

HOW AN EXCEPTIONAL ELEMENTARY PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER  
NAVIGATES HER WORKING ENVIRONMENT AS THE TEACHER OF A MARGINAL  
SUBJECT

by

KAREN MARIE LUX

(Under the Direction of Bryan A. McCullick)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze how one exceptional elementary physical education teacher navigates her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. Specific research questions guiding the study were: (a) What is the context/working environment of an exceptional PE teacher who has managed teaching a marginal subject? (b) What are and how does she interpret verbal and non-verbal messages, actions, and symbols in her working environment about her subject matter and its place in the school environment? (c) What are and how does she interact with administrators, colleagues, parents, and students in her working environment? (d) What are the navigational strategies an exceptional physical educator employs to manage the marginality of her subject matter?

Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) and Marginality Theory (Grant & Breese, 1997) were utilized to make meaning of how the teacher navigated the marginality in her working environment. Data collection lasted 11 weeks spending 8 hours each day three days a week with the teacher using observation and interviews. Field notes were collected during the observations and the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Data trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checks and a peer debriefer. Inductive analysis of the data generated themes arising from the observations and interviews pertaining to Structuration Theory

(Giddens, 1984) and Marginality Theory (Grant & Breese, 1997; Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935). It was discovered that the teacher navigated marginality using four strategies: (a) “Getting In,” (b) “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency,” (c) “Nurturing and Cultivating Kinship with a Paraprofessional,” and (d) “Selectively Initiating and Fostering Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym.” The teacher enacted these strategies using 16 tactics and 24 micro-behaviors collectively to form a comprehensive plan to navigate marginality.

Findings indicated that the teacher responded to marginality with a variety of reactions resulting in an overall emissarial approach. Two simple implications have emerged regarding the navigation of marginality. First, a physical educator must be an effective teacher and second, be a diplomatic professional. Findings from this study have additional implications for the preparation of teachers, National Standards, and formalized mentoring programs.

INDEX WORDS: marginality, Physical Education Teacher Education, National Board certification, exceptional teaching

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“Thank goodness they have your class today; I need my planning time. I need my break.”; “Get their energy out...I can’t get them to do anything in the classroom!”; “What are we going to play today?”; “We are going to have an assembly in the gym. But, it doesn’t matter; its just PE and you can teach that somewhere else, right?”*

Above are just some examples of comments that physical education (PE) teachers hear from other teachers, students, and administrators working in schools. While these comments were not meant to offend, they communicate an underlying message that the purpose of PE is to serve more important work that happens in the classroom or that physical education serves the purpose only of energy expenditure to facilitate learning of classroom material and not the learning of skills, knowledge, and dispositions by students. It conveys a perception of PE as organized recess or ‘play’ with little structure, intent, and meaning. Thus, those who teach PE are teaching a subject that is firmly positioned on the margins of school life. This position has implications for the profession in terms of those who teach it, the preparation of teachers and its very existence as a viable school subject. Because of this, it is essential that those concerned with the quality and existence of physical education investigate this marginality and how those who succeed in spite of it experience it. This proposed study aims to do just that.

#### Marginality as a Social Construct

Through the examination and critical perspective of Marginality Theory, originally offered by Park (1928) and Stonequist (1935), scholars have clarified and redefined the theory. From this, it seems an understanding of Marginality Theory includes not only the life cycle and

personality characteristics of the marginal individual but also the importance of how the marginal individual perceives and reacts to this marginality.

Marginality is a social phenomenon that refers to being assigned low status or positioning within a social group or culture that is outside of central importance or functioning. This experience can apply to any individual, group, race, or culture whose qualities and norms are in contrast to that which is dominant in an environment. Inquiry into this phenomenon began with the seminal works of Park (1928) and Stonequist (1935) in the conceptualization of the theory of the 'Marginal Man'. Through their identification and articulation of this social phenomenon, Park and Stonequist described marginalized individuals as those holding a status that is between two incompatible social categories. The authors discussed this in the context of different cultural groups (such as African-American males) while arguing that certain personality characteristics develop in individuals that experience the social phenomenon of marginality. Following this, other scholars built on this line of inquiry, examined, and reformulated the concepts offered by Park and Stonequist resulting in an evolution of Marginality Theory. Specifically, scholars expanded on how marginal individuals construct and experience marginality including the presentation of possible reactions to the phenomenon.

A significant feature of Marginality Theory that has evolved since 1935 is the notion of how those who are marginalized respond to their status. Grant & Breese (1997) offered that there are several possible reactions individuals may demonstrate in response to experiencing marginality within a social organization. Grant & Breese identified these as: affected, emulative, defiant, emissarial, withdrawn, balanced, paradoxical, and uninvolved. When applied to PE teachers, for example, these reactions could manifest in many ways. They may become angry, frustrated, upset and show this in their interactions with teachers and administrators who they

perceive to oppress them. Another feasible reaction might be to attempt to align themselves with more 'academic' content changing their behaviors, pedagogy, and even curriculum (emulative). Physical educators experiencing marginality might challenge the social structure of their working environment and their marginal status by confronting the beliefs and attitudes that keep physical education in a low status position (defiant). Another possible reaction to marginality might be denying or ignoring their marginality, retreating to the gym and further isolating themselves from others in their working environment (withdrawn), or acting as a liaison between the two groups balancing the place of PE in relation to traditional academic subject matter within the larger organizational structure (emissarial).

Grant and Breese (1997) argued that the developmental processes involved in the socialization of the individual and the development of marginality are not the same for everyone and that individual meaning based on personal experiences and perceptions affects an individual's marginality and resulting reactions. In essence, no two people experience marginality the same because how each individual interprets the behavior and language of those around them is influenced by personal experience.

#### Marginality of Subject Matter in Schools

One of the ways that the social phenomenon of marginality manifests in schools is through subject matter. Certain subjects are deemed more critical to school function, are of central importance, and are awarded higher status while other subjects are perceived as less prestigious, less central to the purpose and function of schools, and are given lower status. Subjects with high status receive more resources (financial and material), class time, and prestige than those of lower status in the form of the number of teachers hired, facilities (in both quality and access to), supplies, and curriculum materials. More time in the school day for students is

devoted to contact time with subjects of higher status and more time for school faculty and staff is spent analyzing teacher and student performance in these subject areas.

The farther away a subject area becomes from the ‘central function’ of schools, the closer it becomes to the ‘margin.’ Subjects such as language arts, reading, science, and math occupy positions of central importance while subjects like physical education, art, and music inhabit positions on the margin and are termed ‘marginal.’

The current educational reform movement and the implementation of *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* (2001) have exacerbated prioritization of reading, math and the traditional academic curriculum. *NCLB* (2001) requires states to administer standardized tests to students in grades three through eight in the areas of language arts and math. Student performance on these tests is directly tied to federal funding and support. As a result, academic subjects other than reading and math have, either overtly or covertly, taken a back seat as accountability measures do not apply to these areas. In order to provide more time for reading and math, therefore, time in other subjects is often diminished. In their informative discussion of this issue, Marsh and Willis (2007) note that, “*NCLB* has placed so much weight on the results of testing that teachers have had little choice but to reduce instruction in other subjects in order to teach to the test” (p. 63). As PE is not included in *NCLB*, it is one of the subjects seeing diminished time and resources. Unfortunately, *NCLB* has only intensified PE’s marginal status.

#### Physical Education as a Marginal Subject and Implications

Before the implementation of *NCLB* physical education was already seen as secondary or tertiary in its’ importance. The first attention to physical education and its’ position in schools was the work of Hendry (1975) which provided initial evidence to the marginalization of physical education by classroom teachers in schools. Hendry (1975) argued that a paradox exists

within the physical educator in that PE teachers seemed to attempt to identify with their classroom colleagues and in doing so, adhere to and accept their values including those of competition and elitism (reminiscent of Grant & Breese's emulative reaction to marginality).

The vigorous attention given by scholars to the study of marginality diminished as a subject of investigation until nearly a decade and a half later. The work done during this period firmly and empirically cemented a view that physical education is a low-status subject in the American public school (see O'Sullivan, 1993; Schempp et al, 1993; Sparkes et al, 1992; 1994; Stroot et al, 1994; Templin, 1989). Given that physical education is marginalized, consequently those who teach it experience life in schools as marginalized professionals.

Scholars who have investigated teachers' experiences of marginality have found physical educators to express feelings of isolation, limited (or no) access to resources, and a continued struggle to be perceived as a legitimate professional by other teachers, students, administrators, and parents (Hendry, 1975; Macdonald, 1995; Templin, 1989). These feelings influence not only how teachers feel about their jobs, but also their effectiveness, interaction with students, a predisposition to burnout and compromised program quality (Sparkes & Templin, 1990).

Unfortunately, ineffective PE teachers bring, conceivably, far-reaching implications. If PE teachers are charged with teaching students the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to lead healthy lives and are ineffective, the possible outcome of this ineffectiveness could be a nation with a majority young people who are physically illiterate leaving them without the tools needed to lead healthy lifestyles. In turn, this may pose a major public health issue as poor eating habits, limited physical activity, increased obesity rates, and increased illness and disease(s) of all types could result. Considering the current magnitude of childhood obesity and Type II Diabetes now reaching epidemic proportions and millions of dollars allocated to studying how to



stem and reverse both epidemics, the significance of *improved* physical education is reaching (perhaps beyond) its most critical time. This appears to be an idea not lost on the *Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention* who advocate that time in physical education classes for students should be increased; not decreased as is current practice in schools as a result of *NCLB (2001)*. Specifically, the *CDC* issued the following statement in 2005:

A systematic review of published studies, conducted on behalf of the Task Force on Community Preventative Services by a team of experts, found that physical education classes taught in schools...are effective in improving both physical activity levels and physical fitness among school aged children. Based on strong evidence of effectiveness, the Task Force recommends implementing programs that increase the length of, or activity levels in, school-based PE classes.

However, the decrease of and limited requirements for PE across the United States (NASPE, 2006) indicate that the importance of quality PE is an idea not just lost on those charged with setting school policy at any level, it has completely vanished or never was considered

#### Existing Literature on Marginality in Physical Education

Scholars have studied the phenomenon of marginality in physical education and as a result, the significant body of literature on this topic paints an overwhelmingly clear picture that physical educators experience marginality as teachers of a subject that is considered less valuable in the hierarchy of schools (Hendry, 1975; Templin, 1989; O'Sullivan, 1994; MacDonald, 1995). This marginality is compounded by other factors such as gender and sexual orientation (Sparkes, Templin & Schempp, 1993) and influences the socialization process through the dialectic negotiation that occurs as teachers construct their beliefs, perceptions, and expectations (Schempp & Graber, 1992). Researchers consider it important for teachers to gain an increased

understanding of the micro political factors operating that inform school structure and function. Scholars maintain that teacher education programs must produce teachers who are entering the profession with this awareness and the skills to manage it, as it will assist them in operating with school micro-political structures and challenging norms in hopes of change, at best, and survival, at minimum (Lawson, 1989; Sparkes, Templin, & Schempp, 1993). Further, teacher education programs must operate from a perspective that is consistent with the existing cultures that teachers will enter. Failure to do so will prepare teachers that are unable to successfully enter or remain in the profession (Dodds, 1989; Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). According to Graham (1987), in maximally effective training programs, professors understand how teachers are socialized, who the most significant agents are, and how the socialization process influences teachers throughout their lives. However, it has been noted that PETE programs may be ill designed or ill equipped to meet this need (Dodds, 1989). It is the hope that findings from this study will serve to inform PETE programs in preparing teachers for the conditions of marginality that they will face and how to successfully negotiate this status to remain in the profession and continue their professional development.

### *Implications for PETE*

It makes sense that if PE is important to the well-being and education of children but a marginalized subject in schools, then those who teach it must confront the struggles that correspond with teaching PE. Thus, PETE programs are best when they can equip teachers with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to face and successfully manage the marginality of their subject matter. PE teachers' ability to remain motivated, effective, and provide quality physical education for students depends upon their ability to adequately learn the culture of their schools. Further, it is necessary for PE teachers to determine interactions within that culture allowing

them to maintain a level of satisfaction with the nature of their job and working environment. Currently, the literature provides PETE professionals with the knowledge that this marginalization exists and a thorough description of how this marginality is experienced by teachers, but is lacking data that provide insight into how to manage this position so that PE teachers can succeed in spite of it.

### Exceptional Teachers and Marginality

Through the lens of Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997), it can be assumed that individual teachers interpret and react to their working environment differently based on everything from personal history and biography to the variation in school contexts. Each PE teacher develops strategies and coping mechanisms that they use to exist and hopefully thrive in schools as the teacher of a marginal subject. All PE teachers working in schools navigate and manage their interactions with co-workers and marginalization within their working environment to some degree. Some PE teachers experience feelings of disrespect, frustration, and this begins to affect their work to the point where it affects teacher effectiveness, programming, and sometimes (over time) leads them to leave the profession entirely (Templin, 1989).

Conversely, we know that there are highly effective PE teachers in our public schools. These teachers are able to plot a course through their working environment, managing their marginalization and interactions with others so successfully that they are able to develop into highly effective educators with advanced levels of expertise; leading us to label them as 'exceptional'. The fact that we are able to label them as 'exceptional' demonstrates their ability to overcome (or at least manage) this marginality by responding in certain ways that allows them to interact with their professional environment in a way that facilitates their development of

expertise. Practically, an exceptional PE teacher is one who demonstrates advanced pedagogical skills resulting in student learning which exceeds that of average teachers (Hattie, 2003).

Exceptional physical educators are active professionals in the field continuing their professional development through workshops and conferences as well as sharing their best practices with other teachers in these forums. These teachers are engaged in a constant pursuit of improvement of their teaching, programming, and the field of physical education. Further, the level of expertise attained by these physical educators emanates from a significant passion that influences every aspect of their professional life (DeMarco, 1998).

Officially, *National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)* defines exceptional teachers as having “skill or knowledge surpassing what is common, usual, or expected, as a result of experience or training” (NCATE, 2008, p. 84). The *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)* has, in fact, created a label and process for identifying these teachers. Thus, if exceptional PE teachers exist, it could be said that they have found ways to navigate, or perhaps overcome, the teaching of a marginal subject. It would then seem prudent that scholars investigate what these teachers do and how they are able to excel as teachers of a marginal subject.

While exceptional teachers (NCATE, 2008) are not expert teachers, Berliner’s (1986) argument that teachers of extraordinary skill should be studied to inform the practices of the less expert seems to fit. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate one exceptional PE teacher who has been successful in managing marginalization in the hopes of identifying strategies she employs in navigating their working environment. Awareness and knowledge of these strategies appears to be a necessary component in the preparation of future physical educators as PETE professionals attempt to prepare pre-service teachers for life in schools.

## Advancing the Field of Physical Education and Study of Marginality

Berliner (1986) argued for the examination of expert teachers and using this knowledge to guide the practice(s) of non-experts. It is this suggestion to scholars by Berliner (1986) that is missing from the literature on the teaching of physical education. Specifically, we do not know how exceptional teachers interpret, construct, and interact with this marginality in their working environment so that it is less of a barrier to their success. As scholars have called PETE professionals to better prepare students to deal with the structures that constrain them and place them in a marginal status, educating recruits about these issues is critical. Understanding how *exceptional* PE teachers experience and manage this marginalization is important in improving the experiences of other physical educators and in guiding work with new teachers as PETE faculty attempt to best prepare them for life in schools. This knowledge is essential to advance the field of physical education and is a line of inquiry in dire need of spirited pursuit. This study seeks to find out how one exceptional PE teacher experiences, interprets and manages her status as the teacher of a marginal school subject.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze how one exceptional elementary physical education teacher navigates her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. It was the intention that findings from this study would identify specific dispositions, actions, or decisions that may serve to inform other teachers and teacher educators in how one might confront the experiences of marginality. Insight garnered from this investigation may assist in moving PE (and those who teach it) from its firmly established place on the margin of what is important in schools and move it toward the center with its classroom counterparts, ultimately elevating the status of PE.

### Research Questions

The specific research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the context/working environment of an exceptional PE teacher who has managed teaching a marginal subject?
2. What are and how does she interpret verbal and non-verbal messages, actions, and symbols in their working environment about her subject matter and its place in the school environment?
3. What are and how does she interact with administrators, colleagues, parents, and students in her working environment?
4. What are the navigational strategies an exceptional physical educator employs to manage the marginality of her subject matter?

## Definition of Terms

Agency. The actions of an individual that are chosen freely. These actions are influenced by the social structure that the individual is within and, in turn, acts back on that structure with either change or reinforcement. This agency can be seen in the behavior, action, and language of an individual with other individuals with the social environment (Giddens, 1984).

Exceptional Teacher. A teacher who has “skill or knowledge surpassing what is common, usual, or expected, as a result of experience or training” (NCATE, 2008, p. 84).

Marginality. A social phenomenon that refers to being assigned low status or positioning within a social group or culture that is outside of central importance or functioning (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935).

Socialization. The process by which people acquire the values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, and cultural norms of a given social system to which they belong (Merton, 1957). It can be seen as an active process that involves a negotiation between the individual and the culture in creating the individual’s ideas about what is needed to be a successful teacher (Dewar, 1983).

Structure. Social norms, accepted routines, and expected ways of thinking and doing things of a specific culture or organization (Giddens, 1984).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to investigate how one exceptional elementary physical education teacher navigates her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. Therefore, it is necessary to first examine how the phenomenon of marginality has been defined and conceptualized historically, and the existing body of knowledge regarding the working environment, socialization, and position of physical education in schools. Relevant literature informing this study will be presented in the following sections: (a) Marginality Theory, (b) Theory of Structuration, (c) physical education teacher socialization, (d) the workplace environment of physical education teachers, (e) the marginal status of physical education, and (f) defining exceptional teaching through the lens of the Theory of Expertise. A review and critique of this literature will illustrate that physical education is a marginalized subject matter in schools and as a result, teaching it well is complex, if not nearly impossible. This review will also explain how individuals in these positions experience marginality and how social action can be understood utilizing relevant social theory. Finally, the intention of this chapter is to demonstrate the existence of teachers who have successfully managed their marginality allowing them to develop into exceptional educators. The examination of these teachers is critical to elevating the place of physical education in schools and more importantly to the preparation of future physical education teachers.

#### Marginality Theory

Marginality is a social phenomenon that refers to being assigned low status or positioning within a social group or culture that is outside of central importance or functioning. This experience can apply to any individual, group, race, or culture whose qualities and norms are in



contrast to that which is dominant in an environment. Inquiry into this phenomenon can be traced back to the seminal work of Robert E. Park (1928) who first conceptualized the theory of the 'Marginal Man.'

Park (1928) defined the 'Marginal Man' as one who strives to exist between diverse cultural groups. He describes the marginal individual as a cultural hybrid, a person living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of distinctly different groups. Unwilling to break connections with held beliefs and norms of the original cultural group, the marginal individual is not accepted by the new (dominant) group with which they are involved. Because of this, he asserts, the individual remains on the margin of the two cultures, which never completely join.

In response, Stonequist (1935) clarified and extended Park's (1928) work with his work, *The Problem of the Marginal Man*. According to Stonequist (1935), the marginal man frequently arises in a bi-cultural or multi-cultural situation. He further clarifies the term when he writes: "What is here termed 'marginal' represents a process of abstraction, a core of psychological traits which are the inner correlates of the dual pattern of social conflict and identification" (p. 10). The natural desire of the marginalized individual is to advance toward occupying position of the higher status group. At this point, there are two possible outcomes: (a) the marginalized individual may be forced to accept a position in the lower status group and possibly serving as a leader for this group; or (b) rejection by both groups. Stonequist (1935) asserts that during this process, a marginalized individual passes through a life cycle consisting of three stages: preparation, crisis, and adjustment.

The first stage, preparation, occurs when the individual is presented with the difference between the conflicting cultural groups. This could happen because of positioning themselves in

a new cultural group or being born into one cultural group and later recognizing contrast between cultures. At a very superficial level, this represents some assimilation between the two groups and may not be recognized by the individual. The second stage, crisis, is the period when the individual becomes aware of the cultural conflict in which they are involved. This may occur suddenly with an isolated experience or over time. Stonequist (1935) argues that during this phase, there are some typical traits exhibited by the marginalized individual: (a) shock, (b) restlessness, (c) disillusionment and (d) estrangement. Through these, the individual becomes self-conscious and begins to adopt the attitudes of the conflicting groups toward one another becoming something of a divided personality. Following this phase, the marginalized individual enters the final stage where adjustment occurs and lasting responses are formed. Stonequist (1935) argues that because of this process (and the initial traits presented in the preparation phase), the marginalized individual develops complex personality characteristics based on awareness of their social position. These personality characteristics can include ambivalence, excessive self-consciousness, restlessness, irritability, moodiness, and lack of self-confidence (Park, 1928).

Stonequist (1935) asserted that, when these personality characteristics develop, three outcomes are likely: (a) acceptance by the dominant culture, (b) leadership within the marginal group, or (c) removing and withdrawing from the cultural conflict. The development of these characteristics may occur in a three-stage process (Stonequist, 1935). First, the individual continues toward the dominant group and may be eventually accepted. For example, a physical education teacher being considered a respected and valued professional whose subject matter is of equal significance by academic colleagues. Second, the individual returns to the marginal group serving in a leadership role; where the physical education teacher is a respected mentor

and leader within the community of physical education. Or, third, the individual withdraws from the negotiation and removes him or herself entirely from the conflict. Studying these personalities is significant because understanding the marginal personality is important in understanding cultural change. Stonequist (1935) concluded by calling for further investigation into this area both practically and theoretically

Taken together, Park (1928) and Stonequist (1935) described a group of individuals holding a status that is between two incompatible social categories along with a set of personality characteristics that are said to develop in individuals in that particular situation. Responding to these works, scholars re-examined and reformulated the concepts offered by the two authors.

Primarily, marginality theorists argued that these early conceptions of marginal theory did not consider that marginal individuals could have varying responses to occupation of this status. Most notably, Goldberg (1941), Green (1947), and Kerckhoff and McCormick (1955) challenged and refined Marginality Theory with their assertions. These scholars provided a significant alteration to Marginality Theory with the argument that individuals experiencing marginality might not demonstrate the personality characteristics proposed by Park (1928) and Stonequist (1935) in the same fashion. About Stonequist's (1935) description of both the status and personality characteristics of the marginal man, they write:

It is not always clear what the nature of the relationship is between the status and the personality characteristics. It is not always clear whether the marginal man is one who occupies such a social status, or one who exhibits the described personality characteristics, or both. We are left with the impression that the two phenomena are not the same nor are they always found together, but the nature of their relationship is not examined. This lack of clarity in their early formulation has been a major factor in the

rejection of the concepts of marginality and the marginal man. Some writers have complained that not all of those Park and Stonequist listed as marginal men exhibit the personality characteristics indicated. (Kerckhoff & McCormick, 1955, p. 49).

Based on this revision of marginality theory, the Kerckhoff and McCormick (1955) offered a new definition of the marginal man as:

...one who used a non-membership group as a reference group. He may also be seen as one whose socialization has not been such as to prepare him to play the role assigned to him in the social sphere. The marginal man is one who has internalized the norms of a particular group (thus it is his reference group) but he is not completely recognized by others as being a legitimate member of that group (thus it is not his membership group). As long as this relationship prevails, his role in countless situations will be ill defined...and he will suffer the effects of uncertainty, ambivalence, and the fear of rejection and failure (p. 49).

In essence, Kerckhoff & McCormick (1955) argue that socialization by members of the dominant culture into the environment does not prepare individuals for marginality because they hold the values of the marginal group and these will not be accepted by the dominant culture. They go on to argue that in these circumstances, the marginal man is highly sensitive to his behavior and the behavior of others in relation to himself and is more likely to experience rejection or discrimination even when those he feels have rejected him did not have that intention. At this point, Kerckhoff & McCormick (1955) argue, the personality characteristics outlined by Stonequist (1935) are likely to develop.

Several years later, Frable (1993) investigated the notion of “marginality as a chronic personal reality” (p. 87). She suggested that marginal individuals concentrate and focus on their marginal status and view themselves as separate and different from others. A marginal status, she argued, whether visible or invisible to the individual or others in the culture, creates a psychological marginality that exacerbates the experience of marginality and contributes to the growth of a gap between themselves and those they consider ‘normal’ (Grant & Breese, 1997). In short, Frable (1993) suggested that marginality is, in essence, a self-fulfilling prophecy; thus, the belief that a person is marginalized increases the likelihood and severity of the phenomenon.

Building on this idea, Grant and Breese (1997) investigated the individual’s reactions to marginality. Grant and Breese (1997) argued that (a) reactions to marginality affect an individual’s behavior and performance and (b) that there are a range of reactions and interpretations of marginality, each of which has a different effect on the individual’s behavior. Until their groundbreaking work in the late 1990’s, relevant literature in Marginality Theory had identified six distinct reactions that can be demonstrated from individuals in a marginal situation: affected, emulative, defiant, emissarial, withdrawn, and balanced (Kerckhoff & McCormick, 1955; Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Riesman, 1951). These reactions provided the starting point for the investigation by Grant and Breese (1997). Based on their findings of marginality of African-American college students, Grant and Breese (1997) extended this list of possible reactions identifying *paradoxical* and *uninvolved* as additional possible responses to experiences of marginality.

*Affected*

People with this reaction exhibit increased sensitivity and self-consciousness. This primary reaction affects the individual's behavior and interaction with others. Symptoms of this reaction can include delinquency and mental instability.

*Emulative*

Individuals responding to marginality in this way take a position of denial, as they perceive the marginality almost intolerable. They attempt to imitate the dominant group, regardless of the consequences, and do so risking of rejection by the original culture.

*Defiant*

Marginal individuals reacting in this way demonstrate open hostility, acts of insubordination, or angry withdrawal. Perceiving an inability to change the situation, this reaction can be a catalyst for change.

*Emissarial*

Individuals responding to marginality in this way view themselves as a liaison or go-between for both groups. In a way, they see their marginality as useful recognizing and exploiting their position to benefit their situation and both groups. In this role, both groups appreciate the marginal individual, as they are perceived as offering special skills and knowledge to each culture. This reaction is dependent up on the mutual respect and appreciation between both groups.

*Withdrawn*

With total rejection of the marginal situation, the individual may resort to complete departure from activities and interaction with others in the group. This may also involve

retreating into the original culture and refusing to participate in activities that are not a part of that culture.

### *Balanced*

In the situation where the marginal individual has co-existed between the two cultures from the outset (usually discussed as since birth), they are experienced with handling the differences and dynamics of both groups. Further, they view their position as 'normal' and the differences between the two cultures as relative to social context rather than in contrast to one another.

### *Paradoxical*

People responding in this way desire success within the social structure, but at the same time are still excluded from the dominant culture or group. These individuals feel pressure from the marginalized (or minority) group to reject the norms of the dominant group. The paradox is that they do not want to be alienated from their own culture, but they desire the rewards that can be obtained from accepting and participating in the dominant culture.

### *Uninvolved*

This reaction is characterized by a lack of anger, insight, or concern for issues surrounding marginality. An individual responding this way may seem apathetic to their circumstances and marginal position. This does not mean denial of marginal status or tensions leading to this position, rather, it stems from a personal philosophy by the individual that gives little thought or attention to how this marginality affects them personally.

These eight reactions informed the authors' redefinition of Marginality Theory. Grant and Breese (1997) argue that the developmental processes involved in the socialization of the individual and the development of marginality are not the same for everyone. Further, individual

meaning based on personal experiences and perceptions affects an individual's marginality and resulting behaviors. On this, they write, "our construction of the notion of marginality allows for contradictions and emphasizes the interpretations of individual meaning..." (Grant & Breese, 1997, p. 194). Utilizing this theoretical perspective, the researchers investigated the marginality of African-American students and their construction of meaning as it affects their experiences with marginalization. In short, Grant and Breese (1997) argue that each individual's experience with conditions of marginality are different as they are constructed by the interaction between the marginalized status and their own personal beliefs, values, and perspectives that they bring to the situation. Findings from this study indicated that marginal individuals are not passive in the process of marginality. Further, the authors state: "Their perceptions and reactions to marginality were influenced by their varying personal experiences, abilities, and social factors. In turn, the conditions of marginality were also dynamic" (Grant & Breese, 1997, p. 203). The authors conclude by summarizing that a variety of factors influence how an individual feels about their marginality and that these feelings and interpretations influence behavior choices.

The notion of marginality that Grant and Breese (1997) argued for emphasizes the significance of personal interpretation and individual meaning and how these factors influence how one experiences marginality and which reactions they demonstrate. It is because of this perspective that a case study approach will be utilized for the purpose of this study. Using this method will allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the specific personal interpretations and individual meanings and how they contribute to which reactions to marginality are demonstrated.

A critique of the Marginality Theory as originally presented by Park (1928) and Stonequist (1935) by scholars has clarified and redefined the theory. A closer examination,



however, reveals that the theory has firmly held together over the years with slight but important alterations to it. From this, it seems an understanding of Marginality Theory includes not only the life cycle and personality characteristics of the marginal individual (as articulated by Stonequist) but also the importance of how the marginal individual perceives and reacts to this marginality.

### Structuration Theory

Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997) offers a way to understand how an individual views and acts in response to experiencing marginality within a social context. Other sociological theorists have offered various approaches to explain behavior in social contexts identifying cultural norms and individuals act within those norms. The Theory of Structuration (Giddens, 1984) is one approach to explain the relationship between social organizations and individual action. In this study, Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997) and Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) will be used together to explain how an elementary PE teacher interprets and reacts to the marginal status of her subject matter in her working environment.

Sociological factors provide strong influences upon the nature of teachers' work and how they experience life in schools. Each teacher's interpretation and experience is different given the variation in school contexts and individual biographies. Scholars have attempted to explain life in schools by using a variety of perspectives. One of these is Structuration Theory offered by Giddens (1984). The ideas presented by Giddens can inform how we understand the relationship between social action and cultural norms and can be applied in examining marginality.

Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory explains social practices (*structure*) by describing the actions of individuals (*agency*) within environments/organizations and how social

organizations are impacted by and influence these actions. The two key components of the theory are structure and agency.

### *Structure*

According to Giddens (1984), *structure* is the social norms, accepted routines, and expected ways of thinking and doing things. While these things form the social structure of a culture or environment, Giddens acknowledges that 'structure' can also refer to architectural construction, the actual building in which a particular organization is housed.

Giddens (1984) posits that everyday practices form this structure. These everyday practices are, in turn, formed by what he refers to as *procedural rules*, *moral rules*, *material resources*, and *resources of authority*. Procedural rules are explicitly stated rules dictating action within the environment while moral rules are implicitly understood appropriate forms of action. The term material resource indicates how supplies and tools are allocated among activities and members within the group. Resources of authority refer to formal organizations, how time and space are organized, and the legitimacy of such activities and members within the group. Giddens (1984) offers that everyday actions create and reinforce a set of expectations about accepted conduct. These expectations are considered 'structure'. This structure encompasses these actions and provides those within it common meanings and values. The held beliefs about appropriate actions are constructed, reinforced, or changed through the interplay of the structure with those individuals within it. Giddens refers to these individuals within the structure as *agents*.

### *Agency*

Defining agency as the independent and freely chosen actions by humans, Giddens (1984) claimed that agency manifests itself in the behavior, action, and language of an individual

with other individuals with the social environment (later defined as structure). A culture or group's accepted norms of behavior impact individual agency as the actions we choose are influenced by the structure and how we are socialized. He posited that structure is what makes daily routines and practices possible because it provides the framework that people use to combine with given resources in the environment when choosing action and behavior.

### *The duality of structure*

Giddens (1984) is careful to note that agency and structure are dependent upon one another. The structure provides a framework for accepted social action that influences the agency of the people in the environment. Likewise, the actions and behavior of the agents within the structure can influence, change or reinforce the structure itself. According to Giddens, there is constant interaction between these two components: the structure informs individual agency and the individual's reactions to the structure (agency) affects the structure; accepted cultural norms influence how people choose to interact and their actions influence (and act back on) the accepted norms of behavior.

### *Empirical Applications of Structuration Theory*

Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) has been used extensively in the study of organizations. Much of this literature involves the conceptualization of different theories and perspectives to explain various aspects of organizational function. Many scholars (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood, 1980) have argued for a unified theoretical perspective to study organizations. Barley and Tolbert (1997) and Ranson, et al. (1980) posit that a unified perspective would collectively apply the concepts of Structuration Theory and other theoretical positions in order to develop specific ways to understand an organizational phenomenon of interest. One example is how Orlikowski (1992) utilized Structuration Theory to

develop a new theoretical model, The Structural Model of Technology, to examine the interaction between technology and organizations. While Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) has been used to inform the development of new theories, it is sometimes viewed as an abstract process theory. Consequently, it has rarely been used in empirical study (Barely & Tolbert, 1997). Data based studies using Structuration Theory as the primary theoretical framework are limited. It is, however, seen as a critical perspective in describing social action in organizations.

Organizations. Many of the empirical studies done apply Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) as a way to understand communication, political symbols, and interrelationships between subcultures in organizations. For example, Orlikowski & Yates (1994) examined communication via email between workers on an inter-organizational project. Structuration Theory was used as a way to understand how these communication practices were shaped and changed by the organization's cultural norms. Application of Structuration Theory has allowed researchers to understand group decision making processes (Scott & DeSanctis, 2006) and the interrelationships of subcultures within political firms (Riley, 1983). In addition, this theory has been used as a method of exploring how human actions influence everyday practices within an organization (Orlikowski, 2002). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) is an effective framework to explain the dynamic between human action and organizational culture.

Schools. There is limited literature involving the use of Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) to understand social action within schools. McFadden (1995) drew from this theory in addressing questions of agency and structure in educational and social change. He argued that a more dynamic theory of individual, social, and cultural change was needed in order to better understand how educational settings could bring about social change. According to McFadden

(1995), Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) provides scholars with the tools to think about social phenomena and change in educational settings so that we can enact change rather than being caught in critique. In essence, Structuration Theory gives researchers what they need to discover specific directions for practical solutions rather than continuing theoretical examination of schools as social organizations.

At present, Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) has not been used to examine marginality in schools. Following the assertion by McFadden (1995), the proposed study will use this theory as a way to understand the practical solutions of an exceptional elementary PE teacher within her school environment. In doing so, this study attempts to fill this void in the literature pertaining to the use of Structuration Theory and marginality within schools as organizations. Using this theory to understand social environments is useful in considering the working environment of schools and the socialization of teachers. Applying Giddens' (1984) theory, structure can be thought of as the held beliefs about education and the purpose(s) of schools that inform and dictate the nature of interaction in schools. Structure in schools can be seen in day-to-day rules, routines, and actions of those involved in the school community. For the purposes of this paper, the structure of schools will be considered from the perspective of physical education teachers and their work place conditions. Agents in this environment include students, teachers, parents, administrators, the local school board, the state and federal government.

#### Physical Education Teacher Socialization

Scholars in education (outside of PE) have been concerned for some time with questions such as, Why does one choose to become a PE teacher. How do they acquire the skills and knowledge to perform the job? What are the socialization processes that shape one's perspective

of teaching (Templin & Schempp, 1989)? A significant effort to understand these issues can be traced back to the works of Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986); Lacey (1977); Lortie (1975); and Sikes, Measor and Woods (1985). Lortie's (1975) *Schoolteacher: A sociological study* is regarded as one of the seminal works in the understanding of how teachers are socialized throughout their careers. Here, he examined the variety of issues in the organization of the job of teaching and investigates the various emotions that teachers hold toward their daily tasks and particular patterns that are seen in the orientations and sentiments that distinguish teaching from other professions (Lortie, 1975). In his analysis, Lortie (1975) proposed a three-stage model of teacher socialization: (a) recruitment, (b) professional education, and (c) entry into work.

The *recruitment* stage involves those experiences both in and out of schools before entering formal teacher training. Critical concepts during this phase are the subjective warrant and the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). The *subjective warrant* refers to an individual's understanding of what is required for the task of teaching and their ability to fulfill those requirements based on their skills and abilities. The ideas and beliefs that one has about the job of teaching based on their years in schools as students are referred to with the term *apprenticeship of observation*. According to Lortie (1975), these pre-career experiences are more important and more powerful than teacher education programs. This argument was the catalyst for future investigation into the implications of the subjective warrant and apprenticeship of observation on pre-service teachers. The *professional education* stage involves experiences during a recruit's teacher education program. Finally, the *entry into work* stage involves those experiences occurring as the teacher transitions into the field of education beginning their career as an educator. This work served as the premise for scholars investigating the socialization of

teachers into PE (Lawson, 1981(a), Lawson, 1981(b); Lawson, 1983; Templin, 1979; Templin & Schempp, 1989).

Within Physical Education. The seminal effort in this area was done by Lawson in 1983. In the discussion surrounding sociological issues for physical education teachers and their work, his work provides a foundation for the theoretical perspectives informing the research done by most scholars. In his two-part paper, Lawson (1983) argues for a model to understand teacher socialization in physical education. His position was that synthesizing the relevant literature to lay the groundwork for the development of such a model and recognized that such a framework would not be fully possible until “the number of findings equals the number of unanswered questions” (p. 3). It is here that Lawson offers that the socialization of physical education teachers begins in childhood, creating a *subjective warrant* for teaching physical education. The subjective warrant has been defined as each person’s perceptions of the requirements for teacher education, teaching in schools, and their ability to fulfill these requirements (Lawson, 1983; Lortie, 1975). Following this, teacher socialization continues upon entry into teacher education programs and the induction into teaching in schools. Lawson (1983) concludes the paper by presenting the idea that teachers who have long careers in teaching physical education have a profound influence on the socialization of PE teachers. The conduct, appearance, thoughts, and actions of PE teachers in schools influence their students’ subjective warrants for physical education (Lawson, 1983). This creates a cumulative effect as the dispositions of these students for teaching physical education impacts the effectiveness of teacher education programs and ultimately future school practices (Lawson, 1983; Lortie, 1975).

Occupational socialization has been used as a way to understand teacher socialization and teacher education curriculum (Lawson, 1988). Lawson (1988) identified different types of

socialization that physical education teachers encounter and then follows by listing 11 assumptions that help to shape the implications for future research in this area. His definition of occupational socialization was conceptualized as:

an umbrella concept to include all kinds of socialization that initially influence persons to enter the field of physical education and that later are responsible for their perceptions and actions as teacher educators and teachers...such occupational socialization continues as long as the person remains in physical education, whether as a teacher or as a teacher educator. (p. 267)

Lawson (1988) commented that his purpose in the exploration of these questions through the lens of occupational socialization was to set a foundation for future research and provide a catalyst for others to investigate physical education curriculum and its place in schools based on these sociological factors. He argued that the status of any curriculum model in educational organizations depends on the power and status of those who advocate for it and called for future research in this area as he articulated a need for the investigation into the social forces acting to dictate the place of physical education curriculum in the structure of schools. Findings from this proposed study provide knowledge about these social forces and how exceptional teachers manage these contextual issues so that they do not hinder professional development and expertise.

Others have viewed teacher socialization from a dialectical perspective believing that teachers develop their professional beliefs and values as the result of constant interaction between their held ideas and those of the school culture. Schempp and Graber (1992) explored teacher socialization from this perspective. The purpose of the study was to investigate the early stages of professional socialization of physical education teachers and support the idea that a



dialectical relationship occurs between the ideas and perceptions of physical education teachers and the expectations and held views of their new working environment. The authors identified and investigated four periods of socialization for new teachers: pretraining, preservice, field experiences, and induction. Schempp and Graber (1992) maintained that in each of these phases, there is a push and pull that occurs as ideas and beliefs from personal experience is met by existing perceptions and expectations of the professional environment. This relationship results in the formation of new conceptions and views within the physical educator. The scholars discuss the significance of the apprenticeship of observation as it relates to the socialization and knowledge development of pre-service teachers. The apprenticeship of observation can be described as the ideas and perceptions of teaching that are learned and acquired through time spent in schools as students. Through their own educational experiences, future teachers interact with the social context of teaching in a variety of ways that provide the foundation for their future ideas about teachers and teaching.

Schempp and Graber (1992) argued that understanding these relationships has implications for teacher education programs as the perspectives and orientations offered in these programs are not simply accepted by students; they are the result of a negotiation that occurs within the individual (p. 244). The authors conclude with the assertion that it is important for researchers to understand the apprenticeship of observation, its significance in the dynamics of the dialectic relationship which occurs for new teachers, and its role in the socialization into the profession of teaching.

In 1993, Schempp, Sparkes and Templin continued this look into teacher induction with their study utilizing an interpretive framework to get perspectives and experiences of first year physical education teachers. This study was one of a series by the authors utilizing life history

methodology to examine the experiences and social contexts experienced by physical educators. In this study, three teachers were interviewed and told their stories of induction into the profession. Data were analyzed inductively until dominant themes emerged and were reported to represent what the authors believed was an accurate presentation of the three teachers and their lived experiences during their first year.

The teachers reported a lack of concern for their subject matter in schools and were recognized for their classroom management abilities, not their consideration for student learning. Others in their educational environment (colleagues, administrators, and parents) did not seem to respect their subject matter or pedagogical content knowledge as physical education was not considered of high priority. Further, the teachers reported a lack of support and educational services available to them as the teachers of a subject with perceived low status. The authors argued that the micro-politics of induction for these teachers would be significantly different if their content was viewed as central to school functioning. The authors concluded by calling for a more meaningful and significant connection to be established between teacher education programs and public schools. Further, Schempp, Sparkes, and Templin (1993) encouraged teachers to reflect on the nature of teaching in public schools and to challenge the structures that keep physical education in a position of low status and assert that this is imperative in the consideration of what is best for students. By examining how exceptional PE teachers have successfully challenged or managed these structures, findings from this study may provide answers to this conclusion by Schempp, Sparkes, and Templin (1993).

An investigation of the socialization of PE teachers in Singapore continued this line of research on teacher socialization. Findings from Wright (2001) supported existing research in the area, but striking differences were also discovered. The study was conducted over an eight-year

period involving questionnaires and interviews of 135 participants. Questionnaires were given to the participants at varying stages in their professional development from recruit through their third year as a professional. Questions were developed to gain access to teachers' beliefs and experiences along their professional development. For example, questions included in the first questionnaire pertained to previous physical education experience and their reasons for selecting the program; while questions on the last questionnaire inquired about feelings of preparedness to teach, and reflections of their teacher education program. Twenty of the participants were randomly selected and interviewed after their first and third years of teaching. Data were analyzed inductively and coded for categories, which were later cross-referenced by interview data. The design of this study to include questionnaires and a large number of participants provided a different approach to investigating teacher socialization and a deviation from typical study designs used to look at this topic. As opposed to case study methods (see Schempp & Graber, 1992; Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1993), the approach used by Wright (2001) provided knowledge into the perceptions of many PE teachers across different contexts.

Some of Wright's (2001) findings conflicted with existing research in this area. First, recruits expressed no preference for coaching over teaching. Second, the teachers did not articulate a desire to reproduce their own physical education experiences and wanted to make lessons meaningful and more significant to students. This became problematic for the teachers, as their colleagues did not understand their concern with student learning. The teachers reported feelings of isolation, in contrast from the strong sense of support gained from fellow pre-service teachers during student teaching. These findings are important in that they illuminate the fact that physical educators experience marginality in contexts outside of the United States.

The results of this study were congruent with existing research in that (a) the pre-service teachers reported student teaching, methods courses, and practical activities to be significant (p. 224), and (b) the teachers expressed feelings of marginalization and isolation. Wright (2001) called for further study regarding the mentoring of new teachers as a part of their professional induction. He echoed the sentiments of Schempp, Sparkes, and Templin (1993) in expressing need for a stronger connection between new teachers, schools, and PETE programs in the induction process. These scholars have discussed the importance of continued involvement with university faculty for pre-service teachers as they are socialized into the profession by utilizing mentoring and professional development opportunities. Findings from this study can help to fill this void by informing PETE faculty and teachers in their understanding of the relationship between marginality and socialization as well as strategies used by those who have overcome their marginal status.

Building on previous work done by North American researchers (Lawson, 1988; Schempp & Graber, 1992; Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1993), scholars in other countries sought to understand the problem using new methods. Naess (2001) utilized 'educational storytelling' (p. 44) as a way to challenge the established norms and beliefs faced by physical education teachers. In doing so, Naess (2001) shared data of the life history of a Norwegian physical educator who has "escaped the problems that other PE teachers have encountered and has continued to love her job and do it with enthusiasm for 30 years" (p. 46). The purpose of the study was to share the story of life history and career of this teacher to highlight what it can tell us about the dialectic that occurs between the teacher and the structure of schools and the socialization process.

Findings indicated that the participant had an overwhelmingly positive perspective of herself, her teaching career, and its position within the school structure. Other data sources (observation and document analysis) did not confirm physical education as a subject matter of high accord. Naess (2001) speculated that the participant constructed this overwhelmingly positive narrative to keep her going; that to accept the views of others would have been too difficult and consequently, she chose to ignore them. According to Naess (2001), the dialectics that occur during the socialization process are greatly influenced by an individual's experiences within socioeconomic and political structures and that these are different depending on one's position within school structure.

Naess (2001) maintained that as teachers become socialized and encounter experiences of marginalization, they retreat to the gym with students where they find meaning. Those physical educators who have seemingly overcome their marginal status have done so by ignoring these messages and constructing their own positive narrative. While understandable, the author calls physical educators to challenge those forces- not ignore them as it implies negligence that not only affects their lives and careers, but other physical education teachers as well. Findings from this study contribute to the body of knowledge on how physical educators function within a marginal status in highlighting the stories of teachers in different countries. Knowledge about the structure of culture of schools and the marginal experiences of physical educators in these different contexts can provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of this issue in our field. Alternatively, it is important to be mindful that there are some parallels that cannot be drawn between a European context and that of the United States.

Taken together, the studies mentioned here demonstrate the socialization process as a complicated one with associated social and political factors. This line of inquiry began with a

call from Lawson (1988) into the investigation of the social forces acting to dictate the position of physical education in schools. Researchers answered this with investigations into the apprenticeship of observation, teachers' experiences of induction, and a look at the dialectical process by which values and beliefs are negotiated within teachers as they are socialized in to the profession. Overwhelmingly, teachers reported experiences of marginality as well as struggle and conflict as their personal views upon entering the profession were met with opposition in the held beliefs of their new working environment. Based on findings, researchers challenged physical educators to question and oppose the structures that confine them in their careers and recognize the importance of a strong connection between schools and PETE programs in providing new teachers the ability to do so.

#### The Workplace Environment of a Physical Education Teacher

In addition to the subjective warrant and apprenticeship of observation, working environment and school context serve as significant socializing agents for teachers. The school structure including hierarchy of subjects; interactions with other teachers, students, parents, and administrators; and job responsibilities all affect how teachers develop their views about the profession of teaching PE in schools. It is this socializing agent that influences marginality most. This section will review pertinent literature to describe the nature of the working environment that PE teachers operate within and how it forms their perspectives and serves as a socializing agent into the profession.

The socialization of teachers into the profession begins at an early age through their experiences as students (apprenticeship of observation) leading them to develop beliefs about requirements needed for a career in teaching (subjective warrant) (Lortie, 1975; Lawson, 1983; Lawson, 1988). This socialization continues through formal teacher education programs and

entry into the field as teachers (Schempp & Graber, 1992; Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1993).

The development of a PE teacher's perspectives is the result of the continuous interaction of individually held beliefs and the social norms of the school culture. This section will present research on the specific elements of the school environment and its impact on socialization.

Teachers' perspective of their working environment is one area that received significant interest in the late 80's and early 90's. The first of these seminal works, done by Templin (1989), looked at teacher isolation in physical education by discussing the promotion of isolation, its implications, and the potential for its reduction. Templin (1989) is direct regarding his message to be conveyed in the chapter when he writes: "The underlying thesis of this chapter should be quite clear throughout: I believe that teachers should learn to work as colleagues" (p. 197).

After reviewing relevant literature, Templin (1989) concluded that there is a paradox between the professional development and autonomy of teachers and a lack of collegiality and professionalism, in essence, schools are not facilitating what they should (p. 202). Further, teachers lack opportunities to reflect on their teaching, receive appropriate feedback, and look critically at their pedagogy. This, in turn, affects job satisfaction and teacher efficacy (p. 202). Templin (1989) argued that this is even more significant for physical education teachers as their subject matter is given reduced status in schools. Physical education teachers, he offered, are responsible for providing their own motivation and stimulation as they have to come up with solutions to their own problems and assess their own successes and failures as they are afforded less support and are more isolated than their colleagues teaching in a classroom setting. As collegiality positively effects teacher interaction, quality of teaching, and promotes shared

culture that increases student achievement; Templin (1989) concluded by calling for the establishment of formal structures to increase teacher collegiality and reduce teacher isolation.

School context has been investigated in respect to how it shapes the role identity of teachers. Solomon, Worthy, & Carter (1993) were interested in the dynamic interaction between factors influencing teachers' role identity during their first year in the profession. Case study methodology was used to gain access to the perspectives of these teachers to determine how their ideas about teaching impacted their professional development. The teachers were studied over the course of one school year using the following data collection techniques: formal and informal interviews, observations and field notes, lesson plans, and student performance data. In addition, the researchers interviewed administrators and co-workers. Taken together, these methods were used to make a comparison between the contexts and perspectives of the three teachers involved in the study.

Findings of the study indicated the teachers had two areas of concern: (a) the discrepancy between student teaching experiences and the realities of an in-service PE professional and (b) the struggle for legitimacy with students, colleagues, and parents. The teachers in this study reported student teaching experiences with effective teachers who had established routines and structured environments. While this provided the pre-service teachers with positive examples of expert management, they were not able to see how these routines and expectations were taught and reinforced to students at the beginning of the school year. While the researchers recognize the importance of a positive and successful student teaching experience, they comment on the importance of PETE professionals attempting to provide students with a realistic setting as to better equip them for a variety of contexts they might face as new teachers.



The teachers also reported frustration in being taken seriously as professionals. The teachers wanted their students to see physical education as a class and not a play period, which was troubling to them. In addition, the teachers shared stories of incidents in which their colleagues implied that they weren't 'real' teachers. Solmon, Worthy, and Carter (1993) suggested that teacher education programs include strategies to prepare pre-service teachers to deal with these potential challenges. It is here where the proposed study aims to extend the body of literature by finding out which strategies are used by an exceptional elementary PE teacher to overcome these challenges. The findings can, therefore, be of use to PETE faculty.

Research done by Stroot, Collier, O'Sullivan, and England (1994) examined context and work environment in the world of secondary physical education extending the work of Solmon, Worthy, and Carter (1993). The purpose of the study was to examine these teachers' perspectives of the factors in the school context that influenced workplace culture. Eleven PE teachers were investigated using a variety of data collection methods. Initially, the teachers were given a 40 item questionnaire which included questions designed to gain information about their perceptions of the dual nature of their role as teacher and coach in a high school PE and sport setting. Following insights gained from the questionnaire, the researchers used formal and informal interviewing, participant journaling, and observation to enhance and clarify this information and enrich the data. Data were analyzed inductively as the researchers looked for categories and themes as they emerged while considering negative cases and their importance in providing differing viewpoints. Cross-checking categories and themes over the variety of data collection methods were used to enhance trustworthiness of the study and provide triangulation of the data.

Findings indicated four categories of contextual factors influencing the work environment of teachers involved in the study: (a) career choice and purposes of physical education, (b) daily routines and workload, (c) the status of physical education in schools, and (d) collegial interaction. The teachers in this study entered the profession of physical education as a result of their desire to work with young people in a sport environment and wanted to provide students opportunities to be healthy and successful through a variety of activities and experiences. The teachers discussed their daily activities as routine and not overwhelmingly demanding, but were frustrated with the amount of non-instructional and managerial types of duties they were asked to perform. They were conflicted with their identity as both teacher and coach and recognized that the demands of successful sport achievement impacted their teaching practices. In addition, the teachers reported experiences of marginalization within their school contexts. They expressed a lack of support from administration and a lack of respect for their subject matter from parents and fellow teachers. Experiences of collegiality were different between participants. Some teachers reported supportive interactions and shared responsibilities while others said that such relationships were virtually non-existent.

Stroot, Collier, O'Sullivan, and England (1994) concluded by recognizing that secondary PE specialists have a responsibility to initiate change and argued that researchers can aid them in doing this by identifying strategies that will help teachers impact the organizational structure of their workplace. This position was consistent with that of Solomon, Worthy, & Carter (1993) demonstrating the extreme for knowledge of the necessary political tactics to successfully influence the culture of the schools where teachers work.

A study done on work environment and its effect on burnout of physical education teachers (Fejgin, Ephraty, & Ben-Sira, 1995) gathered findings that supported previous research

done in the United States. Through a questionnaire distributed to approximately 150 Israeli physical educators, the researchers found three factors contributed to feelings of burnout in teachers: (a) perceived inaccurate financial compensation, (b) bureaucratic limitations (including the role conflict of teacher and coach) and (c) psycho-social issues (including negative attitudes of colleagues toward physical education). Similar to previous researchers, the researchers suggested that PETE programs need to prepare students to cope with role demands and conflict as well as encouraging them to take on administrative tasks in the school setting so as to be more visible and involved in functions that are central to school operation.

The work of Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997) provided answers to these questions and filled this void in the literature regarding strategies used by a PE teacher to impact school norms. While the purpose of the study was not to study marginalization but rather to understand how a late career PE teacher adopted and learned a movement approach to teaching physical education, significant findings emerged regarding how this teacher was successful in creating and maintaining school cultural norms that supported and valued PE as an important subject matter for students. Rovegno and Bandhauer found that the teacher, Dianna, did four things that were essential in contributing to the cultural norms of her school: “(a) participating in school formal committees and projects, (b) initiating voluntary projects and acquiring funds and space for her program as well as classroom teachers, (c) attending to school politics and (d) telling motivational stories in her day to day interactions with colleagues” (p. 417). These tactics, Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997) propose, were successful in elevating the status of physical education at Dianna’s school to a position that was respected and central to the school. The authors rightly claim that their study demonstrates that teachers can change the school culture where they work, but recognize that this may not always be possible in every setting given the

multitude of contextual factors at work in creating school norms. This study was important in providing knowledge about specific political tactics that one teacher used to advocate for her physical education program and provides support for the relevance of the study proposed here.

The work of Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997), while critical, is nearly ten years old and occurred at a time when *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* (2001) legislation was not in effect. Consequently, the socio-political structures in schools were vastly different than they are today and the opportunity for mobility of subject matter in the hierarchy of schools was more plausible. A current examination of school social structure and successful strategies for navigating this landscape is needed. The proposed study aims to do just that. In addition, the proposed study seeks to understand how an *exceptional* PE teacher (as defined by *NCATE* and *NBPTS*) interprets her school culture and how this interpretation leads her to decide on which strategy she believes will be most successful; it is not wholly clear that Dianna was an ‘exceptional’ teacher as operationally defined by the proposed study. Further, Rovegno and Baundhauer (1997) did not focus directly on the phenomenon of marginality; only one aspect of it: school culture. While findings from Rovegno and Bandhaer (1997) supply us with the strategies used by Dianna, it does not grant us the insight into how Dianna came to select these strategies based on her interpretation of her specific school culture. It is this process that the proposed study hopes to uncover.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that physical education teachers are isolated and conflicted professionals who are stimulated and content in some areas of their jobs, but dissatisfied and frustrated with others. They are isolated from colleagues for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, physical proximity, subject matter, and status. As collegial relationships contribute positively to professional development and teacher effectiveness, more

needs to be done to equip our teachers to combat this which constrains them and provide them with necessary professional interaction. Further, physical educators who also take on the role of coach encounter additional frustration in the conflict between the expectations of PE professional with those of coach in a sport setting. This role conflict can impact how teachers feel about their working environment.

Suggestions offered by scholars to improve the working environment for teachers and function within it include stronger relationships between schools and teacher education programs to provide necessary professional development and support and the inclusion of strategies in PETE programs to assist new teachers in facing and challenging organizational structures and issues that hinder professional satisfaction and growth.

#### The Marginal Status of Physical Education

Three lines of inquiry into sociological factors associated with teaching physical education have revealed similar findings. The struggle to be seen as a legitimate professional and teacher of a valuable subject matter is frequently expressed by physical educators. Whether considering work environment or how they are socialized into the profession, experiences and feelings of marginality are common throughout. The following section will discuss research focused specifically on marginality in physical education.

Hendry (1975) provided the first work in the notion of life in a marginal subject. The purpose of the study was to investigate physical education teachers in order to present evidence to show that these teachers experience marginality as a result of a variety of factors, school situations, and educational contexts. He begins with an introduction to the term 'marginality' describing it as roles/positions within the educational setting that are peripheral to the main

functioning of the institution. He continues and discusses the organization of schools, systems, and how power and status is awarded to curricular areas.

Thirteen urban schools were included in the investigation involving a questionnaire completed by all physical education teachers, a small number of classroom colleagues and fourteen year old students. The questionnaire included items pertaining to the prestige of physical education within the school; physical education teachers' relationships with colleagues and students; and their personal characteristics and motivations. Findings indicated that classroom colleagues and administrators viewed physical education teachers as professionals of low status because of their subject matter. In contrast, prestige was awarded when athletic success was achieved with sports teams and the physical educator had a coaching role. Classroom teachers and administrators viewed physical education teachers as primarily social in nature, good with discipline, and able to gain the interest of more students due to their subject matter content. Students viewed physical education teachers as highly social, engaging, and enthusiastically student-centered. Many times, the physical education teacher seemed to connect with students in a way that classroom colleagues did not, similar to a 'counselor' type of role.

Physical education teachers seemed to alienate themselves from staff simply by their duties, activities, and attire. Coaching, running extra-curricular programs, and the physical location of the gym away from central school functions, the physical educator was not a visible presence in the school and unable to take part in many social interactions. Professionally appropriate attire for sport and activity contributes to the perceptions of physical education teachers as peripheral or of lower status. Tennis shoes, shorts, and polo shirts are perceived as less intellectual, less professional than shirts, ties, pants, and dress shoes worn by classroom teachers and principals.

Hendry (1975) argued that a paradox exists within the physical educator. These teachers seem to attempt to identify with their classroom colleagues and in doing so, adhere to and accept their values including those of competition and elitism. According to Hendry (1975), this “neglects the physical education teacher’s most powerful position being their ability to connect with and engage students on a social level” (p. 474). He argued that physical education teachers can gain a more defined professional identity by embracing the strength of their rapport with students and by minimizing role ambiguity.

Several years later, a study done by O’Sullivan (1989) continued this line of inquiry. The purpose of the study was to describe the lives of two elementary physical education teachers over the course of their first year. Research questions guiding data collection involved (a) the nature of relationships between administration, fellow teachers, students, and parents; (b) similarities and differences in behavior between new and veteran teachers; and (c) the success and challenges of beginning teachers.

The researchers used interviews, observations, and participant weekly journals to collect data on their experiences and perceptions throughout the school year. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed looking for dominant themes. These data were triangulated by considering evidence from observations and journal entries, which were read weekly and coded as being positive, negative, or problematic in regard to teacher perception.

Findings indicated that the teachers had expected challenges and struggles, but reported a satisfying first year overall. They were concerned with establishing routines and expectations with students. A number of findings indicated that the transition into teaching was impacted by the nature of the subject matter and the teachers’ struggle to establish legitimacy with colleagues and students. The teachers were praised for their management skills as they were asked to

perform organizational duties involving students and viewed by classroom teachers as skilled managers. They were not, however, considered skilled instructional professionals and their concern for student learning was not understood or supported by their colleagues and administration. O'Sullivan (1994) maintained that as a profession, PETE has failed new teachers and she expressed the importance of understanding new teachers and the challenges they face when entering the profession. The author concluded by asking for a more intensive look at these teachers.

A study by Sparkes and Templin (1990) was the first of several by the researchers employing life history methodology to understand how physical education teachers experience their world and serves as a seminal work in this line of research as it was the catalyst for similar future studies. The focus of the study was to gain insight into what it means to have a career in physical education from the individual's point of view. Further, the researchers "viewed a career in physical education as subjective, ongoing, concerned with identity, and taking a whole life world view" (p. 4). The study included nine physical education teachers from different points in the career cycle ranging from student teachers to those who had retired from the profession, or had left teaching for a different career. Several informal interviews were conducted and guided by themes and preliminary topics as held by the researchers. It is stressed that the teachers, not researchers, controlled the flow of the interviews as later interview questions were developed based on the thoughts, expressions, and key issues that were shared.

Based on the data, the authors maintain that there is a status problem in physical education and that PE and those who teach it are peripheral and marginalized. Physical education is seen as practical or training in nature and not academic, intellectual, or prestigious. Its knowledge is viewed as "utilitarian and related to non-professional vocations that are deemed



low status in society, and hence, the educational system” (p. 7). The teachers in this study were aware of their low status and the image that others had of them, which caused them frustration and dissatisfaction. The authors argue that consistently being devalued impacts teacher satisfaction, commitment, and eventually student learning. The teachers in this study seemed to respond to their low-status position with quiet compliance. While having private reservations and frustration, the teachers retreated to the gym with students and did not visibly or overtly challenge the organizational structures that constrained them or provided these messages of marginality.

The solution, the authors offered, is an understanding of the micro political issues at work in schools that dictate structure, organization, resources, power, status and how these factors influence the way teachers’ careers are constructed. Sparkes & Templin placed the responsibility of providing this awareness with of teacher education programs. They argued that if new teachers enter schools with an idea of how these micro political structures operate, they may be in a better position to function within it and eventually challenge these constraints.

Following this study, Sparkes, Templin and Schempp (1993) brought specific focus in their investigation of this marginality when they considered different dimensions of the phenomenon as experienced by three physical educators. Again using life history methods, the researchers “extensively interviewed these professionals and focused on three forms of marginality associated with subject matter status, gender, and sexual orientation” (p. 388). The purpose of the study was to highlight the stories of these PE teachers and connect individual experiences with the wider framework of dialectic relationship and socialization that challenges and constrains them both professionally and personally.

Findings indicated that marginality is experienced in a cumulative fashion through the three forms discussed. First, physical education teachers reported experiencing a dimension of marginality based on the status of the subject matter they teach within the school setting. This was compounded when the teacher of a marginal subject matter is also a female. Further, a female physical education teacher with a homosexual orientation experiences marginality in a more distinct and severe manner. The authors were careful to recognize that other factors impacting marginality exist and that the socialization process of physical educators is complex, dynamic, and interactive depending on a variety of issues. Sparkes, Templin and Schempp (1993) advocated the importance of further study into those individuals who have challenged constraining structures and have continued to try to change the forces acting upon their marginalization in schools. This, they maintained, is critical in our understanding of the socialization of physical education teachers as the end goal is a change in perception and status.

Advancing the line of inquiry through using a life history approach, Templin, Sparkes, Grant, and Schempp (1994) conducted a case study of a late career physical education teacher and coach with 32 years of experience in an effort to demonstrate the significance of events over the span of his teaching career and the social context of his working environment. The research team spent nearly two years with the participant and collected data through a variety of methods. Extensive informal interviews were done with topics for discussion predetermined by the researchers. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically. Data from interviews was cross-referenced by the research team and the participant reviewed the transcriptions to ensure his thoughts and views were accurately represented. Significant experiences and perspectives expressed by the participant were identified by the researchers and

compared to dominant themes that were evident from interview data. Along the way, this information helped guide interview topics and enriched the data set.

A contrast was found between the participant's position as a teacher and that as a coach. Interscholastic athletics was considered of great importance and the participant received praise and interest in his role as a varsity coach. As a physical education teacher, however, messages of marginality and low status were frequently present. The participant was most concerned with his position as a coach and prioritized this over his teaching of physical education. This, the researchers commented, is not uncommon in an environment when physical education teachers are recognized for their contributions in regards to sport as it is many times elevated above physical education in the hierarchy of schools. Content to focus on athletics and coaching, the participant was not fully aware and did not express marginality to the degree in which it was observed by other data sources gathered by the research team. Templin, Sparkes, Grant, and Schempp (1994) discuss the value of life history methodology and biographical research in informing the socialization and marginality of physical education teachers in school contexts. They maintained that these in-depth stories can provide a level of understanding that is most effective toward initiating change.

Considering marginality with a different theoretical perspective, Macdonald (1995), offered the theory of the physical education teacher as proletariat. Macdonald described the proletariat or 'proletarianization' as "the teacher's loss of control over their work both technically and theoretically and being disempowered in work tasks as routines and protocols are developed for activities and functions" (p. 130). The purpose of the study was to share the stories of Australian physical education teachers working in difficult environments.

Twenty-two new teachers volunteered to participate in the study. The researchers spent a day with them in their working environment conducting interviews, observations, and taking field notes. In addition, the teachers kept a journal over a ten day period recording feelings of frustration, satisfaction, and difficulties they may have experienced. The researchers used a grounded theory of data analysis to examine the recorded and transcribed interviews.

Macdonald's findings were consistent with previous research (Stroot, 1993, Sparkes, et al., 1993) in that the marginal status of physical education was evident and impacted the way the teachers felt about themselves and their jobs. These feelings of consistently being devalued influenced their tendencies to leave the profession for other areas in search of alternative settings in which they would be supported and viewed as legitimate professionals. As a result of the conflict between professional ideals and proletarianization, tension exists within physical education teachers. This conflict, Macdonald concluded, is useful in considering the nature of teachers' work and how they make meaning within existing organizational structures.

Inquiry into the marginalization of physical education has established that this phenomenon is not limited to the United States. Offering an additional international perspective, Johns and Dimmock (1999) examined the marginal status and curriculum policies of physical education in Hong Kong public schools. The authors asserted that what is considered valid knowledge is the product of deeply in-grained socio-cultural values that place high esteem on academic subjects. This results in the marginality of those subjects considered less academic, more practical, or utilitarian in nature. The authors suggested that a broader view be taken to reconsider the positioning of physical education within schools beyond administrators and teachers and examine the social and cultural views that inform beliefs and perspectives of members of a given culture.

The authors offered strategies to address the problems of marginalization and disconnect between curriculum and practice in schools. First, they recommended that a more integrated approach needs to be taken toward curriculum and resource allocation. Specifically, Johns and Dimmock (1999) called for a commitment to increasing resources to physical education that could begin a change in the way physical education is perceived. Next, the authors suggested that government policy makers gain further understanding of the problems and challenges faced by schools and teachers in the implementation of curriculum. This, they argue will aid in the development of more appropriate curriculum and accurate expectations for teachers and administrators who are bringing curriculum to students.

The major findings from this line of inquiry demonstrate that physical educators experience marginality as teachers. PE is clearly a subject that is considered less valuable in the hierarchy of schools. This marginality is compounded by other factors such as gender and sexual orientation and impacts the socialization process through the dialectic negotiation that occurs as teachers construct their beliefs, perceptions, and expectations. Researchers have considered it important for teachers to gain an increased understanding of the micro political factors operating that inform school structure and function. Scholars maintained that teacher education programs need to produce teachers who are entering the profession with this awareness as it will assist them in operating with school micro political structures and challenging norms in hopes of change.

### Expertise and Exceptional Teaching

Expertise is a sought after quality by many performers and professionals. Through extensive and consistent inquiry into this area, scholars have learned a great deal about the development of expertise and characteristics of expert performers, including teachers. As the

purpose of this study is to investigate how an exceptional elementary physical education teacher navigates his or her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject, it is necessary to discuss how expertise and exceptional teaching have been defined and conceptualized in the literature. This section will present research in this area in order to provide an understanding of exceptional teaching to illustrate that the examination of how a highly effective physical educator manages his or her position in the school structure is imperative for the preparation of teachers and the field of physical education.

### *Development of expertise*

Chi (2006) identified two differing approaches to the idea of expertise and expert performance: the absolute approach and the relative approach. Those subscribing to the absolute approach see expertise and expert performance as due to talent or natural ability. The relative approach views expertise as a continuum and a skill that can be developed and attained by people through necessary action, practice, and experience. Much of the study of expertise has taken a relative approach to expert performance.

One of the most significant factors in the development of expertise is the importance of deliberate practice (Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Ericsson, 2006). Deliberate practice refers to the focus and practice on specific elements to the skill and performance that are needed by the individual for improvement. Without deliberate practice, it seems, the level of expertise attained will be limited. Further, scholars have determined that individuals need to be involved in the domain of interest utilizing deliberate practice and accumulating knowledge for at least ten years or more in order to attain expertise. Many hours and significant effort are needed in the development of expertise. Hunt (2006) discussed the influence of social support and motivation on the development of expertise. Becoming an expert, Hunt (2006) claimed,

requires years of practice, commitment, and effort. Because of this, individuals will only continue in their pursuit if they experience enjoyment and are socially supported in their pursuit of expertise.

### *Phases in the development of expertise*

As teachers gain more experience, they get better at what they do. The movement toward more advanced and expert teaching can be viewed along a continuum. Berliner (1994) identified five stages (or levels) in the development of expert teachers: (a) novice, (b) advanced beginner, (c) competent, (d) proficient, and (e) expert. These levels will be discussed here with relevant examples for teaching.

Stage 1: Novice Level. Pre-service and first year teachers are usually considered novices. At this stage, 'context-free' rules and procedures for teaching need to be learned (and often memorized) by the novice. For example: beginning teachers are often told to remain on the perimeter of students always keeping their back to the wall. These novices need to be taught the meaning of terms like 'developmentally appropriate', 'positive specific feedback', and 'teaching cues' as well as being given rules about teaching behavior that is needed to begin teaching (Berliner, 1994). The teaching behavior of a novice is rigid, inflexible, and usually rational as they concentrate on following rules that they were given about necessary teaching behavior and are unable to distinguish contextual cues and modify their teaching behavior accordingly.

Stage 2: Advanced Beginner Level. As teachers gain more experience and are in their second or third years, they transition into this stage. At this point, the teacher begins to recognize similarities and differences between contexts as their experience and knowledge start to merge together (Berliner, 1994). Teachers in this stage of development have acquired

enough past experiences and compare present episodes to knowledge gained from those past experiences as context begins to determine their teaching behavior. For example, responding to off-task or disruptive behavior can be challenging for novices, but after more experience, the teacher can better understand how to handle these situations.

Stage 3: Competent Level. Many third and fourth year teachers reach a level that is considered competent after further experience and motivation for success (Berliner, 1994). Competent teachers can be characterized by two distinguishing characteristics: (a) making conscious choices about their teaching behavior and (b) distinguishing between important and unimportant information while teaching (Berliner, 1994). As a result of their experience, competent teachers are able to recognize what they need to attend to and what they need to ignore (Berliner, 1994). For example, timing decisions and movement from one task to the next becomes easier as teachers enter the competent stage. Because of this, teachers at this level feel more responsible for what happens in the classroom and they feel more engaged and connected to students than novices or advanced beginners.

Stage 4: Proficient Level. Some teachers with five or six (or more) experience reach this stage of development. At this point, intuition and a holistic view of situations guide teaching behavior (Berliner, 1994). Proficient teachers are able to recognize patterns that help them to accurately predict what will happen in the classroom. For example, a proficient teacher will notice (without much effort) that a particular lesson is resulting in meaningful student learning in relation to another previous lesson. While utilizing intuition and recognizing patterns, proficient teachers are still deliberate and analytical in their decision making (Berliner, 1994).



Stage 5: Expert Level. A select few teachers will attain this level of expertise. It is estimated that teachers will not achieve their peak level of performance until at least five years of on-the-job experience have been obtained and that a teacher may not reach the expert level with less than ten years of classroom experience (Berliner, 1994). At this stage, teachers demonstrate fluid performance and seem to know what to do at precisely the right moment (Berliner, 1994). In addition, these teachers can do so without consciously choosing what to pay attention to and what to ignore. In fact, when functioning successfully, these teachers cannot easily describe or qualify exactly how they are working. For example, an expert teacher might describe student readiness to move from one task to another by saying “I can just tell when they are ready for the next task- I just know what they need next in order to maximize student learning”.

#### *Characteristics of experts and expert teachers*

In addition to describing the stages in expertise, scholars have investigated characteristics that distinguish experts from non-experts. This line of inquiry has identified that experts possess the following seven characteristics: (a) extensive knowledge, (b) hierarchical organization of that knowledge, (c) acute perceptual capacities, (d) superior problem representation and solution, (e) automaticity of behavior, (f) superior self-monitoring and reflection, and (g) superior memory (Chi, 2006; Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Tan, 1997;).

Regarding knowledge, experts’ extensive subject matter knowledge is largely the result of ten or more years of experience. Not only do experts possess more knowledge, but they are able to ‘chunk’ information together and organize it in a hierarchical way that makes it more accessible to them which impacts their effectiveness at problem representation and solution. When presented with a problem, experts are more effective at identifying problems and are able

to see things that non-experts miss. They are able to see underlying sources of the problem and take time in gathering information before making a decision about their chosen solution. They often select the most effective solution and do this more quickly than non-experts due to their knowledge, organization, and perceptual capacities. Because of this, they demonstrate automaticity of behavior. Through significant experience and the 'chunking' of information and organization of knowledge, they are able to perform skills in their domain without much thought or process. Related to this is the short and long term memory of experts. This superior memory allows for automaticity, and in turn, leaves room for additional information to be gained because they are able to perform skills without utilizing memory as extensively as non-experts. Finally, experts have a superior ability to monitor and reflect on their performance and identify elements as successful, unsuccessful, effective or ineffective and come up with strategies for improvement.

Experts are not, however, perfect. Chi (2006) identified shortcomings to expertise and expert performance. Expertise, it seems, is domain specific and does not transfer from one area to another. Further, experts may also be inflexible as a result of years of confirming evidence to support their decisions and performances as well as the tendency to be overconfident. As a result of their experience, automaticity, and superior organization of knowledge, they may be ineffective at providing judgment and advice to beginners. They simply know things differently in a way that may not be appropriate for informing beginners.

Drawing on this literature, scholars in education have applied these frameworks to teaching. While they have found expert teachers to possess these same characteristics, there are some qualities that seem more specific to the context and act of teaching. In teaching, extensive knowledge comes in the form of knowledge of the content, curriculum, and how to present it to

students (Shulman, 1986, 1987 and 1990). This leads to superior planning on the part of the expert teacher (Manross & Templeton, 1997). Acute perceptual capacities allow the teacher to more accurately assess student performance and design tasks for students that will enhance learning (Rink, 2003). Automaticity of behavior allows the expert teacher to attend to a multitude of things in the educational environment at once. In their investigation of subject matter expertise, Schempp, Manross, Tan and Fincher (1998) found that when teaching a subject matter in which they had expertise, teachers were able to attend to more variability in student skill performance and were more focused on individual students than when teaching content of which they possess less expertise. They also found teachers to demonstrate more enthusiasm when teaching subject matter of more expertise.

Reflective of their superior perceptual capacities and ability to represent and solve problems; McCullick, Cumings and Schempp (1999) found expert teachers to view themselves as repair people charged with assessing problems in student performance and identifying the best practices to improve them. In addition, the expert teachers in the study saw themselves as ambassadors to the game and sought to foster enjoyment and appreciation for the game with students. Of most significance, the authors concluded, is the importance of the student in the teaching process to these expert instructors.

Through research in the area of expertise, scholars have taken to the 'relative approach' believing that it is something that can be developed rather than something that is due to talent or chance. In their investigations, they have identified phases in the development of expertise (novice, apprentice, journeyman, expert, master) and the significance of deliberate practice and extended years of experience. Scholars have also provided us with characteristics possessed by expert performers: extensive knowledge, hierarchical organization and chunking of that

knowledge, acute perceptual capacities, automaticity of behavior, superior problem representation and solution, superior self-monitoring and reflection, and superior short and long term memory. Researchers in education have applied these to the study of teachers and identified that expert teachers are superior planners, give step-by-step instructions with clear objectives and presentation, effectively assess student performance and needs, give immediate and positive feedback to students relative to correct skill performance and critical elements, and are significantly focused on the student in the act of teaching. They ask lots of questions and use the knowledge gained from student answers throughout the lesson, they often times use metaphors to illustrate complex concepts as well as focusing on few main points demonstrating them in a variety of ways, and close the lesson with success and summary of the most important points (Schempp, Tan, & McCullick, 2002). In addition, these expert teachers possess superior knowledge and skill in both subject matter and the organization and management of classrooms (Berliner, 1986).

Stated simply, effective teaching is teaching that results in student(s) learning skills and objectives intended by the teacher. Exactly how teachers manipulate the content, tasks, environment, and their behavior in order to attain student learning is more extensive. There has been significant research in this area in an attempt to identify what is needed by teachers to be effective in achieving optimal student learning. Shulman (1986, 1987, and 1990) identified specific questions that should be asked to guide this pursuit: What should teachers know? What should teachers be able to do? As a result of inquiry into this area, there is a body of knowledge regarding the characteristics and practices of effective teachers.

The sources experts use to acquire knowledge were the subject of investigation by Schempp, Templeton, and Clark (1998). These scholars found that the primary source(s) of

knowledge for these teachers was interaction with other teachers and their own personal teaching experience. Secondary sources of knowledge included books and professional development, and they reported tertiary sources of knowledge as teacher certification programs. It would seem that these findings reflect the context-dependent nature of teaching articulated by Shulman (1986, 1987). As the blending of content and pedagogy varies by context, personal teaching experience would seem to provide the nuanced and context specific experience from which to build this knowledge.

### *Distinguishing Between Effective and Exceptional Teachers*

In order to fully understand what it means to be an exceptional teacher, it is necessary to describe what they *do* that distinguishes them from those who can be labeled ‘competent’, ‘proficient’, ‘effective’, or ‘experienced’. The body of knowledge on ‘exceptional’ teachers at this time is limited. While the exceptional teacher is short of being an expert, we can safely assume that they are, at the very least, effective. From organization and management to planning and knowledge, exceptional teachers have superior skills and abilities to those of novices and advanced beginners. It is important to understand the knowledge base regarding effective, exceptional, and expert teaching as they can be viewed as three separate descriptors for teaching performance. This section aims to present the body of literature regarding these classifications.

Effective teachers. Findings from inquiry into effective teaching have told us that effective teachers have superior planning skills and utilize clear objectives as well as instruction and presentation of information to students. They do this in a step-by-step manner with students in a way that develops the content using different types of instructional tasks. Through this, increased student learning occurs (Rink, 2003). Opening a lesson by orienting students and asking lots of questions sets the tone and provides the teacher with knowledge that they will use

throughout the lesson to modify and enhance the learning experience for students. During the lesson, effective teachers are more skilled at assessing student performance and are able to attend to significant variability in skill levels and performance by providing differentiated instruction (as well as positive specific feedback) and giving activities to students that are at their optimal developmental level. Expert teachers conclude lessons with positive attempts by students and review main points checking for student understanding. (Schempp, Tan, & McCullick, 2002; Manross & Templeton, 1998; Baker, Schempp, & Hardin, 1998; Rink, 2003).

As a result of inquiry in to effective teaching, we also know about the knowledge that these professionals possess. Effective teachers possess the following bases of knowledge: content knowledge, curricular knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of students, knowledge of the aims of education, and knowledge of the context of the educational environment (Shulman, 1986, 1987, 1990). Their ability to apply this knowledge with the teaching practices described above is what separates the expert teacher from the non-expert teacher. Acquiring this knowledge is done in a variety of ways both in and out of the classroom. Effective teachers have extensive knowledge gained from personal life experience, personal teaching experience, professional preparation and continued professional development, as well as books and interactions with other teachers (Shulman, 1986, 1987, 1990; Schempp, Templeton, & Clark, 1998).

Exceptional teachers. Exceptional teachers can be viewed as superior to those labeled 'effective', 'experienced', or 'competent'. These teachers are closer to what Berliner (1994) describes as 'proficient'. For the purposes of this study, the word 'exceptional' is being selected as it has been operationally defined by the *National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)*. Officially, *NCATE* defines exceptional teachers as having "skill or

knowledge surpassing what is common, usual, or expected, as a result of experience or training” (NCATE, 2008, p. 84). These teachers demonstrate advanced pedagogical skills and knowledge that leads to greater student learning than is achieved by other teachers.

Defining the expertise of teachers in schools has been a common problem. This is largely because unlike a small number of fields (like chess), one is usually deemed to be an expert teacher based on the judgment of others (Berliner, 2001). In addition, the working conditions of teachers exert a powerful influence on the development of expertise (Berliner, 2001) and many times, teachers considered ‘experts’ include cooperating teachers or those recognized by colleagues or administrators (Berliner, 2001). As a result, *The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)* was developed to provide an objective criterion for designating exceptional teachers through specification of what their classroom performance and professional behavior should look like (Berliner, 2001; Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000; Hattie, 2003).

*NBPTS* is a system of advanced, voluntary certification for K-12 teachers including portfolios and videotapes of classroom teaching as well as hours of testing at an assessment center (Berliner, 2001; Hattie, 2003). The substantially low passing rate for *NBPTS* certification and its’ significant challenge make it widely recognized as a valid and comprehensive assessment by which to identify exceptional teachers (Berliner, 2001; Hattie, 2003).

Research findings indicate that teachers possessing *NBPTS* certification perform better in their classrooms than comparable ‘experienced’, well-prepared, and confident colleagues (Berliner, 2001; Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000; Hattie, 2003). These teachers differ from ‘effective’ or ‘experienced’ teachers in the following ways: (a) better use of knowledge, (b) more extensive knowledge of their subject matter and how to communicate it to students, (c) better modification of goals for diverse learners, (d) greater ability to improvise when necessary, (e)

more challenging objectives for students, (f) better classroom climate, (g) superior perception of classroom events and the ability to read cues from students, (h) greater sensitivity to context and ability to monitor student learning, and (i) greater respect for students and demonstrated passion for teaching (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000). As a result, students taught by teachers with *NBPTS* certification demonstrated greater breadth and depth of learning (Hattie, 2003).

The study of these teachers provides important information that should be used to guide the growth and development of pre-service and in-service teachers (Berliner, 1986).

Understanding the beliefs, knowledge, and practices of those who are great provides an example and a vision for non-expert educators. Further, as Berliner (2001) indicated that the working environment of teachers is a significant influence on their development of expertise, it is critical to understand how a PE teacher who has achieved this level of expertise navigates her working environment. Knowing this is essential in the quality of PETE programs and ultimately, the level of expertise by PE professionals.

### Summary

This chapter has presented relevant literature that provides background and rationale for this study. Furthermore, the chapter has outlined literature that will inform the purpose of this study of how one exceptional teacher navigates her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. From the review of literature presented the following is known: (a) the definition of the term 'Marginal Man' (Park, 1928) and the idea that those who experience marginality may respond by developing certain personality characteristics and demonstrating possible reactions (Grant & Breese, 1997; Stonequist, 1935), (b) Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984), composed of the concepts of structure and agency, can be used to further understand Marginality Theory and how individuals experience this social phenomenon in the school



context, (c) teacher socialization is complex and physical educators experience marginality, (d) physical education teachers have reported isolation and a struggle for legitimacy, and (e) some teachers have been able to overcome their marginalization and successfully manage their working environment allowing them to become exceptional educators.

The discussion of this literature begins with defining marginality and presenting Marginal Theory as articulated by Park (1928) and Stonequist (1935). These seminal works offered the idea that the 'Marginal Man' is one who exists between two diverse socio-cultural groups whose values and ideas are contrary to that of the dominant group. Given this, certain personality characteristics may develop (Stonequist, 1935). Further investigation into this social phenomenon by other scholars has argued that marginality is constructed within the individual experiencing a position of low status (Grant & Breese, 1997). According to these authors, if one perceives themselves as marginal, they will be more sensitive to their behavior and the behavior of others leading them to react to marginal experiences in predictable ways (Grant & Breese, 1997; Kerchoff & McCormick, 1955). Some of these responses to marginality can create a barrier between the marginal individual and the dominant (or perceived dominant) group further exacerbating the marginal position and hierarchy.

Related to this is Structuration Theory proposed by Giddens (1984) as it offers a way to understand social action and behavior of individuals and organizations. According to Giddens (1984), there are two key components to how individuals and organizations interact with one another: structure and agency. Structure refers to socially appropriate norms and ways of doing things, while agency refers to how the individuals choose to act within (and based on) this social structure. Giddens (1984) posits that the social structure and individuals actions are constantly acting upon one another. The social structure is constantly influencing people's behavior and, in

turn, the action of individuals is constantly influencing the social structure. Utilizing this theory as a way to understand life in schools and how teachers interact with one another will inform the purpose of this study by providing a way to understand how the school environment impacts an exceptional elementary PE teacher and how that teacher chooses to navigate that environment based on her interpretations of that structure.

Inquiry into how teachers are socialized into understanding this social structure has told us that socialization is complicated and influenced by complex social and political factors (Lawson, 1988; Schempp & Graber, 1992). In addition, these investigations have demonstrated that teachers report experiences of marginality and struggle as their personal views and beliefs are met with conflict by the social structure of American schools. Those who have studied how physical education teachers experience life in schools have found that PE teachers feel isolated and conflicted (Templin, 1989; Schempp, et al 1993). The structure of schools is such that PE teachers are separated from other colleagues by physical proximity, differences in curriculum, and differences in attire. Contrary to this are the experiences of physical educators who also have coaching duties and their experiences of role conflict. The school structure places physical education in a low status position, but many times rewards and elevates the status of coaches and sports teams when successful. These professionals find conflict in interpreting and acting within this structure as they serve two different roles that are perceived very differently within the structure.

The literature presented here has demonstrated that physical education is a marginal subject in schools (Hendry, 1975; Naess, 2001; Solomon, Worthy & Carter, 1993; Templin, 1989; Stroot, Collier, O'Sullivan & England, 1994). As this marginal status has implications for how teachers feel about and approach their jobs, researchers have stated the significance of

understanding the political factors that inform the school structure and affect the work of physical educators. Many scholars have offered that teacher education programs need to prepare pre-service teachers for the landscape of schools providing them with knowledge of the different factors that are at work in schools so that they can be armed to challenge these forces. This speaks directly to the concept of structure and agency described by Giddens (1984). In short, scholars are saying that PETE faculty need to understand the school *structure* and impart this knowledge to pre-service teachers so that they can choose more productive and effective *agency*. For the purpose of this study, utilizing the theoretical framework offered by the Theory of Structuration offered by Giddens (1984) and the reactions to marginality (serving as Giddens' *agency*) as defined by Grant and Breese (1997) will provide a way to understand the working environment and behavior of the exceptional teacher of interest.

How the most effective, exceptional, or expert teachers interpret their structure and choose to respond within that school structure is knowledge missing from the literature on this topic. Berliner (1986) called for the investigation of experts to guide the growth and development of non-experts. Following this approach, this study will attempt to identify the interpretations, strategies, and actions of an exceptional teacher in navigating her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. Understanding how exceptional PE teachers experience and manage marginality is important in improving the experiences of other physical educators and in guiding work with new teachers as PETE faculty attempt to best prepare them for life in schools. This knowledge is essential to advance the field of physical education and is a line of inquiry in dire need of spirited pursuit. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how one exceptional elementary physical educator navigates his or her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. The following chapter will present the study

design and methods that will be utilized to serve the purpose of the study and answer specific research questions.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

The purpose of this study was to analyze how one exceptional elementary physical education (PE) teacher navigated her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. This study was framed by the use of Giddens' (1984) Theory of Structuration supplemented with Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997). These will be discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter. In addition, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the context/working environment of an exceptional PE teacher who has managed teaching a marginal subject?
2. What are and how does she interpret verbal and non-verbal messages, actions, and symbols in their working environment about her subject matter and its place in the school environment?
3. What are and how does she interact with administrators, colleagues, parents, and students in her working environment?
4. What are the navigational strategies an exceptional physical educator employs to manage the marginality of her subject matter?

This chapter will present the design and methods for conducting the study including the: (a) role of the researcher (b) conceptual framework (c) participants (d) procedures and (e) data trustworthiness.

## Research Design & Methods

The desired outcome of this study was to obtain an in-depth and detailed understanding of how one teacher interpreted, interacted, and experienced her working environment within the social phenomenon of marginality. Due to specific advantages such as the ability to access the teacher's construction of meaning, interpretations of words and actions and how these affect their behavior, a qualitative design was used. Perhaps Denzin and Lincoln (2004) describe the purpose and focus of the qualitative research design best when they wrote:

Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (p. 13).

Specifically, a single case study design was employed. Defined as an in-depth look at a single social phenomenon utilizing qualitative methods, Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg (2005) note that the case study approach allows for a multifaceted investigation, demands that it be executed with great detail, and utilizes several data sources. For the purposes of this study, case study research can be seen as an in-depth look into how one teacher manages her working environment as a marginalized professional that provides insight into the larger phenomenon of marginality.

Using case study design provided for two specific and primary advantages for thoroughly answering the research questions. First, it allowed the observations to be grounded in the social structure and working environment of the teacher of interest (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 2005). This makes it more likely that the researcher was able to observe and represent the dealings with marginality as closely as possible to the way that it is understood by the teacher. Second, case

study design provided the ability to access the larger social complexity of life in schools and how different elements influence the beliefs and decisions of teachers and how they operate within this environment (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 2005).

As it is vital to acquire an in-depth understanding of the case, it was necessary to understand the routines, rituals, functions and actions of the PE teacher and her working environment in order to learn cultural norms and assumptions (Stake, 2005). Learning these assisted in the development of an exhaustive understanding of the nature of the marginal PE teacher and provided room for conclusions to be drawn about other work environments for PE teachers. The case study approach provided the best way in which to do this. Specific data collection methods making it possible to learn the school life of this PE teacher were: (a) in-depth interviews (both formal and in-formal) (b) observations (c) field notes from observations and interviews (d) artifact and document analysis, and e) the critical incident data collection technique (Flanagan, 1954; Tripp, 1994). A case study approach was best in allowing me the opportunity to establish the trust and relationship needed to answer the proposed research questions and get rich data needed to understand the complexities of the phenomenon of marginality and how this teacher navigates her environment.

Gaining this trust and establishing a relationship with the teacher was critical and was considered when selecting the participant. The thoughts, feelings, and reactions to experiences in their school can be personal and private for many teachers. Understanding how this teacher perceives and makes meaning of the interaction she has in schools required her to reveal and express opinions, beliefs, and thoughts that may even be perceived as having negative implications for her working conditions if others were to be aware of her feelings. In order to gain access to these types of observations, the teacher needed to trust that what she reveals to me

in interviews would remain confidential. Further, it was important for the teacher to feel as though her experiences and sentiments are validated- that I could appreciate and understand the circumstances. Sharing with her the knowledge that I was an elementary physical educator for six years helped to establish this. It is important to note that this study presents the teacher's perceptions of the marginality associated with teaching physical education and attempts to highlight her interpretations of the messages in her working environment and how she chooses to act in response.

### Role of Researcher

One of the hallmark features of qualitative research is the admission of the subjective perceptions of both participants and researchers (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Researcher subjectivities provide specific advantages in that (a) affective reactions to observations can serve as clues to things that need deeper examination, (b) they are critical in establishing trust and relationship building with participants, and (c) subjective reactions can inform methodological decisions (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This section will serve to present relevant subjectivities that I have regarding teaching PE and marginality through my personal experience as an elementary PE teacher. It is the intention that this section will provide the reader with an understanding of the bias in my perceptions that may inform this study. In addition, I will address how these subjectivities were managed throughout data collection and data analysis to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of findings.

### *Subjectivity Statement*

As an elementary physical education teacher for six years, I worked to establish the legitimacy of physical education and to be viewed as a professional with value equal to that of my 'classroom' colleagues. Upon entering the profession, I felt as though this marginalization



was the result of a lack of information on the part of administration, faculty, and staff about quality physical education, its benefits and value for children. As a new teacher, I believed that it was my responsibility to educate those in my school community and show them the ‘new face’ of quality physical education, and that as a result of this, I (and my content) would be respected and valued as legitimate and important to the education of students.

I worked tirelessly to build and provide quality physical education programming focused on student learning for nearly one thousand students. Opportunities for students beyond expected daily lessons were provided as I created and implemented five different extra-curricular programs running before and after school. One of these was a state demonstration team for the *American Heart Association* which involved the students traveling to approximately 25 schools a year across the state to promote *Jump Rope for Heart* and the importance of living heart healthy lifestyles.

As an active professional I served as a Board Member of the state professional organization for physical education teachers. In this role, I contributed to decision making regarding physical education policies and programming for students all over the state of North Carolina. My program and professional involvement was recognized at the state and national levels as I received awards including a scholarship for quality programming in the state of North Carolina and a national teaching award from an organization in the field of physical education.

Despite this, within the walls of my elementary school, I continued to encounter difficulty being taken seriously. Professional development funds were budgeted and available for ‘classroom’ teachers only, while I had to find creative ways to fund professional development opportunities such as reimbursement from physical education associations and organizations with which I worked. School scheduling revolved around the interest and preferences of

classroom teachers that resulted in daily routines for me (and other ‘special’ teachers) which made delivering quality programming more challenging. While teachers received new computers, textbooks, and supplies; funds were not available to the physical education program to purchase new equipment (or even replace broken or lost equipment). I acquired funds to grow the program through grant writing and other professional affiliation outside of my school. At the end of my teaching experience, I realized that despite my efforts, no significant change had resulted in the perception of the content I taught or of my legitimacy as a professional. These experiences of marginalization were one factor that led me to leave the public schools and pursue a career in teacher education.

#### *Implications for My Role in This Study*

This previous experience, both as an elementary physical educator and of marginality, was beneficial in providing an insider’s perspective to the study. These subjectivities due to my previous experience were essential in establishing and building the intimate relationship with the teacher that were necessary to allow trust and confidence (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). At the same time, it was important to be mindful of how my previous experience influenced my interpretations of what was being observed. In order to do this, I documented my thoughts, feelings, and perceptions about the teacher and others in the school context and included this in my field notes. This journal also served to assist me in staying focused and maintaining my role as ‘researcher’ rather than allowing it to develop into ‘counselor’. Due to my previous experience, background, and emotional connection to the topic, this was a potential concern that needed to be managed. In order to manage this best, I remained consciously aware of when I recognized my own subjectivities and documented times when I feel myself having an emotional response. In addition to helping with the trustworthiness of the data, this also served to indicate

important happenings requiring follow-up with the teacher to investigate her emotions or interpretations. The content of this journal was shared only with my advisor for this study, Dr. Bryan McCullick, when discussing the progress of the project and my observations and interpretations were shared with a peer debriefer to assist with the development of my initial observations. Discussion with a peer debriefer also helped to ensure trustworthiness of emerging themes. Additionally, following data collection, I shared the findings with the teacher to ensure that her thoughts and perspectives were appropriately represented. She agreed with the findings and indicated that my interpretations provided an accurate depiction of how she navigates her working environment.

### Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of understanding how the teacher interpreted and interacted with her working environment as the teacher of a marginalized subject, Giddens' (1984) Theory of Structuration supplemented with Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997) provided the framework for the study. These ideas were used to frame the research questions and were used throughout the study to guide all aspects of the data collection and analysis. Basic tenets of this theoretical framework providing assumptions upon entering the study will be discussed in this section.

Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) explains social practices by describing the actions of individuals within environments/organizations and how social organizations are impacted by and influence these actions. The two key components of the theory are structure and agency. He posits that *structure* can be thought of as social norms, accepted routines, and expected ways of thinking and doing things; while *agency* refers to the capacity of humans to act independently and choose freely: one's ability to decide what they say and do. Agency manifests itself in the

behavior, action, and language of an individual with other individuals with the social environment (later defined as structure). According to Giddens (1984), agency and structure are dependent upon one another and there is constant interaction between these two components: the structure informs individual agency, and agency affects the structure.

The structure of elementary schools is such that students spend the majority of their time with their homeroom teacher involved in traditional academic content and receive significantly less time with enrichment content areas (art, music, PE, foreign language). This demonstrates the held value and belief that academic content is of greater significance than physical education content. Based on this structure, teachers choose their behavior, language, and actions. These held values and beliefs influence how those in the environment interact with one another and how they conduct themselves.

As the structure of schools prioritizes academic content, teachers of academic subjects may act differently towards physical education teachers than other 'classroom' colleagues. For example, scheduling field trips on days when students are to attend physical education class preferring to miss physical education class time rather than other content areas. How teachers are socialized into teaching and their school environment also influences their chosen behavior. As teachers learn the social structure and held beliefs of their school working environment, expected behavior is communicated and informs how teachers will act in the future. For example, if teachers learn from more experienced teachers that scheduling field trips on days when students have PE is frowned upon or inappropriate, they will be less likely to make such a decision in the future. It would also communicate the message that physical education was important enough not to be missed.

Just as the school social structure influences how teachers choose to think, speak, and act, the teachers' actions then act back on the school social structure that change or maintain the structure. The school social structure influences the teachers' actions because it provides a framework that guides behavior choices, and the teachers' actions influence the school social structure by either reinforcement or change. Thus, a dialectic relationship emerges between the school social structure and the teachers' actions that constantly influence one another. If the school structure communicates the value of academics over physical education, actions by teachers (such as field trip scheduling) can either reinforce that held belief or contradict and change it.

According to Grant and Breese (1997) individuals that experience marginality can have one or more of the following reactions to this experience: (a) affected (b) emulative (c) defiant (d) emissarial (e) withdrawn (f) balanced (g) paradoxical, and (h) uninvolved. Practically, this could result in PE teachers responding to their marginal status of their subject matter by becoming angry and confronting 'classroom' colleagues and administration (affected), isolating themselves from the social structure by limiting their interaction with their co-workers (withdrawn), or they may even attempt to align themselves and their curriculum with academic content in an effort to legitimize their work (emulative). Each of these responses may lead to positive change, negative change, or maintenance of the school social structure.

Relevant literature in the past 33 years has established that physical education is a marginalized subject in the school structure (Hendry, 1975; O'Sullivan, 1994; Macdonald, 1995; Templin, 1989). Reduced contact time with students, funding for programs, and professional development opportunities for teachers are a few examples of evidence to this marginality. Because they teach this subject, physical education teachers are marginal individuals within the

school structure. The use of Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) and Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997) can help in the analysis of how an exceptional physical education teacher navigates her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject.

### Participant Selection

One exceptional elementary physical education teacher was selected to participate in the study. The criteria used to select the teacher were: (a) held certificate by the *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)* (b) 10 years or more teaching experience, (c) formal recognition for their teaching and programming, (d) willingness to invest the time and effort needed to participate in the study, and (e) accessibility. Of these criteria, *NBPTS* certification and the willingness and availability of the teacher were of most importance and were not compromised in selecting a teacher for this study. A teacher with 10 years of experience and formal recognition was desired, but not as critical as *NBPTS* certification serves as a form of formal recognition.

*NBPTS* certification serves as the primary advanced certification for teachers in the United States. With rigorous and extensive selection criterion, teachers holding National Board certification are validly regarded as exceptional in terms of their teaching ability professional status. Scholars have investigated *NBPTS* certification as a measure of teacher quality. Findings have consistently indicated that *NBPTS* certified teachers are more effective than teachers who do not hold this advanced certification (Cavalluso, 2004; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007). Findings indicate that students of *NBPTS* certified teachers demonstrated higher quality and superiority than even teachers of comparable, experienced, well-prepared, and confident teachers (Berliner,

2001). For this reason, *NBPTS* certification will serve as the primary selection criteria for the teacher for this study because it can best identify an 'exceptional' PE teacher.

Further ensuring that the participant was exceptional, the research on teaching expertise lent useful guidelines. While exceptional and expert are not synonymous, the participation criteria from expertise studies serve as a rigid guideline for choosing teachers who are extraordinary. Investigation into expert teachers and coaches has revealed that experts possess seven different characteristics that set them apart from non-experts. Two of these characteristics are (a) 10 or more years of experience, and (b) formal recognition from their peers (Ericsson & Smith, 1991; Chi, 2006 Tan, 1996). Relevant literature in the area of expertise has indicated that expertise cannot be attained in less than ten years of deliberate practice in a domain of interest. However, *NBPTS* can be achieved with as little as three years of experience ([http://www.nbpts.org/userfiles/File/Eligibility\\_Forms\\_2008\\_web.pdf](http://www.nbpts.org/userfiles/File/Eligibility_Forms_2008_web.pdf)).

Given this, the teacher's approximately 20 years of experience coupled with her *NBPTS* certification, and formal recognition from her peers in the form of *Teacher of the Year* in 2003 made her a very desirable subject.

Provided the nature of the study, significant time and access with the teacher was necessary. Further, in order to get an in-depth understanding of the teacher and her experiences of marginality within their work environment, the teacher would need to be willing to share their interpretations, thoughts, and feelings. Willingness to contribute the necessary time and involvement was a critical component in teacher selection and I attempted to find a teacher who met this criteria.

Initially, I consulted the *NBPTS* website to identify elementary physical educators in the state of Georgia holding *NBPTS* certification. I then generated a list of teachers who would be

accessible based on their location within the state and projected driving distance. Following this, I consulted with Dr. Bryan McCullick to review the list of teachers to identify any teachers with whom he was familiar. Based on their location and his knowledge of them, we reduced the list to three or four teachers with which I would make initial phone contact with regarding the study and their willingness to participate. Grace was the first teacher I contacted to inform her of the details of the study and to determine her willingness and logistical ability to participate. A few weeks later, I visited her to further discuss her involvement in the study and communicate specific expectations. Following this, a data collection schedule was sent, principal and school district approval, and consent form signatures were obtained and finalized. All appropriate forms were submitted and regulations for conducting research on human subjects set by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at The University of Georgia were followed before beginning data collection.

## Procedures

### *Data Collection Techniques*

Extended engagement with the teacher and in the school setting was necessary to get an in-depth understanding of the social structure, the perceptions of physical education, and the actions, thoughts and feelings of the teacher. I spent 11 weeks collecting data three days each week (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) spending the entire day in the school with the teacher. This will allow for approximately 260 observation hours. I began by establishing a relationship with the teacher and making initial observations about the environment of the school and social structure. Following this, I began investigating specific perceptions, interpretations, reactions, and decisions of the teacher.

Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviews. Frequent unstructured interviews taking the form of conversations (Kvale, 1996) were used to get the teacher to talk about the



environment of the school and the place of physical education within school structure as well as her career as a teacher. Following the informal interview protocol described by Schempp (1993) in case study research investigating teacher's experiences in schools, unstructured and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain perceptions of the teacher and others in the school environment that will inform the research questions. These were done at varying times before or after school, between classes, or at other unstructured times throughout the school day. These interviews did not include a pre-determined set of questions as the purpose of these interviews was exploratory and, when done in the early stages, done to formulate questions for subsequent interviews (Merriam, 1988). These interviews were embedded in conversation and at times the teacher may have been unaware that she was being questioned (Patton, 2002). However, the participant was notified at the beginning of data collection that all conversations are considered data unless asked not to be.

Several semi-structured interviews were also conducted. These interviews were guided by a list of questions to be explored regarding various issues of marginality, school structure, and the teacher's perspectives, but the exact wording of all questions was not be pre-determined. This allowed me to respond and explore the expressions and situation in the moment, the emerging views of the teacher, and possible new ideas that were developing (Merriam, 1988). Following these unstructured interviews, I recorded detailed reflections of the conversations. Additionally, field notes were kept during and immediately following the informal and semi-structured interviews. This was done to help with detailed recording and reflection of my thoughts and interpretations of the teacher's words and expressions during data collection.

Soon after my entry into the setting it was clear that the paraprofessional assigned full-time to the teacher was a significant factor in how she navigates her marginality. It was clear

that this woman provided a valuable and much needed perspective regarding this teacher's agency and the school structure and that she was a necessary data source. Because of this, I obtained the appropriate research approval from the University of Georgia and informed consent from the paraprofessional in order to be able to include data from the paraprofessional in the study. I conducted several informal interviews with the paraprofessional in order to triangulate the teacher's expressions and gain additional depth and richness with the data. Additionally, she was present for many of the informal interviews that took place between me and the teacher involved in the study as the three of us ate lunch together each day. During many of these interviews, the paraprofessional would contribute to the conversation or the teacher would initiate her involvement asking her what she thought regarding a particular question or situation.

Structured interviews. Six, audio-taped interviews lasting approximately one hour each were conducted with the teacher throughout the study. The first two interviews, done within the first two weeks, focused on getting the teacher's perceptions of the school structure and work environment as well as her personal biography and history. The next two interviews, done during the fourth or fifth week, focused on the teacher's perceptions of the place of physical education within their school structure and how she has constructed this belief/knowledge. The last two interviews, done during the last few weeks of the study, focused on gaining an understanding of how the teacher chooses to interact with other teachers, administrators, and students based on their position within the school structure. Specific questions focused on any specific strategies that the teacher employs in reacting to or managing their marginal position. Interview questions were written in advance in the form of an interview guide. The objective in developing the interview questions was to translate the research questions into specific language that allowed the teacher to share her knowledge about the phenomenon of marginality (Denzin,

1970; Merriam, 1988). The aim was to develop questions that are clear to the teacher and in familiar language that will make gaining rich data more likely.

Participant Observations and Field Notes. Data collection through observation was broken into three phases: entry, data collection, and exit (Merriam, 1988). During the first few days at the school, I took the role of passive observer learning what is appropriate in the setting. During this phase, becoming familiar with the school setting and the teacher was of primary importance. After gaining a sense of what there is to observe and understand the setting, data collection began and involved watching intently while attempting to remember as much as possible and recording with great detail what I observed from the teacher (and others in the school) and the specific situation (Merriam, 1988). While the number of visits and exact amount of time spent in data collection was not specifically determined ahead of time, data collection continued until it appeared that no new information or insights about the teacher, school structure, and interactions is being learned (Patton, 2002). As data saturation was reached, visits became more infrequent and the fieldwork was closed.

Following data collection procedures similar to those by Schempp (1993) in the single case study of one teacher's construction of knowledge, fieldwork served as the largest source of data. My role in the school could be described as 'privileged observer' (Schempp, 1993; Wolcott, 1988) as I followed the teacher around the school and during classes observing everyday actions and events. Observations focused on who she interacted with and the nature of these interactions. Specifically, words, language, and meaning related to school structure and the position of physical education and this teacher within it. Observation of students focused on the nature of their interaction with the teacher and gaining an understanding of their perceptions of physical education as a subject and how she chose to respond or react to student words and

action. Field notes captured interaction between the teacher and other faculty, administration, and students as well as my reflections and perceptions of the happenings that were observed.

Critical Incident Technique. Critical incident technique has been considered an effective way to gather qualitative data providing the ability to gain deeper understanding of the function of social situations. Scholars using this technique believe critical incident reporting is advantageous because it can elicit data that gets at the deeper levels of the social context of schools. Additionally, it is a means to gather such qualitative data efficiently (Angeleides, 2001). Flanagan's (1954) establishment of the fundamental principles and procedures as a data collection technique describes critical incident as consisting of a set of procedures that serve to collect data on human behavior in a way that can help to solve practical problems and understand psycho-social principles. Angelides (1999) utilized the analysis of critical incidents along with other qualitative methods part of a three year case study with the purpose of understanding the culture of schools. Critical incidents have been found to be effective in revealing cultural assumptions, the deeper culture of schools, and illuminating workplace cultures (Angelides, 1999). Using this technique allowed me to gain relevant data about the underlying complexities of the teacher's school structure, as well as their interpretations of the actions of others and how they use information gained from these interactions in deciding how to navigate their working environment. Critical incident technique was used to gain additional data speaking directly to the research questions guiding the study.

For the purpose of this study, "critical incident" was defined according to Tripp (1993, 1994) as including everyday events in classrooms and schools. He indicates that:

...the vast majority of critical incidents...are not all dramatic or obvious: they are mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine professional

practice which are critical in the rather different sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives, and structures (p. 24-25).

Four critical incident accounts were completed by the participant. Each critical incident technique was designed to elicit specific examples of events relative to each of the four research questions. The first critical incident report asked the teacher to identify and describe an event that exemplifies the fundamental nature of her working environment. The second critical incident report asked the teacher to recall an incident when someone said or did something that she believe communicated the message that PE was not important. The third critical incident report asked the teacher to identify and describe an event where she aligned herself with classroom teachers. The fourth critical incident report asked the teacher to recall an occurrence when she relied heavily on her paraprofessional for support.

These four critical incident reports served to provide concrete examples to answer the four research questions. Additionally, these reports were a source of triangulation of field observations and interview data. Using critical incident technique also provided an opportunity for the participant to describe and talk about experiences without the researcher present. The ability to write freely and have additional time to think about the questions may influence the way the teacher describes her work environment and different events during her work with others in the school.

### *Data Analysis Techniques*

Formal interviews and critical incident data were transcribed and analyzed inductively. Field notes from informal interviews and observations were also analyzed in this manner. Inductive analysis involves identifying commonalities and themes across data sources (Patton,

2002). For the purposes of this study, the four stages proposed by Huberman and Miles (1994) were used to guide the data analysis process.

Data were analyzed in relation to Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) and Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997) to get an authentic representation of the participant's school structure and reactions to their experiences as teachers of a marginal subject. Data were analyzed in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the school social structure and examined to understand how the teacher reacts to the school social structure through her interactions with their colleagues and others in their school community (agency). Grant and Breese's (1997) reactions to marginality served as a starting point for classifying the teacher's agency and how she navigated the teaching of a marginalized school subject while becoming an exceptional teacher.

In the first stage, data collection and initial analyses were conducted. Analysis began with the first few interactions with the teacher and principal as consent and approval were being gained. During interviews and observations, initial themes and commonalities were noted. In the second stage, data reduction, data were coded and organized by theme or idea that best represented the nature of the observation or expression. In the third stage, described by Huberman and Miles (1994) as 'data display', the data were organized into categories to most effectively organize the data. Transcribed interview data, field note data, and critical incident reports were compiled collectively and were coded relative to the emerging themes combined with my thoughts about connections and relevance between these items. After this, I organized the codes and quotes and aggregated them according to theme. At this point, I then coded within each theme looking for specific strategies, tactics and behaviors to emerge from the data

demonstrating the teacher's agency in navigating marginalization. For example, within the theme of "Getting in" passages were coded 'knowing students' or 'interaction outside of school'.

In the fourth stage, I attempted to make meaning of the data based on the school structure and the nature of the interaction between the teacher and others in the school environment. At this point, the data was considered in reference to Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) as a way to understand the function of the school environment and the actions of those involved, primarily the teacher. The reactions (agency) demonstrated in the actions and language of those in the structure and data gained that provides evidence to this was considered in this fourth stage using the reactions to marginality articulated by Grant and Breese (1997). It is here that the final portrait of how an exceptional physical education teacher navigates her environment as the teacher of a marginal subject was made.

Reflection and analysis both independently and with peer debriefer, a decision to explain what the teacher did to navigate her job as a teacher of a marginal subject matter would be done using the terms (a) strategy, (b) tactic, and (c) agency. It seemed that these terms best classified, explained, and described the nature of the teacher's navigation of her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. Four strategies, 16 tactics, and 24 micro-behaviors (later labeled agencies) were identified. During data analysis, Giddens' concept of agency was further differentiated and classified by identifying varying levels of action (or agency) because it seemed that his broad description of 'agency' (offered by Giddens) was insufficient or not specific enough to explain and understand how the teacher navigated her marginalized working environment.

## Data Trustworthiness

Inquiry and interpretation in this qualitative design provides an obvious degree of subjectivity. While it is impossible to be completely objective, utilizing specific strategies can minimize this subjectivity and ensure that data are trustworthy. Five strategies to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability were employed in the conduct of this study: (a) prolonged engagement, (b) careful case selection, (c) data source triangulation, (d) use of a peer debriefer (Merriam, 1988), and (e) member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 2005).

Prolonged Engagement. Long-term observation at the school site and with the physical education teacher allowed me the opportunity to observe the same phenomenon on multiple occasions. According to Merriam (1988), this helps to increase the validity of findings in case study research as it can allow the researcher the time to get close enough to observe things that may be difficult to see initially or in just a few visits to a site. Additionally, interaction with the daily flow of activities and events can provide the researcher room to develop intuitive reactions that can develop into later avenues for further data collection.

Case Selection. Scholars have identified case selection as a primary and initial concern in establishing trustworthiness and credibility (Stake, 2005). Clearly defining the experience in a school as a teacher of a marginal subject (see Chapters One and Two) and appropriate teacher selection were critical in the ability to collect and analyze data that could be accepted. Selection of the teacher for the study was done carefully and based on the pre-determined criteria and her ability to provide robust data and insight was done to ensure this.

Triangulation. Data from multiple sources were collected in order to triangulate the data and obtain multiple perspectives of my observations. These included gaining observations from different sources on the same happening, collecting data on a particular happening with three



different sources (i.e. observation, interview, and document analysis), and having the teacher validate the observations/account of the researcher (Yin, 2006). In addition, a continual search for negative cases or contradicting perspectives was conducted to increase the credibility of findings. Searching for negative cases as data were being collected and themes are emerging showed the limitations of themes (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). This was helpful in clarifying the themes and patterns of how the teacher chooses to interact within the working environment in managing her marginality.

Peer Debriefing. Dr. Bryan McCullick, my advisor for this study, served as a Peer Debriefing with whom I continually discussed emerging findings and observations. Merriam (1988) offers this as a method to ensure trustworthiness in case study research as it is a way to authenticate the researcher's interpretations of an experience. I discussed my observations and interpretations after data collection visits to the school and as I identified and refine emerging themes.

Member checks. Prior to data collection, conditions under which data may be excluded from the final report were clearly communicated with the teacher. She was given the freedom to remove or suggest alternative expressions, if desired. The teacher was provided the opportunity to review transcripts from interviews and field notes in order to confirm that her ideas and words were accurately represented. As trends and commonalities from data sources began to emerge and themes were derived, I presented these documents to the teacher for confirmation or clarification. This also provided the opportunity for the teacher to expand on their feelings or further reactions. This was also done after data from the critical incident techniques had been interpreted and analyzed allowing the teacher to help the researcher generate meaning from incident data (Ainscow, 1999).

## Transferability

This case study will not provide answers as to how all physical education teachers experience their work environment as teachers of a marginal subject. Scholars who study case study research design have indicated that the ability to make generalizations is limited with this design (Stake, 2005). What can be learned from this case study, however, is experiential knowledge for readers about how this particular teacher interacts with their work environment as a low-status professional who has achieved recognition as a highly effective educator (indicated by *NBPTS* certification). In possessing *NBPTS* certification, superior teaching ability is demonstrated. This makes the examination of their socio-political strategies more valuable as they can be considered models for those in the field. This experiential knowledge provides the reader with the ability to draw their own conclusions and perceptions about this phenomenon. Further, in following a constructivist perspective (Crotty, 1998) in believing that knowledge is socially constructed, information provided by this case study contributes to the reader's construction of knowledge.

## Summary

The purpose of this study was to analyze how one exceptional physical education teacher navigated her working environment as a teacher of a marginal subject. This was guided by Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) and Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997) with specific focus on the reactions to marginalization (agency) presented by Grant and Breese (1997). In order to obtain a detailed and in-depth perspective of the school structure and how the teacher interprets and interacts with that structure, qualitative research methods were used. Given this, findings and interpretations intend to represent the teacher's perceptions of her working environment and strategies she uses to navigate the marginality she

experiences as the teacher of physical education. To gain a greater insight into this phenomenon, single case study approach was utilized using the following qualitative data collection techniques: (a) formal and informal interviews, (b) field notes based on non-participant observation, and (c) critical incident technique. These methods were chosen for their ability to elicit rich data that ensure a comprehensive attempt to answering the research questions. Those data were analyzed inductively through the lens of Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) and the reactions to marginality (agency) theory posited by Grant and Breese (1997). The multiple data collection methods, case selection criteria, member checks, and use of a peer-debriefer lent a large measure of data trustworthiness and credibility.

## CHAPTER 4

### EXISTING AS A TEACHER OF A MARGINALIZED SUBJECT

Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) contends that the social structure of any organization informs how people chose to act within it. As such, a rich description of the physical education teacher and her working environment in this study are important in framing the way she navigates her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. The data presented here provide a prelude to and context for understanding the strategies Grace uses to navigate the marginality she experiences in her working environment. This chapter will discuss how the exceptional elementary physical education teacher selected for this study exists as the teacher of a marginal subject by presenting a picture of (a) the teacher, (b) the community of Manchester, (c) the hierarchy and social structure of Valley View Elementary School, and (d) Grace's relationship with her Principal.

#### Grace

Grace is approximately 45 years old and a devoted wife and mother of three children who has been teaching physical education for approximately 20 years. Born and raised in Manchester, Georgia, she has lived there for her entire life only leaving to attend a nearby college before returning to teach at the secondary school where she had previously been a student.

Grace describes her upbringing as a modest one where she and her brothers and sisters cared for one another and her mother raised them alone working two jobs struggling to make ends meet. She even described how her mom made all of their clothes and she never owned a pair of jeans until high school. According to Grace, because her parents were divorced and her mother was the only source of income, she did not have some of the other things that her

classmates did and was regularly ridiculed. This is something that has stayed with Grace and influences how she approaches her role as a teacher and her sensitivities to the personal lives of her students. She explains:

It was looked down on if your parents were divorced [or because of] the clothes we wore, you could be the object of ridicule because of [those things]. My mom made all our clothes. I was out of the 'group' because I didn't wear jeans. I never owned a pair of jeans until I got to high school. Somebody noticed that one day and brought it to my attention and [the other students] wouldn't let any of us [who didn't wear jeans] go to the restroom during the day because of that. We have [students] that are in the very same boat...and the kids notice it. (Structured interview)

Grace's mother was and continues to be a powerful force in her life. In fact, Grace was quick to tear-up and was visibly emotional several times when referring to her mother during interviews. Grace is one of six children raised by her mother. Her father left after Grace's two oldest siblings were old enough to leave the house and be independent. Without a college education, Grace's mother worked in schools as a paraprofessional. This, Grace describes, made a significant impact as her mother stressed the importance of having a college education, the ability to provide for yourself and to be independent. Her mother's work as a paraprofessional and struggle to make ends meet has shaped how Grace views non-licensed staff at her school and is underscored in the findings presented in Chapter 7. When talking about her mother in this way and the impact it had on her, Grace said:

She didn't have an opportunity to go to college, [and] she just always said, "Don't always depend on someone else to make life for you. There isn't always [going to] be somebody there to make your living. Don't be naïve in thinking because somebody is there one day

that they'll be there the next day for you.” It was just really important [to me] that I wasn't at where she was at, which may sound bad, but [I didn't want to] feel so vulnerable [like] I was in it by myself.

*Faith and “everyone is someone” philosophy*

An important part of Grace's upbringing and current identity is her faith as a devout Christian. Grace frequently mentioned the importance of her 'witness' and her religious beliefs throughout my time with her. Consider the following quote that neatly sums her personal compass:

[Growing up] we went to church. [Going to church] and being a good Christian is something that is very important to me...my order is Lord, my family, and then my school.

While her Christianity is not something that she bases her teaching philosophy on directly, it provides the foundation creating her personal self that informs how she approaches everyone and everything that she encounters. Because of her religious beliefs, Grace made every attempt to be altruistic, compassionate, considerate, and tolerant. Data sources captured this behavior in a variety of interactions and settings with various types of people. It seems that Grace makes every effort to do what she believes is right and refrain from inflicting harm on anyone, even those with whom she disagrees.

One example of how Grace's religious beliefs are demonstrated in her daily actions is in her significant humility. While she has received several awards for her teaching and public recognition for her program, Grace does not advertise or volunteer this information. In fact, the only way I learned of Grace's *Teacher of the Year* award for Valley View Elementary School was by noticing the plaque in her office. Further, Grace would not describe herself as an

outstanding teacher despite the fact that she holds the most advanced teaching certification the profession offers. She will quickly offer all of her perceived areas for improvement as well as things she would like to do differently in the next academic year.

Another example of how Grace's religious beliefs influence her daily actions is seen in her personal philosophy of equality in the treatment of others and having an appreciation and value for each individual. Grace approaches her relationships with everyone she encounters with a mindset of mutual respect believing that everyone is 'equal' and no one person (or group) is superior to another. To Grace, people should recognize that every individual has valuable and redeeming qualities and should be treated with respect and equality. Further, Grace approaches her working environment espousing that "we are all in this together...we are all teachers...we should be helping one another no matter what we do here." It is clear that Grace operates by the 'Golden Rule' of 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' According to Grace, she is only doing what God wants her to do:

God says there is no difference between people and we are all the same.

The following response came when asked what she hoped her students gained from having her as a teacher and her colleagues gained from working with her. Again, Grace is consistent in her worldview:

Everybody is important. Everybody has something to contribute in the class [and] in the world. Everybody has [a talent], they just need to find [it] and then use it.

Field note data present an excellent example of how Grace 'practices what she preaches.'

Consider these data from field notes describing an interaction with her paraprofessional:

*This perspective is also evident in the way that she interacts with and treats her paraprofessional. She treats her as an equal and another professional colleague. She*

*describes this dynamic using expressions like “we are both in here working with the kids” and “it’s not like I’m here (using her hand to show a high level) and she’s here (using her hand to show a lower level).” She does not distinguish herself from the paraprofessional (or anyone else for that matter) based on experience, expertise, level, certification, or content area. She has a very unassuming way about her. It is also clear that the paraprofessional sees herself as different from Grace, but that Grace does not treat her that way and the parapro is appreciative of how Grace treats her like an equal. In fact, the paraprofessional acknowledges the difference in their ‘levels’ more than Grace does.*

Grace’s faith and ‘everyone is someone’ philosophy provide the framework and foundation that have informed the strategies that she has selected in navigating the marginality she experiences in her working environment. This perspective and approach have allowed Grace to be well-liked by her colleagues and form uniquely positive and intimate relationships with a select few as these teachers feel treated with respect, appreciation, and warm invitation from Grace. These make her a trustworthy colleague, co-worker, and role model for other staff members (regardless of position), students, and parents.

#### *Work Ethic and Fear of Failure*

Grace frequently espoused the importance of hard work and the value of having a ‘good work ethic.’ She discusses work ethic primarily referring to herself, her physical education program, and how she goes about doing her job as an extremely driven person who values goal setting, commitment, and persistence. Data from interviews, observations, and critical incident reports all captured the essence of her drive and persistence. This characteristic is important to note because it informs the strategies that Grace has selected to employ in navigating her



working environment as the teacher of a marginalized subject. For example, Grace strongly considers the work ethic of her colleagues when evaluating and assessing their teaching ability and professional dedication. Based on this, she makes decisions about which colleagues she considers trustworthy, reliable, and helpful allies.

She describes this work ethic as being born out of a fear of failure that she remembers having even as a young girl. Grace's words from a structured interview describe this:

I always feared failing. I wanted to be [and] do the very best job that I could do because of *me*. If I ever struggled in something, I did not hide it. I would get up early even as a child and I would help my mom cook and while we would cook, I would do multiplication tables [and] my spelling because I was a horrible speller; I still am. I would always be doing some type of repetition. [And, it was] always with something with school. At any time, you could ask me what I needed to work on and I could tell you. Like now, I could tell you exactly what I need to work on. I just get so driven and I can't my husband says I can't step back. I get so driven on something that I can't let go of it.

It is clear that Grace's fear of failure and relentless work ethic are founded in her mother's heavy influence. Watching her mother struggle, Grace learned at a young age that she did not want to be in the same position. Her mother, also wanting better for Grace, encouraged her extreme work ethic and drive for success as it would help Grace go to college and have a better life. Grace's fear of failure drives her work ethic and this work ethic allows her to be extremely persistent. This persistence and resilience keeps her from succumbing to the negative implications and feelings that she experiences as a result of teaching a marginal subject. Grace's work ethic, persistence, and continued dedication are reflective of the competitive nature that

those with competitive athletic experience possess. Her attraction to teaching physical education as a former athlete is consistent with the knowledge that our profession attracts former athletes, current athletes, and those with positive youth sport experiences (Dodds, Placek, Doolittle, Pinkham, Ratliffe & Portman, 1992).

### *Teaching history*

Grace began her career in teaching physical education in 1982 at the middle school where she attended in Dawson County. There, she taught physical education and health for two years and described it as an overall positive experience, and filled with enjoyment of teaching that age level. The most significant factor contributing to Grace's enjoyment was that she felt like a valued member of the faculty. Without prompting, she offered that while teaching at the middle school, she did not have experiences of marginality within her working environment to the degree that she currently experiences. About her experience teaching at the middle school, she commented:

I really liked it. I would have stayed at middle school if I could have gotten any equipment. I always felt like I was a valuable member of the faculty. I was not just the PE teacher- because I did not provide them with a break.

As I discovered, this is an ironic statement. On one hand, she describes feeling like a valuable member of the faculty, which implies limited marginality. On the other hand, the inability to get equipment would serve as a message of marginality and contradict the notion that PE was not marginalized. Grace also described a conversation that she had with that Principal at the middle school when she told him she was leaving to go teach at Johnson Elementary School. The Principal told her that when she went to the elementary level, she would not be respected and thought of as an equal to her colleagues because due to the structure of elementary schools, her

class would be the source of a break or planning for classroom teachers. Whereas, at the middle school level, classroom teachers' planning or break periods are not dependent upon students leaving their classroom to attend physical education.

While her middle school experience was good, during those first two years at the middle school, two factors left her feeling a measure of dissatisfaction. First, she had virtually no equipment that made teaching lessons and delivering physical education content more difficult for Grace. Second, she had a problematic working relationship with the other physical education teacher in her department. According to Grace, he had many years of experience teaching physical education, yet despite this experience, Grace did all of the planning and lead teaching. In fact, she expressed that she would arrive to work each day and he would ask her what she had planned for them to do with students. Due to the frustration with her colleague and the lack of equipment, Grace saw a move to the new elementary school that was being built within Dawson County as an exciting opportunity. Therefore, in 1984, Grace moved to the elementary level and would stay at Johnson Elementary School for nine years.

Grace speaks fondly of her time at Johnson Elementary School. During her years there, she was able to build her program as well as develop and refine her skills as a teacher. She had positive experiences and relationships with the Principals under whom she worked and talks of the climate in that school as very inviting and team oriented. Her current school, Valley View Elementary School, was built in 1998 because of significant population growth in Manchester. Her Principal at Johnson and many of her co-workers were moving from Johnson to Valley View to work and teach. The Principal asked Grace to transfer and serve as the physical education teacher. This, Grace thought, was a wonderful opportunity due to chance to teach in a new facility with added money for equipment provided to initiate a new PE program.

For the last 11 years at Valley View Elementary School Grace has continued to grow and expand her physical education program while further establishing and forging relationships with her colleagues, students, and parents. Year after year, she has continued to refine her teaching in the continual pursuit of improvement. This is demonstrated in her achievement of *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)* certification in 2001 as possessing this license is considered by teachers and others in the field of education to be the mark of a highly effective educator. Further, her fellow teachers at Valley View Elementary School recognized her efforts as they voted to award her *Teacher of the Year* in 2003. This recognition presents a paradox because while Grace has been recognized for her teaching skills, she receives multiple messages of marginality regarding her subject matter from the same individuals that voted her *Teacher of the Year*. Her teaching space is revoked for various assemblies and events and she is asked to teach in hallways or classrooms without notice; teachers are late to drop off and pick up students from her class, and her teaching schedule is manipulated to meet the needs of classroom teachers. Despite these messages of marginality she receives at Valley View, Grace has been able to stay motivated, positive, and focused on students without succumbing to the negative effects of the marginality in her workplace as the teacher of physical education.

#### *Her teaching philosophy and PE program*

Grace believes that the purpose of physical education is to expose children to a variety of activities so that they will choose to include physical activity and fitness and develop healthy habits that will serve them for a lifetime. Both interview and fieldwork data revealed that Grace places the greatest emphasis on fitness in regards to her physical education program. When asked what was most important to her about her program and what knowledge and beliefs she wanted students to possess because of her program, she said:

Fitness is number one. I feel like that is what I need to drive and I need to give them as much variety as I can fit into the school year. [My students] know a lot about fitness; probably more than many [other] kids [upon] leaving elementary school. [I want them to] know that there are so many choices when it comes to fitness its not just running or its not just jumping rope, I want them to think that physical activity and leisure time can be lots of things because the possibilities are endless. Because it is important to them later, they are going to make all the choices that we are helping and making for them now. They are going to be making those choices for themselves and that is when it is good when they are making choices for themselves.

She is adamant that students are moving the entire time they are in her class. She takes great effort and has established various routines that maximize activity and movement time for students during each lesson. For example, one of the routines Grace has implemented is beginning each class with fitness stations for students. When they enter the gym, without verbal direction from Grace, students quickly move to stations posted on the wall indicating different exercises and activities to be performed. After all students have found their stations and are working in small groups doing the activities, Grace turns on music which has been edited to play for one minute, stop, pause for several seconds, and then continue playing. This music marks the rotation and participation for students at the fitness stations. They work while the music is playing and stop and move to the next station when prompted to by the music.

This philosophy is reflected in Grace's physical education program. She covers necessary skills and content, yet structures each lesson in a way to ensure that students are active for as much time as possible. Nearly every lesson observed was organized using station work for students to practice and perform various physical skills. Daily and weekly lessons consisted of

approximately 10 stations based on a particular theme or unit. Within each lesson, following fitness stations, Grace would give instructions and demonstrations for each of the stations discussing briefly her expectations for students at that station and brief instructions about the performance of each skill. Following these instructions, the remaining time in the class period was spent with students moving through and practicing at each station. During this time, Grace moved continuously around the room speaking to students, providing feedback, and having individual interaction with students about their work. Much of her feedback was targeted at maintaining order and activity keeping students moving quickly through their attempts with various skills.

Grace has the assistance of a full-time paraprofessional who assists her with both instructional and managerial functions in physical education. The help of the paraprofessional is a significant influence and factor in how Grace experiences her working environment each day because she provides important assistance to Grace that helps her to be an effective teacher. The paraprofessional is a constant presence in the PE program and data revealed that the para-pro was involved in everything from running stations and fitness testing students to maintaining records and equipment inventory.

Seven years ago, the paraprofessional was assigned to the PE program so that classes could be scheduled for physical education two at a time allowing classroom teachers additional planning time within their week. As a result, Grace teaches approximately 50 students in each class at a time. With six scheduled class periods, she sees nearly 300 students every day and is the only teacher in the school responsible for providing instruction for numbers of students this large. While this is not uncommon in the state of Georgia, it does create a situation in which

providing a quality educational experience becomes more challenging, even for the most skilled educators.

Grace and the PE program at Valley View Elementary School have received local recognition for quality teaching and programming in the form of newspaper stories and mention on local news channels. Despite this, and like in most schools, physical education is not considered one of the most important content areas at Valley View. In short, physical education is marginalized, as it is perceived as less important than subjects of reading, math, and science are. Some examples of this marginality can be seen in (a) the cancellation of PE classes for academic testing, field trips, and assemblies, (b) the elimination of planning time for the physical education teacher, and (c) the lack of resources and funding provided for the PE program.

Undoubtedly, Grace has not only navigated this marginality, but has even thrived in spite of it. Her achievement of *NBPTS* certification provides clear evidence to this point. She has been able to do this by selecting four strategies that she uses to navigate her working environment as the teacher of physical education. The following four chapters will present and discuss each of these strategies, their tactics, and respective agencies.

## The Community

### *Manchester, Georgia*

Valley View Elementary School is located in Manchester County, Georgia and draws its student body population from the city of Manchester. Manchester, Georgia is a small town located in the northern region of the state close to the Appalachian Mountains. As of the *2000 US Census* report, there were 619 people, 234 households, and 153 families residing in the city of Manchester (<http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html>). This is a homogenous community with demographic data indicating that the racial breakdown of the Manchester

population is 97.58% Caucasian, 1.45% Hispanic, .97% Multi-race, and .65% African American. It can be described as a middle class and seemingly blue-collar community reflected in United States Census report in 2000 indicating a median household income of \$34,327 and a median family income of \$39,000. The city community is known in the sport of auto racing for its long tradition of involvement and as the home of a legendary NASCAR driver. It is a rural community whose residents are proud of the 'small town feel' they are careful to preserve.

A close-knit community, I quickly learned that most people in Manchester know one another and are somehow connected. According to Grace, this is a town where a large percentage of the population has been born and raised here, much like their parents and grandparents and land has been passed down from one generation to the next. Families in this community have a long history with Manchester and with one another. One example of this is the fact that up until a few years ago, all children of school age had come through Grace's physical education program and she had taught every child in this town. Many of Grace's current students are the children of former students who are now raising families in Manchester. Most of Grace's colleagues are from Manchester, as well. In fact, many of the other teachers were classmates of Grace's through high school. Grace shared, for instance, that she went to high school with the Assistant Principal and has known her and her family since she and Grace were young. About this, Grace said, "I know her brother, her husband, and her in-laws. I could tell you a whole story about her family. That's just the kind of community we are." (Informal interview) The nature of Manchester as a small town where people are connected is influential in understanding the findings of this study because it provides a framework for how Grace has chosen and enacted the strategies that she does in order to navigate the working environment of her school as the teacher of physical education. The community has been instrumental in how



Grace carries out the different strategies that she has selected to navigate the marginality she experiences teaching PE in Chapters Five through Eight. The influence of the community will be explicitly delineated in Chapter 5.

### *Valley View Elementary*

Valley View Elementary School is one of three elementary schools in Manchester County with approximately 750 students and approximately 60 staff members. Built in 1998, the building is bright, clean, and feels new upon entering. Like many elementary schools, the white tile floors, cinder block walls, and fluorescent lighting create a well-lit space that has been covered with student work in the form of arts, crafts, and samples of student writing and drawing. There are posters, charts, and banners communicating the values, beliefs, and mission of the school with such expressions as, “Building Minds for Educational Success.” The school colors of green and yellow and the bear mascot are a consistent theme throughout the hallway displays. Walking through the halls of Valley View one hears the sounds of high-pitched voices and children’s chatter and sees young children between the ages of 5 and 12 walking in single file lines through hallways, sitting at desks with paper and pencil, and scattered throughout classrooms reading and working in small groups.

Located away from the main office and left down another hall, the door to the gym announces the week’s activities in physical education: “Caution! Mile Run at Work!” or the next week, “Caution! Boot Camp at Work!” Upon entering the gym, on a short hallway, Grace has displayed standards for quality physical education according to the *National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE)* as well as her program objectives, rules for students, and weekly schedule. It is in this space where teachers drop off and pick up students having them wait in line before entering and leaving the gym.

The gym is a large carpeted room with wooden bleachers on one side and an elevated stage on the other. Large windows and doors flood the gym with natural light and combine with the overhead fluorescent lighting to make this a bright space. The combination of standard basketball goals, equipment arranged across the expanse of the entire gym floor for the daily lesson, and the array of charts and posters on the wall overwhelm the eye with color, shape, size, and dimension. This space is consumed with educational materials and it seems that every nook and cranny is being utilized for the purpose of teaching physical education.

At one end of the gym, a door leads to the office that Grace shares with her paraprofessional. Side by side, desks with computers sit beneath two large windows. On the walls beside the two desks, schedules, notes from students, important phone numbers, and various pictures have been mounted on the wall. Included in these are Grace's diplomas from undergraduate and master's degrees as well as her *NPBTS* Certification and a plaque for *Teacher of the Year 2003*. The perimeter of the small office holds bookcases and filing cabinets full of notebooks, textbooks, papers, and materials for physical education. Beneath one cabinet sits a small microwave and a basket containing condiments, cutlery, and paper products. Supplied with both personal and professional items, it appears that they could comfortably get through the day without needing to leave the office and gym.

#### Social Hierarchy and Structure of Valley View Elementary

There is a distinct order to the social structure in the working environment at Valley View Elementary School. Consistent with the nature of schools in the United States, and due in part to Federal legislation, those people and places associated with 'academic' or 'intellectual' content are perceived as more critical to students' education and as a result occupy a higher place in the school hierarchy. Data indicated that the social hierarchy within Valley View progresses

from the top (or most powerful position) down in the following order: (a) the Principal, (b) 'Those Who Click' with the Principal, (c) 'Floaters,' (d) the 'Group of 7,' and (e) Non- Licensed Personnel. The following sections will introduce and describe these groups and their position within the social structure of Valley View Elementary School.

### *Principal*

Valerie Brown has been the Principal at Valley View Elementary School for seven years. It is important to note that Valerie was not a data source for this study, data from interviews with Grace and her paraprofessional serve as the data sources regarding her role. Valerie began her educational career as a paraprofessional. Mentored by a former Principal, now the Superintendent of Schools, Valerie moved quickly from paraprofessional, to teacher, to administrator gaining the requisite education and certification necessary for each position. Because of her accelerated climb, she has approximately three years of experience as a classroom teacher, which is less than many of the teachers she supervises. Due to this perceived lack of classroom experience, the teachers at Valley View Elementary School view Valerie as less credible to provide them with educational leadership.

According to interviews with Grace and observation data, Valerie's leadership style is best described as autocratic in that she exercises the power of her position as by inherent right and seeks absolute authority. Grace disapproves of Valerie's autocratic leadership style feeling that it is ineffective and unethical as it conflicts with Grace's personal philosophy of 'everyone is someone' mentioned previously. With both Grace and Valerie possessing such different personal philosophies, this conflict might be expected.

Valerie has created and solidified a social structure in which she occupies the highest position within the social structure at the school. This power is largely the result of her position,

not the result of widespread approval from the teachers who work for her. According to Grace, and overheard during observation from some staff members during observation, Valerie is not well liked by most staff members and has created a climate in the school that many feel is negative and bad for morale. Grace lists Valerie's failure to respect them as professionals, value or utilize their input, or perceive them as knowledgeable and possessing critical or useful expertise as problematic. They have developed these opinions over the course of Valerie's seven-year tenure as Principal. Further discussion of Grace's relationship with Valerie is presented later in this Chapter.

*'Those Who Click' with the Principal*

In Grace's eyes, favoritism exists at Valley View Elementary School. According to Grace, positioned below the Principal in the hierarchy of Valley View Elementary School is a group of teachers that Grace describes as 'Those Who Click' with Valerie. Grace explained that 'Those Who Click' are teachers who respond to the Principal in a positive way. Interviews with Grace and her paraprofessional, identify these teachers as a select few group of people who approve and agree with the way that Valerie goes about providing leadership to the students, parents, and teachers at their school. Many of these teachers are those who have been hired by Valerie within the last seven years she has been Principal or those who have come to Valley View from another school specifically to work with her. This group consists of less than 10 teachers from varying grade levels. Grace describes her relationship with this group as cordial and professional. She has not gone out of her way to establish relationships with these teachers and keeps the nature of her interaction with them amicable, yet minimal.

*'Floaters'*

Positioned below the teachers who 'click' with the Principal, Grace contends, are a group of teachers who have not decidedly positioned themselves neither alongside the Valerie nor in opposition to her. This group possesses the largest number of members of any group in the social hierarchy but, ironically, is far from possessing the greatest amount of power. Grace and her paraprofessional explain that this group "can't decide where they want to be and they just go back and forth." Taking no significant stance, this group seems barely visible in the social landscape of the school. It seems these teachers can be characterized by their marked neutrality, standard teaching performance, and customary commitment to Valley View Elementary School. Grace describes these teachers as those who, while still doing their job satisfactorily, merely do what is required and necessary. It is significant to note that despite their 'average' teaching performance and commitment, they remain in a higher position within the social hierarchy at Valley View Elementary School than Grace and the 'Group of 7.'

*'Group of 7'*

Grace positions herself with a group occupying nearly the lowest placement within the hierarchy at her school. This group is below the 'Floaters' and higher only than the Non-Licensed Personnel at Valley View Elementary School. Members of Grace's group, the 'Group of 7' are (a) two 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, Reba and Ricky, (b) a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher, Jane, and (c) a team of 4 kindergarten teachers. According to Grace, what these individuals and groups all have in common are strained relations with the Principal. Each of these players and groups feels they have been manipulated, controlled, and devalued by Valerie and her leadership style. When asked about what they have in common and what has drawn them together, Grace said:

They are all there for the kids and they work hard. They do it even if they are not encouraged and continue to work hard. [We are] driven together because [we] are not supported. We all have strained relationships with administration.

In essence, Grace has identified with other individuals who experience messages of marginality from the Principal within their working environment. Identification with this group of individuals is significant because it has influenced the strategies that Grace has selected in navigating the marginality in her working environment. Chapter Eight will discuss this and the 'Group of 7' in detail.

#### *Non-Licensed Personnel*

Paraprofessionals, front office, cafeteria, and janitorial staff occupy the lowest position in the hierarchy at Valley View Elementary School. It seems that because of the nature of their jobs and level of education necessary for these positions they are perceived as a less valuable group and have been relegated to this low status position. It is important to mention that while 'Non-Licensed Personnel' have the lowest status within the social hierarchy at Valley View Elementary School, Grace treats them with the same respect, courtesy, and thoughtfulness she does every other group within the social hierarchy. This is a testament to Grace's execution of her personal philosophy daily within her working environment.

#### Relationship with the Principal

Finally and perhaps most significant aspect of Grace's working environment, is Grace's perception of her relationship with the Principal, Valerie. Because of her position at the top of the social hierarchy, her attitude and behavior affects all groups below her. Valerie is the most powerful and imposing source of marginality that Grace experiences in her working environment as a teacher of physical education. Due to her position of leadership, and the position of physical

education as a subject matter, Valerie has power to make decisions that profoundly affect the nature of Grace's work each day involving such matters as master teaching schedule, resources and funding, or the assistance of a paraprofessional. Grace feels that Valerie abuses this power and makes deliberate decisions that are not in the best interest of students in order to exert her power over Grace (and other staff members) in an effort to demonstrate and maintain this power.

Grace describes their relationship during the first three years of Valerie's leadership as uneventful and without major discord. Beginning with and developing since an incident three years ago, there has been disagreement, philosophical conflict, and confrontation. This relationship and issues surrounding the nature of her leadership and their interaction were included in nearly every discussion surrounding Grace's teaching and her experiences teaching physical education at Valley View Elementary School. Data indicated that Grace is careful and deliberate in her interactions with Valerie as she fears that any thing she says or does would be used by Valerie in the future to negatively affect Grace and her paraprofessional. The following quote from an informal interview illustrates this:

Right now, I am not included in some things [within the school] because of things I have said and done [in the past] that have come back. That is why I know that this [time] if I address it, if [express how I feel], it would not go well [and that something bad] could happen in a week, a month, in a year. [For example], if [there were] a situation where she had the power to send me to another school, she would make sure that I was transferred.

### *Lack of trust*

According to Grace and her paraprofessional, at the root of their division is the issue of Valerie's lack of trust. Valerie does not trust or respect Grace as a professional or as a person. In fact, Valerie has even expressed this to Grace in a disagreement. Grace shared with me an

incident involving Field Day several years ago. According to Grace, this incident marks the beginning of their strained relationship and the current state of their perceptions of one another all stem from this event. As Grace describes it, Valerie allowed refreshments to be sold during Field Day as a fundraiser for the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and did not communicate this with Grace or any classroom teachers. On the day of the event, students wanted to buy these items but had no money to do so because it was not communicated to teachers and parents. In an effort to please students, and feeling it necessary, the teachers purchased these refreshments for their classes. They felt as though this placed them in an awkward position, as they were not prepared. Because it was an event completely coordinated by Grace, the teachers assumed that she was responsible.

Upset that she had not been notified of something that was taking place within her event, Grace felt badly that this occurrence had upset students and teachers. She chose not to address it with Valerie that day and decided to send an email to the staff apologizing for the circumstances and expressing her concern that they were placed in an awkward position. According to Grace, at no point did she mention Valerie or details of how this was included in Field Day. Grace felt as though she did the right thing- she had apologized to the teachers and had done so without assigning blame to the Principal.

The next morning, Valerie called Grace, requesting she come to the office. As soon as she closed the door, Valerie was visibly angry, talking forcefully for several minutes expressed to Grace that she had made her look bad to the staff and said, “from now on, I know you can’t be trusted.” Since this incident and the subsequent confrontation, Grace described feeling as though Valerie is skeptical and leery within their interactions and notes Valerie’s attempts to keep Grace



uninvolved and excluded from decisions outside of her own physical education program as evidence.

### *Power*

Grace overwhelmingly perceives the motivation behind Valerie's leadership actions and style to be the acquisition, preservation, and exertion of power. Gaining, handling, and using power is necessary in Valerie's implementation of an autocratic leadership style. It seems that Valerie operates in this way to compensate for how she is perceived by staff because of her lack of membership within the larger Manchester community and limited classroom teaching experience. This is a sentiment that Grace regularly expressed when discussing Valerie's behavior within the school environment. Interview, fieldwork, and observation data including Grace and other teachers in the school confirmed these interpretations. About Valerie's agenda, Grace said:

I think it is just the power issue. To me, lots of this goes back to power. I am in power. I am the principal and you are the teacher. It [seems as though she does things with the mindset] I am going to do it because I can. (Informal interview)

Data indicated several examples that illustrate Valerie's desire to demonstrate her authority over teachers. Grace described many instances when Valerie gave 'lip service' to teachers' input in decision making asking for suggestions and feedback and then disregarding those comments and selecting a course of action in opposition to the staff majority. It seems to them, Valerie makes decisions before soliciting input from teachers, only doing so in an attempt to give them the impression that their feedback is valued.

Another action Valerie employs to manipulate staff and maintain power is by postponing meetings or scheduling them at times when essential members are unable to attend. Grace

described circumstances when she was invited to attend meetings involving important decision making only to notice that these events were planned for times they would be teaching students with no effort made to provide teaching coverage in order to attend these meetings. Similarly, Grace offers that meetings are scheduled initially and then rescheduled or postponed notifying only select individuals. For example, toward the end of my fieldwork, Valerie organized a meeting to determine the master school schedule for the upcoming academic year that involved classroom teachers as well as 'auxiliary' staff (physical education, art, music, and media) and scheduled this meeting during time(s) when Grace would be teaching and could not attend.

A paradox within the relationship between Valerie and Grace can be seen upon further consideration. It seems ironic that while Grace has a negative opinion of Valerie, Valerie possesses some of the qualities that Grace values as a part of her personal philosophy. For example, Valerie has worked her way up from the bottom to the top, starting her educational career as a paraprofessional and ascending to the rank of principal. Such humble beginnings and hard work required to achieve such professional development are consistent with the value Grace places on 'work ethic' and 'fear of failure.' It is clear that Grace and Valerie possess conflicting personal philosophies that place them in opposition to one another on a fundamental level. For example, Valerie's lack of trust and desire for power are two qualities that are in conflict with Grace's personal values, religious beliefs, and 'everyone is someone' perspective. Grace is sensitive, unassuming, and takes care to see good in all people, regardless of their position. While Valerie, Grace perceives, is only concerned with showing consideration for people who agree with or can bolster her position. This has resulted in relations with Valerie that are troublesome, prohibitive, and provide Grace with great anxiety that affects how she feels about her working environment on a daily basis. Valerie's action, and their resulting relationship, is

monumental in creating the landscape and tone of the social structure at Valley View Elementary School for Grace. Consequently, they have been paramount in framing the strategies Grace has selected to navigate the marginality in her working environment. Grace's relationship with Valerie has been the catalyst for how she has developed and carried out one of the strategies that she uses to navigate marginality, which will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

### Summary

This chapter provided a description of the environment in which Grace exists as the teacher of a marginal subject by presenting a picture of (a) Grace, (b) the Community, (c) the Hierarchy and Social Structure of Valley View Elementary School, and (d) Grace's Relationship with her Principal. From this, it is clear that Grace's personal biography, the nature of Manchester, and the social structure of her school (including her relationship with her current Principal) all inform the way she approaches her work each day. Further, given these influences, data revealed that Grace has selected four strategies that she uses to navigate her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject.

As data collection progressed, it became clear that while there were specific observable behaviors that Grace enacted routinely that could be grouped into overarching approaches or philosophies that Grace used to inform how she interpreted and acted as a teacher of a marginalized subject. Reflection and analysis both independently and with peer debriefer, a decision to make sense of what Grace does to navigate her job as a teacher of a marginal subject matter would be done using the terms (a) strategy, (b) tactic, and (c) agency. These terms best classify, explain, describe, and articulate the nature of Grace's navigation of her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject.

Therefore, it is important to recognize the explicit differences between each of these three terms. A *strategy* is defined as a plan or method used to obtain a specific goal or objective. Specific to this study and Grace, strategy refers to the utilization of a particular approach across different circumstances and with different groups within her school environment. The goal of each strategy is, ultimately, effective navigation of the marginality experienced as the teacher of physical education. The term *tactic* is defined as any mode of procedure used within a strategy to gain advantage or success in promoting a desired end or result. For the purpose of this study and drawing from Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984), it was decided that the term *agencies* would be used to refer to the definitive, individual, and observable behaviors that Grace performed regularly to carry out specific tactics. Figure 1 below illustrates the relationship and hierarchy concerning Grace’s strategies, tactics, and agencies in navigating marginality:

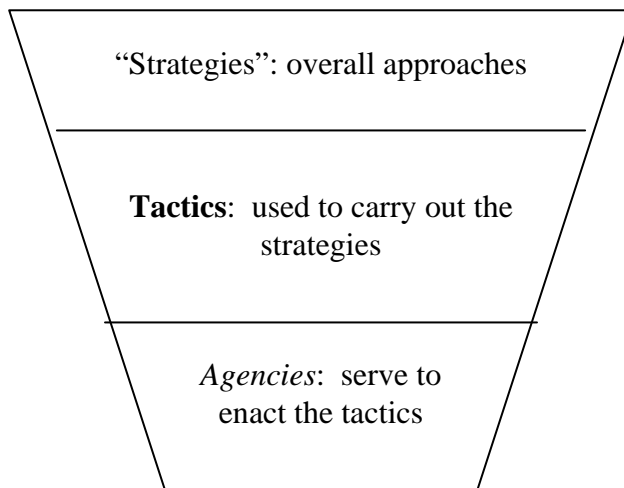


Figure 1. Hierarchy of strategies, tactics, and agencies

The relationships between these concepts and how they work together can be understood using a military analogy, as there is an important distinction between a strategy and a tactic. Strategy is

the utilization, during both peace and war, of all of a nation's forces, through large-scale, long-range planning and development, to ensure security or victory. Tactics deal with the method of employing forces in combat. While agencies would refer even more specifically to the behaviors or movements by soldiers and platoons that occur during deployment and combat. Using the military analogy, Grace employs four strategies that each yield benefits for her in the navigation of her marginalized workplace in the long-term which, in essence, provide her security against the consequences of marginalization. Each of Grace's strategies requires the use of multiple tactics in order to be carried out with fidelity. Doing so with fidelity ensures that obtaining the perceived benefits of the strategy are met. Any misuse or failure to use the tactics may produce, at the very least, no benefit, or at worst, more severe marginality. The execution of the tactics requires the use of many actions. These are Grace's agencies or her reactions to her position as a teacher of a marginalized subject (Grant & Breese, 1997).

The following chapters present each of Grace's strategies for navigating her marginalized working environment. Within each chapter, the tactics are highlighted and explain what each tactic brings to bear on strategy execution. Embedded in each tactical explanation is the identification of the specific and micro-behaviors (*agencies*) Grace uses to ensure tactical success. Presenting the specific observable *agencies* that Grace performs regularly, the *tactics* that those agencies serve to carry out, and how those tactics coalesce and help Grace enact the *strategies* in this format will allow the reader to understand how Grace plots a complex course through, around, and over the marginalization experienced as a physical education teacher. Presentation of these strategies, tactics, and agencies will include a definition of each concept, interview and field work data to illustrate Grace's use of these strategies in navigating her marginality, as well as interpretations as to how these behaviors and approaches serve one

another and benefit Grace in carrying out these strategies allowing her to successfully navigate her working environment as the teacher of the marginalized subject. For the purposes of readability within each narrative, strategies will be identified using quotation marks (e.g. “Getting In”), tactics will be identified using boldfaced text (e.g. **Knowing Students**), and agencies will be identified using italics (e.g. *attending events*).

## CHAPTER 5

### “GETTING IN”

“Getting In” is one strategy Grace uses to navigate the marginality she experiences as a teacher of physical education. The strategy of “Getting In” refers to the action of building exceptionally close bonds with parents, students, and the community. Beyond friendly and positive working relationships, Grace has nurtured and developed relations with the families of the Valley View Elementary School (VVES) community to a degree that is considerably personal. She actively works to establish herself as one who is invested in the lives of students and families both within and outside of school. These connections are so deep and so strong that the lines between personal and professional roles are interwoven to the degree that Grace’s private identity is present within her role as a physical educator. “Getting In” is something that Grace wants and feels is important in her ability to connect with, relate to, and teach students. Reaching students is important in that it provides her important ammunition she needs to enact other strategies that are important in the navigating the marginality of teaching PE at Valley View Elementary School. Having relationships of this nature provides her with essential reinforcement and encouragement, a sense of empathy from parents and students, and credibility with parents and her colleagues. This credibility at times allows her greater social influence in the school structure and is necessary for her to accumulate for future use to be used in negotiating her marginalized working environment.

“Getting In” affords Grace with valuable support and credibility with students, parents, and other teachers. By employing various tactics and agencies resulting in being ‘In,’ students like and respect her; parents trust and confide in her; and other teachers recognize her as

possessing a unique knowledge of the families leading them to include and consult her in matters pertaining to students' academic performance. Grace's ability to "Get In" and establish herself as an entrenched member of the community provides her with support personally and for her physical education program. She certainly feels that she has the approval and backing of parents within her school environment. This sense of approval and camaraderie is emotionally helpful to her, but she also recognizes that it may not elevate the status of PE within the school structure. Regardless, it is something that she appreciates and depends on in dealing with life in her school each day. Grace's ability to "Get In" and nurture her relationships with parents is so powerful that she believes that, if necessary, they would side with her in conflict with the principal. When asked, "If it came down to it, and you were in a conflict with Valerie (the principal) that you believed was absolutely critical, do you think the parents would take your side.... if you needed them?" She paused and was quiet for several seconds and then softly responded: "Yeah." To have earned the affection and endorsement of parents to such a degree that they would place themselves in conflict alongside Grace in opposition to the most powerful person in their school structure is compelling. This demonstrates the depth to which Grace has been able to enact "Getting In" as a way to navigate her marginalized working environment.

Grace's colleagues and administration recognize the significance of her bond with parents and community. She is considered a knowledgeable and valued source of information about students and families because of being "In." Because of this, she is often included in meetings and committees dealing with special cases or extenuating circumstances in which additional attention is needed to help students become more successful. This is due to her intimate and comprehensive knowledge of students and their families both inside and outside of



school. It seems that “Getting In” has provided her with the ability to offer valuable insight, and that many of the people she works with recognize this. About this, Grace said:

I was told that I needed to be on those committees because I might see something with that kid that no one else sees. I guess it’s because I do know the kids so well.

Involvement in professional functions of this nature in the school environment places Grace away from the ‘margin’ and makes her a participant in activities that are central to the purpose of the school. This is advantageous in that increasing her involvement in these central functions might serve to gradually elevate her status and more successfully handle her marginality.

The data indicate that Grace enacts the strategy of “Getting In” by employing the following tactics: (a) knowing students, (b) interacting with families and co-workers outside of the school environment, (c) integrating and balancing professional and personal identity, and (d) championing the cause of parents. Grace is able to carry out these tactics, and ultimately, “Get In” by using the following agencies: (a) attending events, (b) consistently sharing positive comments with parents, and (c) advocating for parents. Subsequent sections will identify and discuss these specific tactics as well as agencies that Grace enacts to navigate her marginality by “Getting In.”

### Tactics and Agencies

#### *Knowing students*

Grace is relentless in acquiring an extensive knowledge of students that goes beyond the walls of her gym. She believes it is critical to know as much as possible about the children not only as students, but she also articulates the importance of knowing the “whole child.” As Grace has lived in this county her entire life and taught in the school district for over 20 years, she has taught most young people in the community. In fact, many of her current students are the

children of former students. This extensive history allows her a depth of knowledge and comprehensive understanding of particular circumstances of families that leads her to be a more effective teacher as well as making a more significant and meaningful personal connection with students and parents. Being an effective teacher and having strong bonds with students and parents fosters increased backing and trust that helps her to “Get In” with them, and ultimately, is useful in navigating her marginalized working environment. Consider the following quote from a structured interview where she discusses the benefits and importance of knowing students and their families:

I love knowing the kids, their families, their cousins; it just makes it a whole circle, you know? You can see [things like] I know why you’re like that because your older brother is such a punk, and that is why you are always on the defensive and ready to stick up for yourself; because you have to put up with this kid all the time at home.

It is more than a job in order to do a good job you need to know what you’re working with, what’s going on with them.

For Grace, having an intimate, comprehensive, and personal knowledge of her students both at school and at home is critical to her ability to meet their needs. The capability to meet the needs of students results in improved teaching which, in turn, further increases Grace’s student approval. Approval from students leads logically to approval from parents, as the students are the real power brokers in schools. This allows her to further “Get In.” This knowledge of students and families provides her with a unique understanding that translates into support from parents and a sense of family that she describes as very important. As a result of this tactic, students and parents enjoy, appreciate, approve of, and care for Grace which translates into her position as embedded, or “In” with the community. This affords her support, credibility, and

leads to socio-political power that can be called upon in navigating her environment as the teacher of a marginalized subject.

One of the agencies comprising the tactic of knowing students is *attending events* in Manchester. Grace frequently attends youth sporting events; sometimes she is there because of her own children, and at other times she is there with the purpose of supporting students and families of her school community. At these events, she will deliberately initiate interaction with her students. Consider the following comments from Grace:

I go to their games. Sometimes I can't always do that because of my own kids and I'm so busy. But, if I'm at a park and some kids are there and I see them and I go over they think you're there to see their game. I won't deceive them and tell them I came to see their game but I will go over and talk to them. (Informal interview)

*Attending events* gives Grace the opportunity to see students in a different context, interact with them in a more informal manner than is appropriate in the school setting, and discover their different interests. All of these enhance and broaden Grace's knowledge of her students allowing her to better enact the strategy of "Getting In."

#### *Interacting outside of the school environment*

Another tactic used to carry out the strategy of "Getting In" is her concentrated efforts to **interact with students and parents outside of the school environment**. Because Manchester is a small town, seeing children and their parents in different public places is a part of every day life. Related to her need to know students and families, she is actively involved in events and functions in the community involving students and families such as ball games and fundraisers. The following quote from an unstructured interview explains the context that makes this tactic easy to employ:

I do see the kids out. We are not just a bedroom community. It isn't that type of atmosphere. We go to the park and we are out and about at the other schools. Even though our kids are older, we still have a connection with the kids; we see them at the grocery store or other little events. Several live in my neighborhood.

The agency of *attending events* is a way to serve the tactic of **interacting outside of the school environment** by going to various community affairs; she places herself in the position to have contact with students and parents in a more personal setting.

Ball games and community events are not the only things she attends. Sometimes she attends very personal events and happenings. For example, in an informal interview, she shared with me a story of a family in the school who had lost a baby at the age of 10 months. The baby was the sibling of two of her students in second grade, and in an effort to show care and concern; Grace attended the funeral for this young child. She commented on how surprised the two students were to see her there, even asking her why she came. Grace answered by telling the girls that she just wanted them to know how sorry she was for their loss and that she was there for them and wanted them to know that she cared. The children appeared to remember this act when a year later this interaction and connection transferred to the school setting when, one year later, the students (now in third grade) asked Grace if she knew that it was to be the baby's birthday.

Grace describes these types of interaction outside of the school environment, as 'it's just the way it is here, it's just the right thing to do.' While this is true and she is genuinely concerned with these students and families, it affords her a sense of family and support that provides her positive feelings as she navigates her marginalized working environment on a daily basis. Interacting outside the school environment aids Grace in "Getting In" as her affection and

investment for students and parents is demonstrated by her regular appearance in environments that are personally meaningful to the families of her school community.

*Integrating and balancing professional and personal identity*

Reflected in the integration of life outside of school and life within school, Grace does not view her personal life and her professional identities as entirely separate. Coupled with this, she is aware that because of her position, she has increased visibility in the community as this has implications for her when attempting to delineate her professional and personal roles. She sees her position as a PE teacher as an extension of her personal self and is careful to act and behave in a way that models positive behaviors and her personal values both at school and when she is out in public. She is mindful that her actions are visible to students and parents and is concerned with how they interpret and perceive her behavior and her job as a teacher of a marginal subject. On this, Grace remarked:

When I leave school I don't leave what I'm teaching behind. My mom always used to say never be anywhere that you would be ashamed even for the Lord to catch you doing things you shouldn't be doing. In this community there is always a set of eyes somewhere watching you. That is serious to me that the kids could see you in any atmosphere where they would think, "I thought that was wrong." (Formal interview)

Conversely, Grace expressed the importance of people knowing her as 'more than a PE teacher.' She is proud of her position and is passionate about teaching physical education, but articulates the value of others seeing her as a whole person of which being a PE teacher is just a portion. Achieving a balanced integration of her personal and professional identities gives her a more personal and significant connection with students and parents, which she feels, is critical in her ability to relate to students. Having this attachment and intimate bond provides her with support

and a network that is useful in navigating her marginality because it aids her in “Getting In” as being a fixture in the community provides her with some political power in dealing with the social structure within her elementary school.

The agency of *attending events* allows her to reveal other side(s) of herself to the families in her community and is essential in enacting the integration of her personal and professional identities as it demonstrates that Grace “walks the walk.” **Balancing and integrating her personal and professional identities** serves Grace because it gives families to have a greater understanding of who she is beyond her role as teacher while reinforcing her distinction as a devoted and trustworthy person. Being perceived this way helps children and families to be more receptive and welcoming to Grace and furthers her ability to “Get In” with them.

They need to know that you're not just this abstract thing. They can't see you as all you know is PE (unstructured interview).

#### *Championing the cause of parents*

Grace is an unwavering and passionate advocate for parents and has a keen sensitivity to their perspective. This is due to not only the kind and caring person that she is, but also the fact that she herself is a parent of three children. One of the agencies used to execute the tactic of **championing the cause of parents** is *engaging in frequent and consistent communication* with parents about social behavior and health and well being as well as curricular issues. She is approachable and makes herself easily accessible to parents corresponding with them regarding even the seemingly smallest of circumstances. The following quote obtained from a structured interview illustrates this agency:

I will call their parent that evening and say you know this happened today and I'm just not sure if you're aware of it and wanted to let you know that I sent them to the nurse or I

took care of it myself and I don't think it's a big deal but I just thought you might want to know why they got that mark on their arm because it looks horrible. A lot of times those parents do appreciate you calling. I've left messages on their answering machine and I'll leave them my phone number at home and I tell them if they want to talk to me about it please call me and sometimes they will; most of the time they just say how much they appreciate me calling.

Another agency Grace uses to **champion the cause of parents** is *deliberately sharing positive feedback and praise*. Sharing this information builds affection from parents toward Grace and tightens the bond between the two parties. This helps her “Get In” as she is readily approached and trusted by parents. While it is in her nature to talk about things in an optimistic way, she is purposeful in her interaction with parents and will consciously share praise and complimentary feedback with parents regarding their children’s social behavior or performance. She has shared that she will do this when she encounters parents while attending events or simply happens upon them at the grocery store or other public places. Field note data supports these statements as I observed this behavior at both Field Day and a community ‘Relay for Life’ event that took place in Manchester. In the following passage Grace conveys this:

I try to do things and try to remember things even if it's small about [the parent’s] kid and if I see the parent out try to say something about their kid; something good; something that they're good at; even if it's small.

A third agency used to **champion the cause of parents** is *directly advocating for parents*. Grace is quick to put herself in the parent’s position and speculate as to how they may perceive a particular event or situation. Beyond that, she has even sided with parents challenging her colleagues or in some instances. For example, Grace is many times included in meetings with

other staff members and parents to resolve issues with students. She shared one case in which the classroom teacher and counselor were advising a parent on what steps and actions they needed to take to assist their child in becoming more successful. Grace found these suggestions to be impractical as she recognized the parent's likely inability to implement the recommendations. Following the meeting, Grace questioned what role the school was taking in helping the parent. Rather than siding with her colleague(s) she positions herself as an advocate for the parent(s). Consider the following:

We have a lot of people who I think they feel like we don't understand them. The parents feel like we don't understand them. I have been in a few meetings when that was conveyed- the meeting was an academic meeting and they felt that we don't understand how it is in the real world. My question after the meeting was 'what are we doing to help the parent'? A lot of people have trouble putting themselves in the parents' position. I need to walk a mile in their shoes and think what would I do about it? Sometimes I feel like the people that need us the most are the ones we help the least. I asked what our role to the parent was, with that story, and she said we didn't have a responsibility to the parents and I said that we did. We didn't encourage her, and we should have.

*Advocating for parents* is significant because it is common for teachers and parents to view one another in opposition taking an "us versus them" mentality making it unlikely that a teacher would challenge the approach of her colleague and instead, ally herself with a parent. In doing so, Grace's actions serve to **champion the cause for parents** as she is viewed as a defender and protector.

Grace positions herself as a spirited proponent and supporter of students and parents within her community. *By attending events, sharing positive comments and praise with parents,*



and *advocating for parents*, she strengthens her relationships with these parties as these bonds provide her much needed support, empathy, and trust which allow her to successfully “Get In” and serve to assist her in navigating her marginality. It would seem that these agencies take the form of what is described by Grant & Breese (1997) as an emissarial reaction to marginality. In this, Grace responds to her marginality by viewing herself as a liaison between school staff and parents utilizing her position of marginality to benefit both parties. In doing so, she gains approval, reinforcement, and credibility that further her ability to “Get In.”

### Summary

This chapter has identified and discussed specific tactics and agencies that Grace enacts in navigating her marginality by “Getting In.” By initiating, forming, nurturing, and deliberately strengthening her relationship with parents, students, and community, Grace has established herself as a trusted and respected advocate. The data indicated that Grace uses four distinct tactics involving various agencies: (a) knowing students, (b) interacting outside of the school environment, (c) integrating and balancing her professional and personal identities, and (d) championing the cause of parents. The tactics and various agencies she uses are representative of an *emissarial* reaction to marginality (Grant & Breese, 1997). In the emissarial role, Grace reaps much appreciated ammunition, influence, and political power that she relies on to deal with the day-to-day reality of school in navigating her marginality.

## CHAPTER 6

## “PROCURING AND MANAGING INSTRUCTIONAL CURRENCY”

The strategy of “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency” is one way Grace successfully navigates her marginalized working environment. “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency” refers to Grace’s active pursuit of gaining tools and resources that she uses to improve the quality of her program and strengthen the position of physical education within the school structure despite its placement on the margin. Tools and resources important to Grace are securing instructional and planning time, teaching space, equipment, and instructional assistance in the form of a paraprofessional. This strategy helps Grace navigate the marginality in her workplace as it allows her to remain focused on her teaching, students, and her program. Concentrating on curricular issues minimizes the degree to which she is affected by negative interactions and incidents that occur within her marginalized working environment that then adds to her being a more effective teacher; as noted in Chapter 5, being an effective teacher allows her to “Get In.” In addition, “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency” benefits Grace as the possession of equipment, space, and time symbolize value within the school context and provide her with a vehicle that she utilizes to navigate the marginality she experiences as the teacher of physical education.

Data revealed that Grace procures and manages instructional currency via the following tactics: (a) acquiring time, (b) defending her turf, (c) stockpiling equipment, (d) presenting a professional image, and (e) effectively utilizing and espousing the need for a paraprofessional. She enacts these tactics through the use of several agencies. The following sections will identify and discuss these specific tactics as well as agencies that Grace uses in navigating the marginality in her working environment by “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency.”

## Tactics and Agencies

### *Acquiring time*

Grace continuously works to gain and preserve both planning time and contact time with students. The tactic of **acquiring time** serves Grace in “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency” as the possession and use of time is a symbol of political power in the context of schools as time devoted to academic subjects serves to demonstrate their educational value within the school setting. Both planning time and contact time with students are critical issues for Grace.

In order to **acquire time**, Grace performs the agency of *providing unsolicited input to the administration regarding scheduling*. Creating and managing the master schedule for the school is one important task that administrators and school leadership teams struggle with each year. They must consider when students will eat lunch; when they will attend the ‘auxiliary’ subjects of art, music, physical education, and media. The time when students attend these classes outside of their homerooms is used as planning time for teachers. It is this last consideration that seems to drive the remaining factors in developing a schedule as providing classroom teachers with the quantity and quality of planning time they desire is seen as critical to their success in teaching academic curriculum to students.

In these suggested schedules, Grace deliberately provides additional planning time for classroom teachers. She does this in an attempt to demonstrate that she is putting their needs before her own and that she is a “team player,” which reflects an emissarial response to marginal experiences (Grant & Breese, 1997). This serves the tactic of **acquiring time** as this selfless perspective is perceived as thoughtful and considerate of others and it generates approval for

Grace from classroom teachers and administration. As a result, she has been able to preserve her planning time and often receives desired schedule requests. Fighting for planning time helps Grace, as planning time is essential to the quality and function of her physical education program. Presenting a high quality physical education program aids Grace in navigating the marginality she faces teaching physical education as it works to further Grace's perception as an educator with her colleagues as it results in enhanced curriculum and improved student performance. Chapter Five noted Grace's ability to "Get In" is dependent upon this teaching effectiveness, curriculum, and student performance. By being a good teacher, students experience success in physical education and have positive feelings about Grace and her class. As a result, parents appreciate and value Grace and physical education because of what it provides their children.

*Challenging administration* is a second agency that Grace performs to help her acquire time. Grace described an incident that took place in a faculty meeting regarding the discussion of planning time for teachers. According to Grace, the school district administration required all school principals to record and submit schedules and allotted planning for all instructional staff members. In doing so, her Principal indicated that Grace received planning time from 7:10 a.m. until 8:30 a.m. when her first class arrived. This showed significantly more planning time for Grace than for any other staff member at Valley View. What this report did not include was that from 7:10 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. each day Grace has approximately one hundred and fifty students who come to the gym before they are dismissed to go to their classrooms. During these 20 minutes before the school is 'open' for students, they are permitted to go to one of the following areas: the art room, the computer lab, the cafeteria, or the gym. Many (if not most) students choose to come to the gym (a testament to Grace's ability to "Get In") and participate in a

walking and jogging program that Grace had implemented in an effort to maximize this time period. The implication that Grace was planning from 7:10 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. was inaccurate as Grace had a classroom full of students with whom she was monitoring and engaged. In essence, this is the equivalent of an extra class period in her working day. The indication of this time as planning for Grace by the Principal made Grace very angry and she verbally challenged the Principal during the faculty meeting. About this, Grace said:

I raised my hand and said “What I’m confused about is how you’re counting my time from 7:10 to 7:30, because, I am here every day at 7:10.” She [the Principal] said that was my choice. It was my choice to have 7:30 duty. By that, she was showing more time for me than for anybody else. But, I had a gym full of kids and only place [for students to go] was the lunchroom and the gym. I said “Are you counting the time teachers come in early until they get their first class?” And she said, “No.” [Then] I said, “How can you count my time if you’re not counting their time?” At that time, I was the only person in auxiliary staff that had morning duty- the only person. (Informal interview)

By reporting Grace’s planning time to include time when she had students communicated the message that uninterrupted time without the responsibility of students was not needed by Grace as the teacher of physical education. In an effort to defend her need for planning time without student responsibility, Grace was vehement about communicating the fact that time in which she was supervising students could not be considered as time used for planning. This assertive verbal confrontation and defense of her planning time reflects a defiant reaction to experiences of marginality (Grant & Breese, 1997).

Since the arrival of her current principal, Grace has fought fiercely and relentlessly to keep her planning time. Grace perceives planning time as essential to her program effectiveness

and sees it as a symbol of her value to administration as a teacher. The suggestion or implication that Grace does not need planning time communicates a message to her that physical education is less valuable. The crusade to preserve her planning time is something Grace describes as a constant battle. About this, Grace said:

I fought [the loss of] my planning [time] since she became principal and, I have *never* had to do that before, but I have fought that every single year [for the past 7 years with this Principal]. (Informal interview)

Fighting for planning time helps Grace in the tactic of **acquiring time** because it works to substantiate her need for this resource and further conveys her worth and academic contribution. This benefits her as it asserts her educational value within her working environment as more time translates into more importance in the context of schools.

A third agency that Grace enacts to implement the tactic of **acquiring time** is *maximizing contact time with students*. In essence, Grace does not get additional time; she simply uses her allotted time effectively and efficiently. She wants to see students as much as possible. In fact, she is surprisingly optimistic about having more than one homeroom class come to PE at the same time. She views it as beneficial because it allows the children to have more physical education than they would if they only came once each week. Grace is uncompromising in her efforts to see students when there is a scheduling conflict. For example, there are frequent assemblies at Valley View in which the school (or multiple classes) convenes to present students with information, cultural events, or introduce fundraisers. These events almost always take place in her class space and many times fall during a time period that prevents classes from attending PE with Grace, as they are required to attend the assembly. During one such incident, the assembly finished leaving approximately 10 minutes left for the scheduled PE class period.

The classes assigned to that period were in the gym as they had just attended the assembly. Grace approached the classroom teachers informing them that she was going to take the students and work with them for the remaining 10 minutes. The classroom teachers had assumed that since there was such limited time remaining, that they would simply return to their classrooms. Grace did a short lesson with the students and oriented them to the beginning of a new unit that would begin the next class period.

When I asked Grace about it later, she explained that there was a lot that she could do in 10 minutes and that if she failed to take them that communicated to the teachers and administration that PE time was not *needed*. *Maximizing contact time* with students helps Grace enact this tactic as it communicates the unwavering appreciation for contact time that she has regarding students and her program. It communicates a need for physical education class time that would not be conveyed if Grace passed opportunities to meet with classes. By *maximizing contact time with students*, Grace is more successful at **acquiring time** that furthers the strategy of “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency” as the possession of increased time devoted to physical education serves as a symbol of its educational value in the school setting. Increasing the educational value of physical education in the school setting results in fewer messages of marginality and a less hostile landscape through which Grace navigates marginalization.

### *Defending her turf*

Grace is engaged in a never-ending struggle to establish the gym as *her* classroom and both interview and field note data indicated that Grace regularly negotiates and defends her use of this teaching space with administration and colleagues for assemblies, plays, and musicals. While classroom teachers have rooms that belong specifically to them, the gym is a space that is used by the entire school. Consequently, the gym does not ‘belong’ to Grace (and physical

education) in the way that a classroom belongs to a homeroom teacher. Because of this, the gym is frequently used for assemblies and other functions requiring large space to accommodate large groups of students. In her school, the gym is considered a ‘public’ space. By **defending her turf**, Grace furthers the strategy of “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency” as physically securing this teaching space serves as a physical demonstration and strengthening of her position within the school structure.

One of the agencies that Grace uses to **defend her turf** is by *demanding and providing communication about special events* both within the PE program and other functions coordinated by her colleagues. She is religious about asking questions both verbally and through the use of email and telephone of fellow teachers, administration, and the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) about various events that might require the use of the gym. Grace recognizes that the gym is the appropriate space for some events, but also believes that on many occasions, it is used when the event could be held in a different location in the school given a small amount of pre-planning. She asks to be included or copied on any correspondence regarding assemblies or events and is in constant communication with classroom teachers when they want or need to have a function and use the gym. Habitually *demanding and providing communication about special events* helps Grace enact the tactic of **defending her turf** because the regular communication with teachers allows her to be proactive in demonstrating her expectations for the negotiation of the use of the gym.

The agency of *displaying student work* in physical education and PE content is another way, serving as a subtle reminder, that Grace enacts the tactic of **defending her turf**. The walls of the gym are covered with posters, bulletin boards, and charts reflecting student performance and PE content. Posters with such titles as “Hot Shot Blitz,” “Hula Hoop Challenge,” and



“Bones and Muscles of the Body” are securely mounted filling the walls of Grace’s teaching space displaying student scores and various physical education concepts that Grace covers in her curriculum. By *displaying student work and PE content* on the walls of the gym, Grace furthers the tactic of **defending her turf** as the presence of these items is a physical demonstration of staking her claim on this room for the purpose of physical education. Establishing PE as the purpose of the gym aids Grace in navigating her marginality because the security of teaching space validates the educational value of physical education and this validation advances the position of PE within Valley View reducing the severity of marginality Grace must manage.

#### *Stockpiling equipment*

A third tactic that Grace uses to carry out the strategy of “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency” is **stockpiling equipment**. This tactic helps Grace navigate her marginality by keeping her focused on curricular matters, improving program quality, and allowing her to possess a critical mass of equipment that serves as a tangible demonstration of the value of physical education.

Grace is unrelenting in her vigorous and constant building her collection of physical education equipment. This is reflected in the vast amount and extreme variety of equipment that she uses on a daily basis and has on reserve in her equipment room. Weekly lessons involve a pervasive and sizeable amount of equipment that is arranged purposefully and specifically. Grace does this as a way to show others that she *has* significant equipment and that she *uses it regularly*. Having such elaborate and extensive displays of equipment is something that Grace describes as important in giving a ‘face’ to her program. To her, what people *see* when they enter the gym will determine their ideas about her program and physical education. Grace sees this show and use of equipment as the way she communicates messages about the quality of her

program and its academic value for students. When asked what she wants people to think when they enter the gym, she replied:

Look at all this stuff! They must really do neat things in here. This isn't what PE was like when I was in school. (Informal interview)

Having this extensive amount of equipment and putting it on display daily in the manner that she does may help Grace in **stockpiling equipment** as it demonstrates that she is faithful and thoughtful in using the equipment she is granted. It might also seem, however, that this strategy may work against her in that demonstrating this large amount of equipment may lead others to believe Grace does not need additional equipment, as it would seem that she already has so much.

Preparing the gym with equipment set-up and organization for lessons each morning requires nearly 45 minutes including help from students and her paraprofessional. To Grace, equipment is the most important element in her ability to be an effective teacher and have a quality program. She sees equipment as paramount in the degree to which she can achieve her goals for her program and provide students with the experiences with curriculum that are so important to her. In essence, rackets, bats, balls, and jump ropes are the tools that are imperative for Grace to teach physical education. Conversely, Grace receives no funding from her school, administration, or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) to obtain essential equipment. In the following quote from Grace gained from an unstructured interview she discusses the importance of equipment to her teaching and program effectiveness:

It would be like asking a teacher to go in there and teach [with] desks and pencils and that's it. What are you going to do? Nobody would ask a teacher to do that, but I've been asked to do that.

The first agency that Grace performs to **stockpile equipment** is by *exercising creativity and persistence in finding alternative ways to acquire the equipment she needs*. She has built and made equipment herself, solicited donations and pursued other options in order to secure the equipment she wants for her program. The following quotes from unstructured interviews illustrate her creativity and flexibility in acquiring necessary pieces of equipment by any means possible:

We needed agility ladders; we bought one and it was very expensive. We needed more, so I made [more] so that we could have them for class. I'll find a way to try and get it if I can; preferably for nothing.

Grace also acquires equipment from other teachers:

There was an English teacher that was there who used to teach PE...she brought me ping pong paddles that they had made; she gave me all her stuff because all we had was a couple mats, 2 jump ropes and 5 flat basketballs. That's the only equipment that I had. So, I started getting donations, [I] started calling and getting things.

A second agency, *consistently requesting equipment*, is another way that Grace enacts the tactic of **stockpiling equipment**. In addition to making equipment and soliciting donations, Grace faithfully and persistently submits equipment requests to both administration and PTO. She does this despite the fact that she has rarely, if ever, had these requests granted. When asked why, she expresses that if she were to stop making these requests, they would think she didn't need anything. Further, she expects her requests to be denied. When asked why she submits equipment and funding requests anyway, she answered:

You never know, there may be one person who says yes. One person could come on board [that] might say 'Hey' and realize that this serves every child in the school.

She went on to explain that she deliberately explains in her requests how the physical education program serves every student in the school and all children are allowed to participate. She is careful to mention this as it is a distinguishable difference between her requests and many others that are submitted from other teachers or for other programs as most times they only involve a portion of the students at Valley View, whereas Grace's requests will be used to directly benefit *all* students. Relentlessly requesting equipment aids Grace in furthering the tactic of **stockpiling equipment** because it helps her maintain the quality of her instruction and PE program, which works to further promote the value of physical education and her educational contribution to students at Valley View.

A third agency that Grace uses to execute the tactic of **stockpiling equipment** is by *holding students accountable for proper treatment of the equipment*.

In the following quote, Grace discusses her expectations for care of the equipment with students:

I'll make the kids take care of it. I'm very adamant and they know it- I have told them if something breaks we may not be able to replace it. I think they need to know that it's not like at home where your parents may let you break something and then go out and get another one somewhere else. We know we don't have that luxury. (Informal interview)

By *holding students accountable for the proper treatment of equipment*, Grace furthers the tactic of **stockpiling equipment** as it helps ensure that the condition and quality of the equipment remains intact. As a result, the equipment can be used longer and over the period of several school years with fewer pieces requiring replacement. This allows Grace to use any limited funding she might be granted toward gaining new or different equipment.

By *exercising creativity, consistently requesting equipment, and holding students accountable*, useful pieces of equipment Grace is able to execute the strategy of "Procuring and

Managing Instructional Currency” as obtaining and expanding her supply of equipment provides Grace with a body of resources that she feels is paramount in her teaching and program effectiveness. Feeling satisfied with her teaching and program effectiveness helps Grace remain motivated and focused on curricular matters. Staying focused on curriculum and work with students is something that Grace describes as important in navigating her marginality because she perceives it as more productive and beneficial than giving attention to social and marginal conditions in her day-to-day life at school. This seems to reflect a withdrawn reaction to marginality (Grant & Breese, 1997) as she is attempting to remove herself from social issues and experiences of marginality in her workplace.

#### *Presenting a professional image*

Grace employs the tactic of **presenting a professional image** to carry out the strategy of “Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency.” This refers to how Grace works to demonstrate her professionalism through her appearance and conduct daily within her working environment. She enacts this tactic through the agencies of *dressing professionally, arriving early and staying late, and achieving advanced certifications*. As opposed to the other measures of instructional currency she acquires, her professional image is an intangible resource that helps Grace to communicate her professional contribution to Valley View Elementary School.

*Dressing professionally* serves as a physical demonstration of the professionalism that Grace values. Grace’s daily teaching attire consists of a tucked in collared shirt, loosely fitting exercise pants, and tennis shoes. Her hair is frequently pulled back and she wears little to no make-up. Although understated, Grace’s appearance is always neat and polished and works to send the message to her colleagues that her work is more than just exercise and that she is attentive to detail. This is reflective of an emulative reaction to marginality in that Grace’s dress

mirrors that of her classroom co-workers yet modified to accommodate the active nature of teaching physical education.

Grace arrives at school 30 minutes earlier than is required at 7:15 a.m. every day. Most days, this makes her one of the first two or three people in the building and many times she is unable to enter the building because she is the first person there and the doors are locked. Grace not only arrives early, but most days she stays late as well. *Arriving early and staying late* serves to carry out the tactic of presenting a professional image as it demonstrates her willingness to work above and beyond what is required of teachers at Valley View. This works to promote the perception that Grace is a dedicated professional as *arriving early and staying late* is many times equated with hard work.

By *achieving advanced certifications*, Grace furthers the tactic of **presenting a professional image** as additional certifications (such as her held *National Board* certification) demonstrate elevated levels of expertise and teaching performance which are perceived as highly professional by those in her working environment. While she does not advertise or volunteer this information due to her humility, she does display certificates and plaques on the wall in her office. It seems clear that possessing these advanced certifications is an important demonstration of the value of a high level of professionalism that Grace works toward.

*Effectively utilizing and espousing the need for a paraprofessional*

Grace employs the tactic of **utilizing and espousing the need for a paraprofessional** through the agencies of *regularly employing her strengths* and *verbally defending the use and relevance of a paraprofessional*. Through these agencies, Grace is able to maximize the assistance of her paraprofessional. Capitalizing on these assets assists Grace in navigating her

marginality as it amplifies her physical education program because the paraprofessional is more productive and effective leading to greater benefits for students.

The full-time paraprofessional was assigned to the physical education program with the sole responsibility to assist Grace with managerial and instructional functions. At Valley View Elementary School, the only teachers who have full-time assistance by a paraprofessional are the kindergarten classroom teachers. At every other grade level first through fifth, one paraprofessional is assigned to work with all of the teachers in that grade. This means that in some grades, four or five teachers share a paraprofessional. Further, no other certified staff members (including other 'auxiliary' teachers; art, music, and media) have the assistance of a paraprofessional.

Seven years ago, the paraprofessional was assigned to the PE program so that classes could be scheduled for physical education two at a time allowing classroom teachers additional planning time within their week. The assignment of the paraprofessional was not intended for the benefit of Grace, the physical education program, or the physical education experience for students. The purpose of this assignment was to benefit classroom teachers and (indirectly) student learning of classroom content. Grace is well aware of this and has, in essence, turned this into an overwhelmingly positive asset for her teaching and PE program. Grace has so skillfully incorporated this paraprofessional to such a degree that she now plays a pivotal role in and is essential to the quality and effectiveness of the PE program.

The presence and effective utilization of this paraprofessional has aided Grace by providing a valuable contribution to managerial and instructional functions. The use of a paraprofessional frees Grace to concentrate her time, energy, and expertise on tasks and aspects of her program that she may not be able to attend to without the help of a paraprofessional. For

example, the paraprofessional produces and distributes all records and certificates for fitness testing awards. This is a task that Grace used to have to do entirely by herself and describes as extremely time consuming. Additionally, I observed the paraprofessional assist with daily lessons by running small group stations and working with students on specific skills that required additional supervision as well as managing make-up testing for individual students who had been absent and wanted to attempt an improved score to earn various fitness testing awards. This paraprofessional's critical role in the function of the PE program benefits Grace as it further solidifies the need for this paraprofessional providing her with additional resources that translate into power within her school context.

In considering the distribution of different tasks, Grace continually provides her paraprofessional the opportunity to select activities with which she feels most comfortable. By increasing the paraprofessional's comfort level, the paraprofessional works more effectively and efficiently. This further augments the contribution that the paraprofessional provides to Grace's program and reduces the amount of work or management required of Grace. Offering choices and regularly employing strengths serves Grace in carrying out the tactic of **effectively utilizing and espousing the need for a paraprofessional** as it allows the paraprofessional to work on tasks being most effective and will maximizing the para-pro's contribution to the quality and effectiveness of the program. These contributions free Grace up to focus her attention and efforts on functions and activities that she would be neglected if the help of the paraprofessional were less significant.

The agency of *verbally defending the use and relevance of a paraprofessional* is another way that Grace carries out the tactic of **effectively utilizing and espousing the need for a paraprofessional**. Help by a paraprofessional is a valuable resource for teachers. According to



Grace, some of the teachers at Valley View are resentful that she has been assigned a paraprofessional because she has this assistance when they do not. Because of this, some people believe that the help of the paraprofessional makes work easier for Grace because the workload is divided between two adults rather than all of it being completed by just one teacher.

Grace seems to champion the work and value of the paraprofessional to everyone in the school community. It is important to Grace to make people aware of the extremely valuable contribution the paraprofessional brings to the PE program and students. Grace regularly praises the paraprofessional to other co-workers, parents, or students in the paraprofessional's presence. Further, she advertises the irreplaceable role the paraprofessional plays to her colleagues. The following quote demonstrates this:

By defending [her]; standing up for her verbally and advocating. Also, telling people: 'she maybe a paraprofessional but she knows more than some people in the building about certain things.' Also, I have to realize that I can do stuff that makes her life harder and put her in a corner. The biggest thing is that people don't realize why Amanda is in here. Some people still don't get that in this building.

*Verbally defending the use and relevance of her paraprofessional* helps Grace further the strategy of "Procuring and Maintaining Instructional Currency" because it helps to strengthen her need for the paraprofessional. This helps to secure the assignment of the paraprofessional to physical education, which helps Grace by easing her workload that helps her be a better teacher. Being a better teacher helps Grace to gain credibility with students, teachers, and parents that she draws on in navigating her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject.

### Summary

This chapter has identified and discussed specific tactics and agencies that Grace enacts in navigating her marginality through the strategy of “Procuring and Maintaining Instructional Currency.” By actively gaining and securing tools and resources, Grace improves the quality of her program and solidifies the position of physical education within the school structure despite its marginal placement. The data indicated that Grace uses four distinct tactics involving various agencies: (a) acquiring time, (b) defending her turf, (c) procuring and maintaining equipment, (d) presenting a professional image, and (e) effectively utilizing and espousing the need for a paraprofessional. This strategy benefits Grace as the possession of equipment, space, and time symbolize value within the school context and provide her with a vehicle with which to navigate her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject.

## CHAPTER 7

## “CULTIVATING AND NURTURING KINSHIP WITH A PARAPROFESSIONAL”

“Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional” is the third strategy that Grace utilizes to navigate her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. The strategy of “Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional” refers to the way that Grace has concentrated her efforts to develop and maintain an unbreakable bond with her paraprofessional, Amanda. Amanda and Grace have been working together daily for the last seven years when she accepted the position assigned to the physical education program. Before taking the position, Amanda was familiar with Grace and Valley View Elementary School as her daughters were students at the school and Amanda had been working as a substitute teacher after leaving a corporate position to spend more time with her family. When a few para-professional positions became available at Valley View, Amanda chose the PE assignment as she had such positive experiences with Grace and her program through her work as a substitute.

Early in the data collection phase, it became clear that this relationship serves as one of the most powerful factors influencing how Grace navigates her marginality. Initially, the study design did not include a paraprofessional as a source of data, but shortly after beginning my time with them, it was evident that Amanda served a critical purpose for Grace in navigating the marginality in her working environment. Consequently, the study design was modified to include interview and field work data including Amanda as a data source.

As I continued to investigate the nature of this relationship, I came to understand a remarkable depth and intimacy that far exceeds the expected connection between a teacher and her paraprofessional or co-worker. These two women have formed a unique and mutually beneficial camaraderie that gives both personal and professional support by providing feelings of

acceptance and encouragement. Consistently throughout my time with them, they were encouraging, respectful, kind, and demonstrated poignant loyalty toward one another. It was as if I was observing a husband and wife team working together; the dynamic of this relationship (both professional and otherwise) closely resembled a successful marriage.

Personally, Grace relies heavily on this friendship for comfort, reinforcement, and at times, counsel that put her in good stead as she navigates her marginalized teaching environment. Since they have established implicit trust in one another, Grace feels safe to share disappointment, anger, or frustration with her colleagues and administration with Amanda; and she does not trust anyone else in her working environment enough to confide to the same degree. Grace knows that what she reveals to Amanda will remain confidential and will not be shared with other co-workers. This grants her a tremendous feeling of acceptance and empathy. In addition, it impacts her reaction(s) to marginality, as Amanda will offer advice and suggestions on how to respond to certain situations. Grace values Amanda's judgment in both personal and professional matters and frequently implements her recommendations. Professionally, Grace includes Amanda in nearly every aspect, including her in both the managerial and instructional functioning of the physical education program that is contrary to the usual role of a paraprofessional. Grace views Amanda as essential to program quality and operation as well as critical to her mental and emotional well being in her working environment. Grace has intentionally treated Amanda to allow her to flourish in her role, find her niche, and increase her investment in the PE program.

The comfort, reinforcement, and counsel Grace receives on account of this kinship helps to alleviate her labor and improve program effectiveness. This strategy results in her having a loyal advocate and friend that provides her confidence in her interactions with others in her

marginalized environment as well as improving the quality and efficiency of her physical education program. Feeling as though she has someone “in her corner” minimizes the effects of negative feelings and events that leave her feeling marginalized because she can talk to Amanda allowing her to feel heard and understood. Having a professional colleague helps Grace to maximize and refine her PE program because of the volume of work that can be accomplished with Amanda’s assistance. Grace recognizes that Amanda brings specific skills and strengths that Grace capitalizes on resulting in enhanced teaching skills and learning experiences for students. Having a program with improved learning experiences for students furthers Grace’s image as an effective educator and is an important factor in obtaining political power to be used in navigating her marginalized working environment.

A positive outcome of using the strategy “Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional” for Grace is that she does not have to manage a relationship with Amanda in addition to navigating her marginality within the context of the school environment. The safety and consolation that she receives from her relationship with Amanda gives her relief from negative socio-political interactions she experiences with her other colleagues. This is something that both Grace and Amanda recognize. When asked how she thinks their relationship aids Grace, Amanda said:

Not battling people all the time; that is one thing she doesn’t have to worry about. You know, you have to worry about those relationships with the Principal and other people and all the other different things that are going to happen during the workweek. But this, what goes on here, is one less thing she has to worry about.

The data indicate that Grace’s strategy of “Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional” is brought to bear by the following tactics: (a) accepting unconditionally, (b)

appreciating Amanda's boundaries, (c) communicating candidly and respectfully, (d) regularly employing Amanda's strengths, and (e) partially yielding leadership tasks. Further, to enact these tactics, she exhibits the following agencies: (a) clarifying roles, (b) listening, (c) sharing, and (d) offering choices. The following sections will identify and discuss these specific tactics and agencies that Grace employs in navigating her marginality by "Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional."

### Tactics and Agencies

#### *Accepting unconditionally*

Grace believes it is essential to be deliberately positive in her approach to daily interactions with Amanda because it fosters beneficial working conditions and mutual appreciation and respect. Grace's unconditional acceptance of Amanda has bred a mutual absolute approval for one another that assists Grace in navigating marginality as it provides her moral support and reassurance. Grace and Amanda share freely both positive and negative sentiments with total acceptance from the other. Through optimism and empathy, it is clear that they demonstrate reciprocal approval of one another. Grace describes this as important in helping her deal with the day-to-day happenings at school; data captured in field notes, interviews, and critical incident techniques illustrate this:

We tolerate each other's bad side. There could be so many opportunities for confrontation. She tolerates the little quirky things that I do every day and sees the good side and not the bad side.

These words from Grace highlight this unconditional acceptance as she recognizes that Amanda allows Grace to be herself without fear of rejection or negative consequences within their

relationship. Further, they connect this optimism to the support and empathy they provide one another in the ability to express the frustrations they do have with other staff members:

We see each other's plusses and don't talk about our minuses very much. We use each other as a sounding board. We know we can't complain to the people we need to complain to and that [talking to one another] helps us to bear it.

One of the agencies that Grace uses to execute **accepting unconditionally** is *listening*. *Listening* is something that both women express as very important to Grace's ability to navigate her marginalized working environment because it provides her with a sense of relief, comfort, and support. Grace feels validated and has been tireless in building a strong sense of loyalty and devotion between both of them. *Listening* serves the tactic of **accepting unconditionally** as it provides Grace and Amanda with a way to demonstrate and further the mutual respect and appreciation that they have developed over seven years of working together. Consider the following quote from Amanda about listening to Grace:

Sometimes when she vents I just listen. Then there are times when I might make a suggestion but sometimes it is just listening. Sometimes that is what people need is just someone who will listen (unstructured interview).

*Sharing* is another agency that Grace uses to enact the tactic of **accepting unconditionally**. Sharing her thoughts, feelings, and frustrations with Amanda is cathartic for Grace and contributes to navigating her marginalized working environment in that she is able to release some of her negative feelings about conflict that arise to someone she trusts which reduces her anxiety and accumulation of resentment for those who are a source of frustration. The ability to air grievances to Amanda allows her to be more diplomatic, professional, and personable in her interactions with co-workers. Both *sharing* and *listening* are agencies that

serve the tactic of **accepting unconditionally**. The bond between Grace and Amanda is strengthened as they share dissatisfaction and grievances about the environment with one another. As that bond grows stronger, the strategy of “Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship” is executed and results in improved navigation through her marginal working environment. This is particularly significant because neither Grace nor Amanda feel as though they can safely share these negative sentiments with anyone else in their working environment. According to them, they do not trust that what they would say to co-workers would remain confidential, whereas they have complete faith in the confidentiality that they both enjoy between one another. *Sharing and listening* in this intimate way further strengthens the bond, trust, faith, and loyalty while aiding the implementation of the strategy of “Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional.” The following quote from a structured interview demonstrates this dynamic:

We kind of vent to each other; she hears mine too; it is really kind of a friendship that has developed. We can kind of lean on each other and talk to each other and she is always [telling me] ‘whatever you need, whatever you need.’ To me, the friendship goes both ways. I am here for her for whatever she needs, and she is there for me too.

#### *Appreciating Amanda’s boundaries*

In order to allow Amanda to gain ownership of her role and gain comfort in their working environment, Grace presumes that her co-worker needs space and distance at times. She is mindful of this thinking of Amanda’s needs rather than her own. For example, she shared the following in an unstructured interview:

I try not to call Amanda [outside of school hours] because I know she's been with me all day. I was going to call her over spring break to ask her something because Monday I was going to do something for lunch, but I thought: ‘No.’ I know that people can have



their fill of me. I don't want to push that [because] we've been together eight hours. I didn't want to bother her. I know I'll see her.

This is interesting because both Grace and Amanda rarely leave the gym and office area. They spend their entire day in the gym with students; sharing both their planning period and lunch together in the office adjoining the gymnasium. During a typical day, these two women interact almost exclusively with one another. Interaction with co-workers and other adults happens only when teachers bring students to the gym their scheduled class time, representing a withdrawn reaction to marginality as described by Grant & Breese (1997). Grace has resorted to a relative departure from activities and interaction with others in her working environment choosing to surround herself with the safety of the gym and her kinship with Amanda.

Grace **appreciates Amanda's boundaries** during the school day as well. For example, Grace was describing to me her reasons for avoiding the staff workroom when eating lunch. She expressed that she didn't care to eat with other teachers because of their negativity (about students, teaching, and other co-workers), but wanted to communicate to Amanda that she did not expect her to eat in the office simply because she was. Further, she considered the fact that Amanda may benefit from having some time away from her. Specifically, Grace said:

I told Amanda she could go eat wherever. I said to her: 'You've been in here with me all day and it may be a good opportunity for you to have time away from me.' (Informal interview)

Despite this invitation, Amanda chooses to eat lunch in their office each day with Grace. It seems that this tactic has helped enact the strategy as well as resulting in Amanda's loyalty to Grace. The quote from Grace demonstrates that she is sensitive to how spending a large amount of time together might affect Amanda. Because of this, it was important to Grace to express to

Amanda the freedom to spend time away from Grace and the gym, if she so desired. This awareness and consideration is significant because Grace is giving Amanda the freedom and space to choose interaction outside of their relationship. In addition, Grace is able to set aside her own preferences to provide Amanda with the opportunity to spend her lunch time in a way that she deems most appealing. By **appreciating boundaries** in this way, Amanda, in turn, appreciates Grace and this serves to solidify their relationship by furthering their mutual respect. **Appreciating boundaries** helps Grace to “Cultivate and Nurture Kinship with a Paraprofessional” by demonstrating respect and communicates an awareness of her needs to Amanda. Because of this, Amanda values Grace’s consideration that in turn continues to build mutual care and respect between them strengthening the kinship. In turn, Grace relies on the security and durability of this relationship with Amanda to provide support and comfort as she navigates marginality.

*Communicating candidly and respectfully*

There is a palpable feeling of ease and camaraderie between Grace and Amanda. It is clear that they know one another so well that they are able to anticipate the other’s reaction, response, or perspective on an issue before discussion. Given that, they talk freely with one another whether brainstorming and problem solving program issues or expressing anxiety and frustration. This openness serves Grace in “Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional” as it builds trust between Grace and Amanda further strengthening their bond and connection upon which she relies when navigating marginality. In addition, it frees Grace from needing to strategize about how to approach Amanda that allows her to utilize her energies toward other issues like students and teaching physical education.

One of the agencies that Grace utilizes to enact the tactic of **communicating candidly and respectfully** is by *unfettered, open, and honest sharing*. Grace describes herself as outspoken. While data indicate that this is true with only certain individuals and with certain circumstances in her working environment; Grace is undoubtedly outspoken within her interactions with Amanda and shares her thoughts in an unreserved, frank, yet amiable manner. Through *unfettered, open, and honest sharing*, Grace minimizes the potential for miscommunication while providing Amanda with confidence that any problems that may arise will be addressed directly without fear of resentment. The previously mentioned agencies of *sharing* and *listening* assist in *carrying out this unfettered, open, and honest sharing*. This helps Grace “Cultivate and Nurture Kinship” with Amanda as it eliminates anxiety as she trusts that they can go to one another to discuss their thoughts and concerns. This, in turn, fosters confidence in the friendship further strengthening their bond.

The following quote from Amanda speaks to their comfort in sharing with one another:

We just feel so comfortable with each other that we can just talk to each other about whatever. I would discuss it with her first before I would ever go to anyone else if I ever had a problem with her. (Informal interview)

It seems that virtually nothing is off limits between them and I frequently observed them sharing personal feelings and perceptions about events in their personal lives involving children and spouses, in addition to circumstances at work. For example, I arrived one morning when Grace to observe Grace venting to Amanda about an incident that had occurred over the weekend involving Grace’s oldest son and his girlfriend. Grace was upset with the way her son’s girlfriend had conducted herself and spoken to Grace and her husband and was sharing this with Amanda requesting feedback about how Amanda would handle a similar circumstance with her

children. In that moment, it felt as though I was observing two good friends sharing struggles and advice with parenting; not two women who have merely a professional relationship.

*Unfettered, open, and honest sharing* of this nature between Grace and Amanda has gone so far, in fact, that it eliminates personal conflict. In fact, according to Grace, they haven't ever had any problems with one another. In an informal interview she said:

I don't ever feel like I can't discuss a problem; not that we have ever really had any problems.

They feel so comfortable with the emotional safety and mutual respect their kinship affords them that they express the overwhelming feeling that they can come to each other with anything without apprehension about negative reactions or repercussions.

An additional agency that Grace utilizes in enacting the tactic of **communicating candidly and respectfully** is *constantly clarifying roles*. Grace utilizes the strengths of both herself and Amanda in order to best serve her vision for the PE program. She is able to do this because she has effectively defined the role(s) for both herself and Amanda and given Amanda room within their relationship to take space if needed. Early in their working relationship, Grace would make lists of tasks that needed to be done and corresponding timelines. As Amanda learned these necessary functions within the PE program, her knowledge grew, as did her recognition of how to best accomplish these tasks. In clearly defining and discussing the position(s) and function(s) of both herself and Amanda, Grace employed the tactic of **communicating candidly and respectfully**. The agencies of *sharing* and *listening* (previously mentioned in facilitating the tactic of **accepting unconditionally**) serve to help Grace facilitate the tactic of **communicating candidly and respectfully** and the agency of *clarifying roles*. For Grace, *clarifying roles* utilizes **candid and respectful communication** and benefits Grace in

“Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship” with Amanda as having explicit understanding of how one another contributes to the overall function and success of the PE program helps both Grace and Amanda to appreciate the skills and contributions of their co-worker. This further develops mutual respect between them and augments their relationship that she depends on in navigating her marginality.

*Regularly employing Amanda’s strengths*

A fourth tactic that Grace performs to “Cultivate and Nurture Kinship with a Paraprofessional” is by **regularly employing Amanda’s strengths**. Capitalizing on these assets benefits Grace in navigating her marginality as it amplifies her physical education program and creates feelings of ownership and empowerment within Amanda that translate into her increased investment in the program and appreciation for Grace.

Before becoming a paraprofessional, Amanda worked for a large technology corporation in bookkeeping where she developed a substantial level of skill with technology and software associated with spreadsheets and word processing. Grace recognizes these skills as something she does not possess and was excited at the opportunity to allow Amanda to incorporate this knowledge to benefit the PE program and students. For example, Grace has given Amanda complete control and responsibility to handling end of the year awards earned by students. She maintains virtually all data and records regarding fitness testing and skill performance. From this, she creates, prints, and produces certificates that are awarded to students at end of year ceremonies. Grace has **communicated candidly and respectfully** and offered tasks requiring these skills to Amanda. In the following quote from an unstructured interview, Grace describes this with the implication that Amanda’s strengths have helped her be a better teacher:

The changes that Amanda helped me make were changes I really couldn't do myself because she has much more technology knowledge than I do. She's taught me a lot of things on the computer and there are some things I still don't understand that she does.

A related agency used by Grace is to *offer Amanda choices* in order to carry out the tactic of regularly employing her strengths. In considering the distribution of different tasks, Grace continually provides Amanda the opportunity to select activities with which she feels most comfortable. This serves to **regularly employ Amanda's strengths** as she chooses tasks with which she feels most confident. Grace is very concerned with providing Amanda the chance to contribute in the ways she feels most satisfied. In an informal interview, she mentioned:

By letting her make some choices. I really like to let her make the first choice. I want her to say what she wants to do. I have never wanted her to do things that she didn't feel comfortable doing.

*Offering choices* to Amanda promotes feelings of ownership in the professional activities as well as gratitude and appreciation for Grace feeding positive sentiments between them both. These, in turn, motivate Amanda to increased investment in and dedication to her role that helps Grace meet her instructional goals. Being an effective teacher then aids Grace as she navigates her marginalized working environment.

#### *Partially yielding leadership tasks*

A final tactic that Grace utilizes to "Cultivate and Nurture Kinship" with Amanda is **partially yielding leadership tasks**. Grace consults and incorporates Amanda in nearly every function and decision regarding the physical education program and is quick to defer leadership involving tasks using the tactic of **regularly employing Amanda's strengths**. This benefits Grace as it reduces the amount of work for which she is responsible placing her in a better

position to navigate her marginality with reduced stress. *Partially yielding leadership tasks* validates Amanda's contribution(s) to the program; leading Amanda to feel appreciated and fosters feelings of confidence and investment in the program. These feelings are beneficial for Grace as they serve to further deepen and solidify "Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship" between Grace and Amanda and contributing to positive feelings within their relationship. The following quote from Grace during an informal interview illustrates this:

At different times, a different person is leading. There isn't always one person is in charge. Sometimes she is leading and she's following. Sometimes I'm leading and she's following its not that one person is in charge or the dominant all the time. Everybody has strengths and weaknesses and ours kind of offset each other.

#### Summary

This chapter has described the strategy of "Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional" which Grace enacts to navigate the marginality of her working environment. The data revealed Grace does this by using five tactics: (a) accepting unconditionally, (b) appreciating Amanda's boundaries, (c) communicating candidly and respectfully, (d) regularly employing Amanda's strengths, and (e) partially yielding leadership tasks. Ultimately, those tactics are manifested in the following agencies: (a) clarifying roles, (b) listening, (c) sharing, and (d) offering choices. By purposefully working to cultivate and nurture a bond with her paraprofessional, Grace has created a seemingly unbreakable bond with Amanda. This bond provides her comfort, reinforcement, and counsel that enable her to navigate the marginality of teaching physical education.

## CHAPTER 8

“SELECTIVELY INITIATING AND FOSTERING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS OUTSIDE  
OF THE GYM”

The final strategy emanating from the data is that of “Selectively Initiating and Fostering Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym.” This strategy refers to how Grace aligns herself with individuals of comparable perspectives and circumstances within her working environment. By identifying people and groups that occupy similar positions in the school hierarchy and forging relationships with them using a variety of tactics and agencies, Grace has created a network of support for herself that assists her in navigating the marginality of teaching physical education (PE). These alliances provide her feelings of support, understanding, and validation as well as promote a positive image of PE. These affiliations are quite different from the “Kinship” described with Amanda (see Chapter 7) and the ability to “Get In” described in Chapter 5. While these relationships are positive and provide Grace with support, they do not possess the depth and personal intimacy that is present within the “Kinship” that Grace has nurtured with Amanda. In addition, the diplomatic relations that she has garnered with her colleagues outside the gym are primarily of a professional nature and do not involve being immersed in personal matters to the degree that “Getting In” denotes. Data sources revealed that Grace employs this strategy by using the following tactics: (a) establishing alliances and strengthening connections, (b) conducting and promoting interdisciplinary teaching, and (c) injecting herself into ‘academic’ matters and functions. The following sections identify and discuss these tactics and specific agencies that Grace applies to employ the strategy of “Selectively Initiating and Fostering Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym” while navigating the marginality she experiences as a teacher of PE.



## Tactics and Agencies

### *Establishing alliances and strengthening connections*

Grace has identified, elicited, cultivated, and grown relationships with other people in her working environment that appear to share a common thread- they all have marginal experiences. She has formed a support group for herself made up of two 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers (Reba and Ricky) and the team of four kindergarten teachers. Common among all of these individuals (including Grace) is a shared rejection by and difficulty in dealing with the Principal. Grace concedes that this 'Group of 7' operates professionally in a way that is in conflict with the philosophy of the Principal. Grace's perspective is that she, Reba, Ricky, and the kindergarten teachers, in her words, "are here for the kids", whereas Grace believes the principal is motivated by maintaining her power within the school environment. Consequently, Grace's 'Group of 7' is not well received by those teachers who are allegedly 'favorites' of Valerie. Grace describes these teachers as 'the ones who click' with the Principal. Meaning, they approve of Valerie, her policies, and her approach in leading Valley View Elementary School and respond to her in a way that furthers Valerie's positive opinion of them. Conversely, the 'Group of 7' do not always approve of the Principal's philosophies and the leadership style she puts forth in her treatment of staff members.

Consequently, all of these players are viewed as 'different' or 'non-conformists.' Consider, for example, the following words Grace shared about how Ricky views his status with the administration:

Ricky [has never] said this but I believe Ricky feels that if they could get rid of him they would. He feels this because he's a nonconformist. He feels it's because he's different.

The following quote from Grace during an unstructured interview expresses the marginality experienced by the four kindergarten teachers. It appears that they are not viewed as vital to the operation of the school because of the nature of their content that is strikingly similar to the attitude she fights regarding her own subject matter:

I know it's like some people think kindergarten and what do they do? I just think that some people who have never been in a kindergarten classroom or at higher grade levels think it is just babysitting they don't understand how much they have to cover in kindergarten.

Because of their shared marginality, Grace has identified them as beneficial partners as they can sympathize with her position. **Establishing alliances and strengthening connections** with other marginal colleagues outside the gym helps Grace navigate the marginality of teaching physical education by helping her to feel understood and validated in her struggle to plot a course through her working environment. This approach, it seems, is another instance of Grace taking an emissarial (Grant & Breese, 1997) reaction to her marginal status.

Further evidence of Grace's emissarial (Grant & Breese, 1997) approach, she enacts the agency of *extending assistance* to these other marginalized colleagues. *Extending assistance* aids Grace in **establishing alliances and strengthening connections** with other marginal colleagues because it helps to build mutual respect between Grace and these colleagues as they view her as sympathetic to the stress they experience within their job. By seeing Grace as sympathetic and helpful, these colleagues are more willing to view Grace as 'on their side' that aids in forging these professional relationships as they begin to see Grace as an ally that she can call upon if needed.

Grace is sensitive to the stressors of daily work experienced by her classroom colleagues and the difficulties involved in the work of a grade level teacher. For example, she expresses recognition that the PE period for their students provides the classroom teacher with the only 'break' they may receive in a day and that many times they have no opportunity to even use the restroom because they cannot leave students unattended. With no assistance, classroom teachers have no one to monitor students for the few moments needed to use the restroom. When asked what she does to offer help to classroom teachers, Grace said:

I ask the teachers, 'Do you need to go to the restroom? Do you need to go get a soda or do you need me to sit here with your kids while you go make a phone call?' We have to remember just like I am counting on my time, they are counting on their time, too.

Over the course of data collection, I observed Grace extending help in this way several times during transition between classes when teachers drop off and pick up students at the gym. While I never observed them accept the invitation for help, they expressed great appreciation to Grace for simply offering this assistance.

*Purposely sharing positive comments about students* is the third agency Grace does to help her **establish alliances and strengthen connections** with other marginal colleagues. She explained that she does this deliberately because it is her impression that classroom teachers hear too many negative things and that being positive and optimistic is more beneficial for teachers and the students than if she were to express disappointment or frustration with the students' behavior and/or performance. *Purposely sharing positive comments* helps Grace **establish alliances and strengthen connections** with her colleagues because her optimism makes interactions with Grace more appealing than if she were a source of negativity. She primarily does this during the transition periods between classes when teachers are arriving or leaving the

gym with their class. When they come to pick up students, most teachers will ask Grace for feedback about the class period. Grace explicitly described that she will nearly always speak positively about the students and their performance during the lesson; even when it might not necessarily be the case. The ability to have a series of positive interactions with colleagues helps foster positive opinions and feelings about Grace and the interactions they have with her.

A fourth agency that works to help Grace **establish alliances and strengthen connections** with other marginal colleagues is by *inquiring into and sharing personal matters*. Grace offered that one of the things she does to help her nurture relationships with these colleagues is to ask them about their families and other things going on in their personal life. Further, she will volunteer and offer things about her own personal life when engaged in these types of conversations with other teachers with whom she works. *Inquiring and sharing about personal matters* helps Grace **establish alliances and strengthen connections** with other marginal colleagues because it demonstrates her investment and consideration for them as individuals outside of their role(s) at school. By showing her investment and interest in personal life, Grace demonstrates that she cares about her co-workers beyond their interactions at school. Through this, Grace changes the nature of the relationship to involve more of the person than just their identity at school. This brings about a greater level of intimacy and works to broaden and deepen the connection between Grace and her colleagues. When asked about why inquiring about personal matters was important, she said:

Asking them about their personal stuff at the right time is always good because [I think] the majority of our teachers are [more than] just [who they are at] school. (Informal interview)

She went on to describe an example that occurred with the reading specialist resource teacher:

There was an issue with Ms. Williams. I knew she had a son [but I went on to ask if she had] any other family. She talked about her daughter and how her daughter had really gotten out of control...she said not a lot of people know it but she's had a baby and she is with a black guy. She said that's not the issue [it's really] all the other stuff that's gone on. [Ms. Williams] was real concerned that she was going to have to make a decision to have nothing to do with this daughter [or allow her to] come back home. She said I don't mind people knowing but it's just really an awkward situation. I didn't talk to anyone else about it because she really is a private person.

Grace described this incident as the first time she had any kind personal connection with Ms. Williams and went on to discuss how that conversation served to strengthen the bond between them changing the nature of their working relationship from that point forward and leading to more warm and inviting interaction at school. According to Grace, it all stemmed from that one conversation.

A fifth agency that Grace performs to help her **establish alliances and strengthen connections** with other marginal colleagues is to *purposely seek advice and counsel regarding professional matters*. While Grace *seeks advice regarding professional matters* from Ricky and the four kindergarten teachers at various times, she asks Reba for guidance more frequently. She describes Reba as a direct and up-front colleague who she respects because of her teaching experience, ability, and professional judgment. Reba serves on an association for educators whose purpose is to advocate for teachers many times in opposition to principals and district administration. Because of this, Grace describes, Reba is respected by the other teachers in the school, but is viewed as an adversary by the Principal and Assistant Principal. Both field note and interview data indicate that Reba is the unspoken leader of the teaching staff (beyond the

‘Group of 7’) at Valley View. According to Grace, many teachers seek her advice on professional matters and conflicts with administration because of her experience and expertise.

When asked about Reba and their connection, Grace said:

We have worked together for a long time. I [have] a real connection with Reba. If you are upset you can go to her and ask her. She is knowledgeable on professional issues and how to handle things; she gives really good professional advice. She will say if this happens it's going to hurt you in this way.

*By purposely seeking advice and counsel regarding professional matters*, Grace demonstrates respect for Reba and the other colleagues whom she asks for guidance. Showing this respect fosters positive feelings within Reba, Ricky, and the kindergarten teachers leading them to view Grace as a thoughtful and humble colleague who appreciates their opinion and expertise. These feelings of appreciation between Grace and her co-workers are necessary in establishing mutual respect and trust that Grace relies on when strengthening bonds and building alliances with these colleagues.

#### *Conducting and promoting interdisciplinary teaching*

Grace volunteers information to her colleagues on a daily basis about the multitude of ways that she touches on and includes elements of their curriculum within her lessons. One of the agencies that Grace uses to **conduct and promote interdisciplinary teaching** is to *volunteer information and debrief with teachers during class transition*. Between the end of one class period and the beginning of the next class period, there is a transition period of approximately 2-5 minutes. During this time, students who have just finished their PE class are lined up inside the gym door and waiting for their classroom teacher to pick them up and return to the classroom. Also lined up at the gym door is the group of students who are arriving and preparing

to begin their PE class with Grace. The classroom teacher brings these students to the gym and when this happens, Grace talks with the teachers who are dropping off and picking up students.

She solicits this information verbally to teachers when they pick up or drop off students, when she is in faculty meetings (and it is relevant), and in documentation like lesson plans and yearly program goals submitted to administration. By doing this, Grace promotes a positive image of PE because it serves to demonstrate academic curriculum within PE content leading to the awareness of the educational and academic contribution that physical education can provide students, which to Grace appears to be the main concern to the school. By recognizing the inclusion of their curriculum within PE, Grace's colleagues are more likely to view her content as more 'academic' and less like 'play' and Grace as 'help' rather than as a superfluous interruption in student learning time. Grace does this in an effort to reduce the marginality Grace experiences as an elevated perception of PE could result in an enhanced position within the school hierarchy thus improving its marginal status.

One example of this occurred between Grace and Ricky late in data collection. When Ricky arrived at the gym with his class, he said to Grace, "I have some kids who are just *not* getting fractions." Grace responded by offering three different ways that she could (and would) address the concept within her lesson, which was to prepare the students for the mile run the following week. After the lesson began, Grace modified the introduction to her lesson she had planned to include a brief discussion connecting fractions to the number of laps and total distance they would be running during their upcoming activity. Following the lesson and during transition between classes, Grace shared this information with Ricky and they had a brief conversation about what might be done the following week in PE and how Ricky might mention their use of this concept in physical education when revisiting his lesson on fractions with his

fifth graders. When asked about this incident and why she consistently explains to teachers her use of classroom curriculum within her PE lessons, she responded by saying:

Because they are not in here, they drop their kids off and then they leave. Because I want them to know we are not rolling the ball out in here and I want them to know we are doing more than exercising- we are thinking on our feet. [I want them to know] my class is not different from theirs; we are just up and moving. (Informal interview)

To Grace, *volunteering information and debriefing* with classroom teachers helps her **conduct interdisciplinary teaching** which, she believes, brings about appreciation for her teaching and the subject of PE, which in her mind is sorely needed, from her colleagues. *Volunteering information and debriefing with teachers during class transition* allows Grace to broadcast this message bringing attention to her interdisciplinary efforts several times each day and by doing so increase the likelihood that PE will be perceived as more academically valuable within the school structure.

A second agency that Grace uses to **conduct and promote to interdisciplinary teaching** is by *displaying 'academic' content on the walls of the gym*. As previously mentioned in Chapter Six, the walls of the gym are blanketed with charts, student work, challenge posters, and other advertisements of activities in PE and Grace's program. Included is a large poster displaying the muscles and bones of the human body including their scientific names, a 'nod' to the science foundation of physical education. During the first two weeks of data collection, Grace closed each lesson in front of this display and guided students through reciting while touching each muscle group. 'Academic' content is also displayed in the form of a large 'word wall' on one side of the gym. A 'word wall' is typically found on the wall in a homeroom classroom as this is a typical tool and technique that classroom teachers use to address language



arts and reading skills with students in all grade levels. Grace has constructed a word wall consisting of terms that are specific to physical education, but also including words that would also be seen on the 'word wall' of a classroom teacher. For example, Grace has included PE terms such as: bicep, cardiovascular, fitness, and heart rate while also displaying 'classroom' words like: right and left.

*Displaying 'academic' content on the walls of the gym* serves as a permanent, tangible, and visible advertisement for her interdisciplinary teaching. This demonstration of the integration of content that is perceived by her colleagues as more 'academic' works to promote the image of PE as more valuable to educational purpose. This helps Grace navigate the marginality of her working environment because having the perception of covering 'academic' content shows her willingness to support her colleagues in their objective(s) to cover necessary curriculum. Further, covering 'academic' content serves to improve the perception of Grace's skills as an educator. Being viewed as a good teacher is critical to Grace's ability to "Selectively Initiate and Foster Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym" because it gives her credibility that is helpful to her in building trust when forging these professional friendships.

#### *Injecting herself into 'academic' matters and functions*

Grace deliberately and discerningly injects herself into academic matters at Valley View as a tactic to carry out the strategy of "Selectively Initiating and Fostering Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym." Many times, these academic matters are happenings and events that she is not invited to or upon initial consideration have little to do with PE content. For example, grade level meetings, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings for students, or professional development workshops planned with the intention of serving exclusively classroom teachers. Attending these meetings and participating with these matters are not directly linked to the

function of the PE program and failure to attend such events would not lead to reduced program quality or teaching effectiveness, nonetheless, Grace is a visible participant in these events and matters. She describes how everything that happens in the school affects what she does because it involves her students and she teaches every child at Valley View. This helps her navigate the marginality in her working environment by keeping her involved in non-marginal functions and work to keep her as a player in central school function. About this, Grace said, “If we aren’t included in something that is going on in the school it starts small and then it gets more and more and just pushes us to the corner even more.” It seems that Grace recognizes the importance of staying intricately involved in all of the functions of the school as it prevents her from being pushed further to the margin. By remaining involved, Grace has information about policies and procedures that have the potential to affect her daily work in the future and can pre-empt and challenge policies that may contribute to the marginality of physical education. Further, **injecting herself into ‘academic’ functions** also helps her to “Selectively Initiate and Foster Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym” because it demonstrates her investment in the work of her colleagues and the educational experiences of students outside of her class and displays her perspective that *all* areas and teachers are equally valuable.

The agency that Grace draws on to **inject herself into academic matters and functions** is to *attend ‘optional’ meetings with classroom teachers*. One example of this was a professional development program focused on differentiated instruction that was intended for classroom teachers. At a monthly faculty meeting early in the year, the Principal announced to teachers that classroom teachers would be expected to take part in a series of lessons and workshops centered around how to implement instruction and activities for groups of students so that learners of all skill levels and abilities could be working on tasks that were best suited for their individual needs

and development. The Principal communicated that these workshops were only required of classroom teachers and informed the ‘auxiliary’ staff (Grace, the art teacher, the music teacher, and the media specialist) that they were not expected to attend.

While the other ‘auxiliary’ staff were relieved and perceived this as an opportunity to be freed from attending yet another meeting, Grace was very upset about the fact that they were not included and perceived this as a message of marginality. To Grace, the fact that they were not expected to attend communicated the idea that differentiated instruction training is not something that Grace would need because the subject of physical education was not complex or important enough to require this type of instruction for students. Grace took action and demanded that she and the other ‘auxiliary’ teachers be included in the differentiated instruction training by each being placed with a different grade level. She felt that by doing this she would be able to gain a more in-depth understanding of what her classroom colleagues were doing as well as providing Grace the opportunity to share with her co-workers about how differentiated instruction is used in physical education.

The following quote by Grace gained from a critical incident report (Flanagan, 1954) illustrates her perspective on what she feels she gains from attending ‘optional’ meetings:

I have attended many meetings that I was not ‘required’ to attend so that I could get [information about] programs and tests that are utilized in the classroom. I have found that by doing this I know more about what teachers and students are doing. [Also], I can hear discussions that make me brainstorm about how I can incorporate these same objectives in my classroom with some work and some foresight. I feel that this can strengthen my students mentally and physically.

*Attending optional meetings* allows Grace to successfully **inject herself into academic matters and functions** where she can work to further the notion that teaching physical education requires the same pedagogical skills and abilities that are necessary for teaching ‘academic’ content. This helps to promote the image of physical education as a subject that offers educational value to students and reminds her co-workers that she is an equally important part of the school and faculty, even though they might not perceive it that way. Further, by **injecting herself into ‘academic’ matters and functions**, Grace’s colleagues are more likely to view her as a contemporary with a job requiring similar work expectations and requirements to those to which they are held accountable. This is important because many times classroom teachers have the perception that PE teachers (and other ‘auxiliary’ staff) do not work as hard or that the nature of the job is less strenuous than that of a classroom position. This perception can be validated if physical education teachers do not attend meetings that are required of classroom teachers as it is seen as providing them with additional ‘free’ time. Voluntarily attending these meetings and injecting herself into these types of functions helps Grace to avoid being seen in this way and this helps her gain credibility with her colleagues that she relies on to navigate her marginalized work environment.

### Summary

This chapter presented the fourth strategy that Grace uses to navigate the marginality she experiences as a teacher of physical education by “Selectively Initiating and Fostering Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym.” Grace has established and cultivated professional relationships with people and groups that also have marginal experiences within the school environment. Using a variety of tactics and their respective agencies, the network of support that Grace has constructed helps her in navigating the marginality of teaching PE by helping her feel

supported, understood, and validated as well as promoting a positive image of physical education. The data indicated that Grace employs this strategy by using the following tactics: (a) establishing alliances and strengthening connections, (b) conducting and promoting interdisciplinary teaching, and (c) injecting herself into 'academic' matters and functions.

## CHAPTER 9

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study have relevance to and inform a variety of fields beyond physical education. In addition to providing increased awareness into the marginality that physical education teachers experience, the findings from this study have illuminated how Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) might be refined to classify micro-behaviors into more specific levels of agency as Giddens originally described it. Findings from this study give the literature done on Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997) additional insight into how the reactions to marginality offered by Grant & Breese (1997) are enacted as the result of the dynamic between a teacher's personal philosophies and a marginalized working environment. Finally, findings from this study have implications for teachers and teacher educators both within and outside of the field of physical education. This chapter will discuss the findings and implications in the following sections: (a) Structuration Theory, (b) Marginality Theory, (c) Marginality and Physical Education, (d) Implications for Teachers Navigating Marginality, and (e) Implications for Preparing Teachers.

#### Structuration Theory

Structuration Theory posits that the social structure and actions of individuals are continually acting upon one another resulting in reinforcement or changes in the held values and beliefs making up that structure. Structuration Theory held up well in this study, as it was clear that the structure of Grace's school and community did influence the strategies, tactics, and agencies that she selected to navigate marginality. Regarding this study, the data revealed, clearly, that the structure of Valley View Elementary School was one in which physical education was marginalized. The physical education teacher, Grace, had an extensive personal

and professional history with the Valley View community and city of Manchester. As a result of a structure that marginalized PE, elevated 'academic' content, and was situated in the Valley View community, Grace responded to that structure by selecting the four strategies of "Getting In," "Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency," "Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional," and "Selectively Initiating and Fostering Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym."

The structure in which Grace operated was multifaceted with the primary components affecting the structure being: (a) the community of Manchester, (b) the social hierarchy of Valley View Elementary School, and (c) Grace's relationship with her principal. This structure led Grace to the selected strategies that dictated tactics to be employed which, in term, required specific behaviors (agencies) be enacted. It seems that although several years have passed since previous investigation into this topic, the low status placement of PE within this school has not changed. Findings from this study are consistent with previous literature demonstrating the struggle for legitimacy, isolation, and oppressive working conditions that physical education teachers face daily (Fejgin, Ephraty, & Ben-Sira, 1995; Hendry, 1975; Macdonald, 1995; Naess, 2001; Stroot, Collier, O'Sullivan, & England, 1994).

The low status of PE at Valley View Elementary is in contrast, however, to findings described by Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997) who found the perception of physical education in the school in their study to be valuable, occupying an elevated status, and appreciated by classroom teachers for what it provided their students. Additionally, unlike Grace and Valley View Elementary School, the structure of Lecanto Elementary School (used in Rovegno & Bandhauer, 1997) consisted of cultural norms that supported physical education, teacher development, and collective philosophical agreement between teachers and administrators.

While the findings from Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997) provide us with knowledge of a positive working environment for a physical educator and how it was further improved, this is uncommon and unlikely to occur. For this reason, findings from that study provide limited knowledge into how a physical educator successfully navigates marginality, as Dianna was not marginalized within her working environment.

In contrast to Rovegno and Bandhauer (1997), findings from this study provide PETE scholars with insight into how a physical education teacher navigates the well-documented, common, negative, and marginal working conditions that physical educators face. Further, this study provides information about how an *exceptional* teacher navigates her working environment that is more helpful to preparing future teachers than knowledge of how non-expert teachers deal with their working environment (Berliner, 1989). As indicated by Hattie (2001), students of teachers holding National Board Certification perform significantly better than students of even teachers who are experienced and are commonly regarded as effective. For this reason, the level of expertise Grace possesses (as represented by her *National Board Certification*) gives insight into the reactions to this negative working environment by a teacher who has been objectively judged as a successful and highly effective teacher.

Grace receives messages of marginality regularly that communicate to her that physical education is less valuable to the educational function of Valley View Elementary School than other content areas. Based on the marginality that places Grace at the bottom of the school social hierarchy, she selected the strategies that would be most successful in allowing her to be an effective teacher and thrive in this working environment despite its oppressive conditions. For example, the strategy of “Getting In” was selected by Grace as the nature of the community of Manchester (structure) allowed her the ability to have personal **knowledge of her students**,

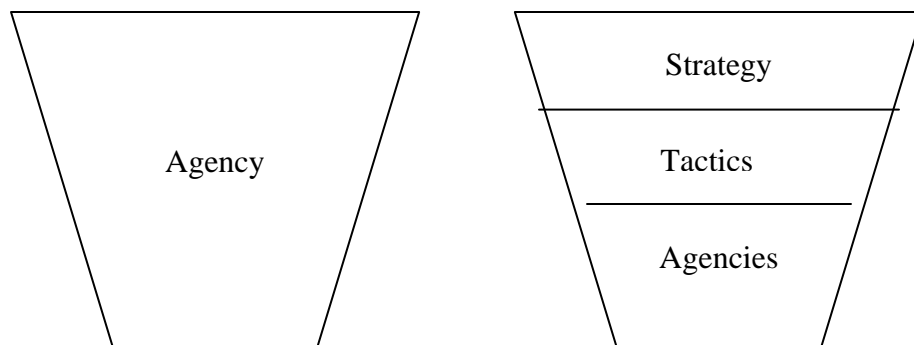


**champion the cause of parents**, and *attend functions and events in the community*. Because Manchester is a small town where everyone knows one another, and Grace was born and raised there, “Getting In” was an effective strategy because it was easy for her to build on the relationships she already had due to her history and investment with the community. Most importantly, “Getting In” helped Grace navigate marginality because students and parents had the power to influence the school structure because of the leverage they could apply to policies, procedures, and school operations.

#### *Re-examining the use of Structuration Theory*

Findings from this study appear to have provided a new way to examine Giddens’ (1984) definition of agency. As described in Chapter 2, Giddens defined agency as the independent and freely chosen actions by humans. As data collection and analysis progressed, it seemed that his broad description of agency offered was insufficient or not specific enough to explain and understand how Grace navigated her marginalized working environment. For example, I identified four strategies, 16 tactics, and 24 micro-behaviors (these behaviors were later labeled agencies). If I had applied Giddens’ definition of agency, this would have resulted in 44 identified ‘agencies.’ Describing Grace’s navigation by using this large number of agencies would not have clearly explained how all of the agencies worked together nor given attention to what seemed to be her different levels of action.

Based on the findings and how Grace went about navigating marginality, it seemed that her agency (as Giddens originally defined it) was comprised of different levels and classifications. During data analysis, Giddens’ concept of agency was further differentiated and classified by identifying varying levels of action (or agency). Figure 2 illustrates this hierarchy and classification progressing from broad to specific in contrast to Giddens’ definition of agency.



Giddens (1984)

Figure 2. Hierarchy of Agency

Figure 3 illustrates an example of the classification system used regarding using the strategy of “Getting In:”

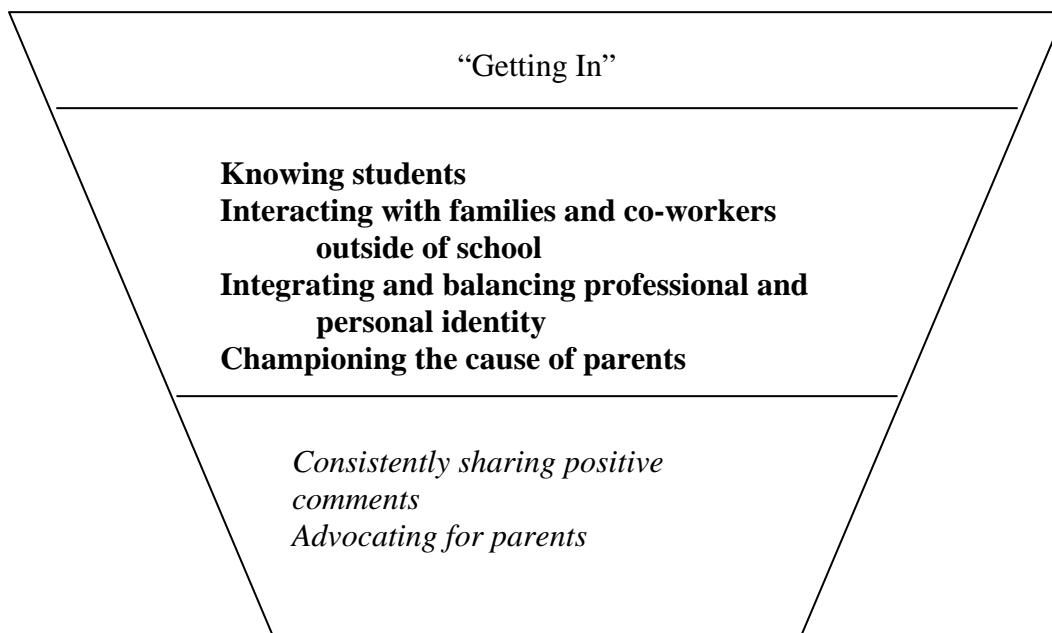


Figure 3. Hierarchy of “Getting In”

It was evident during data analysis that the agencies, by themselves, were not enough to understand and describe how and why Grace used them to navigate her marginality as a PE teacher. The agencies needed to be organized according to the tactics they helped carry out and how those tactics were part of an overarching and comprehensive plan in which to navigate marginality. It is the use of all of these strategies, tactics, and agencies working in combination with one another that allows for a clearer understanding of how Grace navigates a marginalized working environment (what Giddens would define as Grace's 'agency'). While the agencies selected are specific to the context and the individual who is performing them. Applying a more specific classification to the term 'agency' and delineating a hierarchy of action helps us to better understand how an individual navigates marginality through the interplay and collective use of the agencies and tactics that serve to carry out the strategies that have resulted in success. For example, the agencies of (a) *attending events*, (b) *consistently sharing positive comments about students*, and (c) *advocating for parents* all serve Grace in carrying out the tactic of **championing the cause of parents** which is one of three tactics that she uses to employ the strategy of "Getting In."

What is important here is that by identifying the agencies and specific behaviors Grace performed to carry out the tactics comprising the strategies that allowed her to be successful in navigating marginality, these strategies, tactics, and agencies can be taught to and learned by practicing and pre-service teachers. Doing this enables teacher educators to possibly prepare future teachers with some specific approaches to navigating the marginality they are almost certain to experience in schools. While the strategies and tactics would be relevant in varying school environments, the specific agencies selected to carry out those may be different depending on the context. The specific agencies that a female elementary physical education

teacher in a rural setting uses to carry out the strategy of “Getting In” are different than the agencies that the same female secondary physical education teacher would use to carry out the same strategy if she were in an urban setting. Because the social structure, context, and cultural norms of a rural school differ from those of an urban school, the agencies she would select would be dictated by the environment resulting in different tactics and agencies required for success in each respective setting.

In addition to providing a more specific way to examine the way teachers experience their work in schools, findings from this study can also demonstrate how Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997) can be used in conjunction with Structuration Theory to better understand how teachers react to experiences of marginality based on the social structure of their school setting. To do this, the reactions to marginality offered by Marginality Theory serve as labels that can be used to describe the strategies, tactics, and agencies and provide both a comprehensive and specific knowledge of how a teacher approaches navigating a marginalized working environment.

#### Marginality Theory

The potential reactions to marginality offered by Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997) serve to help illuminate how different reactions contribute to Grace’s ability to carry out the strategies and tactics she selected. Using the reactions to marginality offered by Marginality Theory to label the strategies, tactics, and agencies, it seems that Grace responds to the marginality in her working environment with a combination of emissarial, withdrawn, defiant, emulative, and paradoxical reactions that, when used together, result in an overall emissarial approach. These five reactions are seen both collectively and independently in the strategies, tactics, and agencies that Grace uses. Grace has

selected these based on the interplay between the complex social structure of her school community and her personal biography and beliefs as Giddens and others have suggested (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935; Grant & Breese, 1997). This supports the position presented by Grant & Breese (1997) who argued that individuals are not passive in their marginality with a variety of feelings and interpretations influencing their behavior choices.

### *The emissarial Grace*

It seems that Grace is overwhelmingly emissarial in her overall approach to responding to marginality as three of the four strategies she selected to navigate the marginality in her working environment can be labeled as such: “Getting In,” “Cultivating and Nurturing Kinship with a Paraprofessional,” and “Selectively Establishing and Fostering Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym.” Further, while some of the tactics and agencies can be labeled by other reactions (such as defiant or emulative), most of Grace’s tactics and agencies comprising the four strategies she selected are indicative of an emissarial reaction to marginality.

The recognition of Grace’s predominantly emissarial reaction to the marginality in her working environment is important because this approach conflicts with the withdrawn response found in previous studies (Naess, 2001; Templin, 1989) investigating PE teachers’ experiences of their working environments. Grace’s success in choosing an emissarial reaction to marginality demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach in dealing with the negative effects of teaching a subject that is of low status. Further, this finding demonstrates that PETE faculty should warn pre-service (PT) and practicing teachers of the negative consequences of isolating themselves in response to marginality.

Even though Grace was a *National Board Certified* teacher and worked in a clearly marginalized environment, findings indicating the benefits of an emissarial approach are

supported by those of Rovegno & Bandhauer (1997) noting support for classroom teachers as one of the characteristics that helped Dianna elevate the status of PE at Lecanto Elementary School. Based on this finding, and those from this study, it seems essential to make PTs aware of the value of extending themselves outside of the gym and their content area to become allies and partners with their classroom colleagues. In addition, the agencies identified within the strategies Grace used serve as examples of behaviors that both teachers and PTs can be duplicated in a variety of school environments in order to be successful in taking an emissarial approach.

### *The Withdrawn Grace*

Despite Grace's overwhelming emissarial approach, she does sparingly demonstrate a withdrawn response in order to serve a larger purpose. That is, her withdrawn responses serve an ultimately emissarial approach. It is important to mention that her withdrawn reaction is only used with certain circumstances and always results in improved navigation of the marginality in her working environment. Grace's ability to nurture the kinship she has developed with Amanda is partially dependent upon the significant amount of time they spend together one-on-one by staying in the gym and office all day together. By withdrawing in this nature, Grace has developed this loyal and trustworthy colleague. What is significant is that the benefits of the kinship for Grace in navigating marginality far outweigh the negatives that a small degree of a withdrawn reaction elicits. For this reason, for Grace, a withdrawn reaction is an important and effective reaction to use sparingly in combination with emissarial and defiance.

Grace would have been unsuccessful in navigating marginality if her overall approach had been one of withdrawal. Demonstrating a withdrawn reaction would have deprived her of everything necessary to "Get In" and "Selectively Initiating and Fostering Diplomatic Relations

Outside the Gym.” Her ability to “Get In” was dependent upon her participation and visibility in the community with students and parents that would not be possible if she were withdrawn.

Additionally, Grace was able to carry out the strategy of “Selectively Initiating and Fostering Diplomatic Relations Outside the Gym” because she took consistent and deliberate action to inject herself in the functions of her colleagues even if her involvement was not solicited.

This finding is in contrast to existing literature that has documented that PE teachers, in response to their negative working environment, will become secluded choosing to stay in the gym with students where they find fulfillment (Naess, 2001; Templin, 1989) and is further exacerbated by the physical proximity of the gym placed away from colleagues and other classrooms. As a result, PE teachers experience isolation that negatively affects their teaching effectiveness, motivation, and professional development (Templin, 1989).

Naess (2001) offered that as teachers experience marginality they retreat to the gym. Further, Naess argued, physical education teachers who have overcome the marginality in their working environment have done so by ignoring messages of marginality and constructing their own positive narratives about these working environments. Findings from this study contrast this position because Grace only rarely demonstrates this withdrawn reaction of retreating to the gym that Naess (2001) described. While Naess found that teachers demonstrated this withdrawn response, she encouraged physical education teachers to refrain from doing this as she argued that it is negligent and had negative implications for other PE teachers and the profession. Findings from this study support the notion that heeding this advice offers benefits for physical education teachers in their ability to successfully navigate the marginality in their working environment.

### *The Defiant Grace*

While Grace is overwhelmingly emissarial, she is selective in applying a defiant reaction to marginality in order to navigate her working environment in a diplomatic fashion. Grace is careful and considerate in determining which issues and events require confrontation or resistance but is unafraid to use defiance to help her navigate marginality. It is important to mention that defiance is not necessarily characterized by palpable anger or subversive actions as Grace demonstrated defiance in an overt yet diplomatic manner. Defiant reactions to marginality, when used in this way at the appropriate time and place and as a part to a larger whole, have helped Grace navigate marginality. This defiant reaction is used sparingly and with calculation. Examples of this are how Grace *verbally challenges administration*, **injects herself into academic functions**, and **defends her turf**.

Grace is defiant when, after thoughtful contemplation, she has determined it is essential and will likely result in a positive outcome. Despite the fact that presenting opposition may further marginalize her or PE, there are times when Grace chooses this response anyway. For example, by *attending 'academic' meetings* that she was not invited to sometimes makes her an unwelcome visitor. Grace is willing to take this risk because it is worth it to her to gain important information about students and school policies that are critical to the protection of her program and daily work.

Important for teachers and teacher educators is the recognition that this defiant response is used sparingly and with calculation. It might be expected that a passionate teacher who is dedicated to their subject feels highly offended and angry in response to messages of marginality. In fact, it seemed many times, that Grace felt this way. Despite these feelings, she



only acted in defiance at very selective and critical times after much contemplation about the potential benefits and risks.

### *The Emulative Grace*

Findings from this study indicate that Grace's successful navigation of marginality also includes strategies, tactics, and agencies that can be labeled as emulative. Within the strategy of "Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency;" the tactics of **accumulating and maintaining equipment** and **conducting and promoting interdisciplinary teaching**, and the agencies of *displaying student work* and *displaying academic content*. The strategy of "Procuring and Managing Instructional Currency" and the tactic of **accumulating and maintaining equipment** reflects Grace's emulative response as her relentless agency to *stockpile equipment* is an effort to place herself in a similar position to teachers of classroom content. Grace views equipment as a way for her to be provided for in a similar way to the classroom teachers in her school. When asked about the importance of equipment, her own words highlight this emulative perspective when she said, "it would be like asking a teacher to go in and teach with desks and pencils and that's it."

Grace's use of the tactic of **conducting and promoting interdisciplinary teaching** also demonstrates this emulative response to the marginality in her working environment. By including the content of her classroom colleagues, Grace is showing a willingness to cede time from physical education content and is attempting to mirror the practices of what her working environment perceives is more 'academic.' The agency of *displaying academic content* is one place this is evidenced. The large displays of bones and muscles in the body sharing the anatomical and 'scientific' aspects of PE curriculum are a subtle message Grace sends to those in her working environment saying, "Hey! PE is scientific and academic, too!"

This finding supports the argument offered by Hendry (1975) that physical education teachers attempt to identify with their classroom colleagues in an effort to gain legitimacy within their working environment. Grace's identification and inclusion in her 'Group of 7' is an example of this. Further, Hendry noted that physical educators possessed power within their school setting because of their ability to connect with students on a social level. Findings from this study support that as evidenced in Grace's ability at "Getting In." Findings from this study are, however, present an interesting contrast to the ideas put forth by Hendry. Hendry argued that while physical education teachers identified with their classroom colleagues, they did so at the expense of neglecting their ability to capitalize on this social connection with students. It seems that Grace was able to effectively do both of these things simultaneously. She was able to identify with her classroom colleagues and displayed certain emulative behaviors while also being able to effectively connect with students and foster relationships with them that resulted in her ability at "Getting In."

#### *The Paradoxical Grace*

Findings from this study indicate that Grace occasionally uses tactics and agencies that can be labeled as paradoxical according to Marginality Theory. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the paradoxical reaction is one of the additional responses identified by Grant and Breese (1997) in their study of African American students' responses to marginal experiences. Grant and Breese described that people responding in this way desire success within the social structure, but at the same time are still excluded from the dominant culture or group. They feel pressure from the marginalized (or minority) group to reject the norms of the dominant group. The paradox is that they do not want to be alienated from their own culture, but they desire the rewards that can be obtained from accepting and participating in the dominant culture.

It was clear that Grace wanted success within the social structure of Valley View Elementary School, but was still excluded from the dominant group made up of Valerie, ‘Those Who Click,’ and other teachers of academic content (see: Chapter Four). At the same time, she exemplifies the paradox because she does not want to be alienated from interaction and important functions within Valley View School and desires the rewards that can be obtained from participating in the activities of classroom teachers (the dominant group). This was seen in her use of the tactic of **injecting herself into academic matters and functions** and the agency of *attending optional meetings with classroom teachers*. Grace does these things because it benefits her in advanced knowledge about policies, procedures, and other happenings in the school. These would not be possible if Grace were to have a withdrawn response. By knowing things ahead of time, Grace is more successful at protecting her use of the gym, fighting for planning time, and preventing changes that might negatively affect her daily work. She wants and needs these benefits and rewards of accepting and participating in the ‘dominant’ culture in this manner.

What is important about Grace’s use of these reactions (emissarial, defiant, emulative, and paradoxical) is not simply the reactions themselves, but the degree to which she uses them collectively with balance, finesse, and consideration resulting in her characteristically diplomatic conduct. Findings from this study not only demonstrate the importance for teachers to utilize this diplomatic approach, but provide explicit and definitive actions that can guide them in exactly *how* to accomplish this diplomacy. For those preparing and educating teachers, attention to these strategies, tactics, and agencies will assist the development of professional dispositions and behaviors that foster advanced professionalism.

### *Marginality and Identity*

I deliberately approached the study design with the perspective that those who teach physical education experience marginality because of the subject matter they teach, not because of their personal characteristics. Based on the findings of this study, it seems nearly impossible to separate the marginality of subject matter from the marginality of the individual. PE is marginalized and Grace has seemed to own this marginality personally. An extraordinary level of dedication and commitment is needed to attain the level of expertise that is represented by *National Board Certification*. An individual possessing this level of dedication to their career reaches a point when they *become* their job. At this point, separating out personal and professional identities becomes nearly impossible. As a result, when your profession and what you do every day is devalued; you take that personally because it is such a significant part of who you are.

Findings from this study support the notion offered by Macdonald (1995) that the marginal status of physical education in the school setting impacts the way that teachers feel about themselves and their jobs. It certainly seemed that Grace was affected both personally and professionally by the marginality that she experienced in her working environment as the teacher of physical education. According to Macdonald, consistently being devalued in this way influenced the teachers in her study to consider other professions where *they* would be perceived as more legitimate. This holds increased significance as in the case of Grace in that with her National Board certification and documented level of expertise in teaching physical education, if she were to leave the profession, the student learning in physical education at Valley View Elementary School would be significantly diminished. The field must consider the significant impact that marginal experiences have on those who teach physical education and recognize that

providing PE teachers with strategies and tactics that have been successful for others may help them in navigating their marginality so that they feel less oppressed. This may, in turn, provide a better chance of retaining these teachers with advanced levels of expertise.

#### Implications for Teachers Navigating Marginality

Findings from this study support the position offered by McFadden (1995) that Structuration Theory can be a useful framework in providing scholars with direction in finding practical solutions for work in schools. Findings from this study support this notion as the resulting strategies, tactics, and agencies identified can provide specific behaviors that can be taught and learned by pre-service teachers within PETE programs. From these findings, two simple implications have emerged regarding the ability to successfully navigate marginality: (a) a physical education teacher must be an effective teacher and (b) be a diplomatic professional.

#### *You must be a good teacher*

Goodlad (1990) argued that the natural connection between good teachers and good schools was in desperate need of attention. This was later echoed by Darling-Hammond, Wise, and Klein (1999) who argued that more effective teaching practices are needed if teachers are to meet the growing social demands presented to them by students, schools, and the profession. Because students are diverse and learn differently and different content requires different teaching strategies, effective teaching behaviors are essential to student learning (Byra, 2006). This is compounded by the dynamic and complex nature of physical education. Given the diverse nature of students, the complexity of content, and the dynamic social contexts of schools, the possession of effective teaching behaviors is critical.

Being a good teacher is essential to Grace's ability to navigate marginality as it allows her to carry out all of the strategies she has selected. In fact, being a good teacher drives her

strategies as well as supports them. Effective teaching, for example, gives Grace credibility with her colleagues that is critical to her ability to be seen as a competent professional colleague and helps her to carry out the strategy of “Selectively Initiating and Fostering Diplomatic Relations Outside of the Gym.” Being a good teacher has also given Grace legitimacy and trust with students and parents as children like coming to her class and parents recognize that she is conscientious about her profession and student learning resulting in her ability at “Getting In.”

PETE programs should continue to focus on developing pedagogical skills in pre-service teachers as it benefits students. Going a step further, however, it appears necessary to bring awareness to how being a good teacher will help new teachers challenge and navigate the social structure of schools that assigns physical education a position on the margin. Pre-service teachers in all fields can benefit from knowledge of how effective teaching will assist *them* as professionals to thrive in their working environment in addition what it will provide students.

*You must be a diplomat*

Findings from this study indicate that in addition to being a good teacher, it is essential that physical educators diplomatically conduct themselves within their working environment. This is quite different from acting as a politician and it is important to make a clear distinction between these two terms. The term politician can refer to someone who is engaged in government with the intention of influencing policy. Many times this means someone who is engaged in politics as a career or profession and is involved in this arena for personal gain. Politicians seem to have the impression of being manipulative and duplicitous people who will say and do things they know others want to hear and may be dishonest in doing so in order to please their audience and gain approval.

The term diplomat, however, has the connotation of someone with a more genuine and pleasing personality, integrity and sensitivity in dealing with people, an open and curious mind, good judgment, and appropriate toughness regarding principles. An individual in this position protects and promotes the interests of their group or organization. In order to do this, a diplomat needs to be able to perform the delicate balance between reaching out, conceding, being firm, and at times, saying 'no.' Further, they need to do this while demonstrating the qualities and characteristics listed above in fostering positive relations with other nations. It is clear that Grace conducts herself within her working environment as a diplomat. This is seen in her ability to maintain the delicate balance of emissarial, defiant, and withdrawn reactions that she uses to successfully navigate marginality.

Findings from this study indicate that, as a diplomat, teachers must verbally defend, espouse, and advertise what they do in physical education, the value of the content, and its contribution to student academic performance on a regular basis. In essence, teachers must position themselves in functions and relationships outside the gym. Findings from this study indicate that retreating to the gym and demonstrating a withdrawn reaction alone does not seem to be enough to successfully navigate marginality. With this, teachers must be extroverted in that they must initiate and continually reach out to those in their school environment acting as an emissary and offering help and support for their 'classroom' colleagues. Further, teachers need to pay close attention to those people and functions that occur outside the gym and recognize how these things can influence their teaching and how they experience their work every day. These forces, many times, can be easy to ignore as we are located physically away from 'academic' functions and marginalized. PE teachers need to make a deliberate effort to be aware and involved in these matters.

The ability to do this successfully has several beneficial implications for physical educators. By taking these actions and presenting this approach to their professional activities within their school, it seems more likely that those in their working environment will view them as conscientious colleagues and legitimate professionals are not taken advantage of easily. This can lead to increased support and collaboration as well as earlier knowledge about policies and procedures or additional resources. In order to do this, PETE professionals need to make teachers aware of these strategies, tactics, and agencies that others have used to further this approach with success. Helping teachers successfully navigate the marginality of their working environment will involve attention to contextual differences. Given this, it would seem best to make pre-service teachers aware of these issues during formal teacher training, and leave specific attention to these strategies for navigation to teacher education that continues as physical educators enter the profession.

#### Implications for Preparing Teachers

Scholars have consistently called for PETE professionals to prepare pre-service teachers for the social issues they will face when entering the field. Sparkes, Templin, and Schempp (1993) described the need for further study into PE teachers who have challenged the structures of their working environment. These authors express the importance of encouraging physical educators to reflect on and challenge the structures that keep PE in a low status position. Further, if the ultimate goal is to change the perception and status of physical education, Sparkes, Templin, and Schempp (1993) propose that understanding the actions of teachers who have successfully confronted their status and marginality is essential. The strategies, tactics, and agencies identified in this study provide a practical example of how an exceptional teacher did just that providing one of the first examples of how this can be done.



Following their investigation of how contextual factors influence the working environment of PE teachers, Stroot, Collier, O'Sullivan, and England (1994) offered that research can aid physical education teachers by identifying strategies that will help them impact the organizational structure of their workplace. Findings from this study seem to provide the first response to this position by Stroot, Collier, O'Sullivan, and England. While I cannot say that the strategies and tactics that Grace used impacted or changed the organizational structure of Valley View Elementary, we can say that she was able to successfully maneuver around the road blocks in her environment that were in her way as a result of that structure. This seems to be the first step in that a teacher must first learn to survive and navigate before they are able to change the nature of their working environment.

Thorough analysis of what Grace did to successfully navigate her marginalized working environment, resulted in the identification of definitive micro-behaviors that can be useful to teachers in a variety of different contexts and teaching environments. Further, these strategies, tactics, and agencies can be useful to teachers in areas other than physical education as we can speculate that with modification, these behaviors would be beneficial in navigating other marginalized working environments.

#### *Teacher Education programs and professional standards*

A large volume of research investigating the types of Teacher Education (TE) programs that contribute to more qualified and effective teachers abounds. Based on relevant research done in the field of teacher education, *The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF)* (1997, 2003) outlined the six dimensions of high quality teacher preparation programs as: (a) careful recruitment and selection of teacher candidates, (b) strong academic preparation, (c) strong clinical practice to develop effective teaching skills, (d) entry level

teaching support in residencies and mentored induction, (e) modern learning technologies, and (f) assessment of teacher preparation. All of these characteristics focus on the knowledge, skills, and disposition required for the act of teaching. The attention to these characteristics in TE programs must be continued in order to provide teachers with the tools necessary to implement effective teaching behavior in their respective content areas. In addition to possessing the necessary knowledge and skills regarding pedagogy and content outlined by NCTAF, it is important to recognize that how teachers experience their work and life in schools can significantly impact their teaching behaviors and effectiveness. It is attention to this aspect, it seems, that needs to be included in TE programs.

In the field of physical education, accredited PETE programs are guided by the *National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)* and *National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE)* standards. Since these standards guide teacher training, the content and implications of these standards is important to consider. Nearly all of the *NCATE-NASPE* (2009) standards emphasize the skills, attitudes, and dispositions involved in teacher effectiveness. Specifically, the first three standards speak directly to teacher knowledge, content, or the act of teaching. These competencies need continued attention not only because of their effect on student learning, but also because of their impact on teachers' ability to thrive in their professional environments. Findings from this study demonstrate that the ability to effectively teach both drives and supports strategies that can allow physical education teachers to successfully navigate their marginalized working environments.

It seems to be critical to re-examine the emphasis that PETE scholars place on effective teaching within our teacher education programs and our national standards as a profession. While nearly all of the most recent *2008 NCATE-NASPE Beginning Teacher Standards* emphasize

effective teaching, the standards only peripherally address this notion of how to be a ‘diplomat.’ Specifically, the only standard targeting this element is Standard 6 regarding professionalism that outlines, “Physical education teacher candidates demonstrate dispositions essential to becoming effective professionals”. Element 6.2 describes the expectation that PETE majors “participate in activities that enhance collaboration and lead to professional growth and development.” A further description of the intent of the standard follows:

The intent of this standard is to consider those behaviors that constitute professionalism for teacher candidates. Teacher candidates are expected to demonstrate sensitivity and ethical behaviors. They must also consider how they will engage in professional development and work with colleagues in the school system.

The description of the intent offered here by *NCATE-NASPE* indirectly implies attention to these diplomatic behaviors, but is likely discussing them in regard to the field of physical education. It also seems that ‘professional development and work with colleagues’ is pertaining to content and not concerned with teacher socialization, isolation, or marginality. This study demonstrates the significance of these social forces acting on physical education teachers and provides practical solutions that have allowed an exceptional teacher to be successful in spite of them.

Findings from this study indicate that a disposition toward diplomacy is an essential component in successfully navigating marginality. Further, the ability successfully navigate marginality is critical in teacher development and motivation. The inability to deal with the social influences outside the gym and their affect on the physical educator can limit teacher effectiveness, lead to burn out, and at worst cause physical educators to leave the profession.

The current attention to physical activity, physical education, obesity, and student learning demonstrated in our professional standards is important. The skills, attitudes, and

dispositions reflected in these standards needs to be continued. It is important to note, however, that preparing pre-service teachers simply to teach well is to neglect important knowledge and skills they will need to successfully conduct the ‘*whole*’ job of teaching PE and remain in the field (Macdonald, 1995). It is this element of teaching pre-service teachers how to be diplomats that needs to be included in our professional standards as findings from this study indicate that this is essential for the successful navigation of the marginality they will likely encounter as they are inducted into the profession of teaching physical education.

### *Mentoring*

The mentoring of new teachers by PETE faculty has been offered as an important component in socializing teachers into the profession (Napper-Owen & Phillips, 1995; Wright & Smith, 2000). Napper-Owen and Phillips (1995) investigated the experiences with a formal mentoring program of two teachers during their induction into the profession. Their findings indicated that as a result of the mentoring process, the teachers felt more accountable to teaching effectively and more reflective about the teaching process. These findings supported those of Stroot et al (1993) indicating that formalized mentoring with PETE faculty provided the new teachers with emotional and professional support and elevated their perceptions of their own teaching. Napper-Owen and Phillips concluded by expressing the strong need for a dramatic increase in induction assistance to help beginning teachers with problems like isolation and frustration in their working environments. Findings from this study may serve to answer this call from these and other scholars who have indicated this help is needed for new teachers. It seems that these findings might provide PETE faculty with the first knowledge of the practical actions they can share with new teachers during a formalized mentoring process.

Fuller & Brown (1975) presented Developmental Stage Theory in Teacher Education and argued that concerns for teachers occur in the following stages: (a) pre-teaching concerns, (b) survival concerns, (c) teaching situation concerns, and (d) pupil concerns. According to the authors, in the survival stage, teachers are concerned with their adequacy and surviving the ins and outs of their daily working environment, while in the teaching situation concerns stage, they are focused on their teaching context and teaching performance. Given this, it would seem that findings from this study would be well suited for inclusion into a mentoring program for teachers to be presented during these two stages of development.

Findings from this study have provided the first attempt at identifying the specific daily and weekly actions within the school context that might be included in a mentoring program of this nature. In addition to mentoring new teachers in the development of advanced pedagogical behaviors, specific attention to the strategies, tactics, and agencies that will help them to successfully navigate a marginalized working environment may be just as beneficial to maintaining professional fulfillment and continued motivation.

These findings support the notion that mentoring can provide teachers with important emotional and professional support that will assist them in navigating marginality. Grace's ability at "Developing and Nurturing Kinship" with Amanda resulted in a loyal friend and colleague. While Amanda did not instruct or advise Grace, Grace did turn to Amanda for emotional support, comfort, and encouragement much like teachers in the study by Stroot et al (1993). If a teacher with the level of expertise indicated by *National Board Certification* greatly benefits from this type of a relationship, it would make sense that teachers of all levels would be helped by nurturing and developing kinship with a significant colleague.

## Summary

It is clear from this study that in order to successfully navigate marginality, one must be both an effective teacher and a diplomat. Further, the ability to perform both of these activities is essential to properly negotiating a marginalized working environment and is done through a delicate and deliberate balance of emissarial, defiant, and withdrawn reactions. While the field places significant emphasis on the importance of the first (being a good teacher) it is the second (being a diplomat) that needs additional attention in professional standards, formal teacher training, and in-service mentoring programs. Failure to do so falls short of preparing teachers leaving them ill-equipped to navigate the marginality that comes with teaching physical education.

Findings from this study have extended work from PETE scholars who repeatedly described the importance of preparing new teachers to deal with the social structures that constrain them and keep physical education in a position of low status. By detailing the strategies, tactics, and agencies that Grace used to successfully navigate marginality, this study has provided the first attempt at giving teacher educators, practitioners, and pre-service teachers knowledge of the micro-behaviors that can be performed to challenge these social structures. Findings from this study support previous literature and have indicated that physical education continues to be a marginalized subject in schools and that those who teach it experience working environments that negatively effect them both personally and professionally.

By using Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984) this study allowed for the identification of these specific strategies, tactics, and agencies at a very detailed level that can be readily implemented across a variety of teaching contexts. In doing so, this study has extended Giddens' conception of agency to a level of increased specificity. Because of this, findings from this study

support McFadden's (1995) assertion that Structuration Theory can provide educational researchers with the framework needed to generate practical solutions. Using Marginality Theory (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935, Grant & Breese, 1997) in combination with Structuration Theory allowed me to make meaning of Grace's agencies and provided the description of her agencies as emissarial, defiant, and withdrawn. Based on this, it is clear that reacting to experiences of marginality with these responses results in success. Further, PE teachers cannot afford to accept the isolation that many times comes with the nature of their job and must be compelled to extend themselves beyond their content area and initiate relationships and alliances with others in their school environment despite the perception of any negative messages of marginality. It is the charge of teacher educators to impress upon new teachers as well as practitioners the benefits of doing this beyond what it will provide for students.

It seems possible that with the heightened awareness to obesity and physical activity, attention to these social issues surrounding the nature of physical educator's work will grow to seem frivolous or less significant in comparison. Findings from this study, however, indicate that attention to these issues is critical to developing a physical educator's effectiveness and maintaining program quality that can ultimately result in improved health and well being for children.

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APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT FORM (Appendix A)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a research study titled "HOW ONE EXCEPTIONAL ELEMENTARY PE TEACHER NAVIGATES HER WORKING ENVIRONMENT AS THE TEACHER OF A MARGINAL SUBJECT" conducted by Karen Lux from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Georgia (542-4210) under the direction of Dr. Bryan McCullick, Department of Kinesiology, University of Georgia (542-3621). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that my participation in the study is anticipated to be eight to ten weeks. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to investigate how an exceptional elementary PE teacher navigates her working environment as the teacher of a marginal subject. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) Answer questions about my working environment; my interactions with other teachers, administration, students, and parents; my feelings and perceptions about the nature of my working relationships and how I choose to handle them.
- 2) Be observed throughout the school day and have my interactions recorded.
- 3) Complete four critical incident reports.
- 4) If pertinent, provide copies of relevant lesson plans, emails, letters, or written communication between myself and others in my working environment.

The benefits for me are that my participation may help me understand and improve the way I manage my marginality within my school setting. The researcher also hopes to learn more about the effectiveness of particular strategies utilized to successfully navigate my working environment being that I teach a marginal subject.

No risk is expected but I may reveal thoughts, beliefs, or perceptions about my colleagues and school environment that (if released) could have political implications for me in my working environment after the completion of the study. I understand that I will be the only participant in this study and that while anonymity and complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, any potential risk from participation in the study will be reduced by eliminating any identifiable information about me, my school, or any other individuals in my school community. This information will not be shared with others without my 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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Name of Researcher  
 Telephone: 336-324-6441  
 Email: kmlux@uga.edu

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature Date



---

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](mailto:IRB@uga.edu)

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE (S)

## INTERVIEW GUIDE (S) (Appendix B)

## Interview 1

Tell me about your career as a PE teacher. How did you decide to become a physical educator?

What do you feel is the purpose of your job for students?

What do you feel PE brings to the educational experience for children?

What do you like best about teaching PE?

## Interview 2

Tell me what it is like to work here. What is it like to teach PE here?

Take me through a typical day at X Elementary School.

Do you think other teachers feel differently about working here than you do? If so, how and why?

What is most important here at your school? Are there subjects, teachers, or individuals who are perceived as more important than others? If so, who/what and why.

## Interviews 3 and 4

What is the position of PE within your school? What has led you to believe that?

How do students perceive PE?

How do other teachers perceive PE? Administration?

Tell me about a time or give me an example of when the place of PE within your school was communicated to you.

## Interviews 5 and 6

What is the nature of your interaction with other teachers? Students? Administration?

Do you ever feel like you are treated differently because of what you teach? If so, how and why do you think that is the case?

How do you respond if instances like that happen?

Do you ever do things on purpose to impact the way people see you or PE within your school?

APPENDIX C  
CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORT PROMPTS

### Critical Incident Report Prompts (Appendix C)

#### Critical Incident Report #1

Describe a time or an event that exemplifies the essence of what it is like to work here.

#### Critical Incident Report #2

Describe an incident that you felt communicated the message that PE was less important than another subject. What happened? Who was there? Who said what to whom?

How did you respond? Why?

#### Critical Incident Report #3

Describe a time when you aligned yourself with 'classroom' teachers. What happened?

Why did you align yourself with them? Why did you choose to handle things the way you did?

#### Critical Incident Report #4

Describe a time when something happened when you relied heavily on Amanda for support.

APPENDIX D  
RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS

## RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS (Appendix D)

In closing this study, I would like to take this opportunity to share some of the things that I have learned after spending the last year of my life on this study. First, the research process is arduous and trying in every way possible. I was challenged emotionally, intellectually, and physically throughout the past year in completing this project. That said, it was stimulating, fun, and continually fascinating as I learned about myself, marginality, and the research process. Second, what I experienced as an elementary physical education teacher is common, I was unprepared for it, and teacher education programs need to address the issue of marginality when preparing physical educators.

### *The Research Process*

I am convinced that scholars need to conduct research with questions with which they have personal investment and excitement. The emotion, passion, and interest I had in asking this question was based on my personal history and made persisting in the difficult times of the research process easier and better because of my emotional investment in the topic.

After spending 11 weeks with Grace at Valley View Elementary School, I continue to be drawn to the types of questions requiring qualitative research methods. I have also learned how time consuming and involved studies of qualitative design can be and realize why scholars in higher education find these types of projects difficult to conduct while attempting to earn promotion and tenure. The field of Kinesiology would benefit from rewarding scholars for this type of work and considering the nature of these methods when evaluating the scholarly activity of faculty. The ability to ask the types of questions requiring these methods is critical to the in-depth and personal understanding of how PE teachers experience this job.

### *Marginality, Teaching Physical Education, and Preparing Future Physical Educators*

This study has taught me, unfortunately, that many physical educators feel the way I felt in my working environment at Jesse Wharton Elementary School. I am now beginning to understand how marginality works and the complexity of reasons why PE occupies low status in schools. This experience has also left me with the perspective that this marginality is partly our fault because there are far too many PE teachers who continue to merely supervise activity or conduct ‘glorified recess’ every day in schools. I believe that if we want people to take us seriously as professionals, we must demonstrate professionalism at the highest level. We must be more professional, more intellectual, and practice advanced pedagogical skills because we are starting from a disadvantage. I hope that in some small way, I can instill this disposition in pre-service physical educators as I move toward my future career as a PETE faculty member.

It is not enough that PETE faculty teach pre-service teachers (PTs) content, pedagogical skills, and classroom management techniques. They must also know how to deal with the social issues that come with teaching PE in schools. PTs need to know that despite their academic preparation, some people in their working environment will think of them as ‘dodge ball’, ‘kickball’, and ‘the parachute’. Processing those messages, challenging them, and ultimately overcoming them are actions that PETE faculty need to prepare physical education teachers to enact if they are going to survive and thrive in schools.