

UNPACKING THE MEANING OF COMMUNITY:
EXPLORING CONSTRUCTS OF COMMUNITY BUILDING THROUGH
ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' DISCOURSE

by

BARBARA ELIZABETH PALLAS HICKS

(Under the Direction of Kyunghwa Lee)

ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to unpack elementary school teachers' conceptualization of community or community building in school, and to examine the teachers' "folk psychology and folk pedagogy" (Bruner, 1996) reflected in their discourse on community or community building in school. This case study is framed by cultural psychology. Because *community* is such a complex notion, it can best be understood by evaluating the context in which this term is used and shared. Toward a better understanding of the cultural meanings of constructs, such as community and community building, discourse analysis was used to analyze participant interviews in one local school context. The primary data comprised of four elementary school teachers' discourse from three individual interviews and from a focus group interview. Findings suggested that there are situated meanings and cultural models of teaching at play in this local context. Some of the teachers' folk pedagogies enhance their ability to build community in schools while others inhibit their ability to create a sense of community with students and families.

INDEX WORDS: community, community building, teachers' discourse, folk pedagogy

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“This community goes far beyond our face-to-face relationship with each other as human beings. In education especially, this community connects us with the great things of the world, and with the grace of great things. We are in community with all of these great things, and great teaching is about knowing that community, feeling that community, sensing that community, and then drawing your students into it.”

-Parker Palmer
The Courage to Teach

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my grandparents who collectively and by example taught me that I could be a wife, mother, teacher, and scholar. Additionally, I am grateful for their wisdom and their sharing of many life lessons that will serve me in this world and save me through eternity.

In Memory of

Leroy and Elizabeth Green

Andy Shotick

In Honor of

Alice Shotick

Jim and Betty Pallas

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITY IN CHANGING TIMES

Almost a century ago, Dewey (1900) argued for the important connection between community and school: “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must [be what] the community wants for all of its children” (p. 7). Dewey believed that parents and community members ought to have a say in the way schooling occurs. Furthermore, a community should be in agreement about which goals are to be achieved through schooling. Today, community building in schools has become more necessary than ever. Contextual factors, such as changing demographics in the United States, an American sense of lost community (Pipher, 1996; Putnam, 2000), and a climate of accountability in teaching have influenced the revival of interest in community building in schools. Dewey’s perspective on community and the school is relevant today, not only because many researchers draw from his work, but it provides a frame for the kind of school that would offer the most hope against the aforementioned social and educational challenges. In his pedagogic creed, Dewey (1897) wrote:

I believe that the school must represent present life - life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the play-ground. The school life should grow gradually out of the home life; that it should take up and continue the activities with which the child is already familiar in the home. (p. 77)

Dewey’s ideal school is one that integrates with community life and provides rich learning opportunities for all students through the human experience. For elementary children, this would include opportunities to play, investigate, ask questions, and make connections between school and family life.

I became interested in community-school connections when I began to examine my own practices and taken-for-granted notions of community building in the elementary classroom. Indeed, through my teacher preparation, graduate coursework, and practical teaching experience, I had been exposed to progressive educational philosophies that exemplify the ideals of democracy, equality, and community. I began to internalize these educational ideals and merge them with my own beliefs about teaching and learning based on my personal experiences and cultural background. Personal experiences and culture have a lot to do with the way I conceptualize community, and so here I will describe briefly a few points from my cultural background.

First, I would consider myself American. Ideally, I would like to think that the term American is inclusive of a variety of cultures and a variety of backgrounds, but in the process of merging my teaching and learning experiences, I have become a little more critical. I believe in some ways, my whiteness privileges me in my participation in the mainstream American culture that often overvalues individualism, materialism, and assimilation, and sometimes undervalues cooperation, spirituality, and diversity. It could be argued that some of these American values promote the creation of community, while others of these values work against it. For example, a person focused on individual needs may not contribute to a sense of community, but a person believing that he or she is part of a greater plan or working toward a common good, may indeed contribute to a sense of community. Moreover, if any of these values become shared values, then that condition alone provides a basis for creating a sense of community among people.

Spirituality is one of those concepts just as challenging to define as sense of community. As I discuss spirituality here, I define it differently than I define religion—also realizing how the larger sociohistorical and local cultural contexts contribute to the way these terms are defined.

To understand how spirituality can be uniting or dividing, consider how current American politics and conservative media seem to polarize religious views and promote the fundamentalist Christian perspective as the only Christian or American perspective. Yet, Americans affiliate with many faiths, not just Christian, and have varied spiritual beliefs. In fact, spirituality for many Americans represents a range of beliefs on a spectrum from an awareness of God to a sense of connectedness to each other and to nature. The American value of religious freedom is unifying, though some spiritual beliefs and practices can be dividing.

Shared practices and meanings define cultural communities (Rogoff, 2003) more than genetic traits or geographic boundaries. For example, my maiden name is Pallas which is Greek. Though my father's side of the family still maintains olive skin, dark hair, and brown eyes, I look more like my mother who is fair-skinned and red-headed. She was adopted, so she is not really sure where her ancestors came from, but her adoptive parents were from middle Georgia and can trace family lines far back to areas of the Deep South. My mother brings with her and transfers to me a very Southern heritage. This is communicated through her words and actions. Although, I learned aspects of Southern U. S. culture from her, I remember in elementary school wanting to identify with being Greek. I devoured the readings of Greek mythology, and became interested in preparing Greek food, but that was about as far as it went. My father wanted me to know our family was of Greek decent, but we had no Greek language or Greek customs to share. I didn't know any Greek families and I didn't look Greek either, so how could I perform my Greekness? Instead, our family was exposed to the Air Force way of life, as we moved around to different Air Force Bases, mostly in the U.S. Every summer, we returned to Georgia to visit relatives. I learned to adapt to my surroundings, make friends, and follow the cultural norms of the American mainstream and the more local Southern subculture. Undoubtedly, these experiences

have shaped the way I conceptualize community in school and how I practice community building in my classroom.

Teachers have an extraordinary opportunity to affect democracy, equality, and community in the work that they are engaged in schools. As a teacher, it is my hope to promote change that will lessen the impacts of racism and afford equal opportunities for all of my students, and of course, create a sense of community. Creating a sense of community across cultures is a goal for many teachers today, but what does that *really* mean? In the elementary classrooms where I taught, I offered student choice and opportunities to voice ideas and share opinions. I saw first hand how a caring classroom community invites cooperation and sparks curiosity in a way that leads to learning by everyone involved. It is hard to argue against a goal of building community in schools and in the classroom, but I wanted to know if there was a body of research that supported the teacher practices of community building. If so, I wanted to know what framework could be used for studying the phenomenon of creating community in classrooms and schools.

As I began my literature search, I found that in recent years, *community* has become more popular as a subject of educational research (e.g., Baker, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Osterman, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1994). Community-related literature includes topics such as classroom community, professional learning communities, and involving community members in schooling. In fact, the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) annual convention theme in 2008 was "Research on Schools, Neighborhoods and Communities: Toward Civic Responsibility." Educational researchers are becoming more interested in defining *community* and determining how it is constructed.

Defining Community

Sociologists have long studied what constitutes community and the relationship between community and society. According to Thomas Bender (1978), German scholar Ferdinand Tönnies used the terms *gemeinschaft* (community) and *gesellschaft* (society) to describe how people understand both community and society in modern life. In the nineteenth century, Tönnies studied the changing social relations in the context of rising capitalism and urbanization. As an ideal, community, or *gemeinschaft*, has qualities of intimacy, emotional bonds, embracing the wholeness of individuals' lives and a sense of belonging one might find in family, church, small towns, and neighborhoods. *Gesellschaft*, however, refers to the organizational structure that is less personal, more bureaucratic. These terms are two of the main ways researchers describe *community*, but there are other definitions as well.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) described community as having a geographic definition and a relational definition. They proposed the relationship-based community has four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection. Membership refers to boundaries of the group and a sense of belongingness they share. Influence in a community is bidirectional; members feel influence of the group as well as an empowerment to affect what the group does. Integration and fulfillment of needs involves a group's shared values that incorporate similarity or social trade. Finally, a sense of shared emotional connection means group members have a quality of interaction and investment in the community. Several researchers followed this framework as a way of measuring a sense of community in classrooms and schools (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997). They believed a sense of community is present when members participate in shared problem solving toward common

goals. A “sense of belonging” and “relatedness” were also terms found in the psychological literature related to the topic of community (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan, 1991).

More recently, educational researchers (Cairney, 2000; Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001; Miretzsky, 2004) described community in relation to the concept of democracy. Community is inclusive of all people who come from a range of social and economic conditions from rural to urban environments. In other words, together everyone achieves more when a variety of perspectives are represented. Community building in schools has been also explored in connection to parental involvement, business and university partnerships, service-learning projects, as well as service integration by other government agencies (Billig, 2002; Invernizzi, Richards, & Richards, 1997; Sanders, 2003). The term community is commonly used in the educational literature in relation to the goals of learning and emotional support for students (Osterman, 2000). Less frequently used was the limited, geographic construct of community whereby community is determined by a set of boundaries (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). For example, those who live within the neighborhood boundaries are part of the school community.

Taking a different stance, Furman (2004) rejected the notion that community is a “thing”; rather, she argued community is a process:

In other words, to promote fundamental changes in how schools operate with the goal of enhancing community-like experiences, it is more important to focus on the processes of community than the entity of community, and it is more important to inspire commitment to these processes than commitment to the metaphor or image of community as an end “product”. (p. 221)

The process of community includes certain aspects such as perspective taking and relationship building that undergird Furman’s “ethic of community” (p. 215). The ethic of community is

another framework that draws attention to the complex nature of the construct of community. The varying definitions of community in the educational discourse indicate how the concept of community has ranged from a geographically bounded entity to a more inclusive process in recent years.

Context is an important part of meaning-making (Erickson, 1982; Vygotsky, 1978). It is the important place where social interactions take place. Likewise, the meaning of community is created and influenced by the social context. The construct of *community* reflects a part of a coordinated culture (Rogoff, 2003) that is situated in a larger sociohistorical context. That is to say, elements of culture work together and are interrelated in a complex way in the larger social, historical, and political context. In what follows, I discuss sociohistorical factors that have influenced the current interest in the notion of community in education.

Sociohistorical Factors Influencing Discourse on Community

There are several sociohistorical factors that account for the increased interest in community and community building in the educational research literature. The three contextual factors that seem most relevant to an understanding of teachers' discourse on community include America's changing demographics, an era of academic accountability in schools, and a focus on creating schools as caring places.

America's Changing Demographics

A rural county evolves into a metro area. Farmlands disappear as developers build homes in rows with gates and sidewalks. The corner store is replaced by Wal-Mart. The local school system grows larger in population and more diverse in language, race/ethnicity, and income. People start commuting to urban areas while the rural landscape transforms into a suburb. Soon, residents no longer know who lives down the street or who goes to school with their children as

well as they did before. This familiar anecdotal story begins to illustrate the ways in which American life has changed, most notably, in the last 30 years.

In *Growing Up American: Schooling and the Survival of Community*, Peshkin (1978) studied the school and community relationship in a declining rural town he called Mansfield. Mansfield exemplified the changes that communities faced as industry and mobility affected small towns nationwide. Peshkin described the sense of community and reluctance to change felt by Mansfield residents as follows:

At the heart of resistance to changes that would undermine school-community accord are a community's special qualities—intimacy, belonging, nurturance. When overlaid with feelings of territoriality they generate a sense of being part of a special people, school, and town. This sense may be in the mind of the beholder and hence inaccessible to critical scrutiny, but it exists as fact for mainstream Mansfielders. And though these qualities are always in flux, they are treasured as eternal goods, irreplaceable and priceless, the marks of an unchanging (or, at least, very slow changing) order. (p. 206)

Peshkin's findings illustrate the importance of the school-community relationship to its Mansfield residents and provide insight to the sense of community shared by similar small towns in America. Furthermore, Peshkin's findings support that schools play a role in maintaining a sense of community among residents. Schools are places where teachers, administrators, students, and community members create and communicate shared meanings. They substantiate beliefs and practices of the local and larger culture.

In *The Culture of Education*, Bruner (1996) also discussed how industrialization, population migration, and technological advances have had an enormous impact on communities and the way America educates its youth. Population increases and movement caused a shift from

rural schools to urban schools, a reflection of the economic shift from agricultural to industry. In many U.S. cities, larger comprehensive high schools were formed that could affordably offer a broader curriculum to students. Smaller schools, where community was built because teachers and students knew each other, were found only in rural areas. Tyack and Cuban (1995) explained the societal trends this way: “Increasing urbanization and consolidation of rural districts produced the concentration of population required for larger and more differentiated high schools” (pp. 48-49). Going to a “good” high school equated to getting a “good” job. Technological advances required students to be well skilled. Industrialization, migration, and technological advances were not the only challenges to community building in school.

Another event in U. S. history that impacted community building in schools was the landmark decision of *Brown vs. The Board of Education* of 1954. Desegregation of schools promised the opportunity of all students to have equal education—a goal for which educators and policy leaders are still striving:

Most contemporary accounts of urban and predominately African American schools are reminiscent of the conventional historical view of all-Black schools during the era of legalized segregation—depictions filled with sordid images of dilapidated buildings, inferior teaching, and inadequate resources and supplies. (Morris, 2004, p. 70)

Over time, schools faced other issues related to equality such as mainstreaming special needs students, accommodating English language learners, and banning prayer and Bible reading in schools. Struggles for power and equity have divided some communities and united others as America’s demographics have changed. Mainstream values of individualism and consumerism have grown stronger nationwide. There is “a continuing tension between two competing elements of American ideology, one that elevates liberty and promotes free markets and the other

that elevates equality and promotes participatory politics” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p.54). Similar tensions are embedded in the construct of community in American schools.

Because community is a complex notion related to several social systems, professionals in other fields have reflected on the changes of modern families and communities, too. For example, Putnam (2000), sociologist, described the decline of American community due to decreasing “social capital” (Bourdieu, 1973) or social networks that have value for the average American:

By virtually every conceivable measure, social capital has eroded steadily and sometimes dramatically over the past two generations. The quantitative evidence is overwhelming, yet most Americans did not need to see charts and graphs to know that something bad has been happening in their communities and in their country. (p. 287)

In addition to less social connections between people within communities, Americans are less likely to share the same cultural traditions. Often, America is perceived as the nation not united by a common ancestry, history, language, or religion (Baker, 2005). Instead, Americans are “united by our media and by what we consume” (Pipher, 1996, p. 83). Pipher, psychologist and family therapist, argued that Americans are influenced by the technological advances in information dissemination. She described how technology replaced the opportunity of people to form relationships. Putnam, Pipher, and Baker all wrote that Americans are feeling increasingly disconnected from one another and are mourning over the loss of a sense of community.

It is also interesting to note that the U. S. Census (2003) reported substantial increases in Latino and Asian immigration. Table 1.1 shows the data collected for the foreign-born population who entered the U. S. from 1960 to 2000. Since 1960, the Hispanic or Latino population has risen approximately from 1.4 million to almost 6.5 million people. From the 2000

Census data, Hispanic and Latino immigrants account for 49% of all immigrants to the U. S. Since 1960, Asian immigrants increased from almost a half million to 3 million. This is a larger growth increase than all other immigrant groups. These demographic changes influence the discourse on community among contemporary Americans.

Table 1.1

Foreign-Born Population Who Entered the U. S.

		1960-1969	1970-1979	1980-1989	1990-2000
Hispanic or Latino	Number of people	1,437,470	2,073,055	4,158,435	6,488,865
	Percent of total foreign-born to enter U.S.	30.1%	44.2%	49.1%	49.2%
Asian	Number of people	458,895	1,233,655	2,270,080	3,049,575
	Percent of total foreign-born to enter U.S.	9.6%	26.3%	26.8%	23.1%

Statisticians agree America's demographics will continue to change rapidly: "About 65 percent of America's population growth in the next two decades will be 'minority,' particularly from Hispanic and Asian immigrants" (Hodgkinson, 2001, p. 8). As America becomes increasingly diverse, educators face a huge challenge to build consensus on community values that are also equally respectful of the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity within schools. A number of researchers have argued for more culturally relevant teaching in schools and have provided strategies applicable to teacher education programs. Butler, Lee, and Tippins (2006) studied preservice teachers who developed sensitivity to diverse communities through case-based instruction. They found that preservice teachers valued the opportunity to learn collaboratively and discuss the dilemmas the cases presented. Additionally, Cochran-Smith (2004) asserted that students teachers need to raise questions as they work in schools and communities "to try to understand what is going on in their schools from the meaning perspectives of the participants—

teachers, parents, and children—and in relation to the history and values of the community” (p. 52). Teachers can learn to see the community as a resource for developing curriculum and organizing classroom instruction so that students build on previously learned “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 134). These educators emphasize the importance of connecting students’ school lives with students’ home lives, and praise the potential of community building in schools to impact student learning and development.

An Era of Accountability

The changing school context continues to shape the shared meaning of community. Teachers and administrators talk about ways to involve community members and how to create the best climate for learning in their schools. The emphasis on accountability in the larger, national context is another factor influencing the increased attention to community building in school.

The era of accountability began as a response to *A Nation at Risk* (NECC, 1983). The report highlighted the decline of average SAT scores and prescribed more rigorous content, better standards and expectations, more time on task, and improved teaching (Harris & Herrington, 2006). Over the next 20 years, the accountability policies increased to include: standards on the number of school days and hours, minimum high school course requirements, promotion/graduation exams, take-overs of administration, school report cards, vouchers, charters, and school choice.

At the same time such policies were put into place, achievement gaps between white and minority students were increasing. Harris and Herrington (2006) proposed that the recent emphasis on government-based accountability has the potential to improve minority student achievement, but that educational policy makers will have to consider the link between school

and community. They also found that possible reasons for the remaining achievement gaps were due to teacher training and retention. Additionally, Lee and Bowen (2006) studied student achievement among children from varied racial/ethnic and economic groups. They found that the achievement gap was partially explained by differences in parental involvement, but more specifically certain types of involvement were more beneficial to particular racial/ethnic groups. For example, parents' involvement *at school* is a factor that relates positively to academic achievement across groups, but there are many cultural variations in how parents participate at school that leads to unequal benefits for students. Lee and Bowen proposed:

Addressing the achievement gap through parent involvement strategies need not involve radical changes in the culture of the school or of parents from nondominant cultural groups. Instead, it may involve recognizing the common values of parents and schools and modifying the ways in which opportunities and resources from parent involvement at school and at home are made to all parents. (p. 215)

A sense of community can be complicated by such disparities in student success and high teacher turnover, yet, research supports its relevance in defining common values between families and school faculty. Communication between parents and school staff can clarify common goals and values.

Ideally, schools provide a context for students to experience a sense of belonging through meaningful learning activities and to be inspired to engage in opportunities to participate, serve, and connect with people around them. However, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 has increased pressure on schools to achieve an average minimum score on skill competency. This emphasis on accountability and testing in U.S. schools has resulted in more state and national control of curriculum and less control over local decision-making in schools.

Gruenewald (2003) suggested that place-based education has the potential to improve academic achievement scores, but that is not the main focus of place-based education:

The point of becoming more conscious of places in education is to extend our notions of pedagogy and accountability outward toward places. Thus, extended, pedagogy becomes more relevant to the lived experience of students and teachers, and accountability is reconceptualized so that places matter to educators, students, and citizens in tangible ways. (p. 620).

He described the conflict between accountability and community in school:

From the perspective of place, conventional notions of accountability are problematic because they fail to recognize the mediating role that schools play in the production of space (or social context) through the education of place makers (or citizens). Place-based educators often question reforms based on standards and testing because of their tendency to cut off the process of teaching and learning from community life. (p. 620)

National and state curriculum and testing programs have little to do with the local, community context. Gruenewald summed up the situation this way: “The problem is that although the educational discourse of collaboration and community is significant, it is often subsumed by the discourse of accountability” (p. 643).

Many researchers argue that schooling can be about more than raising test scores (Baker et al., 1997; Hargreaves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Levine, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1994). It has been said that today’s schools are focused solely on academic achievement and have been less attentive to skills that students can transfer to their lives out of school (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). Further, such narrow focus on academic achievement may be detrimental to students’ development. In 1996, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

adopted a revised Position Statement entitled *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* which included that “children learn best in the context of a community where they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel psychologically secure” (p. 9). Additionally, research has shown that fostering a sense of belonging and community is beneficial to students’ academic achievement. For example, Osterman (2000) reviewed literature between 1993 and 1999 and found that a sense of community is associated with several academic attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that promote student achievement, including participation, engagement, motivation, and self-esteem. She also found that relationships developed between peers and teachers contribute to a sense of belonging at school for students.

The Need for Schools as Caring Places

Along with the challenges of changing communities, families, and schools, other societal events have impacted the increased discourse on community in school as well. Recent incidents of violence at the national and local levels have reinforced the need for schools to be caring places. Across America, newspaper headlines, TV news programs, and popular songs tell tragic tales of violence in the lives of young people—as victims, witnesses, and perpetrators. “In the U.S., youths 18 (years old) and under represent 26 percent of the U.S. population, but they account for approximately 50 percent of the witnesses and victims of violent acts” (Voisin, 2007, p. 51). Research supports that young people who are exposed to violence may experience trouble in developing “self-esteem, trust, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships” (Voisin, p. 55). Lack of self-esteem and trust, as well as, poor development of emotional regulation and interpersonal skills are personal qualities that can be obstacles to creating a sense of community.

In many U. S. schools, crisis plans are being practiced in case there would be an event of extreme violence. For example, the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* (James, 2006) reported that during a hostage drill at McArthur High School, a mock gunman walked into school grounds, ignored security checkpoints and pretended to shoot two school officials when confronted. This emergency drill, organized in conjunction with local police, was designed to test how well students and faculty would respond to this type of situation. Many schools across the U. S. have policies in place (e.g. hostage drills, visitor logs, name badges) to protect students and help them feel secure. Some educational researchers have criticized such policies. Smith and Sandhu (2004) argued that “the use of metal detectors, security guards and surveillance cameras, dress codes” focus on the “negative behaviors as opposed to building prosocial skills” (p. 287). They proposed building connections between students, families, and school as a more proactive approach to violence prevention.

For many young people, violence is modeled at home. The Children’s Defense Fund (2005) reported that over three million children in the United States were reported to agencies for neglect or abuse; 900,000 children were found neglected or abused after reports were investigated. More children than ever before in the U.S. history come to school from foster-care situations, homeless shelters, and single-parent families (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). When caring connections are established between students and teachers, students achieve more academically (Baker et al., 1997) and teachers meet students’ social and emotional needs. A sense of community may provide the context for fulfilling such needs. Thus, many books and articles have been written to help teachers with ideas, strategies, and activities that promote community building within the classroom (Charney, 2002; Dalton & Watson, 1997; Levine, 2003; Noddings, 2005; Wolk, 2003). However, the empirical evidence of teachers’ practice of community

building is harder to find. More research is needed to understand what teachers do for the sake of community building and how students respond and participate in those activities.

Rationale for the Study

Through my study I hope to contribute to a body of research Zeichner (1999) refers to as “new scholarship.” According to Zeichner, the new scholarship has been built in the past 25 years, and some of it has taken a conceptual approach to include studies that focus on teacher discourses:

There has been a growth in philosophical analyses of some of the enduring tensions in teacher education (such as between theory and practice, between the liberal and technical) and critical analyses of some of what McWilliam (1992) has referred to as the “folkloric discourses of teacher education,” that coherent programs are necessarily good. (pp. 30-31)

Studies of popular discourses add to the understanding of the local context and enrich the process of analyzing the common and conflicting meanings shared by participants. Findings from these kinds of studies show readers what is valued in general by a particular profession and how the same term can be defined differently by the different practitioners. For example, in their book, *The Discourse of Character Education: Culture Wars in the Classroom*, Smagorinsky and Taxel (2005) profiled two very different character education initiatives of the Upper Midwest and Deep South. They analyzed the character education curricula, outlined common and uncommon discourses of the two regions, and used historical and cultural data to draw conclusions about ideological differences between the two states. They wrote, “Character is a concept that may be formulated differently depending on the culture in which it is conceived and the overall social goals and attendant ideology of those who advocate particular notions of

character” (pp. 325-326). Just like the discourse on character education, I believe teachers’ notions of community are subject to cultural and social expectations and goals as well. How do schools cultivate partnerships with families and community members and what and whose goals are being attended? Answers to these questions are embedded in teachers’ discourse.

Several educational researchers have challenged popular slogans in education in recent years. For example, Markham (1999), Valli (1993), and Zeichner (1996) studied the popular concept of “reflective practice” in teacher education. Often, such popular slogans become a mainstay in educational discourse, but may be practiced in a variety of ways. Markham discussed the psychological, institutional, and social forces that make teacher reflection difficult to practice. He urged readers to be mindful of the social construction of identities and perceived realities of the learning experience and cautioned educators not to “be seduced by the metaphor of reflection (in a mirror), neglecting to examine the assumptions behind the metaphor” (p. 72). In real life, teacher reflections are not mirror reflections. Markham explains that the assumption of clarity on which the metaphor of reflection relies is false because the context, including discourse, affects one’s construction of reality. In his article, he emphasized the important relationship between language and thought, and the benefits of using a psychological lens (attending to cognitive processes) to understand phenomena in education. Similarly, I plan to explore the folkloric discourses of teaching and unpack the multiple meanings in the popular slogan of community building in schools.

Purpose of the Study

Toward a deeper understanding of the meaning of community for teachers in schools, I will critically examine teachers’ taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas that are tied to the notion of community. Because *community* is such a complex notion, I believe it can best be understood by

evaluating the context in which this term is used and shared. I take an interpretive stance to understand the “culture-bound frameworks of particular schools and the ways individuals understand and act in specific school contexts” (Feinberg & Soltis, 2004, p. 81). Thus, the goal of my study is to unpack elementary school teachers’ conceptualization of community or community building in school, and to examine the teachers’ “folk psychology and folk pedagogy” (Bruner, 1996) reflected in their discourse on community or community building in school.

Overview of the Chapters of the Study

In this first chapter, I introduced the topic of community building in schools and described the many ways to define the term *community*. Complicating elementary school teachers’ notions of community are several sociohistorical factors. I situated my study in the context of America’s changing demographics, an era of accountability in schools, and the need for schools as caring places. Also in this chapter, I have provided the rationale and the purpose of this dissertation study.

In Chapter 2, I review the related literature of what is already known about community building in schools as it affects students academically, socially, and emotionally. Another section of the literature that I review is focused on community as environments conducive to learning. Specifically, I present research on environments related to the teaching practices within the classroom and the teaching practices that promote school, family, and community partnerships. Additionally, I describe how I draw upon a multi-theoretical framework for my analysis focusing on the usefulness of cultural psychology as a lens for interpreting local culture.

In Chapter 3, I discuss my guiding research questions and the qualitative methodology used in this study. I give a description of the research setting, participants, and data collection

process. Also, I discuss how theory frames my inquiry and highlight the use of discourse analysis as a tool for uncovering a web of meanings in one local context. Data analysis was a process that started in the beginning of data collection, although NVIVO software helped me organize and refine analysis of the data in the later stages. A summary of the data analysis process is included in this chapter as well.

I present the background information of each of the participants in Chapter 4: Presentation of Cases. Additionally, I provide a holistic summary of cases. In Chapter 5, I outline main findings from the cases including themes in the local and national contexts, similarities among cases, as well as unique findings case by case. Chapter 6 provides for discussion of elementary school teachers' constructs of community and suggests implications for the classroom teacher, teacher educator, and for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE: SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

At the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s, Dewey (1900) saw a need to change the philosophy of education and to redirect the way schools were educating the children of America. His desire was to reduce the “skill and drill” method of teaching and to emphasize the importance of engaging the student in activity and occupation. Dewey sought to turn away from only teaching with text and to teach with tools that would improve problem solving skills of students. He dreamed that students would be inspired to learn and would find relevance in the knowledge and skills they acquired, and that what they learned (as well as how they learned it) would be integrated seamlessly with daily living. He believed that education and participation was essential to a democracy. Dewey’s model school was designed to help children approach learning in its social form:

[Children learn] in play, games, occupations, miniature industrial arts, stories, pictorial imagination, and conversation. At first the material is such as lies nearest the child himself, the family life and its neighborhood setting; it then goes on to something slightly more remote. (p. 106)

Dewey’s ideal involved the whole community in the education of the whole child. Through participation and constant evaluation, the learning environments and teaching practices could be changed to meet the needs of the learners.

References from Dewey continued to surface as I reviewed literature published from 1986 to 2006. I used key words and phrases, such as *community partnerships*, *community*

connections, home-family-school connections, community of learners, school climate, and sense of community for the literature search. I particularly focused on reviewing empirical studies related to community building in school. Because the purpose of my study is to unpack diverse views of community that elementary school teachers have, I tried to avoid defining community in a narrow sense. Doing so, I was able to review a wide range of empirical studies related to community in school.

Community Building in Schools

The recent emphasis on community building in schools may be representative of a variety of educational philosophies of American schooling. For example, believing in community building could provide a new paradigm in education toward improvement of educational practice, school structure, and schooling administration (Meier, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1994). Additionally, attention to community building in schools and classrooms may be reflective on the growing body of research supporting the importance of social and emotional learning and relationship building to academic achievement (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). In the sections that follow, I provide an overview of the community-related literature in the areas of school reform and student learning.

Community Building as a Paradigm for Improving Schooling

Promoting early student success through quality early childcare is a notable national reform movement in the United States. Recent findings from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Study of Early Childcare (2005) show that there are indeed connections between early childcare and student success in the primary grades. However, the quality of care was an influencing factor. Quality education and care for young children include the practices of engaging families and community members, connecting curriculum with

home and culture, and providing a caring, nurturing classroom environment. Building community could encompass all of these activities in the work of teachers and school administrators toward improving schooling.

Progressive educators have called for the education and development of the whole child (Cohen, 2006; Noddings, 2005). Education of the whole child means attention to emotional and social development, as well as academic achievement. Wilson, Pianta, and Stuhlman (2007) provided evidence that positive, responsive interactions with teachers and classmates help 1st grade students develop social competence: “We suspect that children who are exposed to positive and responsive teachers are more likely to learn how to regulate their emotions and behaviors and develop skills in social interactions through modeling and carefully crafted experiences that scaffold children’s social skills” (p. 83). Teachers who provide a responsive classroom community through their instruction and curriculum impact student learning and promote progressive practices.

In addition, community building in classrooms provides opportunities for students to develop resilience in overcoming risk factors. Protective practices include teachers who develop relationships and help families connect to community resources. In their study, Pianta and Walsh (1998) described models for supporting this practice:

[In] one model focusing on using child-teacher relationships as resources for development, the focus is on maximizing opportunities for the child and teacher to develop and maintain a close, supportive relationship for as long a period of time as is feasible. In other service-delivery models the school is the hub of community-based services to children and families. Families and children are serviced by a single point of contact, and natural helpers are engaged as resources. The emphasis in some programs is

not to add resources or expose the child to new professionals but to use and mobilize existing helpers and resources in an intervention that is comprehensive. Most vulnerable children need smaller, more integrated systems within which to thrive in school. (p. 413)

The current literature supports practice of community building in schools toward improving schooling through the education of the whole child with attention to social, emotional, and academic learning.

In the field of educational leadership, community building in schools is considered a useful strategy for allowing all members of a community (parents, teachers, students, and staff) to recognize people's needs and define goals (Sergiovanni, 1994). For example, Sergiovanni asserts a principal who is able to facilitate the discovery of shared purposes and values in a community can make prudent decisions for the school with regard to curriculum, resources, and plans for evaluation. Likewise, the classroom setting offers another practical illustration of facilitating a shared vision. Educational researchers support teacher practices of communicating shared purposes and classroom practices to promote cooperation and participation among students (Charney, 2002; Dalton & Watson, 1997). From this perspective, a sense of community in the school and classroom can provide a place for student and teacher interactions where everyone's learning needs are met. Teacher talk and peer interactions provide a scaffold for students and an "environment of apprenticeship" (Gutierrez, 1995).

A sense of community affects class climate. For example, Matsumara, Slater, and Crosson (2008) surveyed middle schoolers and observed their participation in class. Their work showed that middle school teachers' degree of respect toward students significantly predicted students' behavior toward one another and increased the participation among students. Several empirical studies on the effects of classroom climate (defined as the degree to which students

feel connected and supported) show a connection between teachers' behaviors and students' sense of community. Moreover, research conducted in both elementary (Epstein, 1985; Fopiano & Haynes, 2001) and middle schools (Shann, 1999) has revealed that opportunities for students to engage in collaborative work with peers are associated with a positive classroom climate of caring and respect.

In the area of special education, participatory and inclusive practices are considered critical to all learners. A case in point is represented by Weibe-Berry's (2006) work. She studied the process of creating learning communities in a special education inclusion classroom. Teachers' talk and instructional activities "encouraged participation and collective responsibility for helping" (p. 489). Teachers and students used the Morning Message activity (a message written by teachers to the class and read collectively) to strengthen engagement in the practices of the local classroom community. Weibe-Berry collected data from teacher interviews and classroom observation to investigate how special education teachers' conception of community provided for inclusive or exclusive learning opportunities for special education students in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades. The shift from a teacher-centered, authoritarian classroom to a more student-centered, participatory classroom reflects the progressive ideals of community building in schools and classrooms.

However, several researchers have challenged the "too rosy" conception of community (Achinstein, 2002; Cobb-Roberts, Dorn, & Shircliffe, 2006; Fendler, 2006). It's hard to argue against the idea of community building in schools when it is related to so many school improvement efforts such as improving early childcare, promoting participation among all stakeholders in a school, and increasing student development academically, socially, and emotionally. Yet, Cobb-Roberts, Dorn, and Shircliffe argued that it is problematic to think of

schools as communities when historically schools often exclude many parents, students, and community members:

As we look beyond the superficial nature of what we believe schools to be and delve into the many purposes schooling has served and many practices that schools have used, a different portrait emerges. We imagine schools to be more like communities than they are. We think of schools as communities, but with the knowledge that communities can push out as well as pull in people, divide as well as unite. (p. 2)

Their case study of the contemporary Tampa Palms community documented how members were separated geographically by railroad tracks, but also separated by social status, social capital, income, culture, and goals.

Additionally, Cobb-Roberts, Dorn, and Shircliffe (2006) discussed the complexities in defining community and community resources before and after segregation of U. S. public schools:

Those who continue to argue for desegregation as a priority of education policy, such as Gary Orfield, claim that children of color, who are disproportionately from poor communities, cannot command the resources and expectations necessary to educational success when in racially isolated schools. In contrast, historian Vanessa Siddle-Walker has argued that the segregated schools of the early twentieth century were able to support academic achievement where a community pooled its resources together. (p. 3)

Clearly, communities have the potential to be united and divided. A consensus among community members doesn't necessarily guarantee educational progress. They asserted that community building is nothing more than rhetoric in many schools and communities today.

Fendler (2006) troubled the notion of community further. Community building rhetoric can be a cloak to continue discriminating educational practices and to promote a process of normalization. She took issue with Sergiovanni's (1994) statement promoting normalization within a community. Sergiovanni wrote, "Community building is the secret weapon that can help domesticate the wild cultures that now seem so omnipresent in our schools" (p. xiv). Fendler explained that community building can be seen as "third way thinking" (p. 306) referring to a compromise between commonality (against diversity) and individualism (against unity). She critiqued that compromise should not be the *only* goal of community building. She advocated for a view of community building that works toward a multi-dimensional construct of community. One that includes community as "affect, emotion, and caring", but also as a construct that allows for interplay of difference of opinions, intercultural perspective-taking, and community-based pedagogy (p. 316). Community building is a seductive idea that needs critical evaluation with regard to practices and discourse in local contexts, but overall, research has shown that community building in schools has the potential to improve the process of teaching and learning, promote acceptance of diversity, and increase participation in the life of schools.

Community as Environments Conducive to Learning

A 21st century view of teaching and learning has changed from an individual view to a social view of learning (Brown, 1997). The notion of "learning communities" has been promoted to advance teacher and student learning. Brown argues that classrooms are to become communities of learning and thinking where students learn about how to learn. In many ways, this sounds similar to Dewey's (1900, 1902) ideas on learning through inquiry and problem solving, and collaborative learning to experience new ways of teaching and learning. In the next sections, I will describe two trends: school-community partnerships and caring, democratic

classrooms that are represented in the literature on community in school and are reminiscent of the kinds of schools Dewey envisioned.

School, family, and community partnerships. Ideally, strong school and community partnerships include continuous communication by all stakeholders about which goals are set and how to go about achieving them. These multiple stakeholders include families, business people, and other community service organizations. Many researchers (e.g., Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002) are involved in work that documents the ways communities are involved in school and classrooms. Connections involve multiple levels of support that target the communities in which families live and schools are built.

Effective school-community connections depend on building strong, trusting relationships between school members and parents (Lewis & Henderson, 1998). Such relationships are crucial to students as they provide a source of connections, information, and understandings that parents and teachers can draw on to help their children succeed. Miretzky (2004) studied the parent-teacher relationship through individual and focus-group interviews. Three schools were chosen as research sites. Forty interviews and four focus groups comprised the data collected. She organized the information gathered based on the five original interview questions:

- 1) What kinds of meanings do parents and teachers attach to their encounters?
- 2) What are the educational issues that most concern parents and teachers, and do they share these concerns?
- 3) What kinds of collaborative relationships would parents and teachers choose to have with each other if they felt they had a choice?

- 4) How can parent-teacher discussion inform our understanding of how parent-teacher communication and collaboration can be improved?
- 5) How can parents and teachers become agents in shaping their interactions toward optimal collaborative support of children's success and resolution of shared concerns?

She found that parents participated in traditional communications (e.g., parent conferences, classroom newsletters, open houses), but what they really wanted was a sense of community—a cooperative and reciprocal relationship for the benefit of the child they and their teachers hold in care. Miretzsky found parents articulated a desire to have joint responsibility in the education of their child. Ideally, parents, teachers, and students work cooperatively toward learning goals: “Independent of students’ academic needs, parent-teacher relationships can foster individual growth, opportunities for mutual learning, support and respect for adult efforts, and renewed appreciation for the community of the school” (p. 820). Though parents did not state explicitly that their wishes coincided with democratic community ideals, Miretzsky points out several ways parents implicitly long to have more of a collaborative partnership and a sense of community in the school.

Another study discussed the complexity of the parent-teacher relationship that involved parents’ expectations and belief systems in comparison to those of school staff members. The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading (CIERA) studied the roles of parents and teachers in supporting the early development of reading skill. Edwards, Dandridge, and Pleasants (2000) discovered many differences in the ways parents and teachers view involvement and how their conflicting perceptions create tensions among them that can be an obstacle. One of the most interesting findings was a different stance between two groups of teachers: Head Start teachers and elementary teachers. Head Start teachers, in general, expressed a greater commitment to

working with children and families as a unit and assumed that parents were invested in their children's education. But elementary teachers tended to see a lack of parental involvement as disinterest on the part of the parent. Using Bruner's (1996) idea of "folk theories", Edwards and colleagues showed how parents', Head Start teachers', and elementary teachers' theories of parental involvement affected the way they worked with children and community resources.

Positive relationships between schools and families may not occur due to parents' past negative experiences with school, poor home-school communication, parents' experiences of discrimination, and dissimilar teacher and parent expectations (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). However, recent research documents that parents do get involved in their children's schooling despite obstacles, especially if educators are "attentive to alternative, less visible ways that parents are and can be involved in their children's schooling" (Fields-Smith, 2005, p.135). In her article, Fields-Smith challenges the stereotype of uninvolved and disinterested parents and presents the historical and contemporary ways African American parents have been and are involved in their children's schooling. In another study, Lopez (2001) studied the parental involvement of four immigrant/migrant families and found that the parents considered themselves highly involved. The parents believed that they were contributing to their children's academic success by involving them in physical work and advising them of the limited opportunities available if they dropped out of school. He argued that if educators viewed this activity through a "traditional" involvement lens, they would think the parents were uninvolved in their children's education. It is up to teachers and school administrators to use this emerging research to build parent-teacher relationships across cultures.

Though parent-teacher relationships are an important component of school community, business and community leaders who connect with teachers and school administrators contribute

to building a sense of community as well. Researchers have studied ways in which communities could be more involved in the work of schools (Comer, 1999, 2003; Dryfoos, 1998). For example, Comer's school model focused on improving students' academic success by involving parents in the administrative decisions of the school as to better build a bridge between home and school. Additionally, Comer promoted the development of after-school programs and community business and service partnerships (e.g., health services, art-related organizations, and recreation centers) to enhance the development of the whole child.

School reorganization models facilitate the kind of changes need to make schools a community hub. In Dryfoos's (1998) model, she described a "full-service community school" where the school "combines the best in quality education with the supports needed to assure the healthy development of children in the context of their families and their communities" (p. 407). In this model, schools would act as hubs for an array of integrated health, mental health, and social services. To further support the range of services provided, the school building is open day and night, weekdays and weekends, to provide a place for parents to access libraries, students to receive homework help, or for other meetings and socializing among community members. Dryfoos also cited many examples of collaboration between school reformers and business leaders to reform school practices including programs like "Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound", "Modern Red Schoolhouse", and "Roots and Wings" (p. 406). Such programs involve community members in more active ways other than requesting donations. Community members get involved with learning experiences (e.g., cooperating with field studies, reading to students, mentoring) and learn how to contribute to decision-making with the schools. These programs enhance the educational curriculum by involving community and community resources.

Caring and democratic classrooms. As classroom community was described in the literature, “caring” and “democratic” are two themes that emerged. Most research included a set of practices, a sense of respect, and a way of treating each community member that could be broadly defined as caring. Also common was the idea of participation and choice that could be broadly defined as democratic.

Most often, in order to build community, teachers provide opportunities for children to share, problem-solve in groups, and resolve conflicts. Classrooms can be considered the first public space for this kind of growth and development. In fact, Marri (2005) included community building as a component of democratic teaching. Marri asserted Dewey’s (1916) idea that democracy is learned through resolving conflicts with people whose views are different from one’s own. A classroom community provides a place for these kinds of interactions. Three case studies of teachers incorporating “good teaching practices” (e.g., providing equitable opportunities for all students to learn, using multiple perspectives and resources to support curriculum, and encouraging students to expand learning beyond the classroom) were observed. Marri concluded that although good teaching practices were observed, it would be difficult to state that students will become thoughtful, active, and effective citizens in the future. It is hoped that by providing students opportunities to participate in the classroom, students will transfer those participatory skills to real life. This study, however, does not support that students actually felt a sense of community by being involved in participatory activities.

However, Browning, Davis, and Resta (2000) were able to find a connection between students’ sense of belonging and students’ opportunity to resolve conflict. Twenty first-graders were observed during an eight-week action research study. The teacher-researcher collected student pre- and post-surveys, student conflict-resolution journals, behavior tally sheets,

observational notes, and teachers' reflective journals. In the beginning of their study, verbal aggression was the most used method of conflict resolution. She taught students to be aware of the choices that are available, through direct instruction, role-playing, and intervention during a child's time of crisis. The most important activity during this study was the class meetings: "Through the class meetings, students are able to express concerns and solve conflicts in a non-threatening environment. They help students develop a sense of value and belonging by allowing them to share concerns, anxieties, frustrations, and celebrations" (p. 234). By the end of the study, the number of verbally aggressive acts decreased, and so did the number of conflicts, in general.

Additional research supports the fact that students' sense of community is related to classroom behavior. Battistich, Solomon, and Delucchi (1993) studied students' sense of belonging at the elementary level in 24 schools. They believed students would most likely adopt and feel committed to the norms and values of socializing agents, such as teachers and peers, when they felt bonded or attached to those agents, and that this happened when those agents satisfied students' basic needs for feeling supported, cared about, and listened to. They concluded that a caring community both conveys a set of values, and helps establish the motivation to abide by them.

Moreover, teachers set the stage for community building in classrooms. Battistich, Solomon, Watson, and Schaps (1997) found that there is a particular set of activities and practices related to the sense of classroom community. Their study measured the effects of a professional development program for teachers on students' sense of community. The professional development offered as part of the Child Development Project (CDP) promoted

students' social and ethical development through a caring environment. Teachers from three elementary schools were trained to provide students numerous opportunities to:

- a) collaborate with others in the pursuit of common academic and social goals;
- b) provide meaningful help to others and receive help when it was needed;
- c) discuss and reflect upon the experiences of others to gain an understanding and appreciation of others' needs, feelings, and perspectives;
- d) discuss and reflect upon their own behavior and the behavior of others as it relates to fundamental prosocial values of fairness, concern and respect for others, and social responsibility;
- e) develop and practice important social competencies; and
- f) exercise autonomy, participate in decision-making about classroom norms, rules, and activities, and otherwise take on responsibility for appropriate aspects of classroom life. (p. 138)

They used a survey instrument to measure students' sense of community after teachers had implemented the practices. Survey results supported the fact that the CDP program contributed to an increase of teacher practices, and that the teacher practices improved students' sense of community. Battistich et al. wrote that students' level of engagement at school depends on whether or not their needs for belonging, autonomy and competence are met. They make a distinction between a group structure that provides personal support and a group structure that agrees on purposes and commitment. From this perspective, community means more than having some students grouped together; it is created when students actively participate in a cohesive group toward a shared goal.

Battistich et al. (1997) also found that cultivating a caring classroom community leads to success among disadvantaged students. These students receive an additional amount of support, encouragement, identification, and commitment that being a part of a community provides. Their study underscores the important role that teachers have in community building: “The conceptualization and measurement of community emphasizes teacher collaboration and influence, and teachers’ caring for and supporting students, but ignores relationships among students or students’ participation and influence in school” (p. 149). However, this study focused on teachers’ perceptions of the experience of community of which the researchers admit is highly dependent on the particular context. Many factors including the teacher role influence students’ sense of community. Teachers provide students the experience of community membership within the classroom and teach them about the responsibility that entails.

Several studies support a possible link between a sense of community and student achievement, though researchers do not use the term “sense of community” exactly. Instead, they compare qualities of school climate that are closely related to a student’s perceived sense of community. Sherblom, Marshall, and Caldwell (2005) measured students’ sense of belonging and their perceptions of school expectations, and student voice. They found a positive correlation between students’ perceptions of a healthy school climate and achievement scores in reading and math. Additionally, McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002) used school-based research and national survey data to document the importance of connectedness. By constructing linear models, they estimated the relationship between school characteristics (e.g., school size, students participation in extracurricular activities, discipline-related data) and sense of students’ connectedness in school. In another study, Ryan and Patrick (2001) found students who have teachers who show care and concern for them perform better on tests and are less likely to

become involved in violent behavior. Research supports that positive climates, caring, and democratic classrooms contribute to student achievement.

Although useful, current research related to community in school leaves some important gaps in the literature. First, in order to reach Dewey's ideal of community building in schools, more research is needed about what motivates individual school staff members to build community in schools. Second, further research is needed to understand what attitudes and beliefs contribute to a teacher's conception of community and practice of community building. An analysis of elementary teachers' discourse on community building may serve as a way to examine and understand assumptions, values, and beliefs in a particular local context. Further, once teachers are aware of how their views of community are constrained and facilitated by their cultural beliefs, they may well be able to consider what impact such cultural beliefs have on their students' learning and development in school.

Cultural Psychology: A Theoretical Framework

Cultural psychology provides a frame to understand the role of interpersonal interactions, cultural practices, and cultural artifacts in human development and learning (e.g., Cole, 1996; Shweder, Goodnow, Hatano, Levine, Markus, & Miller, 1998). From the lens of cultural psychology, culture cannot be separated from the individual and the mind, and cultural artifacts (e.g., tools, signs, texts) are crucial in the negotiation of human action and agency (Bruner, 1996). Culture, then, is both a learning context and a way of learning. There is a responsive and interactive relationship between learning and the learning context. Further asserting the relationship between culture and learning, Rogoff (2003) explored the notion that children's cognitive development occurs through "guided participation" (p. 283) that requires attention to personal, interpersonal, and community processes.

Culture is created through human participation and interaction with the world and others.

Shweder et al. (1998) define cultural psychology in this way:

[Cultural psychology is] the study of the way culture, community, and psyche make each other up. Alternately stated, cultural psychology is the study of all the things members of different communities *think* (know, want, feel, value) and *do* by being the kinds of beings who are the beneficiaries, guardians, and active perpetrators of a particular culture. (p. 867)

Overall, cultural psychology assumes the importance of looking for learning in relations among people rather than in the individual, and in everyday social settings, like school, rather than in the laboratory.

According to Greenfield (2000), there are two principal psychological processes in the theoretical framework of cultural psychology. The first is the “construction of meaning” that refers to the shared meaning that is understood in a culture. The second process is “development and socialization” that recognizes a person is more than a “static entity with a set of cultural characteristics” (p. 225). An important concept to the cultural psychologist is that communities are always changing (Rogoff, 2003). There is an evolving relationship between what people in a society do, and how what they do reflects what they believe and value. Miller and Goodnow (1995) described culture as a “dynamic process of contextualization and recontextualization” (p. 8). What a community believes and values is created and substantiated in everyday social interactions. So, in order to bring to light what is valued in a particular community, individuals and society must be studied together as they exist in an ever-changing culture.

Everyday social interactions reflect the beliefs and values of a community. Bruner (1996) discussed how we rarely examine these “everyday intuitive theories about how our minds work” (p. 45). He explained folk psychologies in this way:

Folk psychologies reflect certain “wired-in” human tendencies (like seeing people normally as operating under their own control) but they also reflect some deeply ingrained cultural beliefs about “the mind.” Not only is folk psychology preoccupied with how the mind works here and now, it is also equipped with notions about how the child’s mind learns and even what makes it grow. Just as we are steered in ordinary interaction by our folk psychology, so we are steered in the activity of helping children learn about the world by notions of *folk pedagogy*. Watch any mother, any teacher, even any babysitter with a child and you’ll be struck by how much of what they do is steered by notions of “what children’s minds are like and how to help them learn,” even though they may not be able to verbalize their pedagogical principles. (p. 46).

Such pedagogical principles may remain invisible for teachers and for those involved in the process of schooling, yet, the implications are powerful. Bruner explained further:

Folk pedagogies, for example, reflect a variety of assumptions about children: they may be seen as willful and needing correction; as innocent and to be protected from a vulgar society; as needing skills to be developed only through practice; as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge only adults can provide; as egocentric and in need of socialization. Folk beliefs of this kind, whether expressed by lay people or “experts”, badly want some “deconstructing” if their implications are to be appreciated. For whether these views are “right” or not, their impact on teaching activities can be enormous. (p. 49)

Teacher practices are sometimes taken for granted and supported by the community of the school through daily interactions with students, colleagues, administrative faculty, and parents.

This qualitative study investigated underlying cultural values by paying attention to the teachers' discussion about community building in schools and classrooms. Lee and Walsh (2001) explain the challenge of identifying cultural values within a local community:

All cultures have their folk psychologies. From these folk psychologies flow folk pedagogies—deeply embedded beliefs about how children learn and how teachers should teach that are not taught in teacher education programs but that are learned in the daily conduct of life in culture. Like water to the fish, cultural beliefs remain transparent to members of the culture because they reflect unchallenged expectations about how children are and should be. (p. 84)

Studying elementary teachers' discourse will reveal their folk pedagogies about community related to student learning and development and reveal their expectations of how students are and should be for their school and for society.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: WORDS MATTER

Not only does language incorporate the vocabulary and terminology with which we understand the world, but it also is the method by which we convey the meaning or interpretation to others. The purpose of this study is to attend to elementary school teachers' discourse to explore their notions of community or community building in classrooms and schools. In order to achieve this goal, I used the following research questions to guide this study:

1. How do elementary teachers conceptualize community and community building in schools and classrooms?
2. What are elementary teachers' folk theories about community or community building related to student learning and development?
3. How do teachers' local definition of community enable and confine their efforts, and what tensions arise as they negotiate demands from local and larger cultural contexts?

For this study, I employed discourse analysis as a way of understanding the cultural meanings of constructs, such as community and community building, in one local school context (Cazden, 2001; Gee, 1999).

Discourse Analysis

Pianta and Walsh (1996) explained that the dominant discourse is “the proper or correct way to talk about a topic” (p. 31). Dominant discourse includes whatever is socially appropriate at the time in a given context. However, it may also include what is *not* said at the time in a given context:

A discourse reflects a set of shared, or common, understandings about the critical dimensions of something and the ways it is organized. At any given time, the discourse on a topic is bounded in important ways by culture, history, and the influence of certain individuals and groups. A discourse is affected by the ideas supported by it and the availability of words to express those ideas. It can be viewed as what we say and think about something as well as how we say and think it. Further, a discourse is always bounded by what we do *not* say and what we do *not* think. (pp. 30-31)

Pianta and Walsh attended to the dominant discourse to discuss the culturally constructed terms of “school readiness” and “at-risk” in their case studies of young children considered at-risk for their academic failure. They assert that a holistic view of child development is needed and that “schools in which children experience a sense of belonging are those that are integrated with community, home, and neighborhood” (p. 164). Conversations or similar discourse across contexts are particularly important for children because they can ease transitions for children between home and school. The common discourse provides social scaffolding for the child and allows situated learning to occur.

Another way of conceptualizing discourse is described by James Gee (1999): “They [discourses] are tools of inquiry. Social languages, discourses, and conversations are thinking devices that guide us to ask certain questions” (p. 37). Discourses involve “characteristic ways of acting-interacting-feeling-emoting-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-knowing-speaking-listening” (p. 38). This definition is valuable to the researcher as she learns about a particular culture, much as the discourse was important to the child who learns at home and in school from the aforementioned example. Language meaning, including all ways of communicating, is specific to the sociohistorical context. A useful method to study meaning in

culture is analyzing cultural texts (Hatano & Miyake, 1991). Hatano and Miyake claimed that the “cultural effects on learning are both enhancing and restricting. It is an important task for researchers in this area to specify how cultural constraints produce this double-sided effect” (p. 279). In this study, I tried to examine the “double-sided effect” of elementary teachers’ discourse on community and community building in schools and classrooms.

We cannot assume community building is necessarily “good” without paying attention to values, goals and priorities in the given social context. Under initial consideration, community building appears to be a “good” thing, but what are the assumptions behind the notion of community? What is the dominant discourse that enables and constrains teachers’ practice of community building? The community building literature discussed in the previous chapter revealed that some beliefs and notions of community building hinder connections with many students, especially students of color (Fendler, 2006). In this study, I examined the dominant discourse that enables and constrains teachers’ practice of community building. I believe this is an urgent issue for American schools and teacher education programs as the number of culturally diverse students is increasing and the number of teachers of color is decreasing (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Critical analysis is needed in the area of community building in schools, particularly where teachers have the most influence in starting these relationships (Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999).

Tools of Inquiry and Analysis

There are many ways to define discourse, but the work of Gee (1999) was particularly appealing to me because he views discourse in a holistic way. Discourse (with a capital “D” as Gee uses) is not only spoken or written language, but it can be explained as:

different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language “stuff”, such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools, and objects in the right places and at the right times so as to enact and recognize different identities and activities, give the material world certain meaning, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others.

(p. 13)

Two of Gee’s concepts, in particular, that seemed to enlighten my thinking in the analysis process were situated meanings and cultural models.

Situated Meanings as a Tool of Inquiry and Analysis

Meanings are situated in relation to other texts, historical events, present context, and other voices. Gee (1999) suggested these questions for investigating factors that contribute to a situated meaning:

- What specific, situated meaning is it reasonable, from the point of view of the Discourse in which these words are used, to attribute to their “author”?
- What specific, situated meanings is it reasonable, from the point of view of the Discourse in which these words are used to attribute to their “receivers” (“interpreters”)?
- What specific situated meanings is it reasonable, from the point of view of the other Discourses than the one in which the words were uttered or written to attribute to actual or possible interpreters from these other Discourses?
- What specific situated meanings is it reasonable, from the point of view of the other Discourses than the one in which the words were used or of other Discourses, to

assume are potentially attributable to these words by interpreters, whether or not we have evidence that anyone actually activated that potential in the current case? (p. 53)

Gee illustrates with shoes. Not only does a child begin to learn the word shoe and become familiar with its basic characteristics (e.g., belongs on your foot, hard, could be shiny, may have laces), but a child learns to wear certain shoes in particular situations in particular ways. Because humans are adept at pattern-making, situated meanings are formed through experiences. When a mother says, “Put your shoes on. We are ready to go”, a daughter knows which shoes to get out of her closet based on a pattern of interactions that occurred previously. For example, if they were going to the park, the daughter would know to choose athletic shoes.

Cultural Models as a Tool of Inquiry and Analysis

Cultural models are revealed in what people say and do. Researchers can use cultural models in addition to situated meanings to better understand the social activity that is occurring. Gee (1999) suggested the following questions for exploring the social mind through analyzing discourse:

- What cultural models are relevant here? What must I, as an analyst assume people feel, value, and believe, consciously or not, in order to talk (write), act and/or interact this way?
- Are there differences here between the cultural models that are affecting espoused beliefs and those that are affecting actions and practices? What sorts of cultural models, if any, are being used here to make value judgments about oneself or others?
- How consistent are the relevant cultural models here? Are there competing or conflicting cultural models at play? Whose interests are the cultural models representing?

- What other cultural models are related to the ones most active here? Are there “master models” at work?
- What sorts of texts, media, experiences, interactions, and/or institutions could have given rise to these cultural models?
- How are the relevant cultural models here helping to reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships? What Discourses and conversations are these cultural models helping to reproduce, transform, or create? (p. 78)

For example, Alsup (2006) described how cultural models contributed to conceptions of a successful teacher:

In many middle and high schools, it seems that the definition of a good or successful teacher is quite straightforward and requires no supporting research: A successful instructor keeps his or her students under control (quiet, “on task”) and seldom approaches the principal with problems or difficulties. In other words, invisibility to these administrators and stakeholders is rewarded. Preferred and rewarded invisibility has been a dominant characteristic of the cultural model of teacher over the last century of American public schooling. (p. 29)

Cultural models on a particular concept or issue may be conflicting or related. It may be that there are several cultural models of a “successful teacher” dependent on local and larger cultural influences. Also, cultural models are tentative (Gee, 1999). Depending on the context, cultural models are understood and communicated. Cultural models may change as the context changes. I used Gee’s notions of situated meanings and cultural models when comparing and contrasting

each of the four main participants' views of community and community building forthcoming in Chapter 5.

Case Study

The case study method that I used in my study draws from the qualitative research paradigm rather than a quantitative, experimental orientation (Lundeberg, Levin, & Harrington, 1999; Merriam, 1997). Yin (1994) suggested the case study method to answer exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive research questions. Merriam reported the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing that data is the researcher. The case study method allows the researcher to investigate a topic in a particular setting “over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61).

For this dissertation study, the case study method was most useful because I could explore the notion of community and community building in schools from the perspective of four participants in one location. Systematic collection of data for each case allowed for thoughtful analysis for each case and comparisons between cases. Creswell (1998) wrote: “Through this data collection, a detailed description of the case emerges, as do an analysis of themes or issues and an interpretation or assertions about the case by the researcher” (p. 63). Indeed, themes emerged, as I collected in-depth case descriptions of biographical information including participants' past experiences of schooling and captured their notions of community building in schools using a consistent protocol.

Additionally, when using the case study method, pilot inquiries can enhance the design of the later study. Yin (2003) reported that the pilot case study “can be much broader and less focused than the ultimate data collection plan. Moreover, the inquiry can cover both substantive and methodological issues” (p. 80). The pilot study that I conducted prior to the dissertation

study allowed me to consider more focused questions, issues with interview timelines, length of interviews, and organization for the case study report.

In order to learn more about notions of community from the participants' perspectives, I collected data from interviews, observations at key information meetings at the school (e.g., curriculum night, technology night), and artifacts (e.g., teachers' newsletters, principal's letters). I employed an inductive research strategy, and the final product of the study is rich in description (Hays, 2004). The primary data comprised of four elementary school teachers' discourse from three individual interviews and a focus group interview. Observations and collected artifacts helped me triangulate my interpretations and assertions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and developed a richly textured sense of the context in which teachers are working and enacting their visions of community.

Research Setting

All four participant teachers of this study work in Apple Elementary School* in Peach County approximately 30 miles away from a major metropolitan area. Apple Elementary School (AES) is located in a southeastern state of the United States and serves approximately 1,300 students from Pre-K through fifth-grade. AES employs approximately 50 certified teachers. AES is classified as a "choice school" which means parents of students who attend a nearby low performing school have a choice to enroll their children at this school. This fact, along with the population growth of a close major city, has caused a change in the demographics of the school. This school which previously served a predominantly white, middle-class population, is now serving more African American students and students who are economically disadvantaged measured by free and reduced lunch.

* All names of the school and teachers in this study are pseudonyms.

The school district served 11,445 students in 2006. Of these students, 39% are economically disadvantaged, 11% have disabilities, and 1% are English language learners. The school district overall, as well as AES, made Adequate Yearly Progress for 2006 and 2007. When considering students' race/ethnicity enrolled in 2006, 74% were white, 19% were African American, 3% were Hispanic, 2% were Asian, and 2% were multiracial.

Research Participants

In the school year 2005-2006, I conducted a pilot study to explore teachers' notions of community. During that time, I was employed with AES that was also the site of my research. Based on teacher observations and new relationships, I chose three teachers. All these teachers were European American. Mark, a fourth-grade teacher, looped with his third-grade class last year. He had 5 years teaching experience and earned a B.S. and M.Ed. both in early childhood education. At the time of this study, he was working toward an Educational Specialist degree in curriculum and instruction. Sara teaches kindergarten with a B.S. in early childhood education and has 11 years of teaching experience. Whitney, a second-grade teacher, completed her third year of teaching at the end of Spring 2008. She has earned both a B.A. and M.A. in early childhood education. These teachers were purposefully selected because of their range of teaching experience, differences in grade levels taught, gender, and their willingness and ability to discuss educational issues as I observed while working with them in the school year 2005-2006.

In the table that follows, the participants in the pilot study are listed by name, age, gender, racial/ethnic background, years of teaching experience, and degrees.

Table 3.1

Pilot Study Participants

Mark	32 male European American	5 years teaching experience, teaches 3 rd & 4 th grades, M.Ed. in Early Childhood Education
Sara	41 female European American	11 years teaching experience, teaches Kindergarten, B.S. in Early Childhood Education
Whitney	25 female European American	2 years teaching experience, teaches 2 nd grade, M.A. Early Childhood Education

When the 2006-2007 school year began, I ended my employment with AES to accept a faculty position at a small private college. At the same time, school and central office administrators started plans for redistricting county school zones for the following school year. In addition, the principal was transferred to a new location to open a new school. Several teachers, including two of my pilot study participants decided to move to different schools within the district. One remaining pilot study participant, Whitney, volunteered to continue our conversations on community for my dissertation study. The new principal of AES recommended five teachers based on my desire to have variation with respect to age, ethnicity, and teaching experience. Of the five, I chose three new participants who showed willingness to discuss their ideas on teaching and living in or around this local community.

The main participants of this dissertation study, therefore, were comprised of four elementary teachers. I also used data collected from interviews with the school administrator, informal conversations with parents at key events, and pilot teacher interviews as contextual information. In the table that follows, the main participants are listed by name, age, gender, racial/ethnic background, years of teaching experience, and degrees.

Table 3.2

Dissertation Research Participants

Lorna	38, female, African American, Single, one child	5 years teaching experience, teaches Kindergarten, Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education
Patricia	48, female, European American, Married, one child	20 years teaching experience, teaches 5 th grade, Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood Education
Rhonda	43, female, European American, Married, two children	11 years teaching experience, teaches 3 rd grade, Educational Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership
Whitney	25 female European American, Single, no children	3 years teaching experience, teaches 2 nd grade, Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education

The four main participants of the dissertation study include all females. Three participants are European American and one participant is African American. Lorna, a 38-year-old African American, teaches Kindergarten and is thinking about returning to school for a doctoral degree. Patricia, a 48-year-old European American has 20 years experience teaching 5th grade and relies on professional development at the school system level instead of pursuing an advanced degree. Rhonda, a 43-year-old European American, has 11 years teaching experience and teaches 3rd grade. Although she already has an Educational Specialist degree in Curriculum, she is working on another Educational Specialist degree in Leadership. Whitney is a 25 years old European American and teaches 2nd grade. She has 3 years teaching experience and completed a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education. As mentioned previously, she is the only participant from the pilot study who continued interviews in the dissertation study. Lorna and Whitney grew up and attended schools in Peach County. Rhonda grew up and attended school in an adjacent county. Patricia grew up and attended school in a county located in the more

southern part of the state. Chapter 4 includes a more detailed description of each participant in the dissertation study.

Data Collection

There were 2 sets of participants and 2 sets of interview data for the same research site. One participant, Whitney, contributed to the data in both studies. Data collection was similar in both studies, although, I made some minor modifications to my methods and my research plan based on preliminary findings from the pilot study. Data for this dissertation study was collected through individual interviews, a focus group interview, observation, and by artifacts collection.

Interviews

For each of the four main participants, I conducted 3 interviews lasting approximately one hour per interview. I asked questions about relevant aspects of the participants' lives to provide rich, descriptive accounts and explanations (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Before the interviews began, I developed a protocol for each one of the semi-structured interviews. After conducting the interview, transcribing the audio tapes, and reviewing field notes, I determined what questions I needed to ask for the next interview.

Follow-up interviews allowed me to further my inquiry about the participants' beliefs after reviewing data from previous interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) recommended that research be field-focused and the researcher collects data from the natural setting. I held individual interviews in the teachers' classrooms and held the focus group interview in a local restaurant in a secluded part of the dining room. The focus group interview combined with other qualitative methods (e.g., individual interviews, informal conversations) developed unfolding scenarios found in previous interviews (Barbour & Kitzinger, 2001). Additionally, the focus group format encouraged the participants to respond to one another and interact with each other

in a way that was insightful to me. Interview data also provided for a descriptive case study of each of the participants including personal history and education. Administrators, in addition to the four main participants, were key informants about the history of the local community and school. The participants' descriptions were compared to corroborate facts and opinions relevant to the local school context. Two interviews with principals (one with the principal at the end of my pilot study and one with the new principal during my dissertation study) added to the descriptions of the community and school. All interviews were audio taped, and audiotapes were transcribed and coded for data analysis. The following table shows the dates of the individual teacher interviews and the focus group interview.

Table 3.3

Interview Timeline

Interviews	Date Completed
1 st Round Interviews	May 22, 2007 (Whitney) July 17, 2007 (Lorna) September 6, 2007 (Patricia) September 5, 2007 (Rhonda)
2 nd Round Interviews	July 25, 2007 (Lorna) September 19, 2007 (Patricia) October 8, 2007 (Whitney) October 25, 2007 (Rhonda)
3 rd Round Interviews	November 28, 2007 (Patricia) December 3, 2007 (Whitney) December 4, 2007 (Lorna) December 12, 2007 (Rhonda)
Focus Group Meeting	March 17, 2008
Principal Interviews	March 6, 2006 (First principal) July 25, 2007 (Second principal)

Observations

To gain contextual data, I attended key information meetings:

1. Curriculum Night: I chose to go to this event to observe parent attendance, interactions with parents, administrators, and faculty. Also, I was interested in how the school staff conducted the program and incorporated notions of community in their planning and implementation of the event.
2. Technology Night: I chose to go to this event to observe parent attendance, interactions with parents, administrators, and faculty. Again at this event, I was interested in how the school staff conducted the program and incorporated notions of community in their planning and implementation of the event.
3. A high school football game: Whitney, one of the case participants, suggested I attend the high school football game when both Peach County high school rivals played.
4. An elementary students' football game (not affiliated with the school, but a local league): One of the participants, Whitney, mentioned how her students enjoyed seeing her at these events, so I attended to observe teacher and parent attendance, and to observe teacher-student-parent interactions.
5. Two school board meetings: I chose the events based on fact that redistricting planning was on the agenda.

For each event, I observed and recorded handwritten notes on a notepad. When I came home from the event, I used my computer to expand the handwritten notes and reflected on what I had observed. During the data collection, I would also add notes to record how I was seeing events as connected to the participants' stories.

Artifacts

I collected newsletters created by the four main participants (2 newsletters per teacher). I collected one principal letter. I collected 2 school board meeting agendas. Artifacts were collected during scheduled interviews or during the school board meetings. These artifacts were reviewed to gain insight about notions of community when teachers were communicating to parents. Artifacts provided a check of the data I collected through interviews.

Data Analysis and Writing

Data analysis was conducted throughout the entire data collection process (Erikson, 1986). The data analysis process and the writing process were ongoing and simultaneous. Many times, I revised sections of my writing after reviewing a participant's transcript. Conversely, after reading a section of my literature review, I revisited participants' transcripts. From time to time, new ideas and directions came to me and I recorded them in a "notes" file on my computer. I considered my analysis notes important to the development of my thinking and to the writing process. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) described writing further:

And it is thinking of writing in this way that breaks down the distinction in conventional qualitative inquiry between data collection and data analysis—one is more assault to the structure. Both happen at once...Data collection and data analysis cannot be separated when writing is a method of inquiry. And positivist concepts, such as audit trails and data saturation, become absurd and then irrelevant in a postmodern qualitative inquiry in which writing is a field of play where anything can happen—and it does. (p. 971)

Though I may not go as far to say that audit trails and data saturations are not useful concepts, (that would be especially bold as a new researcher), I believe that writing was an important

process for my data analysis. As I wrote chapters in this dissertation, I reviewed data analysis notes, made new notes, and wrote some more.

In order to keep track of the data I collected, I used computer software designed especially for qualitative analysis:

Computers and software are tools that assist analysis. Software doesn't really analyze qualitative data. Qualitative software programs facilitate data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing, and linking—but human beings do the analysis...The human being, not the software, must decide how to frame a case study, how much and what to include, and how to tell the story. (Patton, 2002, p. 442)

I found NVivo 7 software to be helpful as I coded and connected ideas. As I analyzed the data, I constantly compared and revised categories of themes (Grove, 1988; LeCompte & Priessle, 1993). As I noticed themes, the data were coded and categorized. The software program allowed me to “park” important ideas, interview transcripts, and archival documents to save them for later review. For example, a drawing tools feature of the program allowed me to visually represent my first thoughts on emerging themes after the first round interviews with elementary teachers. I used the drawing to consider how each of the teachers' themes about community are situated in the larger national context and connected to their rationale for building community in schools and classrooms. Figure 3.1 that follows is a screen shot of my first thoughts concept drawing.

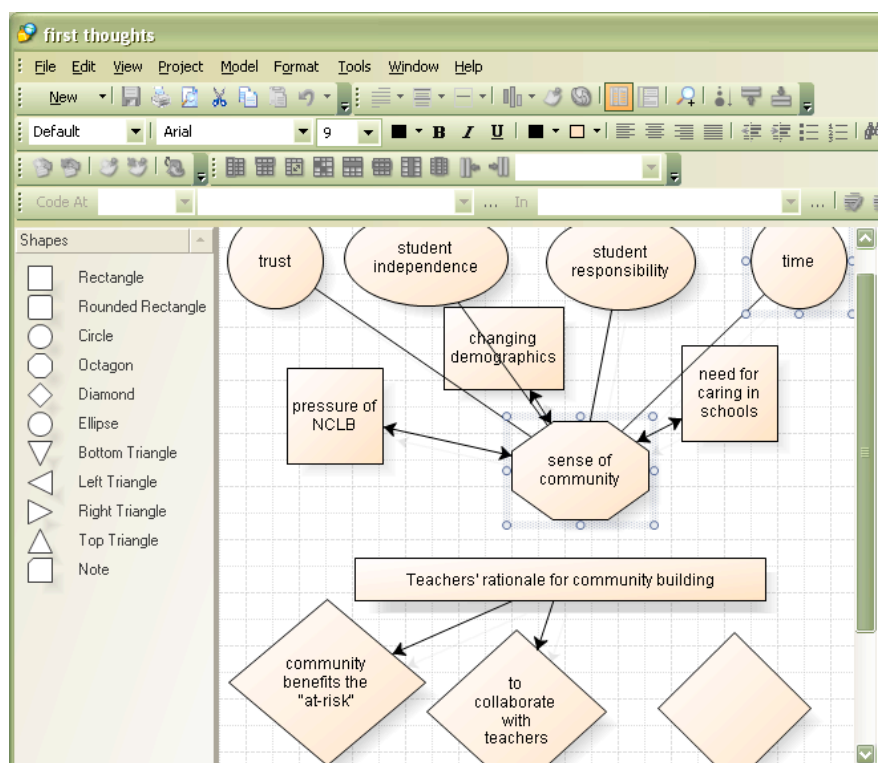


Figure 3.1: First Thoughts Concept Map in NVivo 7

As if creating meaning from the data that I was collecting wasn't challenging enough for me, I encountered a few obstacles as I tried to learn NVivo 7 on my own. Even though I consider myself comfortable with many computer technologies, there were times in my data analysis when learning the features of the program hindered my progress. In these cases, I relied on MS Word and tables to create matrices. A question matrix printed on larger paper and posted on a wall enhanced my ability to reduce the data even further. I used highlighter markers to fine-tune my selection of noteworthy themes or nodes as they are called in NVivo 7. The figure that follows is a picture of the question matrix I used in later stages of analysis.

Comp Q1: Discuss the historical context of the discourse on community-building in cultural. What are some factors that have influenced...

Comp Q2: ...

Comp Q3: ... Methods

Figure 3.2: Questions Matrix

However, several NVivo 7 features improved my progress in data analysis. The software program allowed me to:

1. organize chunks of my participants' texts and retrieve text through a word search,
2. link participants' texts to themes (or nodes) and record the number of such links,
3. create relationships between nodes and organize them in a hierarchy, and
4. annotate data points.

Eventually, I became more comfortable categorizing ideas and making connections between ideas. The figure that follows is a screen shot of a list of nodes and the number of references for each node.

Name	Sources	References	Created	Modified
concepts of commu	6	19	6/20/2008 2:40 PM	6/24/2008 3:17 PM
childhood experienc	5	45	6/20/2008 2:42 PM	6/26/2008 3:10 PM
rationale for commu	3	11	6/20/2008 2:48 PM	6/26/2008 3:41 PM
folk theories	4	14	6/20/2008 3:08 PM	7/16/2008 10:37 AM
at-risk students	10	34	6/20/2008 4:32 PM	7/16/2008 10:37 AM
members of a com	4	12	6/20/2008 4:35 PM	6/26/2008 2:39 PM
role of teacher in co	11	41	6/23/2008 4:10 PM	7/2/2008 3:18 PM
role of parents	5	13	6/23/2008 4:13 PM	7/16/2008 10:37 AM
role of students	4	4	6/23/2008 4:29 PM	6/24/2008 3:12 PM
description of cities	4	6	6/24/2008 2:34 PM	6/26/2008 2:41 PM
reasons for working	5	28	6/26/2008 1:58 PM	7/16/2008 10:00 AM
effects of ch demogr	2	8	6/26/2008 2:21 PM	6/26/2008 3:14 PM
thoughts on assess	4	39	7/1/2008 2:27 PM	7/2/2008 3:33 PM
teaching social skill	1	2	7/1/2008 2:53 PM	7/2/2008 12:45 PM
thoughts on safety	4	15	7/2/2008 12:46 PM	7/2/2008 3:34 PM

Figure 3.3: Free Nodes in NVivo 7

Systematically, I recorded and arranged the data, searching for patterns, sorting what I found to be noteworthy and determined what was worthy to be reported (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). During this analysis process, I generated ideas about what these patterns might mean and explored potential meanings in the data. Also, I kept in mind the idea that culture and language is evolving and responsive (Bakhtin, 1981), and so I analyzed elementary teachers' discourse with particular attention paid to the current context by referring to my interview transcripts and observation field notes. Carefully examining elementary school teachers' verbal texts, gathered by interviews, I was able to see patterns that emerged to form cultural meanings of the local school context: "The sharing of meaning transforms individual meaning into cultural meaning" (Greenfield, 1997, p. 326). Thus, such meaning making may be broadly understood within what

Geertz (1973) termed “webs of meaning” in that people make sense of who they are with respect to both local and larger communities.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF CASES: SPEAKING OF COMMUNITY

The four main cases (participants) of this study participated in discussing community and community building in schools and their own elementary schooling experiences. Although the focus of this dissertation was not a comprehensive study of these teachers' early life experiences, their recollection and retelling of their elementary schooling provided a richer description of context relevant to how they would later talk about community and the process of community building in their schools and in their classrooms. In the sections below, I provide an introduction to each participant followed by a summary of her thoughts about my research questions.

Case One: Lorna

“You’ve got to make them [students] all feel that they are a part of that classroom—when you have a child with the most advantages and the child with the least. I try to do that because of my own experience (in school).”
(Lorna, Kindergarten Teacher, 7-17-2007)

An Introduction

Lorna is a 38-year-old African American woman. She has completed 4 years teaching experience in kindergarten and recently graduated with a Master of Science degree in Early Childhood Education. She lives close to Apple School. Her classroom demographics included 18 students: 3 African American boys, 2 African American girls, 7 white boys and 6 white girls. Eight students were on free or reduced lunch.

Deciding to become a teacher was a second career choice for Lorna. She earned a B.S. in marketing management and worked in Peach County with a building supply company for 8 ½ years. When she became a mother, she tried to balance her family life and work life. She found

herself working more and more evenings and spending less and less time with her son. She is not married. Eventually, she considered a job change. Lorna went to a couple of classes at a local college to see if teaching was right for her. While enrolled in education classes, she applied to work at the county's Head Start program, where her son attended. She figured that when she became a teacher, she could take her son with her to work, and hoped that teaching would provide more evening time with her family. Lorna was hired as a Head Start teacher and continued her teacher preparation. Upon receiving her Master's degree in Early Childhood Education, she worked as a special education teacher in another county for 2 years and then was hired at Peach County where AES is located.

Lorna is the oldest in a family of 4 siblings. She has 1 brother and 2 twin sisters. Her mother was a single working mother because her parents had divorced after 3 years of marriage when Lorna was very young. She remembers having a lot of responsibility for taking care of her siblings and believes this fact may have contributed to her love of teaching and working with children today.

I remember that my mom was very busy being a single parent with 4 children. She depended on me, and I would help out a lot. Even though she was single, she was very active at the school. She was there for all the PTO meetings—most of them. (Interview #1, 7-17-2008)

Lorna remembers every one of her teachers since her first year in the early 1970's at Pre-Kindergarten in Peach County. She described her first teacher as loving and "very huggable". She was African American like Lorna. Looking back on it, Lorna feels as if this could be one of the reasons she felt so comfortable with her first teacher. Lorna had many friends, both African American and white students, in her first years of elementary school. She went to a primary

school within the city limits that served mostly city residents of families with varied incomes. When Lorna was 9 years old, she moved to a neighborhood outside of the city limits. She had no black teachers as she did previously and not many black friends; this was a salient memory for her:

We didn't have anybody black around us. When we moved out [of the city], I remember thinking we just don't have anybody to talk to. At the new school, there were a couple of blacks. So I remember thinking that we live in the white part of town. You know, that's me thinking back then, that I probably wouldn't have any friends or anything. (Interview #1, 7-17-2008)

Lorna also described a very traditional learning experience: sitting in rows, copying from the blackboard and from textbooks, no student work on the walls, and very little interaction among students during class time. However, Lorna was involved in various extracurricular activities such as band, chorus, art club, and 4-H Club. Through clubs, Lorna felt a sense of community with her friends. She did not describe a similar feeling when she described the traditional classroom experience. She retold how it would be if she were to receive a note home from her teacher for misbehavior: "It would be very bad, not as bad as for kids today" (Interview #1, 7-17-2007). She explained her mom would punish her harshly, as opposed to how parents would respond to children today. Respect for the teachers' authority was more the norm back then than it is today in her opinion.

Lorna's mother instilled in her the value of learning and inspired her to do well in school, not only to take care of herself and family, but also to recognize that schooling was a privilege not afforded to other members of her family in recent history. A family story includes the fact

that her grandfather couldn't read and her grandmother always read for him. Her grandfather had to drop out of school in the 7th grade to work in the fields:

Growing up with my [single] mom meant I was around my grandparents a lot. My grandfather couldn't read and my grandmother would do his reading for him. Anything that needed to be read she would read. She said, "You know your granddaddy, he can't read. He dropped out of school in the 7th grade because he had to go work in the fields." And so she would always say, "No matter what, you better go to school because you can't even get a dishwashing job without a high school diploma." She always said that and so I think that really influenced all of us to finish school and to go to college. My mom said, "I'm going to help you, I don't care if we have to roll pennies, but you know you're gonna go to college." (Interview #1, 7-17-2008)

Throughout her schooling and career, Lorna felt supported and encouraged in her educational pursuits.

Lorna belongs to a Baptist church in a neighboring county from where she works. The historically African-American church has long-standing family ties, and she feels a sense of history and connectedness there. Presently, she lives just outside the city limits, close to the school where she teaches.

How does Lorna conceptualize community and community building in schools and classrooms?

Lorna sees community as inclusive of the things she has access to and the people who support her in living and working on a regular basis. She includes her faculty colleagues at her school and especially maintains a strong rapport with her teacher assistant in her kindergarten classroom:

In kindergarten, it's very important that we build community in the classrooms because a lot of times these kids may not feel a sense of community at home—some have never been away from home, so they may feel a belonging in the family, but as far as in the community, I don't know. With our demographics changing, I think that the teacher really needs to do that. We, my para [paraprofessional/instructional assistant] and I really try to make everyone feel as if they belong. (Interview #3, 12-04-2007)

A sense of community for her means a place where everyone feels included. This resonates with her past experiences of schooling when she felt included in the clubs and extracurricular activities after school. Also, she finds a sense of belonging today with colleagues at AES.

I don't know if this is a practice in every school system, but I was paired up with a mentor. And then our grade level gets together for collaborative planning, so that makes us feel like we are a community. We had like...12 kindergarten teachers! And we would meet twice a week to do a lot of planning. So, we just knew we were in it together. (Interview #2, 7-25-2007).

What are Lorna's folk theories about community or community building related to student learning and development?

When Lorna talked about the reason for building community, she believed it was connected to student learning and her teaching:

I think that if I can build that sense of community in my classroom, then it would definitely help me have a good classroom, a successful classroom, and the students would be successful. And you know administrators view it as a priority. I think that if students in the classroom feel like they are part of that community, then they will learn better, because actually, it's like they have ownership in something. (Interview #2, 7-25-2007)

Lorna believed kindergarten, if not preschool, was a good place to establish a sense of community with the school that would perpetuate in the later grades. In her opinion, it is foundational:

Especially with early childhood education students, now maybe up into the higher grades, with teenagers, the high schools, probably there isn't a lot of emphasis because they have so many other things to get involved in. You know, the sports community, extracurricular things. With the younger kids, there needs to be that sense of community at the school because that may be their only community outside of family that they can affiliate with in a positive way. (Interview #2, 7-25-2007)

For Lorna, a sense of community can combat many of the negative influences that may impact her students. She mentioned gangs, older brother or sister influences, and less parental supervision due to the fact that both parents may be working, or a single parent may be working more. Lorna's folk theory is that community is most helpful to those students who are "at-risk"—a belief that connects in some ways with current research (e.g., Osterman, 2000; Shann, 1999) on sense of community and academic achievement. Lorna said:

But I do try to make all of my kids feel just like they are part of the class regardless of situations. And there are a lot of situations. I mean we get kids that come to school that maybe didn't eat last night, you know? They need it the most. (Interview #1, 7-17-2007)

However, her rationale of building community to protect children from negative influences, is unique as this idea was not discussed in the literature.

Lorna also learned about community building strategies (e.g., building common knowledge about values and expectations, establishing everyday routines like circle time and morning message, and holding special all-school events) in her graduate program where she

received her initial teaching certification. Because of her graduate classes and her practical teaching experience, she also views community building as connected to her classroom management strategies:

I have students who know 120 sight words and students who only know 10 words, so we play the sight word game and the alphabet game in collaborative pairs. They also pair up to share responsibilities in the classroom. So, I think about community. They are part of this room because they help me take care of this room. (Interview #1, 7-17-2007).

She reported to incorporate pair and group instructional strategies, to allow students opportunities to socialize and help one another.

How does Lorna's local definition of community enable and confine her efforts, and what tensions arise as she negotiates demands from local and larger cultural contexts?

Lorna's definition of community serves her students by including them in classroom activities and giving them responsibilities in the classroom. Lorna taught special education classes previously, and this inclusive teaching philosophy has carried over to the regular kindergarten class she presently teaches. She discussed that even though building community is part of her philosophy of teaching, there are challenges:

I think having helpers and the other things that involve students are important. It's giving them a sense of community, a responsibility in the classroom, but at the same time, the helpers chart sometimes gives me a headache! (Interview #2, 7-25-2007)

Although planning for student involvement in the classroom is not always easy, she believes this develops students' abilities to make choices for themselves. Negotiating ideals and practice in this area is one example of tensions that arise in community building for her.

Additionally, Lorna's discourse on community building is affected by the larger discourse nationally and at the school level concerning safety and emergency preparedness:

Safety is important in the classroom from the equipment to making sure that my communication logs are correct, so children get picked up by who they need to be picked up by. It's my job to keep children safe. Weather emergencies, and terrorism, you know, unfortunately we have to think about that. (Interview #2, 7-25-2007)

Lorna's concern about terrorism reflects the national attention given to this issue because of recent violent events (e.g., the shootings at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech; the attack on the twin towers on 9-11-2002).

Caring for students is an important responsibility of teachers. Yet, Lorna's discussion of keeping children safe is related to her efforts to provide a caring community for her students and reflects a culturally and historically situated notion of safety. Also, the school principal implemented a new safety and preparedness plan for the school to be implemented in the events of weather emergencies, intruders in the building, and acts of terrorism. This could account for Lorna's attention to these issues at this time.

At the time of this interview, Peach County Public Schools had begun plans for redistricting and the opening of 2 new elementary schools. Teachers anticipated changes in the demographics of AES, and Lorna commented on how the changes may impact the school:

Definitely there are some challenges here. A lot of teachers may not be ready for that because a lot of teachers have been used to maybe one (student) from a different community. But you know Apple School was that district where people moved out to the suburbs and that's no longer the case because this bus is gonna go across town to some

areas...this community is on the news just as much as this metro area with crime, and other issues going on. (Interview #1, 7-17-2007)

In this excerpt, Lorna portrayed AES as serving mostly white middle-class students in the past and added to the description of the local changing context that includes an expectation of the teachers about the students they thought they would teach. She believed there would be academic challenges, if the number of students from low-income families increased.

Case Two: Patricia

“We are all unique and individual, but it takes all of us—bringing a little bit of ourselves to the group—to make our classroom a real community.”
(Patricia, fifth-grade teacher, 9-06-2007)

An Introduction

Patricia is a 48-year-old European American woman. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education. She has completed her 20th year of teaching. She has taught in the same county in two different schools. She currently teaches 5th grade. Her class included 22 students: 3 African American boys, 1 Asian girl, 10 white girls, and 8 white boys. Six are on free and reduced lunch.

Patricia is the oldest in her family; she has a younger sister and a younger brother. She was raised in a very small rural town in the south of the state. She didn't go to kindergarten, which was the norm at that time. Instead, Patricia started the first grade at age 5. She spent weekends with her grandparents who lived in the next town, because her mother divorced and remarried when Patricia was very young. This way, she visited with her father and his parents on weekly occasions. Growing up, she went to church, participated in sports, and played outside around her house for hours on end.

Patricia's first teacher was old enough to have taught her stepfather, and she credits her first teacher for developing her love of reading as an adult:

She made me the reader that I am, and I think that it's because that's what she really emphasized: wanting to read. We had the vanity rack and all those old readers. I just remember wanting to read everything that I could get my hands on, and then I basically taught my younger sister to read. (Interview #1, 9-06-2007)

Patricia's parents, including her mother, father, and stepfather, worked very hard and stressed the importance of a good education, so she always tried her best in school. In fact, she and her sister were compared in school based on their academic performance. Patricia describes that sometimes the competition was too much for her sister to bear:

Being the oldest child and having this love for school, I always did well. Whereas my sister, being the second child, was...I don't want to say forgotten, but kind of like the Jan Brady syndrome, you know? She didn't like being compared to me because she wasn't as strong a student as I was. So we got the comparison from the other teachers. That's something today I've taken from my own personal experience, that when I have siblings, I don't assume things about students. I've had a lot of siblings in my career. I don't make those comparisons because I know exactly the affect that it can have, you know, because it can be a big negative. (Interview #1, 9-06-2007)

This past experience has shaped her teaching practice by judging students on their individual qualities and not making assumptions based on parents or siblings. Growing up, Patricia felt a family expectation to go to college:

We always had to read at grandma's. We'd read the Bible, and she made us learn hymns, and we read the newspaper. I remember we were always made to go to church and

Sunday School. And schooling was something certainly stressed and appreciated. I remember we had graduation in the 8th grade at the end of junior high. I got to graduate and be an honor graduate—that was “the thing” in our family. When you are an honor graduate, you get to sit in the front row, and then the same with high school. There was that expectation for me because I basically was the first to go to college in our family other than my great aunt Ada who went to college. She was one of the first women at that college, too. (Interview #1, 9-06-07)

“Like gypsies” Patricia’s family moved 8 times during grammar school, but all of the moves were in the same city. Her family lived in government housing that was segregated in the rural area of the state in the 1950s to the 1970s. After school, she would go to the library, parks, and to swimming pool which was also segregated at the time. She played outside in what she called “the projects neighborhood” (government housing) without worry of any danger: “My mom would let us play and run around until after dark. It was just a small, tight-knit community where everybody knew everybody” (Interview #1, 9-06-2007). Afterschool sports allowed her whole family to be involved and it was common for the whole community to gather for children’s sports events. Additional extracurricular activities included Patricia being involved in the Beta Club (an academic club for boys and girls), chorus, and church activities such as revivals, Vacation Bible School, and concerts.

In general, Patricia’s growing up was in a very tight-knit community, and she felt a sense of community of which the school was a major part. She also remembers the local newspaper reported local events and communicated local news such as pageants, high school sports, and community parades. Since she started teaching, Peach County has doubled its population. She has family that lives in the local area and has developed personal relationships with community

members over the years. Her husband owns and manages a small grocery store in the community. Patricia projects that she will retire in this school system where her career began.

How does Patricia conceptualize community and community building in schools and classrooms?

Patricia described community as where we live, where we reside, where we go to church, where we do our shopping, and those places where you can interact with family and acquaintances. She also advocated for building a sense of community in the classroom:

I let them come up with what makes a classroom successful. What do we need to do, you know? If we have to have rules, what are some good rules to have and then we just kind of brainstorm and we come up with some basic rules. Then I let them know I look at them as all my babies! They're mine and that we're all in this together, and we're all going to get along, and we might not like each other all the time, but we are in here together. And so, I think that kind of sets the tone for the year, that they see that I am not going to treat one any differently than the other and that when one person makes a mistake, it's all of our mistake, and we've got to help each other fix it. (Interview #2, 9-19-2007)

In the classroom, Patricia encourages participation from all of her students especially at the beginning of the year.

In her school, Patricia reported having a sense of community because of her colleagues and central office administration: "I consider the teachers in my school as friends. We work together, share ideas for teaching, and sometimes meet socially. I went to college with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction" (Interview #1, 9-06-2007).

Her sense of community might also be related to the fact that her husband went to this county's high school with many of the community leaders:

The county commissioner graduated from high school with my husband. I went to college with him, so we knew each other from college. I know his wife and his wife teaches, too. The sheriff graduated with my husband, and the police chief is married to my first cousin. So, it's almost like you still know everybody. My husband has had his business here for twenty years and he grew up in the community. It's neat. It's like our peer group is running everything. (Interview #1, 9-06-2007)

Patricia's teaching life is integrated with her personal life. Her sense of community is tied to the local personal relationships she has with family and community members.

What are Patricia's folk theories about community or community building related to student learning and development?

Patricia knows the history of Peach County, has taken classes by the local historical society, and suggested the same for all teachers in AES to really get a sense of Peach County and its local culture. She thinks knowing students' families helps her teach and helps her build relationships with parents:

It does help me understand why a particular child might act the way they do, or have the learning problems that they do. It helps me to know the family. It helps me to know, and even if it's not because I know them, because I have their siblings, know the families in the community because of my husband's job (grocery store manager/owner), or church, that's certainly an advantage to being somewhere for as long as I have. (Interview #2, 9-19-2007)

If she taught in another area, her teaching would not change all that much because in her opinion best practices and standards are the same across the state. However, Patricia did say it would take her awhile to learn about her students and learn about what resources are available in the new environment.

Compared to her schooling, Patricia believed that school is more “fun” today; students have more opportunities to interact with each other than when she was in school.

The teacher talked and we just sat and listened. You know, sometimes we would pass notes, but really we didn’t interact a lot. But I use groups and try to keep them interested.

They get to share ideas and work together a lot. (Interview #1, 9-6-2007)

Her choice to involve students in learning activities that encourage student-to-student interactions is one example of how she reported that she considers community building in her classroom.

How does Patricia’s local definition of community enable and confine her efforts, and what tensions arise as she negotiates demands from local and larger cultural contexts?

In our conversations, Patricia advocated for building community by being connected to events and people outside of the school:

I like going to their ball games, to see them in a play or just things out in the community so that they will know that I’m still part of their lives outside of the classroom. So, and it’s kind of, I guess, that sense of concern and care that spills out over beyond these four walls, and I try to do those things. You know, communicate with the parents, and make phone calls, or email them, you know that whole learning community, that we all work together. (Interview #2, 9-19-2007)

For Patricia, being a part of the community means having relationships outside of the community and in her school. School is one element of her conception of community for Peach County.

Patricia's discourse on community was affected by larger contexts such as the state's redesigning of curriculum standards and the national focus on the No Child Left Behind Act. She shared challenges in her teaching:

It gets harder every year. Now is so much different than when I first started. I mean, like every year there is just something major. Lately, the task of teaching has been enormous because of the new standards and the new way of teaching, and that's just something we'll have to get used to, if we're in it for the long haul – whatever it takes to make sure these kids learn and we meet their needs. (Interview #2, 9-19-2007)

Patricia's 20 years of teaching allowed her to see the changes that have occurred in education in both the local and larger contexts. In addition to curriculum and assessment changes, she commented on other tensions that impact her teaching, namely the changing demographics of the nation and her local school:

Our population of children has changed dramatically since we opened up AES. I mean it's amazing with the socioeconomic status of these families, the free and reduced lunch vs. the non-free. It's changed dramatically and thrown a lot of folks off, and I think that a lot of people left last year to go to that new school because they feared what was going to be coming in here, because of the new districting. (Interview #2, 9-19-2007)

Patricia chose to stay at AES because she said she is in it for the children and she lives close to the school where she teaches: "I want to impact the lives of students who live right here" (Interview #1, 9-06-2007). When she went to school, students walked to school and the children

she played with were the same children she went to school with. In Patricia's opinion, that's the way schools should plan district lines now:

My only concern with the redistricting is I've always felt that children should go to the school that's closest to where they live, and the way that it has been redistricted, that's not always the case. And we've got children who are a stone's throw from other schools who have to bus all the way out to here and so that you know, it really doesn't make any sense. Whose interests are they serving there? Are they trying to mix up the schools, you know, balance them? (Interview #2, 9-19-2007)

She showed concern that students will not develop a sense of community in school, if they do not have the same friends, visit the same businesses, or play at the same parks and playgrounds.

Patricia listed several points of contention which made me wonder how these facts impacted her belief about the possibility of building a sense of community in the classroom and building relationships with parents. She thought that "the [families] that are the farthest away, more than likely, are the ones that would not come to these school functions anyway" (Interview #2, 9-19-2007). I don't know if this was pure speculation or anecdotally this is what she has experienced. However, either way, this view could be a barrier to building relationships with parents as well as a factor influencing the sense of community in students of the families who are farthest away geographically.

Despite the less hopeful view of the outcomes of redistricting, Patricia thought that something positive could result from the changes:

One positive effect is that students are exposed to a more diverse group and that's a good thing to be a part of that community of diverse learners. And to know that you brought your little bit of yourself and who you are to that group, and...that we are all unique and

individual, but it takes a whole group to make the group what it is. (Interview #2, 9-19-2007)

Patricia didn't identify any specific challenges related to her teaching other than perceived lack of parental involvement that may occur if there were to be an increase of students from geographically distant areas.

Case Three: Rhonda

"I will take care of you, you take care of me. We take care of each other. We're a community, a family. And they know that. They sense that."
(Rhonda, third-grade teacher, 9-05-2007)

An Introduction

Rhonda is a 43-year-old European American woman. She is working on her Education Specialist degree in Educational Leadership and aspires to be an administrator with Peach County. She has completed her 11th year of teaching and has 7 years experience in this county—the last 3 years teaching 3rd grade. Additionally, she has taken on several leadership responsibilities in recent years including instructional coach and home-family coordinator. Her class included 22 students: 1 African American boy, 2 African American girls, 1 Latino boy, 8 white boys, and 10 white girls. Eight students received free or reduced lunch.

During our interviews, Rhonda talked about rooting for the “underdogs” and wanting to help those who struggle in school like she did. She wants to make learning fun, interesting, and relevant for students. She wants students to see where education can take them. She has lived in Peach County for 17 years and married 17 years with 2 children. Greg, her husband is the mayor of Apple City. She was a stay-at-home mom until her children went to school and then she thought about going back to school.

She has wanted to be a teacher since the 2nd grade, but she was afraid that she could not complete the teacher preparation programs or pass the teacher certification tests because school had always been a challenge for her. She started elementary school in a little red schoolhouse with multi-grades and multi-age classmates in a rural nearby county. She lived in 1 of 3 houses that were located on a narrow dirt road. Rhonda recalls plenty of cows and chickens to take care of around her house. She believes she had Attention Deficit Disorder, but has never been diagnosed. Rhonda remembers a very teacher-centered learning environment. She also remembers that her teacher lived in the city and that she felt as if there was a difference in social/economic class between the teacher and the students: “Most of my teachers lived in town. We didn’t even going shopping at the same places” (Interview #1, 9-05-2007).

School was boring for Rhonda and not connected with life outside of school: “I just remember it was boring. I don’t want to be boring... The teacher didn’t know anything about us, and I never saw her outside of school” (Interview #1, 9-05-2007). After school, she and her classmates rode bicycles, made forts, always playing outside until dark and some days after dark.

Rhonda’s mother stayed at home to raise her and her two younger sisters. Her father traveled a lot in his job. Although, neither parent graduated from college, education was stressed at home.

If you got in trouble at school, you are going to get it ten times worse when you get home. My parents believed, “You need to respect school. You need to respect your education.” Neither my mom nor dad graduated from college, but the fact that I’ve graduated from college, my sister’s a teacher with her Master degree says a lot. My parents focused on the importance of getting an education, taking care of yourself, and

not having to be dependent on another person for your survival. (Interview #1, 9-05-2007).

Her parents would have never taken Rhonda's side over the teacher's side – that was unheard of at that time.

Although she doesn't recall ever being in trouble with the teacher, Rhonda didn't particularly like the teachers and did not feel a sense of community in her classroom or a sense of belonging to the school. Neither did she see a big connection with school and the community growing up: "I don't recall any kind of partnership between the community and the school. Local businesses are more involved today" (Interview #1, 9-06-2007). That recollection contrasts with what she sees with business partners and teachers' role of communicating with parents in today's schools and classrooms:

When I was an instructional coach, I was in charge of Math Night. Each grade level was responsible for coming up with some type of game. It was amazing, and we had a huge turnout. We had hotdogs for dinner. So [parents] would eat and then go to the classrooms. I worked closely with our parent involvement coordinator which not every school in our county has. (Interview #1, 9-05-2007)

Rhonda speculates that building community has become more important now because she believes it is a national trend that many students do not have both parents living at home or relatives living nearby.

As a current resident of Peach City, Rhonda sees a big difference in 2 main cities of the county. First of all, there are high school rivals, but the rivalry continues in politics, business, and school administration. One high school's population is predominantly African American, and the other high school's population is predominantly white. There are economic differences,

too. The cost of housing and the family incomes are higher of the students attending the mostly white high school. She said she hears about the other city being the better place to live, but she feels a strong sense of community where she lives. AES is a part of that feeling. Rhonda said, “We have parents that call and ask, ‘I’m about to move to Peach County. What’s the best school?’ They are all great, you know? And that’s what I tell them” (Interview #2, 10-25-2007).

How does Rhonda conceptualize community and community building in schools and classrooms?

Rhonda believes the school is a part of what fosters community for a city or neighborhood:

A friend of mine who lives here has a child who goes to a private school in another county. She also teaches at that school. She said it has been the hardest thing, not living there, because they felt so disconnected. And I guarantee you, I know exactly what she means. That would be like if I taught in another county different from where I lived, I would not feel connected to the community. You see what I’m saying? But because I live here and I work here, my friends are here, there is more of a connection. You feel more at home. You maybe feel more like family. This is like a family. You know? So I think it’s very important. (Interview #1, 9-05-2007)

She feels very connected to the community because she lives in Apple City and her husband is the mayor of Apple City. In her school, she thinks of community of people working together:

When I think of community, I think of people that work together. I know we use that word a lot in schools, you know professional learning communities and things like that. And it’s a good thing. When people work together, they share ideas. When one person is weak, you know, another steps up to the plate and they help. They help with the

weaknesses. So, I guess I think of community is basically working together to help each other out. (Interview #1, 9-05-2007)

For Rhonda, working with her colleagues created a sense of community for her in her school.

What are Rhonda's folk theories about community or community building related to student learning and development?

When Rhonda thought of community building in her classroom, she reported that she believed it helped with student learning. Her rationale was:

You've got to know what these kids bring to school everyday because it makes them who they are. But it could be telling of the kinds of experiences they've had or not had and how you can connect that with what you are trying to teach. (Interview #2, 10-25-2007)

Rhonda talked about knowing students and understanding how to match instruction to a student's experience. Here's one example shared by Rhonda:

I will never forget. I taught this girl about 3 years ago, and she couldn't read a lick. And we were looking at the front cover of the book and the book was titled, *Blueberry Mouse*. And there was a blueberry muffin on the front cover. Well, you know, in my stupid state of mind, I thought the whole world new what a blueberry muffin was, so I was like ok, honey, let's look at this picture and let's try to figure out what the story is going to be about. What's this right here? She said, "a cupcake?" And I said well it kinda looks like a cupcake. And then after prodding and prodding I realized she had no clue what a blueberry muffin was. So, those things are important. You know, not everybody knows everything. So she didn't have a clue – she could read blueberries, even though she thought it was a cupcake! I told her [what it was] and then the next day I brought her a

blueberry muffin. I did! This is a blueberry muffin. And that just seems so minimal, but she didn't have a clue what a blueberry muffin was. (Interview #2, 10-25-2007)

Rhonda related community building to knowing about her students and about the community from which they come.

Rhonda has strong ideas on using the school and its resources to help parents and community members feel connected to the school. One proposal she is working on is to open the library to students' parents some evenings, so that they can have internet access to job resources and state testing information. Rhonda reports to do all she can to help students succeed, especially when they come from a low-income family:

Now whether their poverty is generational or situational, it affects how children learn.

With poverty, these kids need to see that there's another world. So I think that is a problem we are starting to face. Like at Peach City Primary School and even AES, we can't give our kids the opportunity to see there's another world on the other side, and I don't know if you've been through any of Ruby Payne's training on poverty, but that's what I see. The average income for a household in Peach County is somewhere around \$35,000 to \$40,000 a year. Well, you know, a family of four can hardly live on that. So, when we have that...when you are worried about where your next meal is going to come from, education is probably not forefront on your mind. (Interview #1, 9-05-2007)

Also, she believes parents should be invested and involved in their child's education – and articulates some of the obstacles low-income families face at being a part of the school community (e.g., having to work evenings, not having transportation to school events).

How does Rhonda's local definition of community enable and confine her efforts, and what tensions arise as she negotiates demands from local and larger cultural contexts?

Rhonda spoke about how different schooling is today than when she was in school. She doesn't think that parents respect a teacher's authority like they did when she was in school:

I've had parents call that are upset about a sad face in the agenda and the note that I wrote. Some parents challenge what I say happened, really happened. It used to be if the teacher said it, then that's the truth. Not necessarily anymore [do parents take teachers at their word]. Now we document everything, so that we can prove something to parents.

It's almost adversarial towards parents. (Interview #2, 10-25-2007)

Also, Rhonda thinks students are less respectful than when she was a student:

One time a student was working on something [at his desk] and he said, "This is just boring!" And I flat out told him, "It is not my job to entertain you." I think this is a growing problem. Our children are so used to being entertained. We all have to do things in life that are boring, but what's boring to one person may not be boring to another. It just amazed me that he said that out loud at all. I would have never said such a thing to my teacher, but I don't see that kids really respect teachers now like we did then.

(Interview #1, 9-05-2007)

She believes that children are a product of the changing U. S. society, specifically families with both parents working or single parents. She thinks that her students are representative of students nationally that are eating less meals with family and experiencing busy schedules:

You know, family values have changed. We all don't sit down at the supper table and eat supper at 5 o'clock. I mean we don't do that at my house, because we are all going in a

hundred different directions. You know, people so often want to blame children. It's not their fault. (Interview #2, 10-25-2007)

She described "busy-ness" as the biggest problem in society and in her teaching: she's too busy teaching (e.g., lesson-planning, assessing) to build relationships with students, and parents are too busy (e.g., working, performing household chores, parenting) to build relationships with schools.

Case Four: Whitney

"Building community can be communicating expectations about how we will work together. It can set the tone for the whole year."
(Whitney, second-grade teacher, 5-22-2007)

An Introduction

Whitney is a 25-year-old European American woman. She has completed her fourth year of teaching 2nd grade at this school. She has completed her Master degree of Early Childhood Education. Her class included 20 students: 3 African American boys, 2 African American girls, 1 Asian boy, 7 white boys, and 7 white girls. Six students received free and reduced lunch.

She remembers primary school and wanting to teach since kindergarten. She talks about the only two primary schools that were open at that time; Peach City Primary School and Peach County Primary School. As the county grew, elementary schools were added in the later years; AES is one of the newer elementary schools. The fall festivals and spring flings were big events of both communities:

In Kindergarten through 2nd grade, we would have fall festivals and spring flings and it was crowded. I mean everybody came. There was only one primary school in the county besides Peach City. The county was kind of separated. Everybody who was anybody

came. Kids showed up. Parents showed up and were very into what their kids were doing.

(Interview #1, 5-22-2007)

However, she was disappointed in the fall festivals that she has attended as a teacher at AES. She compared the difference in parent participation from last year to when she was in primary school.

Last year at this school, I think we had 10 parents show up. I thought we would have more parent participation. And even last year in my classroom I had a couple of parents who didn't work and they were really involved in the classroom, but school-wide, I was very disappointed knowing that there are a lot of parents who could come and could do more, but just chose not to do more. On the other hand you have these parents, like half the school, I think, is kind of made up of the parents who...they just can't come [to school]. They try their best to support their family and they can't come to any of these things the school offers, you know, all of the math nights and the open houses and all the PTO things. They do the best they can to get their child to school everyday. And they really stay behind them as far as their schoolwork, and I think that [the parents] are kind of left behind like they always talk about no kids left behind. I feel that the parents are getting left behind because there are some who don't care at all, and they never come for anything, which is very sad. (Interview, 5-22-2007)

Whitney confided that it was difficult for her sometimes to stay late or come back to school for special events: "I don't come back to school for every PTO meeting, so I know it could be hard for parents sometimes" (Interview, 5-22-2007).

Whitney's family grew up in a small subdivision that had about 20 houses around a cul-de-sac in another city (not Peach City) in Peach County. She has one brother who is a year older than her. Their father was the principal of the county primary school. When she started going to

elementary and middle schools, everyone knew that her father was a principal and they expected her to behave as a good student should: “Everyone knew who my dad was, so I guess they expected me to not be so talkative. I never really got in trouble, though” (Interview #1, 5-22-2007). Her mother prepared to be a teacher, but only taught for one year after she graduated. Both parents had high expectations for her education.

In the 7th grade, her family moved to a bigger house with more privacy, farther out into the county, and less neighbors. Because Whitney’s brother could drive, this move didn’t hinder their socializing with friends very much. Some of her extracurricular activities included playing outside after school and playing basketball and softball in the county leagues.

When she thinks about the Peach County area, she describes two distinct communities of Apple City and Peach City. She reports the main differences between the people of these communities are race/ethnicity, economic income, in addition to the difference in the city, rural, and suburban qualities. She believes schools in the county are better because they are built more recently. She has confronted the idea that her friends have that Apple Elementary is a “rough” school (i.e., students have more discipline or behavior issues, or issues associated with belonging to low-income families). She describes the school as balanced with regard to social and economic challenges: “I grew up in Peach County, but I work in Peach City, so I guess I see both sides. People automatically think that ‘oh, you work over there’ where there are more behavior issues and you know the families are not all well-off” (Interview #1, 5-22-2007).

Whitney wishes for more parent participation and thinks the school offers opportunities for parents and community members to engage with the school faculty and administration. She feels a connection to the school system and her school because she is a product of the school

system. Yet, she enjoys her living in another county that is 30 minutes away for privacy and being separate from work in some ways.

How does Whitney conceptualize community and community building in schools and classrooms?

Whitney talked about community to mean working together, listening to each other, and respecting each other's differences. In her view of community, she focused on the classroom and organization of the learning activity:

In the beginning [of the school year] they're just kind of one big group until I get to know them, you know, on an academic level. I have to see how they are socially, behaviorally. All those things come into play. So, depending on where they sit, I kind of put people near them to kind of help draw out the positive behaviors and kind of distinguish the negative behaviors. If I can, I kind of pair two up that way. (Interview #2, 10-08-07)

She believed students have a responsibility or a role to play in developing or contributing to a sense of community in the classroom. She spoke of the room environment (e.g., student work on the walls, furniture arrangement) and instructional strategies (e.g., cooperative groups, peer tutoring, buddy helpers).

I have structured time and stick to the structure. I try to be very consistent with it. And I think that that helps the children as far as a community goes because if you're not, you know, from this time to this time then it's more kind of chaotic. I think that the room environment has a lot to do with organization and how you create a sense of community. In my room I have certain areas in the room. I have like a reading center and even the books...I have them in buckets and that's where they go, that's their place. I have places

in the room where students can gather to work and read together. (Interview #2, 10-08-07)

Whitney feels a connection with the school because she is a product of the school system and because she has developed friendships with colleagues at AES. She thinks that there is value to knowing the community and it would be ideal for a teacher to live in the community that she teaches. However, she believes that it is not necessary for the teacher to live in the community if the teacher is open to learning about the community in which she teaches. The main reason she remains employed at this school is due to the relationships with colleagues.

What are Whitney's folk theories about community or community building related to student learning and development?

Whitney believed that knowing the resources of a community can help her to be a better teacher by providing better instruction that students find more relevant:

Just knowing what's around, kind of knowing the influences that the kids have when they leave the school, knowing the places they can go, whether it be the Boys and Girls Club, church programs, or different daycares, that kind of helps me feel like I can prepare them better for what they're going next. Going to a county that I don't really know a whole lot about, you don't know where they come from or what influences they have outside of school. I mean, I could bring something in from the community to help teach something if I know what resources are available in the community. (Interview #2, 10-8-2007)

Whitney considered collecting teaching resources from the community as a form of community building in her classroom.

Additionally, Whitney talked about the routine of circle time in her classroom. Circle time is a time to share something nice about each other, learning to appreciate what each person

brings to the class. She described an example of including a boy who has autism. She wanted her students to recognize the positive things he could bring to the classroom instead of focusing on the more noticeable behavior problems that he had in the classroom sometimes. Circle time was a time to reinforce the class value of inclusion with her students:

I have to kind of figure out who he can be within a group and try to encourage him to follow the right directions and not get discouraged when he doesn't listen. It's hard because you never know what kind of day he is going to have. He does sit away from everybody and he's got a list of modifications that help him that the other children can't do. For instance, I mean, sometimes he can chew gum, that calms him down. Wearing a hat helps him feel like he is more by himself which helps him to do his work better.

There are things that the other children see and notice and know that it's not the same.

That kind of throws the whole community feel off because they kind of separate from the class and him sometimes. So that's difficult for me to bring everybody together where you know we are community but there's some things that he can do. That I can't in detail explain why, because they don't necessarily need to know that, and they're not going to understand that. So those are some things that make it difficult to keep the flow of the community and the environment, you know, all on the same pace in the classroom.

(Interview #2, 10-08-2007)

Not only did she strive to promote a caring classroom environment in an effort to show caring to his mother, Whitney took detailed daily behavior notes to share with the boy's mother so that they could compare home and school behaviors. Whitney described this as a way to help her student transition from home to school and eventually she began to see how home could be an extension for all of her students' learning, not just for this one student.

How does Whitney's local definition of community enable and confine her efforts, and what tensions arise as she negotiates demands from local and larger cultural contexts?

As it was for all of the participants, Whitney's discourse on community building in schools included the tension of the school system's upcoming redistricting:

I think the main concern from all of the redistricting is with the children who come from the lower economic areas and that they are all below grade level. The majority is below grade level – I'm not going to say all. (Interview #2, 10-8-2007)

Because of the fact that next closest school did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), parents of that school could choose to send their child to another school within the school system. Many parents chose AES. It was an opportunity for Apple teachers to experience a growth in student numbers as well as exposure to students of color and from families of low income. It may have been a sampling of the student population they were about to receive after redistricting. Whitney discussed the perceived gaps in students' academic performance due to the lack of support from home:

A main concern is having a whole group of children that, you know, some of them should have been held back to first grade to get caught up instead of still being so far behind because they don't get help beyond 3 o'clock. So, that's probably the hardest part that I've learned in my last 2 years. Although I have had many children, as I do this year, that [the situation is] what they get at school is what they get. And I can push for stuff outside of school but it's not going to happen. That's probably the main concern that's come for me is knowing that they are not going to have a lot of parental support or any help at home with homework or reading or anything. (Interview #2, 10-8-2007)

Community building for Whitney is complicated by the perceived lack of parental support for student learning. Without parents as part of the learning community, Whitney thought she would have significant challenges in meeting the instructional needs of all of her students.

Another challenge Whitney reported was her lack of ability to differentiate her instruction when the skill levels and readiness levels have a broad spread. Whitney described how she struggled with the different levels of abilities in her class:

That's something I'm still trying to figure out when I'm one-on-one with one child to get this basic concept. You know, I've got other children that are just kind of sitting and waiting and they've gotten it and they're ready to be challenged a little farther, so as far as getting everybody, keeping everybody up to where they can be, it's harder because I've got you know, a big range of learners. So it's not as easy to kind of get everybody on the next level as to where they can go with learning because I've got some over here and some way over here. It's more challenging for me to figure out how I'm going to teach this person this concept but then (teach) this person in a more challenging way. And then you've got all the ones in between. (Interview #2, 10-8-2007)

Although, Whitney said that knowing the community and home culture of students helps her in her teaching, she did not mention the fact that knowing the backgrounds and resources of students from this neighboring school will help her teach them. Her knowledge of students in this case is based on a deficit-view. She wanted to help low-performing students but communicated that she feels under-prepared.

Another tension felt by Whitney and that is reflected in the larger national context was the issue of accountability. Whitney, however, didn't think that her practices of community

building are hindered or that her teaching practices had changed a great deal although she wished for more time:

That's just one of the things that when I did my master's it was something that I just felt real heavy on, making sure that a sense of community was in my classroom. I take time to do that because I feel that is what's going to keep your classroom running smoothly. If they can learn to get along with each other, and learn to respect each other then they'll be able to do the standards and the activities that go with it. (Interview #3, 12-3-2007)

Whitney shared other obstacles to her building community which, from her view, reflect the contemporary cultural context:

I guess the most obvious answer to me would be that it's just more of a violent world now. Like there's things that my second graders know that I probably didn't know until I was in middle school. They are becoming way more mature than they need. You know? They're learning things they shouldn't need to know at seven and eight. Influences nowadays are not based on family or church, but music stars, sports stars, and T. V. (Interview #3, 12-3-2007)

Summary of the Cases

In this chapter, I presented an introduction of each participant case and summarized the ways each answered the research questions. The participants spoke about their conceptions of community and addressed the complexities of building community in their school. Their discussions on curriculum, assessment, and redistricting are similar to a larger discourse taking place in conjunction with other sociohistorical factors such as America's changing demographics, academic accountability in schools, and creating schools as caring places

discussed in the earlier chapter. In what follows, I display the participants' classroom demographics and a summary of group findings.

Classroom Demographics

The table describes each of the participants' classroom demographics for the 2007-2008 school year. The participants expressed concern about redistricting and the changes in demographics that AES had already experienced with it being designated as a "choice" school. Free and reduced lunch numbers had risen from the previous year, and teachers speculated that AES may soon qualify for Title I funding.

Table 4.1

Classroom Demographics

Teachers	Total # of Students	African-American	Asian	Latino	White	Free/Reduced Lunch
Lorna (K)	18	5 (28%)	0	0	13 (72%)	8 (44%)
Whitney (2 nd)	20	5 (25%)	1 (5%)	0	14 (70%)	6 (30%)
Rhonda (3 rd)	22	3 (14%)	0	1 (4%)	18 (82%)	8 (36%)
Patricia (5 th)	24	6 (25%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)	16 (67%)	6 (25%)

Group Findings

All four participants had families that stressed education. All four participants were raised in a southeastern state. Lorna and Whitney were raised in Peach County; Rhonda was raised in a neighboring county; and Patricia was raised in the same state several counties away. All four participants reported playing outside much more than their students do. During their own elementary schooling, Lorna, Whitney, and Patricia felt a strong sense of community in their schools, but Rhonda did not—she felt there was a difference in geography and economic status that may have been one of the contributing factors for her lack of sensing community. Lorna described feeling a sense of community connected to race/ethnicity; she was concerned

that when she moved from one school to another school that she would not experience community because she would not see as many African Americans in her new school. Lorna, Patricia, and Rhonda acknowledged how times and schooling have changed from their schooling, but Whitney, the youngest participant, did not report a highly traditional schooling experience. All four participants seemed to agree with promoting a sense of community in schools, although each participant provided a definition of community from their own view in light of past experiences and their current local cultural influences.

As a group of teachers from AES, participants shared several common ideas on community building; some of which are local to the school and others reflect the larger sociohistorical context. I will explain further both common and uncommon themes emerged in the next chapter by using the tools of discourse analysis to bring attention to local and larger cultural influences.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: STICKS, STONES, AND SILVER LININGS

From the beginning of this research project, words have been integral to the meaning-making process. Developing research questions, interviewing and transcribing, reading and thinking, and finally writing an analysis of findings, words are the conduit of understanding. In this study, I analyzed four southeastern elementary teachers' discourse to unpack the meaning of community building in schools. As I pondered over words and phrases, trying to make meaning of the data I collected, my goal was to delve deeper—past the mere words, but toward the ideas, values, and beliefs expressed by the participants.

Similarities and Differences Among Cases

In the case study method, “researchers examine each case expecting to uncover new and unusual interactions, events, explanations, interpretations, and cause-and-effect connections” (Hays, 2004, p. 218). As I reviewed the participants' interview transcripts, I looked for patterns, connections, and disconnections that would illuminate “situated meanings” and potential “cultural models” (Gee, 1999) to help me understand community through my participants' voices. Doing so, I was able to compare and contrast the four main participants' “folk psychology and folk pedagogy” (Bruner, 1996) as presented in the next sections.

The Teachers' Conceptions of Community

Lorna, Patricia, Rhonda, and Whitney constructed community related to where they live. However, it wasn't the only common characteristic of community that emerged. All four participants reported that they currently felt a sense of community in their school, and they also

mentioned other stakeholders in the building of community (e.g., business partners, political leaders, churches, and school colleagues). In addition to the themes that occurred in all four cases, similar themes occurred among two or three of the participants.

Table 5.1

The Teachers' Conceptions of Community

<i>How do elementary teachers conceptualize community and community building in schools?</i>				
Themes	Lorna	Patricia	Rhonda	Whitney
Community is related to "places"	X	X	X	X
Community is related to diversity	X	X	X	X
Community is related to colleague relationships	X	X	X	X
Community is related instruction (e.g., circle time, peer helpers, cooperative groups)	X		X	X
Community is related to developing trust			X	X
Community is related to developing student responsibility	X			X

Community is related to "places." All four teachers' discussion of community reflected their conception of community as related to "places". They relied on the geographic construct of community as described by McMillan and Chavis (1986) in their discussions about the two main cities in Peach County and as they described their concerns about redistricting. The teachers' also talked about the importance of having school close to the students' residences, so that children can access the school and school playgrounds during non-school hours. It is important to note, however, that Patricia and Rhonda, who have community ties and history in the community, considered the "place" to be the city and geographic area around it. Lorna and Whitney emphasized the classroom as the "place" community occurs.

Community is related to diversity. All participants made reference to the fact that every person is different and that each person contributes to a community. In general, this was seen as a positive thing, and something that a teacher should promote. For example, Lorna explained:

You've got to make them all feel that they are a part of that classroom—when you have a child with the most advantages and the child with the least. I try to do that because of my own experience (in school). (Interview #1, 7-17-2007)

Lorna honored the contributions of the students, no matter what experiences her students brought to the classroom. This idea was similarly expressed in the other participants' discourse. Patricia said: "We are all unique and individual, but it takes all of us—bringing a little bit of ourselves to the group—to make our classroom a real community" (9-06-2007). Even so, participants expressed concern about the possibility of working with students from low income families and who are performing below grade level, an issue to be discussed further in the later section of this chapter.

Community is related to colleague relationships. When participants talked about community, they spoke about the relationships they had made and how they work and plan for instruction in teams at their school. They also spoke about the book study that the principal led on developing Professional Learning Communities. It was obvious that teachers were influenced by the examples (e.g., teacher collaborative teams looking at student work, teacher-student mentor programs) in the book of teachers who collaborated to improve student success in the schools. Whitney shared her thoughts about collaborating with teachers in her grade level:

Being a new teacher and coming into a group of ten other teachers in the 2nd grade was a little bumpy. I mean some of us have similar personalities and the some of us have different personalities. Some of us are more outspoken and some of us are more quiet.

We have different ideas. I think that's why our principal encouraged us to think about professional learning communities. Being at a large school, you know. I don't even know half the people here! But we can learn a lot from each other and share different ideas about teaching. (Pilot Study, 12-01-2006)

Additionally, teachers talked about the personal benefits of having friends and emotional support at their school. For example, Whitney said, "The reason I stay here at this school is because of the people in the school" (Interview #2, 10-08-2007). Although the Professional Learning Communities model promotes student learning as a desired outcome (Vesio, Ross, & Adams, 2007), teachers at Apple Elementary expressed their satisfaction with interactions (friendly and professional) with colleagues.

Community is related to instruction. As teachers talked about community, their concepts of community building were related to their instructional practice, the physical arrangement of the classroom, and the rules that were made for classroom norms of behavior. Tied to a sense of community was the perceived benefit of having a well-run classroom where every student learns. Although the research (e.g., Battistich, Soloman, Watson, & Schaps, 1997) supports greater academic achievement for students who feel a sense of belonging, another cultural model of teaching may be found: A good teacher keeps order in her classroom. A conception of community in this local context seems to include building community in the classroom as a method for managing the classroom. Three of the four cases viewed community related to instructional methods and two of the four cases thought that developing trust and responsibility among students is part of community building.

Three participants described community as related to their instructional practices. Whitney said that a sense of community helps her set the tone for the year. In her view, circle

time and whole group problem solving is used as a classroom management tool. Rhonda and Whitney discussed having students work in pairs or in groups. Lorna talked about how she uses book buddies to develop relationships among classmates. Whitney, Lorna, and Rhonda believed that having students work together in pairs or small groups contributed to a sense of community in the classroom. Although all participants discussed posting student work, Lorna was the only one who linked this practice to a sense of community: “I tell my students, ‘This is your classroom and always do your best, because we’re going to put it up on the wall.’ That lets them know that it’s their classroom” (Interview #1, 7-17-2007). She valued students’ work. There’s a sense of equality and respect for all contributions in her descriptions of instruction related to community.

Community is related to trust. Rhonda and Whitney were the only two participants to mention trust as a requirement to building community in their classrooms. The trust was connected to the notion of establishing expectations about how students and teachers would work together: “They need to know, to trust that I’m going to do the things I say I’m going to do, and I expect them to do their part. I trust that they will do their part” (Rhonda, Interview #2, 10-25-2007). Whitney talked about her classroom “circle of trust” where students feel safe to share their thoughts and feelings, but also learn about their responsibility to the group (Interview #1, 5-22-2007). In their discussions, teachers and students have symbiotic roles based on situated meanings of trust: they help each other and they expect or trust each to do his/her part. Therefore, the trust is built based on the fulfillment of individual responsibility.

Community is related to developing student responsibility. Classroom management is a term that includes both how teachers organize learning activities, as well as, how teachers share responsibility of classroom routines. I discussed previously that all four participants related

management of instructional activities to community—usually referring to how desks were arranged or working in pairs or small groups. However, Lorna and Whitney also mentioned developing student responsibility in the classroom by assigning student classroom duties.

Lorna and Whitney are the younger of the two teachers. It is notable that these two participants, in particular, talked about classroom management (e.g., sharing responsibility for class routines) as related to community. Lorna specifically mentioned that her teacher preparation program contributed to her beliefs about creating a sense of community. This may reflect that teacher preparation programs have recently focused on community building in schools along with the trend of an interest in community building in the educational literature of the past 10 years (e.g., Baker, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997; Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Osterman, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1994).

The Teachers' Folk Theories

The teachers' discourse on community and community building revealed their folk theories that parenting is critical to children's learning and development. All four participants described how they remembered from their own schooling that parents respected a teacher's authority more than today. Some participants were sympathetic to the challenges of today's parenting, and other participants felt as if parents should do more to partner with schools to help their children learn. Two participants believed that parents were not supportive of their children's education because parents consider schoolwork to be less important than other issues (e.g., financial trouble, safety concerns) their family may face. The table that follows shows which themes were common among participants. A description of each theme follows the table.

Table 5.2

The Teachers' Folk Theories

<i>What are elementary teachers' folk theories about community or community building related to student learning and development?</i>				
Themes	Lorna	Patricia	Rhonda	Whitney
Parent Participation	Thinks parents are working and sometimes experience obstacles to partnering with schools	Helps her teaching if she knows the students' families	Thinks she's a better teacher because she knows the family's circumstances and areas of wealth and poverty Thinks students would learn more if parents helped with homework	Believes there is less parent participation in schools than in her past schooling Poor parents don't come to events because they don't appreciate education
Parents and Student Assessment		Thinks parents pressure students to make all "A"s without concern for student progress	Thinks parents seem to be concerned about grades and not necessarily learning. Thinks parents don't understand the goals of the school or how resources need to be spent	Thinks parents don't understand all the assessments the school uses

Parent participation. All four participants spoke about parent participation and longed for more cooperation of parents, in general. Lorna, Rhonda, and Whitney attributed low parental involvement to the students' families with low incomes. Rhonda said that she found parents would be involved if she knew them from outside the community or from having taught a sibling of the student previously. Whitney believed that the low-income attribute would predict whether or not parents would be involved in their child's education:

[In] our school, knowing where it was located, I thought we would have more parent participation. Even last year in my classroom, I had a couple of parents who didn't work and they were really involved in the classroom. But I was very disappointed, knowing that there are a lot of parents who could come and could do more, but just chose not to do more. (Interview #1, 5-22-2007)

Whitney didn't reveal her awareness of all of the reasons parents have for choosing to participate or not participate in school or classroom activities in the way she has planned. However, Rhonda speculated about the reasons for her perceived low participation of parents:

Times have changed. You know, I don't remember partners in education and, you know, I don't remember much community intervention because our parents took a lot of responsibility. That's the biggest thing I see, you know. We didn't have some of the parents home as much. You know, you had the mom and daddy. For instance, my dad always traveled, but I still knew he was the authority figure in the home, you know. What I see the major change is the way we parent our children. Do you see what I'm saying? And I think you see a lot of community involvement now because you don't have that parent. You know, there are a lot of children who, you know, mom is in jail and don't know where daddy is, and they might be living with grandma and so you have to have outside sources to maybe mentor these children. (Interview #1, 9-05-2007)

Rhonda's description shows how the larger cultural context affects her local definition of community and community building in schools. Societal changes in occupations, family structures, and the general "busy-ness" of today's world are factors affecting contemporary parenting.

Additionally, participants seem to be teacher-centered when it came to issues of building community and developing relationships with parents. In other words, teachers directed parents on how they should contribute to their child's learning. There was no mention of consulting with parents to promote a more two-way conversation allowing for parents' views and ideas on how they would like to contribute to their child's learning and how schools could help (Lewis & Henderson, 1998; Miretzky, 2004). Participants described distributing newsletters, scheduling

conferences, and planning school events as examples of engaging families in their students' learning. I believe that, to some degree, participants' past experiences (e.g., traditional and limited interactions with teachers) of schooling hinder their ability to encourage partnerships with parents in other ways than what is traditionally done (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Fendler, 2006).

Parents and student assessment. Except for Lorna, the other three teachers discussed parents in relation to assessing students. Lorna, the kindergarten teacher, performs assessments that are more performance-based and easier to communicate to parents, in her opinion: "During a parent conference, you can say, this is what your child can do and this is what he or she is still working on. It's a very easy assessment chart" (Interview #3, 12-04-2007). It is important to note that kindergarten does not participate in the state's end of grade tests or district benchmark tests. The other three participants, however, spoke about how parents are not as concerned about testing as they should be. For example, Rhonda thought that the school's location and the parent's level of education might be a factor:

Parents do not understand the importance of the CRCTs. Generally, the things that I hear parents complain about, in my mind, are irrelevant – you know the school's carpet is old, etc. I wonder if the reason parents don't get more into curriculum and standards is lack of education. In a rural area like this, I don't think we have very many professionals.
(Interview #2, 10-25-2007)

Patricia offered another explanation on why parents may seem disinterested:

Test, test, test. I think parents have a more difficult time understanding the whole assessment process. It's hard for them to tell which tests are important, because they get

information about so many. Testing is so important, but to parents, there's just no urgency about it. (Interview #3, 11-28-2007)

Participants reported that parents aren't worried about testing, but that they are worried about student grades. They seemed to be discouraged by parents' lack of understanding of assessment practices, but not willing to accept responsibility for communicating with parents on student assessment issues. Here, the increased focus on accountability in schools has limited participants' view on how parents may be involved in their child's education. The issue of assessment and accountability is discussed in the local context and is part of the larger national discourse on education. It is a tension that I will discuss further in the next section to show how the local and larger contexts contribute to teachers' conceptions of community building in schools and classrooms.

The Teachers' Tensions

As teachers discussed how they conceptualize community, a divide between teachers and families metaphorically occurred. Participants used words to denote an "us vs. them" relationship which I speculate is mostly about class and race. Participants seemed to preserve and perpetuate stereotypes about "at-risk" students. They believed "at-risk" students would benefit most from community building. They perceived low-income parents who often are cultural minority groups to be uninvolved and disinterested in the value of their child's education.

Some of these teachers' concerns and the tensions that I mention are quite possibly related. Sociohistorical factors such as the U. S. changing demographics, increased accountability in schools, and the need for schools as caring places have created tensions as teachers attempt to build community in schools. Participants discussed the local challenges of redistricting, dealing with diversity, facing pressures from NCLB, and creating much needed caring places for

students in uncertain times. The Table 5.3 shows common themes among participants.

Descriptions of each theme follow the table.

Table 5.3

The Teachers' Tensions

<i>How do teachers' definitions of community enable and confine their efforts? What tensions arise as they negotiate demands from local and larger contexts?</i>				
Themes	Lorna	Patricia	Rhonda	Whitney
Challenges that come with redistricting	<p>Thinks some teachers will have difficulty working with students who are different</p> <p>Was the only participant to discuss race in relation to community</p>	<p>Tries to look at "at-risk" students with the thought that she needs to give them what they need and treat them no differently because of their race and class</p> <p>Redistricting will pull kids away from their homes and neighborhoods</p>	<p>Believes the biggest challenge is that the school will receive a larger population of students coming from low-income families and are below grade level</p>	<p>Redistricting will pull kids away from their homes and neighborhoods</p> <p>Thinks the new students will be below grade level</p>
Dealing with diversity	<p>Is sensitive to class issues, discussing dressing up as to not intimidate parents and students</p>	<p>Thinks that it is good that students will be exposed to a more diverse student population</p>	<p>Thinks redistricting is good so that it will shake up the stereotypes of the school – the "word-of-mouth rankings"</p>	<p>Thinks that class, not race, is the issue that will be difficult for her</p>
Pressures from NCLB	<p>Helps her to know what to reteach and how to communicate progress to parents</p>	<p>Students are desensitized to testing</p> <p>Without competition (opposite to community as she described) students would be satisfied with mediocrity</p>	<p>Thinks students are less concerned about testing because too many chances to retake</p>	<p>Students are less concerned with tests than they used to be</p>
Rationale for providing caring environments	<p>Thinks early grades need more caring and nurturing classrooms</p>	<p>Wants to create a safe place for students, but also wants to communicate the "harsh realities" of life</p>	<p>Thinks teachers need to provide for students who are hungry and that students need supportive relationships because of poverty and other home situations</p>	<p>Speculates that it is a more violent world and that students are being exposed to more and more mature things through media</p>

Challenges that come with redistricting. Redistricting was necessary. The school system faced several years of increased growth as a suburb of a large city. Additionally, the school system was still under a federal court order from 1954 to desegregate. Lorna described how she was understanding the changes that redistricting would cause:

We have a lot of disappointed parents and disappointed staff because a lot of people when they signed their contracts wanted to teach in this community. Maybe that's what they felt comfortable doing. Now for me, it's the opposite. I came from teaching Head Start and I came from teaching special needs, so I've been exposed, but some teachers maybe weren't exposed to different communities. And that's fine. I really think that is fine – not anything negative to that teacher, but thinking about last Monday when I registered some children from different communities, it really opened my eyes. There are some challenges coming. Because you know that when you come from different communities your culture is different, your background is different, you know, economics may be different. (Interview #1, 7-17-2007)

Lorna felt that she was prepared to serve a diverse student population, in part because her teacher preparation program, but mostly because of her past teaching experiences. Whitney, however, was uncertain about what to expect when redistricting was accomplished, while speculating the role of socioeconomic class during the process:

I think that the community is split. I don't think we're in an area where you have way, way good parent participation and then I don't think we're in an area where you have no participation. I think it's kind of a mish-mash of different things. And then with redistricting next year I'm not really sure what that's going to bring because my kids, just my class this year, they divided up into four schools next year. It just kind of depends on

what the economics are, people's status of their jobs and everything else. (Interview #1, 5-22-2007)

Lorna and Whitney speculated about how their school's student population would change and predicted that there would be many students with learning difficulties and low parent participation. However, from a system-wide perspective, Rhonda pointed out how this would be good for the whole county:

You know what I think? To me, the biggest benefit of redistricting is that our schools don't seem to be stereotyped anymore. Like nobody wanted to go to THAT school. Everybody wanted to go to THIS school. And now I think we are all on a level playing field. (Interview #2, 10-25-2007)

An emerging model for this school system seems one that includes all of Peach County to be considered one system, one community, rather than several, competing, and smaller school communities. Teachers described that after his opening remarks, the Superintendent distributed red plastic bracelets that said "One Peach County" at the 2006-2007 Year Beginning Meeting.

Dealing with diversity. Participants discussed how they connected community to their teaching. Lorna emphasized knowing about the families of her students helped her make decisions about communication and instruction. She was aware of the racial, linguistic, and especially income differences of her students:

You can't come in and make your class feel intimidated by the way you dress. Like I wouldn't come in, wearing a lot of jewelry or a lot of make-up. So, in a different area if my children dress in this way, I may start to dress the way my kids or parents are dressed. Because I want to make the parents feel comfortable and welcome in my classroom. And

that doesn't mean you have to wear a \$200 pair of designer jeans, you know. (Interview #3, 12-04-2007)

Lorna desired to modify her practices in an effort to build relationships with parents and students. She reported that understanding how her students are diverse helped her connect with them. She considered that many teachers do not think as she does on relating to students of color or students with families of lower incomes.

In the teachers' conversations of redistricting and diversity, they expressed fear about not knowing what problems will come to the school and classroom. Their assumptions about crime and other societal issues resulted from having people from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds seem to be based on national or state media reports and not actual statistics from the local area. Meiners (2007) reported that the media indeed offers a misrepresentation of minority groups:

[Media] disproportionately use images of street crime that highlight African-Americans or Latinos as perpetrators... We need to both encourage and ensure that cultural critique and media analysis are perceived as central to teacher education because daily life in the classroom, from the policies that influence educational practices to teachers' everyday actions, is informed by media. (p. 25)

Whitney's description of teachers' attitudes about the impending redistricting were similar to Lorna's description:

I think a lot of teachers did come from the county when this school opened and they were not used to students who were different, and from different backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses – anything like that. And I think it has been a transition for some people. I don't know what the answer is to help that transition, but I think the more we

go, we're going to see people working together to help each other out or people just leaving and giving up. (Interview #1, 5-22-2007)

Nationally, too, teachers confront the challenges of connecting with students from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Whitney's assessment rings true for teachers who are not prepared to teach in ways that are responsive to the needs of all students. A report from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda echoed that new teachers feel that they are under-prepared to teach students with varied cultural backgrounds (Rochkind, Ott, Immerwahr, Doble, & Johnson, 2008).

Despite the school system's attempt to equally serve the elementary students of Peach County, Rhonda seemed skeptical about bussing students from one area of the county to another. Although in the same interview she supported the redistricting as a good thing that would break up stereotypes, Rhonda thought that residents should live close to schools their children attend: "This is my community. I know the parents. I know our superintendent, and he knows me. There's a lot to be said for living and working in the same place and it being a small community" (Interview #2, 10-25-2007). On issues of redistricting and diversity, Patricia voiced her opinions less. She remained positive and neutral when asked about the changes in the student population.

Pressures from NCLB. The focus on accountability in schools and with NCLB has caused school systems to test students more frequently and has caused teachers to feel as if they are test-focused rather than student-focused (Baker et al., 1997; Gruenewald, 2003; Hargraves, Earl, & Ryan, 1996; Levine, 2003). Patricia described her experience with testing and data collection from her 5th grade class:

Sometimes there's so much data, so much that you can't... I'm swamped! I can't get to it. I can't use it. It's not graded in time for me. On the same days that our CRCT scores, if they

would come back the next week, oh my goodness, imagine what we could do for that next month to help those children. But when they come back the last day of school or that last week of school, you've got four weeks left. Sometimes there are surprises because the kids you think would do very well, didn't. And even if they passed, they barely passed. There went four weeks you could have spent with them on intense training on particular skills. (Interview #3, 11-28-2007)

Patricia also felt as if, by the 5th grade, students were “desensitized” to testing; they didn’t take the end-of-grade test seriously anymore.

In contrast, Lorna’s response about assessment and community in her kindergarten class was that the NCLB accountability was helpful because now teachers would teach more closely to the curriculum. However, she thought the environment of testing becomes more stressful to parents who are just beginning to learn about the testing practices.

Both local and larger contexts were connected and affected the teachers’ discourse on community building in schools. Changing demographics and responding to the needs of all learners to eliminate achievement gaps have been part of the national discourse in education for the past many years (Harris & Herrington, 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Morris, 2004). In addition, educational researchers have been investigating the relationship between class size and student performance (Strike, 2008). Teachers in this local context voiced similar concerns about the achievement gap and proposed reducing class size as one of the ways to improve teaching and learning in their school:

Well, they took away the paraprofessionals in the lower grades. That is really going to affect how well kids do. Kindergartens, especially, need more supervision when they are learning to read, beginning to hold a pencil, you know. If they would reduce the class size, then

maybe it [teaching and assessing] would be a little more manageable. (Lorna, 12-04-2007)

Also, teachers were influenced by local policies (e.g., system-wide benchmark tests) about what a good teacher should do; assessment was the most emphasized task. As policy has been pushed down from the national level, to state and local systems, teachers felt the pressure.

Rationale for providing caring environments. The participants agreed that a caring community was essential to the early grades classroom environment. Participants compared their classrooms to families and safe havens. Lorna said, “I really try to make them feel like part of the community because of the pressures that are just out there” (Interview #1, 7-17-2007).

Participants felt that students needed caring, nurturing classrooms for learning because students are exposed to a more violent world than in past times. Recent violent events (e.g., shootings at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech, Terrorist Attack on 9-11-2002) colored participants’ views about building community. Their discourse collectively expressed a sense that school may be the only place where many students, especially those students from low-income families, may experience caring. This was a strong reason teachers built a sense of community in their schools. Lastly, considering the theme related to teachers providing caring communities, the national discourse on preventing school violence and assisting students that are at-risk (e.g., Smith & Sandhu, 2004; Voison, 2007) may contribute to teachers’ local rationale for community building in schools. Unfortunately, local teachers’ discourse did not include involving parents in a coordinated or consistent way.

Summary of the Findings

Situated meanings influenced by a sociohistorical context were shared in the process of interviewing. The sociohistorical context is complex involving teachers' personal and professional experiences, histories of the school and community, and the current school context. Situated meanings that seemed to reoccur as I analyzed the data contributed to my ideas on the cultural models that were working in the participants' lives and in the practice of teaching. The cultural models found are organized in the subheadings of values, beliefs, and identities presented in the sections that follow.

I note that values, beliefs, and identities are not as easy to separate as I may imply. Each concept is intertwined and linked with daily practices of living—"acting-interacting-feeling-emoing-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-knowing-speaking-listening" (Gee, 1999, p. 38). Teacher beliefs are part of a belief system that, as Pajares (1992) described, included attitudes and values that are acted upon through an identity. He urged researchers to "study the context-specific effects of beliefs in terms of these connections [the broader belief system]" (p. 326). Recognizing that values, beliefs, and identities are inherently connected and best understood in relation to the local context, I use the subheadings here to organize and summarize noteworthy findings from this chapter.

Values

Teachers value the pursuit and attainment of education for themselves and for their students. They value the idea of community building in schools which is connected to national discourse on community building in schools related to teacher learning communities, student learning communities, and family and community involvement in schools (e.g., Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001; Osterman, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2004; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2007).

Given the fact that all participants reported that living in the district or in the nearby geographic location to the school helps define the community, the teachers seem to value a kind of community school. They valued the fact that students could play on the playgrounds of the school after school hours; that families lived closer to the school and the school was more accessible; and that students were not on the buses for long lengths of time traveling to and from school.

Beliefs

From this study, there were some common beliefs that emerged. All four participants believed that having a smaller class size would contribute to a sense of community. The current research supports that building a sense of community improves student learning (Osterman, 2000); a sense of community may be the missing component from research that looks for direct relationships between student learning and class size. Another common belief shared by teachers was that families with lower incomes and cultural minority groups who come from a particular geographic area of the county, in general, show less parent involvement. This belief of lack of parental support in their schools and classrooms is a barrier to teachers' efforts to form relationships and a sense of community with parents from diverse backgrounds (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Such relationship-building practices as contacting parents by phone, email, or home visits, and providing and planning parent events at the school, take time that teachers report they do not have. Teachers believe that in the era of accountability, collecting and analyzing student achievement data has become more important than other teacher duties such as involving parents and building community.

Although current circumstances make community building more difficult, past experiences influence teachers' beliefs as well. Teachers' past experiences of schooling

contribute to for and against traditional practices of schooling. However, teachers reported that their teaching would change based on the community where they taught. Teachers' beliefs have the potential to change, if provided experiences that cause them to reflect on their practices in relation to students' learning and development.

Identities

Identity can be defined as the type of person an individual is recognized as being in a given context (Gee, 1999). For teachers, a professional teaching identity often includes “a strong personal commitment towards their profession” and is involved with “human nurturance and connectedness” (O'Connor, 2008, p. 118). Teachers use their identity to make choices about how they teach and how (or if) they will build community. But also, the local context affects how teachers create their professional identity. Alsup (2006) described that “a teacher's identity is a weaving together of various subjectivities or understandings of self as expressed through genres of discourse and influenced by multiple life experiences” (p. 42).

In this study, I listened to how teachers described themselves. Their discourse on community and community building in schools communicated their values and beliefs about teaching. As colleagues, the participants communicated the fact that teachers know what they are supposed to do and wanted to communicate professionalism to me as a colleague. I believe in many ways, teachers were more open with me because I was one of them—a teacher from their school. However, the fact that the teachers knew I was working on my dissertation and would be writing about their stories may have skewed their responses to reflect the positive, idealistic side of teaching and building community, and unintentionally stifled some of their challenges or concerns.

I noticed that, considering contributions for all participants, there was very little discussion of the relation between race/ethnicity and community. In general, these issues were not discussed in depth, if only to say that there wasn't a problem related to race or ethnicity. Rather, the focus was on class differences. I interpreted this silence on race to mean that building community in their classrooms was not dependent on or modified for white students or students of color. In other words, perhaps teachers applied their philosophy for community building in one way and did not consider how race/ethnicity may affect one's conception of community. Teachers who construct community with this colorblind approach do not see a relationship between community and race/ethnicity. Because there was no mention of how to connect with different cultures or mention of their own "social positionality" (Howard, 1999), except by one African American teacher, Lorna, it could be that the participants are unaware of their place in this school as related to the evolving school and community culture and unaware of their race/ethnicity in relation to community and community building in schools.

On a positive note, when speaking of community, it was clear that teachers in this local context were influenced by the Professional Learning Communities book study that the principal led in 2005-2006. This shows that teachers are receptive to learning more about improving their practice in a collegial environment.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS: TALKING AND WALKING

Community building from Dewey's (1900) perspective was a way to "enlarge" the "range of the outlook" for schools (p. 7). Imagine the possibilities, so to speak, and involve all stakeholders to participate in the brainstorming for the improvement of schools. How can community building in schools help students, families, and communities who have different values and beliefs to achieve what they envision schooling to be? It's a challenging question.

For this dissertation, I chose not to consider community a "common sense" solution or an "ideal" in early childhood education. The interpretivist perspective brings certain assumptions to understanding the meaning of community. To begin, there is the assumption that our ideas about community are socially created. In this study, the idea of community was discussed and reflected upon in an effort to explore how elementary teachers make sense of the notion of community building in schools. Furthermore, ideas of community are historically bound and influenced by a larger cultural context, by a local cultural context, and through social institutions, particularly in U. S. public schools. For example, Apple Elementary School teachers create constructs of community while experiencing America's changing demographics, the trend of academic accountability in schools, and a focus on creating schools as caring places. Additionally, through their talk, they define and redefine their constructs of community in the local school setting. This study attempted to take into account the context in which they come to know community. And finally, the interpretivist perspective assumes that the socially constructed, situated meanings

will always be problematic because interpretations are sometimes contradictory, and continually reinterpreted through our ever-changing cultural contexts (Bruner, 1996; Rogoff, 2003).

Language plays a key role in the production and reproduction of local cultures and is important to the process of learning: “Language is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience becomes knowledge” (Halliday, 1993, p. 94). Teachers use language to construct their knowledge of community as they interact with colleagues and families. Ideally, they also use language to build caring and democratic learning communities for their students.

A basic property of such communities is that they have some shared understanding of the situation and activity in which they are jointly engaged. This does not mean that they all agree, but that they agree to try to understand each other to become mutually involved. They essentially agree to be parts of the same social mind for a period of time. (Johnston, 2004, p. 65)

So, language is a tool that is central to community building on many levels. Attending to language in these processes of teaching and learning tells something about the cultural values that are being formed, reproduced, and transmitted to students through the schooling experience (Gee, 1999; Gutiérrez, 2002; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

This study examined how community is talked about and what the elementary teachers’ discourse on community reveals about their folk pedagogies and conceptions of community building in schools and classrooms. The following discussion outlines the findings of this study and contributes to an understanding of community from the perspective of four teachers in one local school context. Recognizing the teachers’ tensions, struggles, and challenges of building

community provides implications for teachers, teacher educators, school administrators, and educational researchers of contemporary U.S. public schools.

Discussion

Everyday talk and practice can become so routine that a teacher's hidden assumptions and beliefs are not challenged or critically examined. As Gunzelmann (2008) urged, educators should "remain open-minded to the possibility of questioning our policies and practices" for the benefit of our students (p. 86). Examining teacher discourse and highlighting teachers' folk pedagogies about community building is one way of challenging taken-for-granted practice. In the following sections, I revisit the four teachers' definitions of community, their folk theories, and their tensions that arose in their discussions of community building in schools in order to situate these teachers' views in the larger discourse on education in the contemporary United States, reveal their hidden assumptions, and explore their imagining of possibilities.

Teachers' Definitions of Community Revisited

Part of the teachers' definitions of community was clearly connected to McMillian and Chavis's (1986) geographic construct of community. Teachers talked about community in relation to places and expressed their concerns about students and families who live farther from the schools. Teachers' conceptions of community were also connected to McMillian and Chavis's relational construct of community. For example, all teachers discussed feeling a sense of community through their colleague relationships. Patricia, Rhonda, and Whitney talked about positives of their long-standing relationships with community members and school staff. In addition, teachers' discussion about community revealed their concern for providing a "caring" and safe environment (Marri, 2005) for today's students in general and for those considered "at-risk" in particular.

The teachers' discourse on community was limited in that they rarely talked about community building as "a process" (Furman, 2004) through which people from diverse backgrounds work together for a shared goal, solve problems, and come to a consensus. Although they talked about the importance of creating caring classroom communities, teachers' discussion revealed deficit views of students from low-income families and cultural minority groups. What was missing in the teachers' discourse is the concept of community for democracy envisioned by Dewey (1900) and promoted in many related texts (Cairney, 2000; Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001; Miretzsky, 2004; Marri, 2005). As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Dewey's notion of community building in schools is connected to his vision for enlarging the possibilities for schools. This conception is clearly connected to Dewey's (1916) ideal of democracy that involves conflict resolution among people with diverse experiences and perspectives. If Dewey's vision is to be realized, we need to support the expansion of teachers' discourse on community by bringing inadvertent discriminatory assumptions and beliefs about students from low-income families and cultural minority groups (Cobb-Roberts et al., 2006; Fendler, 2006) to the teachers' consciousness. We need to create contexts in which teachers have opportunities for perspective-taking and developing insights about diverse aspects of their students' communities.

Teachers' Folk Theories Revisited

Teachers expected parents to attend school functions, supervise homework, and generally support the learning goals of the school. This cultural model defines parent participation in school related activities as critical to student learning and development. However, teachers' discussion about the role of parents in their child's learning neglected the importance of building genuinely cooperative and bi-directional relationships between teachers and parents (Miretzky,

2004). Such relationships are crucial to students as they provide a source of connections, information, and understandings that parents and teachers can draw on to help their children succeed (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Lewis & Henderson, 1998). Instead of recognizing the importance of learning from diverse families through these reciprocal relationships, the teachers' discourse revealed their expectation that parents adopt and assimilate into school activities and perspectives (Sergiovanni, 1994).

In addition to teachers' folk theories, the increased focus on testing locally and the larger, national attention toward accountability in today's schools (Gruenewald, 2003) have affected the ways that teachers think about parental involvement. Teachers' discussion of parents' concerns for grades and testing showed that teachers are discouraged by parents' lack of understanding about assessment, more precisely about standardized testing in schools. Yet, teachers were not willing to accept responsibility for communicating with parents about testing procedures and their potential impact on students' learning and progress. Rather than discussing their role in proactive communication, teachers described parents and community members as lacking in understanding of or agreement for what is best for their children. This school- and teacher-centered perception about parent roles in student learning and development prevents the teachers from truly recognizing "parents as a child's first teachers" (Powell, 1990, p. 3). Instead, the teachers' folk theories place parents, particularly those from culturally and economically different backgrounds than the teacher's own, in the position of clients who need education from the expert teacher (Lubeck, 1994).

Teachers' Tensions Revisited

As America's population becomes increasingly diverse (Hodgkinson, 2001), educators face a huge challenge to build community in schools and connect with students and families

from varied cultural backgrounds. This larger discourse about changing demographics coupled with local and national pressure for accountability influenced the participant teachers' views on their work with students from diverse backgrounds. For example, teachers expressed concerns about the school system's plan to redraw attendance zones and speculated that AES would see an increase of students from low-income families and cultural minority groups who perform below grade-level. Locally, AES as a choice school began to serve more African American students from low-income families because a neighboring school did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for two years in a row. Part of the teachers' speculation was based on serving students from the low-performing school in the year that this study was conducted. Given the nation-wide pressure for accountability under the No Child Left Behind Act, teachers were likely concerned that AES might not make AYP with the changes in student population. I believe that the national discourse on the achievement gap (Harris & Herrington, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006) also contributed to the teachers' ideas about students' academic performance.

Although local and larger discourses and contexts contribute to teachers' tensions, the participant teachers had personal experiences and perspectives on community that they could have utilized for their work with students from diverse backgrounds. For example, Lorna, as a minority student, experienced how race could influence a sense of community in schools. Patricia and Rhonda attended racially segregated schools during their childhood and reported socioeconomic differences between their teachers and themselves as students. Whitney acknowledged how having her father as a school administrator increased teachers' expectations on her performance in school. Given these personal experiences, it is interesting to note that the teachers did not articulate on the structural and systemic inequalities in both historical and contemporary U.S. public schools in general and in the public schools they had experienced in

the South in particular. Although nostalgically shared, the teachers neither critically reflected on nor tapped into their personal experiences to develop empathy for students from different cultural and economic backgrounds and to recognize the strengths and resources that these students bring to the classroom environment. Instead, teachers talked about their rationale for providing classroom communities, as if school was the only place for students, particularly those from low-income and cultural minority groups, to feel a sense of belonging. The local cultural model about building community illustrated by these teachers is that a sense of community is most advantageous to those students who are considered “at-risk.”

Implications

Taking for granted the notions about community (to believe that it is necessarily good) and defining community in such way that is normalized and therefore differences are not appreciated, does not seem to match the ideal of community building in schools. Efforts to build a common language and communicate diverse ideas and goals are hard to achieve, but nonetheless, a worthy pursuit. Bruner (1996) described a “possible world” where diversity is valued: “I see debate and negotiation, again openly pursued, as the enemy of hegemony—whether related to gender, race, ethnic origin, religion, or just brute force” (p. 96). If *this* kind of community is a possibility, certainly teachers should play a role in creating it and school should be the context where it thrives. In what follows, I describe several suggestions for teacher educators, school administrators, and educational researchers to continue the process of building community in schools for teachers, students, and families.

Teacher Education and Professional Development

In light of the limiting ways teachers in this study defined community, teacher education and professional development could target providing experiences that would help teachers

expand their thinking on the definitions of community. Such learning activities would help teachers to consider multiple constructs of community and reflect on the with opportunities and constraints offered by varying definitions.

Teachers need opportunities to explore the ways in which national and local discourses on community constrain their vision of what building community means. Adding to teachers' understanding of a geographic construct of community, teachers could begin to understand how community can be defined in terms of a process rather than a product. They can begin to see how relational constructs of community are inclusive and discriminating at the same time. Teachers may begin to reflect on the situated meanings and cultural models at play in their schools and classrooms to determine what constructs of community are needed to provide structures that support educational equity.

Teacher educators and professional development providers should consider how teachers may develop a professional identity that encourages teachers' self-efficacy and sense of agency in creating and promoting fair and just learning environments. As teachers reflect on the privileges, assumptions, and advantages that they have, they can begin to see the resources and relationships that they possess to promote educational equality as well as the resources or "funds of knowledge" of their students (Moll et al., 1992). Teachers need training in how to use their knowledge of students to improve their instruction and build reciprocal relationships with parents and families (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Lewis & Henderson, 1998).

Also, seeing parents as partners in student learning will help teachers deconstruct the notion of the "needy" and "at-risk" student that was characterized by participants of this study. Beth Swadener (1995) suggested changing the at-risk discourse to a discourse of promise:

The notion of children and families being “at-risk” has indeed become a cliché in a number of professional and public discourses...We do children, families, and entire groups of people a disservice in our persistent overuse and trivialization of this construct. By suggesting an alternative “at-promise” view, I have attempted to convey the importance of considering the possibilities in all children and the promise of partnerships with parents and community members of diverse backgrounds. (p. 41)

In an effort to promote critical evaluation of the “at-risk” term and other discourse reflected in national media, teachers can learn about alternative and critical views that do more to contribute to positive interactions with students and families from diverse backgrounds.

Additionally, teacher educators can think about ways to prepare preservice teachers in the area of developing school-university-community partnerships, especially with students and parents of diverse cultural backgrounds. Teacher education programs may continue or begin to make available coursework and interactions that encourage preservice and inservice teachers to examine their racial/ethnic/cultural identity and their “social positionality” (Howard, 1999) in relation to their views of students, the community, and the world. It is important to support preservice teachers in developing habits of mind and practices that they carry into community building efforts in diverse classrooms and schools.

Furthermore, in teacher education programs, field placements during student teaching assignments can facilitate critical thinking and reflection on the relationship between culture and learning. Bruner (1996) wrote: “Beliefs and assumptions about teaching, whether in a school or any other context, are a direct reflection of the beliefs and assumptions the teacher holds about the learner” (p. 47). Innovative programs for learning pedagogy in context should be explored, so

that school staff, community members, parents, and future teachers can come together to promote a broad vision for the education of their students and for building community in schools.

School Administration and Leadership

For the educational leader, findings from this dissertation may propel her professional development in a direction that helps her provide a sense of community for students, parents, and community members in her school. Additionally, administrators and teachers may become more aware of their “everyday intuitive theories” about how children learn through professional learning activities. Such theories require critical review that helps teachers expand their thinking in order to change restricting teaching practices. In light of the findings from this study, teachers learn best with supportive and collaborative relationships with colleagues. Further, there was some evidence that teachers would be receptive to implementing professional learning communities (PLCs) as a process for continuous professional development. PLCs may provide a venue for teachers’ discussion on meeting the needs of diverse learners in the authentic context of their school and problem solving for the issues that are relevant to their school and community (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2007).

Lave and Wenger (1991) provide a framework for learning in social contexts that would help teachers and administrators recognize local resources for their instruction. At the center of this framework is the concept of “community of practice”, a social group engaged in the sustained pursuit of a shared goal. Practices are ways of negotiating meaning through social action. Professional development based on this framework could support teachers to learn about ways of improving their schools and creating a professional identity with a sense of agency and empowerment to achieve the shared goals they envision.

School administrators and central office staff need to develop a network of community resources and a structure for communication that allows for participation from all community stakeholders including community leaders, business partners, teachers, families, and students. If Dewey's (1900) idea for the connection between community and school is to be actualized, schools should be proactive to elicit ideas from these multiple stakeholders in the community. Although the participants from this study acknowledged an awareness of several resources in the Peach County community, they did not express how they would use such resources to improve instruction and student learning. A network of community and school administrative support could help teachers identify and make use of the resources in their local community to provide meaningful learning experiences for students and families.

Despite the current emphasis on accountability in schools, administrators and educational leaders can make conscious effort to move beyond the discourse of the achievement gap and focus on utilizing resources to fund the educational debt owed to students. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2007) challenged the current educational discourse and the focus on deficit:

The current concern with an achievement gap is substantive and semantic, does not take into account the other gaps that plague the lives of poor children of color, and suggests that children fail because the parents do not care, the children do not have enough experiences, the children are not ready for school, their families do not value education, and they are coming from a culture of poverty. It is time to challenge the inherent fallacies and place students' academic struggles in the larger context of social failure, including health, wealth, and funding gaps that impede their school success. (p. 316)

School administrators and district leaders need to bring attention to structural and systemic barriers that prevent a certain group of students from being successful in school. For example,

they may make local spending decisions based on the needs of the community and the needs of the local school to improve student learning and eradicate the achievement gaps that currently exist.

Future Research

The case study provides a useful method for studying issues, such as unpacking meanings and taken-for-granted notions, in local settings. Findings from a particular case study do not provide the basis to generalize conclusions. However, I believe further research in the form of replicated case studies allows researchers to compare case studies to form conclusions with broad implications.

In relation to community building in schools, future research will need to involve perspectives of students, parents, community members, and school administrators in order to fulfill Dewey's (1900) ideal of school and community. Such research will allow educators and educational researchers to compare the points of views held by the various members of the community and understand where common understandings exist and where further clarification and negotiation is needed about the conceptions of community. Instead of assuming shared meanings and beliefs, I think the understanding of multiple stakeholders' notions of community should be the first step towards building community in schools. In addition, case studies in several locations within and outside the United States will help educational researchers see how local and larger sociohistorical contexts influence study participants' views on community and community building in schools. All of these voices will contribute to new ways of thinking about building community in schools and broaden the meaning of community for all involved.

In Closing

The ideals of community become another discourse to include or exclude, to make free or to control, to categorize or to unite. Perhaps the findings of this exploratory study will inspire participant teachers and readers to reflect and question their interpretations of community and consider how they choose to talk about and enact community building in schools. Upon much reflection, I believe that community building in schools is not the answer to our educational challenges, but rather is a point of departure for questioning contentious issues in our lives, so we can learn about others, ourselves, and negotiate the complexities of our world.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "UNPACKING THE DISCOURSE OF COMMUNITY: TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATOR PERSPECTIVES" conducted by Barbara Hicks from the Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education at the University of Georgia (706-769-2492) under the direction of Dr. Kyunghwa Lee, Department of Elementary and Social Studies Education, University of Georgia (542-4244). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The study is a qualitative study examining how teachers and administrators define community and how they talk about community in relation to the classroom, the school, and beyond.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

If I am a teacher,

- 1) I will be asked questions about my practices and beliefs related to the concept of community.
- 2) I will participate in 3 interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes each. The interviews will be scheduled approximately 2 weeks apart.
- 3) I will participate in 1 focus group interview.

If I am an administrator,

- 1) I will be asked questions about my practices and beliefs related to the concept of community.
- 2) I will participate in 1 interview lasting approximately 30 minutes.

No payment, gifts, or extra credit will be exchanged.

This research will provide administrators and teachers an opportunity to voice their ideas and opinions related to the concept of community and share their concerns about meeting the needs of children from diverse cultural backgrounds. This research will contribute to the field of practice of community-building in school.

No risk to the participants is anticipated. Pseudonyms will be used on cassette labels, in transcripts, and for the report of this study. Results of analysis will be available to participants upon request.

No information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Barbara P. Hicks

Telephone: 706-769-2492, 706-614-5647cell

Email: bhicks@uga.edu

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

I also give the researcher permission to use audio records on her presentation at professional conferences.

Barbara P. Hicks

Signature

Date

Telephone: 706-769-2492, 706-614-5647cell

Email: bhicks@uga.edu

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX B

Dissertation Study Timeline

Task	Goal Date for Completion	Completed?
1. Participants selected.	September 1 st , 2007	Yes
2. First Round Interviews with 4 teachers/Transcribe data	September 10 th , 2007	Yes
3. Attend key information events	ongoing	Some events attended, more upcoming
4. Analyze 1 st Round Data and prepare/adjust questions for next round of interviews	September 15, 2007 (writing group meeting)	Yes
5. Second Round Interviews with 4 teachers/Transcribe data	November 1, 2007	Yes
6. Analyze 2 nd Round Data and prepare/adjust questions for next round of interviews	November 15, 2007	Yes
7. Third Round interviews with 4 teachers and administrator of school history and county context/Transcribe data	December 20, 2007	Yes
8. Complete revisions on prospectus from committee feedback due to Dr. Lee	January 21, 2007	Yes
9. Analyze 3 rd Round Data and prepare for Focus Group Interview	February 15, 2008	Yes
10. Continue writing and analysis. Develop outline for the rest of the dissertation.	February 15, 2008	Yes
11. Complete graphic organizer of common themes and determine how data answers research questions. Develop action plan for next data collection (focus group or follow-up individual interviews based on analysis)	February 15, 2008 <i>(writing group meets Feb. 16)</i>	Yes
12. Follow-up data collection (focus group or individual interviews)	March 1 st , 2008	Yes

13. Analyze data from focus group or interviews.	March 8, 2008 <i>(writing group meets March 8)</i>	Yes
14. Intensive data analysis continues. Intensive writing begins.	April 1, 2008 – September 1, 2008 <i>(writing group meets April 5 & April 26)</i>	Yes
15. Writing, member-checking, and revision. Submit draft to Dr. Lee	July 15, 2008	Yes
16. Revision suggestions from Dr. Lee completed. Submit copy of dissertation to committee.	September 1, 2008	Yes
17. Defense of dissertation (open invitation to grad students and faculty)	September 20, 2008	Yes
18. Receive revision suggestions. Revise draft.	October 20, 2008	Yes
19. Submit commencement info. to Grad School	November 7, 2008 <i>(Grad School Deadline)</i>	Yes
20. Submit draft to Grad School for format check electronically.	November 17, 2008 <i>(Grad School Deadline)</i>	Yes
21. Graduate School deadline for submitting final copy of dissertation	December 8, 2008 <i>(Final date for corrected dissertation and defense form)</i>	Yes
22. Graduation	December 19, 2008	Yes

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Unpacking the Discourse on Community: Four Elementary Teachers' Perspectives

Interview Protocol:

Teacher Background (Round 1)

- Describe your earliest experiences of school.
- Describe the community in those experiences (urban, rural, suburban).
- Where did you grow up? What was it like?
- What relationships did you see between community and school?

- Tell me about your teaching experience.
- Describe details about your family and culture.
- Describe your teaching experiences.
- Describe your community at present.
- What relationships do you see between community and school?
- How are you informed by these relationships? Does it affect your teaching? Do you have social networks that help your understanding of children and teaching/learning?
- What are the challenges and/or benefits related to teaching in the same community?

If where the teacher lives is different from the school where teaching, then:

- Tell me about how you came to accept this teaching position at this school.
- What are the challenges and/or benefits related to teaching in a different community?

- What relationships do you see between community and school?
- Do you think you felt a sense of community in your classroom/school growing up?

Introductory (Round 1)

- How do you think of the term community?
- What kinds of things do you think about when you say or hearing community?
- People talk about community in many different ways, what does community mean to you?
- What kinds of things do you do to build the kind of community that you envision?

Professional and Classroom Practices (Round 2)

- Do you focus on trying to build a sense of community in your classroom?
- If so, why do you think it's important? How does it help teaching and learning?

- If not, what are the important things you focus on in the classroom? How do (the important things named) help teaching and learning?
- Thinking about your instructional strategies, which methods do you use and why?
- Thinking about your discipline or behavior plan, what methods do you use and why?
- Thinking about your overall classroom management, what methods do you use and why?
- Additional questions may be developed from the first interview theme(s).

Changing Demographics of Students and Families (Round 3)

- Do you communicate with students families?
- Tell me about the typical ways you communicate with families.
- Tell me about an unusual circumstance that you communicated with families.
- How do you think community members should be involved in a school, and/or students' learning?
- Describe the demographics of your students this year.
- Have you seen a change in demographics? If so, why do you think?
- Is your teaching impacted by changing demographics? If so, how?
- Is student learning impacted by changing demographics? If so, how?
- What challenges related to the changes in student demographics have you faced?
- What are the benefits of the changes in student demographics?
- Additional questions may be developed from the first interview theme(s).

Era of Accountability (Round 4)

- Describe the assessment policies and practices in your school and classroom.
- What are the challenges and benefits of the assessment policies and practices?
- How are students impacted by the assessment policies and practices?
- How is your teaching impacted by the assessment policies and practices?
- How is a sense of community (in schools and classrooms) impacted by the assessment policies and practices?
- Additional questions may be developed from the first interview theme(s).

Need for Caring in Schools (Round 5)

- Thinking about the school's policy for providing safe schools, do you think the policy is appropriate? Why or why not?
- What issues of safety have you confronted during your teaching experience? at this school?
- What do you speculate about the reason for an emphasis on safety in schools?
- How do you provide a safe classroom?
- How safe do you perceive your students feel? Why do you think so? What have you observed?
- Additional questions may be developed from the first interview theme(s).

Follow-Up to explore previous concepts given in responses (Round 5)

- Questions may vary dependent on previous data collection.

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Questionnaire

NAME: _____

1. Current Position
2. Years at present position
3. where you live currently
4. Other teaching experience and years at each position, where you lived at each position
5. Age
6. Gender
7. Ethnicity/Race
8. Degrees (name of degree and institution)
9. Religious Affiliation, if any
10. Briefly what your philosophy of teaching is – bullet form, big ideas
11. Why you became a teacher – bullet form, big ideas

Questions for focus group – Saturday, 1pm

What questions do I have for focus group?

- related to at-risk students – literature supports deficit-view
- how do previous experiences affect what you do (teaching)?
- Living in the community –
- At risk students
- Past experiences of school
- how do teachers envision the future of education, ideal community?
- how do teachers envision the role of parents, families, and caregivers?

Plan to link autobio of participants to larger cultural issues-

For example: - caring in schools (sensitivity to violence), accountability
discourse/pressures, changing demographics in southeast & US

Explore teachers' notions of (assumptions about) parents' role

- what is role, duty
- who are the parents
- which are involved/not involved
- what do they see the reasons behind parent involvement
- Discuss the changing expectation of family/ caregivers (from past to now)

APPENDIX E

Pilot Study Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. History of the community and the school

- How has this town and county changed and tried to build community under the changing conditions and school population?
- What is “One Walton County” all about?

2. School choice

- How do you think school-of-choice affects your ability to create community?

3. Teachers’ efforts to create a sense of community

- Describe communication between home and school? When do you communicate, and how? How do you incorporate parents concerns or hopes in your teaching?
- What are the community resources do you utilize in your teaching? Is there something you would like to use in future?
- What activities do your students participate in at the school, in the community? What are the important for places for students in the community?
- What challenges do you face when relating to your students and families? How do you overcome?
- What professional development courses or experiences would you like to have to help you work with students and families?
- How do you think students are learning cooperation and collaboration in your class/school?
- What are the things that you do to cultivate cooperation and collaboration? Are there things that the schools do to promote it?
- What can schools do to promote cooperation and collaboration?

4. Sense of evaluation, effects

- How do you think students make sense of the notion of community?

APPENDIX F

Notes on Initial Analysis from Pilot Study

<u>Mark</u> -male, masters degree -4 years exp.	<u>Whitney</u> -female, masters degree -1 yr exp.	<u>Sara</u> -female, bachelors degree -13 years exp.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional learning communities • Tolerance theme in community building • Accepting of differences with intellectual abilities • Notion of helping others • Community as context for setting expectations • Individuals' personality contributes to community • Structure of groups related to community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notion of helping others • Community as a way to interact with people • Way of organizing groups • Professional connections: sharing ideas • Context for setting expectations • "helping a community staying a community" through rules • sense of individual responsibility, trust • related to climate, a place where students can be successful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professional learning communities • within the classroom, participation and voice • notion of helping others • organization or structure of learning groups • neglecting social skills, focusing on content • context for setting expectations • individuals' personality contributes to community