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COMMUNITY: A COLLABORATIVE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT IN AN ARTS IMPACT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

DISSERTATION

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

By Allen W. Trent, M.S.

The Ohio State University 2000

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Professor Gail McCutcheon, Adviser
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This qualitative research project is a collaborative action research case study of an arts IMPACT (Interdisciplinary Model Program in the Arts for Children and Teachers) elementary school. Data was gathered over a two school-year period (1997-1999). As practitioner-researcher, I participated in and wrote the account and interpretations. However, the perspectives of many other teachers are also included.

The focus is on community. The research addresses teachers' local definitions of community, the role of the arts in this community, collaborative efforts to evolve and improve the community for teaching and learning, and factors that enable and constrain the building of community in a school. Additionally, I assert that, in varying degrees, this research can be useful to other educators, and the potential for transferability exists on a number of levels. The understandings, assertions, and interpretations concluding this study are centered on three topical areas: (a) collaborative school improvement, (b) community as an explicit focus, and (c) consensus.
Dedicated to my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my adviser, Gail McCutcheon, for the support, critique, and encouragement she’s provided me over the years.

I also wish to thank my other committee members for their assistance. Patricia Stuhr for allowing me to explore the power and place of the arts in education, and Antoinette Errante for stepping in when Ken Howey returned to Wisconsin.

I am forever grateful to the staff and students at Duxberry Park Arts IMPACT Elementary School. They will always be a part of me, and I hope, I a part of them.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Universally, the participants and constituents of public education agree that schools should be good places for students to learn and teachers to teach. This consensus fragments in discussions on the constitution of a “good” school and the means by which practitioners and other stakeholders seek to attain it. I view “good schools” and “good classrooms” as communities. In this dissertation, as a practitioner-researcher, I explicate my conceptual construction of community and explore the social construction of community in an arts-integrated elementary school, Duxbury Park Arts IMPACT (Interdisciplinary Model Program in the Arts for Children and Teachers) Alternative Elementary School.

Many practitioner researchers value ‘talking through’ the [research] question with colleagues and other practitioner researchers (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994, p. 114).” During the first year of this study, I had the opportunity to do this with a group of my colleagues engaged in an independent study group. Our discussions, deliberations, and interactions have shaped not only this qualitative research project, but also my personally held theories about teaching and living in a school community. The central research questions were:

1) How can a group of practitioners construct an intersubjective definition of
community?

2) How does community develop in a school? What factors enable the development of community? What factors constrain it?

3) In what ways do the arts affect this community?

4) In what ways can a group of practitioners collaborate to strengthen school community as a part of ongoing school improvement initiatives?

This dissertation explores these questions and the theoretical developments that have occurred as a result of their exploration. I review a variety of perspectives and definitions of community and other relevant literature including the topics: classroom management; curriculum; deliberation; and arts education, and situate this literature within a paradigmatic context (Chapter 2). I outline the chosen research methods and methodology and their appropriateness for this type of inquiry in chapter 3, and using this research framework, I provide a case study account of my school (Chapter 4). I end the dissertation with a chapter (5) that delineates and interprets resultant themes and theoretical development.

In this introductory chapter: I begin the exploration of community and note some assertions about community building in schools. Next, I describe the research site, the arts integration model and philosophy as employed at the site, the school staff, the school environment, the student population, and my role at the site. Following these descriptions, I introduce the research methodology. I end the chapter by establishing the purposes, significance, and intended audiences of this research.
Constructing Community

"Community" is a construct. "Constructs such as creativity, authoritarianism, democracy, [community] and the like have acquired such diverse meanings that agreement on operational definitions of such concepts would be difficult, if not impossible (Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh, 1996, p. 108)." Operationally defining these constructs so that they may be quantified, studied, analyzed statistically, and generalized may be an impossibility. These concepts are fluid. They can't be defined specifically as variables that can be subsequently measured. However, this should in no way preclude their study. The assertions made in this research do embody degrees of transferability. These assertions about developing schools and classrooms as inviting places for learning and teaching are relevant to many practitioners, and therefore, even as fluid social constructions, warrant attention. A construct, a high-level, socially produced abstraction, is exactly what I, interacting as a practitioner researcher, have studied (In this case, the construct "community."). The study of such a construct, as I discuss in the methodology section of this dissertation (chapter 3), is best undertaken qualitatively.

Defining Community

Throughout the case study, I provide an account of the social construction of an intersubjectively derived definition of community. This definition (How a group of practitioners, define "community" in a specific context) is evolutionary and open-ended. Communities exist on many levels (classroom, school, local, arts, gay, medical, etc.) and in countless configurations. People in communities participate and evolve their own context specific definitions. They value themselves by valuing their relationships to others in the
community. As a teacher, these are relationships with my students, their parents, my
colleagues, and others supporting our students’ learning.

In chapter 2, I review a variety of perspectives and definitions of community. My
conception of “community” incorporates Kohn’s. Kohn (1996, p. 101) defines
“community”:

In saying that a classroom or a school is a “community,” then, I mean that
it is a place in which students feel cared about and are encouraged to care about
each other. They experience a sense of being valued and respected; the children
matter to one another and to the teacher. They have come to think in the plural:
they feel connected to each other; they are part of an “us.” And, as a result of all
this, they feel safe in their classes, not only physically but emotionally.

Kohn’s definition is primarily student centered. From my practitioner-researcher
perspective, I expand this notion to include a special kind of connectedness that exists
between teachers. Broadly, community includes continual efforts to make a school a great
place for teaching and learning. In this dissertation, I assert that for community to develop,
teachers and other school staff must:

1) value their roles and relationships in the community,

2) actively work to evolve and support the context specific construction of
   community, and

3) trust that others are equally committed to the community and its evolutionary
   improvement.

Circumstances and proximity bring individuals together in schools, but caring
people acting on shared visions deliberate to transform these schools into the "communities" to which I refer.

These assertions about community development are conclusions that I have drawn throughout the conduct of the research. They are not generalizations, but instead are interpretive summaries and claims (Stake, 1995). These and other assertions in this dissertation are results of data analysis. In the case study and interpretations presented in this dissertation, I provide support for these and other assertions about community and its development in the studied context. Knowing that my interpretations are among many, I also represent the voices, perspectives, interpretations, and assertions of other stakeholders. In the next section of this chapter, I outline some additional assertions.

Inserting Assertions

As a practitioner-researcher, I have shaped, described, discussed and analyzed a variety of events and interactions pertaining to community development. Having done so, I make these assertions about community:

1) Teachers in this sort of community believe in collaboration and group deliberation. In other words they choose working together over proceeding alone. In doing so, group members affirm their commitments to support the community. This support comes through a shaping of shared missions and an emphasis on the process of continued growth.

2) Communities are bounded, but these boundaries are permeable. Logically, a classroom community’s boundary is its central membership, the teacher and group of students. Likewise, the staff and students comprise the central membership of the school
community, but extensions beyond these boundaries have proven to be important.

Relationships developed outside these logical boundaries of membership have expanded membership and changed the relationships among the central members. Erasing portions of the boundary between the school community and the individual classroom communities has strengthened Duxberry’s community orientation. These erasures should continue. Every attempt should be made to continually widen the scope of community membership.

3) Communities are dynamic, always changing. Social interactions prompt these changes. Community development involves a complex web of interactions that differ from one context to another. Communities are context specific. An action taken in one situation might yield different results in another. Understanding these facets of community necessitates an ongoing process of reflection, strategizing, and implementation.

4) Conflict in any community is a productive inevitability. Communities are not devoid of problems, tensions, or occasional crises. The community is unique in that it recognizes the synergistic power of deliberative resolution. Seeking consensus is chosen over proceeding alone. A group engaged in deliberation must collectively identify questions in need of response, weigh alternatives, establish grounds for deciding on answers, and choose among the options (McCutcheon, 1997). This research provides accounts of these deliberations.

5) Sharing leadership and responsibilities within a community demonstrates an appreciation of democratic processes and places value on individuals and their potential contributions. Communities are strongest when members feel that their individual voices are being heard and that their opinions are valued.
6) Consensus agreement on philosophy and theories provides a base from which community can develop. Most school populations are brought together arbitrarily. Students, teachers, and other staff members are typically assigned to a school by administrators and policies of the district. However, this is not true of the studied context. All teachers, the principal, and many of the students are at Duxberry because of a belief in arts-integrated education. This commonality provides an underlying cohesion. This is particularly relevant when there is disagreement in the community. Consensus can be sought on contentious issues from an existing, intersubjective theoretical foundation. For the Duxberry community, the arts are this theoretical foundation, but the assertion is that philosophical and theoretical agreement among any community’s stakeholders is essential.

7) Community is best addressed as part of the overt curriculum. "The overt curriculum constitutes what school people intend that students learn and what teachers say they intend to teach (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 188)." Learnings about community, or lack of, in a school are often embedded in the hidden curriculum. "The hidden curriculum is what students have an opportunity to learn through everyday goings-on under the auspices of school, although teachers and other school people do not intend those learnings (McCutcheon, 1997, p. 188)."

The investigated context values community to the extent that it is made overt and explicitly pursued as an aim of the educative process. If teachers value community as an ongoing goal, then this should be made known to all stakeholders. Explicitly stating community development as an aim conveys the message that this is important to us and will be pursued. Items that lurk beneath the surface (as a part of the hidden curriculum)
may or may not be perceived as significant. Making the aim of community development (and the justification for doing so) overt leaves no doubt about the philosophy behind the decisions and organizing principles of a school or an individual classroom.

The assertions outlined above are further supported by descriptive data included in the case study and its interpretation. The next sections of this chapter describe the research site, the staff, the school environment, the arts integration process, the student population, and my role as practitioner-researcher.

Research Site

The research site is an Arts IMPACT elementary school. The Arts IMPACT philosophy supports a collaborative, integrated approach to curriculum development and implementation. The arts and traditional academic subjects are viewed as co-equals and mutually supportive.

The school, Duxberry Park Arts IMPACT (Interdisciplinary Model Program in the Arts for Children and Teachers) Alternative Elementary School, is an urban public school in Columbus, Ohio. The student population is approximately 380. Duxberry has integrated the arts (dance, drama, music, and visual art) and “traditional” academic subject material for more than 17 years. The school has won many state and national awards and receives hundreds of interested visitors per year.

The Interdisciplinary Model Program in the Arts for Children and Teachers (IMPACT) was founded by the United States Office of Education in 1970. The intent was to develop a program in which the arts (dance, drama, music, and visual art) were prominent areas of learning infused into all aspects of the school curriculum. Federal
funding of the program began in the 1972-73 school year and ended at the conclusion of the 1973-74 school year. Most programs were discontinued after federal funding ceased, but Columbus Public Schools (CPS) continued Arts IMPACT through the 1976-77 school year. The Columbus program expanded during that time from two schools and one arts team, to twelve schools and six arts teams. Budget restraints closed down the Arts IMPACT program completely in 1977.

The IMPACT program was reborn at Duxberry in 1982. A principal of one of the former IMPACT schools recognized and appreciated the educative value of this approach. He asked and was granted permission to develop a new IMPACT school in Columbus. An important factor in this school’s continued survival is that the teachers were (in 1982), and continue to be, chosen because of their expressed belief in the power of the arts as an essential component of education. Currently, the district funds the substitute teachers that cover classes while the teachers collaboratively plan and deliberate about curriculum (This planning process is further discussed later in this chapter). Funding for visiting artists, performances, or special programming is provided through PTO raised monies or teacher initiated grants.

Staff

The Duxberry staff believes that a collaborative effort to include and integrate the arts into and across the curriculum will appreciably enhance the quality of education for all children. This commonality is the thread that binds together the diverse, idiosyncratic fabric of practitioners. The arts team consists of four full-time arts specialists, one each in the areas of dance, drama, music, and visual art. Arts specialists, classroom teachers, and
the principal have been interviewed and selected by a panel of teachers. Interview committee members seek educators who believe in and are willing to expand upon the power of the arts to positively affect the process of education.

The faculty’s commitment to the arts extends beyond the school. Teachers sing in choirs, play in bands and orchestras, participate in dance organizations, produce visual art, and go to plays and art shows. The arts permeate the personal lives of the members of this community.

Environment

The appearance of the school is unique. Outside, a large brushed aluminum “Arts IMPACT” sign and a rock garden peace sign welcome visitors to an otherwise typical looking red brick school. Inside, art installations adorn the building. A mobile constructed entirely of recycled materials hangs just inside the front door. Ceiling tiles have been painted throughout the hallways. Ten-foot tall abstract paintings and assemblages grace the stairwells. A brightly colored bench teems with rain forest images. All students and teachers have participated in these projects. These collaborations illustrate a community minded philosophy and commitment to the arts. These installations are parts of a carefully planned and orchestrated program.

Planning for Arts-Integration

Coordinating an arts-integrated approach to curriculum development requires us to plan and deliberate at regular intervals. To begin the cyclical planning process, classroom teachers, as grade level teams, meet to discuss plans for the coming five weeks. During this grade level planning time, the arts team takes all the students in the grade level for
large group arts experiences (called town meetings). The classroom teachers complete a planning sheet that includes themes for study, content objectives, a thematic web, and potential arts connections. This planning sheet is forwarded to the arts team for their study and reflection. Next, the arts team meets to study and discuss the planning sheets for each grade level. Then, the arts team, principal, and classroom teachers meet by grade level to clarify, deliberate, and brainstorm connections and lesson ideas. Three substitute teachers are hired to rotate and cover classes during these planning sessions.

During planning, the group devises plans for the arts classes and ways in which the arts can permeate the regular classrooms. The arts lessons are developed with three emphases in mind: (a) each art taught for its own sake as a discrete discipline; (b) each art as it relates to the other arts; and (c) each art as it relates to the classroom curriculum.

After these planning sessions, the arts team creates a “flexible” five-week schedule. The schedule includes scheduled arts classes, visiting artist performances, field trips, and schedules of artists in residence. Usually, there are at least two extensive residencies per year, combined with a variety of shorter artist visits. Money raised by the school’s PTO finances these residencies. Recent residencies have included Opera Columbus, a marionette artist, a poet, a children’s book author (Debra Nourse Lattimore), two sculpture residencies, and a dance residency (Zivili).

Participation

At Duxberry, the arts are for everyone. Dance, drama, music, and visual art are not “pull-out” programs for a select few. Everyone participates in these classes. The arts specialists lead and facilitate, while the regular classroom teachers act as model learners.
and co-teachers. This allows students and teachers to view each other in different contexts. It enables teachers to further develop their knowledge of arts-related concepts. These understandings can then be reflected back in the regular classrooms. Students have multiple opportunities to explore topics from a variety of perspectives.

Participation is not limited to students and teachers. Parents play a vital role. The Duxberry population is selected by lottery. Parents enter their children into the lottery to attend Duxberry. Parents at Duxberry support the program by raising funds to pay for visiting artists, assisting in arts and regular classrooms, and providing technical and artistic support for the program (Trent et al., 1998).

Population

The student population of approximately 380 students at Duxberry is selected through a lottery. Parents apply for their students to attend the school. This investigation started as the district was returning to a “neighborhood school” policy. Prior to the district’s return to “neighborhood schools,” the school’s population was approximately 50% African-American students and 50% non-African-American. The students came from many different locations in Columbus. Socio-economically, at that time, approximately 30% of the student population qualified for free or reduced price lunch (a socio-economic indicator). At the conclusion of the study, the population was approximately 65% African American children. The percentage of free and reduced price lunch was over 60%. Many more students came from the school’s surrounding neighborhoods.

Practitioner-Researcher

I have been teaching for almost a decade. All of these have been at “arts-focused”
elementary schools. I have taught first, fourth, and sixth grades. Prior to obtaining my certification and becoming a teacher, I worked as an advertising representative and a caterer. I viewed these positions as jobs. I view teaching as a career.

I have been a first grade teacher at Duxberry for more than 7 years. As a visual artist and advocate of arts education, this is a good place for me to be. My philosophy and theories dovetail with the school's. I am involved in the school community and actively work to support it. Adopting the role of practitioner-researcher throughout this research project, I have grown professionally as a result of the ongoing reflection and collaborative activity.

The preceding sections have described the research site, staff, environment, arts-integration procedures, population of the researched school, and I've briefly introduced myself as practitioner-researcher. The next section of this chapter briefly introduces the research methodology and data treatment procedures. The methodology, research methods, and data treatment are further discussed in chapter 3. Following this introduction, I discuss the purposes and significance of this research and its potential audiences.

**Methodology**

This dissertation provides a narrative case study account. It is a "multivocal text." In addition to my personal descriptions and interpretations of school events, I also include the perspectives of colleagues and other community stakeholders. The case represents multiple realities and has a variety of potential meanings. The study spanned a two school year period. The case study is an account of my school, Duxberry Park Arts IMPACT
Elementary School. The case is qualitative research. Specifically, I employ, in varying degrees, a combination of case study and action research methodologies.

**Qualitative Research/Case Study/Action Research**

Qualitative research relies on narrative data and detailed descriptions. The aim is increased understanding of the case and the actors within. Themes are identified and supported in the narratives. Knowledge is constructed. In varying degrees, the qualitative researcher takes an active role in the setting. This was certainly the case in this dissertation project, as I situated myself as a practitioner-researcher.

The account in this dissertation is, in part, a case study. The focus is on understanding intrinsic issues, but simultaneously recognizes the instrumental usefulness of this data to other audiences. In my role of practitioner-researcher, I focused the case on specifics and contextuality. Scientific generalizations were not sought. Instead the aims were description, interpretation, understanding, and improved practice. Qualitative case study methods (coupled with action research) met the methodological needs of this project. Science based on regularity and universal determinism did not.

In this project, case study is combined with action research, “Systematic inquiry that is collective, collaborative, self-reflective, critical, and undertaken by the participants of the inquiry. The goals of such research are the understanding of practice and the articulation of a rationale or philosophy of practice in order to improve practice” (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990, p. 148). This point is significant and influenced the selection of methodological principles. In addition to the case study researcher’s desire to understand a situation, the action researcher seeks to affect change within that setting.

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These changes are justified by the researcher's perceived understandings derived through systematic reflection. This type of research is subjective. I elaborate on this in the methodology chapter (3) of this dissertation, but importantly, through revealing and exploring the researcher's inherent biases, this subjectivity is viewed as a natural part of this type of inquiry.

Typically, a qualitative researcher might choose case study, or action research. As noted, I will employ both. The tenets of case study are applicable to this study in many instances. So too, are the tenets of action research. A combination of these methods provided me both framework and flexibility as necessary methodological components.

Data Treatment

Data has been collected for the case from multiple sources including individual and group interviews, video and audiotape transcription, students' writings, and my personal professional journal. Data analysis and interpretation, what Stake (1995) calls the "making sense" part of the inquiry, has also drawn on these multiple sources through the use of member checks and focus groups. Chapter 3 of this dissertation provides a more thorough discussion of data treatment. The concluding sections of this chapter focus on the purposes and significance of this research and its intended audiences.

Purpose/Significance/Potential Audiences

Purpose

At the beginning of this inquiry, problems at Duxberry were surfacing that had not previously been school-wide concerns. For example, suspension numbers were up, as were
referrals to PEAK (the in school suspension or time out room). Teachers were expressing higher levels of frustration, and there had been more disruptive/destructive behavior than in the past (e.g., more fights, items vandalized in the halls, and students (and teachers) being less than respectful of one another. As a classroom teacher, I was unhappy with the community (or lack of) in my classroom, and felt the deterioration of the school community. This feeling was widely shared.

As a staff, we began to address these problems. As a classroom teacher, I did the same. We realized that understanding how to collaboratively develop and support community in our school and in our classrooms was essential for our continued growth and success. This dissertation chronicles these attempts.

This research addresses concerns that are relevant to thousands of educators and other stakeholders of education. Urban areas continue to grow and “discipline” related issues continue to be a priority. “The concern about discipline is not declining but is growing year by year. Numerous studies list discipline as a major problem with which teachers must contend (Charles, 1996, p. 3).” As urban educators, sharing ideas, theories, and experiences should be a priority. I talked recently with a former principal of mine. “How was your school year?” I asked. “Oh, Allen, discipline in the schools is a big problem. It’s affecting everything we’re trying to do. This was a tough year,” she said.

Research about the social interactions and orientations of school children and teachers has been relatively minimal (e.g., Solomon et. al., 1985, 1988, 1990/Battistich, V., Solomon, D., & delucchi, K., 1993). “The bulk of the recent encyclopedic compendium of research on teaching is focused on academic/intellectual outcomes, with
almost no attention being paid to social/behavioral outcomes" (Solomon et. al., 1988). It seems that educational researchers have neglected issues of social development at both the classroom and school-wide levels.

This accurately reflects an imbalance in our knowledge of the effects of schooling: we know much about the teacher and classroom antecedents of academic achievement, at least as assessed by standardized achievement tests, but little about the parallel antecedents of social development. (Solomon et. al., 1988)

Recently, scholars have started to notice the impropriety of this inequity, “It is important that school success be defined in terms of students’ affective and social developments as well as of their subject-matter knowledge (Good, 1996, p. 655).”

The research that has been conducted in this area has tended to collect primarily quantitative, classroom-based data for the purpose of proving that a program (in the case of Solomon et. al., a professional development effort aimed at teachers to promote prosocial orientations in their students) indeed achieves its desired result. The focus is on cumulative occurrences. Instead, this study examines the nature of teacher collaboration in a school improvement context, what it looks like, and what the implications of the observed phenomena might be. Attending to the social aspects of education and school reform is an integral part of building community. The teachers in the studied context recognize and capitalize on this belief.

Good argues that student social development should be a priority of education (1996). Berliner has argued for the importance of social and interpersonal development for the purpose of better preparing students for the workforce. “The primary reason workers
are fired is because of poor interpersonal skills and the failure to take personal responsibility” (Berliner 1992, and cited in Good, 1996, p. 654).

Recently, advocates of arts education have been using this argument for the curricular inclusion of the arts. Many of these arguments highlight the social development opportunities inherent in arts oriented activity (e.g., Packer, 1994/Hanna, 1994).

As do advocates of social development research, arts education researchers argue for the importance of more supportive research. “Higher education should invest in research directly related to practice. ... Research in arts education has not been marked by sufficient rigor or duration to yield scientifically compelling data” (Fowler & McMullen, 1993, p. 22).

Additionally, it is my belief that the extant research lacks a depth of description that is necessary for practitioners (an intended audience of this study) to ascertain and benefit from any degree of transferability. For example, Stake, Bresler, and Mabry (1991) have published a book of case studies in the arts, but these cases suffer from two serious problems. First, the case studies are done by “outsiders” (educational researchers there to collect data quickly and then leave) who are not familiar with the intricate workings and contexts of the situations which they are studying. And, secondly, the duration of these studies seems far too short to get an adequate representation (less than two weeks in some cases). Stake, Bresler, and Mabry do identify what they perceive as problems of arts education, but potential solutions to these problems are nowhere to be found.

Calls for the “practitioner as researcher” are on the rise. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1991, p. 41) contend that, “what is missing from the knowledge base of teaching,
therefore, are the voices of the teachers themselves, the questions teachers ask, the ways
teachers use writing and intentional talk in their work lives, and the interpretive frames
teachers use to understand and improve their own classroom practices." Dewey (cited in
Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994) recognized this earlier this century, "It seems to me that
the contributions that might come from classroom teachers are a comparatively neglected
field; or, to change the metaphor, an almost unworked mine."

Carroll asserts that education dollars should be invested in model programs and
research in the arts. The proposed research site has functioned successfully as an arts-
integrated IMPACT alternative school for more than 17 years.

Schools that model an arts based curriculum appear to offer the best opportunity
to study the impact of sustained and substantial programming in the arts. Higher
education can help develop appropriate assessment strategies and evaluation
studies that could identify how and why the arts contribute to excellent education.
(Carroll, 1993, p. 21)

This dissertation takes a step toward addressing some of the concerns noted
above. It is a longer-term, descriptive study that recognizes the importance of teachers’
thoretical development. The research has been conducted in a school that has evolved an
arts integrated model for more than 17 years. This has been and continues to be an ideal
location for the study of community. I assert that developing a community is a necessary
component of the "excellent education" of students. This study observes and documents
"how and why" community develops and explores the role of the arts in this context.
Significance

In appraising research efforts, a researcher must answer the question: Was it worth doing? This project focused on a school staff’s efforts to develop community. Additionally an aim was to examine the inextricable role of the arts in this context.

The study had dual intentions. First, the attempt has been to simultaneously build and define community in an elementary school setting, and to document this process. In doing so, many teacher-generated theories and strategies have been shared and developed. Positive, school-wide change has occurred over the two-year study period including:

1) Reduced suspension, in school suspension, and PEAK room referrals. 2) The development of a new process for staff collaboration, problem solving, and consensus building. 3) A higher degree of teacher satisfaction. 4) A student body that understands and values community, and 5) An increased level of collaboration between teachers.

The strengthening of the school community reciprocally supports the individual classroom communities. Personally, I have benefited through improved practice, new understandings, increased collaboration and interaction with colleagues and students, and refined practical theories. My classroom is a better place for learning and teaching as a result.

The second aim of this research was to simultaneously shape an account, embedded within a specific context, which may be useful to others in other contexts. This study rests on a view of transferability where the reader generalizes from the study to her or his setting; it does not rest on the assumption that the researcher generalizes to other settings. “Qualitative research does not seek to generalize one study to all other similar
studies; instead it seeks to explain behavior in one setting, which, if it reminds the reader of his or her own setting, has been successful” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen 1994, p. 110).

The literature I review in chapter 2 was used to interpret and analyze the case study account, however, these reviewed writings are often presented from an outside observer, theorist, or ethnographer’s perspective and usually provide only cursory anecdotes of actual classroom and school interactions (e.g. Stake, Bresler, and Mabry, 1991). I assert that this is why practitioners are generally uninterested in educational research. They dismiss it as irrelevant, impractical, or boring (Mims & Lankford, 1995). Research conducted by other practitioners, however, can overcome these obstacles.

“There is no way an outsider, even an ethnographer who spends years as an observer, can acquire the tacit knowledge of a setting that those who must act within it daily possess” (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen 1994, p. 4). As a practitioner-researcher engaged in a longer-term qualitative inquiry, I have attempted to explicate this tacit knowledge from an insider’s perspective. Teachers need to see relevance in the activities in which they engage. Teachers necessarily operate in a complex, social, fast-paced, over-scheduled environment. Professional development (from formal “inservice” presentations to informal readings, teacher discussions, or action-oriented reflection) must offer the consumers (teachers) a reason to be engaged. The next section of this chapter addresses potential audiences for this research and how they play a role in determining the significance of the research.

**Audiences for Research**

The readers of research determine its usefulness. These readers determine the
degree to which they might transfer learnings into their individual, idiosyncratic contexts. Munby argues that the teacher is the most prominent of potential audiences for research. “Usefulness cannot be fully considered without giving some thought to the views of the user about transporting research results (theories and findings) from published papers to the classroom setting” (Munby, 1983, p. 423).

**Teacher theorists.**

In considering the second aim of this project, Dissemination of the case study account, I had to consider the intended audiences. Teachers are primary among these groups. I view teachers as theorists. In a sense, teachers are deliberating and researching all the time. Teachers are assessing problematic situations on a many times per-day basis. They are collecting data, forming hypotheses or potential theories, testing these initial formulations through active curriculum development and implementation, and are then revising, using, and sharing the results. These theories guide teachers’ thinking, curriculum planning and implementation, and assessment, and are subject to continual revision. As a teacher participating in this process, it is helpful for me to share this process with colleagues and to read about others similarly engaged. This research provides accounts of teachers’ theoretical formulations. These accounts are offered to other teacher theorists that might face similar circumstances or situations.

**Other potential audiences.**

As additional potential audiences for this research, I identify prospective teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and other educational researchers. In an attempt to be relevant to these potential readers I have tried to focus on educational practice as it relates
to theory (practical and published) and have attempted to communicate this shared data in accessible, relevant ways. The literature reviewed in the next chapter of this dissertation is an eclectic collection. As the study of community is diverse and complex, so too is the body of literature written about it. The reviewed literature has been used in the data discussion, analysis, and interpretation of this dissertation.
CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

The last chapter of this dissertation stated the research questions, overviewed the case study and the research methods, and briefly outlined the reviewed literature. This chapter reviews this literature in greater detail. I provide context for the case study by reviewing literature that deals specifically with schools and classrooms, and also review a body of literature that contextualizes the research within a broader philosophical arena.

This dissertation focuses on community, so this concept is treated first. As community is connected to moral development and Kohlberg’s “just community,” this literature and other related items are also reviewed. As I discussed the project and collected data with colleagues, they connected community with theories about discipline and classroom management. I realized this area needed to be included as well. A variety of perspectives on discipline and classroom management exist. I present exemplars of a range of these perspectives.

At the beginning of this research, I recognized that curriculum and community were related. Having conducted the research, I now have a better understanding of this connection and feel strongly that the two are inextricably intertwined. I explore and provide a basis for this connection in this chapter and later provide descriptive data in the case study and interpretations to support it. I also address the deliberative nature of curriculum and related theoretical development and review information related to teacher
collaboration.

The research site employs an arts integrated curriculum model. This philosophy and accompanying methods of curriculum development impact the school and classroom communities. Arts education theories and their relationship to this research are outlined.

The study was conducted at a time when “postmodernism” was being discussed and written about in many areas of academia, e.g., the arts, philosophy, and education. This research was conducted in a postmodern context, recognizing postmodern ideas and theories. Understanding this philosophical context is crucial to the case study and its interpretation. Therefore, postmodernism is explained, contrasted with modernity, and related to the arts to provide a philosophical base from which I operated as a practitioner-researcher. The next section of this chapter begins with a review of an eclectic variety of perspectives on community.

**Perspectives on Community**

The theme of this dissertation, community, is an abstract social construction and depends upon context for its meaning. “Words have dictionary definitions, of course, but the precise meaning of any word is dependent on the context” (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 274). Community can be described on many levels, the “classroom community,” the “school community,” the “learning community,” the “local community,” etc., but “community” is not only determined by proximity. For example, the gay, legal, medical, and educational communities claim “members” worldwide. In other cases, people have been neighbors for years, yet don’t know each other’s names. Much has been written recently on “community” development in schools and in classrooms (e.g., Dalton & Watson, 1997;
Kohn, 1996; Martel, 1993). To explore community in a school environment required me to study and consider a variety of perspectives. This exploration (in addition to community) included the topics of: “classroom management,” “discipline,” “prosocial behavior,” “curriculum,” and “deliberation.” These topics will be addressed within this literature review section.

Definitions of Community

A stated aim of this research is to depict multiple realities, interpretations, and meanings. A fluid construction like the abstraction “community,” necessitates individual constructions of meaning, and therefore serves as a nice starting point for this inquiry. In my recent readings, I have encountered a variety of perspectives on “community.” I present the following characterizations, because they have shaped my conceptual understanding:

Kohn (1996, p. 101, also noted in chapter 1) provides a definition of community:

In saying that a classroom or a school is a “community,” ... I mean that it is a place in which students feel cared about and are encouraged to care about each other. They experience a sense of being valued and respected; the children matter to one another and to the teacher. They have come to think in the plural: they feel connected to each other; they are part of an “us.” And, as a result of all this, they feel safe in their classes, not only physically but emotionally.

London (1994, p. 4) writes that:

The community is the place where friends are made and enemies are grappled with. It is here that dreams and fantasies are generated and tested, where the triumphs
and the tearful losses of life are encountered. The community is the web of life that inextricably embraces, defines, and empowers children and adults alike... The community is the arena for the creative expression of personal encounters with one’s environment, one’s web of life.

He continues (p. 46):

A community is the sum of the rewarding interactions among people sharing common attributes. Interactions based on shared values make people care about the fate of their neighbors and make giving time, sharing personal resources, and performing acts of kindness obvious and appropriate things to do. The integrity of a community, meaning the degree of expressed care that all its members have for all the others, makes living in that community safe, warm, and congenial.

Marche writes about the many meanings attributed to the term community:

As a broad concept and simple term, community has found its way into public discourse. We hear that it takes an entire village, or community, to raise a child. Ecologists study biological communities, and even in law enforcement, the emphasis is on community policing. In education, discussion centers on school and classroom communities, and in art education the topic is community-based art education. However, careful attention reveals that participants’ conversations are employing the term in a variety of ways. Community may refer to a collection of individuals, including students, teachers, administrators, and support staff, who work within school settings, directly participating in the educational process. Or it
may refer to the local environment that exists outside the classroom walls. Within
these two broad categories of internal and external communities, there are a
number of educational approaches... (1998, p.7)
Greene (1995) conceives community as inclusiveness, as a means of including the
marginalized and powerless:

Democracy, we realize, means a community that is always in the making.
Marked by an emerging solidarity, a sharing of certain beliefs, and a dialogue about
others, it must remain open to newcomers, those too long thrust aside. This can
happen even in the logical spaces of classrooms, particularly when students are
couraged to find their voices and their images. ...

In thinking of community, we need to emphasize the process words:
making, creating, weaving, saying, and the like. Community cannot be produced
simply through rational formulation nor through edict. Like freedom, it has to be
achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize
together and appreciate in common; they have to find ways to make intersubjective
sense.

**Historical Perspective**

Earlier this century, Dewey wrote of community and its connection with
democracy:

Dewey found that democracy is an ideal in the sense that it is always
reaching towards some end that can never finally be achieved. Like community
itself, it has to be always in the making. For Dewey, community involves
collaborative activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by the individuals who participate. The good is realized in such a way and shared by so many that people desire to maintain it. When this happens, there is community. And the clear consciousness of a communal life constitutes the idea of democracy.


Dewey also wrote of community that:

It is not the will or desire of any one person which establishes order but the moving spirit of the whole group. The control is social, but individuals are parts of a community, not outside of it. ...[The teacher’s authority] is not a manifestation of merely personal will; ...[the teacher] exercises it as the representative and agent of the interests of the group as a whole. (cited in Scarlett, 1998, p. 83)

Kohlberg, Moral Development, and a Just Community

To do this study without mentioning the work on “just community” by Lawrence Kohlberg would be a serious omission. Kohlberg, “spent his career applying Piagetian notions of cognitive development to the moral realm (Kohn, 1996, p. 67).” Kohlberg contended that moral reasoning developed over time through a series of six stages. Moral development, wrote Kohlberg:

does not simply represent an increasing knowledge of cultural values usually leading to ethical relativity, Rather, it represents the transformations that occur in a person’s form or structure of thought. The content of values varies from culture to culture; hence the study of cultural values cannot tell us how a person interacts with his social environment, or how a person goes about solving problems related
to his/her social world. This requires the analysis of developing structures of moral judgment, which are found to be universal in a developmental sequence across cultures. (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 54)

Kohlberg’s six “stages,” grouped under three “levels,” are summarized as follows:

I. Preconventional Level - the child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right or wrong, but interprets these labels either in terms of the physical or the hedonistic consequences of action (punishment, reward, exchange of favors) or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and labels.

Stage 1: The punishment-and-obedience orientation. The physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness, regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences. ...

Stage 2: The instrumental-relativist orientation. Right action consists of that which instrumentally satisfies one’s own needs and occasionally the needs of others. ...Elements of fairness, of reciprocity, and of equal sharing are present, but they are always interpreted in a physical, pragmatic way. ...

II. Conventional Level - maintaining the expectations of the individual’s family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. ...

Stage 3: The interpersonal concordance or “good boy - nice girl” orientation. Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them. ...
Stage 4: The “law and order” orientation. There is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of social order. Right behavior consists of doing one’s duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

III. Postconventional, Autonomous, or Principled Level - There is a clear effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles and apart from the individual’s own identification with these groups.

Stage 5: The social-contract, legalistic orientation. Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and standards which have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society. There is a clear awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions and a corresponding emphasis upon procedural rules for reaching consensus. ...The result is an emphasis on the “legal point of view,” but with an emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational considerations of social utility (rather than freezing it in terms of stage 4 “law and order”).

Stage 6: The universal-ethical-principle orientation. Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect
Kohlberg and Hersh (1977, p. 55), after reviewing the stages of moral development, assert that, “the aim of education ought to be the personal development of students toward more complex ways of reasoning,” both intellectual and moral. They write that, “whether we like it or not schooling is a moral enterprise. Values issues abound in the content and process of teaching (p. 53).” It’s best, they say, if we explicate this moral dimension. Otherwise, the moral education curriculum lurks “beneath the surface in schools, hidden as it were from both educators and the public. This ‘hidden curriculum’ with its emphasis on obedience to authority ...implies many underlying moral assumptions and values, which may be quite different from what educators would admit as their conscious system of morality (p.54).”

Kohlberg admits that his theoretical framework is not sufficient for a system of moral education, but that these theories can inform moral education. A system aiming for moral education should attempt to create a “just community.” The central principle of such a system should be justice. “Justice, the primary regard for the value and equality of all human beings and for reciprocity in human relations, is a basic and universal standard. Using justice as the organizing principle for moral education meets the following criteria: It guarantees freedom of belief; it employs a philosophically justifiable concept of morality, and it is based upon the psychological facts of human development (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977, p. 56).”

Lickona is a theorist who has tried to apply Kohlberg’s theories to classroom
settings. He reviews techniques, strategies, and instructional approaches as they are shown in practice to illustrate Kohlberg's theories of moral development and "just community." Kohlberg's work began using discussion of hypothetical moral dilemmas, but those promoting a just community approach in schools rely more on "real-life" scenarios focused on the students' actual interactions at school.

Lickona advocates the use of class meetings as, "essential to moral education in the elementary classroom (1977, p. 100)." He says that these meetings can be used to exchange views, solve problems, talk about projects, and to discuss ideas. Lickona asserts that, "In our work, we have found the daily class meeting to be the best vehicle for bringing democracy to the elementary classroom (1977, p. 101)."

Striving for community in schools and in classrooms involves moral education or a "just community" approach as described by Lickona (1977). Most of the work on community that I've read credits (or at least alludes to) Kohlberg and his conceptual framework. However, while they embody these principles, they fail to refer to their work as "moral education." In other words, the goals are similar, but the label has changed. We can agree as a society on certain moral and democratic principles, "justice, regard for human rights, freedom, respect for others. These are standards that every intelligent individual in the community ought to be expected to heed (Greene, 1995, p. 66)." Building "community" is less controversial than "moral education."

Prosocial Behavior

Though few in number, some studies have been conducted about social development in schools. For more than two decades, Solomon et al. have researched the
strengthening of children's prosocial orientations. "By 'prosocial orientation' we mean an attitude of concern for others, a commitment to the values of fairness and social responsibility, and the ability and inclination to act on these values in everyday life" (Solomon et al., 1990, p. 231).

Solomon et al., in their longitudinal study utilizing large "program" and "comparison" groups observed over an extended period of time, conclude that indeed, teachers can affect and strengthen students' prosocial orientations (1990, p. 255). Their quantitative data has been gathered utilizing an extensive series of structured observations and interviews (1985).

As a part of this study, teacher participants discussed the promotion of engagement in prosocial behavior (as contrasted with anti-social behavior) in a community context. Prosocial behavior is closely related to community. Members of a community, as I define it, hold prosocial behavior as an agreed upon standard.

Classroom Management and Discipline

This topic has garnered the attention of many in education circles, but curiously, it holds a low priority among education professors (Public Agenda survey, completed October 1997, in Columbus Dispatch, 7-6-98, p. 8A). I did not specifically plan to discuss issues of discipline and classroom management in this dissertation project until I began discussing it with colleagues and other teachers. As I proposed my ideas of community in schools and classrooms, people with whom I talked responded with comments specific to discipline related issues. Discipline is a top priority for many teachers and has been for over 30 years now (Charles, 1996). Teachers' theories about classroom management and
discipline directly affect the classroom and school communities.

A variety of approaches to classroom management exist. Many of these are outlined in prescriptive texts or professional development programs aimed at classroom practitioners. A complete review of these programs is not the intent of this dissertation. Charles (1996) has done an extensive review of 10 of these “models,” the Redl and Wattenberg Model, the Neo-Skinnerian Model, the Kounin Model, the Ginott Model, the Dreikurs Model, the Canter Model, the Jones Model, the Glasser Model, the Gordon Model, and the Curwin and Mendler model.

While I’ll not address each of these models, it is important to note that they generally fall on a continuum from the most conservative approaches, like Canter’s Assertive Discipline (1976), to the more liberal approaches advocated by Kohn (1996) and others. Therefore, I will explain and briefly compare these two diverse approaches.

**Canter’s Assertive Discipline.**

For decades, Lee Canter, collaborating at times with his wife, Marlene Canter, has dominated the “discipline” scene with his model program, Assertive Discipline. As inferred in the title, Assertive Discipline, “the central focus of the Canter model is on showing teachers how to take charge responsibly in the classroom and establish a climate in which needs are met, behavior is managed humanely, and learning occurs as intended” (Charles, 1996, p. 106).

Among Canter’s “principal concepts and teachings,” are:

Positive recognition. This phrase refers to the sincere, meaningful attention teachers give students who behave according to expectations.
Consequences. These are penalties teachers invoke when students violate class expectations. Consequences must be something students dislike (staying in after class, being isolated from the group) but must never be physically or psychologically harmful.

Positive repetitions. These involve repeating directions as positive statements to students who are complying with class rules, for example, "Fred remembered to raise his hand. Good job."

Moving in. This technique is used when one or two chronically misbehaving students do not respond to normal consequences. It involves moving directly to the student, making eye contact, restating directions to be followed, and indicating what the next consequence will be for further misbehavior. (Charles, 1996, p. 106)

Assertive discipline, since the introduction of the model in 1976, has been controversial. Gartrell (1987, p. 10) labels the model, "unhealthy for children and other living things." He criticizes the use of rewards and public punishments. "The fear and stigma of public punishment must not be underestimated" (1987, p. 10). Gartrell is concerned that, "assertive discipline tends to turn teachers into people managing technicians (1987, p.11)." He contends that, "Assertive discipline neglects the fact that making curriculum and methods more appropriate for children’s development and learning styles often prevents discipline problems (1987, p.11)."

On the other hand, McCormack (1989, p. 77) argues that, "from a practitioner’s standpoint, Assertive Discipline works." He cites research findings of “improved student
self-perceptions, greater teacher satisfaction, improved student behavior, fewer office
 referrals, reduction of classroom disruptions, improved time-on-task, better student
teacher preparation, and appreciation of the program by students and staff” (1989, p. 79).

Charles, summarizes this debate:

Assertive Discipline was, and still is, criticized for its extensive use of praise and
other rewards, which some authorities believe reduce intrinsic motivation. Debate
continues, too, concerning whether research supports the effectiveness of
Assertive Discipline. Some writers present evidence that it does work (Canter,
1976; McCormack, 1989), while others claim the opposite (Curwin & Mendler,
1989; Render, Padilla, & Krank, 1989; Kohn, 1995). As with anything else, people
have different opinions and interpretations. All in all, however, the widespread
popularity of Assertive Discipline suggests that it provides educators with effective
skills they have been unable to find elsewhere. (Charles, 1996, p. 122)

Kohn’s model.

Kohn would probably reject the term “model.” He offers, “neither a recipe nor a
different technique for getting mindless compliance (1996, p. xv).” Compliance, says
Kohn, is the goal of all classroom management systems. “In short, the prescription is
dictate, control, and threaten (p. 56).” He says he wants to, “offer alternatives to the
conventional goals and methods of discipline rather than another set of techniques for
maintaining order (p. xiv).” He calls this an “alternative vision.” Incidentally, Kohn
equates classroom management and discipline, and uses the terms interchangeably.
Our attention, asserts Kohn, should be focused on what children “require for optimal functioning (1996, p.9).” He says that children (like adults) have three:

universal needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Autonomy refers not to privacy but to self-determination, the experience of oneself as the origin of decisions rather than as the victim of things outside one’s control. Relatedness means a need for connection to others, for belonging, and love and affirmation. Finally, the presence of competence on this list suggests that all of us take pleasure from learning new things, from acquiring skills and putting them to use. (Kohn, 1996, p.10)

Kohn opposes all forms of rewards, consequences (or punishments), and praise. He calls these “bribes and threats.” Punishment and rewards, he asserts, get only temporary compliance. “Punishment generally works only for as long as the punisher is around (Kohn, 1996, p. 25).” He believes that the use of punishments and rewards: makes matters worse, teaches bad lessons, impedes ethical development, and must continually be revisited (1996). Kohn labels rewards as “control through seduction (1996, p.33).”

At least two dozen studies have shown that when people are promised a reward for doing a reasonably challenging task—or for doing it well—they tend to do inferior work compared with people who are given the same task without being promised any reward at all. (Kohn, 1996, p.33)

Kohn’s message is that, “rewards, like punishments, can only manipulate someone’s actions. They do nothing to help a child become a kind or caring person (1996, p.34).” Kohn closes his chapter on these topics proclaiming that, “schools will not become
inviting, productive places for learning until we have dispensed with bribes and threats altogether (p.36).” Kohn (later in his book) declares the concept of rules to be “troubling (p.72).” “Rules turn children into lawyers, scanning for loopholes and caveats, narrowing the discussion to technicalities when a problem occurs (p.72).” Teachers, he says, become “police officers (p.73).”

Kohn urges educators to work to create democratic communities by maximizing opportunities for students to make choices:

There are few educational contrasts so sharp and meaningful as that between students being told what the teacher expects of them, what they are and are not permitted to do, and students coming together to reflect on how they can live and learn together. It is the difference between being prepared to spend a lifetime doing what one is told and being prepared to take an active role in a democratic society.

(Kohn, 1996, 73)

Kohn values process over product and sees disagreements as opportunities for learning (1996). “Conflict is so vital to development that some experienced teachers go out of their way to highlight, or even create, situations where kids must think or feel their way out (in Kohn, 1996, p.74).”

Kohn compares and differentiates his approach from Assertive Discipline and other models. Some studies of Assertive Discipline have shown it to have negative effects (Kohn, 1996). “Overall, most of the published research shows the technique [Assertive Discipline] to be detrimental ...(Kohn, 1996, p. 57).” Kohn criticizes Assertive Discipline for its reliance on rewards, praise, and punishments, “even the most cursory exposure to
the program makes it clear that the overriding goal is to get students to do whatever they are told without question (Kohn, 1996, p. 57).”

A variety of alternative models are grouped by Kohn under the heading of “the New Disciplines.” Among these are: Discipline With Dignity, Teaching Children to Care, and Cooperative Discipline. According to Kohn, most of these models are based on Dreikurs work. Kohn asserts that these models claim to “reject the use of punishment (p. 39),” however, he asserts that they are merely renaming punishment as “logical consequences” and continuing on with punishment as usual. “The New Disciplines give us permission to ‘punish with impunity (p.44)’”. A heavy reliance on rewarding students dooms these programs from the start (Kohn, 1996). Kohn closes his chapter on these alternative models concluding that:

A careful reading of the New Disciplines compels the unhappy conclusion that, on balance, most of them are remarkably similar to the old school approach in their methods—and, ...their goals. These programs are merely packaged in such a way to appeal to educators who are uncomfortable with the idea of using bribes and threats. The truth is what it has always been: a ruse is a ruse is a ruse. (1996, p.53).

**Connecting Community, Curriculum, and Deliberation**

A focus on community should not be construed as solely focusing on affective or social domains. Of course, these are important, but to separate them from curriculum and instruction would be to decontextualize. As Gartrell (cited earlier in this chapter) and Kohn note, appropriate curriculum and methods often eliminate or minimalize what have
traditionally been viewed as discipline problems.

**Community and Curriculum**

Kohn correlates how students act in school with what they’re asked to learn:

Unwelcome behaviors can be directly traced to what children are asked to learn. The curriculum is part of the larger classroom context from which a student’s behavior or misbehavior emerges. Kohn says that if we really want to make sense of how students act, then the curriculum must be scrutinized. (Jones, 1996, p. x).

Much more so than the “New Disciplines,” Kohn connects the classroom “climate” (Kohn doesn’t use this term, but the staff at my school does) or community, with what students have an opportunity to learn (curriculum). My experiences and research serve as supporting data for these arguments. “The quest for community is not—indeed cannot be—separate from what students are learning. Teachers can deliberately use one to promote the other in any of several ways (Kohn, 1996, p. 117):”

First, community-building activities [like class meetings] can be devoted to academic issues. …

Second, skillful teachers can often find a way to work academic lessons into other tasks and discussions. …

Third, academic study is pursued cooperatively: students learn from each other and, in the process, form connections with each other. …Finally, elements of the curriculum may be selected with an eye to supporting social and moral growth and, indirectly, the construction of community. This can be done most readily in language arts units, with works of literature chosen and taught in such a way as to
promote reflection about things like fairness and compassion, along with topics such as narrative construction and character development. (1996, pp. 117, 118)

Constructivism.

Kohn embraces a “constructivist” approach:

The “constructivist” model of learning challenges the central metaphors that so often drive instruction. Children, like adults, are not passive receptacles into which knowledge is poured. They are not clay to be molded, or computers to be programmed, or animals to be trained. Rather, they are active meaning makers, testing out theories and trying to make sense of themselves and the world around them. Learning comes from discovering surprising things—perhaps from grappling with a peer’s different perspective—and feeling the need to reformulate one’s own approach. It entails playing with words and numbers and ideas, coming to understand these things from the inside out and making them one’s own. Skills are acquired in the course of arriving at that deep and personal understanding, and in the context of seeking answers to one’s own questions. (Kohn, 1996, p. 66)

This active construction of meaning called for by Kohn relies upon the learner having, “substantial power to make decisions (p. 78).” Specifically, adds Kohn, “if we are talking about learning to use the language, then those decisions include such issues as what to read and write about. If we are talking about learning to be a responsible, caring person, then the decisions include how to solve problems and get along with others (p. 78).” Student decisions, says Kohn, should include, “what to learn, how, and why (p. 81).”
Curriculum, ideology, and community.

Greene writes that, "The curriculum unquestionably needs expanding and deepening so that more and more options are provided where the study of texts and images and formulations are concerned (1995, p. 181)." The arts areas, she repeatedly asserts, are ideal for this expansion and depth. Later in this chapter, I’ll expand upon this argument for the centrality of the arts. Greene is an advocate of postmodernist views, arts education, and community. She links these ideas:

We should argue strenuously for the presence of the arts in classrooms. We are finding out how storytelling helps, how drawing helps; but we need to go further to create situations in which something new can be added each day to a learner’s life. Postmodern thinking does not conceive the human subject as either predetermined or finally defined. It thinks of persons in process, in pursuit of themselves and, it is to be hoped, of possibilities for themselves... It may now be possible to consider (as we could not before) what it might signify to break the hold of some specific fixities and constructed categories, to let (as it were) specific children go. Attending concretely to these children in their difference and their connectedness, feeling called on truly to attend--to read the child’s word, to look at the child’s sketch—teachers may find themselves responding imaginatively and, at length, ethically to these children. To respond to those once called at risk, once carelessly marginalized, as living beings capable of choosing for themselves is, I believe, to be principled. Attending that way, we may be more likely to initiate normative communities, illuminated by principle and informed by responsibility and
Greene’s, like Kohn’s, is a constructivist ideology. The exhibited practices of such weaves comfortably into the postmodern discourse. As noted earlier, however, not all agree that a constructivist, postmodern approach is the best for our systems and institutions of education. As Canter’s (more positivist or modern) model of classroom management ideologically contrasts with Kohn’s (more postmodern) model, so too do some argue against a constructivist approach to curriculum in the schools.

Hirsch, for example, labels himself an “educational pragmatist.” The constructivist attempt at teaching “higher order skills,” he says, is unattainable (1998). “The idea that school can inculcate abstract, generalized skills for thinking, ‘accessing,’ and problem solving, and that these skills can be readily applied to the real world is, bluntly, a mirage (1998, p. 5).” Hirsch calls for a return to the teaching of “factual knowledge.” Hirsch claims that, “I have never seen a carefully reasoned defense of the repeated assertion that, in the new age, factual knowledge is changing so fast as to make the learning of significant information useless (p. 6).” He argues that, “for most problems that require critical thought by the ordinary person regarding ethics, politics, history, and even technology, the most needed knowledge is usually rather basic, long-lived, and slow to change (p. 6).”

As noted in this dissertation, I support the notion that what students have an opportunity to learn (curriculum), and how these learning opportunities are presented (instruction) affect school and classroom communities. Therefore, within the context of this research, I observe and reflect upon this constructivist/pragmatist debate, and its manifestations in this community study. Curriculum is developed through the process of
deliberation. Both individuals and groups do this. The next section of this chapter deals with the deliberative nature of curriculum development, teacher collaboration, and teachers’ theoretical constructions.

**Deliberation, Collaboration, and Practical Theories of Action**

**Deliberation.**

One aim of this study is to document teachers’ reflections. Good teachers continually reflect upon their own practice. These teachers consciously examine theories and classroom interactions, juxtapose them with their existing beliefs and ideas, and determine successive courses of action. Referring to Schwab and Dewey, McCutcheon (1995) calls this process “deliberation.” Deliberation is purposeful, ongoing, reflective, and seeks a deeper level of understanding. In education, the ultimate focus of deliberation is curriculum. May writes that:

> I view curriculum development as a complex, reflexive, ongoing, and problematic process as well as the disposition to reflect, consider, choose, and act in ways that are more likely (than not) to benefit others equitably and to enrich understanding of the multiple ways in which we view the world and act in it humanely. I view curriculum development, then, as deliberation (Dewey, 1904; Gauthier, 1963; Greene, 1978; Reid, 1978; Schwab, 1969; Walker, 1971). Deliberation occurs inside a individual’s head or among colleagues creating and acting upon curriculum decisions. It may or may not result in a document. Whether a proposal or action, it is grounded in practice. (1990, p. 4)

Donmoyer characterizes deliberation as a “negotiation of meaning (1990, p. 275).”
In her book on the topic, McCutcheon (1995, p. 4) discusses deliberation:

Deliberation is a process of reasoning about practical problems. It is solution oriented, that is, toward deciding on a course of action. A deliberative approach is a decision-making process in which people, individually or in groups, conceive a problem [or focus] create and weigh likely alternative solutions to it, envision the probable results of each alternative, and select or develop the best course of action. It is not a linear process.

Continuing, McCutcheon (p. 4) notes that, “not all thinking and discourse about the curriculum constitute deliberation. McCutcheon asserts that deliberation requires the presence of nine characteristics (p. 5):

Deliberators (1) consider and weigh alternative possible solutions and actions, (2) envision potential actions and outcomes of each, and (3) consider equally means and ends, facts and values, and must (4) act within time constraints... Deliberation also (5) has a moral dimension... decisions are inescapably informed by values and ethical commitments...deliberation is (6) a social enterprise... Another important quality of deliberation is (7) simultaneity. That is, when people deliberate many things simultaneously vie for their attention as they think and speak... Finally, two other important characteristics of deliberation are the presence of (8) interest and (9) conflict, which interact to fuel deliberation and drive the process.

**Group deliberation.**

McCutcheon differentiates between solo and group deliberation, “Whereas solo deliberators develop an individual construction of their reality, group deliberators develop
a social construction of their reality through a quest for intersubjective agreement” (1995, p. 147). Seeking agreement, says McCutcheon, is “the foundation of the social construction of knowledge” (p. 147). During deliberation a group develops agreed upon ideas, values, and norms and focuses on beliefs and values about the content of schooling, curriculum. Different normative interests are made overt. “Conflict among these interests ensues inevitably, tying the group together as it examines alternatives closely” (McCutcheon, 1995, p. 147).

“When groups deliberate to develop a curriculum, they actually create both a text and a subtext. The text is the curriculum they are developing, and the subtext is the set of agreed upon norms and social rules for proceeding” (McCutcheon, 1995, p. 148). In this inquiry, I document and analyze both of these textual creations. McCutcheon cautions that:

Group deliberation may appear to be highly disorganized, particularly at the onset, because it is developing the subtext (group agreement) and text (curriculum) as it is becoming a group that is learning about one another and trying to define the problem and approaches to treat it. One significant benefit of group work is that it typically generates more alternatives and develops more creative solutions than individual work (Thorndike, 1938).

Collaboration.

Group deliberation, by nature, is collaborative. Alternatively, not all collaboration is deliberation. Using McCutcheon’s characteristics, one can differentiate between the two. This research project focused on collaborative activity among teachers. Some of this
was truly deliberation other instances were not. Collaboration among teachers strengthens a school, increases teachers' feelings of efficacy, and brings together professionals in a sometimes-isolating profession.

Opportunities for teachers to work together strengthen collaborative norms, which, in turn, strengthen the school community. Teachers who perceive schools as strong communities show greater enjoyment in their work (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). In fact, teachers are better able to adapt to a students' needs if they work in strong professional communities in a department, school, network, or professional organization that are engaged in systemic reform efforts (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993).

Despite the importance of teachers' collegial work, one recent survey of teachers (Carnegie Foundation, 1990) noted that 59% of those queried rated the quality of time for meeting with colleagues "poor" or "not regularly available." In 1997-1998, fewer than 10% of public school teachers said they were highly satisfied with the extent and quality of opportunities to collaborate with colleagues (Choy, Bobbit, et al., 1993). (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996, pp. 88, 89)

Collaboration among teachers, as noted above, is a win-win situation. However, it involves its own set of obstacles. "Collaboration requires thinking about new ways to teach and changing the traditional habits of one's practice... four factors are critical in their [teachers] ability to work together: time, trust, courage, and communication" (Book, 1996). Collaboration is an inextricable part of the IMPACT model employed at the research site for this dissertation, but all practitioners within that setting argue that more,
not fewer, opportunities for this type of activity are needed.

Practical theories of action.

Group members, engaged in collaborative activity in general or deliberation specifically, develop their own understandings that can adapt or modify the personally held theories that guide their facilitation of the process of education. McCutcheon calls these personal theories “practical theories of action” (1995, p. 34):

Practical theories of action are interrelated concepts, beliefs and images teachers hold about their work. They guide the decision making process before and during teaching and form the interpretive lens teachers apply to their post-teaching reflections. These reflections inform teachers’ future decision making as well. In sum, they affect teachers’ preactive and interactive planning and postactive reflections.

...teachers’ practical theories vary. Curriculum policies treat school systems as a whole, but teachers work alone in classrooms with particular students in specific situations and apply their theories to their work.

...teachers transform curriculum policies and materials to such a degree that it is more appropriate to think of them as curriculum developers than as mere implementors.

This section of this chapter has addressed the connection between community and curriculum, teacher collaboration, the deliberative nature of curriculum development (solo and group), and the theoretical formations that teachers derive from engaging in this process. As a practitioner-researcher in an arts-integrated school, I have developed
personal theories about curriculum development and the central role of the arts in this educative context. In the next section of this chapter, I outline some arts education related literature that supports these theories and provides insights that have been drawn upon in the case study.

**Arts Education**

This section of this literature review focuses on arts education, advocacy for the arts in schools, and connects these themes with the overarching topic of community. The arts are, in a plethora of forms, all around us. The arts are, in varying degrees, a part of all communities. Therefore, the arts should be overtly recognized as powerful, insightful, and expressive. London explains this notion:

> The arts, whether visual, literary, or performing, are richer in meaning when they are an expression of experiences that matter deeply. Things and events that matter, that have the potential to shape people’s lives, take place within the immediate environment or community. (1994, p. 4)

**Arts education advocacy.**

Many argue for the place of the arts in our public school curricula. Sautter (1994, p. 434) writes that “There is a growing body of evidence that supports the power and value of the arts in education... research by academics and practitioners into the effectiveness of the arts as an educational tool has slowly but steadily accumulated.” This accumulation, says Sautter, started with the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts in the early 1960’s. “Over time, a pattern of positive evaluation has emerged” (p. 435).
Neu (1990, p. 30) also argues for the inclusion of the arts. "Because the arts constitute a living history of eras and peoples and a record and revelation of the human spirit, they should be basic in the education of every citizen."

Greene (1990) touts the student benefits derived from participation in arts experiences:

The arts provide ‘inexhaustible insights’ that help us to understand life’s mysteries. They ‘plunge us into adventures of meaning.’ They allow us to imagine in new realms and ‘to break through the boundaries’ of linear, logical thinking and go beyond the confines of a single reality. Educating the artistic intelligences nurtures more awareness. (cited in Fowler, 1990, p. 25)

These arguments seem powerful, but it seems that too few are heeding this advice. "It is decidedly odd that all of the school reform activity of the past decade so deliberately ignores the arts" (National Coalition for Education in the Arts (1992), in Carroll, 1993, p. 17).

Perhaps one reason for this exclusion is that, except for those in specialized arts programs (e.g., those in art ed., music ed., dance ed., and drama ed.), preservice teacher education programs do not expose students to theories and methodologies that address or utilize the arts. Carroll (1993, p. 17) notes that arts based theory is absent from the texts encountered by preservice teaching candidates. "Arts education researchers have no presence in this material" (p. 18).

Carroll suggests that we "change the paradigm" (1993). "We need to find ways to expand the experiential base in the arts among all our colleagues and forthcoming
generations of teachers. We must help reconstruct a theoretical vision of educational practice that is informed by the arts" (1993, p. 20).

This view finds quick consensus among those “already in the choir,” but those that are not may be far less receptive to this change. To some, “the arts have a non-essential image” (Hanna, 1994, p. 36). Calling for change by no means assures it. Munby cautions, “a frank but inescapable revelation becomes thickly enmeshed in quite different views or positions about how one ought to go about the business of changing teachers...Getting people to change, whether they are teachers or students, can be taken to mean very different approaches” (1983, p. 424).

Though Carroll’s points (above) are well taken, “changes in paradigms” are long term affairs. Donmoyer observes that “For those in the midst of such a revolution, however, the ‘revolutionary’ process can seem slow and labored, indeed” (1990, p. 197).

The Duxberry staff echoes these calls for increased emphasis on arts education. Our experiences back up these arguments. Perhaps the descriptions in this dissertation, of arts experiences as they relate to community development, will provide additional impetus for this urged paradigmatic change.

**Art, community, and aesthetic development.**

As previously noted, Piaget developed a theoretical continuum of cognitive development, and Kohlberg extended this idea and formulated stages of moral development. Likewise, Parsons has done the same for aesthetic development. Parsons labels these five stages of aesthetic development: Favoritism; Beauty and Realism; Expressiveness; Style and Form; and Autonomy. Parsons holds the view that, “art is
basically the expression of self and of human nature. ... any psychology of the arts has to have a coherent view of what the arts are and why they are important (1987, p. xiii).”

Community enters into Parsons’s framework at stage four. “Our main achievement at stage four: the further insight that interpretation requires a dialog in the context of a community of viewers (p. 80).” Parsons elaborates:

The painting exists not between the two individual poles of the artist and the viewer but in the midst of an indefinite group of persons who are continually reconstructing it—a community of viewers. Its significance is constituted by the discussion of a community of which one is now oneself a member. As Michael Oakeshott said somewhere, a cultural tradition is like a “great conversation” constituted by the writings of artists and philosophers who have been talking to each other across the centuries. This conversation can be joined by whoever is willing to listen to it.

The community includes the artist herself. The role of the artist acquires more stability but loses some drama when we see the painting in the midst of a conversation. (p. 85)

The type of “community” to which Parsons refers is broad and incorporates both “internal” and “external” community, similar to but farther reaching than that described (cited earlier in this dissertation) by Marche. This community connection is only marginally relevant to this project, however, Parsons’s theories of aesthetic development play a more central role. In order to examine art in education, as a prerequisite, one should understand how people understand art. I frequently engage children in art criticism related
activities in my classroom. An understanding of Parsons’s framework and interpretation of community have helped me to better deliberate about and implement these curricular endeavors.

This research takes place in a “postmodern” context. Many of the theories, topics, and ideas discussed in this research, e.g., constructivism, deliberation, arts education, and qualitative research and arguments for its validity, recognize this paradigmatic shift. Understanding this context and the philosophical debates in which it is grounded has aided me in the execution of this research. In the next section of this chapter, I provide a description of this paradigmatic turn and relate this to the arts areas and arts education.

Modernity/Postmodernity

Like Greene and other advocates of arts education cited in this dissertation, I assert that the arts are ideal “sites” for building community in schools and in classrooms in a postmodern context. In this section, I’ll briefly delineate my conceptions of modernity and postmodernity and will outline my arguments for a postmodern/arts education connection.

Modernity and modernism.

In the broadest sense, modernity arose as a revolt against the autocracy of the pre-modern world. It eventually overturned the medieval forms of government, religion, science, art, and education. Modernity was a continuing revolution in the sense that it did not occur all at once. Nor was it restricted to one particular country or to one specific domain of society. Rationalism, humanism, democracy, individualism, and romanticism were all modern ideas that took root and flourished at different times in different places.
Moreover, modernism was largely a Western phenomenon, and even today one can still find non-western societies that are more feudal than modern. (Elkind, 1995, pp. 8,9)

Some date modernity’s origin back to the mid 15th century (Jencks, 1987); others (Sarup, 1988) (Elkind, 1995) place modernity’s rise close to turn of the 20th century. Jencks, (1987) describes the modern era as a capitalist society, relying on mass production methods spawned by the industrial revolution. It is, he says, characterized by a bourgeois culture that views time and its cultural "missions" in a linear fashion.

Elkind notes that modernity, “did have a unifying motif. It celebrated the individual as opposed to established authority (1995, p. 9).” He claims as modern cornerstones: the supremacy of reason, the supremacy of the individual, and the supremacy of individual freedom. “Protestantism in religion, self-expression in the arts, experimentation in science, and democracy in government all echo these modern themes (1995, p. 9).”

Elkind asserts that, “three basic beliefs...were the foundation for our modern perception and understanding of the world.” First, “the belief in the concept of social progress: the idea that society and the lot of individuals within that society are gradually improving.” A second, “fundamental truth,” he says, “was the belief in universals...It was this belief in universal natural laws that encouraged the grand theories in science.” The third belief, “regularity. The belief in the regularity and predictability of natural phenomena...Modern science was established as the search for the universal and regular natural laws that governed the physical and social worlds” (1995, pp. 9,10).

The nuclear family was the modern model. “The modern nuclear family has been seen as the configuration best suited to the rearing of caring, responsible, and productive
citizens... The sentiments that characterize the modern nuclear family are those associated with romantic love, maternal love, and domesticity” (Elkind, 1995, p. 11).

The modern school mirrored the modern family. John Dewey, “introduced an educational theory in keeping with the tenets of modernity and with the sentiments, values, and perceptions of the nuclear family.” Dewey’s metanarrative, “a grand theory of progressive education, was built on the notion of progress, universality, and regularity.” The purpose of such a grand theory? “Progressive education was meant to facilitate children’s adaptation to the larger society... Little attention was paid to cultural diversity, for it was commonly believed that all families were ‘melting’ toward the ideal model of the nuclear family (Elkind, 1995, pp. 11,12).”

The term postmodern (though again, this is debated) was widely used and recognized by the early 1970s. Indeed, by the time an epochal paradigmatic shift has been recognized, and a name for the epoch has been socially constructed and accepted; the epoch and its cultural manifestations are well entrenched. Therefore, the periodization of postmodernity should be placed around the time 1960.

By this time, many were realizing the promises of the Enlightenment were unfulfilled. “Modernity’s promises of liberation masked forms of oppression and domination.” Faith in rationality and the sciences waned. Social, cultural, and technological changes necessitated a new discourse, “postmodern theory” (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 3).

Postmodernity and postmodernism.

Modernism worked in a linear fashion. Each newly discovered “truth”
"progressed" the society one step closer to the ideals touted by universals and metanarratives. The convergent methodologies of the modern allow for a relatively tidy explication. Alternatively, a divergent characteristic of postmodernism renders its explication a near impossibility. Many postmodernists, however, do not view this inherent uncertainty in a negative context. Instead, this ambiguity is itself accepted as a tenet of postmodernism.

Best and Kellner (1991, p. 23) write, "there is no unified postmodern theory, or even a coherent set of positions. Rather, one is struck by the diversities between theories often lumped together as 'postmodern' and the plurality - often conflictual - of postmodern positions." Usher and Edwards concede, "Perhaps, then, all we can say with any degree of safety is what it is not." It is not, they say, "a systematic theory or comprehensive philosophy," nor is it a "system of ideas or concepts," or a, "unified social or cultural movement" (1994, p. 7).

Postmodernity, then, "describes a world where people have to make their way without fixed referents and traditional anchoring points. It is a world of rapid change, of bewildering instability, where knowledge is constantly changing and meaning 'floats' without its traditional teleological fixing in foundational knowledge and the belief in inevitable human progress (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p.60)."

This permeable, fluid nature of postmodernism enables the breakdown of traditionally rigid boundaries. "This collapsing, or problematizing, of boundaries has led to more playful and diverse modes of writing, while subverting standard academic boundaries and practices (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 23)." These "boundary crossings" are evidenced
repeatedly in most facets of culture, society, and education, e.g., among academic disciplines, between art and everyday life, between high art and popular art, and between elite and popular culture.

Lash (1990, in Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 13) argues that, "postmodernism breaks with modernism in that the latter is a process of cultural differentiation producing clearly defined boundaries of practice and meaning whilst postmodernism on the other hand is a process of 'de-differentiation' where boundaries break down." Lash (and others arguing for a "clean break") seems to say that by accepting postmodernism, we must necessarily reject modernism.

Others, however, deem as necessary the recognizance of the modern/postmodern connection, for their conception of the postmodern is a "re-reading of the modern text."

Postmodernist thinking offers to re-read the very texts and traditions that have made premodernist and modernist writing possible - but above all it offers a reinscription of those very texts and traditions by examining the respects in which they set limits to their own enterprises, in which they incorporate other texts and traditions in a juxtapositional and intertextual relation to themselves. Postmodernist thinking involves rethinking - finding the places of difference within texts and institutions, examining the inscriptions of indeterminacy, noting the dispersal of signification, identity, and centered unity across a plurivocal texture of epistemological and metaphysical knowledge production. Postmodernism brings the modernist hegemony to closure. (Silverman, 1990, p. 1)

Elkind (1995, p. 10) also argues for the connectedness of the modern and the
postmodern. Postmodernism is not a “revolt,” he claims. It is “a set of attitudes and efforts designed to modify and correct modern ideas that have been perverted and modern beliefs that have proved too broad or too narrow. ... Modern beliefs were not entirely wrong, but they were often idealized.”

Even the use of the term “postmodernism” acknowledges a debt to the modern, for without the recognition of the modern, how can we pass beyond it? This also brings to the debate this problematic, If “modern” represents the current, the “now,” then isn’t its transcendence an impossibility? Quite simply, the use/meaning distinction of the term has evolved. Some now use the term exclusively to refer to the ideas, events, and the epoch that ended about 1960. Others still use the term to mean, up to date, latest styles, or recent times, e.g., “Modern Trends in the Philosophy of Education.” Once again, for the postmodernist, this ambiguity is not problematic, instead it illustrates the postmodern emphasis on the contextual embeddedness of language. “The notion of Truth is replaced with that of purposeful uncertainty (Fehr, 1994, p. 210).” “Postmodernism venerates language, rather than thought, and honors human diversity as much as it does human individuality (Elkind, 1995, p. 10).”

This latter point made by Elkind, the honoring of human diversity, is an important tenet of postmodernism. Modernity heard only the voices of the privileged. Postmodernity consciously makes spaces for the silenced to be heard.

Usher and Edwards (1994, pp. 8,15) write that, “an important ‘message’ of the postmodern,” is, “that knowledge cannot be systematized or totalized into a singular, all-encompassing framework. ...At the same time, postmodernism recognises that
representation is not a neutral process...the very act of representation is itself discursively bound up with values and power."

The postmodern family is characterized by Elkind as “permeable.” “The nuclear family is but one of many different family forms. ...Single-parent, two-parent working, remarried, and adoptive families are just some of the permeable kinship structures that are evident in America today (1995, p. 12).” Elkind says that postmodern children are seen as competent. This is primarily so, he says, because postmodern parents need competent children.

Other descriptors associated with postmodernism include, eclecticism (a mixing of codes, e.g., old with new), ludicism, ambivalence, decenteredness, inclusiveness, global, hyperreality, parody, irony, and pastiche. Many of these postmodern features have become generally accepted. This, however, is not to say that there is general agreement among those participating in the postmodern discourse. In fact, postmodernism’s inevitable lack of closure and acceptance of ambiguity beg for perpetual debate, deconstruction, and re-examination.

Before turning toward the next section of this chapter, I must first issue this caution: Even if, hypothetically, a socially constructed, context specific, linguistically embedded scholarly consensus on the essences of the postmodern was achieved; there is still no assurance that this consensus could be construed to positively affect our systems of education. Academia, including representatives from the arts, humanities, and the sciences, has led the way toward clarity of the postmodern. Unfortunately, few of these “insights of understanding” have “trickled down” to our systems of public education. The hierarchy
and practices of public education today remain largely controlled by a modern ideology (e.g., the continued emphasis on standardized testing). However, there are exceptions to this rule. Specific schools and certain curricular areas have affirmatively embraced postmodernism, and these entities are utilizing the essential strengths of the postmodern to enhance educational programming. What effect(s) has the postmodern epoch had upon the arts, public education and upon arts education specifically? In the next section of this chapter, I will address (but certainly not answer) this and other related questions.

**Postmodernism, the Arts, and Arts Education**

When asked to define "the arts," respondents construct a continuum ranging from the narrow, accepting only visual art as "arts," to the very broad. For example, Sy Kleinman, an Ohio State University Education professor, said in a lecture (June, 1995) that, "good science is really good art. Art encompasses science. ...good art defies categories. ...any expression of intelligence is artistic." For it is "human beings," says Kleinman, that, "decide 'what is art?' We decide what is good art. We decide what is bad art."

For the purposes of this discussion, I will, as is done in the National Standards for Arts Education (1994), narrow the focus to visual art, dance, theatre (or drama), and music. In other contexts, I would readily extend my personal definition of "the arts" to include a variety of other expressive forms, e.g., the literary arts of poetry, prose, narration, storytelling, etc. One can further differentiate between the arts in this manner: Visual art operates in the dimension of space. Music in the dimension of time, and dance and drama occupy both.
Many proponents of educational reform may be surprised to discover that many of the ideas they are advocating - like the integrated curriculum, shared responsibilities, and product and performance assessment - are postmodern.

The integrated curriculum recognizes that conventional subject boundaries are arbitrary and that all knowledge is interrelated...

Shared responsibility attempts to correct the modern notion of role differentiation, the belief that individuals should fill only one major role...postmodernism has been characterized by what might be called de-differentiation.

The postmodern recognizes irregularity as a legitimate concept. This runs counter to the notion of regularity implicit in the modern use of tests and grades, in which it is assumed that all knowledge is uniformly acquired and can be tested in the same way.

By contrast, portfolio and product assessment is built on the notion that learning is an irregular process, and that children learn in different ways, at different rates, and to different degrees. Portfolio and product assessment recognizes this by providing a cumulative record of what children have done in particular domains at specific times. (Elkind, 1994, p. 6,7)

Some criticize this postmodern notion of assessment and problematize it with the label, "incommensurability." Eisner dismisses this criticism and sides with the postmodernists. "We are going to have to give youngsters opportunities to represent what they have come to know in very different ways, regardless of whether it exacerbates the
What "common ground" can be found between arts education and postmodernism? and, why is arts education needed? I assert that the commonalities to be discovered between the arts and postmodernism are plentiful. Furthermore, the implications of these commonalities call for a radical re-envisioning of our educational systems. Arts education, by its eclectic, open-ended, contextual, interpretive nature, can and should be a cornerstone of (postmodern) educational reform.

Earlier in this chapter I noted the postmodern rejection of linear, universal seeking methodologies. The postmodern distaste for linearity promotes divergent multiple methodologies for the postmodern. This, too, is a tenet of the arts. Eisner elaborates:

Having fixed objectives and pursuing clear cut methods for achieving them are not always the most rational ways of dealing with the world...No painter, writer, composer, or choreographer can foresee all the twists and turns that his or her work will take. The work of art--by which now I mean the act of creation--does not follow an unalterable schedule but is a journey that unfolds...In the context of much of today's schooling, the lessons taught by the arts are much closer to what successful and intelligent corporations do and to what cognitive psychologists are discovering constitute the most sophisticated forms of thinking. (1992, pp. 594,595)

The arts, then, teach problem solving. Through the arts we interpret and take action. We artistically express our thoughts, feelings, emotions, opinions, and judgments. Teaching through the arts allows students opportunities for the exploration of many kinds
of knowing. This divergent, analytic methodology becomes enormously relevant in a postmodernism of "provisional, relative truths."

I have noted that postmodernism re-reads, re-examines, re-envisions, re-inscribes, and deconstructs modernist texts and traditions. The arts are the richest of resources for these purposes:

The arts are one of humanity's deepest rivers of continuity. They connect each new generation to those who have gone before, equipping newcomers in their own pursuit of the abiding questions: Who am I? What must I do? Where am I going? (National Standards, 1994, p. 5)

As students re-examine their links to the past, they form opinions of how they should shape their links to the future. Through the arts, students become aware of themselves and others. They form their own interpretations of culture past, culture present, and at the same time begin devising their expressions of culture future.

Postmodernism "celebrates diversity." Arts education celebrates diversity and, "forces educators to take note of voices often ignored in the establishment of educational priorities. The increasingly multicultural character of western nations mandates an accommodative, elastic curriculum" (MacGregor, 1992, p. 3).

"Art after all, provides the synthesis of all else we learn," says Judith Witmer. The teachers of art, music, and dance, she continues, "have known all along what is essential and how students can best demonstrate their understanding of the 'connectedness of all things.' For that is what art is. It enables us to see beyond ourselves and into the relationships among all other disciplines" (1993, p. 40).
This section discussed modernism, postmodernism, and the relationship of the arts to the postmodern context. Next, I’ll review some postmodern developments specific to particular arts areas:

**Visual art.**

The visual arts deal with many of the issues already discussed, especially multicultural education and interdisciplinary study. A postmodern movement in visual art education worthy of mention is discipline based art education (DBAE). "DBAE can be viewed as a function of postmodern society (Moore, 1991, p. 36).” Moore states that, "At about the same time that postmodernism became a recognizable phenomenon, discipline based art education began to challenge the modernist theories of those art educators who emphasized a studio based curriculum (p. 37).”

DBAE wants students to, “appreciate and discuss works of art in their appropriate historical and cultural contexts (Moore, 1991, p. 38).” Moore also adds that the postmodern era has seen improved relationships between artists and the art market. Other characteristics of DBAE noted by Moore include respect for monetary success and the inclusion of western and non-western art exemplars ranging from ancient to contemporary. “By incorporating the art of many different eras and areas into its curriculum, DBAE may help students to cope with the bewildering array of symbols and styles that are presented in postmodern art (Moore, 1991, p. 39).”

**Drama.**

Process drama is a postmodern form of drama or theatre. The drama teacher at my school employs the methodology of process drama. Process drama, as developed by
theorists and practitioners such as Heathcote (1984), O’Neill and Lambert (1982), Bolton (1986), and others, engages readers with literary texts in ways that provide opportunities for multiple interpretive experiences. These experiences encourage intersections among the text, the world of the participant, and the community in which the drama is unfolding. Such intersections create shifts and transformations in the initial text, the stances and understandings of the participants, and the dynamics of the learning community (Crumpler, 1996).

Crumpler makes these connections, “Process drama and postmodern theory both explore the construction of competing worlds, issues of power, how language shapes our constructions of reality, and the problematic nature of representation (p. 1).”

Another important aspect of process drama, according to Crumpler, is, “the teacher in role.” The “teacher in role” changes, “the nature of the traditional teacher-to-student relationship...in [process] drama the teacher in a way suffers a reversal of his usual role, which is that of one who knows (Heathcote in Crumpler, 1996, p. 7).” This new role, asserts Crumpler, marks the transition from a modern to a postmodern stance. “She becomes decentered in the sense that she ceases completely controlling the discourse of the classroom ...the teacher becomes a facilitator and co-constructor of meaning (pp. 8,10).”

Crumpler tells us that, “connecting process drama with postmodernism is significant because it challenges us to become more sensitive to the diversity already existing in our classrooms (pp. 14,15).”
**Dance and music.**

Dance consists of several disciplinary components including: dance making, dance sharing, and dance inquiry (Mirus, White, Bucek, Paulson, 1993, Dance Education Initiative Curriculum Guide). Each of these components, at least partially, embodies postmodern tenets. Cultural manifestations of postmodernism in dance are plentiful. For example, Bill T. Jones multimedia dance production, “Still Here.”

In music, recent interest in neoclassicism has been noted. Musical examples of eclecticism, parody, and pastiche are numerous. For example, Bela Fleck’s meshing of the banjo with an array of jazz and classical styles. 1996 Grammy award winning pop singer Alanis Morissette provides a musical illustration of the postmodern tendency to accept ambivalence positively. The following are excerpts from the lyrics of one of Morissette’s songs, “Hand In My Pocket.” “I’m broke but I’m happy. ...I’m sane but I’m overwhelmed. ...I’m lost but I’m hopeful. ...I’m here but I’m really gone. ...I’m free but I’m focused. ...I’m green but I’m wise. ...What it all boils down to is that no one’s really got it figured out just yet.”

This literature review has encompassed a diverse group of writings on a diverse number of subjects. Even more literature was reviewed for this research, but I included that which most directly related to the studied context. The next chapter of this dissertation outlines the research methodology.
CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

The opening chapters of this dissertation have provided an overview of the research and the literature base upon which it has been conducted and interpreted. Next, I turn to the methods used and their philosophical underpinnings. In this methodology chapter, I will discuss qualitative research and its applicability to this dissertation; action research, collaborative action research, and action research related to deliberation; case study; data treatment including collection, analysis and interpretation, and display; and validity, significance, and transferability in the context of this research.

Qualitative Research

The term "qualitative research" covers a wide range of practices and orientations. Accompanying this wide range of practice and orientation are an equally broad base of conceptual and theoretical underpinnings. Qualitative research, in general, is post-positivistic. A quantitative research paradigm fit nicely with modern ideals and conceptions. The demands of our new epoch (postmodernity as discussed in chapter 2) require more open, flexible, and divergent methods. Eclecticism, is an appropriate descriptor for the methodologies employed by many qualitative researchers and theoreticians.

Qualitative research, as contrasted with quantitative research, uses linguistic, non-
numeric data. It relies on thick descriptions to illustrate and support identified themes, theories, or findings. Qualitative research strives for understanding, whereas quantitative research pursues explanation. Qualitative researchers adopt a personal role in the inquiry. Qualitative research is a process of constructing knowledge. Alternatively, quantitative researchers view research as knowledge discovery (Stake, 1995). As qualitative research, this inquiry "seeks to understand human and social behavior from the 'insider's' perspective—that is, as it is lived by participants in a particular social setting" (Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh, 1996, p. 476).

Stake reviews the following characteristics of good qualitative study:

- Holistic - contextually well developed, case oriented (case is bounded by a system), relatively noncomparative, seeking to understand its object more than to understand how it differs from others...

- Empirical - field oriented, emphasis on observables, preference for language description, naturalistic, noninterventionistic...

- Interpretive - research is a researcher-subject interaction, relies on intuition, validation through triangulation of data, tries to disconfirm own interpretations, honors multiple realities...

- Empathetic - planned but emergent design, looking for emic issues, attends to intentionality...

- Experience of researcher is important (1995, p. 47, 48).
Action Research

Historical perspective.

Action research’s origins are, and continue to be, a subject of much debate. Some connect it with the writings of John Dewey early this century (McTaggart, 1991). Others trace its “intellectual origins” back to Aristotle (McKernan, 1996, viii). These debates have little relevancy in this project. I do, however, find it necessary to provide at least a cursory overview of the history of this tradition in order to situate myself, and, in turn, this project, within it.

Kurt Lewin is regarded by many as “the father of action research (McTaggart, 1991, p. 6).” “Until Lewin’s time, in social science (and especially in psychology) the relation between theory and practice had been understood as the problem of the application of the results of research. The power of action research, as Lewin conceived it, was in its focus on particular social problems as the impulse to inquiry (McTaggart, 1991, p.7).” Around 1950, Stephen Corey introduced and developed the practice with teachers in the United States (McTaggart, 1991). Though not specifically an advocate of action research, the work of Joseph Schwab in the 1960’s and 70’s greatly influenced action research (McTaggart, 1991). Schwab believed that curriculum, then emerging as a field of inquiry, should become distinctive. “He argued that curriculum inquiry should be based on an entirely different epistemology which he termed ‘the practical’ (McTaggart, 1991, p. 21).” Schwab has been criticized, however, for not emphasizing action as a result of data collection, this he wrote, “is an afterthought (in McTaggart, 1991, p. 21).”

Action research has also undergone the paradigmatic evolution into postmodernity.
Relying less on scientific methods, and more on interpretive methodologies, action research continues to evolve, but has also fragmented to mean different things in different contexts. Many have used the writing of Habermas (1972, 1974, in McTaggart, 1991) to describe three different kinds of action research: technical, practical, and emancipatory. Briefly, technical action research is “other-directed.” “A common form of technical action research involves the teacher testing the applicability of findings generated elsewhere (McTaggart, 1991, p. 27).” Practical action research is “self-directed.” “According to advocates, the study conducted by the practitioner ...is reflective and interpretive, taking account of the perspectives of others, an ongoing study of a dynamic case in which the enquirer takes deliberate, strategic action (McTaggart & Kemmis, in McTaggart, 1991, p.29).” McTaggart offers this definition of emancipatory action research:

emancipatory action research extends beyond the interpretation of meanings for participants to an understanding of the social, political, and economic conditions which cause and allow meanings to be as they are. The advocates sought not only the transformation of individual practitioners and the profession of teaching, but ultimately a transformation of the language, organisation and practice of education. ...Emancipatory action research in these terms went beyond ‘radical critique.’ (McTaggart, 1991, p. 30)

Though I acknowledge being influenced by all three of the action research typologies noted above, I would situate this particular project in the practical. McKernan describes this as “practical-deliberative action research (1996, p.20).”

The goal of practical action researchers is understanding practice and
solving immediate problems. Practical deliberation responds to the immediate situation which is deemed problematic from a moral perspective—there is a sense in which curriculum action must be taken to put things right. The practical is also connected with the process rather than the end products of the inquiry. ... 

Curriculum is a practical and highly moral matter which views itself as a changeable process, capable of transforming human action, and indeed, culture. As a theory of practice, action research attempts to make some difference to how people behave or live their lives; to how they feel and think. (McKernan, 1996, p. 20, 21)

Subjectivity is a part of this type of inquiry. "Like all forms of inquiry, practitioner research is value laden" (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen 1994, p. 3). "Practitioner researchers can work with subjectivity by presenting both initial assumptions and subjective reactions to events; in effect, presenting audiences with both preconceptions and postconceptions. Qualitative researchers address subjectivity by incorporating and openly discussing it; quantitative researchers address subjectivity by attempting to exhume it from themselves and their study by design and statistics" (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen 1994, p.111). Eisner (1996) asserts that ontological objectivity or veridicality in which a claim can be proven to match reality is an unobtainable goal. Instead, he argues for the virtues of subjectivity. "It is a matter of being able to handle several ways of seeing as a series of differing views rather than reducing all views to a single correct one" (p. 49).

Action research "defined."

The definitions/explanations of action research I present here are chosen because
they fit my beliefs about action research, and they fit the needs of this project. McKernan (above), as I do in this project, connects action research with deliberation. Action research incorporates and formalizes the deliberative process. Action research, research done by practitioners for the purpose of improving practice, occurs when a teacher, engaged in practical deliberation, decides to pursue intense study of a situation, problem, or program in order to improve upon the existing situation. Elliot (1991, p. 69) writes that, “Action research might be defined as the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it.” Deliberation happens frequently, sometimes spontaneously. Action research can be employed at the discretion of the practitioner. As May (cited earlier in this essay) noted, deliberation may or may not result in the production of a document. Action research will yield a variety of documentary evidence, and ultimately, in some form, a document designed to make resulting understandings and interpretations public.

Though action research is a recognized research methodology, it is not a rigid, linear, prescriptive format. McCutcheon and Jung note that action research “defies easy description,” (p. 144) and encompasses an eclectic variety of epistemological perspectives, but it is united by the characteristic that “it is done by teachers” (p. 150). Classroom interaction is inextricably situated and contextual, therefore, action research must embody an inherent flexibility to enable practitioners to modify each project to meet their own needs. Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh explain:

Specific methods or techniques are not what distinguish action research. Instead it is characterized by a continuing effort to closely interlink, relate and confront action and
reflection, to reflect upon one’s conscious and unconscious doings in order to develop one’s actions, and to act reflectively in order to develop one’s knowledge... Each action research project - whatever its scale - has a character of its own... Nevertheless, some typical broad stages can be found in any action research process. (1993, pp. 6,7)

Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh identify these general stages as 1) Finding a starting point. 2) Clarifying the situation. 3) Developing action strategies and putting them into practice, and 4) Analysis, theory generation, and making teachers’ knowledge public (1993, p. 7,8). In this inquiry, I will use these stages as an organizational guide. A set of research questions will serve as the “starting point” noted above. These questions were constructed and shaped with the help of many of my colleagues.

This action research/dissertation project draws on Elliot’s characterization (1991, p. 107):

1 It focuses on the identification, clarification and resolution of problems teachers face in realizing their educational values in practice. As a form of inquiry it is a practical/moral rather than theoretical/technical science.

2 It involves joint reflection on means and ends. Educational values as ends are defined by the concrete actions a teacher selects as the means of realizing them. Such values are realized in a teacher’s interactions with students and not as extrinsic outcomes of them. Teaching activities constitute practical interpretations of values. Therefore in reflecting about the quality of his/her teaching a teacher must reflect about the concepts of value which shape and give it form.

3 It is a reflexive practice. As a form of self-evaluation or self-appraisal, action research is
not simply a matter of the teacher evaluating his/her actions from any perspective, e.g. that of their technical effectiveness. It is primarily a matter of the teacher evaluating the qualities of his/her "self" as they are manifested in actions. From this perspective, such actions are conceived as moral practices rather than mere expressions of techniques. Self-appraisal in the context of a moral practice involves a particular type of self-reflection; namely, reflexivity.

4 It integrates theory into practice. Educational theories are viewed as systems of values, ideas, and beliefs which are represented not so much in a propositional form, as in a form of practice. Such theories are developed by reflectively improving practice. Theory development and the improvement of practice are not viewed as separate processes.

5 It involves dialogue with professional peers. Inasmuch as teachers strive through action research to realize professional values in action, they are accountable for the outcome to their professional peers. Such accountability is expressed in the production of records which document changes in practice and the processes of deliberation/reflection through which they were brought about.

**Collaborative action research.**

Sagor (1997, p. 169) notes that, “In the action research community, ‘collaboration’ conveys numerous meanings.” To him, collaborative action research: builds on felt needs; participation in it is voluntary; it focuses on educationally critical issues; the strategy calls for mutual adaptation; the resultant data build teacher efficacy; ...the participants receive ample support; and what participants learn from information, as it is uncovered, puts pressure on them to change. (p. 170)
Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994, p. 7) write that, “We believe that practitioner research is best done as a part of a collaborative effort.” They characterize collaborating practitioners as an “emotional support group.” Sagor, “defines the collaborative aspect of collaborative action research as the voluntary, collegial involvement of teams of teachers at the same site as they pursue joint inquiries into areas of significant personal/professional concern” (1997, p. 169). Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993, p. 181), “use the term ‘collaborative research’ when several teachers (from the same or several schools) collaborate in their research by sharing experiences and discussing outcomes, though not necessarily sharing the same focus.”

**Action research and deliberation.**

Deliberation and action research are similar processes. Both are practitioner-based and involve the social construction of meaning translated into practice. Either can be done individually or in groups (though of course, this changes the dynamics of the process). Action research and deliberation are both oriented to the achievement of solutions to practical problems. In both, normative interests are made overt, reflection is a recognized part of the process, and theory gets integrated into practice. A subtext develops in both group deliberation and collaborative action research.

Good teaching is dynamic and deliberate. Good teachers consciously change, adapt, modify, experiment with, and deliberate about the curriculum, classroom environment and the social interactions occurring there. This environment, these interactions, and the curriculum are shaped by teachers’ personally held theories of action. Deliberation allows practitioners opportunities to reflect upon these personally-held
practical theories and the actions driven by them.

Collaborative action research, as noted, incorporates and formalizes the deliberative process. Action research is teacher-based and contextually situated. It allows teachers to intensely inquire into their own practices or the implications thereof, and consequently provides teachers understandings that facilitate the changing of the curriculum, classroom or school environments, and/or social interactions for the attainment of a “perceived good.” These understandings take the form of theory. Theories are implicit in all practice. Theorizing consists of articulating tacit theories and subjecting them to critique in open discourse (Elliot, 1991).

Action research covers a broader range of activities than that encompassed by deliberation. Deliberation is specifically related to curriculum development and implementation. In action research, the use of the term “research” alludes to a formal, rigorously conducted documentation of the inquiry. The documentation of deliberative activity may only be recorded in the minds of teachers.

The preceding sections of this chapter have focused on qualitative study and action research as they relate to this dissertation. Aspects of qualitative case study research are also drawn upon in this project, therefore, the next section of this chapter is a discussion of these aspects.

Case Study

The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness. (Stake,
1995, p. 8)

Doll is a curriculum theorist. He tells us that, "As a post-modernist, I will draw on and intermix a variety of contemporary movements" (1993, p. 12). Echoing Doll, in this study I will combine the qualitative research methods of case study as described by Stake in his 1995 book, The Art of Case Study Research; with action research methods as described by Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993), McCutcheon and Jung (1990), Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994), and McKernan (1996).

Case study methods have been gaining in prominence and popularity. Recently (as in this project) these methods have been applied in arts education settings (Stake et. al., 1991).

Stake (1995), in overviewing his eclectic approach to case study methods, notes that his view "draws from naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic research methods" (p. xi).

Using Stake's methodology as researchers, "we enter the scene with a sincere interest in learning how they function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus and with a willingness to put aside many presumptions while we learn" (Stake, 1995, p. 1).

The purpose of this type of study is particularization, not generalization. For example, Eisner, reviewing Stake et. al.'s book of arts case studies notes that: According to its authors, Custom and Cherishing is not intended to yield unassailable generalizations about the character of arts education in America or about the content of what students learn. It is rather an effort to describe the uniqueness and complexity of eight sites in which arts education occurs... (1993, p. 32)
Stake realizes that the case study researcher will encounter "multiple realities." It is the task of the researcher to preserve and present these, even when conflictual. This is especially important in the proposed inquiry. The theme, community, is an abstract construct. There is no "one correct interpretation," therefore, multiple realities are a prized inevitability.

To ensure credibility in qualitative case study research, Stake, and Flinders and Eisner (among many others) propose methods of triangulation. These methods, to be explained later in this chapter, will be employed in this project.

Data

Data collection.

Data collection spanned a two school year period (1997-1998 & 1998-1999). I collected data for this action research/case study by recording and transcribing collaborative action research group meetings, teacher interviews, focus groups, and professional development meetings. I followed up initial writings and interpretations with member checks and continued dialogue in order to preserve multiple realities and present a multivocal text. Teachers throughout the two-year period were asked to read quotes, sections, and drafts of the research.

Data was also obtained from a variety of other sources, teacher and student writings, staff produced documents, and my personal professional journal. I kept a reflective journal that includes observations and interpretations of my experiences. This
journal includes information gathered in whole staff meetings, and other teacher conversations in a variety of configurations. It also includes anecdotal information gathered in my classroom during the research period.

Data analysis/interpretation.

Initially, data analysis followed the methods prescribed by Stake (1995), and Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993).

According to Stake (1995), data analysis and interpretation are the making sense part of the inquiry. The researcher asks questions like: how is one part related to another?, and, what is the meaning of this? Researchers can arrive at new meanings via two ways. First, through direct interpretation of the individual instance "the qualitative researcher concentrates on the instance, trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully—analysis and synthesis in direct interpretation" (Stake, 1995, p. 75), and secondly, the qualitative researcher can interpret meanings using categorical aggregation, "the collecting of repetitive instances of a phenomenon" (Stake, 1995, p. 74). This study uses both methods of meaning-making interpretation. In addition to the direct interpretation of observed interactions, data has been coded and attention paid to patterns, emergent themes, and repeated occurrences.

A purpose of data analysis, according to Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993, p. 120), "is to find explanations which ‘fit’ our understanding and therefore seem emotionally plausible.” These explanations are a form of theory building.

Display.

It has been noted that few teachers pay attention to “research.” Some teachers find
research somewhat inaccessible...or irrelevant or impractical to their particular teaching situations” (Mims & Lankford, 1995, p. 92). “Practitioners, in fact, seldom read educational research, and they often feel incompetent to judge its adequacy. For most practitioners in our experience, most conventional research is thought to be remote from practice, except, perhaps, when its conclusions confirm or support what they already believe (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p. 173).”

Richardson (1994, p. 516) writes that, “I have a confession to make. For 30 years, I have yawned my way through numerous supposedly exemplary qualitative studies.”

A purpose of this research endeavor is to provide data that is relevant, accessible to practitioners, and interesting. I have anticipated that by combining the positive aspects of the qualitative research methodologies of case study research and action research with an appropriate narrative form of data display, that the pitfall of impracticality can be avoided.

Richardson (1994) emphasizes process over product. The aim is to share: insights about deliberation and practice, understandings, exemplars, and stories. Often, this information is perceived as more relevant than other “scholarly research” as action research theories are embedded in practice and inextricably link the theory/practice and researcher/researched relationships.

The study employs a “user friendly” method of data display, thus enabling a wider range of potential consumers. It is in ways a, “narrative of the self,” a, “story,” a “polyvocal text” (Richardson, 1994). The case describes actual events, discussions, interactions, and deliberations. This account is presented from the perspectives of insiders. Additionally the (comparatively) long-term nature of this project should make its
understandings more salient. The study could be of interest to a variety of constituencies: current teachers of the arts, classroom teachers, educators involved in school reform/school improvement efforts, artists-in-residence, pre-service teachers and administrators, parents, legislators and other policy makers, administrators, members of the business community concerned with the state of public education, professors of education, and of course, other educational researchers.

Validity/significance/transferability.

Throughout this study, attention has been paid to what Lincoln and Guba call trustworthiness. "Trustworthiness consists of four components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (these are the constructivist equivalents of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300)."

While researchers, by virtue of their training and positions, have a special mandate to scrutinize research reports and to determine that what is said is accurate and well founded, they seem not to have the same mandate to pass judgments upon the usefulness of the research, provided it has satisfied the examination. The task of establishing if the research is useful ultimately falls to the teacher. (Munby, 1983, p. 426)

Several measures have been employed to "triangulate" or maximize the credibility/validity of this research. Stake (1995) proposes data source, investigator, theory, and methodological triangulation. Flinders and Eisner (1994) advocate consensual validation, sharing work with others knowledgeable in the area; structural corroboration, the weight and consistency of multiple data sources; and referential adequacy, the degree
to which the reader can experience the qualities within the situation that the critic claims to be there.

In this inquiry, I used data provided by practitioners (including myself) to corroborate interpretations and gain additional insights. As mentioned, I have solicited member checks of the study for accuracy and palatability. The attempt has been to provide readers with “layers of meaning” to support the reported descriptions, interpretations, and assertions.

McKernan speaks of validity specific to action research:

Action research aims at feeding the practical judgment of actors in problematic situations. The validity of the concepts, models and results it generates depends not so much on scientific tests of truth as on their utility in helping practitioners to act more effectively, skillfully and intelligently. Theories are not validated independently of practice and then applied to curriculum; rather they are validated through practice. Action research is thus grounded curriculum theory.

(McKernan, 1991, p. 4)

In this sense, validity blurs with usefulness and significance. Throughout the study, I attempted to reflectively examine and communicate explicitly my personally held values, theories, and perspectives. Haggerson and Bowman (1992, p. xi, xii) describe this process: “the personal voice of the researcher is reinserted back into the conduct of the activity. The authors will reference their feelings and emotions as they explain what they did, how they felt, and how that influenced their work.”
Significance and transferability.

This research has the potential to be useful intrinsically and has the potential to provoke additional research to further support community development as well as the potential of the arts to contribute in multiple ways to the education of our school children.

Significance is a way of appraising research efforts. "Significance," says Munby (1983, p. 423), "is closely tied to that of usefulness." Munby adds that "the importance of qualitative research is recognized for its educative value, that is, for its ability to cause teachers, and other readers, to look at classroom events in a different way" (p. 427).

What makes this study of particular use is that it is being conducted in an area where there is a perceived need. Little qualitative research has been conducted that examines teachers' collaborative interactions aimed at school improvement and community development from a qualitative/emic perspective. Additionally, this might be the first study to simultaneously address the elements of community building, curriculum development, teacher collaboration, school improvement, and arts education.

Qualitative research does not seek significance through the development of unassailable generalizations. As opposed to generalizations, Stake has noted that interpretive conclusions drawn by case study researchers are more like assertions (p. 9). Though not touting the certainty of prediction and control sought by quantitative researchers, the understandings derived from a single case can be valuable. "We do generalize all the time from individual, nonrandomly selected events; we do seem to learn valuable things from these events that help us to cope with our respective futures" (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, p. 171).
Donmoyer, in a chapter titled "Generalizability and the Single Case Study," claims that, "qualitative case studies appear to have far more utility for applied fields such as education, counseling, and social work than was traditionally believed" (1990, p. 198). Lincoln and Guba reconceptualize the notion of generalizability. They prefer the term "transferability" (in Donmoyer, 1990, p. 185). Case studies, says Donmoyer, allow us "to see things we otherwise might not have seen" (p. 194). He continues, "case studies can help those who are uninitiated into a particular theoretical viewpoint come to understand that viewpoint... [If] case studies are well done, they can add depth and dimension to theoretical understanding. By definition, theory simplifies our understanding of reality" (p. 195).

This "transferability," the extent to which learnings from one context can be applied to another, has been tested within the context of this inquiry. In an action researcher role, the "practitioner's practice tests the validity of his or her previous research [or personally held theories]" (Altrichter, Posch, & Somekh, 1993, p. 208). In the context of this research, this is a measure of research validity and significance. I, along with my colleagues, as action researchers, have tested and developed a variety of practical theories of action in practice. I discuss these theoretical developments in the next two chapters. Additionally, the readers of this research will also determine the extent to which this case study and the presented interpretations are applicable to their own situated contexts.

This chapter has outlined the research methodology employed in this dissertation research project. The qualitative methods of action research and case study have been coupled to achieve the aims of the inquiry. The next chapter presents the described action
research/case study of the school over the two-year data collection period. The closing chapter of this dissertation summarizes the interpretations, understandings and assertions derived from the research.
CHAPTER 4

DUXBERRY PARK ARTS IMPACT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL –

A CASE STUDY

Between a Preface and a Bridge (and other parenthetical information)

This brief dissertation section is written to fulfill two purposes. First, it connects the first three chapters of this dissertation to the case study, and secondly, it serves as an overture or introduction to the case for those not particularly interested in the first three chapters anyway. As I completed drafts of this manuscript, I repeatedly sought peer reviews, editorial comments from friends, colleagues, fellow graduate students, professors, and other advisors. Classroom teacher friends criticized the first three chapters as “too much educational jargon,” “boring,” “too theoretical,” and, “long.” These same reviewers typically felt differently about the case itself. As practitioners living in schools and classrooms, they were able to situate themselves (at least at times) within the described settings. Most claimed that the study prompted a great deal of reflection about their own practices and theories in their specific situations.

Alternatively, my graduate student reviewers were more amenable to the early chapters. Dovetailing with their recent studies, projects, and explorations, these editors wanted to discuss more of the philosophy and makeup of the literature and methodologies presented. The case had a much wider range of relevancy to this group. Some related to
the descriptive information and interpretations; others had very little to say. This dissertation, by design, attempts to play to both audiences. As a dissertation the paper must be scholarly, well organized, and academically defensible. As my personal project and investment, I also have sought to produce relevant accounts of my perceived theoretical understandings for those not on my dissertation committee. Too many dissertations are written, approved, and gathering dust on library shelves. Perhaps this too will become a doorstop or paperweight, but my attempt has been otherwise.

I discussed the subjective nature of this type of research in the previous chapters. It is a subjective account, but the reader will determine its significance. I, too, as action researcher, have determined the extent to which this endeavor has helped me grow as a reflective practitioner. Subjectivity does not denote a lack of credibility. Instead, it allows one to reveal personal biases throughout the account instead of pretending they don’t exist. I am a teacher and this is my perspective. It’s not detached, disinterested, or seeking an objective point of view. Instead it’s a passionate telling of a story. To pretend objective detachment would be dishonest and unproductive.

The case spanned a two-year time period (1997-1998/1999-1999). It is an account of my school, an arts-integrated alternative elementary school with full-time visual art, dance, drama, and music teachers. I co-wrote an article about the school published in the July 1998 issue of Art Education. Also, much “site specific” information has been included in the earlier chapters.

The case focuses on teacher collaboration related to “Community development.” Again, this has been discussed in depth in previous chapters, but broadly, I define
community in schools or classrooms as ongoing efforts at constructing a positive learning context for all actors in that context, students, teachers, administrators, parents, etc. Persons in a community context feel safe, respect themselves and each other, and work cooperatively to make decisions and shape future events. These central research questions guided this dissertation research:

1) How can a group of practitioners construct an intersubjective definition of community?

2) How does community develop in a school? What factors enable the development of community? What factors constrain it?

3) In what ways do the arts affect this community?

4) In what ways can a group of practitioners collaborate to strengthen school community as a part of ongoing school improvement initiatives?

The case proceeds somewhat chronologically, but also focuses on aggregated themes. The summaries and descriptions of events chronicle two school years. Interpretations, understandings, and theoretical developments are woven throughout the case, but a closing chapter is devoted specifically to this purpose. The assertions made are partly mine, but those assertions made about the school community have been "triangulated." In other words, I have revisited these points with my colleagues and have confirmed that what I wrote is what they also believe to be true. I make readers aware of instances where there is disagreement or varying points of view.

For our school community, the discourse is continual. There is always a new
challenge, an unanticipated obstacle, or a new way of proceeding that seems better than
the former. Valuing collaborative, reflective practice keeps this discourse moving forward.
For this dissertation, I excerpt a section from a timeline. In doing so, I hope that the
reader can enter this reflective discussion. Education is, and should be, a never-ending
conversation.

Case Study Introduction – “God I’m Glad You’re At This School.”

Duxberry Park has always had a special aura about it for me. There is a special
feeling in this school community that I sensed even before I could begin describe it.
I came to Duxberry from an urban elementary school in another large Ohio city. My
former school was a rough place to be, with daily fights, unmotivated students, and
teachers that seemed uncaring. This former school of mine, by district mandate, was an
“arts magnet” school, but this meant little to the teachers and barely affected the stale
curriculum and antiquated instructional delivery methods. Still, I enjoyed it tremendously.
By happenstance, the arts integrated model was an ideal way for me to teach. Though
ignored by the majority of the faculty, I began to employ the arts to stimulate student
interest and deepen educational experiences. I’d worked five years in the business
community and hated most of this business experience. Teaching, I thought at the time,
would provide me the fulfillment and satisfaction that I was lacking and would pay me
enough to maintain a modest but comfortable lifestyle. I’ve never regretted this decision.

As my only urban school experience (I grew up in a mostly white, middle class
suburb), I thought my former school was pretty much the norm for an inner-city school
and expected Duxberry to be pretty much the same. These preconceived notions were
absolutely wrong. As I waited nervously in suit and tie to interview for the Duxberry teaching position, a man approached. Wearing paint splattered pants, a worn T-shirt, walking fast, and humming a show tune, the man introduced himself. This man, the principal, warmly welcomed me and invited me to a first grade classroom where I was to interview with a group of teachers whom I now consider my dearest friends. The teachers, voluntarily staying until after 6:00 in the evening for this interview, immediately impressed me. They cared about children and they cared deeply about an arts integrated form of education. This was evident from their questions and our discussions. The interview seemed to move to more of a conversation. I saw myself in these people and for the first time realized that I was not alone as an educator.

My first year at Duxberry (1993-1994) was an intense one. Moving to a new school is difficult. Switching from sixth to first grade exacerbated the difficulties. The teachers rallied around me providing me a safety net that allowed me to feel comfortable as I learned on the go. I had a district provided mentor that supported me with elementary teaching know-how and an incredible crash course on early literacy. The Arts IMPACT Model employed at the school called for collaborative planning. This helped me to understand the school's curriculum implementation methodologies. The model also dictates that classroom teachers attend and participate with their students in the arts classes. This allowed me to observe four seasoned veterans teach and interact with this age group. Mary helped me put all the pieces together.

Mary, at that time, was the visual art specialist (teacher) at Duxberry. Previously, she'd taught first grade for 18 years. "I understand it's a little tough moving from an upper
to a lower grade like you’ve had to do,” she said one day early in the year. “Come and see me after school today.” I did, and this meeting led to a routine of meetings about one or two times a week, sometimes until nine or ten at night. Mary cared passionately about the school and its theories of education. “This is how we do it here,” she’d say, “and this is what you’re gonna do tomorrow.” With Mary I could discuss, reflect, and always get a boost when I was convinced that I couldn’t do it. While we talked, she’d work, like cutting mats for 380 individual student art projects because, “it’s an arts school, we have to make the place look like it. This is how we show others what we do and how we learn.”

Mary reflected the prevalent Duxberry teacher mentality. She taught because she loved teaching. She taught at Duxberry because she loved the arts and believed that the best way for students to learn was in and through the arts. She always did more than was expected or required. As I grew as a teacher throughout that first year, my relationship with Mary evolved from mentor/student, to a deep and caring friendship. Mary, years prior, had cancer. We’d talked about it in our late night sessions. She’d beaten it. In May of that year, it came back. In a month’s time, this brilliant, energetic, zany art teacher withered to a shell of her former self. Mary couldn’t finish the year. As she walked out of the building for the last time, she put her arm around me, looked me in the eyes and spoke the last words I’d ever hear her say, “God I’m glad that you’re at this school,” she said.

This was to have been Mary’s last year of teaching before retirement. She was going to enjoy her flower filled yard and work daily in her backyard artist studio that was yet to be built. After school was out for the year, as Mary lay inside the house dying, the studio became a reality. Daily, teachers showed up with tools, building materials, paint,
etc. They came to construct what all knew in their hearts was more of a monument than a
studio. This case study is about these people. The studio was finished. It was perfect, as
Mary would have demanded. Mary died shortly thereafter, but her memory and the arts
centered educational ideals that she championed live on in the hearts of all that knew her.

I have started this case with this story, not to depress the readers, or even to make
myself feel better, but to begin to illustrate the type of community that existed at Duxberry
upon my arrival and to situate myself within this context. The school has functioned as an
Arts IMPACT (Interdisciplinary Model Program in the Arts for Children and Teachers)
School for nearly 18 years. Many staff members have been at the school more than ten
years. Some of them have been there since the school’s inception. Turnover has been
comparatively minimal. The teachers hired for the program are interviewed and selected
based, in part, on their belief in and commitment to an arts based educational ideology.
The program has received numerous awards (Redbook School of the Year, Ohio’s
B.E.S.T. Practice Award, the Governor’s Award, etc.) and yearly welcomes hundreds of
visitors from across the U.S. each year.

The next few years of my tenure at Duxberry (1994-1997) were years of growth,
confidence building, and continued successes for the school. I continued to evolve as a
teacher and continued to pursue a graduate degree at The Ohio State University.

In 1997, the district, no longer bound by a court desegregation order, returned to a
“neighborhood schools” policy. This new school assignment policy changed the make up
of the population of many area schools, Duxberry being no exception. The school’s
population is drawn from a lottery system in which parents apply to send their children to
the school. Previously, the school drew children from many widely different areas of the city, most coming specifically for the arts program. Now, these children had the option (which previously didn't exist) to walk to their neighborhood school, or be bused (in some cases a 45 minute ride) to Duxberry. Many chose the former and the school population changed. Many more children in the surrounding neighborhoods now attended Duxberry.

As this was happening, I was exploring a variety of options for dissertation research. As a doctoral student/teacher, I was looking for an appropriate topic to tie together my graduate research and professional pursuits. I began to notice things about the school community that I hadn't before. Discipline seemed to be an issue. Previously, it seemed peripheral. Teachers were becoming frustrated, with one another, with the administration, and at times with the students. Was this model learning community beginning to deteriorate? If so, what were the factors that enabled it to become so strong and appealing in the first place? What changes were necessary for continued community growth and teacher satisfaction? Was our arts centered approach the best way to teach all children or just those that came for this specific program? Armed with these questions, I began to focus the research project and its guiding questions.

Duxberry Park — Year One

Searching for Questions — A Collaborative Action Research Group

I discussed these early ideas with my advisor at OSU, Dr. Gail McCutcheon. McCutcheon, the rare higher education professor who spends a lot of time in public school classrooms, readily related to these issues, but also realized the still broad and unfocused nature of the project. She agreed to allow me to facilitate a school based, one-
quarter independent study group with university credit for participants who so desired. This would allow me simultaneously to begin data collection and to focus and refine the research questions.

This section of the case study is an account of this study group. I begin by discussing the group and subtextual issues. McCutcheon (1995) describes the subtext as the group’s “agreed-upon norms and social rules for proceeding.” Next, I describe group discourse on community, discipline, students, and teacher and student roles in a community. Then, I detail theory driven strategies and actions employed as a result of the collaborative action research project, and close this section of the case study with discussions of community, the arts, and relationships between the two.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the real name of the school and the school district. I don’t, however, use teachers’ names, including my own (except in a few instances in which my name is a part of a direct quotation), throughout. Instead I use introductions like “a teacher said,” or “a group member added.” In some instances, when referring to parents, students, or board members, I do use pseudonyms. I do this for confidentiality of course, but also because it’s the perspectives, not the individual names that are important. Member checks were still conducted and all information has been triangulated.

Subtextual Issues

I recruited the independent study group members in August 1997 at a teachers’ meeting that we had to discuss some of the year’s upcoming events. I made a brief presentation about my initial project ideas and explained my conceptions of the group’s
involvement. Ten teachers agreed to participate in the study group. The imposition of a term paper requirement caused three teachers to drop out of the group. "I want to better my teaching, not please a university professor," said one of those who dropped out. Still, I was very happy with the number that remained. The independent study group met regularly on Tuesdays after school in the visual art room. Most of us kept reflective journals. Sharing and discussing these was a major focus of our work. One teacher said of his journal, "this is the product of my learning, these reflections, to write it up is just busy work to me. This journal is evidence of my learning through our discussions and my reflections." To collect data, I audio taped the meetings and was given access to the teachers' individual term papers and, in some cases, their journal writings.

As facilitator, I started the first group meeting by distributing Kohn's definition of community and by asking members what they wanted to get out of the group study. When my turn came, I stated that I wanted to better understand our school community and explore ways we could continually improve it. I also wanted to focus less on discipline and help the students to be more self-directed. Lastly, I noted that I wanted to document ways that the arts helped us to build our community. Each member answered the question thoughtfully, but before they were willing to discuss these ideas in depth, they wanted to first discuss subtextual issues (times and lengths for meetings, group configuration, materials to bring, frequency of journal entries, etc.). We did this, built consensus around our plan, and then began to discuss textual issues to be dealt within the deliberations of this study group. I shared a set of more than 12 early dissertation research questions that I'd developed. One group member said:
These questions are somewhat abstract for me. Let’s start talking about what we want to get out of this. What I’d like to hear is each of us sharing what we’re doing relative to this idea of building community. Here’s what I’m doing. Here’s what worked. Here’s what didn’t work. I’m happy with this. I’m sad with this, and just hearing each of us reflecting about what we’re doing I think will be interesting. That collaboration will be extremely valuable in terms of not only our relationships with one another, but also understanding the idea of community in more specific and concrete ways. I’d like to hear that.

These comments obviously struck a chord with the group members. Many wanted to add to these ideas. “I agree, the theoretical stuff sounds good, but we face it on a day to day basis, if what we do here doesn’t help with the day to day, then we’re wasting our time,” said one participant. Another added, “Let’s think out loud, share stories and ideas, share across grade levels, make it more open-ended than our usual meetings. Let’s help each other solve classroom problems.” By now, all were nodding in agreement and echoing calls for this semi-structured, practical oriented format. The group quickly built consensus on these ideas. The feeling was that we didn’t have enough opportunity for this type of sharing, and this study group could help fill this void. “I feel better already,” said one member. “We’ve already made a decision. We agree, and we all feel good about it. That’s more than I can say for our recent staff meetings, talk, talk, talk, but nothing is getting decided. We leave without deciding anything. That is so frustrating!” Again, the group nodded in agreement. We felt good because we believed that our deliberations* were going to be fruitful, and that we’d be able to positively affect our classrooms and our
school.

This important first step, agreeing on a loosely defined mission and guidelines for accomplishing it, set the tone for the quarter. There would inevitably be conflict and disagreement, but this would be a necessary component of deliberations aimed at better understanding what we do and how we could continue to positively affect children's lives through our unique educational model. The ball was rolling.

Community, Discipline, and Students

I had read a lot of Kohn's material (reviewed in chapter 2) about community and had thought a great deal about the connections between community and theories and practices concerning discipline and student behavior in schools and classrooms. I was surprised, however, how closely practitioners related these concepts of "community and discipline." As our group began to discuss community, issues of discipline and student behavior were continually raised.

Our discussions revealed that we all seemed to be experiencing a greater frequency of what we described as "inappropriate behavior." For example, teachers noted increases in defiant or insubordinate behavior, violent acts, and vandalism in the school. We also discussed seemingly shortened student attention spans and decreased motivation to produce "quality work." We brainstormed possible reasons for this. Our student population was changing – This meant a socio-economically lower clientele, and a decrease in students that came to our school specifically for our arts-centered program. Also, students were (and continue to be) exposed daily to a mass media blitz of violence, disrespect, and flashy sound bytes. Additionally, the nuclear family is now the exception
rather than the rule. Students were having less contact with their parents due to familial groupings or parental job obligations. One teacher explained, “it’s not just our changing population. It’s that kids are changing. Kids are louder. They’re used to talking over the TV, stereo. It’s the video generation. It’s fragment here, fragment there. I watched a commercial last night. The images changed every second. I try to explain to the kids, I’m not a TV. We have to interact, not be ignored or talked over.”

We also realized that these brainstormed reasons were beyond our control and that we needed to focus on what was within it. A group member asserted:

Yes, teaching here is different this year, maybe because of the kids, maybe some of the things we’ve always done don’t work anymore. We need to think about what changes need to be made, let’s think about supporting each other so we support the whole program. It’s progressive, K through Five. If we begin building community early, each year is just an extension of that. We already do this. I know immediately who hasn’t been here when I get a new group of students. The new kids don’t have this sense of community that our kids that have been here a while do. We’ve had the same families here for years, they’re loyal to the program, but now we aren’t going to have that consistent population. There’s going to be more turnover.

Two other teacher members connected discipline and community:

A lot of community has to do with behavior. That’s the ground level, the community can help to establish acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Then, the kids and I have this understanding in common. Behavior shows who’s getting it
and who isn't. Those that aren't, we need to try to understand why and what we can do to help them? The gut level is we can establish a ground level community and build on it.

[The second teacher added] Yes, You're right. How can we develop this so it's ongoing? But you're never really there. I'm hearing frustrations, so how can we use the arts to decrease the frustrations and continue forward progress? We're starting to get this ideal [community], now that we better understand that, and that we'll not get there, let's determine what we'll do to at least attempt to progress toward the ideal, but it's not linear. It's much more wholistic. Progress isn't always what we'd consider forward, but overall it's going to be, in the long term.

"Well," begins another group member, "Changing is easier said than done." "Yes," says another, "acknowledging the need for change is the first step, but in no way does that mean the change will occur." A third teacher says, "I make this point with the kids, and I use myself as an example. I'm 50 years old and I need to lose ten pounds, at least 10! Now I've known this for a long time, but have I done it? No! Hopefully the kids'll project that onto themselves, 'yeah even adults have problems changing,' but at least acknowledging the need is a step."

Another teacher summarized some of the discussed ideas. "If we really do our job on this community building, then the kids can help take care of themselves, become more self-directed, less self-centered. It cuts down on discipline problems. What can we as teachers do to help them as students to value themselves as a part of this community?"

These latter topics, teachers' and students' roles in the community, like the topics
of discipline and student behavior, were continually revisited. Next, I focus on some of these discussions and deliberations about the roles of community participants. Later in the case, I describe some strategies and theory driven actions undertaken by the group as part of our community building efforts. I note some of the inevitable areas of conflict, including conflicts related to teachers’ ideologies and political loyalties. Lastly in this section of the case devoted to the collaborative action research “study group” effort, I highlight our discourse about the arts and their inextricable role in our school community.

Teachers’ Roles in a Community

Community as overt curriculum.

Often, our discussions focused on our roles as teachers. Perhaps because this was what we were able to most directly impact. The group agreed that overtly conveying our interest in community to our student population was essential. “First, we need to let the kids know that we value community,” said a group member. We also believed that we already did this, sometimes referring to “community” specifically, and at other times referencing community principles that we embodied. “This is a part of our curriculum,” remarked one teacher. “Just look at our last two years’ school songs. ‘Unity’ last year and ‘Celebrate Community’ this year. The words to those songs are reinforced in all the arts and in the regular classrooms.” These songs, learned by all students and teachers at the beginning of the school years, are used as opening themes integrated throughout the arts and regular classroom curricula. The texts reflect an overt attempt to promote respect and caring among all school stakeholders. “We don’t just hope this happens. We make it a goal of what we do,” said a group member. “Maybe now, as we notice new problems, it’s
even more important,” said another.

**Community – beginning to build a local definition.**

Our research group also agreed that community means different things to different people, at different times, and in different contexts. This, we thought was not a bad thing, but we also believed that attempting to define community in our school and in our classrooms was a worthy endeavor. Our collaborative action research efforts often overlapped with whole school or whole staff activities. In other words, as an action research effort, our colleagues outside the research group usually shared our objectives. The difference was that in the research group more attention (especially on my part) was paid to documentation of these endeavors.

In a whole staff meeting, I asked the teachers to participate in a collaboratively constructed piece of visual artwork. Each teacher took a “puzzle piece” that I had made and wrote a word or symbol on it that they would use to describe community. We then assembled these onto a background piece. When assembled, the pieces form the word “community.” This piece was (and periodically continues to be) displayed in the school’s hallways. This was a part of our overt attempt at sharing our views on community. The words the teachers used to describe community are: friendship, Dux, value, celebration, common interests, unity, linked together, growth, spirit, commitment, happiness, connection, together, responsibility, love, support, fun, group, respect, trust, caring, togetherness, and foundations. Some teachers liked this idea and executed similar projects with their students. These brainstormed lists were used throughout the school year as our individual and collective interpretations of community evolved. Revisiting and revising our
evolving definition of community, with our students and as a staff, was (and continued to be) a way to build common goals and understandings. When "community" is mentioned at Duxberry, stakeholders know the meaning. This word is a part of our frequently used vocabulary. In fact, intentionally using a common vocabulary is another of our deliberate attempts at building community in our school.

A vocabulary of community.

Schools develop a culture unique to their own context. As a teacher/researcher, I've observed this in the many schools I've visited. As an arts-integrated school, Duxberry has commonly held cultural norms, expectations, and customs unique to this site. A part of this culture is a deliberate use of a consistent vocabulary. This shared vocabulary was another theme discussed and revisited throughout our collaborative action research project. As noted, teachers use the term community and discussed this with their students. "Let's work as a community," or, "remember we're a community and remember what that means for you," might be phrases commonly heard. When cooperative activity seems to be going well, I've often had students tell me things like, "Mr. Trent, we're really working in community today," or "being a part of this community is great!"

The term "focus" is another term carried throughout the building. Initially used in our process drama classes, we use this term to tell participants that activity is ready to begin, or restart, and that all participants are asked to focus solely on the task at hand. For example, the drama teacher will say, "Focus up here" (As she does this, she brings her hands together, fingertips touching, palms apart, and expects the students to mirror this movement.). In doing so, she sees who is listening, and who isn't. "Drama is a group
activity," she says, "and we need all group members focused for this work." (When she sees all are focused) "The next time I speak to you, I will be speaking in role," and the drama begins. I also use the word focus and the non-verbal mirroring technique in my regular classroom. In a transcribed audiotape of a readers’ theater I say, "Let’s get focused before I turn on the video [meaning camcorder]. Lay your script down in front of you and focus up here. [I do the hand movement and watch for students to mirror.] Excellent, now remember focus with your mind, not just with your hands [a phrase I’ve again picked up from the drama teacher]. Let’s work together so we’re proud of this at the end. Okay, pick up your scripts and let’s begin."

As noted, the common vocabulary includes the non-verbal. Echo clapping is frequently employed in regular classrooms, the arts, and in whole school or large group assemblies. For example, after students filed into the gym for a concert by the Columbus Symphony Strings Ensemble, the music teacher went to the front and clapped, bum, bum, ba, bum, bum. The students echoed this clapping pattern and then, in near silence, listened to her introduction of the group. A teacher, at the beginning of my tenure at Duxberry told me, "the echo clapping is a polite way to say, ‘okay, I need your attention now.’ It’s so much better than screaming at children to get quiet. It’s effective and respectful. We all know what to do and what this means." Other verbal and non-verbal commonalities are also used, and others continue to emerge. Importantly, we use these shared terms and cues to build community. A group member asserted, "It [using a common vocabulary] promotes continuity and gives the children a consistent message. It lets students know that we [share] have the same expectations." Shared expectations is the next topic I’ll offer in
discussion of the teachers’ roles in a community.

Shared expectations.

Many in the group asserted that to address perceived community related problems we needed to maintain high expectations for all students, and we needed to communicate these expectations to students and their parents. One teacher described it like this:

You have to take the time, make the investment, even though this takes a lot of time, discussing and reinforcing, it pays off in the future. We must let these children and their parents know our expectations are high and will remain high because we have confidence in them, and they should have confidence in us.

Sharing and defining expectations for ourselves and our students became another site of much discussion and debate for our research group. The question, “should our expectations be the same for all children?” was immediately raised. A group member responded, “I agree with you. The expectations need to be high, and defined, and communicated to kids, because they don’t automatically know it, but they can’t be the same for everybody can they?” Another teacher entered this discussion, “yeah, what about the kid that doesn’t know his alphabet? Do I expect him to read what Rachel is reading? She’s at a level 28 [reading recovery level].” The first teacher responds, “No they’re different, but we should expect each student to progress from where they are currently, we also have different kinds of expectations. Right?” A teacher asks, “what do you mean?” Well, we have academic expectations, and these are different even subject by subject. We have expectations for behavior, cooperative activity and on and on.” A group member agrees, “sure, some kids might really struggle academically, but they’re the most
cooperative, congenial kids in the world. They’re meeting expectations in some areas, and still have a ways to go in others.”

The group discussed and agreed that, in general, expectations needed to be high for all students, and these expectations should be communicated to students and parents and revisited frequently. It was also agreed that expectations would vary from child to child, setting to setting. “We can’t measure all kids with the same yardstick,” remarked a group member. “It’s like the Gardner stuff [Frames of Mind and the Theory of Multiple Intelligences]. We’re all different, learn differently, have different strengths, weaknesses.” Another teacher responds in agreement, “when kids understand a multi-tiered set of expectations, even with behavior, then, they realize individually that maybe one kid is going to be defiant, lose their temper, and refuse to do anything, but that doesn’t mean that’s acceptable for them, they know that.” A teacher noted that, “we expect students to do their best, and they should expect our best in return.” Another teacher, in the closing moments of this discussion added, “This has allowed me to do this [give a best effort].

Community as a vehicle for self-examination has been very helpful. It’s a set of criteria I can use to view myself and my teaching.”

Teachers in conflict.

Our school model (IMPACT) mandates group deliberation. We regularly plan, discuss, debate, and develop curriculum and school policies. Individuals enter into group deliberation with idiosyncratic theories that guide action. Conflict is inevitable. Some argue that the conflict can be deleterious, others for its positive aspects, still others for its minimization (McCutcheon, 1995). As a group of practitioners, we commonly believe that
conflict in our situation is diminished, or at least seen as productive, due to our jointly held theories that support arts-integrated education. Still, conflict occurs and must be dealt with. In this section, I make note of three specific areas of conflict that arose during the collaborative action research time period.

We discussed some educational literature and theoretical writings. Often, the feeling was, “these people don’t teach in urban classrooms five days a week. If they did, their theories would be different.” Discussions of the writings and theories of Kohn, Glasser, Dewey, Canter, etc. led us to specific discussions about student behavior, which in turn led to discussions of our roles in giving rewards and punishments in the school and in classrooms. Kohn, for example, abhors both. Canter, on the other hand, embraces them. Discussions were fruitful. Some common ground was established. For example, most felt that if consequences (or punishments) were employed, then they should be related directly to the specific behavior and should be aimed at assisting the child in understanding the inappropriateness of the given action and developing strategies for future avoidance. Most also felt that rewards shouldn’t become so important to the children that the reward became the reason for the positive action. Some felt that rewards were okay if given to a whole group, but not acceptable when done individually.

I discuss these topics, rewards and punishments, later in this dissertation, because they have subsequently been topics discussed by our entire staff. However, in our collaborative action research group, no clear consensus emerged. Some believed in and utilized rewards for perceived positive behavior and negative consequences for perceived inappropriate behavior. Others had eliminated them all together. Each involved in the
discussion had personally held theories that supported their use or non-use. All felt they had a better understanding of their own personal theories on the topics as a result of our discussions.

Personally, my theories on rewards and punishments have evolved. Initially, I was a practitioner that used both rewards and punishments. I didn't even recognize the existence of alternatives. Now at the writing of this case study, I have attempted to eliminate both rewards and punishments from my classroom community. I'm not asserting that I've accomplished this, just that I'm continually working toward it. Kohn (1996) sees this as a continuum ranging from “doing to,” on one end to “working with” on the other.

Another area of conflict emerged during the time of the collaborative action research project, though the conflict had been going on for some time. A member of our group held (and continues to hold) clearly constructivist oriented philosophies. While others in the group understand and utilize elements of a constructivist ideology, this teacher was much more of an advocate. Compounding the problem was this teacher’s belief in and support of the use of technology. She knew more about it and worked hard to make computers an important part of curriculum and instructional strategies. Others in the building thought that this would deflect interest and focus away from the arts. This ideological disagreement became painful for the teacher and other staff. The conflict was not necessarily with members of the research group much in the research group, but rather with those who were to make connections with her ideas during planning sessions. Her ideas in collaborative curriculum development sessions were deemed, “too abstract,” “irrational,” and “way above the kids’ heads.” “There’s nothing here for me to tie into,”
stated an arts teacher.

Alternatively, the constructivist teacher believed in her methods and guiding theories. She felt “the school model had fallen into ‘ruts of tradition’ which were becoming oppressive to both innovation and student identity and ownership.” She believed that, “the entrenched processes didn’t honor student ideas or individual innovation.” She saw the school as more concerned with transmission of facts than with teaching students how to learn or allowing them to be involved in the design of their own learning. This teacher considered herself “on the bleeding edge,” and “marginalized by a few.” Other teachers in the building disagreed with her assessment and asserted that the model did support and apply constructivist tenets. Perhaps the conflict was either a lack of intersubjective agreement, or that the discussed teacher was ideologically farther toward “constructivist” on a “positivist-constructivist” continuum than other staff members.

We discussed some of the elements of this conflict in our group, but perhaps to avoid further conflict, much of it was intentionally ignored. In retrospect, this was probably wrong. Repressing or ignoring conflict doesn’t help to build community, but the theories of the staff at large seemed incompatible with those held by this teacher and friend, and I doubted further discussion would bring a positive resolution.

Personally, I’ve reflected much on this teacher’s thoughts and theories. Perhaps, due to the recent increased (intense) external pressures applied to “raise test scores at all costs,” we have focused too much on teacher (or test) driven curricula. Maybe further understanding of constructivist ideas would enable us as a staff to better serve the needs of our students. In my classroom (largely due to action research related reflection), I have
tried to lean toward a more constructivist direction, but again a constant stream of
curriculum and testing mandates have hindered these efforts. Unfortunately, the champion
of these constructivist ideals has since left the school citing theoretical incompatibility as
one reason for doing so. Conflict between staff in planning sessions has diminished as a
result, but I assert that continual questioning of theories that drive our curriculum decision
making should continue.

Lastly, in this section on teachers’ roles in conflicts, I’m obligated to describe a
conflict in which I was directly involved. I have noted that our staff’s general agreement
centering on our school model of arts-integrated education is a unifying factor. Because of
this, consensus related to curriculum deliberation is more readily achieved. A teacher
explained this to me, “that’s our common ground. Within that we have a philosophy that
we all relate to, but outside of it, in other areas, there’s a lot more diversity of opinion.”
Teaching, however, is a complex endeavor enveloping many areas outside of curriculum.
Teachers’ union politics is one of these areas.

Union politics, inside and outside the field of education, often elicit strong feelings.
The following is an excerpt from an action research group member’s term paper:

At the beginning of the school year the teachers of Columbus had no
contract. The teacher’s union voted to work at school only the hours stated in our
expired contract. (8:30 – 4:00) This resolution was not followed by all the
members of the Action Research Community.

I felt frustrated and discouraged by a breach of community agreement. For
a time, the sense of a cooperative, supportive community ceased to exist. As a
member of that community, I floundered and questioned whether our community should continue. I felt those members who would not work to the common good—a viable teaching contract—were threatening the well-being of the larger community of Columbus teachers.

I believe a shared commitment to the arts was the glue that held us together during this frustrating time. As our community at Duxberry buckled and was torn, an appreciation and commitment to drama, music, dance, literature and visual art kept a channel of communication open. Without this shared belief in the value of the arts, I doubt any sense of community would exist.

Now that this situation has been resolved and is behind us, I am thankful we have this common ground of the arts to bring us back together. The arts have helped us to strive for a community fostering respect and concern for each other.

I, the author of this dissertation, was one of the teachers (referred to above) who did not follow the teachers' union directive. I continued to come to school early and stay late. I continued to try to give my best, and at times, felt this still wasn't enough. As noted earlier in this dissertation, I worked in the business community before becoming a teacher. I hated it. I teach because I love it, love children, and feel when I give my best, that I can and do positively affect children's lives. My obligations (perhaps under-examined) had always been to my students.

I'd had a long running disdain for unions and what I perceive as propaganda oriented tactics. Like many personally held theories, these beliefs have been shaped by my
experiences and the experiences of my parents. My parents are retired educators, my mother a teacher, my father a retired superintendent. I remember when there was a strike in my parents' district. I remember hearing my mother crying nightly after being threatened and verbally and physically accosted for crossing a picket line to get to her classroom. She was doing what she believed for her was the right thing. Answering the phone, I fielded threats against my father for his role in contract negotiations. He was doing what he believed for him was the right thing.

Now, later in life as a teacher, I had made a decision. I did what I thought was the right thing. I tried, and continue to try, to stay out of union politics. I pay my dues and silently resent the union's distribution of overwhelmingly negative information. This decision (to not abide by the union resolution) was made knowing that I would be letting down a group of people that I loved. I understood and respected their positions, but I wasn't in agreement with them. I realized that by breaking ranks with my colleagues I risked friendships and a professional life I enjoyed beyond belief. My only hope was that we could agree to disagree, respect (not agree with) each other's positions, and continue to jointly construct a learning community that allowed for differing beliefs.

My fears were never realized, my hopes were. After the resolution of this situation, I was treated professionally and, in most cases, warmly after the contractual issues were resolved. I did likewise. This was a gut-wrenching time for me. In this instance, I experienced incredible internal conflict. I felt (and continue to feel) strongly about supporting this community of practitioners, but in this scenario, I didn't. I agree with the author (cited above) that the arts helped the community to heal. We don't just teach in and
through the arts. We live in and through them as well. The arts are a part of us. This commonality has helped us bridge many gaps.

A colleague who read this section of the chapter asserted that my perspective was “narrow-minded” and tore apart the community we were all trying to build. I can’t disagree with this. This colleague also asserted that it was a “gut wrenching time” because, in retrospect, I might have made the wrong decision. Again, I don’t disagree. I can say that my overall perspective has changed. Were the events to occur now, three years later, I probably would make a different decision. It would be based more on the fact that I am a part of a community of practitioners. Through reflection, I realize that this means prioritizing community and colleagues over individual beliefs. My colleague asserted that “in a loving community, we sometimes need to suffer together. We need to re-look at personal decisions in the broader context of community. We all have to sacrifice and be flexible. Community is almost a sacred thing. The sacrifices are worth it.”

I debated whether or not to include this series of events in this case. Undoubtedly, this will change readers’ perceptions of me, but to exclude the incident would be to mis-educate the reader about who I am and what has shaped my teaching. Additionally, the teacher (cited above) felt strongly enough to include the events in her paper. In turn, I felt it necessary to include her comments and my response.

In this section about teachers’ roles in conflicts, I’ve noted the complex nature of teaching. Conflict occurs. The discussed conflicts described teachers’ roles in conflicts related to theories of classroom management, teaching ideology, and union politics. No easy answers or clear-cut winners emerged. Through reflection, I’ve developed these
personal theories about conflict: expect conflict and don’t immediately view it negatively; work for productive, consensual resolutions; continue dialogue; respect individual differences and idiosyncrasies; and when all else fails, agree to disagree and revisit at a later time. Internal conflict is also inevitable, but helps us grow personally and professionally.

The preceding section on teachers’ roles in a community has included discussions of community as an overt curricular component, the importance of a localized definition of community, the employment of common vocabulary and shared expectations, and teachers’ roles in conflict. The following section describes students’ roles in a community.

**Students’ Roles in a Community**

A better title for this section of the case might be “teachers’ perceptions of students’ roles in a community.” This case study focuses on teachers’ perspectives and discourse, and while some student data has been collected, a companion investigation, presenting the multiple perspectives of students and their perceived roles and relationships in a school community would be a worthy endeavor. It was not, however, the purpose of this dissertation. Saving this topic for post-doctoral work, I now proceed to explore our action research group’s discussions of student roles.

A group member asked, “How do you get children to respect the fact that they are part of a community?” A teacher responded, “they have to give something back. When you put something into it, work, they will reap the rewards. It’s the giving back, the giving to, that really helps to build these ideas.” This idea met with much approval. “If a student gives to the community, like you say, they sacrifice for the community, then they
obviously value it," says another member. "But, of course, the problem is that sometimes
they don’t value their membership," remarks another.

Yet another teacher injects, "I think that self understanding is a part of community,
by understanding his or her own self, a kid can balance this with how they fit in this
community. I draw two circles with arrows on the board. On one, the arrows face out, on
the other, the arrows face in. I ask the kids which they’d like to be. They’d all like to be
the one with the arrows facing out, concerned about others and their role in making the
community work."

Another group member adds, "respect is in there too. This developing self respect
helps develop respect for others, without the intrapersonal, kids can’t develop the
interpersonal. It’s self respect and understanding first, then respect for others as a result."

This teacher provided an example:

I get the kids to reflect on this. I have them brainstorm lists of things
they’re good at. Then I have them describe these things as qualities. One kid said
he was good at being funny, so I said ‘okay, so you’re able to make people laugh,
maybe you can even make someone laugh or be happy when something else might
be bothering them.’ Finally, then, I have them relate these personal qualities to
contributions they can make to the whole group. How do these qualities contribute
to your ability to collaborate? The idea is going from self understanding and fitting
this into a positive aspect for the collaborative group.

The group agreed with the idea that self-respect should be fostered in an effort to
foster less self-centeredness and more self-directedness. Some of us noted that we didn’t
focus on this enough. "Again, we need to be explicit about this with our students," said one teacher. "If we want this to be a part of our students' roles in our community, then we need to model it for them and let them know that we value it."

"I also want my students to be self-directed and to care about each other," begins one teacher, "but I also don't want them to be so concerned about other's behavior that they become little policemen, tattling all the time. I tell them, 'run your own railroad.' The other day I said it and the kid said, 'I'm trying, but he's on my track!' I use this because it's not derogatory, but it teaches them to mind their own business when it's appropriate to do so." Another teacher added, "I like the 'run your own railroad' idea. I told a kid today who said somebody said somebody said something about his mother, 'wait a minute, who's in control here? Don't let someone else be in control of you.'"

Other talk was about how we present our perceived roles of students. "We put a slant on things, of course, but it's done with the right intentions. I ask the kids, 'what good things happened on the playground today?' I'm trying to get them to focus on the positive roles that people play here day in and day out." Another teacher adds, "the DARE [Drug Abuse Resistance education] officer does that too. He puts his slant on things and lets them know why he feels the way he does." The teacher relayed a story told by the officer in which he talks to kids about revenge behavior and hitting back, and why he feels they shouldn't (it exacerbates an already problematic situation and there are better ways to deal with it). After the lesson, he remarked to the classroom teacher that the Duxberry students were able to discuss this at what he perceived to be a higher level than comparably aged students at other schools. The officer credited the strong community
atmosphere at Duxberry. He thought the focus on trying to get children to see past
themselves to the larger situation was working.

Another teacher responds:

I agree with him [the officer] I think our kids view their roles differently
here. I’ve been at other schools, so I have something to compare it to. Kids are
generally supportive of each other here. I’ve got a student that’s virtually a non-
reader, but when this kid reads the others compliment him, praise him, support
him. To see this makes me feel incredibly good. In other schools that kid would be
laughed out of the room. Maybe this is because we have the arts and this helps our
students better understand their roles. Maybe it’s the way we treat the kids and
each other. I don’t know.

In these discussions of students’ roles in our community, we discovered much
theoretical agreement about our goals for students. We believed that students should
respect themselves and respect other community stakeholders. We believed that they
should expect to see the same from us as teachers. We agreed that students should have a
view of their place in our community and the importance of their participation. It was also
asserted that a student’s role should be a progressively self-directed one, and that we
should openly discuss roles and expectations for teachers and students. Lastly, we believed
that our students view their roles differently or better understand them as a result of the
existing strong community and opportunities for artistic activity.

**Strategies for Building Community**

As our collaborative action research group discussed and refined our definitions of
community, stakeholders’ roles in a community, and our foundational theories underlying our practices, we also brainstormed and executed a variety of strategies for building the type of community we intersubjectively envisioned. This, after all, is action research; ascertain, reflect, plan, take action, reflect, revise and start all over again. It’s a spiral-like process, and like community building, can be perpetual. In this section of the case study I discuss some of these strategies and actions for community building and our conversations that surrounded them. Others will be discussed later in the case. Discussions specific to the role of the arts in our community will close this section of the case study.

First, I briefly situate the IMPACT model within this community context (more on this later). Next, I present some “discipline” related strategies and theories we explored. Then, I detail specific strategies and their perceived outcomes. These include circle meetings, cross grade level activities, a teacher student partnership project, rubric development, and connections made with external communities.

I have stated that a strong sense of community existed long before my arrival at Duxberry. I’ve also noted that communities unavoidably evolve, and though this community is no exception, a strong community atmosphere and philosophy still exist. A big part of this project is the understanding of what factors have enabled community to thrive and ascertaining what actions need to be taken to evolve the program so it continues to do so. In conversations that have spanned nearly ten years, I have been repeatedly told, and am in agreement, that the IMPACT model itself supports community building processes and theoretical development. A teacher in the collaborative action research group explains these connections:
I said in one of our earlier meetings that community enables us as teachers to examine our teaching through a special set of criteria. This meshes perfectly with the IMPACT philosophy. IMPACT is the overriding philosophy, and community develops within the model. If we focus on IMPACT, community develops as one of the results. The model provides for cooperative planning, so we can work together as community minded people. IMPACT puts us in the arts classes, participating right alongside the students. This reinforces community.

"These teachers care about this." We're modeling a caring and respecting of the arts, each other, and our students. That supports our community efforts. We interact with outside groups and artists through the IMPACT process. That supports it [community]. That's a big thing that we have going for us. Our philosophy does this [enables community development].

The IMPACT model guides our interactions. It's intertwined with our educational methodologies. Likewise, it's intertwined throughout this case. The above, as an excerpt from our collaborative action research group's deliberations and discussions, is provided to make this point: Community building is not a new thing at this school. In no way am I trying to assert that this action research project geared up and "community" started happening. I am pleased that as a result of the action research and many longer term school-wide efforts, we are developing a better understanding of our community and are formulating direct actions to support it. The next portions of this section are about some of these direct actions engaged in by members of the action research group. Some of them were deemed effective and continue still. Others were implemented, revised, and re-
implemented. Some were tried and fizzled or were left behind for other reasons.

**Discipline, classroom management, rules, and consequences.**

Discipline evokes strong sentiments. Often viewed negatively as punishment for the purpose of control, talk of discipline brings to mind, for many, days of paddling, detention, dunce caps, and writing lines. Some, however, don’t view it so negatively. In fact, it can be viewed as a quest for self-control, a strengthened character, or a focused efficiency. Kohn opposes the use of the term discipline. He says it’s “doing to” children instead of “working with” them. Teachers use the term. They also use the term classroom management. In our group the terms discipline and classroom management were used to refer to the ways and strategies we employed to help students become self-directed and behave within a framework of what we believed to be appropriate behavior. This framework varied from teacher to teacher and sometimes was developed with the children.

Teachers in the group used a variety of “management” methodologies ranging from traditional assertive discipline to an approach in which problems were dealt with on a case by case basis and no real structured system existed. For the 7 school years prior to this one, I had used some form of assertive discipline. Most recently I had used a “behavior ladder” form of assertive discipline. This particular year, having read the Kohn book, I was not using this system and was also attempting to eliminate all forms of rewards and punishments. Those of us who used an assertive discipline system did so for similar reasons. It seemed fair. It held students accountable. It demonstrably notified students when they were acting inappropriately. It provided set consequences for inappropriate actions, and it was easy to communicate to parents.
We all (who used an assertive discipline derived system) also agreed that we’d prefer not to “have” to use the system, but needed to maintain an atmosphere in the classroom that was conducive to learning. Most agreed that minimizing reliance on any management system was a worthy goal, and that ultimately, we wanted students to take more responsibility for their own behavior as opposed to our external controls. Most in the group also agreed that we should have the flexibility to choose methods compatible with our personally held theories.

We didn’t have a clear consensus on the use of consequences. I mentioned to the group that Kohn suggests asking the question, “how can we help?” He says “If a student had trouble with long division, after all, we would naturally want to help him understand the procedure (and its rationale), rather than seeking to punish him” (1996, p. 115).

Another teacher responds, “I read the chapter and I’m very frustrated with it. I’ve got a real distaste for this researcher, disconnected from classroom, telling me to continually ask kids how I can help them.” Another teacher agrees (We’ve all read the literature that’s being discussed) and notes that of course, we’re all trying to help kids all the time. It’s a matter, says the teacher, of how we individually believe it’s best to help. A group member adds,

Kohn is idealistic. He doesn’t teach elementary school and even if he ever has, I’m sure it’s been a long time. Kids have to learn consequences. It’s a part of life, good consequences, bad consequences; It’s not always the negative. Talking is great. It should always be a part of what we do. Sometimes it works, but when that’s exhausted, you try something else, and a natural consequence for
unacceptable behavior is one of those things.

Another teacher questions, "But isn’t the point that they’ve got to learn it on the inside? External rewards and punishments work sometimes, and even then, only temporarily. Don’t we want the kids to internalize the appropriate behavior?" A teacher answers, "Who’s to say that these external things don’t help kids work toward internalizing? Plus, adults are motivated by external factors all the time."

A teacher adds democracy to the discussion.

We talked about democracy in my night class. I try to use democratic principles in my class when possible, but is it really a democracy? Of course not. These kids are 7 and 8. I’m in my 30’s. Are we equals, with equal decision making power? No. I have education and experiences that qualify me to be the facilitator in that classroom. That means that sometimes I’ll dictate decisions that the students won’t agree with. I do it because I believe it’s correct, but the point is, when possible I do allow my students freedoms, decision making power, and input into our classroom activities. With consequences, there’s a point where, for example, a student disrupts a cooperative group activity all morning. He tears up other people’s papers, pushes other children, refuses to participate, and completes no work. Then that’s an instance where that student needs, as a logical consequence, to stay in at recess, do the work that I expected him to do, and talk with me about what better course of action he can choose in the future. Many agreed, as we had discussed previously, that if there were to be consequences, then they should relate directly to the inappropriate behavior. A teacher
shared this story about a friend of hers. “She uses ‘negotiating chairs’ as a logical consequence. If two kids are having an argument, she sends them to the negotiating chairs to try to work it out on their own.” Another teacher joins. “That could be viewed as a consequence, but it’s constructive, and puts the burden on them to solve the problem, not the adult.”

Throughout the project (and beyond) we revisited the topics of rewards and consequences. Still, no theoretical consensus on these issues emerged. We each better understood our own theories and those of the other group members, and we all expressed appreciation for the flexibility offered us at this school. This flexibility allowed each of us to proceed individually. There were, however, other “management” related ideas that we did all agree upon.

We felt that consistent teacher behavior was essential and agreed that as a staff we talked with students more as adults than as children. “This shows our students that we respect them and are willing to hear what they have to say,” said a teacher.

This teacher shared a story about a field trip. One of her students got in trouble with a guide on the trip. The guide screamed at the child, embarrassed him, and wouldn’t listen to what the child had to say. The teacher talked to the student on the return trip to school. She found out that the student was actually organizing something for the guide that was out of order. He was helping the guide, but because the guide screamed and didn’t listen, she’ll never know the whole story. “That kid would have never been able to convey that to me if I’d done the same thing as the guide, yelled at him, disrespected him and not heard him out. What he had done made perfect sense after I talked with him about
it." We all agreed that our belief in mutual respect was salient. "You don't find the typical 'sit down, shut up, and listen' mentality here," said a group member.

Along these same lines, we asserted that to use a continual, caring approach was also important. "We show students that we care about them, not just those in our own class, but all students," said a group member. "And that makes a big difference in how our community is perceived, even by visitors," said another teacher that corroborated this with a story about a recent conversation with a visiting educator.

**Circle meetings.**

Open, respectful lines of communication, it seemed, were near the top of everyone's list of components for a quality learning community. One way that we accomplished this in our classrooms was through the use of circle meetings. These meetings, we believe, are a component of classroom management. We shared about these meetings on many occasions in the collaborative action research meetings. Many teachers in the group had used this activity for long periods of time, and others just started as a result of the community building activities and strategies devised in the research group, but all agreed that they were worth the time invested.

We discussed our individual approaches to circle meeting procedures. We agreed upon the importance of a set of procedural items. These items were:

1) Everyone (including the teacher) sits in a circle. (The older students in chairs, the younger ones on the floor.)

2) One person talks at a time. The others look at the speaker. Respect is shown by listening and not laughing at any responses.
3) Participants take turns (by going around the circle, or by passing or rolling an object; a ball, beanbag, stuffed animal, stick, etc. person to person). The person with the object has the floor.

4) Circle meetings can be used to discuss class or school problems, academic matters, items of student interest, personal experiences, or anything else selected by the teacher or students.

As teachers in our group experimented with these class meetings, some concerns and frustrations did arise. “When I’ve tried to discuss problems in my circle meetings, some kids want to talk, others don’t. Sometimes these that don’t are really kids I want to hear from,” said one teacher. Another teacher offered some suggestions:

First, you might try going around the circle, giving everyone the opportunity to speak. Of course, a kid can pass if he or she wants to. We don’t want to force any participation, but if most people are entering into the discussion then maybe it’ll be less threatening. Also, since you’re just starting out with this, try some topics that aren’t problem oriented. Use some topics that are close to kids. Get the kids used to talking and listening. Maybe pets, TV, family, music, their neighborhoods, animals, toys, these might be some to get things started. Then, build to more serious topics once the format is set, and be specific. What can we do to improve such and such?

The teacher tried some of these strategies throughout the quarter and reported many successes back to the collaborative. Other concerns raised included the problem that students at times would give responses that “the teacher wanted to hear,” but then the
teacher observed little carryover from talk to action. A teacher addressed some of these concerns.

I’ve always encountered that too, but this, like so much of what we’ve talked about, is a slow process. We’re always revisiting. I’ve talked about cooperation, building community, respect, and thinking of others, for 8 or 9 weeks now, in and out of circle meetings. At times I felt like I might as well talk to the walls, but now, it’s finally starting to click. The three or four kids that have seemed so hard to reach, so self-absorbed, they’re starting to see the intrinsic rewards of community participation. Even if they don’t get it now, the seed is planted. It starts the process of understanding. As we seek continuity, common vocabulary, unify philosophies, this will build. It has to be revisited. It’s metacognitive we want kids to think about these ideas when there is conflict.

Circle meetings fit nicely within our IMPACT model and our theories about community and classroom management. These meetings allow for each classroom community member to speak and be heard. It’s a non-threatening venue in which the teacher and students share roles. Participants can guide discussions of expectations, frustrations, or triumphs as they see fit. Most teachers in our school now use a form of circle meeting. This enables the building of community-oriented skills and attitudes. If year to year students participate in open, non-threatening discussions such as these, then the dialogue will continue to grow richer and be more productive. Community building, like our IMPACT model, builds upon past experiences. Continuity leads to deeper understanding.
Cross-grade level activities.

One strategy utilized before, during, and after the collaborative action research project was to bring older and younger kids together. This was done in a variety of ways. Some activities such as partner reading (1 older, 1 younger paired to read to each other or together), sharing of writing or artistic products, or cooperative games, could be done with little notice or planning and fit into our already crowded schedules. Other cross-grade level activities were extensively planned and orchestrated.

One series of activities grouped a first grade class and a fourth grade class together. The planned culminating activity was a joint visit to the Columbus Museum of Art for a William Johnson Retrospective. To prepare for the visit, the two classroom teachers coordinated a number of cooperative activities. These included a presentation of "Little Sis and Uncle Willie" a book about Johnson’s life told from the perspective of his niece and illustrated with his paintings. The presentation of the book included breaks in which the students (in cross-grade level groups of 4 to 6) would be asked to participate in dramatic activity, acting out scenes from his life, solving problems he might have encountered, or freezing in tableaux to show actions or feelings detailed in the book. Another session allowed the classes to explore and learn about the Harlem Renaissance (in which Johnson was a major figure) and learn dances of the time period. The students also executed paintings and marker drawings in Johnson’s folk art like style, but they did these collaboratively instead of independently.

Finally, the students went to the museum. The tour groups consisted of a mix of first and fourth graders. The museum docents were hesitant at first. After the tour of the
exhibit, the docents praised the groups for their prior knowledge. “They get more out of it this way. If they know something about what they’re going to see, it’s a richer experience,” said a docent. Another docent said, “I was uneasy with the wide range of ages, but it was amazing to see these kids work together today.” The classroom teachers agreed. The fourth grade teacher observed, “some kids that might give me trouble in the classroom are the opposite in this context. They stand up to this responsibility, because they’re trusted with the responsibility. I might still have some of the same problems in the classroom, but there’s some degree of transfer. I see real benefits in the long term.”

Cross grade level activities continue to be employed at Duxberry. All that participate in these respond positively, though there are roadblocks that must be overcome. A flexible, sometimes crowded schedule, increased pressures to raise test scores, and the yearly moving of teachers from grade level to grade level (due to space limitations in the building), are all seen as obstacles. Still, these activities continue to be used to foster and build our school learning community.

The pal project.

As our group discussed community building strategies and classroom and school management, we became aware of a shared concern. It seemed to us that day to day, week to week, even year to year, the same children were perceived as “discipline problems.” These were the students typically found in in-school suspension, the PEAK room (an attended time-out or in school suspension room), or on the suspension list. One teacher called these students the “habitual offenders.” We were all bothered by this. One teacher shared her discomfort with the high number of African-American males among this group.
Our discussions of frustration led one teacher, recently transferred from another school, to suggest a project employed at her former school. "We called it "secret pals," she explained. "Each teacher accepted one of these kids that consistently behaved inappropriately as a secret pal." The child would not be in the teacher's class, she explained, so that it was a more informal, friendly relationship. The teacher would write the student notes of encouragement, praise, or would begin a dialogue writing questions to be answered by the student. The teachers acted as couriers and facilitators. This gave these children "a little boost, some extra attention where it was needed," she said. At the end of each quarter, the teachers would introduce themselves to the student and the two would have lunch together. Then, the teachers would switch "pals" and start over again the next quarter.

As is common in education, teachers in our group liked some of this proposed project and wanted to modify other parts. One teacher remarked, "I like the pairing idea. This is a positive way to send a message to specific kids 'I'm not your regular teacher, but I'm someone that cares about you, wants to learn more about you, and will help you in any way I can, but I'm uncomfortable with the secrecy part.'" "Well the idea is, to build excitement, get the kids interested in who this might be," said the first teacher. Another teacher added, "Yeah, I also like the idea, but that secrecy thing could be a problem. How's a parent going to perceive that? My kid's getting anonymous notes from some strange adult?" The teacher continued, "I'd like to develop a rapport with my pal, have lunch, talk, let them know that they can come to me with problems. That's the way it would work for me."
The group, as was often the case, decided that each individual should have the option of proceeding in the manner in which they were most comfortable. Some did so in secret, others revealed themselves initially. This was another effort that, after implementation and reflection, was deemed, for the most part, successful. Some of the participating teachers noted marked improvement in participating students’ attitudes and classroom participation. The teachers commented that they enjoyed developing a relationship with a student outside their immediate class and often outside their current grade level. “It gave me a new perspective on the kids that I consider ‘behavior problems,’” said one participant. The students also seemed to benefit from the effort. Being able to speak with an adult outside the traditional teacher/student context gave them another outlet. Some of their behavior that we, as teachers, deemed inappropriate, was attention seeking action. These partnerships provided some of this sought after attention.

The project wasn’t a magic bullet. These children didn’t all instantly conform to teacher expectations. In fact, none of the strategies discussed so far, or those yet to be discussed, can be perceived as a “magic bullet.” People are too complex for one-size-fits-all solutions to human problems. Programs that claim to do so are more marketing than substance. What we have found is that a concerted effort is our best shot. A process of trial, error, reflection, and retrial is essential, and continued focus on and restating of our commonly held vision helps us to continue evolution in the right direction. This pal project, along with others developed in and outside of the collaborative action research group, continues in various forms to assist our community stakeholders.
Rubrics.

As I reviewed the collected data for writing up this dissertation, the repetitive themes became obvious. One of these themes recurred time and time again. We, as teachers, wanted to facilitate our students’ development toward self-direction and self-assessment. This was true in academic as well as other areas such as cooperative activity, community contribution, behavior, friendship, etc. One action research group member proposed, early in the quarter, the use of rubrics to pursue these objectives. This became an ongoing topic for discussion and was revisited throughout the project and beyond.

The teacher that proposed the use of rubrics explained, “with development of a rubric, I’m shifting responsibility from me to us. I’m also giving the kids a much clearer picture of what they’re expected to do.” She gave an example of a rubric discussion in her class.

I asked the students, “what do you think will be used as the criteria to grade your [Columbus Public Schools’] writing assessment? How does a teacher know what grade to give you?” The students responded: time, neatness, length, spelling, and much later, they talked about content. Then I showed them the district provided rubric. Content was number one, a logical beginning, middle, and end, transitions, and on and on. The kids basically had it wrong. We don’t really give kids a sense of our criteria. We expect them to assume them. After that, I asked them, “what should a teacher use as criteria to grade you?” Their list was then a combination of the two [theirs and the district’s]. They had a better understanding going in.
A rubric is not a grade. It's to see development over time. It's about critical capacity. It's about understanding expectations. It's about self-assessment. They [students] should understand their own inclinations as far as strategic learning goals, their learning styles.

In a later meeting, our "rubric expert" talked about the steps she took to develop a rubric for collaborative work in her classroom.

First, we brainstormed. What is the meaning of leadership? What would a good leader do? What is the meaning of collaboration? What should one do in a collaborative group to make it work? Next, we sorted this information into large categories with other ideas and descriptors falling underneath. Then we prioritized, and finally, we determined that if someone engaging in collaborative work did these things consistently, then that would be a one, the highest level on our rubric. If they did these things most of the time, a two. Sometimes, a three. Little or no evidence of or rarely, a four. By co-developing this with the kids, they totally understood the expectations.

Many in the group had the same question, "can a kid really locate him or herself on a rubric?" One teacher remarked, "I've got kids that I'm sure would be a three or four on that scale, but they'd probably self-assess themselves as a one." The teacher replied, "Well, it is a learning process, at least with the rubric you can point to specific criteria and, in a non-confrontational manner, justify why you feel the student is wrong. There are different perspectives on this and that's also good learning. You think it's a two. I think it's a three. You have reasons. I have mine, but it's not so external. With grades there's
not as much focus on continuing improvement. It's get the grade and then start over. Maybe this rubric is a tougher one to start with because it is a little more subjective.”

Many of the action research group members tried rubrics in their classroom and discussed their successes, challenges, and concerns within the group’s deliberations. A shared concern was that students often didn’t do “quality work,” or work to their potential. As a result, some teachers in the group used rubrics to set agreed upon standards for quality. The visual art teacher developed, with students, a rubric for a symmetry project. The criteria was as subjective as possible, and the examples used were anonymous and from another class, so students didn’t get embarrassed or have their feelings hurt. The art teacher assessed the attempt, “with one like this, the kids were really good at locating their project on this continuum. They were all real close to where I would have put them. On the downside, it took a lot of time. One class period to discuss and develop the rubric and criteria, two class periods for the studio, and then part of another for the self-assessment.”

Teachers developed and deliberated about other rubrics and their usage throughout the project. These included a rubric for field trip behavior, a rubric for a classroom community member, and a coloring rubric used by first graders. One group member clarified a common concern, “If the goal with using a rubric is to self-assess, set goals, and compete against your own prior work or behavior, then isn’t this setting them up to compete against all the other kids?” The group agreed, but noted that grades do the same thing and that the rubrics enabled all students to begin an activity with a better understanding of a successful outcome. Rubrics in general were perceived as a way to
work toward student self-assessment. They were also perceived to be time-consuming endeavors that were very appropriate for some, and meaningless to others. "Like with all things," said a group member, "some value it. Others don’t. We have to balance this out for ourselves and determine the overall worthiness."

**Other community building strategies.**

Many theories and strategies centering around community development were addressed within the context of the discussions and deliberations of the collaborative action research group. We agreed that cooperative activity, represented in many forms, should be a part of our teaching methodologies. We also agreed that this was a worthy but sometimes difficult procedure. One group member, in a discussion of cooperative learning, remarked, "this isn’t easy at 100 different levels, I get excited about this talking to all of you, but when I get in the classroom it’s hard." In addition to those already discussed, some teachers tried, and shared about, individual community building collaborative efforts in their classrooms. One teacher was piloting the use of "literature circles." The cooperative group had to deliberate and decide on roles for each member. The roles were defined. The students had to decide who would assume what role. The students then were to proceed to discuss literature read as a part of their language arts curriculum according to a semi-structured format. This teacher provided the group a status report:

This is another one of these non-linear things. The first time in these literature circles they negotiated roles, worked as planned; I thought "Wow, this is great!" The second time it was a disaster, fighting, tears, selfishness. We reflected and discussed this afterwards. The third time, we’re back on track. It wouldn’t
help if I solved those problems for the kids, though it’s tempting. If I stay out, then the kids ultimately do take ownership. It’s a real growth process, and it’s hard. I modeled the roles, especially the difficult ones. I also realized that different combinations of kids would create different problems, but also different learning opportunities. This is where they learn these skills. Some kids that are very good individually aren’t necessarily able to lead a group and make it function. I’ve seen it in dance too. We are using Deweyian principles of democracy here, no seating chart, lots of choices and responsibility for the kids, sometimes this is a disaster, but the kids know that they have the decision making ability and they then have to solve the problem, sometimes they do. It’s great. Sometimes they don’t. It doesn’t feel good, but it’s also part of the process.

Another teacher, reflecting on classroom management, adopted another idea and shared throughout the project about it. A teacher of upper elementary age students, this teacher wanted to change the traditional operation of the system. The teacher explains:

In reality, how do I make the classroom work without me being the magician with the wand up front controlling all activity? I wanted students to take part in the process. –Every year I have two rules. Rule number one, show respect. Rule number 2, remember rule number one, because kids have routines. They forget the context, what they’re about, what they’re expected to do. This year, as a result of this project, it’s we’re all a part of a community. The problem is that I don’t want to be perceived as the enforcer. We generally know and can discuss what actions support our community and what actions don’t. That’s why I’ve
started this jury system.

The teacher explained throughout the project how this system operated and evolved. Each student had a license that entitled him or her to certain privileges. The jury, comprised of classmates that rotated alphabetically throughout the year to give all a turn to sit in judgment, could revoke these privileges. The teacher is still using a form of this system. "It's great, they're judging each other. It's not so much of the teacher as the bad guy. This has helped us to mature as a community. It spreads the responsibility around."

Another general strategy emerged in our deliberations. Instructional approaches and curriculum delivery methods and facilitation methodologies can not be separated from the process of community building and development. The visual art teacher was the first to note this in our discussions, "we've got to connect curriculum, community, discipline, all these things. Let's be honest, most of your [classroom] activities are very much alike, reading, writing, arithmetic. If the activity is changed, then often the kids respond differently. You know how it is in here. A kid that might be horrible in math can't wait to get to the art room because the format is different and his level of success is different. Take some kids out to dig in the dirt. You'll see what I mean."

"Yeah, but, we're not just here to dig in the dirt. We've got testing pressures to deal with, a course of study, parents..." The art teacher responded, "I know that, but the point I'm making is this, whenever we have something we're going to teach, we need to think, 'how can I best connect this material or set of ideas with my students?' Paper and pencil isn't always the best answer." We all agreed and shared examples of this type of thinking and planning throughout the remainder of the project.
Often these examples included arts-integrated teaching. The arts, we believe, allow for a wider range of interpretations and success and also enable students to process ideas so that they are retained and internalized. In the last part of this section of the case study dealing specifically with the collaborative action research “study group,” I further describe our deliberations and discussions about the role of the arts in our learning community.

The Arts and Community

I started one collaborative action research meeting by asking - Do the arts help us develop a sense of community? And, if so, why?

A teacher responded:

For me they do, but I can’t answer how, or at least it’s harder for me to explain. For me hearing others’ vocabulary they use as they try to accomplish the same things I am, like we use, unity, self-control, energy, controlled energy, focus. The arts teachers use this and I use this [vocabulary]. This helps me to facilitate community development in my class and it helps me to connect with kids across the building. The arts bring us knowledge. Each art has its own knowledge base, but each also has different teaching approaches. For me, that helps, the carryover and the variety.

Another teacher added:

The way they’re [the arts] used here it helps. The arts are conceived so they do help. We, as classroom teachers are aware of these community issues, and the arts teachers are aware of them as well. In addition to teaching about a musical staff for example, the activity is done cooperatively. The kids are moving, working
together. The knowledge is relayed, but it also accomplishes community goals at the same time.

"That's a good point," began another group member. "We do a lot intentionally with the arts that addresses the art itself, the community, and even other more traditional academic goals at the same time. Like our whole school art projects." The teacher was referring to a series of whole school collaborative art installations we've done that allow each student and teacher (about 400 people in all) to play a role in the project's execution.

"Well, I do a lot of art criticism in the classroom for that reason," began a group member:

It allows for lots of open-ended, no single correct answer talk. They're [the students] constructing information and understanding. It's not, 'be quiet and I'll tell you about the art.' It's 'you tell me about the art.' It's developing community. It's using visual art vocabulary. We write about art, so it's language arts. It's integrated. There's no real separation, but when it works, it covers all of those bases.

Each group member had different, but relevant comments on this arts/community connection. Though each group member asserted different ideas, after each, the group members were in agreement with the other's assertions. This was an easier site for philosophical agreement, because this was the area in which we were most ideologically unified, arts integration and arts IMPACT methodologies. Another teacher provided her perspective:

The arts and community... well, first, the arts allow for student success.
When kids start having success, they buy into the process. The different kid isn’t an outcast. They’re a member of the community that has different talents and different expectations. The other kids respect them for their strengths, but help them in the problem areas. Ideally the students are constantly aware of others’ feelings.

Here we all participate. The kids see us in different roles as we participate alongside them. This school cares more about process than product, so success is within everyone’s grasp. This is important. The arts help to pull kids outside themselves, make them less self-centered. They [the arts] give them the opportunity to extend themselves. When most kids are willing to take a chance, then it’s not such a big deal to the kid that’s hesitant. Everyone else is doing it too.

Another group member inquired, “What do you mean when you say that the arts help the kids to become less self-centered?” The teacher responded:

In the arts you’re learning about other people, relating to their perspectives, seeing things through their eyes, their artistic expressions. These are people that may have lived a thousand years ago, or people we’ll never meet, but because we’ve encountered their artistic products, we relate to them. We develop our own interpretations and realize there are many others too.

Another teacher spoke not about the content of the arts classes but about the positives associated with attending the arts classes. “In class we might get into a real negativity spiral, and all of a sudden, it’s time for an arts class. The arts can give us a break, a different direction, recharge the class and the teacher, often the culture is different
in my classroom after the class. This is such a nice change of pace and I don’t think it would be like that if I didn’t attend and participate with the kids.” A group member added, “Even processing those experiences after the fact helps. Back in the classroom I’ll ask, ‘what did we do in there [the arts class] to make it so successful? ‘What can we do to carry that over to our regular classroom?’

Another teacher, though agreeing with the assertions noted above, had a different perspective:

The arts as community is a big jump. The arts help with what we’re trying to do, but kids have to understand community principles first, then kids can engage in arts related activities within the community context. What I’m saying is that once we’ve developed this respect and openness and caring, then the arts activities are truly experiences of deep understanding. They’re not nearly as meaningful or as rich if we don’t have a grasp of the community aspects first.

A group member understanding the point, but also disagreeing to a degree responded,

Yes, but all kids don’t have that understanding [of community] and the arts give us an advantage. They provide us, teachers and students, with experiences that help us to build community. There are many ways to interpret a landscape, many ways to interpret community. No single interpretation is correct, but it’s a meaningful context because the arts are real. They’re not some hypothetical textbook situation. We’re doing real art, interacting with real artists, and seeing real performances.
This point, connecting with art/artists outside our regular school community was also an important focus of our discussions. When people outside of schools think of community, they think of the people and places around them. Connecting with this "external community" is the theme of the next section of this case study.

**Connecting school and external communities.**

The arts allow us to connect our school community to other "external" communities. In fact, this is a component of our IMPACT model. Connecting with artists outside our school community also enables us to better understand ourselves and shape our vision of the learning community within which we operate.

Many artists work, perform, and interact within our school community each year. Sometimes these are one time performances or visits (e.g., The American Boychoir; Floyd Cooper [an illustrator], Robert Post [a one-man show combining drama, mime, juggling, humor and a lot more], or a steel drum ensemble. Others are short, one or two day visits (e.g., author Eloise Greenfield), and still others are long-term residencies (like Opera Columbus or Zivili, a Yugoslavian dance ensemble). These artists present their work to the Duxbury community and work with the students and teachers in artmaking contexts.

As important as what happens during these visits or performances is what occurs before and after them. Before an artist comes to our school, or we take our students to see a performance, exhibit, etc. in our community, we have prep sessions. We talk about the content to be viewed. For an art exhibit, we show slides; provide biographical information; discuss cultural context, history, media and artistic style; execute related studio projects; etc. We talk about context and expectations. What is expected of us at an art museum? A
Generally, the arts teacher most closely associated with the art to be viewed leads the preparation. If the performance is a dance show, for example a Savion Glover show that our fourth graders attended, then the dance teacher will spearhead the preparation efforts, however, the responsibility for preparation is also viewed as a collaborative endeavor. The classroom teacher will extend and reinforce these preparations. For the Glover show the dance teacher presented information about tap dancing and its historical evolution, Glover’s biographical information, the cultural context within which he was dancing, specific information about the show, and general expectations for an audience at this type of performance. The students also learned basic tap steps and collaboratively developed their own tap sequences. The classroom teacher, in turn, revisited these learnings before the trip.

At the performance, the classroom teachers observed noticeable differences between the Duxberry students and those from other schools. The Duxberry students were attentive, watched with a degree of expertise, and applauded at the appropriate times and in the appropriate manner. The teachers attributed this to the preparation. “These students knew what to expect, how to critique what they were seeing, and how to respond. It was meaningful to them because of this.” A research group member wrote:

I had talked to my students about hooting-appropriate at a sports event, but not at a dance concert. My students knew others might “hoot.” They didn’t need to follow suit when this happened. When the predicted hooting occurred my students actually sat up taller, smiled knowingly and nodded at me. Knowing how
to respond to an artist gave my students a community pride that is indescribable.

The teachers reported that students of the same age but from other schools talked during the show; screamed at inappropriate times; hit, picked and played with each other; and didn’t know the manner in which they should have responded after the performance. “Kids aren’t born knowing these things. They have to be taught,” noted an attending teacher.

In the classroom after the performance, the students discussed and wrote about what they had seen. In successive dance classes, students continued to explore tap and derivative forms of dance. Some were so energized by the performance and related events that they joined a school tap club that met during lunchtime. “This was especially great for the boys,” said the dance teacher. “They realized that tap was cool and requires you to be in excellent shape. Many of them gained a whole new respect for dance as a result. To be able to dance with them now is really exciting.”

Connecting with practicing artists places community in an easy to understand and relevant context for both students and teachers. “By witnessing real artists, musicians, dancers, kids see that rules have a purpose,” began one teacher.

When Bill Agnew [a local ceramicist] came to talk to the fifth graders, we told them, “there will be more than 50 people in a small room. We have to be quiet to hear what he has to say. He threw pots and told stories, and for more than an hour you could hear a pin drop. He talked. People asked questions one at a time and he responded. But it was such a powerful experience that everyone followed the rules because we all knew that that would help us all to get more out of it.
Here’s this guy who’s lived in Columbus and devoted his life to the arts and he’s showing and telling us about it. It doesn’t get any more real than that.

Others agreed with the real aspect, “Live is best,” said another teacher. “It’s a closeness, an intensity that you can’t get unless you’re there. I know that so well as a musician. Listening to a tape is one thing. Hearing it live is on a whole other level.”

Bill Agnew, the ceramist mentioned above, was part of a larger community project. A playground had recently opened in Columbus. The Kwanzaa playground consists of permanent installations by each of seven local African-American artists. The works were designed to be functional. Children can play on or around them. The pieces also connect these local artists with their African influences. Five of these artists accepted invitations to work with us at Duxberry. The artists, throughout the first half of the school year, visited, showed and discussed their work, and guided the students in performance and studio related visual art projects.

The whole school adopted the theme of community. The theme was extended differently at each grade level. Kindergartners, first, and second graders worked with Barbara Chavous, a “totemist.” Chavous’s sculptures “express a need to ascend, to connect the Earth and sky. The works connect her to African ancestry in a spiritual way.” With Chavous, kindergartners did projects that related to families. First graders focused on neighborhoods, friends, and relatives, and second graders expanded the theme to include the school community.

Third graders worked with Queen Brooks. Brooks told stories of her recent travels in Africa and how this had influenced her use of patterns and symbols in her artmaking.
Brooks talked about the concept of “doors,” and the students each executed a wood relief. These were combined on a discarded door for display in the school. Brooks shared a series of walking sticks she’d made with the third graders. Though this wasn’t a pre-planned studio project, the students’ interest and fascination with these caused it to happen. Each student found and brought a stick to school for the project. Some brought more than one for those that couldn’t. The sticks were painted, burned, and decorated using techniques learned from Queen Brooks.

Larry Collins worked with the fourth grade. Collins is a sculptor and uses found, recycled, and reclaimed materials. He is also a musician and makes his own instruments. After he performed for the students, he helped them to select and design their own studio projects. The students constructed a variety of shakers, percussion instruments and rainsticks. A former student of mine stopped me in the hall holding up her rainstick, “Can you believe it Mr. Trent? Can you believe I made this?” she asked proudly. “And I’m only in fourth grade,” she added and smiled as she turned the stick upside down bringing the sound of soft rain to the otherwise quiet hallway.

In addition to Bill Agnew, fifth graders worked with Pheoris West, an autobiographical painter. West taught the students that each viewer brings his or her own experiences to enter into a dialogue with art. He taught about African Adinkra symbols and symmetry. The students designed their own symbols and used these in a studio painting project under West’s direction.

As is typical in our school, these artists’ visits were extended in the arts and regular classes. For example, six classes went (at different times) to the Kwanzaa
playground. A docent met the students there and presented information about the playground, its history, and community connections and attitudes that made it a reality. The students sketched, made rubbings, and of course, had time to play. "This brings this project full circle," said one teacher. "The kids meet and work with these artists and then come here to see the playground. That really connects our school community, the arts community, and the local community." Another teacher added, "This helped my class to understand community on a basic level, then expand on it. We've had great discussions. 'Why did we connect our community with the Kwanzaa artists? Why are they a community? What makes them unique? How do we interface with them? Can our community learn from them and vice versa?' These were all great conversations."

Other connections and extensions were plentiful. First graders studied local landmarks, viewed slides, made posters, and visited some of these on a field trip. During a dance residency that occurred later in the year (Zivili), students consciously related the discussions and learnings about community to this new educational context. The dance teacher remarked, "What they're (the Zivili dancers) saying about community meshes so nicely with what we've talked about all year, and the kids are making these connections themselves. They're able to apply these community ideas to a larger context."

We were asked, and gladly accepted the invitation, to show our visual art projects at the main Columbus Metropolitan Library. We included the teachers' piece on community in the display. One day, as I was in the library pulling some books for my classroom I heard two adults talking about our display. "Even the teachers do art. Now that's different," said one of the adults. For us, I thought, it would be unthinkable not to.
Collaborative action research group - conclusion?

For some teachers, the philosophical connection might be science, outdoor education, Spanish, or French, but for us, the arts connect our community and help us to understand ourselves, each other, and the educational model we employ. It is within this context that we develop our community. A research group member shared a story from an article in one of our last “official” meetings, “There were two guys looking at a world famous painting, ‘I don’t see anything great about that,’ said the first. The second replied, ‘but don’t you wish you did?’”

We seek for our students, and ourselves, to be like the second person, looking, seeing, feeling, and understanding at a deeper and more meaningful level. Our unified philosophy and continual focus on community help us strive to do so. The collaborative action research project helped me to focus this dissertation as I better understood our existing community of practitioners, students, and other stakeholders.

Readers of this case will determine for themselves the degree of transferability to their own contexts and situations. As an action research project, we discussed, reflected, and developed strategies and employed actions that helped us to evolve and influence our school and classroom communities positively. We encountered and withstood conflict. We asserted and deliberated our personally held theories and shaped, refined, and altered these as a result. As action research ultimately seeks positive educational improvements, we unanimously agreed that ours was a success, although an open-ended and unfinished one.

Our declaration of success was based on a broad-based set of criteria. Working through subtextual issues gave us agreed upon standards by which we would proceed. In
itself, this was a community building accomplishment. Defining community as we situated it in our context proved slippery, but valuable as we progressed. Discussions of discipline, rewards, and consequences revealed ideological differences, but in their revelations we learned from increased awareness of our own and other’s personally held theories. Our jointly agreed upon recognition of the necessity of overt attempts at building community through vocabulary, shared expectations and delineation of teacher and student roles was intersubjectively shared and supported school-wide.

Specific strategies for developing community included continued belief in and support of our school’s arts IMPACT model. This ties us philosophically together and supports, by nature, a community approach to education. Our discussions of classroom management strategies, successes, and failures allowed us a lens through which we could reflectively view our individual practices. By utilizing circle meetings, rubrics, teacher/student partnerships, cross-grade level activities, and cooperative learning strategies, we empowered students to take more responsibility for themselves, and reciprocally, the community. Our conversations often turned to the arts or to arts specific examples to illustrate points. The arts and community at our school can only be separated hypothetically. Community building is a set of overt and valued objectives pursued by our staff. For these objectives to be realized, the arts must figure prominently.

Action research group members asserted that the time was well spent and valuable from both personal and professional perspectives. “I really feel good about what we’ve done,” said a group member. She continued, “This [collaborative project] has caused me to examine my practices constantly. I don’t assume as much.” All believed that our efforts
should continue and merge with school-wide community building efforts. “Well I hope we continue to read and discuss things in one format or another,” said a group member. “I’ll miss these meetings and discussions. This should be something the whole staff does,” said another. Most group members didn’t “need” college credit, so few were interested in a credit seeking follow-up project. All, however, agreed that we should evolve our group and its emerging theories so that we could continue to pursue the objectives we identified and continue to form our context specific definitions of community. Our IMPACT model provides for specific curriculum planning, but leaves little time for us to deliberate other related matters. The collaborative action research project allowed us the time and flexibility necessary to do so.

The university quarter ended before winter break, but it wasn’t as if our project “concluded” at all. Most of the initiatives we started continued. Our discussions, though more informal, were still fruitful and community focused, and we continued to share relevant articles and information with one another and the staff at large. A “school climate” committee was subsequently formed and took up from where the collaborative action research project left off. Differently, the committee didn’t need to answer to a university professor. Similarly, the group dealt with issues of school community and the broad question, “How do we continue to make this school a great place for learning and teaching?”

The next sections of this dissertation describe and interpret the evolutions of the Duxberry school community through the remainder of the 1997-98 school year and throughout the 98-99 school year. This part of the case study includes discussions,
deliberations, and actions of the school climate committee and of the whole school staff. The case proceeds chronologically, but also focuses on identified themes and their explorations. A closing chapter summarizes collective interpretations, individual perspectives, and assertions derived from this qualitative, dissertation research project.

**When it Comes to School Climate, We're All Meteorologists**

After the official end of the collaborative action research group, a school climate committee was formed. The committee started meeting regularly in the winter of 1998. Many school climate committee members had participated in the action research study group. Others interested in school related issues but not a part of the action research also joined. The issues addressed were often similar to those discussed in the study group. The subtextual procedures were also similar but with a greater degree of flexibility in regards to meeting times and frequency and documentation.

I co-chaired this committee with another teacher who was not a part of the independent study. This teacher, however, was very much involved in the school. She had taught at Duxberry approximately 10 years, served on a number of committees, was the union representative, and cared deeply about the evolution of the school. The committee comprised a larger group than the research group and was a cross-section of the staff with many grade levels and the arts represented. The principal attended occasionally.

The committee frequently dealt with issues and projects raised in whole staff meetings. Large-scale decisions made in whole staff meetings were then delegated to this committee for further brainstorming, refinement, and planning. Often, the climate committee would report back to the whole staff or would present proposals developed in
the committee for whole staff approval. For example, the group devised and presented a plan for spending monies doled out to the school earmarked for “drug education” and “equity.”

The topics raised in the whole staff meetings, and subsequently our school climate meetings, grew increasingly similar to those deliberated about in the independent study group. These concerns included student behavior, school-wide policies on discipline, staff morale, respect and other issues related directly to school community. The principal noted in a mid-winter staff meeting, “we have some serious community concerns. These include student behavior inside the building, in the halls, etc. It seems that we need to correct the climate and get the ship back on keel. I’ve talked with the school climate committee and they’re starting to work on these things.”

As a committee we began to meet more frequently. First, we realized a need to ascertain and prioritize perceived “problem” areas that we could address. Frustration with CPS administrative policies, for example, was a series of issues largely out of our control, and therefore, not a priority for this committee. Other things, however, were within our locus of control. Things like staff morale, and community building were items we felt we could have a direct impact upon. We tried to address these items. The next sections highlight these issues and planned actions.

**Staff morale.**

Staff morale, typically high at Duxberry, was uncharacteristically low. As a direct result, teacher disagreements became more frequent. One teacher told me, “We’re simply not being kind to one another. Everyone’s frustrated and taking it out on everyone else.
Instead we need to be supporting each other. I’m just as guilty, but it’s something we need to work on.”

Knowing it wouldn’t cure all our ills, but also that it had helped us in the past, we planned some “outside of school” activities. These included staff get-togethers at restaurant/bar locations. At one establishment we played a televised, electronic trivia game. Many teachers stayed for hours, spouses and friends joined us throughout the evening. A good time was had by all. “This helps,” remarked a teacher. “To get away from school, change the context, relax, and have fun together. This helps us de-stress and recharge ourselves to work together.” Another teacher agreed, “doing this brings us together. We’re a close knit group and we’re going to be facing some challenges. We’ve got a lot better chance of success if we face those challenges as a unified front.” Other events included groups attending arts related events; concerts, exhibits, dances, etc. “Luckily,” said a teacher, “we have a lot of common interests. We can enjoy the arts and each other’s company. It builds community between us. That’s got to happen before we expect it to happen with the students.” During one of these events one teacher noted that, “doing these things brings us together doing things we like to do. I know of other groups that climb ropes and fall backwards into each other’s arms, but that’s so artificial.”

Socializing together won’t reform a school, but it does change the context and build relationships. We believe that it positively affects us as a staff, and in turn, positively affects our school. Teachers, especially teachers like us who are deeply involved in developing curriculum, have many time consuming responsibilities. Add to this family obligations and all other outside pressures, and time is a scarce and treasured commodity.
Still, we believe “out of school” activities are worth the effort, and we continue to plan and participate in them.

What’s your name?

In a whole staff meeting, a teacher presented a proposal. “I know we’ve been talking a lot about our school community and things we’re going to do to improve it. This idea is something that we can do now. It will have, I think, a positive effect immediately.”

The teacher proceeded to propose that we all wear nametags. Everyone in the building, all the time. She had plans for making these using clear baseball card protectors and small spring-loaded clips bought at an office supply store so that the nametags would be both durable and inexpensive. Most were in agreement with the idea, though some concerns were raised about lost tags, children’s willingness to wear them, age appropriateness, etc.

As much talk had recently centered around discipline related issues, one teacher suggested that, “if we see a kid misbehaving in the hallway, then we can take their nametag. With their room number on it, we can trace it back to the teacher and that kid will get the appropriate consequence for his or her actions.” Time ran out before discussion was complete, so teachers agreed to meet again to further discuss the wearing and use of the nametags.

Before this next meeting, the teacher who had originally proposed the nametag idea circulated a memo outlining her idea for wearing the nametags. The memo stated:

Most importantly, I believe nametags can help to foster a more solid sense of community. I have a vision where each person speaks to others by name, where respect is the underlying current, where voices are rarely raised, where all feel safe
and cared for.

I believe everyone in the building should wear a nametag. We should all try to address others by names. *at the copy machine *in the lunchroom *on the playground *at any occasion where one would interact with another

I do not think this should be in ANY WAY A MEANS OF DISCIPLINE!

I realize we all have a difficult child or two. But if everyone was aware of names, perhaps a new feeling would be generated so other means of discipline might follow. At this time I do not think taking nametags away from children (or adults for that matter) will have any positive effect.

At the following staff meeting, all agreed to go with the nametag idea and the idea of “taking” nametags was dropped. This was a positive attempt at community building and shouldn’t be construed otherwise. The idea, though frustrating at times (replacing lost, chewed upon, and other mutilated tags), was a successful one and continued for the remainder of that school year and throughout the following year (the time of the writing of this case study). An overwhelming majority agreed to continue the practice each time it was revisited. Although one teacher said her students didn’t want to wear them and she didn’t want to make them do so, she still assented to go with the overall consensus.

Visitors really appreciated the practice. “This is fantastic,” said a visiting teacher. “I can start a conversation with these kids and be personal about it, because I know their names. It makes me want to go and get myself a nametag too!”

Assessing not assuming.

As I previously mentioned, our school climate committee realized a need for
assessing areas of primary concern. We frequently asked, and were given, time in the regular, principal led staff meetings to work on the objectives of improving the “climate” of our learning community. In one of these instances, we asked teachers to brainstorm a list of their concerns that they felt we, as a staff, could address. The list of brainstormed concerns, in alphabetical order, was: bathroom behavior, building appearance, bus behavior, hallway behavior, individual classroom climate, library (student behavior), lunchroom behavior, office organization/operation, overwhelming teacher responsibilities, parent involvement, playground (time, space, equipment, etc.), pride in selves/school, quality of (student) work, respect (self, others, property), staff morale, student aggression, tardiness, and tone/volume (of teachers dealing with students). Our committee then organized these on a form and asked the staff to prioritize their concerns from areas of most concern to areas of least concern. We realized that this list contained items that sometimes overlapped, some items were more concrete and others of a more abstract nature, and also that some items would be easier to address than others. Still, this list was a product of staff brainstorming and directly conveyed stated concerns. We weren’t conducting a scientific experiment. We were trying to focus on issues on which we could identify and collaborate to positively affect change.

The totals were tabulated. Respect (self, others, property) was the highest priority. Rounding out the top five concerns, in prioritized order were: Student aggression, staff morale, playground (time, space, equipment, etc.), and pride in selves/school. As a committee we wanted to address these concerns. We also realized that the overwhelming majority of all of the brainstormed concerns were related to student behavior or
“discipline” related concerns. Of those not directly related, many had indirect relationships.

We provided space for additional comments, but most chose not to use it. Of the few that did, most clarified why they prioritized specific items over others. Three teachers commented positively about the process itself and noted their pleasure in the way we were attempting to address community concerns. One teacher expressed displeasure with the process and wrote that the staff was a “dysfunctional family.”

We knew that our major strength was our unifying philosophy of arts-integrated education. We, for the most part, had intersubjective agreement about this and knew the theories and literature that supported it. This wasn’t the case, however, with our discipline-oriented theories. Many philosophies, some in direct contrast, existed and were evidenced in practice at our school. Establishing some common ground or understanding for further discussion was deemed a priority.

As a committee, we searched out readings that related to topics of behavior, respect, discipline, community, etc. We spent weeks doing this, and then, after collecting them, we agreed to divide them up among the committee. Each member was to read his/her assigned readings and pass judgement about the appropriateness of these readings as related to our school climate improvement objectives. We each did so and reported back to the committee in a series of committee meetings. These meetings were very beneficial. We discussed these books and articles as they related to our situation and concerns. In juxtaposing these theories and our practices, we had to justify our practices or change our personal theories as a result of the examination. We felt that the exercise
would be equally beneficial to the entire staff and would give us a common base from
which we could deliberate about our specific learning community concerns. We narrowed
the readings down to those that we felt most directly related to our context. Intentionally,
we chose readings that presented a variety of perspectives, some contradictory.

**Planned action.**

We developed a plan. We asked all teachers (and some other community
stakeholders) to read (over the summer) a packet of materials that we selected and copied
for them. The readings included information on the Tribes program (Gibbs), Glasser’s *The
Quality School* (1992) (selected chapters), Hirsch’s article “Reality’s Revenge,” Dodd and
Rosenbaum’s article “Learning Communities for Staff Development,” Kohn’s book
Beyond Discipline: From Compliance to Community (1996) (selected chapters), selected
parts of *Blueprints for a Collaborative Classroom* (1997), and portions of Mendler’s
Discipline With Dignity. In addition to the readings, we provided each person with a list of
the tabulated and prioritized results of the school climate concerns and a “reflection sheet”
for each piece, so that as we read, we could record ideas we liked, didn’t like, agreed
with, or didn’t agree with and also record any questions we had.

We planned a professional development day in August 1998 (before the school
year started) to focus on school community concerns. We wanted to address those
concerns from the prioritized list and also develop a framework within which we could
operate throughout the rest of the year (and beyond).

As we planned these activities, other concerns were raised. First, though not a
specific part of the school climate “tabulated concerns,” many staff members had
expressed, both publicly and privately, concerns about our staff meetings. The feeling was that we were having long staff meetings, hearing much from the principal about issues related to CPS administration policies and directives, but were having little time to address our own agenda items. Often, these seemed more relevant and pressing. As a result, teachers frequently left staff meetings in which we "discussed a lot and decided nothing," noted one staff member. This frustration was expressed by many. "We talk, talk, talk, and then leave. We're not making clear decisions about what we need to be doing," said one teacher.

As we planned the professional development day, we began to realize that we lacked the expertise or outsider perspective necessary to attack all of these important issues. An outside facilitator, we thought, would be a better choice to lead these discussions. We searched and found someone who was an expert in these areas. Coincidentally, she had just attended a weeklong workshop on group leadership and decision making processes. She agreed to facilitate the day's activities.

Ending as Beginning

As the 97-98 school year came to a close, we were beginning to view our roles as deliberators and actors with more clarity. We had explored issues of importance, delineated areas for planned action, and strategized collaborative methods in which we would address concerns and other topics of importance to our school community. The preceding sections of this dissertation have chronicled this process. Beginning with the study group, my initial research questions, and a rather broad focus and ending with clear ideas about future change endeavors, the year was one of growth and satisfaction. The
next sections of this case study chronicle year two of the research, the 1998-1999 school year.

Duxberry Park – Year Two

School Climate – Moving the Thermostat

As many teachers have experienced, changing the physical temperature in a classroom is often an arduous task. In my years as a classroom practitioner, I’ve tried to manipulate the temperature through a variety of ways e.g., covering the thermostat with wet paper towels, ice bags, or plastic wrap to turn on the heat. To attempt temperature increase I’ve taken apart blower units and even tried heating a thermostat with a heating pad (when the students were out of the room of course). Changing school climate, community, culture, or atmosphere can be equally arduous and much more complex. Dealing with social constructions of reality can be slippery and perplexing. Nevertheless, these are alterations that must be attempted if schools are to evolve as institutions of learning and teaching.

This section of this case study continues to detail these attempts at Duxberry Park. As noted earlier in the case, school improvement is a non-linear task full of challenges, some unanticipated. The process encompassed a range of successes and failures. The next parts of the account detail some instances of the peaks and the valleys.

Summer reading… and lots are talking.

All but one teacher agreed to read the packet throughout the summer. Some were intimidated by it. One teacher said, “I feel like I’m back in college. I hope I can understand all of this stuff.” Another teacher was amazed by the size of the reading packet. “Oh my
gosh! If I start today, I might finish by August!” The packet was copied one side and, measuring more than an inch thick, it did look rather imposing.

Personally, I was excited about the reading. I cared deeply about this school community and felt empowered that we had chosen these readings specifically to meet our community’s needs. It was a much different feeling than I typically had in summer graduate school, going to the library, finding the reserved items, not having the correct change for the copier, finally copying the necessary material, and then reading what I was commanded to do by the summer quarter syllabus.

I started the readings immediately. I knew I’d speak with my committee co-chair a couple of times throughout the summer to plan our professional development day. I also expected to see a few other teacher friends at concerts, outdoor plays, and other arts events we’d planned to attend. I expected that most teachers would read the packet and had high hopes for our discussions at the beginning of the following school year.

What I didn’t expect was the enthusiastic response to the readings I received during the summer. During the first week of break, three teachers called to discuss readings and how they might apply to our situation. “Did you read the Glasser yet?” asked one teacher. “Those points about quality work. That makes so much sense to me. It goes along with what we talked about holding high expectations. He’s saying expect, no demand, quality from students and ourselves. That chapter really hit home.” Another teacher called, “Now that Kohn. He’s not living in the real world is he? It’d be nice if things worked that way, but he’s obviously not an urban teacher. I do however like some of his ideas. We’d just have to modify them for us. Like the rewards thing. I totally agree
we should get rid of the gotcha [a schoolwide program in which children are given tickets for doing positive things, and then those tickets are entered into a drawing for weekly prizes]. Those kids are doing things to get the tickets, not because it’s the right thing to do.” The third teacher called, “The Hirsch piece really makes sense. I like the fact that he’s not afraid to say, ‘hey these constructivist arguments are largely a bunch of nonsense.’ The king is naked, and he’s got the guts to say it.”

These conversations continued throughout the summer. Many called me. I called others for clarifications or their insights. Some of us even got together for lunch for some additional discussion. One teacher said, “We should do this every summer, because it’s the only time we have to do it. During the school year, we’re so stressed and barely doing what we have to do. This would be a headache during the year, but in the summer we can read at our own pace and really reflect on it.” These sentiments were shared by many. We did, in the process, plan our professional development day and shared the readings and our plans with our outside facilitator. She in turn made some suggestions to us about what she thought would be beneficial for our staff at this point. The summer, as always, flew by. I finished the last article sitting on the bottom of the Grand Canyon in mid-August. I was energized and as excited as I’ve ever been for a school year to begin.

School climate and global warming.

Our late-August professional development day was held at a CPS center devoted to a number of uses, group meetings being one of these. Primarily, we chose it for three reasons: it was air-conditioned, it was off campus, and it was free. While the temperature inside was delightfully cool, the feeling as people arrived was very warm. The beginning of
the school year butterflies still fluttered, but there was an atmosphere of positive expectations and excitement. We could have spent the morning catching up, drinking coffee and eating donuts. Informal conversations about the readings, the upcoming school year, and our plans to evolve our school community sprung up throughout the room, but our facilitator knew there was much work to be done.

We started the day (after the informal arrival) with what the facilitator called a grounding and a greeting. We sat in a large circle. We went around the circle with each person answering the questions, “Who are you? What is your relationship to the school? And what are your expectations for today?” “In communication,” said the facilitator, “speaking is never the problem. Listening is.” We listened attentively to all responses. Hearing how people spoke about their relationship to the school sent chills through me. The long term dedication and warm feelings expressed about the school gave me the feeling that we couldn’t fail. Expectations were high, for this meeting, and for the fast approaching school year. Next, the facilitator asked all to stand and she led us in a snakelike pattern that, when completed, allowed each person to greet all others and vice versa. I still don’t know how this worked but wish I did.

When assessing situations, the facilitator asserted that, we should “think about the best possible outcomes and the worst possible outcomes.” We did this orally about that day’s events. We often considered and hoped for best possible outcomes, I thought, but thinking of worst outcomes was a new but intriguing idea.

She told us that she was going to teach us a process that we could use as a template for our staff meetings. The principal agreed that we could try this. First, all
meetings needed to be held in a circle. For the same reasons we used circle meetings in our classrooms, she advocated we use them as a staff. Everyone can see each other. It’s respectful and better for listening. It gives each person a place of equal importance, etc.

The facilitator advocated a designated facilitator and recorder for each meeting. She said that these responsibilities should rotate throughout the year.

We spent the morning brainstorming the best and worst possible outcomes of a staff meeting. The process dictated that these lists be recorded and composited. We broke out into smaller groups and brainstormed lists (onto chart paper). Each group designated a facilitator and a recorder. These lists were then combined over lunch, including all responses. This was done by literally cutting and pasting the charts together. As we did this, we grouped similar items. This was the composite. The next step was to achieve consensus. In seeking consensus, we reviewed (back in the whole group) the composite item by item. Anyone not in agreement was to state why and then alternatives were suggested upon which all could agree. Seeking this dissension could be done by asking those who disagreed to speak up, or by going around the circle asking each individual for comments. Each method had its drawbacks. The former required dissenters to speak up, possibly an uncomfortable situation for some. The latter was time consuming. We used (and continue to use) both methods depending upon the issue. Seeking consensus was time consuming, noted the facilitator, but when everyone buys into an idea, a plan, or a particular decision, then the time is well spent because all group members will work to support the particular initiative.

To summarize, the process was first, to brainstorm, perhaps in breakout groups,
second, to composite all responses, and third, to seek consensus. The facilitator explained that we were agreeing on beliefs and behaviors that would coincide with these beliefs, and then determining agreed upon strategies that would support the achievement of these desired behaviors.

That afternoon, we brainstormed about the roles of successful facilitators and recorders. We also discussed meeting agendas, “What would be the format? How would we prioritize agenda items? Who would facilitate and record? How could we fairly rotate these duties? What would be our expectations for ourselves and others within the context of our new meetings?” A general consensus emerged that we were going to use this new staff meeting format, but that we also needed much more time to work through subtextual issues as a staff. The facilitator gave us the generic theories and procedures. As a staff we would need to personalize it. The facilitator provided us with more readings on the topics: facilitators, recorders, consensus, and agendas. We used all of this information in the coming months to develop a format and process that was workable for us. We left these topics (on this day) with a general understanding and agreement, but also knowing that many loose ends remained.

We felt it was important to specifically address school climate issues and concerns. We spent the remainder of the day doing so. We brainstormed, in the context of the new format, “strategies and actions for improving our school climate.” Many ideas were composited, and we were out of time.

The day was exciting. Many people stayed afterwards to continue discussions. Most spoke of being “energized” and “empowered.” The principal, too, was happy about
the new strategies and plans. He would still have a designated piece of each meeting to express administrative concerns, but he also felt a sense of relief that the burden and focus of school improvement would now be more of a shared responsibility.

The school climate committee gathered to plan successive meetings and actions. We were disappointed that we didn’t get to some of the items on the day’s agenda. We had planned specific discussion of items in the reading packet. The facilitator felt it more important to proceed with exploration of the new process. She felt the discussion of the readings could happen throughout the year as applied to specific instances and situations at school. This did turn out to be the case. We wanted to address specifically the top school climate concerns. This meeting, we thought, went a long way in addressing many of these concerns, or at least gave us a procedure in which we felt they could be effectively addressed. To confront the noted concern about student aggression, we had planned a spot on the agenda for two teachers to teach us techniques of “peer mediation.” Time was short and this didn’t happen. Apologetically, we planned this for a staff meeting after the school year started. The meeting felt good. I smiled on the drive home. Teachers anticipated that this was to be a good year. They said so. I felt the same. We may not have warmed the globe, but we had warm feelings as a staff and were ready to begin anew.

Back to School

In nearly a decade of teaching, this was the first time I’d looked forward to staff meetings. A colleague told me it was the first time she’d looked forward to them in three decades. First, we knew that we needed to address subtextual, nuts and bolts issues. We began with items we felt would achieve easy consensus. In the first few meetings of the
year (September 1998), we tackled these subtextual issues. We agreed to sit in a circle for all meetings. We also decided to meet every other week for approximately an hour and to end the meetings on time. A facilitator and recorder would be used for each meeting. We discussed these roles and affirmed our commitment to the facilitator/recorder descriptions we reviewed during our August professional development day. We agreed that the role of facilitator would rotate alphabetically by last name, and the role of recorder would rotate alphabetically by first name. All were encouraged to fill these roles when the time came, but the right to pass, we decided (after much deliberation), was an option for those not comfortable facilitating or recording.

The format for meeting agendas would be:

I. Introduction/welcome activity

II. Announcements (usually from the principal)

III. Grade level sharing (a brief sharing of teaching ideas or techniques)

IV. Revisit old issues

V. Issue time (new issues)

VI. Closure

The agenda would be prioritized, constructed, and distributed at least a day before each meeting by a committee of seven consisting of past, present, and future facilitators and recorders, and the principal. The staff had access to “Agenda Proposal Forms” on which they would list 1) Agenda item 2) Issues/problems associated with item 3) Amount of time anticipated for discussion, and 4) Priority – high, medium, or low. The committee then prioritized these proposed items for the coming meeting. We agreed to address no
more than 5 issues per meeting, and those issues not addressed would be carried over to the
next meeting. Alongside these Agenda Proposal Forms (in the teachers’ lounge), we agreed that the meeting agendas and recorded minutes from each meeting would be stored chronologically, so that all would have access to these at their convenience.

A Collaborative Process in Action

The initial “nuts and bolts” or subtextual elements were out of the way, so we began to move forward. However, the process itself requires ongoing revisitation. We did this throughout the year. This was especially the case during the first half of the 1998-99 school year, because the process was still new.

Much needed to be done, and due to time constraints, not all of it could happen within the context of the staff meetings. Smaller groups addressed specific items (like making the lists of facilitators and recorders, a calendar of meeting times, the organization of the minutes and agendas, etc.). The school climate committee met and worked on the compositd “Strategies and Actions for a Positive School Climate.” We didn’t want to eliminate any ideas, but we did want to get them into a more workable format. As we reviewed these ideas, we grouped them under very general topical headings that could be addressed during “issue time” in coming staff meetings. The general headings were:

A) New Staff Meeting Format – Though the groundwork was laid, we needed to continue to shape this process to meet our ever changing needs.

B) Circle meetings – Many teachers used circle meetings, others wanted to, still others were interested in non-confrontational ways to problem solve with children. Discussing circle meetings, their use, successes and failures, our committee thought, could address
and positively affect many of the proposed strategies. C) Small communities within the larger communities – One of the strategies that we learned from our facilitator during our August professional development day was to break into smaller groups to discuss issues. This allowed for more people’s ideas to be heard, discussed, synthesized, and then subsequently reported back to the whole group. Many of the strategies and actions for a positive school climate related to breaking down into smaller, more personal groups with students and staff. D) Rewards? Punishments? Consequences? – Discipline issues were important. Staff members wanted to address these. E) Volunteers in the School – Volunteerism fluctuated in the school. It was the common belief that we could do much more. F) Quality, Modeling, Academics – Getting students to do quality work and teachers to set positive examples for students was another series of items strategized. G) Issues in Process – These were issues decided or acted upon that we would revisit.

These general topics with the composited strategies and actions listed under them, were distributed to the staff. Many of these were addressed throughout the year (in staff meetings, by grade levels, and other groupings of staff members). At the end of the year, many of these strategies and actions still remained and would (hopefully) be carried over into the 1999-2000 school year. The following is the complete composited, grouped list. The [ ] bracketed comments are mine, inserted for clarification:

Strategies and Actions for a Positive School Climate

A. New Staff Meeting Format

168
- Sharing ideas (curriculum) with staff
- Ongoing sharing/investigation between staff to continue growth in school climate
- Back up teaching approaches with research
- Staff meeting smaller groups! more efficient
- Small communities within the larger community
- Implement ideas from SCIP [School Continuous Improvement Plan – a plan mandated by the District to plan for raising test scores] plan regarding parents
- Build self-esteem.
- Agreement by staff involving discipline
- As a staff: rethink (with outside facilitator) our philosophy on discipline, punishment, and rewards and what we can do as alternatives
- "At Duxberry We respect one another.” (posted in every room)
- Respect and kindness among staff as a model!
- RESPECT needs to be modeled and practiced - not automatic.
- Slow down, listen and trust
- Everyone is important and respectable (& Valuable)

B. Circle Meetings
- Circle meetings, bringing closure and a better sense of community.
- All classrooms use circle meetings
- Sharing decisions with students
- Develop ways that children can be heard
- Build self-esteem.
- Treat all FAIR - not the same
- Slow down, listen and trust
- Everyone is important and respectable (& Valuable)
- Find ways that each person feels that they are a part of the community, and therefore (buys into) values a “positive” environment

C. Small Communities Within the Larger Community

- Establish set small groups in classroom
- Teacher group meetings (smaller group) curricular, discipline...
- Sharing ideas (curriculum) with staff
- Organizing sharing groups among staff (sharing successes and failures)
- Ongoing sharing/investigation between staff to continue growth in school climate
- Back up teaching approaches with research
- Staff meeting smaller groups! more efficient
- Small communities within the larger community
- Implement ideas from SCIP plan regarding parents
- Grade level interaction - more
- Cross age activities builds community in whole school.
- Cross age activities. Build strategies across grade level. See in different areas.
- More interaction between grade levels
- Meet with bus riders and walkers as communities with staff
- Share personal info with kids. We are people too.
- Try harder because you care about them
- Develop TRUSTING relationships with students
- Staff mentor program. Check on 1 kid - weekly. make contact.
- Schoolwide effort to get special help for those who need it
- Some students need more help than we can give, so let's get it (mentors, parents, community members, etc.).
- Parent meeting with present and past teachers when needed. Or call a meeting with just teachers to get info and help.
- Everyone is important and respectable (& Valuable)
- Find ways that each person feels that they are a part of the community, and therefore (buys into) values a “positive” environment

D. Rewards? Punishments? Consequences?
- Sharing decisions with students
- Implement ideas from SCIP plan regarding parents
- Build self-esteem.
- Students mediate own problems
- Peer mediation
- Rules should serve the kids not visa versa
- Satisfy needs not just make rules.
- Common Ground - for expectations. Consistent. Fewer rules more consistent
- Problem solving instead of punishment
- Consequences not punishments/reward
- Emphasize consequences over punishments

- Agreement by staff involving discipline

- Take active involvement in discipline

- As a staff: rethink (with outside facilitator) our philosophy on discipline, punishment, and rewards and what we can do as alternatives

- Treat all FAIR - not the same

E. Volunteers in the School

- Implement ideas from SCIP plan regarding parents

- Staff mentor program. Check on 1 kid - weekly. make contact.

- Schoolwide effort to get special help for those who need it

- Some students need more help than we can give, so let's get it (mentors, parents, community members, etc.).

- Build self-esteem.

F. Quality, Modeling, Academics

- Implement ideas from SCIP plan regarding parents

- Talk about quality - define and work towards (?) What are we striving at - behavior, art, school - in terms of their needs

- Quality work - is it redundant? stimulating? - affects behavior - Question your assignments

- RESPECT needs to be modeled and practiced - not automatic.

- Adult behavior models good behavior for students

- Quality not quantity
If we, the adults do it, they will pick up on it.

G. Issues in Process (to revisit)

- Implement ideas from SCIP plan regarding parents
- Build self-esteem.

- 45 minute lunch [Because of discipline problems on the playground, we went from a one hour to a 45 minute lunch period.]

   During the meetings in which we reviewed this list, we also agreed that if at all possible, we would strive to achieve consensus on all issues. Most of the time, we thought, this would be possible and worth the time investment. Our first major agreement came as a more specific listing of the “Best Possible Outcomes of a Staff Meeting.” We achieved consensus on the following:

   1. Everyone comes to the meeting prepared to listen without interrupting and to invest themselves fully in the decision-making process.

   2. Important issues are discussed with a clear plan of attack. The issues are clearly explained so all understand.

   3. Discussions of important issues come to closure with definite, agreed-upon solutions or clear understanding of the process of working toward a solution.

   4. Everyone has input into solving school problems. This means non-certified staff members are invited to meetings that concern them or are fully informed of decisions made if they cannot attend.

   5. Everyone is given the opportunity to participate and give individual input. In this way everyone has a clear understanding of what happened at the meeting and the decisions
made.

6. Everyone is committed to the solutions made and the actions necessary to implement them.

7. A clear, specific plan for carrying out solutions is made and revisited.

8. The group is energized by making clear decisions through consensus, sharing values, solving issues without hurting the feelings of others, and feeling productive at the meeting.

9. Everyone leaves the meeting with positive feelings, knowing that the meeting was well organized and efficient and that their time was not wasted.

10. The meeting ends at a reasonable time.

11. The school community is a better place because of the feelings of community, accomplishment and respect in the meeting.

As our comfort level and trust in the process grew, our productivity reciprocally increased. We arrived at consensus on a number of important school-wide issues. Those that initially disagreed with particular initiatives were assured that, once changes or new policies had been given a chance, then these issues would be revisited for subsequent evaluation. We altered our dismissal time and procedure (15 minutes earlier) to account for the shortened (by 15 minutes) lunch period. We discussed, clarified, and achieved consensus on a set of playground rules (in appendix).

Issues that were deemed “high priority,” were given more time and attention. We often broke into smaller groups to begin brainstorming specifically about these items. Usually, we determined the appropriate number of groups and counted off by that number.
The groups then separated by going to various areas throughout the building.

From our list of "Strategies and Actions for a Positive School Climate," we began to address discipline related issues. First, we had breakout group brainstorming. The groups were to focus on the question, "How does discipline work positively in your classroom?"

The small group session was, in itself, a very productive endeavor. My group discussed many ideas. The teachers were excited to do so. My group was particularly happy to discuss items outside the "formal" curriculum. "When we plan, we talk only about curriculum. It’s nice to share about our classrooms, how they work, and what each of us is doing to improve it," said one teacher. All in my group echoed these sentiments.

One teacher explained how she shifted the burden for responsible behavior to peers. Another talked about circle meetings and how the children responded positively to being invited to take part in the problem solving process. The described circle meetings often started with the teacher asking, "______ seems to be a problem. What can our classroom community do to help?" Our discussions also included "transition times" and how these could be quicker, more productive, and less teacher directed. In discussing praise, we agreed that less individual and more whole group praise assisted in the community building process. Our group was opposed to individual rewards and wanted the elimination of a school-wide "gotcha" ticket system in which students got tickets for "good" behaviors and then entered their tickets in a weekly drawing for prizes. One teacher reminded us to always be respectful of students, "friendly respectful reminders are okay," she said. "Criticizing a child isn’t."
Another idea discussed in our small group was to assign one classroom per month to take responsibility for displaying signs and artwork in the bathrooms. This plan was adopted by some older classes. One sign read, “We all have to use it, so please keep it nice and clean for everyone!” The picture showed a squeaky clean, though somewhat out of proportion toilet.

All of the groups ran out of time, with more to be discussed. As we ended this meeting, we agreed to begin the next by concluding these small group sessions. In the next meeting, we composited and discussed the small group generated ideas. There were many. Our next step was to determine which ideas would achieve staff consensus. The school-wide reward program (gotcha tickets) was eliminated. Most wanted to do away with it, but some did not. As there wasn’t consensus on this, we agreed that rewards could be given (or not) on a teacher by teacher basis. The teachers with theories that supported the practice could do so in the classroom. Those who didn’t believe in it didn’t have to. This issue was revisited later in the year. Still no consensus was achieved. The supporters of a school-wide reward program felt strongly that it should be reinstated. The detractors (which comprised a majority) did not. The system didn’t resurface.

Of the many ideas, few obtained consensus of the staff. Regarding the discipline issue, we agreed that, when possible, we should speak to children in private about school/classroom problems. We also agreed that we should focus on “natural consequences” of actions as opposed to “punishment.” Lastly, we agreed that, as a school, we would uniformly employ the ideas and practices of peer mediation.

I talked with a group of teachers after this meeting. Initially, we were disappointed
with the lack of consensus on so many proposed ideas, suggestions, and policies. One teacher's comments helped to change my mind:

The fact that we didn't get much consensus isn't particularly a negative thing. We're all different with different philosophies about discipline. Importantly, we agreed that much should be left to the individual classroom teacher. For us it's easy to agree on curriculum decisions because we're more aligned there, but with discipline, we're all over the map. Wouldn't you rather have it that way? You do your thing, I do mine. It doesn't mean we can't share ideas. It just means we're not locking ourselves into school-wide procedures we don't all agree with.

Reflecting after this discussion, I did indeed agree with the above teacher's comments and felt that, for me, the few agreements paled in comparison to the great experience I had in the small group. The rare opportunity to share and reflect on these ideas was the most valuable part of all.

Simpler, more specific issues were addressed expediently within the context of the process. Items like "lining up after the recess bell rings," or "some students don't have time to finish eating their lunches," were discussed, solutions were brainstormed, and consensus on specific actions was achieved comparatively quickly. In these instances, staff members were very pleased with their accomplishments. "In previous years, we would have discussed these things, but we'd have never gotten around to making a decision," noted one teacher.

Discipline continued to be an ever-present topic. As noted earlier in this dissertation, discipline related issues had gradually risen from low to high priority.
Frustration was evident. Our principal (while loved by many) was not viewed as a disciplinarian; and most felt that the “downtown” administration was not supporting our efforts.

This last reason, lack of administrative support, became a hot topic. Our district has had (since I’ve been in Columbus) various forms of “middle management.” These managers are usually former principals who are assigned responsibility for a group of schools. The titles for this position have changed, though the teachers’ perception of the position has generally been the same, our principal’s direct superior. Our school had two of these administrators during the two years of this case study (one for each of the years). The first, a white female, was perceived as very supportive of our program, the teachers, and the principal. The second, an African-American female, was perceived by the staff as “out to get us,” a critic of our program, and “an enemy,” of our principal. “She’d like nothing more than to see us fall flat on our faces,” said one teacher.

I mentioned (above) the race of these two administrators because this too, intertwined with the discipline related issues, became a dominant theme near the end of the school year. One parent’s name, “Ms. Brian,” began to be frequently mentioned (or alluded to) in teachers’ conversations and in whole staff meetings. Ms. Brian, an African-American (also mentioned for relevancy) had three children in the building. One of these children was frequently involved in the disciplinary process. I did not have the child in class, but did do some team teaching with his regular classroom teacher. During the year I personally witnessed the child punch, slap, and kick other children. I watched as the child purposefully disrupted instruction and defied reasonable teacher directions. Apparently,
the child needed help in learning to interact safely within the school context.

Ms. Brian asserted (to our principal and to his superior) that the child was singled out because of race and that our staff was racist and biased against African-Americans, especially African-American males. This was true, she contended, in both curriculum and discipline related areas. We were, for the first year in the history of the school, an all white teaching staff. We agreed this was a problem. The lack of African-American teachers in urban (and other) settings is a nationwide problem.

The parent, through many channels, claimed many parents supported her allegations. Later in the year, one grandmother of a student did come forward to support this contention. Others did not. Of course we were very concerned (and probably defensive) about the allegations. No one wants to be called a racist. We had always openly discussed the racial make-up of our students and staff and the importance of culturally relevant teaching. We were white. We weren’t culturally insensitive. I know these seem to be subjective assertions, but I stand by them. We developed curriculum, planned thematic units, and invited positive role models of many cultures (especially African-American) to come and interact with us in our school. We did so recognizing our diverse population. A focus of our program is cultural exploration and acceptance. Many African-American parents throughout my tenure at Duxbury have told me how relevant the school’s program has been to their children’s needs; cultural, academic, and social.

We took the accusations seriously, but at the same time we thought that the feelings were not widespread. Many African-American parents approached teachers individually to tell them that they disagreed with the accusatory parent and were pleased
with discipline and curricular practices throughout the school. We took comfort in this.
We decided that we needed to continue to address things within our control.

One meeting was devoted to our use of PEAK (Positive Efforts for Adjustment and Knowledge). This program has its own space in the building. It is attended by a non-certificated staff member and is used for "time-out" and "in school suspension." Generally, we wanted to use this program more effectively. We wanted to know what other schools were doing, and we wanted to know what flexibility we had within the district-specified parameters. We scheduled a CPS facilitator for this meeting who was a director of the program. She didn't show up. We spent the time brainstorming questions for her for the next meeting and also listed the reasons we referred students to PEAK. The next meeting the facilitator did attend, but provided a very generic overview of the program and didn't provide many satisfactory answers to our questions. One teacher explained, "that's an instance where we didn't need the outside facilitator. She wasn't in tune with what we wanted and people came away unsatisfied. The time would have probably been better spent among ourselves."

During the middle portion of the year, confidence in the process and in each other grew. Building consensus takes time. Sometimes an issue or two would dominate an entire meeting, but still, all felt the time well spent. Half of a "non-contact day" (when the students didn't come to school) allowed us the time we needed to revisit our process and catch up on continued issues.

Revisiting.

We started this non-contact day in a whole group but planned for breakout groups
if needed. We focused on the questions: What parts of the process [new staff meeting/decision making] have positively affected staff and school? What do we want to continue? What do we want to do differently? How should we proceed? We reviewed the “Best Possible Outcomes of a Staff Meeting,” our agenda format and proposal procedures, the roles of facilitators and recorders, and the process of seeking consensus. Overwhelmingly, teachers and other staff members approved of the process and wanted it to continue. We discussed some minor issues like what to do if a bus is late on a meeting day (a teacher agreed to watch the students so the meeting could go ahead), but mostly, the discussion centered around praise for the process and continued hopes for future success.

This part of the process, revisiting issues, prior decisions, and earlier discussions was an essential element. We all felt that decisions were made but not carved in stone. After implementation and reflection, we knew that returning to an issue for further discussion and possible modifications was always an option. It allowed us to be more experimental.

**Dealing with fatigue.**

We quickly proceeded to deal with an issue carried over from the previous staff meeting, fatigue. Teaching is a hard job. So too is school improvement. Add to this mix curriculum development, accusations of racism (still coming from the one parent), a perceived lack of administrative support, and the maintenance of some semblance of a personal life, and fatigue was a factor needing to be addressed.

The facilitator for this meeting provided us a handout. At the top she noted:
We have been working very hard to make improvements in the school this year. We have focused on the children (which is our job). However, for the next hour (or so) it is important to focus on ourselves, as whole people…with needs of our own.

She asked us to take ten minutes to brainstorm and record, individually, “obstacles which interfere with your enjoyment of this job (creating excess stress).” We did this and then broke into small groups. These groups discussed those obstacles which we felt “we can remedy as a staff.” The small groups’ lists were composited and then grouped under like themes. The first theme was “Many Parents.” Obstacles under this heading included: “not supporting academics at home,” “not supporting good behavior,” “not supportive of special arts focus,” “feeling alienated from teachers,” and “lack of support from ‘downtown’ also noted.” Though not mentioned specifically, it was my feeling that this theme was a priority due to the recent allegations made by Ms. Brian. The second thematic grouping was “Time.” Listed items included: “other duties, committees, responsibilities taking time from teaching and crowding schedules,” “parents and negatives taking too much time,” “small amount of planning time too often interrupted,” “no time for collaboration with grade level team, for set-up.” The third of the six common themes was “Communication.” Obstacles related to a perceived lack of discretion, an isolated feeling by teachers, and needs for communicating to all stakeholders (parents, part time staff, etc.) about our arts emphasized program. The fourth theme was “Testing Pressures” and involved the obstacles of outside mandates and a lack of articulation between grade levels. Lastly, a “Broken Building” arose as an obstacle that we had revisited for many years. Our facility was too small to accommodate our program and had many
structural/mechanical problems. It's "hard to cope with broken plumbing, leaky roof, etc."

The small groups reconvened. First, we discussed solutions to the obstacles. Next we phrased "we will" statements that we hoped would combat the problems of stress and fatigue. This is the list of statements:

- We will call parents about upcoming events.
- We will have a sheet for parents to sign in the back of the handbook.
- We will have a magnet or folder for each Duxberry family at the beginning of next year highlighting early releases, vacations, and special events.
- We will believe in and talk about our mission to parents, potential parents and to the community.
- We will get teacher training about dealing with parents/diversity/poverty.
- We will be realistic about time and ourselves.
- We will try to arrange inservice with someone like Mr. Kambon.
- We will start a "warm fuzzy" tradition at Duxberry.
- We will plan a community night for parents and teachers only (have_____ or _____ provide entertainment).
- We will plan a retreat to deal with curricular (articulation) problems.
- We will institute a monthly principal's breakfast or open office hours so parents can have access to the principal and have their concerns and ideas heard.
- We will plan a meeting with teachers and parents to discuss Duxberry's mission and to devise positive ways to solve problems. This will be done with
the help of an outside expert facilitator.

In the preceding sections of this case study, I have discussed the new staff decision making/deliberative process employed at our school. Though it had its drawbacks and required constant tweaking, revisiting, and re-evaluating, it was deemed "overwhelmingly successful," "empowering," and "great for morale," by the staff. My plan at this point in the case would have been to continue to discuss the generated list noted above and the resulting deliberations, actions, and reflections. Many of these statements had consensual support of the staff. Due to changes in focus and in leadership, few, if any, of these ideas were pursued and/or implemented (as of the writing of this case study). The remaining sections of the case study describe these changes.

A Lit Fuse and Items Not on the Agenda

Despite the positive focused efforts of the staff toward school improvement, a feeling of defeat began to pervade the school. The parent mentioned earlier (that accused us of being racists and biased against her child) became more vocal. Our principal was called to a 2+ hour meeting with this parent and his supervisor. He returned from the meeting depressed and feeling as if he had been "ambushed." The high level of stress was affecting his health and staff morale.

I have, until this point in this case study, not discussed the SCIP (School Continuous Improvement Plan) Committee of which I was a member. Briefly, all schools were directed by CPS administration to form this committee consisting of teachers, parents, non-certified staff, the union representative, and the principal. Early in the year, following a district provided format, we wrote a plan to improve our test scores. Among
our strategies was to survey parents about our school. I haven’t spent time discussing this committee because it had little impact on the day to day interactions of our learning community. The school climate committee and the whole staff using our new meeting/deliberative/decision making process were, to date, much more influential. A parent and former CPS teacher coordinated this SCIP committee. In a spring meeting of the committee, this parent/SCIP coordinator shared that she had been contacted by Ms. Brian. She believed the concerns expressed by Ms. Brian were more widespread than we thought (though again, no names were attached to this assertion) and suggested that we have a “community meeting” to air and address concerns.

Meeting?

Initially we agreed to plan this meeting. An outside facilitator, we thought, would be a necessity. Finding the appropriate facilitator proved to be a problem. In the meantime, a teacher contacted the teachers’ union, which advised, “You’d be crazy to have such a meeting.” Also, word filtered back that the meeting was to be attended by a board member, “Mr. North,” and a coalition group he had formed that had aligned themselves with Ms. Brian and her allegations of racial bias. Mr. North is known for causing controversy and dissention among groups. The Columbus Dispatch wrote that North’s:

Tirades against imagined conspiracies turn the board’s attention from the crucial business of children’s education. [North] turns meetings that should be spent honing educational policy into a sort of theater of the absurd, offering nothing of value to the children who desperately need sensible guidance and perspective from those who govern their schools. (11/2/99 1A)
The proposed meeting began to be viewed by the staff as an opportunity for Mr. North, his colleagues (none connected to our school), and Ms. Brian to accuse and defame, not as an opportunity for constructive problem solving and community development. The teachers decided not to have this meeting. Instead, we wanted to go ahead with the survey of the parents. What exactly were the concerns? How widespread were negative feelings about the school/teachers? How widespread were positive feelings? What issues could we address and how might we go about it? The SCIP coordinator formulated the questionnaire, and the SCIP committee made minor adjustments and approved it for distribution. I felt (and others shared this feeling) that a fuse was lit and little, if anything, could be done to prevent the impending explosion.

Community questionnaire.

The community questionnaire was distributed to all Duxberry families. Because of a pervasive feeling of mistrust, the questionnaires were numbered so that duplication and multiple submissions could not occur. The questionnaire could be returned anonymously, or, if people wanted individual responses, they could include their names.

A little less than 10% (40 in all) of the distributed surveys were returned. A parent told me that some were intimidated by the numbering and so refused to complete it. Another parent told me she was “extremely happy” with the school and so didn’t feel a need to respond. The returned surveys were to be anonymous and viewed only by the SCIP committee, therefore it would a breach of this agreement for me to share specific written responses in this case study. A “summary report” was to have been distributed to all parents after this survey was reviewed and interpreted by the committee. The principal
did not finish the school year. He was on medical leave, and during this leave was reassigned to another school. The summary report (as of the writing of this case study) was not completed or distributed.

I do feel comfortable noting that the surveys were generally positive toward the school. Some expressed concerns that racism had been raised as an issue and should be addressed. A small number of respondents did purport that racist practices were evidenced at the school, specifically that African-Americans were involved in disciplinary processes more frequently than their white peers, and that our staff lacked diversity. One African-American parent expressed these concerns to me personally. Another respondent asserted that we reverse discriminated by focusing too much on African-American figures, history, and culture. This parent also made these comments to me personally, therefore, I feel it’s okay to include them in this case. Incidentally, I responded to this parent that I understood the comments, but felt that we were presenting an appropriate balance. I’m also comfortable sharing these comments parents shared with me about the survey and related issues. These comments were not made in confidence:

- “Good teaching is good teaching. That’s what I want for my kids. Race isn’t an issue for me.”
- “Is there a problem here? This survey bit makes me feel like there is. I’ve been here all year. It’s our first year here, and I feel like this is the greatest place in the world. My child has blossomed in this environment.”
- “You just don’t understand. If you were black you’d understand, but you’re not so you can’t.”
- "The only black history you're teaching here is about slavery. You've got to do more than that."
- "This is the best public school I've ever seen, or even heard about. Having a diverse group of kids, not just black and white, but economically, family wise, background, that mix, with the way the arts are used, that makes this place great. Why couldn't I have attended a school like this?"
- "This race issue has to be addressed. I wish you had more African-American teachers here and I hope that happens, but you have to move forward this has to continue to be a thriving program."

Redirecting focus

The surveys were returned, morale plummeted, and the school bell continued to ring at 9:00. We tried to maintain a focus on our main mission, providing children with exceptional educational opportunities. Indeed it was hard, considering the circumstances, but what choice did we have? The staff meetings continued, and issues discussed seemed to be of a more immediate and specific nature.

One such topic arose as a result of a whole-school assembly. Author Eloise Greenfield visited for a day. First, she met individually with each grade level. She shared her poetry, stories, and life experiences. Later in the day, she was our guest at a whole school assembly in the gym. The program included singing (by the school chorus), presentations, and readings. Unanimously, the teachers were not happy with the students' behavior at this event. Talking, playing, inattentiveness and moving around were commonly observed behaviors. We have always prided ourselves on teaching our students
appropriate ways of behaving and interacting as audience members. We have done this (as discussed earlier) by using extensive preparation that includes conveying our expectations and discussion of the type of performance to be given. For example, behavior at a jazz show is different than that at a classical music concert. We discuss the differences and the reasons for them. This event was a disappointment.

In the next staff meeting, we strategized our course of action. Each classroom teacher would discuss the previous assembly and begin outlining expectations for appropriate behavior at the upcoming performance by Opera Columbus (again held in the school gym). These expectations were reinforced in the arts classes. Prep sessions in music classes taught students about the different voices students would hear and the history and purposes of opera. In drama, students received and participated in an overview of the plot of Beauty and the Beast (the opera to be sung). The show was fabulous, as was the audience behavior and response.

During the teacher discussions of audience behavior, we determined that one of the things we, as a staff, needed was to further define our expectations for behavior/interaction in various contexts. Sure "we wanted the students to be good," but specifically, what did that mean? We agreed to address behavioral expectations in three areas: assemblies, the lunchroom, and hallways. Following our now practiced process, we came to consensus on these items. For assemblies, students would be expected to enter and leave the gym with a low level of noise. During the performance, students would sit flat in their own space and watch the performance. Students would sit in clusters with their class members, leaving aisles so that teachers could sit with their classes. We agreed
on which doors specific classes would use to come and go. Misbehavior in a performance would be reflected in the arts grades. The classroom teacher would communicate with the arts teachers about this. We also agreed to create a "plan of action" which would contain expectations. This would accompany a letter to parents at the beginning of the year. In the lunchroom, we agreed that another "plan of action" would be co-developed with the students at the beginning of the school year in assemblies run by the arts team and lunchroom duty teachers. This plan would be posted in the lunchroom. For hallway behavior, we agreed that, when moving as a class, expectations would be up to the individual classroom teachers.

As the year came to a close, we continued our attempts to stay focused and move forward. We selected a reading program, debated plans for uninterrupted 90 minute language arts blocks for each grade level, and continued to address and come to consensus on specific school problems, e.g., getting the children from recess back to the classroom in a safe and efficient manner.

Concluding my two-year research project, I solicited some final interviews, answers to questions, and summarizing remarks. I had started writing up the case study and wanted to finish data collection about a month before school was out. This would give me an opportunity to do some member checking without bothering too many people over the summer break.

Something Bad is Going to Happen

As neat and tidy plans often go, my plan to conclude data collection and write up my case study didn’t turn out to be neat and tidy. As an explication of a two-year period in
the life of a school, the project was already a messy text encompassing: multiple perspectives; complex, sometimes conflicting interpretations; and attempts at providing assertions to summarize our learnings and evolved theories, so that others might reflect upon their own.

To not include the closing weeks of most school years would be understandable. To exclude the closing weeks of this school year would have been dishonest. Two parents, at separate times, stopped me to talk in the hallways. The conversations both occurred on the same day, about three weeks before the school year ended. Both conversations were short. The first went like this, “Something bad is going to happen Mr. Trent, I’m not sure what, but I think something bad is going to happen,” end of conversation, she walked away with a puzzled and reflective look on her face. The second went like this, “Mr. Trent, I just want you to know, I appreciate what you do as a teacher. You know I think you’re the greatest. This isn’t about you. It’s not even about the teachers. It’s about the administration, but I’ve got to do what I’ve got to do.” I still didn’t know what was to come. I did believe whatever it was would be “bad.” It was.

“Racists,” “oppressors,” and “child-abusers.”

A few days later, as my students packed their bookbags preparing to go home, I looked out my open classroom door (classroom doors are almost always open at our school). A group of five or six 5th grade students huddled near the second story window. “It’s Ms. Brian’s mother,” one of them yelled. “Why are they doing that?” asked another. Curious, I too walked to the window to see a group of five adults pacing the sidewalk, picket signs in hand. The group included Ms. Brian, Mr. North, a grandmother of one of
our students, and two other men unaffiliated with the school, but known friends and
supporters of Mr. North. Was this the bad thing? I wondered. As I read the first sign, I
knew that indeed it was. It read “RACIST STAFF DESTROYING OUR CHILDREN.”

I glanced back across the classroom. Blood rushed to my face and my heart to my
stomach. How should I address this with the class? I thought. That instant, dismissal was
called. I mentioned to some on the way out, “there are some people outside, we’ll have to
talk about it tomorrow.” The students left, and speechlessly, I returned to the window.
Other signs read “DOWN WITH WHITE SUPREMACY,” “BLACK AND PROUD,”
“MORE BLACK TEACHERS,” and “CPS INSTITUTIONAL RACISM.” Signs carried
in coming days alleged “CHILD ABUSE” and “DANGER HERE.” My heart raced and I
felt sad and defeated like I’d never felt before. I walked out to talk to the picketers.
“Obviously we agree on some things and not on others,” I said to Mr. North. “I certainly
agree that the lack of African-American teachers is a problem, but not just here. It’s a
problem in many schools and in many urban districts,” I added. “It’s institutional racism,”
he retorted. And you’ve done nothing about it.”

Mr. North asserted that we’d recently had opportunities to hire African-American
teachers and had refused to do so. We had recently hired a new teacher for the school. Of
dozens of applicants, two were African-American. The first of the two African-
Americans, was unanimously selected by the hiring committee, and was offered the
position immediately after the interview. Family considerations forced her to withdraw her
application and move to Cleveland. The other African-American candidate was
interviewed, however, a white candidate was chosen. The hiring committee unanimously
selected this individual. An African-American parent who was a member of the hiring committee asserted to the committee that if the African-American candidate would have been hired, it would have been because she was black. The hired candidate, she asserted, was better qualified. I explained this to the board member who seemed to listen to little of what I said. He repeatedly interrupted and changed the subject.

"Who are you?" the board member asked. I began to reintroduce myself as Ms. Brian intervened (I say reintroduce because Mr. North had read to my students in my classroom as an invited guest earlier in the school year). "Mr. North, this is Allen Trent. He is an excellent teacher. Remember, this isn't about the teachers, this is directed at the administration." "Well the sign says 'racist staff,' and 'destroying our children' that seems directed at teachers to me," I asserted to no direct response. "Well she says you're one of the good ones, anyway," he said and turned and walked away. I expressed my hopes for meaningful dialogue about these issues again to no response, so I turned, walked inside, and greeted my colleagues and friends. Some of them were crying, all appeared horrified, as they stood staring and bewildered. I say bewildered perhaps more to describe myself. For years I'd shed literal blood, sweat, and tears in this community setting. Had I been totally deceiving myself that these years had been spent positively affecting the lives of our students? How widespread were these feelings? Only two people directly affiliated with our school participated, but even one seemed too many. What actions would have prevented this?

A classroom community continues to talk.

The students returned the next day, the principal didn't. An after school visit to the
doctor yielded a diagnosis that he must not return to work. I started the day by gathering the students in a circle. They were already discussing the picketers of the evening before. We frequently met in a circle to discuss a variety of topics. I started by telling them that I was glad we lived in a place where people could openly express their feelings. I noted that I agreed with the picketers’ assertions that there were not enough black teachers in our school and in many other schools. I told them that I hoped that the problem would be addressed and that someday they might be contributors to the solution. I also tried to summarize other claims made by the picketers. In the literature the picketers distributed it said, “The marchers are picketing the schools in protest of the emotional, psychological, and physical abuse of our children, at the hands of callous and insensitive, and racist teachers and administrators.” I explained these items to my students, but also told them that with these points I disagreed. I urged them to always keep an open mind and look at all sides of issues. We have always done this in our regular and arts classes at Duxberry. The students, most seven years old, had much to say. These were hard concepts to deal with at any age, but because these children had been members of a community that celebrated individuality, respect for all, and culturally relevant teaching and learning, they seemed able to reflect and readily form opinions on these matters.

“Are you going to be fired because you’re white Mr. Trent?” asked a girl in the class. “No man, they can’t fire Mr. Trent,” said a boy. “Don’t worry, we ain’t gonna let them fire you Mr. Trent,” added another. As I began to respond, I realized that several people (myself included) in the circle were crying. We looked at each other. We didn’t know what was to come, but we did know that we had a love for each other that
transcended any designations of race, gender, or age. I explained that I wouldn’t be fired and that I hoped that we could all learn from these experiences. A girl interrupted, “wait, wait, I got it,” she said. We looked at her and she continued, “Here’s what you do, you put all the white teachers upstairs, and you get all black teachers for downstairs, then everybody will be happy.” “No. No. That’s not fair,” said another student. “Do it by every other room. 101 a white teacher, 102 a black teacher, 103 a white teacher, 104 a black teacher…” By now we were laughing.

Our conversation continued, at times very seriously, at others humorously. Some students asserted that the race of their teachers didn’t matter as long as they “were nice.” Some claimed that the problem was easily solved by just hiring some African-American teachers to fill openings that came available (an option I too supported). Many expressed their support for me throughout the meeting noting that “You care about us,” “We all have fun being together,” and “we’re a community Mr. Trent, we stick together.” The meeting and these students’ comments buoyed me. After about 170 school days together, we had formed deep bonds. We were a community, respected each other, and cared about each other’s well being. Our talks continued throughout the remainder of the year. As picketers returned on a daily basis, classroom life settled back into a sense of normalcy. They did their thing. We continued to do ours.

**Community in Crisis**

The end of a typical school year is simultaneously stressful and exciting. This year, in our community, these descriptors were intensified. As teachers we seemed to be functioning in a fog. In conversations with colleagues, many expressed that they were
unsure what we could or should do. We openly wondered what the future would bring? After all, we had invested a great deal in building this community, shaping its philosophies, and coming to consensus about our school improvement efforts.

“A community is very fragile when another community sees fit to criticize without full information,” remarked one teacher. She referred to a conversation she’d had with a (African-American) parent that had been told by the picketers that we didn’t bring any African-American role models into the school and that we weren’t teaching about African-Americans in our classes. This simply wasn’t true. I, too, spoke with the parent and explained to her that much of the budget for bringing artists into the school had been spent on African-American artists. These artists included author Eloise Greenfield, illustrator Floyd Cooper, and five local artists of the Kwanzaa playground. I showed her a list of African Americans studied about in the arts classes in the current school year. The list, even to me as a teacher in the building, was impressive. “Oh. I didn’t know about any of that,” she said. I told her that I was constantly aware of the students in my class. “I believe we can and should always try to do better. I’m a white guy teaching a class that’s 75% African-American. I’m aware of it constantly. I try to be sensitive to the needs of all of my students. Sometimes I fail, but never to the point that I believe I deserve to be called a racist, or a child abuser,” I said. “It’s sounds like a lack of communication to me Mr. Trent,” she said. I agreed and we discussed ways in which the lines of communication could be opened and utilized to positively affect the school community.

“So what about our community?” asked one teacher. “All these positives. We’ve made such great steps forward. Everyone here seemed to feel so good about what’s been
happening. Is it all lost now?” This question seemed to be on the minds of many. We received unofficial word that our principal would be reassigned to another building. Who would our new principal be? Would he or she be supportive of our community driven efforts? “How much of this will we get to keep?” asked one teacher. What we are doing has been “great,” she added. “There is more straightforward communication. People feel their time is productive and not wasted. More issues of general concern are being addressed and we are actually doing something about them!” We all wondered what would become of this community?

“What mistakes have been made? What could we have done about this?” Asked another teacher. She continued, “I would love to have more black teachers here, but where are they going to come from? Isn’t the CPS administration responsible for helping us to racially balance our staff?” “Well we obviously have to try to do something about it ourselves,” added another. “They’ve done nothing to help us so far.” Discussions with colleagues continued daily, yielding many questions and few answers. Walking past weeping colleagues after dismissal was a common occurrence.

I’ve had low points and high points in my teaching career. This year, I experienced extremes of each. As I gathered data for this dissertation, I was excited about the discussions, deliberations, and actions of our community. Forged of effort, determination, and struggle, I felt as if I’d grasped “the keys to community building,” and was ready to share these with any educator that would listen. As the year concluded, however, I felt (at times) like I knew less than I did when I started. As I wrote and reflected, I realized that, in fact, much had been learned from the research and the ongoing school improvement
efforts. If action research is to better understand and improve the practices of the actors within, then indeed the project succeeded on many levels. I will further explain the theoretical developments, evolutions, and understandings (verstehen) that I as a practitioner, and we as a school community, gleaned from this project in the final chapter of this dissertation. I close this case study with the events of the final two days of school.

Ending With Uncertainty

An interim administrator had been assigned to our school throughout our principal’s absence. She told us that a new principal would be assigned and that she, personally, was not a candidate. Too bad, as she seemed to have a good rapport with parents and staff and in light of the racial issues I have just discussed, she was an African-American.

We heard that a new principal had been assigned to our school through a phone call from a teacher at another school. Unfortunately, we weren’t given any official notice. The new principal stopped in to the teachers’ lounge at lunchtime on the last school day for students. I went in to introduce myself. She was white, and that I thought, was a problem. Recent events as they had been, I believed that the choice of an African-American to lead our program would send the message to our stakeholders that an all white staff with a predominately black student population was indeed problematic and we, as a district were attempting to remedy this situation. Again, this was out of our control. By the end of the day, two African-American parents had visited me to express their disapproval with the new administrator.

As the students left, I felt that typical sense of worry for them that I felt at the end
of school years. I felt joyful reflecting on the countless experiences we’d had together. We
looked back at photos, videos, and artwork we’d collected. I hoped I’d done enough for
them. I believed I’d done my best. As usual, many students left teary eyed knowing it
would be a while before we talked, laughed, sang, danced, acted, painted, or cried
together again.

I also, as is typical, felt a sense of relief, though this time not so relieved that
school was out, but instead relieved that after this day I stood a good chance of going
months without being called a racist, callous, or a child abuser. I felt battered and
exhausted.

The next day was a teacher “records day.” We worked in our rooms completing
end of the year paperwork and close-down procedures. Two of my colleagues and dearest
friends retired. This was their last “official” day as teachers. “38 years, 38 years, and this is
how it ends,” said one of them. “I always pictured it differently,” she added and forced a
laugh to break the uneasy silence. Teachers pretty much kept to themselves, working to
finish these obligatory tasks, but also to put the end of this year behind. Each time I saw
someone in the hall, even without speaking, I felt we knew each other’s thoughts, each
other’s pain, each other’s disappointment.

And So We Danced

That night, I hosted a retirement party in my backyard for my two colleagues. We
wanted to end the year on a positive note. The evening was beautiful, what one would
imagine when thinking of the perfect spring night. A soft breeze blew. The air was warm.
Spring flowers bloomed. All the teachers came; so too did families associated with the
school, the now “former” principal, other CPS employees, and friends of the retirees. As the evening progressed, the pressure seemed to lessen. We needed to be together. We’d ridden an emotional roller coaster so intense that descriptions pale in comparison. Our community would survive. We would continue, it would continue. Growth can come from emotional pain. A consensus began to form that it would.

A parent that attended the party played the bagpipes. Earlier in the evening, as he arrived, he began playing as he walked down the street to the backyard. The eerie whine of the pipes grew louder, sharper as he neared. He entered the party, dressed in kilt and knee socks, to the approval of the crowd. Later in the evening, as night had fallen, under a star and moonlit sky, he picked up his pipes and began to play again. Muted in an instant, conversations stopped and attention turned to him. The pipe music it seemed, was the only sound on Earth. Two arose, and without speaking, joined hands and started dancing. Others followed. Without words everyone in the yard stood, joined hands in a circle, and began to dance. Amazing Grace pierced the night, and the circle, now moving as one, pulsed slowly in as hands lifted, and out as they fell. Some sang softly as the circle broke off with a leader twisting it around until we were all intertwined together tighter and tighter until, finally, the bagpipe sighed a final note. I don’t know how long we danced. It seemed forever. I wish it could have been and am grateful for the vivid memories now etched in my being. Bagpipes are often played at funerals. On this night, they were played to celebrate life, art, friendship, and the future. In tears, many hugged at the completion of this magical dance. I embraced one of my retiring friends. “You know it’s not the end,” she said. “It’s a beginning. It has to be.” After all the guests were gone and I completed
the late night clean up, I stopped, sat in the yard, and looked skyward. “God I’m glad I’m at this school,” I thought. And I walked inside anxious for a new beginning.

Conclusion

The presented case is an account, an account of two years in the life of a school. The focus has been on the collaborative efforts of a school staff. It has been my attempt to represent many voices in addition to my own. In the case study I have attempted to describe events, but, unavoidably, interpretations, assertions, theoretical developments, and emergent themes have been included. I will focus on the latter, interpretations, assertions, theoretical developments, and emergent themes in the last chapter of this dissertation. I have conducted extensive member checks, edits, and reviews of this case. Utilizing this additional information, especially that from my collaborators, colleagues, and co-investigators, along with my own thematic aggregations, I will summarize the interpretive understandings that have emerged from this project.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Coupling Understanding and Uncertainty

The preceding chapter was a narrative, qualitatively researched case study. The research site was an arts-integrated elementary school, Duxberry Park Arts IMPACT (Interdisciplinary Model Program in the Arts for Children and Teachers) Alternative Elementary School. Extensive descriptions of the interactions within this context during the two-year data gathering period were included. This final chapter discusses implications of these descriptions.

In this final chapter, I present the understandings, interpretations, and other reflections associated with this qualitative research project. Stake calls this the "making sense (1995, p.71)" portion of qualitative study. I will discuss my own learning, but, as I have done throughout the case study, I will include the perspectives of others. Many common understandings emerged, but as individuals constructing personal knowledge and theory in a social context, we each hold differing situated interpretations. This presentation of multiple perspectives allows the reader a wider range of theories and assertions, which might prove worthy of varying degrees of transferability.

This interpretive chapter's point of convergence is on the theme of community.
Three interrelated themes have been identified as key factors enabling community development in the researched school culture. These themes also have potential implications for other contexts. After the three themes are addressed, the relationships among them are explored. The themes are (a) collaborative school improvement, (b) community as an explicit focus, and (c) consensus.

Following these sections, I close the chapter by sharing some factors that teachers assert constrain the development of community and some final reflections and implications for future research and practice. The next section of this chapter focuses on the first theme, collaborative school improvement.

Collaborative School Improvement

As described in the case study, the staff of the research site worked cooperatively, in a variety of configurations, to address school-wide and classroom specific concerns. First, a group of teachers engaged in a university-sponsored independent study/action research project. This group evolved into the “school climate committee.” The entire staff eventually embraced the ideas, concerns, and objectives of this collaborative effort.

The staff developed a new staff meeting format/decision-making process that dramatically altered the culture of the school, its hierarchical model, and the methods by which decisions about the school community were made. Leadership, in this process, was a shared responsibility. This section presents understandings, discussion, and theoretical assertions about this collaborative-school improvement process and the change to a non-hierarchical leadership model. Without question, the feedback I received from colleagues leads me to believe that this is one of the most important series of learnings to result from this qualitative inquiry. All community participants heralded the process. While
disagreements and a lack of consensus accompany other topical areas of this research, this process gained universal support in all member checks, focus group sessions, and written responses.

The process.

Embodying democratic principles more reflective of our society at large, this school improvement effort facilitated feelings of engagement and empowerment. A teacher told me, “this process makes all members important - it’s simple - ask how they feel - or what they want to be comfortable with a decision, but it’s also essential. It seems this year everyone was consulted before decisions were made. It wasn’t just one or a few making all the decisions.”

“Our new staff meeting format is a huge plus,” wrote a teacher. “They are more often and all are committed to the process. The small breakout groups to discuss important or complex issues helped enhance personal relationships, too.”

Another teacher expanded these understandings, “The process builds insight into other people, where they’re coming from, people you might not otherwise understand. Even if you don’t agree, this insight builds understanding, communication and respect for others.” After the subtextual elements of the process were developed, many consensual decisions were made utilizing this power sharing procedure. This was a change and alleviated some previously expressed frustration derived from much meeting and discussion and few resulting decisions or conclusions. One teacher claimed that, “outcomes themselves are a new outcome. I’m so happy to leave a meeting and feel that sense of accomplishment. We worked hard, listened to all possible solutions to problems,
and decided collaboratively on the best course of action.”

Another teacher summarized these ideas like this:

There is more straightforward communication. People feel their time is productive and not wasted. More issues of general concern are being addressed and we are actually doing something about them! People feel more a part of the decisions being made as everyone’s voice is heard. People share in the leadership, which helps us all understand the process better.

Though hesitant to embrace the new process, one teacher was pleasantly surprised. “Even though I felt the principal should run the meetings – I’ve come to like the change.” She also claims that the new staff meeting format has greatly improved the community of the school. “Everyone has a part in the decision making process – not just the loud ones. It’s brought us closer together. Issues are addressed openly, and all are aware of the issues to be discussed.”

The agreed upon process and standards for participation are a demonstration of staff commitment to school improvement. A teacher wrote:

I would emphasize the point that the process itself (different facilitators/recorders; meeting in a circle; no grading papers, etc.) means we are committed to time well spent and on task. It makes staff “feel good.” By sharing leadership responsibilities, more ownership is taken in the meeting. Consensus building on issues eliminates backstabbing because someone’s opinion wasn’t accepted. The sharing by staff members in the building allows the community to see what’s going on in areas that they might never see. Conflicts are resolved in a productive manner.
The individual interpretations shared above are representative of many other similar perspectives. Overwhelmingly, the practitioners at this school agreed upon the value of these collaborative professional development/school improvement efforts. They were equally unified in their issuance of cautions. "There's a danger here," said one teacher. "The process takes time. It's sometimes laborious, but you must follow the procedure. Listen, speak to the point when it's your turn, and give all voices a chance to be heard. People get tired, and don't want to take the time, but it's so important, the time invested is well worth it." Another like-minded teacher agreed that the process is time consuming:

The process can seem long, but outcomes that are agreed upon and trusted by all are worth the effort. It is necessary to constantly renew the commitment to the process. To revisit it, renew commitment to philosophy. The ship can get lost in the storm, but we have to take the time to stay focused. This is what we believe in. This is where we want to go, and this is why.

Shared leadership was viewed as an essential element of the process discussed above. Diverging from the traditional top-down decision-making model, the staff of this school sought and utilized a more equitable and effective form of leadership. Leadership in the context of collaborative school improvement is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Leadership

Leadership in this community was an important issue. First, a lack of strong, directed leadership was seen as a problem in this context. One teacher stated that, "I find it difficult to sustain a working community without an effective leader. Our lack of
leadership has hurt our school.” Another teacher remarked, “A lack of leadership and trust has caused the community to break down.”

Later, when leadership became a shared responsibility, it was viewed as a major positively contributing factor in the continuous school improvement efforts. The principal at this school was seen as an instructional leader and supportive. He was an expert in the arts integration program and was himself a visual artist and involved extensively in theater set design and many local arts organizations. As a classroom teacher, I felt supported and energized by the principal’s enthusiasm and laid-back style. A weakness though, perceived by many community stakeholders, was that this leader wasn’t forceful in making decisions or in bringing the staff to points of decision making. This principal’s willingness to concede this area of weakness and to allow a process of shared leadership to supplant his supreme, hierarchically bestowed power was essential to the furtherance of the school improvement/professional development endeavors. It takes a strong leader to make decisions, state the reasons for these decisions, and enforce their implementation. It takes an even stronger leader to recognize the leadership capacities of other community members and to allow this to happen in support of the overall community’s mission of quality education. This leader did just that. Still a crucial part of the process and still just as accountable to the existing school administration hierarchy, he allowed this sharing of leadership, and through this revolutionary move, supported a faculty in the best way possible, by trusting them.

A teacher elaborated on the topic of leadership:

All levels of community need to have leadership, but it’s good to have the leadership change. Sharing leadership in a school community is good, but there’s
a need for a strong leader, not a dictator. One who says, “here are the boundaries, the structure, how are we going to work within these.” Like a mother or father. It makes them [participants in the community] feel safe.

Echoing support for shared leadership, one teacher noted that sharing leadership, by design, supports our shared community orientation. “One leader tends to establish a ‘me against them or us against him/her’ feeling. Sharing leadership creates feelings of togetherness, unity, and cooperation.”

These understandings, interpretations, and assertions about leadership, born of the lived experience of teachers, speak strongly to the pervasive top-down hierarchical arrangements of our public schools and systems of education. Teachers in this context favor a radical re-envisioning of leadership, staff decision-making processes, and school continuous improvement. Unanimously teachers felt empowered by their interactions, even though time investments were significantly greater than that invested in previous practices.

This section of this chapter has focused on collaboration in a school improvement context and shared leadership as an element of this process. The next section of this chapter addresses the second of three major themes, community as an explicit focus. As is often true with qualitative research, emic issues have emerged, unanticipated twists and turns have appeared, and divergent topics and questions have surfaced. However, throughout, community has held a place of centrality.

Community

The study of community at this school was prompted by a combination of factors. The school had what people referred to as “a strong sense of community,” however,
previously unseen frustrations, problems, and concerns had surfaced. Changes at the school and district level had contributed to these issues, and the teachers at this school realized that systematic assessment and subsequent actions were necessary to maintain a sense of continuous school community improvement. This intensive study of community was born from these realizations. The following sections of this chapter discuss understandings related to an explicit focus on community and teachers’ evolved definitions of community.

Community: an explicit focus.

Community, in its most productive manifestations, doesn’t “just happen.” Community building must be an overt, agreed upon aim of stakeholders. It must be pursued, discussed, and revisited continually. This ongoing focus was identified as an enabling factor for the building of community. Community and its aims of respect, appreciation, receptivity, and valuing should be an explicit curricular focus because this keeps the aims of community at the forefront, visible, and viable. Often, community and its principles are assumed. They remain implicit assumptions of educators and others within specific contexts. Of course, when asked, these educators would claim that community aims, like “respect for each other,” were valued in their situations. I assert that this attitude falls short. Assuming that students will implicitly pick up on, accept, and adopt attitudes that productively support community isn’t enough. Community should be stated as an aim of a school. This idea should be continually communicated and discussed among all stakeholders. Like the explicit stating of academic goals and objectives typically found in graded courses of study, so too should we explicitly share and strive for the goals of community development. Revisiting, reflecting upon, and revising
community practices and conventions should be an ongoing process.

This process of ongoing reflection shouldn't be unique to the staff. By “all stakeholders,” I assert that students, parents, and other connected community members should also engage in the process. This has happened at Duxberry and does support the explicitly stated aims of community development. Students and teachers meet in circles to discuss issues, problems, plans, and to refine understandings about community.

These reflections also take shape in student writing. A fifth grader wrote:

A community is made by many people who join together. Even if some don’t get along with each other and others do. You should take the responsibility to try your hardest to get along and help each other. If there is a few people who aren’t joined in the community, you could become their friend and make them feel part of the community. Try to join them in on the fun (sic).

A third grader wrote that, “Community means when people come together no matter what race they are. We all live in community. Community means no fighting and we all live in peace.” A kindergartner drew a sketch of people, standing in a circle, holding hands, and smiling. Though early in the process of acquiring many forms of literacy, this kindergartner is beginning to develop, internalize, and take ownership of a vision of community. In collecting data for this dissertation, I collected dozens of writings and drawings of this sort. The teachers believe that these metacognitive efforts help students as they connect words, thoughts, and actions as they interact daily within the community. As I reviewed these writings, the words love, caring, sharing, peace, and helping are frequent inclusions. I assert (again supported by my colleagues) that an overt focus on defining and shaping community in specific contexts enables this process to
flourish. Duxberry teachers’ experiences reinforce this claim. One teacher explains, “I think teachers’ constant reminders, modeling and inclusive lessons help develop community. Many of our children do not seem to have a sense of community in their homes or neighborhoods. So, it’s up to the teachers to encourage children to learn to respect and value a community feeling. Focusing on that goal has worked.”

Through the described course of events the teachers in the researched school didn’t crystallize their individually idiosyncratic definitions of community into one, but teachers did solidify, refine, and examine the criteria behind their own understandings and theoretical positioning on this construct. The school faculty developed an increased degree of intersubjective agreement on the meaning of community and the means by which it is sought. Each better understood one another’s perspectives as a result of our discourse and reflections. In closing out the data collection I asked colleagues about their definitions/conceptions of community and if and/or how these had changed. All agreed that their individual understandings were more concise. Many people shared these refined conceptions. Teachers spoke eloquently of the importance of community and shared assertions about building community in schools and classrooms. The next section includes some of these perspectives.

Community Connotations.

The teachers in the studied context unanimously support the synergistic power of community in schools. They hold theories that support an overt focus on continuous reflection, discourse, and action aimed at improving the learning/teaching context for all participants. These themes, that building community and facilitating social development is empowering and should be a conscious focus of educators, were expressed more
concisely as the research evolved. As noted in the literature review (chapter 2) portion of this dissertation, some educators/scholars are recognizing and supporting these ideas (Good, 1996; Kohn, 1996). The theories held and articulated by the participants in this project clearly provide understandings from a, sometimes overlooked, emic or insider’s perspective. In this school, teachers continually focused on and revisited the meaning of community in this situated context. For instance, one teacher remarked:

I’ve taught in a number of schools. Some have really had what I’d call a community atmosphere. Most haven’t. It’s isolating. When teachers are collaborating, thinking together, sharing ideas, you feel better about what you’re doing, because you have more of a belief in what you’re doing and others do too. You really feel like everybody’s on the same page. In the schools where I’ve taught where this hasn’t been important [building community], the feeling is that we’re here for academics only, that working on cooperation, or social matters are taking away from “the academic mission.” Really, it’s the other way around.

When teachers, along with students, are working together with common understandings this community atmosphere that’s created makes everyone work toward succeeding in all areas.

Another teacher echoed the importance of community. Her understandings and theories address the construct “community” on a variety of levels. As she defines community, she also asserts personally constructed knowledge and beliefs. Her expressed theories make very concrete the, sometimes abstract, notion of community:

A community is a group of people who share common needs, common goals, and they gather together in some way to achieve these goals and meet these
needs, and as they gather, they create rituals, and they create boundaries. I compare school community to a journey and we’re all taking the journey for our common goal, and we need to help one another develop a community so we’re not alone, drifting. A community needs to have boundaries, and especially young children need to know what the boundaries are.

The idea of building community is the most important thing that educators can do. It is even more important than teaching skills. I know all the educators will say “what?” But, if that person can not get that community spirit, cannot function in a community, that person becomes an outsider and dangerous. Like in Littleton, these people didn’t feel a part of the community. They felt like loners. So to build community, especially in elementary schools is extremely important.

By spending time on this [community building] we’re helping the child in other areas. The rest will come when they feel a part, valued as a member. Far after students are out of school, they will live in a community. They’ll have to be members, and leaders of a community. Dates and facts they can look up. You can’t look up how to function in a community.

Another teacher described community as:

Individuals working together as a unit for the best of all in involved. It is an always-changing environment when all members are valued and have a voice. But, as members of a community, individuals need to realize that they need to cooperate and be flexible. It is not always possible to meet everyone’s needs and wants. So everyone can’t always be happy with all the decisions being made. The trade-offs, in the long run, are worth it.
Many mentioned similar understandings of the give and take nature of community. "Community is an ‘us.’" Said a colleague, continuing that, “Community is when each person feels a part of something larger than himself and is willing to sacrifice for the good of the group. Community is feeling responsible for actions and events outside your own self.”

Another teacher interpreted, “Community as a group of people who work together toward common goals and have common values. People in a community respect others in the group and generally feel respected themselves. Practicing community building like improving communications, decision-making processes, and increasing school-wide planning has brought our sense of community closer to the ideal.”

Similarly, a teacher wrote that:

A community is a group of people who come together with common goals. They choose to work towards those goals with others, but also as individuals. Communities exist on different levels, the entire school, the staff, the first floor of the school building, the second floor, the grade level, and at the classroom level. All of these communities overlap in pursuit of the common goals. In our case, that is to educate and or receive education in our own special way – the Arts IMPACT process. Each sub-community has its own way of contributing to the goal, but each knows that the others are working toward the same.

Lastly, a teacher, defining community, but also reacting to others’ understandings, stated that:

While I agree with your perspectives on community on the whole, I still
feel that they are too ideal. This all sounds good, but in no way is it easy to do. Teachers with their age, wisdom, learning, etc. need to establish this kind of community feeling. Kids come to us from home situations that sometimes don’t support this definition but actually oppose it. A sense of being valued, some kids don’t really feel that. For kids, the community experience is more subjective and unconscious. You structure a classroom very consciously that builds positive feelings in spite of a child and what he or she might bring. I agree with the ideas, but I also realize the challenges in getting there.

As I stated earlier, individual definitions of community have not fused into a singular, representative whole. Instead, each teacher/participant has evolved her or his personally held definitions and theories about community in schools. Many common themes, however, are present in these definitions/discussions of community. These include the general importance of community to these teachers, the recognition of the give and take collaborative nature of community, and the teachers’ commonly held, community specific goals.

Community members share goals, values, and ideas. These may not be identical, but they are discussed and refined among the community stakeholders. A community seeks intersubjective agreement on goals and values. Agreed upon methods for continual communication are also essential elements.

Ultimately, a community’s collective goals and values take precedence over individual opinions (or at least work in tandem with them). Making sacrifices and being flexible are a part of community membership. In turn, issues are never addressed with finality. Everything is subject to revisitation. For me, this has been an important learning.
Having a group concur with and share your asserted beliefs is easy. Agreeing to abide by a community derived decision that counters one’s personal opinions is harder to do. In the end, however, the sacrifices and compromises are “worth it,” as one teacher said. The value of community membership and the simultaneous feelings of empowerment outweigh the uncomfortable feelings that sometimes accompany compromise. True ownership of this idea was a gradual process for me. A colleague summarized this point,

In a community, the priority is the community and colleagues’ collective opinions. This takes precedence over individual beliefs. You have to ask yourself, “how sacred is my opinion?” We’re forced to re-look at decisions in this community context. Community has the power to force you to re-evaluate who you are, to change who you are, and to change what you believe.

Collectively, we have developed and/or refined theories that support the notion that community building fosters respect for all persons. “Community is a compassionate perspective,” said a teacher. Continuing, the teacher asserted that, “Community recognizes and respects individual differences. Community brings people together to create a school environment that’s humanizing. Key in all this is that it happens for teachers and students alike. Community is an approach of acceptance, listening, and feeling.” All teachers consulted within the context of this research support this “humanizing” contention.

Community is a part of this school’s explicit curriculum and a point of convergence and ongoing discussion for the school staff. This overt focus has helped the staff to facilitate the development of the teaching/learning context in positive directions. This portion of this chapter has outlined the understandings associated with this explicit
focus.

The preceding sections of this chapter have summarized two of the three major themes identified in this research. First, a section addressed collaborative school improvement. Next, the participating teachers’ beliefs in an explicit focus on community and teachers’ individual connotations and understandings related to community were also reviewed. These understandings are snapshots frozen at a point in time. In actuality, these understandings are fluid and continue to evolve. Many interpreted themes and assertions have been noted. The next section of this chapter highlights the implications of learning associated with the third theme, consensus. The related topics of communication, trust, and the arts as an area of consensual philosophical agreement are also included. I close the section with a discussion of areas in which consensus was not achieved.

Consensus

“Consensus,” like the preceding themes of collaborative school improvement and community, became a focal point for the participants of this inquiry. Consensus was seen as a specific factor that enabled the development of community in this school. This assertion is based on the situated experiences discussed in the case study. However, as is true of the other identified themes and accompanying assertions, the implications are that transferability to other contexts, in varying degrees, is possible. Before discussing consensus specifically, I overview some general assertions about open, respectful communication in a group context. These assertions are included because they are essential prerequisites for the seeking of consensus. After this initial discussion of communication, the topic of consensus in the studied context is addressed, followed by the related role of trust in a community. The arts, as an area of obtained consensus, are
then discussed, and at the end of this section, I note some non-consensual topics.

**Communication.**

To begin, for community to develop in a productive manner, all members must have opportunities to speak and be heard. Opinions can be expressed without fear of angering others and decisions can be made together by a group which is truly a community. “All members of a community should feel safe in expressing their opinions without fear of reprisal. Without this, community flounders,” said a teacher. Another teacher hearing this added, “Yes, it again goes back to respect. We respect each other enough that we want to hear each other. Even if the viewpoints differ. Everybody respects everybody else. We respect each other so much egos go out the door. We’re fortunate. Without it, it doesn’t work. When you respect you trust.” Trust, discussed later in this section of the chapter, is another element participants valued in the community context. The collaborative school improvement efforts discussed at the beginning of this chapter allowed for the types of listening and speaking referred to above. A process that valued open, respectful communication provided a foundation upon which consensus could be sought.

**Consensus as an aim.**

Generally, teachers and the principal agreed that we should seek consensual decisions whenever possible. This was true, most asserted, even if extra time was spent seeking common ground. Many, however, asserted that, eventually, if consensus was not obtained, a strong majority would have to suffice in order to move the group forward. A
few teachers explained it like this:

"The community comes together to make rules and solve problems. Everyone has a voice in developing consensus on issues. This is a time-consuming but important way to let everyone in the community have a say and thus buy into the decisions made."

"Consensus is a wonderful idea, but I don't think it is possible in all cases. I think a strong majority is enough in most instances. Those who disagree should be able to bring up alternatives frequently. Try for consensus first, but eventually we need to move on."

Another teacher noted that seeking consensus is more important on some issues, "Consensus is important in some instances, but at other times a leader can make these decisions, explain why, and move the group forward. We need to weigh when we strive for consensus and when we don't, both are important."

Having participated in the process, I assert that a decision that has been discussed and altered until all participants are willing to accept and take ownership of it is worth the time spent and has the best chance of being successfully implemented. On those items upon which we achieved consensus using this process, most impacted the school community in a direct and positive way. I assert that this was the case because we sought and obtained consensus, and therefore, success was a shared goal. In rare instances, due to the practical matter of time constraints, voting on decisions may be necessary to continue on to other concerns or issues of the community. However, in these instances when consensus has not been achieved, revisiting these voted decisions is a must. By doing so, trust is maintained. Those who don't agree with a decision realize that after a reasonable period of implementation, the issue will be re-addressed, discussed, and
perhaps altered or reversed. This knowledge builds trust. Teachers’ understandings of trust as an enabling factor in the pursuit of community are the topic of the next section of this chapter.

Trust.

Trust was deemed an essential factor in building an environment conducive to school continuous improvement and professional development. Teachers’ assertions cover the difficult, long-term nature of trust acquisition, but also the benefits gained when members of a group trust each other. One participant argued that not trust, but mutual respect, was an essential element in a community. I include this person’s perspective at the end of this section. All others argued that trust should be developed and maintained.

A teacher/participant spoke to these points:

I think complete trust is important and takes a long time to build. I’ll take suggestions, try them, have faith in them, because of this trust. Trust should be built between teachers, between teachers and administrator, and between teachers, administrator, and the children. If you don’t have trust, you’re not going to take risks. You’re not going to open your mind up to possibilities.

Another teacher’s interpretation is that:

Trust is essential in a caring community. This goes from the smallest child to the most seasoned veteran. I think the building of trust is the most essential value to allow a community to function at its highest level. When anyone in the community ignores, undermines or neglects trust, the whole community suffers.

Still another offered these understandings:

Members of the group must trust each other to have any hope of becoming
a real community. Opinions and ideas must be able to be stated without ensuing anger or derision. Decisions must be made with all voices being heard. Collaboration can only happen when members of the group trust that their ideas will at least be considered.

According to one of the arts specialists, teachers can facilitate the development of trust in specific ways in their classrooms:

Children also need regular rituals and routines. A teacher, for example, that gathers the children together for a meeting each morning. The children can say, “OK I understand what we’re doing, I understand what is expected of me in this community.” This repetition and understanding of ritual makes one feel safe as a member of the community. As trust develops in a community, a person develops a self-image. And I don’t mean “good self-esteem.” This bothers me. My feeling of self-esteem is “I am a valued member of this community, but I am a member. I’m not the only one in this community. I can say what I feel and people will listen to me. I trust them to do that. They may not agree, but they will listen to me and point out what they don’t agree with.” I think some people have the wrong idea of self-esteem. Part of the problems in schools is the children are spoiled. Not with material things, but they have no responsibility. This is true within any kind of community, and the idea is that their feelings are the only ones. Not so! That’s why community building, with trust being a part of it, is so important.

One colleague’s interpretation of this factor was that trust wasn’t necessary. This teacher did, however, speak of “mutual respect” as a substitute for the presence of trust:
I would not call trust essential to a school community. It may be semantics or how the term “trust” is used, but I think “mutual respect” is how schools build community. I don’t need to “close my eyes and fall into a staff member’s arms” to be in community with other teachers, but mutual professional respect is essential.

The issue/factor of trust might be the most intangible of all those discussed in this chapter. Specific procedures were developed and localized to seek consensus among staff members. The same was true for sharing leadership within the community. Trust, alternatively, seems necessarily to require time more than process. It grows, develops between caring community members collaboratively seeking to address school concerns. Though programs exist to facilitate “trust building” among groups, these seem artificial to the members of this community. Only through faithful interaction and engagement in the context can trust spread and solidify within a group. It happens within the developed processes, not external to them. In the studied school context, consensus was obtained on the school’s arts-integrated model. The next portion of this section on consensus and related issues summarizes this philosophical agreement and resultant implications.

The arts, philosophical agreement, and community implications.

Conversations about Duxberry Park, the studied school, inevitably turn to the arts, the roles of the arts in education, and Duxberry’s interpretation of these roles. The role of the arts-centered education model, the staff commitment to the central philosophy, and the community-oriented nature of the arts are the focuses of this section of this chapter. The staff consensus was that these were all community enabling factors.

Before new staff meeting formats, shared leadership, and school climate
committees, this school started with a model. The Arts IMPACT Model provided a framework for teachers to work within, yet still allowed room for local practices, rituals, and conventions to develop. Throughout the school’s 18+ year history, the arts-integrated model has ensured a central role for the arts of music, dance, drama, and visual art.

Teachers agree upon and value the tenets of the IMPACT Model. Participation is the rule. These teachers don’t just collaboratively plan learning experiences for students and drop their students off for art, dance, music, or drama. They go and participate. As model learners and co-teachers, the classroom teacher sees students in different environments and “classroom teachers know arts specialists much more personally by being in the classroom with them and planning with them,” contends a teacher.

Another teacher explains that:

Arts classes are places where community can be used to create beauty and meaning within each art. Collaboration to sing a song well, to create an ending to a story, to make an art work or create a dance takes trust among the members of the group and the common idea that such activities have value for us as human beings as well as for the academics. Sharing arts experiences (performances by students and professionals) gives us common experience to discuss and build on as individuals and as classrooms. By sharing stories, listening to music, seeing dances and studying artworks, we begin to experience life from many viewpoints which allows us to expand our communities to include many more ideas and kinds of people.

The arts specialists that facilitate many of these activities are given much credit. “Our arts team is incredible,” says a teacher. “Arts people can be egocentric. Our arts
team, like the rest of the staff, knows how to listen and lead.”

Consensus centered around the IMPACT Model keeps teachers focused on arts-integrated curriculum designing and implementation. It requires group deliberation directed at integrated curriculum development. As noted above, all participants share common arts related aesthetic experiences. Within this model, Duxberry teachers have created a shared theoretical vision of arts education and have continued to articulate and evolve it. Again, teachers value this shared philosophy as a factor that enables community growth. A rich, arts integrated curriculum, filtered through the IMPACT process, is seen by the teachers in this school a major factor enabling the development of community.

“For an entire school to function together a common philosophy is vital,” begins a teacher, and continues, “in order for a building to function to its highest potential, the staff must have consensus on a basic philosophy. Duxberry’s darkest hours were the times when a member of the staff did not believe in the value of an art-based education.”

Philosophical agreement is a consideration from the outset at this school. Committees of teachers, parents, and the principal have hired the teachers at this school. Community stakeholders seek candidates committed to the equitable administration of an arts-integrated program. This provides a site for intersubjective agreement even before the discourse begins. It’s an opening into further discussions, commonalities and co-developed theories. Even within this philosophical agreement on arts education, varying perspectives or philosophies guide various manifestations of curriculum and instruction. Our school, for example, weights process over product or performance.

“It is crucial for the staff to agree on a philosophy,” begins one teacher. “When
we don’t agree, we undermine what others are doing. We have a strong clearly articulated philosophy, which is passion for the arts and our belief in arts education. We all have a commitment to hard work, and a commitment to our philosophy.”

A colleague noted that philosophical agreement “is becoming exceedingly important.” The colleague continues that:

We are now seeing how important it is for us to have a common philosophy about behavior. We have enjoyed agreeing upon the integrated arts program of Arts IMPACT for years and now we are expanding that agreement to other areas of school citizenship. Agreeing on the Arts IMPACT program has occasionally been a struggle when various aspects of the program have been challenged. Whenever possible, the program is stretched to include new ideas, needs and processes, but we have fought passionately to keep the flexible schedule, planning time with teachers during the school day, and attendance by all teachers during arts classes.

I recall teaching in schools where everyone goes about his or her own business in the classroom and there is no unifying philosophy other than “this is school.” This sets up such isolation from classroom to classroom, mistrust and resentment when ideas are “stolen,” and that most limiting of mentalities: These are my students in my classroom, so hands off!

Lastly, a teacher echoing the call for a unifying philosophy, but expanding the assertion to schools that might have a differing focus contends that consensus on philosophy is:

Absolutely essential! Even if it’s not Arts IMPACT. For some schools it’s
science or math, outdoor education or foreign language. Whatever it is needs to be supported across the school. Without that, problems are right in your face before you start. And if these disagreements are philosophical there may be no meeting point! For example, if we tried to join Direct Instruction with Arts IMPACT.

In addition to the arts model and intertwined philosophical agreement, teachers point to a consensus on the nature of the arts themselves as being community oriented. The arts, teachers assert, necessarily support community oriented attitudes and theories.

The very nature of the arts is claimed to support community development, teacher professional development, and school improvement by the teachers in this school. Again, teachers have developed consensus around these assertions. Thematically, teachers understand the arts as lenses through which we view the world and sites upon which we build relationships. “Through the arts,” notes a teacher, “one learns to accept and appreciate others. I believe the arts are essential to the foundation of a caring community. The arts allow one to see the world outside ones-self.” Also combining these ideas, a teacher states that, “the very nature of the arts supports community in our school. They [the arts] stress our humanity, creativity and working together.” Another colleague relates the arts to the theme of relationships asserting:

The arts are about love, beauty, truth, perception, and understanding how we see the world and others. So, the extent to which, we teachers (and kids) are involved in the arts and the promotion of community is implicit! It also gives us vehicles for building, personal relationships on the staff. “How did you like _____ movie?” “What did you think about _____ (play, concert, etc.)?” Sometimes we even attend the programs together, plays, concerts, art shows…And sharing our
art abilities adds. Your bringing your sculptures to school; people hear me play in
Doc’s band; Carol singing with The Cecilian Singers – that kind of thing.

Through the arts we’re building relationships, engendering positive feelings,
moods, and ideas.

Lastly in this section on the nature of the arts, I’m including a lengthy, but
insightful quotation. This teacher speaks to the previously discussed themes, but also
expands these notions. Eisner (1991) speaks of a “connoisseur” as being “highly
perceptive in some domain (p.7).” This teacher, a 38-year veteran of drama and regular
classroom teaching, certainly meets this criterion. Dewey (cited in chapter 2) called for
an honoring of teachers’ knowledge. By including the following quotation, I am
attempting to honor this teacher’s practical knowledge. Her understandings and
interpretations speak more eloquently to the nature of the arts and the mapping of this
nature onto community ideas than I could ever hope to paraphrase:

Drama builds community by the nature of process drama. The teacher is
not the all knowing teacher, but the facilitator, one that accepts the knowledge of
the students. The teacher is an attentive listener. Drama includes a routine to
prepare students. We seek cooperation and collaboration. Students must learn to
give up ideas, take ideas, and that give and take can be learned. The teacher as
facilitator shapes a routine, cooperative aspects, collaborative opportunities,
listening, pretending, building trust, and all help build community. Drama is
community.

In all of the arts, all problems and all concepts are brought to the universal
which is human. The arts humanize everything. The arts are the making of human
beings. The center of the arts is humanity. We can see that we are all part of this universe. We are not the only one’s with this concept or this struggle. It’s at the core of the drama, like all other arts. I [as facilitator] think it out. I think symbolically and want the students to do so. The community aspect needs to be there, to explore. It’s a balancing act. Then you get to the core of an understanding. Some classes get there others still fall short.

The arts are the reason for the community to gather together. Through the arts a community is celebrated. Through the arts a community can look at themselves, reflect upon their decisions, their behaviors, their beliefs, their heroes, so in effect the arts are a mirror to the community. They help push the boundaries of a community in a positive way. Many are trying to push the boundaries, but the arts generally push the boundaries in a positive direction. Seeing things from different perspectives, they [participants in the arts] can leave themselves and stand in other people’s shoes, and say this is how they felt, and think what if? It comes down to being able to translate the concrete things into the symbolic, getting at the core of the arts, the humanities, within the arts they can try things out, scary, dangerous, and then have a chance to reflect upon the decisions before they are made in real life.

In visual art, you can show the ideal, or the realistic. The artist is either a mirror or a critic of our time, In dance we are learning to symbolize a situation without words through movement and relationships, through concepts. The arts work for all kids, and adults for that matter, because they’re about humanity.

Teaching has always been a challenge. It’s more of a challenge now
because schools are being blamed for all the ills of society and schools reflect all the ills of society. It is more of a challenge for those without life experiences. It's a challenge we can meet and overcome by articulating our philosophy, continuing to build consensus around it, and working hard. It’s not easy, but it’s really important, give it time.

Non-consensual topics.

There were, throughout the research period, instances and topics upon which consensus was not achieved. This, however, also came to be seen as an enabling factor in our community. In some instances, control over and decisions about community procedures and actions should be left up to the individual. Guided by personally held theories, individual community members need a degree of autonomy and independence. Finding a balance between autonomy and community agreement is a process each group must work through. In our situation, the issues of rewards, praise, punishment, and consequences were groups of ideas upon which much diversity of opinion existed. These topics were discussed and revisited on many occasions, but usually decisions about these issues were placed at the classroom, not the school-wide level. When issues didn’t have a clear majority of opinion and didn’t seem as if they were going to obtain one, these items were decided at the discretion of each teacher. This allowed for idiosyncrasies and different teacher perspectives. Teachers maintained ownership and benefited from the chances to reflect upon their personally held theories about discussed practices.

The preceding parts of this section have reviewed understandings related to the theme consensus. Discussed topics included communication, trust, the arts and a shared philosophy and model of arts education, and instances of topics that didn’t achieve
consensus. As supported by the presented interpretations, teachers were passionate about these topics and their relationships to the enabling of community development.

Thus far in this chapter, I have addressed three themes identified as important areas of learning in this research. These themes, (a) collaborative school improvement, (b) community as an explicit focus, and (c) consensus have been dealt with as individual topical areas. However, in the studied school culture, the themes would not be so easily separated. In fact, these three themes are closely related and have been mutually supportive of positive developments within the school culture. The next section describes the interrelationship of these themes. Following these descriptions, I overview some factors deemed as constraints to the building of community in this school culture and close the chapter with some final reflections.

Connections: Collaborative School Improvement, Community, and Consensus

Though discussed as separate sections of this chapter, the three themes identified as cornerstone areas of this research are interrelated in the studied school context. Each supports the others, and reciprocally, by removing one, the effectiveness of the others in enabling the development of community in the school diminishes.

First, the collaborative school improvement process that was developed during the conduct of this research allowed for the other themes (community as an explicit focus and consensus) to develop as positively enabling factors in this community. The agreed upon subtextual elements of this process ensured (a) that leadership would be shared, (b) that all teachers would have a chance to voice their opinions, suggestions, and ideas in all instances, (c) that all teachers would have opportunities to hear others’ opinions, suggestions, and ideas, (d) that community development was an explicit, ongoing aim of
the staff, and (e) that consensus on all issues, including our intersubjective meanings of community, would be sought and revisited as needed.

Secondly, viewing community as an ongoing focal point for our interactions within the school culture fostered continual, positive school community development. The teachers in the studied school accepted and pursued Kohn's (1996, p. 101) definition of community as a "place in which students feel cared about and are encouraged to care about each other. They experience a sense of being valued and respected; the children matter to one another and to the teacher. They have come to think in the plural: they feel connected to each other; they are part of an 'us.'" Teachers include themselves within this "us" referred to by Kohn. Necessarily then, explicitly focusing on this required the support of the other two identified themes. To explicitly state and seek the vision of community noted above, a group must work collaboratively and aim for consensus whenever possible. It's all a part of being "valued," "respected," and "connected." A teacher stated that, "focusing on our school community forces us to work together to seek common ground. Without this focus, community becomes something we all agree we want, but nobody works toward getting it."

Lastly, specifically addressing consensus as it relates to the other themes again highlights the interrelationships between these compatible, mutually supportive thematic areas. Consensus cannot be obtained in a group of any kind without a commitment to collaborative processes. The collaborative process allows, makes room, for consensus to emerge. This doesn't happen without conflict and sharing of alternative courses of action. These, too, are necessary parts of a collaborative process. Decisions that obtain consensus are far more likely to be implemented and adapted so that they positively affect the
culture, mission, and aims of the school. One teacher asserted that, "whenever we reached consensus, I knew that the decision made would be carried out and would affect our school in a positive way. I knew it because everyone wanted this to be the case. When everyone supports an idea, everyone makes sure it happens."

The above section explored relationships between the three primary themes of this chapter, (a) collaborative school improvement, (b) community as an explicit focus, and (c) consensus. As noted, the three themes are mutually supportive. Like the legs of a tripod, the removal of one seriously hinders the functioning of the other two. These themes were seen as factors that enabled the development of community in the studied school culture. Additionally, interactions and relationships among these themes also enabled community development.

Next, I turn to factors that constrained the development of community. As with the enabling factors, these constraints have been aggregated and interpreted so that the resultant understandings can be communicated to stakeholders of the studied community but simultaneously be of worth to others in similar situations.

**Constraints to Building Community**

Some roadblocks presented challenges and hindered continuous school improvement and community building efforts. To this point in this chapter, I have focused attention on the factors that enabled the development of community. I’ve done so for a number of reasons. First, my biased perspective is one that believes in focusing on positive, enabling factors. In doing so, my experiences dictate that failure-producing impediments often lose their ability to impede. Secondly, some of these constraints were viewed as “beyond the control” of the localized realm of this project, and so were given
less attention. Lastly, throughout I have claimed a representation of the multiple perspectives of participants in the studied context. In general staff discussions, formal and informal meetings, research interviews, focus groups, and written responses, the teachers in this context focused more on enablers than on constraints. It’s easy to assert why things are not happening, but harder to assert how they are, should be, and will continue to happen.

The studied teachers believe in and work to support the evolving community. This is not to say that teachers have turned a blind eye to challenges and constraining factors. On the contrary, but what teachers have done is select those factors within their control and developed positive strategies to address them. Many of these strategies and related understandings were presented in the preceding portions of this research.

Some constraints are very real and are likely shared by other educators in differing contexts. This section addresses some of these constraints. These constraints include questions of support; communication; factors external to the school community, but impediments nonetheless; items related to leadership at various levels; and interpretations of time factors as constraints to the building of community.

**Lack of support and effective communication.**

Many teachers in the arts feel a lack of support. When budgets are being cut, the arts are often sacrificed undeservedly. The arts-integrated school discussed in this research is no exception. Those labeled as less than supportive over the years included “downtown” administration, legislators, and the state department of education.

In recent times, however, this lack of support was also seen as having a never before mentioned parental component. Throughout the program’s history parents have,
unanimously it seemed, supported the program in many ways (some of these discussed in chapter 4), philosophically, financially (raising money), and voluntarily by spending many hours in the school and with the students in the community. As the school population changed, some teachers perceived that fewer of the students and their parents were attending the school specifically because of the arts-centered philosophy. A teacher contended that, “more children are coming to us who don’t know or particularly care about the arts.” This was seen as a constraining factor. “Fewer and fewer parents understand and support us,” wrote a teacher, continuing, “we now have a need to better communicate our philosophy and expectations to parents. Previously parents were entering their children into the lottery because they already understood these things. Now, this lack of understanding or agreement is hindering our community’s ability to move in a positive direction.” Another teacher noted that school continuous improvement efforts were constrained by “parents who mistrust the school, and parents who do not support the school or their own children’s academic efforts.” A teacher explains the constraint this way:

I believe that a “created” community such as that in a school is subject to many outside pressures. For instance, can students actually “feel cared about” when efforts to get the student to control behavior and do the work assigned is viewed as “being picked on” by those in the immediate community. How far can students actually go toward to respecting teachers, students with various viewpoints and those things which are viewed as success within the community when such things are not valued by those in the student’s home? The feeling of safety within a community is very fragile when another community sees fit to
criticize without full information.

Indeed, a lack of school/parent communication hurt this school tremendously in the closing days of this case study. This research, by design, focused on teachers, and primarily, their interactions within the school context. However, throughout the data-collection time period, efforts were made to open/maintain channels of communication between school and home. Events such as grade-level potluck dinners, regular PTO meetings, evening concerts, “sharings (student created arts performances),” and parent/child “make it take it” workshops were held on a regular basis. Still, as the described events indicate, some felt as if they were outsiders or adversaries, as opposed to community members working constructively to address perceived problems.

The staff was aware of this emerging communication problem and formulated specific plans with which to address it. For example, in a staff meeting described in the case study, when formulating “we will” statements, the staff agreed that:

- We will call parents about upcoming events.
- We will have a sheet for parents to sign in the back of the student handbook.
- We will have a magnet or folder for each Duxberry family at the beginning of next year highlighting early releases, vacations, and special events.
- We will believe in and talk about our mission to parents, potential parents and to the community.
- We will get teacher training about dealing with parents/diversity/poverty.
- We will plan a community night for parents and teachers only
- We will plan a retreat to deal with curricular (articulation) problems.
- We will institute a monthly principal’s breakfast or open office hours so
parents can have access to the principal and have their concerns and ideas heard.

- We will plan a meeting with teachers and parents to discuss Duxberry’s mission and to devise positive ways to solve problems. This will be done with the help of an outside expert facilitator.

Unfortunately, these plans were not actualized in time to avoid the events that occurred at the end of the 1998-1999 school year. I have asserted in this research that a goal of school communities should be the bringing of outsiders “in.” In this case, this didn’t happen soon enough.

Clearly, these identified constraints, communication and lack of support, are related. The expansion of community membership I refer to above necessarily requires more effective communication. This was also a problem at the district level. A lack of support from the district level was also seen as a constraint. This will be discussed in the beginning of the next section, “external factors.” By external factors, I’m referring to entities outside the school and classroom communities. Of course these boundaries blur, but the distinction is made for the purpose of organizing and displaying these interpretations. Lastly in this section, I address the constraints posed by concerns specific to leadership and time considerations.

External factors.

“The Columbus Board of Education has never understood or supported what we’re doing here at Duxberry,” said one teacher. This succinct comment was echoed by many. “We should expect our administrators to be supportive, appreciative of what we do. Instead, we feel little to no support. All this lack of support drains committed teachers
into feeling: "What’s the point!" asserted a teacher. Another teacher attributes the lack of district support to an array of factors:

We get inconsistent leadership from downtown. Nobody knows the history of this program. Therefore they have no ownership of the program. We’ve had revolving-door superintendents with each new one imposing new structures on the schools. We’re constrained by a bickering school board which does very little to give a feeling of confidence that “things are being taken care of downtown.” And it certainly doesn’t help that [the district] finds a new emphasis every year.

Another external factor seen as a constraint is legislation driven accountability measures. “The legislators that are putting this testing on us are doing it so they can say, ‘see, I’ve done something, and they can’t live up to it.’ They are trying to be accountable to voters by shifting the blame.” Another teacher agrees, “Our legislature imposes arbitrary measurements of success. Then when push comes to shove, they finally admit that the test hasn’t even really been validated yet! We’re beating ourselves and our fourth graders up over a reading test that “hasn’t even been validated yet?”

These external factors that constrain community, at both district and state levels, didn’t often receive the focused attention of the teachers at the researched site. Feeling that these constraints were largely out of their control, the teachers concentrated on a more local, school-based arena. Within this local arena, leadership, by some was seen as a constraining factor.

Leadership and time as constraints.

The combined realizations that the teachers in this context perceived little positive leadership from their state, or district level, and also considered the principal lacking in
decisiveness and "always tied up in trivial tasks," prompted some to claim that a lack of leadership constrained the developmental efforts of the community. A teacher explained:

Lack of strong leadership and lack of expectations can lead to mediocrity and confusion. It can lead to miscommunication, miscommunication of our expectations. Leaders' indecisiveness, inconsistency, lack of support for rituals, have taken confidence away from us. Our energy is directed toward covering mistakes. Community becomes difficult to sustain. In a perfect community the leader of the community is competent and able to lead. When this is not the case, the sense of community cannot be as strong as it should be.

Lastly, and again a constraint that an overwhelming number of educators share, is the factor of time. "We simply don't have enough time," said a teacher, "this leads to a rushed feeling for all, teachers and students. This limits the interactions that we should be having, between teachers, between classes, between grade levels, on different floors, with the secretary, or parents." Other teachers also mentioned time (or lack thereof) as a constraint. Most also noted that increased pressures to perform on standardized tests added to the feeling. Teachers in this school had used some creative ways to maximize the time they had to work with. Still, most agreed that a lack of time constrained efforts to build community at the site.

This section reviewed some teachers' understandings of the factors that they perceived inhibited, hindered, or constrained the development of community. Previously, in this chapter, I reviewed factors that enabled community-based school improvement efforts. In the remaining section of this dissertation, I share some additional insights gained throughout the research project, provide an assessment of the research validity,
and close with some implications and suggestions for future research and practice.

**Setting Up the Sequel**

Unfortunately, as successful, fulfilling, and empowering as participants claimed the community development process to be, the future of these innovations and all other school improvement and professional development activities is uncertain. Ending the year knowing that a new administrator would be assigned to the studied school left all with a hopeful, but uncertain feeling. Still, hopes of continuing were high. A teacher proposed that:

> A committee of teachers will have to present the process to our new principal to get him/her on board without feeling that his/her “power” is being usurped. The way our systems of schooling are set up, the power at the building level rests with the principal. We may not have a choice in the matter, but I hope this isn’t the case.

All participants deemed this research successful and beneficial. Other educators seeking to benefit from any degree of transferability from the described to other contexts should realize that each situation is idiosyncratic. This is not to say the described theories and assertions can’t be of use. On the contrary, but those adopting practices similar to the ones described must also take ownership, develop their own situated subtext and proceed according to the needs and (hopefully) consensual agreements of the participants.

This chapter “completes,” “ends,” or brings this research to a “close,” but really, it’s only a stopping point in the writing. The educators in the studied and all other contexts continue to interact on a daily basis. The challenges, problems and enabling and constraining factors will continue to evolve in each situation, as will individuals’
interpretations of community and their interactions within the various communities of which they are members.

The title of this chapter, "Understandings and Uncertainty," is indicative of the findings of this research. Indeed the practitioners in this context, as evidenced by the data displayed in the last two chapters, have deepened understandings and developed professionally as a result of reflecting upon and interpreting their roles, definitions, and theories about community. Despite these significant understandings, the text ends with many outstanding uncertainties. The community is in flux. A new principal is forthcoming. Will this individual support the commonly held community aims? How will the lack of diversity on the staff be addressed? How can the learnings and understandings asserted in this chapter be of use to these teachers in future school improvement efforts? Continuing to reflect upon these understandings in light of the various areas of uncertainty could be a productive means to learn from the past and grow into the future.

Some things seem clear. The process of community development is emergent, ongoing, and certainly not linear. It is best addressed collaboratively with established, agreed upon methods for continual communication, reflection, action, and re-visitation. Attempting to bring community outsiders in as community members should be an ever-present goal.

The interpreted community constraints and themes that enabled community development are good places to continue the discourse for those in the studied context. Can any of these constraints be rectified? Made enabling? For example, could the teachers in this context broaden their community building efforts to open lines of communication and build trust between their community and say perhaps the accusatory
parents or the school district administration? In doing so, these groups might come to feel membership in the community. The labels outsider and adversary might no longer be applicable.

In fact, this should be a focus for all community building efforts. It’s easier, neater, not as messy, to say that the community boundary is the classroom, or the school, but a focus of our efforts should be the blurring of these boundaries, the bringing of outsiders in. This after all, was the problem with some of the discussed parents. Communication, for whatever reason, broke down, and these parents felt like outsiders instead of valued members of the community. These parents were viewed as uninformed adversaries rather than community members offering a critique.

Hindsight isn’t 20/20.

It would be nice to assert that as result of our successes and failures throughout the conduct of this research that we now knew the actions that should have been taken that weren’t, and the course that now needed to be followed to assure community harmony and continued growth. In this and many other situations of complex social interactions, it’s not so easy. We do reflectively realize mistakes and also possibilities that weren’t, but will be, attempted. For example, the arts, as the cornerstones of this program, will be used to bring the community together. Focused efforts to educate all parents about our program, its methods, approach to multi-culturalism, and its philosophies will be future inclusions. Forums for open, continual communication between all community stakeholders are being developed.

Additionally, teachers are now realizing that some items deemed “out of our control” need to be within it. For example, efforts to communicate about and explain our
program to our district administration are to be undertaken. Teachers are getting directly involved in recruiting a more diverse group of practitioners for this school. And, externally imposed accountability standards are to be addressed within the IMPACT model, "The standards are here to stay," said one teacher. The teacher continued, "so what can we do to use the arts to help the children achieve the desired outcomes without sacrificing the important learning derived from arts education?" These and other focused efforts will be among future attempts to evolve and improve this school community. Hindsight and reflection don't reveal all the "correct" answers in matters of school community. However, this reflection does point to strong possibilities that give community members direction and focus for continued community evolution.

Big issues.

"Education," I wrote earlier, "is and should be a never ending conversation."

There are many issues facing educators and other constituents of public schools worthy of attention in these discussions. Big issues including: assessment of learning, curriculum constitution, culturally relevant teaching practices, the recruitment of a diverse and qualified group of future practitioners, the education and induction of these pre-service teachers, the evolution of today's schools growing into tomorrow, and the professional development of the teachers within them, demand inclusion in current and future discourse.

All of these big issues, I assert, can be more fruitfully addressed by a collaborative community of members dedicated to open communication about and reflection on the meaning and seeking of educational improvement and excellence for children and teachers.
Revisiting validity.

This research meets several criteria for qualitative research validity. The learnings, descriptions, understandings, and assertions presented in this research are those of a group of practitioners dedicated to ongoing, collaborative school improvement. The collaborative process succeeded according to the criteria for validity of action research presented in the methodological chapter of this dissertation (chapter 3). In addition to those noted by Stake (1995) and Altrichter, Posch, and Somekh (1993) in the (chapter 3) methodology section of this dissertation, the research has “democratic validity,” in that it was “done in collaboration with all parties who had a stake in the problem[s] under investigation.” Multiple perspectives and interests were taken into account (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). The research achieves “catalytic validity,” as well. Catalytic validity is “the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (Lather, 1986, p. 272). The conduct of this research has focused, energized, and transformed the participants and their reality. “Dialogic validity” comes through collaborative peer review and discussion of the research descriptions and interpretations (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994). This too has been done extensively throughout the conduct of this research. “Outcome validity ...the extent to which actions occur that lead to a resolution of the problem under study” (Cunningham, 1993) is more of a question for this project. Some problems have been resolved. Others are in process, and others wait changes before resolution can even be attempted.

In addition to these sought confirmations of validity. The research account is offered for potential transferability.
If there is to be transferability, the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make the application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do. The best advice to give anyone seeking to make a transfer is to accumulate empirical evidence about contextual similarity; the responsibility of the original investigator ends in providing sufficient descriptive data to make such similarity judgements possible. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Conclusion.

Research about teacher collaboration and school improvement efforts will and should continue. The transformative power of teachers' knowledge is still underestimated by scholars, but perceived as most relevant by other teachers. There is a great deal of potential for this type of research and sharing of accounts. Other practitioner accounts of their collaborative school improvement efforts and accounts of teachers working to build community in their specific schools and classroom contexts would be welcome entries into this discourse. Administrators' accounts of living in, working in, and building school communities that are great places for teaching and learning are also invited. The activities of sharing, discussing, and cooperatively building knowledge brings communities together. Bringing communities together, making outsiders community insiders, should be an ongoing mission for all communities. The information presented here attempts to invite some of these boundary crossings.

And so, this inquiry comes to a "close." The descriptive data and accompanying interpretations are offered. The "burden of proof," passed to others in pursuit of
community. In the studied context, the evolution continues. Dealing with the uncertainties, constructively addressing the identified constraints, and deepening understandings to affect and improve practice are all challenges to be faced. The sequel to this text is already being written.
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