obesity and inattentive rates. Furthermore, no study reviewed suggested that FMNV, and the corporations controlling them, are responsible for obesity soon becoming America’s most preventable cause of death. To understand the role of FMNV and activity levels from a medical stance would aid in comprehending ties between health, psychology, and education.

Make transparent FMNV corporations. One area of future research could also be to study the makers of FMNV and make transparent their daily operations as they relate to public schools. This may include interviewing FMNV workers; independently analyze their foods; and hold town-hall style meetings between the community and the corporations.

Aesthetics is understudied. Lastly, the field of aesthetics and attitude in the National School Lunch Program should be investigated. Throughout the study Workers told this writer that aesthetics and attitude toward students were just as important as the
quality of food being served. Indeed, Foodservice Workers more often reported content students in schools with positive aesthetics and attitudes towards them. The following is a list of aesthetic and attitude areas of future study:

1. Variations in cafeteria light and air in relation to mood/plate waste (including windows in the cafeteria)
2. Cafeteria vistas (such as internal vistas of FMNV machines)
3. Teachers and Foodservice Workers eating with students

These areas of study come from the interviews and observations conducted throughout the three districts. These subjects were consistent themes that arose as the project continued, and speak to the need for further examination.

Final Thoughts

How this study contributed to the knowledge base. This study is unique in that it gives a qualitative view of the daily functioning of the National School Lunch Program. In the review of literature, no studies were encountered with the sole aim of entering the NSLP and gaining a clear understanding of the Program from the perspective of those who work within. Several studies looked at student health, financial questions, and student preferences for lunch, but none achieved the research questions stated in this project.

Also, this study adds to the body of qualitative inquiry methods on fast-access anthropology and interviewing techniques. Fast-access anthropology involves interviewing and shadowing in a limited amount of time, as described in Chapter 3,
Methods. This research demonstrates fast-access anthropology in action and sets a template for future researchers.

Finally, this project questions fast-food corporations and producers of FMNV. Through the lens of Critical Theory, these entities are asked one question: What good are you doing for us? The answer is much, much cloudier than the daily functioning of the NSLP. Have purveyors of FMNV squashed dissent within the NSLP workforce while purporting the misconception that students prefer pre-fabricated (and unhealthy) foods over homemade entrees?

What would have improved this study. The ability to move out across more school districts would have enhanced this project by allowing the researcher to examine under-represented areas (such as rural and primitive schools). In addition, greater access to the FMNV corporations would have improved this study by allowing the researcher to better understand their dealings with public schools. It should be noted that the agreements between schools and FMNV are considered financial and not public, and therefore Foodservice Directors were hesitant to divulge these data. In fact in one school district the athletic department was in control of FMNV contracts, taking it out of the hands of education.

Disconfirming data and surprises. The disconfirming data existed mainly in the area of the preference of homemade foods vs. fast-foods and FMNV. As stated, Foodservice Directors and the Ohio Department of Education said that students wouldn’t buy lunches not resembling what they are used to eating at home (fast-food). Foodservice Workers more often disconfirmed this statement. The majority of Workers reported that
students overwhelmingly supported from scratch cooking such as casseroles and plated entrees consisting of a protein, starch, and vegetable.

One of the brightest surprises of this research was the reluctance of Workers to question the NSLP. This point has been reviewed, but it should not be overlooked as health indicators state that the initiative may be abetting incidences of obesity and inattention. While this may be apparent, those working in the system and taking advantage of benefits and school hours are reluctant to say so.

Another surprise was how few Workers knew the difference between local and domestic foods. As reported, the vast majority of interviewees confused local (coming from a fifty mile radius) with domestic production (continental US). It left this writer wondering if there are other important areas of foodservice being confused in our National School Lunch Program. In addition, shouldn’t those working with food be given basic training in systems and nutrition?

An initial assumption of this writer was that the NSLP was riddled with financial problems and that it was administered in a shadowy manner, hence leading to a rise in obesity and inattentive disorders. This was not the case. In nearly every stop along the project, the NSLP was readily made transparent by those working within. It should be clarified that the structural workings were made plain, but not the nutritional information or suggestions for improvement. In addition, the NSLP does not suffer from financial difficulties, yet is funded by the school district’s free and reduced lunch rosters. There was very little complaining about the financial state of the National School Lunch Program.
In addition, this writer was surprised to find the level of acceptance that occurs in public schools concerning Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value. During one interview a Foodservice Manager said that FMNV was not an issue, yet behind her was a display of deep-fried potato and corn chips. Every school (except SD2) had machines selling FMNV, and each school’s interviewee passively complained about them. Yet there were no plans (outside of SD2’s refusal to sell junk food) to remove FMNV. Going into this project, this researcher believed that those working in the NSLP would be waiting for an opportunity to lash out at FMNV corporations and suppliers.

Lastly, this study places quite a bit of criticism upon the producers of Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value with little discussion whether the NSLP could survive without them. One assumption of this writer was that the USDA could update the NSLP for the better, thereby diminishing the need for FMNV. Yet as noted, school districts rely on vending machines and FMNV sales to fund essential programs. FMNV are prevalent in the vast majority of American middle and high schools, and their popularity remains high with students. Therefore, one must ask: is the relationship between the NSLP and FMNV somehow necessary? Perhaps it is too easy to simply state that FMNV are “bad” and must be removed from schools. Economically, the relationship between the NSLP and FMNV is strong, if not essential, and during the review of literature no one source stated FMNV is causing what ails the lunch program. The complex food system in the United States, which is geographically enormous and prosperous, may suggest that the producers of FMNV could be filling in the gaps left by a faltering US Department of Agriculture.
*How the study compares to the literature.* The body of literature suggests there is a problem with our students in regards to obesity and academic achievement. This study did not directly measure these areas, but the findings do confirm that those working within the NSLP see obesity and slumping achievement scores as problematic. Each district studied mentioned that obesity was an educational concern. The only district to enforce a health plan was SD2, enacting a five-year roadmap to address developmental, nutritional, and performance issues.

This study does veer from the body of literature in one notable area—it disconfirms what Martin, Fleishhacker, and others stated about Foods of Minimal Nutritional Value. The authors put forth that with the ubiquitous presence of FMNV (97% of schools having them) that students would soon only eat foods resembling fast-food. The participants of several schools reported this is not the case, with students requesting from scratch, plated entrees.

*Project Conclusion*

The National School Lunch Program is remarkably well run for a federal initiative serving twenty-nine million citizens per day. It has a faithful base of consumers, captive in some ways; a loyal work force; and compassionate Directors who have worked their way up through the NSLP ranks. The Program’s parent agency, the USDA is (in theory) supportive of revamping the NSLP into a healthier entity. The participants of this study were overwhelmingly genuine and helpful, with several inviting this writer to come back to the school and “have lunch on them.”
However, difficult questions remain in regards to childhood and adolescent health and wellness. Why are our students becoming obese, increasingly aggressive, and inattentive? Furthermore, why are our math and science scores declining in comparison to the other advanced nations? These questions cannot be answered by this study, nor by any other research used in this project. However, we should never discount that a national program charged with feeding so many students every day and heavily influenced by fast-foot corporations may not have some implication in these epidemics.


Lapadat, J., & Lindsay, A. (1999). Transcription in research and practice: from standardization of technique to interpretive positioning. *Qualitative Inquiry, 5,* 64-86.


APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS
## Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Longevity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>Foodservice Worker, Elementary School</td>
<td>SD2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Foodservice Manager, High School</td>
<td>SD1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Foodservice Manager, Elementary School</td>
<td>SD1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dudley</td>
<td>Foodservice Director, District Wide</td>
<td>SD2</td>
<td>20+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Foodservice Manager, High School</td>
<td>SD1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fritz</td>
<td>Principal, Elementary School</td>
<td>SD2</td>
<td>Not in NSLP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>Foodservice Manager, Alternative School</td>
<td>SD2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
<td>Foodservice Worker, Alternative School</td>
<td>SD2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Foodservice Worker, High School</td>
<td>SD1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. W.</td>
<td>State Consultant to the NSLP</td>
<td>Ohio Department of Education</td>
<td>“A long time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Foodservice Director, District Wide</td>
<td>SD3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCRIPT
Interview Script

1. What is your function in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)?
2. How long have you worked in the NSLP?
3. How many students do you feed each day?
4. What would a typical daily menu look like from the NSLP?
5. Is the NSLP school lunch popular? Why or why not, in your opinion?
6. Do you believe more or less students are eating from the NSLP than when you began working in this system?
7. In your own terms, how does the National School Lunch Program function in your school on a daily basis?
8. Who is responsible for making sure this food system runs as the United States Department of Agriculture mandates?
9. What feedback from the students do you personally receive? Would you share a feedback story?
10. Do you see the school lunch program in your district as being equal? Do students in every school get the same quality of food?
11. What are the top three components of this system that need to be changed? Why?
12. If you had unlimited resources and time, how would you envision the National School Lunch Program?
13. What can parents do to make this program better?

14. What can students do to improve this program?
APPENDIX C

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE
Consent Letter

I consent to participating in research entitled: An exploratory study describing the National School Lunch Program as it functions on a daily basis and suggestions for its improvement.

Antoinette Miranda, Ph.D., the principal investigator from the Ohio State University, or her authorized representative, Matt Bereza, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date:  
Signed:  
(Participant)

Signed:  
(Principal Investigator or his/her authorized representative)

Signed:  
(Person authorized to consent for participant, if required)

Witness:

__________________________________
APPENDIX D

RECRUITMENT LETTER
Dear Food Service Worker,

My name is Matt Bereza. I am currently working on my Ph.D. at The Ohio State University in the School Psychology program. As a future psychologist, I am interested in conducting a study on how the National School Lunch Program functions on a day-to-day basis in your school district and what suggestions you have for improving this program. The relationship between good nutrition and high academic achievement has been thoroughly investigated. I would like to know how the school lunch program is functioning and how we can make it better.

I would like your participation in my study. I would like to set up a ½ hour appointment to interview you. This interview is at the time and place of your choice and will be audio-taped for transcription. Following the interview I would like to shadow you for another ½ hour. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can cease participation at any time. All responses will be confidential and viewed only by the principal investigator, Antoinette Miranda, Ph.D., and myself.

If you would like to participate, please contact me at your convenience to set an appointment at (614) 299-9652.

If you are not interested, thank you for taking the time to read the letter.

Additionally, if you have any further questions or are interested in the results of the study, please feel free to contact me at matt.bereza@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Matt Bereza, M.Ed.
Co-Investigator
The Ohio State University

Antoinette Miranda, PhD
Principal Investigator
The Ohio State University
APPENDIX E

FINDINGS IN CIRCULAR FASHION
Visual Graphic of Findings in Circular Fashion

Numbers within circles indicate frequency of response across the interviews.