**REFLECTING FROM THE MIDDLE: HETEROGLOSSIA AND THE ROLE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT CHAIR**

by

SARAH L. SKINNER

(Under the Direction of Bob Fecho)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative action research self-study's purpose was to examine how one department chair and teacher leader in one public high school (grades 9-12) used reflective practice as a method of professional development to inform and negotiate the multiplicity of her position as part-administrator, part-colleague, and part-teacher. Undertaken from an insider's positionality and with a critical theory frame, this study also examined how a department chair, committed to an educational philosophy that promotes democracy, dealt with the hierarchies within her position and the organization's structure. This study made two arguments: 1) enacting the department chair position is an existential practice in which the person negotiates a multi-layered, contingent space, 2) and reflective practice is an essential means for the department chair to do that work.

The practitioner-researcher was the study's primary participant, but fellow teachers, department chairs, and administrators served as co-participants. Data was collected via ethnographic methods, including an attitudinal survey, interviews with the school's former and current principals, a professional reflective journal maintained by the research-practitioner, two videotaped department meetings, collected email and other role-related artifacts, and a daily professional action log. The practitioner-research "wrote the data," using reflective vignettes and "re-storied" scenes from the data set and her own memory, to conduct an inductive analysis, using Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) conceptions of *heteroglossia*, *hybridity*, and *becoming*, furthered by Freirian (1970) theory. The study's conclusions included that a department chair lives in heteroglossia, continually negotiating the various tensions acting upon it, but able to privilege certain tensions to further emancipation for all members of a school's organization. With the role in a state of continual "becoming," no fixed professional training is apt for the role; instead, reflective practice provides a means for a practitioner to develop her work in the midst of it, making contextualized and authentic meaning. As a liaison position, the department chair role's is an untapped resource for principals to build democratic school communities focused on individual potentials and achievement.

INDEX WORDS: Action research, High school department chairs, Teacher leader, Role theory, Reflective practice, Heteroglossia, Hybridity, Becoming, Democracy

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by

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## DEDICATION

When I began my doctoral studies, I thought I knew how school and learning fit into my life's fabric, that I had tailored myself into a good student. But this process has helped me realize that I have a far richer life tapestry than I ever imagined. Through this work, I have woven together my past and present and have begun to envision my future. As I prepare to put this project aside, I reflect on those who have enabled me to patch together my life's many pieces and pay homage to those who have offered a continual thread of encouragement.

I dedicate this work to my mother, Lucille S. Skinner, and my father, the late Dr. J. Jones Skinner Jr., who each taught me well. Daddy taught me the power of caring; Mom taught me the power of dedication and determination. Together, they raised me to love learning, appreciate life, and acknowledge privilege. Herein, I attempt to express my appreciation for their never-yielding support and faith in me. Mom, I'll love you forever; Daddy, I'll miss you just as long!

To my many teachers who challenged me to go further, accepted me as I was, and encouraged me to try again when I fell short, I offer this work in return. I honor Mrs. Cox's magnolia tree, June's front yard, Mrs. Nancy's keyboard, Grandma's pocketbook, Mr. Pollack's bandroom, Mrs. Kellam's 2nd grade trailer, Mrs. Carroll's red ink spill, and Nell's kitchen—but space is too limited to individually honor the myriad "classrooms" and each teacher who has made a difference and played a part in this. But know that this

is for each of you.

To my sister, Mary, for your gifts to me—intellectually, spiritually, emotionally—I dedicate this to you. In so many ways, you made this possible. Your words—whether over many miles or on the drafts themselves, whether on this process or on life's larger concerns—often helped me go on. I am lucky to call you sister, but grateful to call you friend. I love you.

And to Robin, my best friend, my confidante, and my partner, this is yours as much as it is mine. For without your never-ending faith in me, your willingness to rearrange your life, and your patience with my physical and emotional absences, I would have never found this journey's end. For five long years, you have been steadfast. You have been my constant, my harbor in the midst of the storm. When I feared I couldn't do it, you insisted I could; when I wanted to stop, you wouldn't let me. I am grateful in so many ways, and I love you so!

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Words are nearly too weak to express my heart-felt gratitude to the many people who have made my graduate study, this research, and this dissertation possible. Herein I attempt to name a few of the individuals who have enabled me to reach the completion of this project.

To the many educators—the Language Arts teachers and Leadership Team members—who gave selflessly to me throughout this study and my tenure as a department chair, I am humbled by your professionalism and commitment to students. I consider you my dear friends, colleagues, and collaborators in this undertaking, and I am grateful.

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To Dr. James Kahrs, I am forever in your debt. You believed in me from the beginning and were the impetus for my doctoral pursuit. More than that, though, you were the force that helped me see the possibilities within the classroom and the promise of democratic leadership. Your faith in my abilities gave me the courage to attempt this project and the strength to complete it. I am grateful.

To Mary Lynn, Jim, Debbie, Tom, Collyn, Cass, and Darrell, I am beholden. Your continual support, advice, encouragement, and depth of thinking pushed me to go farther in my work than I could have ever gone alone. Your commitment to intellectual excellence has been my compass, and each of you has served as my guide along this long and winding journey. You offered direction and support—wind in my sails—in times when I felt lost and afloat in the vastness of this experience. I am grateful.

To my students I am eternally indebted. Your patience with my inattention, your encouragement of my studies, and your continual enthusiasm for my role as a student and emerging writer made this process possible. I hope you learned half as much from me as you taught me. I am grateful.

To Hope, Renee, Lana, Joanna, Dean, Ward, Shane, and so many others, I appreciate your constant presence in my life. So often, you offered words of encouragement and persisted in believing that I could accomplish this goal. Furthermore, you generously gave me support in many other ways for many other endeavors and have left me in awe of your friendship, of which I am undeserving. I am so grateful.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Page

## LIST OF FIGURES

Page

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*"We need to see you. Please come to Patricia's room today at 3 p.m. We have heard some things, and need to speak with you."*

*The message screamed from the computer's screen. I had taught at this school for merely six weeks, and was already being summoned to meet with my department chairs as a child might be called to the principal's office.*

*At 3 o'clock, I dutifully reported to Patricia's room. Both department chairs were seated behind a table at the front of the room; a student's desk had been pulled from the rows and was facing the pair. Recognizing my place, I slid into the desk, heart pounding. My brain raced over the occurrences of the past few days, replaying each class's lesson and each interaction between student and teacher, and from teacher to teacher. I could not determine what I might have done wrong, what had gotten me into trouble so deeply that precipitated this inquisition.*

*Edith started, "Thank you for meeting with us . . ."*

*Did I have a choice? I wondered.*

*"We've been approached by another teacher from another department . . ."*

*"Who shall remain anonymous," Patricia interjected.*

*Edith nodded in agreement. "We've heard that you've been saying demeaning things to students, calling them 'stupid' and 'lazy' and that their grades are low because*

*you don't like teenagers. Your colleague shares some of your students, who have repeatedly complained to her about you."*

*I was stunned. These were blatant lies. I sat motionless, at a loss for words.*

*"Well, what do you have to say for yourself? What exactly is going on?" Patricia asked.*

*Although the school year had just begun, I was already working ten to twelve hour days, encouraging my 9th and 10th grade students to engage personally with texts and to rise to new levels of achievement and accomplishment, yet I was accused of hurting children—and all at the word of another nameless colleague whose only proof stemmed from the reports of adolescents. These department chairs knew little of me, my classroom, or my teaching; they had hired me after only a 30 minute interview, given me my appointed schedule, shown me my classroom, mentioned the name of my "mentor" whose classroom was in a trailer on the other side of campus, and wished me luck. I had seen the chairs only four times since the beginning of school; twice at faculty meetings and twice at department meetings, where they handed out packets of procedures and explained the process for checking out textbooks.*

*My voice remained trapped by my hurt, anger, and disappointment in this situation. I had hoped that this new school, this new setting would show me that schools and school leaders were professionals, were collegial, were supporting and nurturing. After all, that was my desire upon becoming a teacher. I longed to help students learn, to work alongside and with colleagues. I wanted to build a learning community within my classroom and the larger school setting where all could continually move closer to education's promise of democratic participation for all voices. But here I was on the*

*defensive. As I summoned the composure to respond to the accusations, I bolstered myself with the belief that education could be better, that I could find a place where educators acted like and were treated as professionals.*

This single experience is but one as a classroom teacher that exemplified my positionality at the bottom of the educational hierarchy. Although I entered education in hope of exciting children about learning, encouraging and assisting them to achieve academic and personal success, and continuing to expand my own learning, I found myself trapped within a system where accountability was too often based on hearsay rather than observation, and where a teacher must continually explain herself to administration, department chairs, parents, students, and even fellow teachers. Feeling helpless for nearly a decade against these forces, I decided to take a different stance. Rather than being a pawn for these various players to manipulate, I would find a way to take control of the game: to move from a place of subjugation as a classroom teacher in a hierarchically structured and managed situation to a place of liberation for my students, my colleagues, my school, and myself.

## Background of the Study: The Story of the Question

Because each research study emerges from a larger context, as researcher, recorder, and presenter, I offer a brief description of the background that led to this study. My family, society's perception of teachers and the educational structure, and my own lived experiences as a classroom teacher revealed that I should pursue something "more" than the teacher role. However, not ready to leave the classroom entirely and move "up" into administration, which seemed to have a separate educational purpose, the department chair position seemed an obvious intermediate role to pursue.

*Personal Contexts: Explaining Why I Pursued the Department Chair Role*

In January 2003, after nine years as a classroom language arts teacher in a large, suburban southeastern school district, my professional growth had stagnated. Although I had continually pursued opportunities to improve my teaching craft—seeking additional degrees and higher certifications, maintaining journals and completing countless hours of professional reading, and joining various professional organizations—I felt stuck. The motivation for these various pursuits had been two-fold.

Though difficult to admit, my first motivator was to mitigate the societal "pity" associated with education and being "just" a teacher (McNeil, 1986). As Lortie (2002) asserts, society considers teaching a "special but shadowed" (p. 10) career choice, viewed with praise as a position of respectability and stability, but also with disdain as feminized and not "enough" (p. 88) or as challenging as other professions such as medicine or law. Although my heart understood the importance of teaching and education, my pride longed for the same financial status and respect afforded peers in other professions. I wanted to be freed from the "oppression" I felt emanating from many aspects of society, including my own middle-class, highly-educated and ambitious family. I wanted to "make them proud" and "be successful" rather than resign myself to a teaching job that Lortie (2002) describes as "suitable lifelong employment for a woman" (p. 9) and my own mother had often described as "safe for a woman to fall back on." I desired a role that was recognized by society as powerful, meaningful, and intellectually challenging.

Secondly, my experiences in education had led to a heightened awareness of the inequities within the structure. This system, which ironically purports itself to be the promoter of democracy, operates as Marx suggests to reproduce its own system

(Papagiannis, Klees, & Bickel, 1982), creating and perpetuating a definitive hierarchy between those in power (the administrators and central office staff) and those without it (the teachers and support staff). Too often I had seen this system at the local level perpetuate such a hierarchy within its classrooms by its privileges, favoring the "haves" (the academically-gifted, the financially-privileged) over the "have-nots" (the intellectually- or physically-challenged, the poor, the "Othered"). My inner drive along with a strong work ethic and sense of professionalism instilled by my parents and paternal grandmother—all of whom had at one time been classroom educators—pushed me to continually improve my situation and myself by extending their vision of addressing the rampant inequities in education.

*Seeking personal fulfillment by changing roles.* Working within two different schools under the "guidance" of five distinct department chairs and witnessing a variety of supervisory and management styles, I had observed both positive and negative behaviors and results, yet none of those department chairs had ever shown an interest in my fellow teachers' or my professional development. While perhaps their assumptions were that I did not need their encouragement, I was nevertheless discouraged by what I perceived as their lack of interest in the possibilities for improvement beyond the immediate classroom or school walls. Indeed, there were times when their behaviors and words led me to question whether I should continue my work in education.

Refusing to accept defeat or retreat from an unsatisfactory situation, however, I embarked on a new phase of my career by applying for the high school department chair position at a new school opening within the same suburban school district where I had taught. My knowledge and past experiences suggested that I had much to offer, that I

could enact the role in ways that would enhance others' and my own professional growth and would mitigate scenes and situations like those presented in the opening vignette. Furthermore, I had become interested in moving into administration and eventually the principalship, believing those positions held greater opportunities to address the inequities for all members of the educational community I had witnessed. I believed the department chairmanship was the next step on my career path.

*The ironies of moving "up."* Although I recognized the paradox of being both a classroom teacher dissatisfied with a hierarchical system and also a person who desired to "move up" within that system to achieve some sense of accomplishment and professional and public recognition, I did not see any way to affect the system if I remained at its organizational bottom. I was also aware that leaving a space I viewed as the essence of education—the individual classroom and the relationship between teacher and student—was incongruent with my efforts to move into a space further "up" in the system. Instead, my only choice seemed to be to seek out a different position within that system imbued with some power and ability to shift the system to a more egalitarian one. I wanted to create a new space, where students and educators alike could share in an educational community that fostered equality and distributed resources equitably. I hoped the department chair position would begin to provide the opportunity for my creation of that space.

*Professional Contexts: My Early Experiences in the Department Chair Role*

In February 2003, I was hired to serve as the Language Arts Department Chair in the system's newest school, scheduled to open the following August. Although I was still completing my contractual teaching obligations at one school, I suddenly found myself

mired in issues of hiring and personnel, curriculum and instructional decision-making, and textbook and supply management. I attempted to enact this new role—for which I had received no formal training—even as I continued teaching full time and fulfilling the responsibilities of that role.

Throughout the summer and into the first months of the school's existence, I found myself "figuring out" how to be a department chair by living the role and comparing its daily requirements to my past experiences as a classroom teacher. As time passed and I finally began to understand my department chair role and its potential, the context shifted once again.

*The shifts within the context.* In December 2005, midway through my third year as department chair, the principal who had initially hired me as a department chair left the principalship for emergency medical reasons. When a new principal was named in January 2006, I once more found myself uncertain about my role as a department chair and instructional leader. What would being a department chair mean under new leadership? How would my role in the school change? Would I remain a department chair?

I found myself trying to negotiate new role definitions and expectations while continuing to seek answers to the larger questions of education, teacher leadership, and the creation of a more democratic learning environment for all members of the educational community regardless of the larger structure's limitations. Attempts to answer those questions led to this dissertation's formal study of my department chair actions and my work as an instructional leader.

Throughout this study, many questions beyond those initial few continued to be raised, including:

- What are the benefits and limitations of a school based in a hierarchical power structure?
- What are the system's aspects that limit or support each educator to be a perpetual learner, an effective instructor, and a professionally-challenged and satisfied member of the school's community?
- What can an educator, in this case a department chair, do to create a space for her voice and participation in a hierchically-structured school environment?
- And what can a department chair do to further such space and opportunity for others in that same environment?

*Academic Rationale*

This academic study examined how I as a department chair in a high school (grades 9-12) used reflective practice as a method of action research to inform and negotiate the multiplicity of the position as part-administrator, part-colleague, and part-teacher. As the study evolved, I added a component: examining how a department chair, committed to an educational philosophy that promotes democratic space for all members to grow, dealt with an ever-shifting context. Using an insider's, or *emic*, positionality and "living knowledge" (Swantz, 2001), this study tried to provide other educational leaders—such as teacher leaders, department chairs, and principals—an "insider's view" of the issues encountered by a high school department chair, the limitations placed upon the role by its position within the existing hierarchical structure, and the knowledge and skills deployed in negotiating the day-to-day demands of the position. Furthermore, as an action research self-study, the knowledge generated throughout the study created an opportunity for the researcher to think critically about her department chair work and to potentially improve her practice both in real time and for its future consequence.

While other researchers have studied the department chair's role from a researcher's viewpoint, examining the position (Orris, 1988) and its ambiguity (Fish, 1976) as well as its lack of role definition (Schmidt, 2000), I was not able to locate from an extensive search a single study that had been published to date offering a department chair's own narrative description and analysis of her role and work on a daily basis. Therefore, because the department chair's work from an insider's perspective is a terribly understudied area and because this was the work I undertook on a daily basis, this study provided a much-needed addition to the body of work on the department chair role.

## Statement of the Problem

Although the research and my own lived experience showed that the department chair position was under-researched and not fully understood as discussed previously, I believed that the role's potential also remained unrealized. Both in the larger structure of public high school organizations and also within my own particular context, the position had never been examined from the perspective of a sitting department chair. Furthermore, because I had received virtually no training for the department chair position and the dearth of research literature on the role provided little to study, interrogate, or improve my enactment of the role, this inductive action research self-study attempted to examine, critique, and inform my work as a high school language arts department chair and instructional leader. In it, I studied how reflective practice aided a department chair's role understanding and enactment, and enhanced my instructional leadership of and with the members of the department I chaired. Too, I examined the hierarchies which affected my role and my work within that role, seeking a greater sense

of awareness of how those roles interacted with and affected one another. This led to a more open and honest interrogation of the complexities within each.

Throughout the study, I considered myself a *practitioner researcher,* employing the term because of my co-commitant but nevertheless hierarchical roles as full-time professional educator and part-time doctoral student, bringing my insider perspective, and examining the advantages and limitations that accompanied both roles. Financial limitations and an acknowledgement of the politics facing those educators who move out of the day-to-day workings of a large educational system led me to remain a full-time professional educator, using evenings, weekends, and summers to complete the scholarly requirements. The contractual expectations of my full-time role held me more accountable to the duties and responsibilites of my department chair position and promised greater ramifications should that focus wane. Throughout the study, however, I tried to devote equal time and energy to both roles—practitioner and researcher—but must admit that the practioner role ofter took higher priority because of the immediacy and urgency of its responsibilities. Regardless, there were advantages of the co-commitant roles including: access to the context and content of study as well as data sources. I was also able to draw from a pool of trust formed between the co-participants and myself due to our past years of working together. Through a heightened consciousness and commitment towards reflection, I was able to honestly interrogate my actions as both a practitioner and a researcher.

## Research Questions

To examine my past actions as a department chair and work to fulfill my principals' and colleagues' expectations of me as an instructional leader as well as define

my own understanding of my role, my action research self-study was guided by the following questions:

1. What does it mean for a department chair to negotiate her role within the context of a school community that holds complex and simultaneous conflicting notions of that role?
2. In what ways does reflective practice enable that negotiation?

## Theoretical Framework

Critical theory resides in the epistemological tradition of refusing to accept the constructs and meanings of society and culture as they are presented and continually critiquing society with the intention of changing it. Its interpretive and emancipatory principles offered the means by which I could interrogate how power was at work in my school organization and how it affected my department chair role within that larger organization. My work as both practitioner and researcher resonated with critical theory's broader call for an increased awareness of context, for humans to become self-creating and more liberated, and for transforming the world to a more socially just and free environment.

Several key concepts, namely Bakhtin's (1981) conceptions of dialogue and heteroglossia (the tensions within language that lead to the construction of meaning), and Freire's (1970) ideas of critical inquiry (problem-posing education) and praxis (the intersection of action and reflection), helped me make sense of my department chair work. This study—like much work based in critical theory—was not research for research's sake, but for the generation of knowledge to determine future actions within a specific context, actions that were not made complete until the members of that

community—and in this case, me as practitioner-researcher—reflected upon those actions. Just as Freire (1998) suggested, "Thinking critically about practice, of today or yesterday, makes possible the improvement of tomorrow's practice" (p. 44). The theoretical foundation of this study rested upon the idea that a "systematic and intentional inquiry" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 7) of this practice would lead to changes of and within the setting and for all participants.

*Dialogue and Heteroglossia*

According to Bakhtin (1986), "all the diverse areas of human activity involve the use of language" (p. 67), which "arises from man's need to express himself" (p. 67), and help us each conceptualize the world and our positioning in it. In Bakhtin's (1981) theories of dialogue, language and meaning are in constant negotiation, and meaning is dependent upon the context into which it is emitted. Therefore, language and the meaning we derive from it cannot be viewed as neutral nor fixed and contained; instead,

> meaning is so dependent on context that it remains forever in process, at the intersection of centripetal tensions—those forces that usually represent collective authority and seek to stabilize and center—and centrifugal tensions—those forces that usually represent individual interpretation and seek to diversify and pull outward. (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007, p. 551)

Some language works to contain, codify, and limit interpretation of meaning and create norms. Bakhtin (1981) labeled these language acts as the voice of the authoritative discourse, spoken with the intention of bringing unity and a singularity to meaning, understanding, and experience. The authoritative discourse is spoken from a distant

place, from above or from the past, with an assumed authority. It employs the language of the institution, which lends a weight and power and allows for no play in understanding. As such, it is a voice that can only be transmitted, rather than represented.

Yet other language acts—those spoken with what Bakhtin (1981) called the internally persuasive discourse—simultaneously work to expand, enhance, and enlarge potential meanings, encouraging creativity and rebellion. The pull of the internally persuasive discourse, which is powered by centrifugal tensions, keeps language and meaning alive, contemporary, and open to possibilities. It is the means for language to be assimilated and made one's own, able to "reveal ever newer *ways to mean*" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346, italics in original) as it responds to the unifying and centralizing authoritative discourse.

Considering the ongoing war of the voices and tensions in action within language, Bakhtin's theories (1981) remind us that there are no "neutral" words (p. 293); instead, language is multi-layered and multi-voiced, and meaning is always under construction as each tension attempts to overtake the other. In the continual give-and-take of the various tensions, privileged one at a time and continually in turn by the two discourses, meaning is negotiated, living in "every concrete act of understanding" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 282). Language in use, then, both constructs and reflects the relationship between individuals and their settings.

Bakhtin (1981) termed the intersection of the two forces, the space where the languages coexist, heteroglossia. In this heteroglossia of language, with voices layered one upon another sounding simultaneously, meaning is contingent and understanding in a constant state of "becoming" (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), continually negotiated through every

response. Language as heteroglossia is active and living, and through dialogue, meaning emerges in every response, whether the response is an internal or overt one. Still, all words and responses are situated within their various contexts—both that of the speaker and the listener, and each is "overpopulated with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). Therefore, a listener takes up each word or speech act and in his or her response makes meaning of it. At times, a single word or idea may be deemed a hybridity. As a "hybrid construction" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 304), the word or idea is a mixture of two conceptions, two understandings, suggesting that a single word or idea may hold dual interpretations and uses simultaneously, with a listener perceiving one understanding in light of the other.

For the purpose of this study, my department chair role was enacted in constant dialogue with others in the system as the expectations for my role and work were a type of speech act. Furthermore, in a context shifting under new leadership, I experienced a shift in language and its meanings as it related to my department chair role and work as well as the larger context itself. In my constant negotiation of the department chair role, even in understanding how that role should be defined and carried out, I lived in a heteroglossic position, with each of my responses acting in the same way Bakhtin (1981) suggested each word lives, "on the boundary between its own context and another" (p. 284). As such, each action by and response of the department chair provided the opportunity for a form of dialogical response. I could further the push of the centripetal forces in the guise of the school's hierarchical structures or extend the pulling and stratification of centrifugal tensions and individual responses in hope of fulfilling education's promise as a place for social justice and democratic participation.

*Critical Inquiry*

In order to examine these tensions and their effects on my department chair role, work, and context, I believed this study offered an opportunity for critical inquiry. With its "focus on searching and finding" (Geahigan, 1998, p. 12), critical inquiry requires a "constant unveiling of reality" (Freire, 1970, p. 81) in which each person develops the power to make meaning of the world. Through an ongoing, recursive process, a person becomes an interpreter of his or her context, determining future actions by reflecting on past and present situations and preparing for subsequent actions by which the person may transform the world. In order to fulfill the potential of my department chair role and potentially transform the context in which it existed, I had to interrogate the context within which I performed that work, seeking out the aspects of that context that were limiting or potentially unjust.

Rather than applying an outsider's knowledge to a context or enacting some "best practice"—what Freire (1970) called a "banking system of education" (p. 72) where knowledge is collected, stored, and deposited into learners as if they were passive receptacles—critical inquiry begs for the examination of problems of practice, learning from the situation itself, making meaning for and within the context, and enacting that meaning in subsequent actions. Again, critical inquiry spoke to my understanding of reflective practice in which educators work to find ways to create knowledge for use in practice and "make new sense of uncertain, unique, or conflicted situations of practice" (Schön, 1987, p. 39) rather than acting as the conduit of some fixed understanding of the processes of the practice. Indeed, Freire's (1970) call for "acts of cognition" (p. 79) and a

rejection of education that involves merely "transferals of information" (p. 79) resonated with my understanding of reflective practice.

As practitioner researcher, I committed myself to a critical inquiry in the hope that the study of my work would lead to a deeper self-awareness and a greater enhancement of that work. Because the school itself was experiencing a leadership change, the changing context further provided a critical moment in my career as an educator. Rather than waiting for a new identity to be defined for me or accepting what Freire (1970) described as a fatalistic response, allowing a power figure to control my positioning and me, I committed to examine my past actions, increase my awareness of my present context and its politics and practices, and work toward an understanding of the potential within my department chair role for future actions. Additionally, I believed critical inquiry offered means of empowerment for my colleagues and me as professional educators, whether as classroom teachers, other department chairs, or the principal himself. Therefore, as a practitioner researcher conducting an action research self-study, I maintained a stance of critical inquiry and interrogated my actions even as I lived them; I embraced the notion of "becoming" a department chair, knowing I could never "be [the] best, only better" (Fecho, 2000, p. 199) in that role, and remain eager and open to the possibilities and potentials the position held.

*Praxis*

A stance of critical inquiry sets the stage for praxis, the "continuous interplay between doing something and revising our thought about what ought to be done" (Noffke, 1995, p. 1). Sounding much like Dewey's (1933) descriptions of reflection, for Freire (1970), true praxis never exists as a merely intellectual activity. Instead, as the

intersection of action and reflection, praxis leads to the transformation of the world and the opportunity for emancipatory learning for all people since participants are no longer bound by others' mandates, understandings, or expectations for their thinking, speaking, or acting. Participants become the agents through which knowledge and understanding are generated and then, enacted in the world.

Action and reflection are not stages of praxis; instead, they must be continually enacted simultaneously, within each particular context, together becoming creative and leading to what Freire (1970) calls "conscientisation," a heightened awareness of one's situation, necessary for the development of critical consciousness and leading back to further action. As a person's awareness of his or her situation becomes clearer, the individual gains an understanding that one's actions "can create a new situation" and help all within the context pursue a "fuller humanity" (Freire, 1970, p. 47). In this study's context, reflective practice provided the opportunity for critical examination of my practice, and the co-commitant roles of practitioner and researcher led to a critical consciousness affecting my subsequent actions. By remaining "attentive to the relationship between theory and action" as Van Manen (1987, cited in Grimmett, MacKinnon, Erickson, & Riecken, 1998, p. 8) suggests, I had a greater opportunity to affect my context and move others and myself toward a more liberated practice.

Within the department chair and professional educator roles, I had often relied on reflection and critical thinking to help me determine my next actions. In doing so, I had experienced some success. In order to truly transform my role as department chair to one that was emancipatory and provided opportunities for others to join in an "engaged pedagogy" (hooks, 1994), encouraging multiple perspectives and many voices, I had to

take a stance of continual self-inquiry, opening my work and myself to critique and examination. As personally difficult as it was, reflective practice required that I turn my interrogation inward, seeking tensions and inconsistencies between my espoused theories and my lived practices, seeking greater consciousness (Freire, 1970) about where my practice had been and what improvements were needed.

Furthermore, Freire's (1970) notion that all human activity exists as the coexistence of theory and practice, action and reflection, which he included in his discussion of praxis, speaks to the various identities and experiences I lived daily as teacher and scholar, department chair and classroom instructor, administrative manager and instructional leader. Rather than being forced to accept the binaries of much of educational rhetoric as depicted in the examples above, however, the idea of praxis within critical theory allowed me to examine my practice through a "both/and" lens (hooks, 2003, p. 10), holistically interrogating my work as it occurred.

*Synthesizing the Ideas; Pulling It All Together*

The ideas within Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) work on dialogue and heteroglossia and Freire's (1970) work on critical inquiry and praxis came together for me as I considered the role and work of the high school department chair. As a multi-layered role, replete with various positionalities, the department chair position is heteroglossic in nature, always being enacted within the den of many centrifugal and centripetal tensions. As a titled position in a larger hierarchical organizational structure, the role could easily become reified into a stagnated middle management position that works to recreate the system. By enacting the role from a stance of critical inquiry and employing praxis to

work toward true dialogue, however, I could continually seek new meanings and deeper understandings of the context and my place in it.

As Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Freire (1970) both discussed "becoming" and the idea of emergent ideologies, identities, and understandings based on social intercourse and changing contexts, so the critical theoretical lens further extended my self-identification beyond that as a social constructivist. As such, I grew from one who saw knowledge as something generated within a social context to one who understood that the generation of knowledge is an ever-fluid, perpetual process in an effort to serve a larger purpose of changing that social context. These ideas of problematizing one's current context and interactions with others also resonated with my stance as a reflective practitioner, assumed in my early educational training. Just as Atwell (1987) and Graves (1983) sought to create classrooms where students could have space to create meaning and have a liberated voice, so reflective practitioners "both pose and solve problems related to their educational practice" in continual efforts to better that practice (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 4). For the purpose of this study, then, the work was not intended to uncover the "right way" to enact the department chair's role but to accept its ever-fluid positionality and examine how past experiences and reflection affected my ability to make knowledgeable and appropriate responses. Ever mindful of Bakhtin's (1981) idea that meaning is only made in response, reflective practice became my way to make meaning, through responding to my lived experiences and anticipating subsequent actions.

Throughout the study, I attempted to reach out to the teachers within the department and other educators within my school to increase the dialogue among the

various players and avoid becoming isolated in a practice-reifying, self-absorbed self-study. Through a continued commitment to dialogue, critical inquiry, and praxis seeking deeper understanding of my practice and working towards greater emancipation, opportunity, and participation for all within the community of learners, I employed concepts from Bakhtin and Freire to theorize and make meaning of my lived experiences. In essence, critical theory provided the barometer by which I measured my actions, responses, and subsequent analyses of those actions and responses as both practitioner and researcher.

## Assumptions

Several assumptions were made prior to and during this research. Throughout the study, I continued to reflect upon those assumptions that guided my work as both a department chair and as a researcher of the department chair role. The study, therefore, was conducted and analyzed based on the following assumptions:

1. A department chair's role is in a state of constant flux: the role's definition is under continual negotiation based on the emerging needs of the department members and the changing duties and responsibilities as assigned by the principal and required by the local, district, state, and federal contexts. Adding to the role's complexity is that the negotiation occurs in conjunction with the ever-growing understanding of the research concerning pedagogy and curriculum in the department's content area.

2. The practitioner researcher's reflections and the artifacts created as a part of her work, combined with interviews with her past and present principals, were the best data sources for this study.
3. The focus of the study was on the actions, reactions, and reflections of the practitioner researcher, but always in response to others, namely the co-participants.
4. The co-participants of this study—the members of the practioner researcher's department, the members of the school's Leadership Team, and the former and current principals of the research site—willingly participated in the study.
5. The department chair's work is important to the high school and department.

## Definition of Terms

Throughout the study, the following definitions of terms helped to anchor this study in the context of this suburban school and system and within the use of the pracitioner researcher. The definitions described below are those of the practitioner researcher; in each case, however, an example of the research that acted as a significant influence on my understanding of the term is acknowledged.

1. High School Department Chair (Head) – a certified classroom teacher with some level of content expertise hired and designated as supervisor of a subject area department in a high school, who acts as department manager and instructional leader for its members. {Note: Throughout the research literature, the terms *department chair*,

*department head*, and *head of department* were used interchangeably without a precise distinction other than locale of the researcher. For the purpose of this study, I solely employed the term *department chair* because of its use in my current professional context. My definition of the role was further shaped by the system's official job description (Appendix A).};

2. Instructional Leadership—an ongoing process of providing professional learning opportunities for other teachers and facilitating the movement toward a more collaborative and effective community of learners for the purpose of overall improvement of the school (Weller & Weller, 2002);
3. Teacher Leader – a visionary and innovative classroom teacher who moves beyond her primary duties as an instructor of students and works to further the educational program and effectiveness of a larger community, such as a department or a school (Zepeda, Mayers, & Benson, 2003);
4. Professional Learning (Development) – the processes whereby an educator continues to grow and learn about content, pedagogy, or professional field (Killion, 2002);
5. Reflective Practices – those processes and actions undertaken by an individual or group in which conscientious and critical consideration is applied to past, present, and future actions and responses in an effort

to improve their effectiveness and move closer to public education's promise of democracy and social justice (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

## Significance of the Study

Based on a review of the literature available on the department chair, including the seminal work conducted by Siskin (1994), Siskin and Little (1995), Turner (1996, 2003), and Wettersten (1992; 1993a; 1994), inadequate research exists on the work of the high school department chair, particularly in the areas of how that work is negotiated and carried out on a daily basis. Moreover, no research could be found from an extensive search of the literature that examined the work of the high school department chair from an insider's positionality. Additionally, almost all work published more recently on the department chair referenced those initial seminal studies referred to above as the authoritative texts within this field of interest.

Although action research has found more credence as being an invaluable tool for educators to improve their practice by becoming not merely consumers of knowledge but producers of knowledge, by systematically and scientifically examining their daily work, moving them toward higher levels of effectiveness and a greater sense of efficacy (Mills, 2003; Noffke & Stevenson, 1995; Reason & Bradbury, 2005), little evidence can be found within the literature that teacher leaders, particularly high school department chairs, have pursued such self-study for their own professional growth and development. Therefore, this study provides knowledge that can be used in the future by other department chairs or those who wish to become department chairs as well as by administrators who might oversee department chairs or use them within their school's organizational structure. This study also provides educational leaders an opportunity to

see how a hierarchical school organization structure affects those “at the bottom” and “in the middle” of that structure. Results of this study may be used by researchers, other practitioner researchers, administrators, department chairs, and teachers to understand the daily lived experiences of a high school department chair and how she used reflective practices within her work as a department chair.

## Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 includes a background and rationale for the study, the purpose of the study, the statement of the problem, and the research questions. The theoretical framework for the study is presented to elucidate the lens through which the study was developed, administered, and analyzed. The assumptions of the study and definitions for key terms are also provided. Finally, the significance of the study within the context of the larger body of educational research is detailed. Chapter 2 reviews the related literature in the areas of the work on the high school department chair and reflective practice. The review of the work on the high school department chair includes how role theory informs that literature and the role itself. The reflective practice literature examined provides perspective on teacher development and instructional leadership. Chapter 3 presents my positionality as the practitioner researcher, offering a series of vignettes to show some of the critical incidents that led to my identity as an educator and educational leader at the time of the study. The chapter also presents a series of philosophical statements stemming from and in response to my work as a department chair as a means to characterize the practitioner researcher and identify my beliefs. Action research methodology, the methods of data collection, the methods of qualitative data analysis, the context of the study and its participants, and issues pertaining to the

study's design and limitations are discussed in Chapter 4. Through a Bakhtinian lense, the data are presented and analyzed in Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the study's findings with conclusions and implications from within the data.

# CHAPTER 2

## A REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This study examined my lived daily experience as a high school department chair and my use of reflective practices to negotiate a multi-layered role as a full-time department chair and language arts teacher and a part-time doctoral student and researcher. Using a Critical Theory lens to critique the hierarchical inequities within my role and context, I attempted to create a more collegial and democratic situation for all educators within that context.

The study's guiding questions were as follows:

1. What does it mean for a department chair to negotiate her role within the context of a school community that holds complex and simultaneous conflicting notions of that role?
2. In what ways does reflective practice enable that negotiation?

According to Siskin (1994), the department organizational structure, which separates high schools into "realms of knowledge," is a nearly universal feature in the 22,000 secondary schools currently operating in the United States, yet "researchers have long disregarded" the department chair role (Siskin, 1994, p. 9), and after an extensive search, research on the role from an insider's positionality remains seemingly non-existent. Furthermore, the role itself remains convoluted and nebulous, frequently dependent upon the definitions of the local school system and the individual's own understanding or lack thereof, often leading to issues of role conflict (Katz & Kahn,

1978; Huse, 1980). Indeed, in my own situation, the Human Resources Division of the school district had an official job description (Appendix A), but its wording was vague and non-descript, perhaps to leave much of the role's definition to the local school principal.

Given the near-omnipresence of the department chair position in American's high schools and the increased achievement expectations and accountability in individual subject areas due to the Standards Movement (Lewis, 1995) and the public's continuing outcry for school reform and "highly qualified teachers" (Mullen & Farinas, 2003), an examination of this role and the leadership it offers in fostering continual teacher professional development and its potential for increasing instructional effectiveness was overdue. Furthermore, because the literature (e.g., Callahan, 1971; Weller & Weller, 2002) shows that professional training for and development of high school department chairs is generally nonexistent, an exploration of the literature surrounding reflective practice suggested a potential professional learning method for people like me, in the high school department chair role, who generally had no other means of professional development. Therefore, this study was significant and timely due to the increased accountability of educators, the expectation that high school department chairs lead and supervise teachers who are accountable for student learning, and the lack of current practices concerning the professional development of these teacher leaders.

A qualitative approach, employing action research self-study methods, was selected for this action research self-study, which argued that enacting the department chair position is an existential practice requiring the person to negotiate a multi-layered, continually contingent space, and reflective practice is an essential means for the

department chair to do that work. This chapter presents the three areas of research literature that spoke to those arguments and in which this study was grounded—the research on high school department chairs, role theory, and reflective practice. In order to better understand my department chair role and work, I looked to the research on that position as a basis for reflecting on my daily lived experiences. As I read and examined the department chair literature, I realized that role theory was often used to discuss the department chair position; therefore, an examination of that literature furthered my understanding of the role and my work. Finally, having been introduced to reflective practice as a part of my initial teacher training and having employed various reflective practices in my work as a classroom instructor, I believed that reflective practice held promise as a professional development and research method in my work as a practitioner researcher. Therefore, the literature on reflective practice provided another basis for this study. Furthermore, these three research areas—the department chair, role theory, and reflective practice—spoke directly to the research questions that guided this study as well as its design and intent.

## The History of the High School Department Chair

According to the research on the American high school (Kaestle, 1983; Marsh & Codding, 1999; Novack, 1958; Orris, 1988), the department chair position grew alongside the development of the comprehensive public high school, but one must first consider what created the contemporary high school's organization. The historical literature on public education (e.g., Adkison, 1981; Hisada, 2006; Lee, Smith, & Cioci, 1993; Strober & Lanford, 1986; Strober & Tyrick, 1980; Tyack & Hansot,1982) shows that as the teaching profession became more feminized in the late 19$^{th}$ century, moving

from one-room schools to larger organizations primarily made up of burgeoning numbers of female teachers, patriarchal society demanded that strong male principals be put into place to oversee the female teachers, providing discipline to students but also supervising and controlling the teachers. Local boards charged principals with the tasks of serving as instructional leaders and curriculum supervisors of the school, ensuring some sense of consistency to instructional practices, curriculum taught, and behavior of both students and teachers. The creation of the principal position also entrenched schools in an organizational structure of hierarchy and power, leaving teachers at the bottom.

As schools moved from entities such as the all-encompassing "little red schoolhouse" to the factory model more in keeping with emerging industrialization, specialization, and urbanization, so the need for additional layers of organization and administration arose. As public school student populations swelled, so did faculties and management expectations for the principal. It became impossible for a single principal to oversee the day-to-day operations of these much larger schools, and the principal needed assistance to carry out the supervisory activities that ensured the school and its staff were operating with the greatest effectives and efficiency as defined by societal expectations (Kidd, 1965). According to Constanza, Tracy, and Holmes (1987), the principal was forced to delegate some of his supervisory and management responsibilities, leading to the creation of the "principal teacher" position (Orris, 1988). This person's duties, then, included acting as the principal's informant, which helped him retain an awareness of and control over classroom happenings. As the schools and their populations continued to grow into still larger organizations, even principal teachers were unable to provide what was viewed as adequate management or supervision of the teaching staff. Rather than

giving classroom instructors autonomy and the opportunity for increased professionalism, schools were reorganized into subject-specific departments, led by a department chair, adding another rung to the hierarchical ladder of school leadership and furthering the distance between the classroom teacher and the school's primary decision-maker and authority: the principal.

As Siskin (1994) notes in one of the most comprehensive examinations of the department chair position, subject-area departmentalization in the American high school and the subsequent need for departmental leadership arose as by-products of increasing size and bureaucratization of schools in general. Other theories, though, suggest that the addition of the high school department chair arose more from an immediate imitation of collegiate departmental organization (Kidd, 1965), but these theories have the underlying suggestion of hierarchy as well in that high schools were working to replicate those organizations and practices they viewed as superior. Regardless, according to Little (1995b), the department chair position is currently the most common and recognized formal position of teacher leadership, even though its role and responsibilities remain incredibly variant, dependent upon its local context for some form of role definition. Furthermore, it is the only position in the high school's organization whose work is focused primarily on the teachers and teaching while remaining in the classroom oneself and not a role of "pure" administration.

*The Influence of the Subject-Area Department*

As faculties and school buildings have continued to grow, the subject-area department structure has emerged as the locale of a "social world" (Siskin, 1994, p. 89) for educators, complete with a distinct sense of shared values and norms. Yet, these

subject-area divisions offer both positive and negative effects on the larger school's organization and structure.

*The positive effects of subject-area departments.* Subject-area departments provide teachers a "professional home" (Siskin & Little, 1995, p. 7), complete with a sense of belonging, a common purpose, and a shared language. There, teachers have a locale where they can develop their professional identities as well as a community in which they can develop the specifics in the nature of their work. As Little (1995a) suggests, department affiliation plays a "large role in defining teachers' relationships with colleagues and in mediating their relationships with administrators, the community, and students" (p. 51). Furthermore, the department has become linked with teachers' identities (Hannay, 1994; Hannay & Erb, 1999; McLaughlin, Talbert, & Bascia, 1990) and provides the greatest opportunity to facilitate professional growth for educators (Johnson, 1990).

*The negative effects of subject-area departments.* These divisions not only provide positive effects for educators and schools but can also lead to isolation and division among the various content areas and to chasms within the school community as a whole. As Lortie (1975) suggests, for many teachers, this isolation is not only the norm but is preferred. Indeed, Hargreaves and Macmillan (1995) caution that department divisions create a "balkanizing" influence that further isolates teachers into micro-cultures within schools, even to the point of becoming "fiefdoms" (Ball, 1987), replete with their own values, policies, practices, and philosophies. Too often, the department structure only furthers teachers' immediate concerns with their classrooms and content areas rather than encouraging them to examine the child's education across content areas

and the school's organization as a whole. Although the department chair role may have been intended to help principals ensure that teachers were fulfilling his or the Board of Education's expectations within the classroom, the role may in fact have done the opposite. As a subject-specific middle management role, the department chair position may encourage teachers to move toward a more focused conception of their instructional responsibilities, dependent upon their own subject matter and immediate colleagues more than the principal's goals for the school and student learning.

*Retaining the Departmental Structure*

By the late 20th century, subject-specific departments had become the "taken-for-granted means of organizing secondary schools" (Hannay & Erb, 1999, p. 2), an integral and "fundamental" part of the organization, structure, and management of the American high school, as well as the "logical focal point for high school instructional improvement" (Keedy & Robbins, 1993, ¶ 2). The use of the subject-area departmental structure remains an area of "contested ground" in light of educational reform (Little, 1995a, p. 47), the degrees to which teachers are subjected to external controls over curriculum (Archbald & Porter, 1994), and the nature of department leadership (Hill, 1995; Little, 1995a) impact organizational structures.

Although some researchers point to schools and administrations that have tried to eliminate department chairs or find other means of dividing a large school for management purposes (Giannelli, 1985; Goldberg, 1996), research suggests no significant trend of high schools moving away from the use of subject-area departments or department heads (Manlove & Buser, 1966; Siskin & Little, 1995). Furthermore, considerable evidence (Sergiovanni, 1984; Weller & Weller, 2002, Witziers, Sleegers, &

Imants, 1999; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007) suggests that departments provide teachers with a context for valued support, an opportunity for influence beyond their own classroom walls, and a space for encouragement and development of improved practice. Also, the overwhelming presence of the departmental structure in American high school and the research's suggestion that the departmental leadership directly relates to teachers' experiences within a school directly speak to this study's examination of one department chair's role and work. As Hill (1995) reminds us, "strong departments" (p. 123) stem directly from the leadership of department chairs, providing additional justification for examination of the department chair position.

## The Department Chair Role

As subject-area departments arose in prominence within school organizations, so rose the expectations placed upon the leader of those departments. This "lead teacher" position (Zepeda et al., 2003), however, remains an understudied entity within schools. Wettersten (1992) attempts to bring some order to the suggested duties and divides the work into "three general areas of responsibility . . . curriculum development and implementation, supervision (in some cases, evaluation of instruction), and liaison between the administration and the teachers with the department" (p. 8), but how these various areas play out in actual situations and settings varies for each school and may be shifting even within a single context. Nevertheless, the literature on the secondary department chair role suggests that this position—which arose out of an administrative need to increase principals' abilities to control and standardize teacher performance for greater school efficiency and assumed effectiveness—remains poorly defined and ever-increasing in scope as well as "largely invisible to educational research" (Siskin, 1994, p.

19). Siskin (1994) in one of the most comprehensive and frequently cited studies of the department chair role to date makes note of how scant the literature is on the position, which is often "relegated to the shadows" (p. 14).

*The Complexity of the Department Chair Role*

In the first-known study of the department chair role, Koch (1930) argued that there "is little agreement among school administrators as to what, in practice, its function should be" (p. 348). Although the role had become an integral part of the school's organization by the early 20th century, it remained an ill-defined and complex positioning, operating in myriad ways and dependent upon its context. Providing some structure to the unclear position, Koch's (1930) study divided the department chair's activities into two major categories, namely "administrative" and "supervisory" responsibilities (p. 336). Koch's study was the first to show a split within the role between the more managerial duties (e.g., textbook and supply requisitions, inventories, budgets) and the teacher development-oriented duties (e.g., formal and informal supervision, mentoring, the modeling of exemplary teaching practices). Other researchers (ASCD, 1948; Kidd, 1965; Worner & Brown, 1993) have also attempted to make sense of the role and its responsibilities. As a "Janus position" (Gmelch & Burns, 1994), the department chair is often forced to wear two faces: one as an administrator and one as a fellow teacher. The position is further complicated beyond a duality of identity because department chairs, myself included, also usually spend some portion of the day as classroom instructors, "often caught with 'one foot in and one foot out' of teaching" (Zepeda et al., 2003, p. 1). Therefore, the department chair is quasi-administrator, quasi-colleague, and quasi-classroom instructor. The role, then, is more

complex than Mayers' (2001) description of it as a "duality of identity"; indeed, the department chair position requires a *multiplicity of identity*, with the person fulfilling multiple roles in simultaneously existing worlds so that finally she is "not accepted as members of [any] group" (pp. 3-4).

In a hierarchical structure, as schools were originally designed, the department chair sits in a place of disadvantage, operating from the bottom of the administrative realm, but still expected to "lord over" the teaching corps and further the control of those at the top of the power structure. If the administration desires to listen to the voice of the teacher and gain a deeper understanding of classroom instruction and the school's day-to-day happenings, however, the department chair role may become one of privilege and potential, with its enactor able to serve as a source of information who can view both the administrative and teaching sides to the organization. Regardless, the department chair operates in a "situated complexity" (O'Neill, 2000). And as Yeomans (1987) notes, they both "lead the team and belong to the group" (as cited in O'Neill, 2000, p. 14). In attempting to make sense of this complexity, the literature spoke to various functions department chairs carry out as a part of their roles.

*The department chair as middle manager.* Often labeled in the more recent literature as a "middle manager" (Hannay & Ross, 1999; Turner, 1996; Wettersten, 1993b; Witziers et al., 1999), the department chair operates in an ambiguous space. Various researchers, teachers, administrators, and department heads themselves view the department chair role as "liaison," "buffer," and "bridge" (Wettersten, 1994), or a "pipeline," "conduit," "facilitator," "expediter," "resource person," and "supporter" (Wettersten, 1992). As the person who operates between the teachers and the

administrators, the chair is “in the center of the flow [and] acts as the 'linch-pin' who balances, accommodates, and adjusts the flow of exchanges” (Wettersten, 1994, p. 26), suggesting the enactor of the role possesses a power well beyond the role’s original conceptions. But not all labels are so empowering or favorable, as Mayers and Zepeda (2002) point out: chairs have also been characterized as "paper pushers," "racehorses with plowhorse duties," “schizophrenic," and "ringmasters" in a "36-ring circus" (p. 50).

Weller (2001) argues that department heads are “both manager and leader” and “provide [a] 'vital link' that promotes continuity between teacher and administrator expectations and job satisfaction; however, it is their 'in-the-middle' position that makes the role of the department chair the most difficult" (p. 74). According to Fitzgerald (2004), the language surrounding this positionality and education leadership is implicitly hierarchical. As the middle tier of an organizational hierarchy, the department chair operates in a space where collaboration and teamwork are often not considered integral or appropriate. Therefore, their position can become one of isolation, where the department chair is “neither fish nor fowl” (Wettersten, 1992).

*The department chair as professional developer.* As a part of the role’s proximity to teachers and classrooms, the literature suggests that one role of department chairs is to develop the teachers around them. Constanza, Tracy, and Holmes (1987) conclude that department chairs “have the capacity to provide the on-going subject-specific leadership in defining curriculum and objectives, shaping the classroom learning climates, and influencing teaching styles, methods, and procedures that are necessary to translate abstract concepts of educational excellence into educational achievement” (p. 78). Others (Brown & Rutherford, 1999; Easterday 1965; Freidman, 2004) have also looked

to the department chair role for its nearness to teachers and its ability to have an impact on instruction and student achievement.

*The department chair as content expert.* Another function expected of department chairs, according to the literature, is to act as content expert. According to Hanna (1932), an effective department chair possesses a complex integration of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and interpersonal skills, and other researchers (e.g., Sergiovanni, 1984; Verchota, 1971) echo the need for department chairs to be well-versed in their instructional skills and content. This role expectation offers department chairs a privileged position but also further enforces the divide between teacher and department chair, presupposing that the department chair possesses subject knowledge superior to her peers.

*The department chair as reform agent.* Within the roles previously mentioned, the literature identified another role that speaks to the potential influence within the department chair position. Mayers and Zepeda (2002) note that because of a department chair's proximity to teachers and their familiarity with the curriculum, they may serve as the persons best able to lead and facilitate change if they are "empowered to be more than gofers attending to administrative detail" (p. 49). Other studies (Achilles, Smith, & Bingham, 1993; Bliss, Fahrney & Steffy, 1996; Hannay & Denby, 1994; Hannay & Erb, 1999; Harris, Jamieson, & Russ, 1995; Little, 1995a; Mayers, 2001; Siskin & Little, 1995) examined the department chair's role during times of change, reform, or program implementation, suggesting that the role offers school administrators a potential helpmate in school improvement. Nevertheless, according to Bliss et al. (1995), the department chair position remains a "beleaguered and forgotten entity in the context of systemic

reform" (p. 18), still understudied and therefore perhaps undervalued or enacted in a way that has unrealized potential. To that end, the same department chair who may be in the best position to facilitate school improvement efforts and enhance the school's overall academic program and effectiveness is often positioned at the bottom of the administrative hierarchy in a way that prohibits her from carrying out that work.

*The department chair as teacher*. While department chairs spend a part of their time and energy working on administrative duties, according to Achilles et al. (1993), many department heads view themselves as teachers first and as administrators second. Perhaps this prioritizing is because of their past experience and comfort with the teacher role paired with the multiplicity of expectations within their department chair responsibilities. Other studies have also shown that the department chair still has a strong identification as a classroom instructor (Aseltine, 1931; Berrier, 1974). Regardless, because these teacher leaders usually spend some portion of their days as classroom instructors even as they are enacting their management responsibilities, they live in "two worlds" simultaneously (Zepeda et al., 2003, p. 114). Therefore, the department chair role creates a "classical example" of role conflict, which usually produces frustration (Verchota, 1971, p. 129). Further exacerbating the desire to embrace the role as teacher and slight the quasi-administrative aspects of the department chair role is the lack of formal training that department chairs receive as noted in the research literature (Hannay, 1994; Weaver & Gordon, 1979; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007). Rather than venturing into a role of uncertainty, department chairs may easily return to the role possessing familiarity and comfort: classroom instructor.

*The Department Chair's Lack of Role Clarity*

The complexity of the department chair role is made more so because as Weller (2001) argues, "No universally accepted job description exists that delineates the roles and responsibilities of this important mid-management position " (p. 73). So while the department head is in "a pivotal role, . . . a high degree of ambiguity and stress" (Siskin, 1995, p. 2) is inherent in the role. Although numerous studies have attempted to define the high school department chair role (Altimari, 1968; Bliss et al., 1996; Brenner, 1966; Buser, 1966; Ciminillo, 1966; Orris, 1988; Siskin, 1991; Thorum, 1969), no real consensus has been reached among teachers, principals, and department chairs on how the latter spent their time or what were the exact parameters of their position. And Korach (1996) has suggested that this lack of understanding about role expectations has led to ineffective performances by department chairs. Even the more recent studies on the department chair (Kruskamp, 2004; Mayers, 2001) have continued to echo the cry that the role lacks clarity and clear identity.

Adding to the confusion surrounding the work and role of the high school department chair, much of the research (Bolam & Turner, 2003; Brown, Rutherford, & Boyle, 2000; Glover & Miller 1999; Harris et al., 1997; Sammons, Thomas, & Mortimore, 1997; Turner, 1996, 2003; Wise & Bush, 1999) has been rooted in the context of schools in the United Kingdom rather than the context of schools in the United States.

*Critiques on the Department Chair Research*

To date, the research on the department chair has been conducted under the assumption that the principal needs to watch over, supervise, and manage teachers and

that the department chair plays an integral role in this hierarchical structure. In other words, the literature examined has never explored the potential of a department chair to move beyond or work to flatten the organization's hierarchy; instead, the department chair literature reviewed suggested that the department chair, as a product and part of the hierarchy, was destined to recreate and further it.

Furthermore, an extensive review of the literature suggested that all had been conducted from a researcher's perspective; no study was found that had been conducted from an insider's positionality or with data collection and subsequent analysis performed while the researcher was an acting department chair *in situ*. Research conducted concerning department chairs to date has primarily been done *to* department chairs rather than *by* department chairs, creating yet another hierarchy, suggesting that theoretical or scholar-produced knowledge is superior to practitioner's experience- and self-generated knowledge. As such, this study had significance because of the practitioner-researcher's positionality. This study provided an opportunity to examine the department chair's role and experiences, offering a first-hand accounting of one within a situated complexity, negotiating the issues associated with being a leader and a member of a department, and operating in a context replete with ambiguities and hierarchies.

## Role Theory

The research shows that many researchers have used role theory to make sense of the department chair role and work (Hord & Murphy, 1985; Huse, 1980; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Kruskamp, 2003; Mayers & Zepeda, 2002). An examination of role theory literature offered a means to examine and discuss the department chair position with its multi-layered identity (Getzels & Guba, 1954) and the expectations placed upon the

department chair to operate in a complex capacity, responding to numerous others and myriad responsibilities. As previously mentioned, the department chair literature shows that the department chair can be plagued with feelings of conflict, split loyalties, and uncertainty about the direction of her efforts and attention when she is acting as an agent of or colleague to the administrative staff while also working closely with fellow teachers and maintaining a focus on direct student instruction. The role theory literature addresses these very conflicts.

*Key Concepts of Role Theory*

Role theory arose from a phenomenological analysis of how individuals in society occupy positions (Thomas & Biddle, 1966), and it "describes an individual's behavior within a group or an organization" (Kruskamp, 2003, p. 24). Role theorists see an individual's role as determined by the many factions of that person's context and the perceived expectations from this perspective. An individual's role, then, is completely contingent, always in response to someone or something else, known as a role sender. Known as an actor in role theory, an individual attempts to enact her role by fulfilling others' expectations of "appropriate behavior" for that particular position based on the actor's understandings (Bible & McComas, 1963, p. 225). Role congruency occurs when an actor perceives the role sender's expectations are ones he or she can perform (Gross, McEachern, & Mason, 1966); this leads the actor to a sense of satisfaction and competence, and seemingly, an increased opportunity for greater role effectiveness. The organizational structure and situation, however, will affect the actor's experiences as well as his or her perceptions of the role's expectations and the pressures of those expectations (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1966). This suggests that the way the actor

perceives the role, its work, and the work's context has a direct effect on his or her abilities to perform the role effectively as well as the person's feelings about the role and enacting it.

*Role ambiguity and role conflict.* According to Huse (1980), role ambiguity is inevitable for an actor when there is "insufficient knowledge of the expectations" (p. 53). When an actor faces role ambiguity, confusion about role expectations and appropriate role behaviors creates high levels of tension for the individual and can lead to a lack of job satisfaction *(*Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek 1964). Yet many actors face not only role ambiguity but also role conflict, which Katz and Kahn (1978) define as the "simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult" (p. 204). When role senders' expectations create a conflict, role pressures build for the actor (Kahn et al., 1966), who may "abandon one role and cling to the other, . . . attempt some compromise between the roles, or . . . withdraw either physically or psychologically from the roles altogether" (Getzels & Guba, 1954, p. 165), perhaps coping with the conflicts by isolating himself or herself from colleagues or superiors (Seeman, 1953). Continuance of the role conflict leads actors to experience stress and decreased role effectiveness (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Mitchell, 1990; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970), and an actor who is unable to resolve the role conflict faces the danger of being judged ineffective by the various role senders (Getzels & Guba, 1954). As such, the actor may be removed from the role.

*Role overload.* One of the more recent concepts to expand the ideas of role theory is that of role overload. While some research suggests that multiple role involvements can lead to a "meaningful sense of self that enhances well being" (Coverman, 1989, p.

966), when the actor is overcome by the sense that there is simply too much to do and too little time to do it, role overload (Busher, 1988; Clift, Johnson, Holland, & Veal, 1992; Coverman, 1989) exacerbates an actor's feelings of anxiety, tension, and frustration. Without means to make sense of the roles, their conflicts, ambiguities, or excessive pressures, an actor faces a greater potential for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, both identified as part of burnout (Kottkamp & Mansfield, 1985; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). This, in turn, makes an actor ineffective, perhaps causing him or her to withdraw permanently from the role or the context.

*Role Theory's Applications to the Department Chair Position*

The department chair position is one that Getzels and Guba (1954) would describe as a multi-layered identity. And while the teaching aspect of the role is familiar, the department chair's position as a peer within the department is muddied by her affiliation with the administration; at the same time, her role within the administration is unclear and tenuous. Because the position is dependent not only upon the local context but also the contingencies of the moment—often in response either to administration or other teachers pulling her in different directions—a department chair has little opportunity to have a full understanding of the bounds and extents of her daily work.

According to Adduci, Woods-Houston, and Webb (1990), six specific factors contribute significantly to role ambiguity for high school department chairs, including "equivocal job descriptions; conflicting functions; vague goals; ineffective staff development; lack of agreement by role senders (e.g., principals, central administrators); and inadequate resources" (p. 16), leaving the role in a state of constant negotiation as role enactors attempt to make sense of their position. Furthermore, because department

chairs simultaneously enact the roles of teacher and administrator, conflicting role expectations are a part of the daily lived experience. Often finding themselves "saddled with administrative tasks and serv[ing] the bureaucratic needs of the principals instead of the instructional needs of teachers" (Keedy & Robbins, 1993, ¶ 19), department chairs often face disparate or conflicting role expectations because their role's interpretation depends on who is describing it and for what purpose (Hord & Murphy, 1985). Within the same setting, an actor may find myriad job descriptions or components of a role depending on various role senders' perspectives.

Because department chairs work as both administrators and teachers, they must negotiate the fact that they "have both a collegial and hierarchical relationship with teachers and building principals" (Kottkamp & Mansfield, 1985, p. 31), but their role is only further complicated by the notion that each school offers its own organizational "laws" along with "departmental custom[s] and the idiosyncratic compromises negotiated between individual chairs and their administrators and colleagues" (Siskin, 1997, p. 610). Still, department chairs can experience conflict in more ways than simply in the pull between their identities as part-teacher and part-administrator. Mayers and Zepeda (2002) report that for participants in one study, role conflict occurred on "two different levels: (a) between their roles as instructional leaders and the reality of the clerical demands on their time and (b) between their work world as department chairs and their work as teachers" (p. 54). As a result, department chairs can find themselves not being fully accepted by either teachers or administrators.

Department chairs must struggle to negotiate the various identities and multiple layers their role entails (manager/staff developer, teacher/administrator,

supervisor/evaluator) against the backdrop of their own unique situation. All of this complexity only further exacerbates the role conflict and role ambiguity that department chairs must face daily, potentially leading to a sense of being ineffective in the position, job dissatisfaction, and ultimately burnout (Mayers & Zepeda, 2002). Simply put, role conflict and ambiguity stifle a department chair's productivity and potential.

The research further suggests that any possibilities for reducing a department chair's role conflict and ambiguity depends on the principal's willingness to intervene, calling for principals to provide clear role definitions in order for department chairs to reach their potentials (Adduci et al., 1990; Schmidt, 2000). Schwab and Iwanicki (1982), in offering several practical strategies for reducing role conflict and ambiguity for department chairs, suggest that administrators must establish clean lines of authority within the school organization and clarify the hierarchy and accountability structure within the school. Furthermore, principals should make greater efforts to involve teachers in the development of realistic school goals and objectives, embracing more notions of shared leadership and fostering a greater sense of focused purpose, vision, and mission among the various members of the school's community

Yet, even in these suggestions, which point to the potential for greater role certainty and increased power for teacher leaders, the department chair cannot be his or her own agent of change. Instead, he or she must await the principal's acting to provide the chair an opportunity to realize and act to the potential that exists within the role, once more highlighting the role's heritage and its positioning as a furtherance of the principal's power.

*How Role Theory Informed This Study*

In the context of this study, the system's lack of a specific role definition for department chairs paired with a changing administration and organization's restructuring contributed to my feelings of role ambiguity as department chair and practitioner researcher. My uncertainties about how to assist my colleagues with an administrative transition or the various role senders' expectations of me in the shifting context exacerbated the situation. Regardless of those factors, however, from a critical theory stance, the role ambiguity I faced offered a form of emancipation as I gained a space to study, understand, and define aspects of the department chair role for myself. This study provided an opportunity to document first-hand the effects—positive and negative—of role ambiguity and a department chair's perception of it on her practice. Furthermore, this study offered the opportunity to address what Hord and Murphy (1985) describe as "a wide variety of data-free perceptions [which] abound" concerning the department chair role (p. 2). Rather than relying on knowledge developed outside the department chair role or by anecdotes and ideas created about the role, I was able to document, report on, and make sense of the role as it was lived and by reflecting on it.

Therefore, to maintain some level of day-to-day effectiveness within the various and often conflicting roles I enacted simultaneously as a department chair and remained mindful of the data collection aspect of the study, a coping mechanism was necessary to assist the actor in dealing with the role ambiguity, conflict, and overload that the literature suggests are married to the department chair position. For this practitioner researcher, reflective practices—first encountered during my teacher education training—

served as the means by which I examined, enacted, and made sense of my various roles and the expectations and pressures within them.

*Role Theory's Affect on the Practitioner Researcher's Role Understanding*

In examining the department chair position and work, an examination of role theory was also necessary as it spoke directly to the multi-layered positionality of that teacher leader role. Role theory, which seeks to make meaning of how people act and respond in social situations, provided a lens to view this study and its examination of a high school department chair's role and work. By considering the literature's suggestions about the effects of role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload on the work of the department chair, this practitioner researcher gained a clearer understanding of her shifting positionalities throughout the study and a means to make meaning of her emotions and responses within the timeframe of the study and in the subsequent analysis. I also came to recognize spaces within the literature that were heretofore under-examined. Recognizing that I lived in a space rife with role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload, I sought out ways to reframe my positionality, looking for means to negotiate the varied, simultaneous, and often conflicting expectations I received from the role senders around me, namely the co-participants of the study. In essence, role theory helped me name, describe, and understand the lived experiences I had faced previously as a department chair and continued to face throughout the study.

## Reflective Practice

After reviewing the literature on the high school department chair's role and work and role theory, I extended the review to survey the area of reflective practice because of its prevalence in the research literature on educational reform and professional

development for pre-service and in-service teachers (Calderhead, 1987; Grant; 2001; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Wildman, Niles, Magilaro, & McLaughlin, 1990). To date, however, my literature review found little evidence of an examination of teacher leaders'—particularly department chairs'—use of reflective practice. Furthermore, given the department chair literature's repeated concern over the lack of professional development and job training department chairs receive (e.g., Weller & Weller, 2002; Zepeda & Kruskamp, 2007), paired with my own experiences and the research's suggestions that reflective practice offers educators one means of professional growth (Day, 1993; Ferraro, 2000; Osterman & Fishbein, 2001; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001), an examination of the reflective practice literature was important as a basis for this study as I sought to use reflective practice to understand and develop my department chair role and work.

*A Historical Perspective of Reflective Practice*

Reflective practice as a method of educational inquiry arose from Dewey's (1938) belief in the "organic connection" that exists between education and personal experience (p. 25). Building a philosophy of education that encouraged practitioners to work toward developing a "trained mind," one that used past mistakes, observation, reasoning, and experimental testing to plan for future action, Dewey's (1933) ideas were a reaction against a prescriptive, technical-driven, managerially focused form of education as was prevalent in America's public schooling in the early 20$^{th}$ century (Grant & Murray; 1999; Marsh & Codding, 1999; Reese, 1995). Warning against the "quest for certainty" (Dewey, 1929) in instructional practices, Dewey (1903) encouraged educators to be

thinkers and responders to their contexts, students, and own experiences, looking to reflection as the means to explain the process of learning from experience.

More recently and in response to the prevalence and privilege of positivistic scientific knowledge in research, Argyris and Schön (1974), two social scientists working with organizational structures, furthered Dewey's original concepts of reflection when they articulated an increased appreciation for the wealth of practitioner knowledge that professionals use and employ in their daily practice (in Osterman & Fishbein, 2001), drawing distinctions between theories-of-action (what we say we do) and theories-in-use (that which we actually do). Focused on the work of professionals such as architects, lawyers, and physicians, their research encouraged professionals to work toward "competence" by making their "tacit" knowledge—that which is used but cannot be articulated and is rarely thought about—more explicit, and developing both technical and interpersonal theories-of-practice. In theorizing, a person may make meaning of and describe his actions and thereby change those actions, if necessary or warranted. Their contributions brought about a newfound appreciation for practitioner knowledge.

Van Manen's (1977) work in the 1970s extended the ideas of reflective practice when he considered the philosophy of teaching and the moral implications involved in the deliberation of one's practice, building connections between critical theorists—such as Habermas (1973) and Freire (1970)—and the social science field of education. Viewing education as a realm in which the traditional binary of theory and practice could be commingled and bridged within the concept of the practical, Van Manen's (1977) ideas brought credence to the "practical action" within classrooms, asserting that educators work to find the "best" action rather than the "right" action, using past

experiences and each situation's context as determiners. Furthermore, like Habermas (1973), Van Manen (1977) insisted that "practical action" must be "emancipatory" and in "constant critique of domination, of institutions, and of repressive forms of authority" (p. 227). Through the "process of becoming aware of one's context, of the influence of societal and ideological constraints on previously taken-for-granted practices, and gaining control over the direction of these influences," reflective practice offers practitioners power in the form of "self-determination" about their actions as professionals (Calderhead, 1989, p. 44). Rather than awaiting knowledge or future action to be assigned from outside one's self, reflective practice gives practitioners space to direct their own ways.

Through "an unlimited inquiry, a constant critique, and a fundamental self-criticism" (Van Manen, 1977, p. 221), reflective practice offered practitioners means to understand the full extent of the societal context out of which they work or live and gain what Freire (1970) termed "conscientization," leading to praxis, the intersection of theory and practice. Through "true reflection" (Freire, 1990), which required the combination of thought and action, a practitioner not only raised his or her awareness of the given situation, but found opportunities to bring greater liberation to that context.

*Conceptions of Reflection and the Reflective Practitioner*

Just as the history of reflection and reflective practice is ever-evolving, so are the understandings of those concepts, but a distinction should be made between the two. According to Leitch and Day (2000), reflection is "associated with thinking and the cognitive processes" of problem identification and problem solving (p. 180) and is primarily an intellectual activity. According to Boud (2001), "reflection involves taking

the unprocessed, raw material of experience and engaging with it in a way to make sense of what has occurred. It involves exploring often messy and confused events and focusing on the thoughts and emotions that accompany them" (p. 10). Reflective practice, however, can be viewed as a problem-solving technique, a frame analysis, a bridge between theory and practice, or as a "way of being" deriving from spontaneity and the mindfulness of Zen (Jay, 1999). Others (Hatton & Smith, 1994; Osterman & Fishbein, 2001; Rucinksi, 2005; Valli, 1997) echo similar definitions. Yet it is the ambiguity and varied connotations of reflection (Zeichner & Liston, 1996) that keep reflective practice processes from becoming "constrained and systematized" (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 74), allowing practitioners to employ both reflective practice and reflection in ways that yield the most meaning for their given situations.

Although Dewey originally conceived of reflection as a process with "steps" or "aspects," he later re-theorized his concepts in an effort to escape the implication of reflection as a linear process. Yet it was Schön's (1983) *Reflective Practitioner* that developed an epistemology of practice, built on the notion that reflective thought is a dialectic process incorporating action with experience to uncover one's underlying assumptions of reality. He argued that professionals not only think about their practice and change it after the fact, but that they "can think about doing something while doing it" (Schön, 1983, p. 54). Calling this sort of thinking *reflection-in-action*, Schön considered it a separate process from *reflection-on-action*, based on the timing in which each occurs. With Schön's (1983, 1987) model of professional problem solving, he defined a process of reacting to the inconsistencies in a situation by rethinking one's tacit knowledge and reframing the situation within one's intuitive understanding in an action

experiment that tests possible solutions rather than assuming the role of a practitioner seeking out the single right solution.

His work, which asserts that reflection-in-action is central to professional expertise (Ferry & Ross-Gordon, 1998), emphasizes uncertainty, intuition, and value judgment. According to Schön (1983),

> There is some puzzling or troubling or interesting phenomenon with which the individual is trying to deal. As he tries to make sense of it, he also reflects on the understandings which have been implicit in his action, understandings which he surfaces, criticizes, restructures, and embodies in further action. (p. 50)

His ideas suggest that reflection begins when a practitioner determines an area of interest or what Lesnick (2005) terms a "problem of practice." Through "setting the problem" (Schön, 1983), the practitioner becomes reflective as he extracts and studies causes and consequences, recontextualizes them, and envisions a change in his practice. Through comparative reflection—considering a problem or situation from as many perspectives, frames, or views as possible—a reflective practitioner gains perspective on the situation (Jay & Johnson, 2002).

Zeichner (1983) extended Schön's (1983, 1987) conceptions by insisting that reflective practice had to include consideration of the social, economic, and political purposes and conditions of teaching and learning, and also interrogate the classroom and larger school contexts. By questioning her own "beliefs and orientations" (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 5) about the situation, context, and the issues, the practitioner "reframes the problem" (Schön, 1983, p. 263) and can then interpret it. By embracing a willingness

to self-interrogate and seek out the limitations and biases within her own frame and actions, the reflective practitioner may discover insights that lead to greater understandings and additional reflection in a never-ending spiraling process. By applying the "repertoires of values, knowledge, theories, and practices" of their past experiences to their present and future contexts (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 16), practitioners enact "critical reflection" by making a "judgment or a choice among actions, or simply integrat[ing] what one has discovered into a new and better understanding of the problem" (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 79). That understanding allows a practitioner to find new meanings in a situation or promoting further inquiry into the situation, moving onward, rarely ending in a simple solution, but rather leading to material for further reflection, new questions, and improved understanding. Valli (1990), Zeichner and Gore (1995), and Zeichner and Liston (1996) argue that critical reflection requires consideration of the broader historical, socio-political, and moral context of schooling; through this consideration of context, reflection has the power to become emancipatory and liberating for the practitioner and all within the context.

Some researchers (e.g., Cruickshank, 1985, 1987) have used the terminology of reflective practice to perpetuate and support more technical-oriented teacher education models, such as the Reflective Teaching model, which operates as a sort of micro-teaching strategy. Yet most descriptions of reflective practice seem to have several common aspects, "including describing the situation, surfacing and questioning initial understandings and assumptions, and persisting, with an attitude of open-mindedness, responsibility, and whole-heartedness" (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 75). By retaining a critical stance toward one's own practice and that of one's peers (Johnston & Badley,

1989), a practitioner gains the opportunity for both improved practice and professional development.

*Reflective Practice in the Research on Education*

As qualitative research methodologies became more acceptable for studying teaching throughout the 1970s, so the time became ripe for introducing a way for teachers to think and work that combined Dewey's ideals with the subsequent work in praxis, practical thinking, and constructivism in the classroom (Richardson, 1990). With the coinage of the terms "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" in Schön's (1983) *Reflective Practitioner* and a thorough treatment of reflective practice used in professional practice, teachers and teacher educators found a theory by which to show and discuss classroom actions and move from being "consumers of curriculum knowledge" (Paris, 1993, p. 149) to becoming creators of it, acting more fully in "constructivist learning" (Costa, 2001, p. xiii). The classroom became a place for educators to produce new knowledge instead of relying on outside researchers to provide scholarly-produced knowledge for them to enact.

Since then, the possibilities within reflection and reflective practice have become an integral part of the rhetoric around and research on teaching, teacher education, teacher professional development, and educational thought and have been written about in a wealth of scholar and practitioner research (Brookfield, 1995; Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers 2006; Grant & Zeichner, 1984; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Pollard, 2002; Ross, 1990; Sergiovanni & Starrett, 2007; Zeichner, 1986, 1999). In that research, various terms have been associated with the idea of reflection in the process of professional development for educators, including "reflective practice," "inquiry-oriented

teacher education," "reflection-in-action," "teacher as researcher," "teacher as decision-maker," teacher as professional," and "teacher as problem-solver" (Calderhead, 1989). All of it, however, has been grounded in the idea that the daily situation of the classroom is the ideal breeding ground for a marriage between theory and practice (Valli, 1997).

As Zeichner and Liston (1996) considered the role of reflection in the life and work of an educator, they concurred with Dewey's original notions that *openmindedness, responsibility*, and *wholeheartedness* are key features of a reflective teacher. They understood and embraced Schön's ideas that reflection happens in two time frames, as action is occurring (reflection-in-action) and after it has occurred (reflection-on-action). Both felt, however, that Schön's work omitted two vital components of reflection: (1) the power and importance of the context in which and out of which that reflection occurs and (2) the idea that reflection is not only a solitary endeavor but is most effective when treated as a social practice. Zeichner and Liston (1996) argue "that teachers should be encouraged to focus both internally on their own practices, and externally on the social conditions of their practice, and that their action plans for change should involve efforts to improve both individual practice and their situations" (p. 20). Furthermore, they must give "concerted attention to those assumptions, influences, and dynamics, to the reality of school life and to the social conditions of schooling" (Liston & Zeichner, 1996, p. x). Others (e.g., Jay & Johnson, 2002) echo the call for consideration of education's social, moral, and political aspects.

Across the educational research literature, reflective practice involves the idea that reflection occurs across time and across situation all in an attempt to make meanings of one's past actions and anticipate subsequent ones, whether they be in the immediate

present or the near or distant future. According to Leitch and Day (2000), engaging in reflective practice moves individuals toward "greater self-knowledge and self-challenge" (p. 182). As an open-ended, inquiry-based method of professional development, reflective practice serves as a means for educators to make sense of their work as well as improve the work even as they strive to improve their context.

*Reflective Practice and the Department Chair Role*

Because the reflective practice literature mostly targets the classroom teacher and the department chair literature is completely devoid of a link between the role and reflective practice, this study carries the significance of opening a new area of study, fulfilling Shulman's (1999) call for "generativity" in doctoral scholarship. As department chairs deal with what Munby and Russell (1990) refer to as "puzzles of practice," attempting to fulfill the expectations of their multiplicitous roles—even in the face of role ambiguity, conflict, and overload, this study offered a view into an insider's positionality in a way that the research has not yet seen to date. Therefore, this study provided the opportunity to examine the many roles of my daily lived experiences as teacher, department chair, researcher, and reflective practitioner; as an educator working from a constructivist position, I operated as a learner first. I embraced Boud's (2001) assertion that

> learning is always grounded in prior experience and that any attempt to promote new learning must take into account that experience. All learning builds on existing perceptions and frameworks of understanding;

> therefore, links must be made between what is new and what already exists if learners are to make sense of what is happening to them. (pp. 11-12)

Each day of the study presented another opportunity to build my experiences as a teacher, department chair, and researcher, and each role yielded situations ripe for reflection. Just as Valli (1990) asserts that the classroom acts as an "ideal breeding ground," so does the role and work of the high school department chair with its uncertainties, conflicts, and ambiguities as discussed in the previous sections.

With a commitment to maintaining open-mindedness, responsibility, and whole-heartedness—qualities that the literature suggests are essential for a reflective practitioner (Dewey, 1933; Grant & Zeichner, 1984; Jay, 1999; Schön, 1983; Valli, 1997)—within and toward my work, reflective practice became the method for me to take self-inquiry to a new depth. It yielded rich understanding of the ways I worked and the connections and disconnects between my beliefs and actions. Because this study required critical self-examination and a "willingness to engage in constant self-appraisal and development" (Pollard, 2002, p. 12) as well as a stance of full disclosure even as the department chair role was being enacted, this study explored a subject matter that heretofore did not exist as such in the scholarly literature as reviewed by the practitioner-researcher.

*How Reflective Practice Informed This Study*

According to Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1998) in their practitioner-oriented and politically-charged text *Best Practices*, "Teachers need to reflect, to analyze, to compare—to build knowledge and theoretical understandings about their work" (p. 228),

furthering the idea that reflective practice is a necessary component for an educational system or a teacher to be effective. I argue that it serves a vital professional development role for the department chair as well. The reflective practice research operates with the underlying implication that reflective practices act as a form of job-imbedded professional learning, helping educators at all levels further their craft and potentially increase their effectiveness in it. As a classroom instructor, I had found reflective practices to be what Johnston and Badley (1996) describe as a "useful way of achieving personal development" (p. 5), carrying me from novice educator to a National Board Certified teacher. As a department chair who had received almost no formal training for the position, I once more turned to reflective practices to examine my role, work, and context in the hope of greater understanding leading to greater possibilities for emancipatory action.

Because the context of the study was riddled with change due to shifts in the organizational structure under a new principal's leadership and because roles that were previously somewhat determined had to be renegotiated within that new context, I framed the study to require critical reflection by myself as practitioner-researcher. This was an attempt to deal with the day-to-day actions required of me in my various roles. Considering that Bartelhein and Evans (1993) define reflective practice as "the ability to integrate professional experience with theory and research to formulate solutions to problem situations . . . [and as] a decision-making theory that . . . professionals might use to resolve unique or complex problems as they arise" (p. 338), I believed reflective practice could serve as means to examine and improve my work and context, even as I sought to understand, interrogate, and analyze that work and its context.

Still, as the research suggests, reflective practice is not without its challenges. As Bleakley (2000) cautions, educators who rely on a humanist approach to reflective practice can end up with an assumed transparent nature of the 'self' and the desire for a particular and fixed identity. He encourages reflective practitioners to consider what Schön (1987) insisted about the origins of reflectivity, that it "begins not in the 'high ground' of technical-rational certainty, but in the 'swamp' of uncertain practices—in indeterminacy, ambiguity, and value conflict" (p. 412). For a department chair, as that literature suggests, the role itself is a "swamp," mired in the heteroglossic tensions of shifting positionalities and ever-changing expectations. This study, then, provided the opportunity to witness one practitioner's negotiations of that potential quagmire.

Yet, the study itself as a self-study based in reflective practice ran the very risk of that which Bleakley cautions against: becoming overly confident of one's understanding of self, and the urge to seek out the one "right way" to work as a department chair. Through reflective practice, a practitioner becomes more cognizant of the personal theories from which she operates and can measure them against more "public theories," such as those found in academically-based research. "To recognize the crucial way one's own personal theory affects one's own practice is a critical prerequisite for any attempt one might make to change one's practice" (Griffiths & Tann, 1992, p. 80). Teachers need to articulate their own theories, critically examine them, check for consistency, coherence and adequacy, compare them with alternative theories and reconceptualize them in order to increase the effectiveness of their own professional thinking (Griffiths & Tann, 1992). Effective practice emerges when one finds congruence between theory-of-practice and theory-in-use and it is measured against the findings of scholarly theory and

the context of the situation and past experience. Therefore, this study provided an opportunity for me as practitioner researcher to systematically examine and critique whether or not congruence existed between my theories-of-practice and my theories-in-use. Through reflective practice, I had the continual opportunity to work toward a greater congruence.

As the practitioner researcher at the center of this study, I attempted to employ what Wellington (1996) refers to as deliberative and dialectic orientations toward reflective practice. The deliberative orientation, which emphasizes discovery and personal meaning, helped me discover personal relevance within the institutional structure and explore strategies that were responsive and contextually sensitive. But I also maintained a dialectic orientation, advocating political liberation, focusing on political and social issues, and promoting political awareness and activism. Within this study as a reflective practitioner, I inquired into my own situations to gain greater understandings of my work, to critique my actions, and to build theory by which to guide subsequent action, operating in a state of constant motion, a "dance-like pattern" moving between theory and practice and melding the two, simultaneously "doing and learning and coming to know" (Tremmel, 1993). Furthermore, the reflective practice served as a tool for revealing discrepancies between espoused theories (what we say we do) and theories-in-use (what we actually do) (Imel, 1992). By becoming a reflective practitioner, a professional comes to examine and understand her work in a deeper way, opening up opportunities for closer critique, potentially leading to greater effectiveness, but certainly moving toward the construction of additional experience and knowledge. In

the case of this study, reflective practice provided the means by which a department chair could simultaneously enact her role and examine it.

## Chapter Summary

Despite the widespread prevalence of subject-area department chairs in America's public high schools today, little research has been conducted on the role, and to date, almost none has been conducted by a sitting department chair. What research has been conducted focuses primarily on defining what department chairs do. Early studies (ASCD, 1948; Koch, 1930) determined that managerial tasks—that is, inventorying textbooks and ordering supplies—comprised most of high school department chairs' work. Later studies (Kruskamp, 2004; Weaver & Gordon, 1979; Wettersten, 1993) concluded that the high school department chair role could also be one of instructional leadership. Yet other researchers (Adduci et al., 1990; Hannay, 1996) found that poorly written job descriptions and a lack of professional development were the primary causes of role conflict and ambiguity, which hindered department chairs achieving full efficacy or the realization of the potential within the role. Finally, most recent studies have centered on the impact of role ambiguity on a department chair's effectiveness (Korach, 1996), the leadership of the department chair (Kruskamp, 2004; Wettersten, 1993), and an examination of the "subject worlds" in which and out of which department chairs operate (Siskin, 1991). Across the literature, however, only one study (Ciminillo, 1996) used the department chair's own perspectives to examine his or her role, and none of these studies approached the position from an insider's positionality.

The literature concerning reflective practice in education is extensive, ranging from initial theorizing in an attempt to define and analyze the process of reflection

(Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983, 1987; Van Manen, 1995; Zeichner & Liston, 1996) to surveys of various forms of reflective practice, including journaling (Boud, 2001; Brookfield, 1995), peer coaching (Barkley, 2005), and collaborative conversations (Bailey, Hawkins, Irujo, Larsen-Freeman, Rintell, & Willett, 1998). Yet most of the research focused on the use of reflective practices by pre-service and in-service teachers and teacher educators, rather than by teacher leaders, such as department chairs. Furthermore, no research could be found that examines the use of reflective practices by a high school department chair to negotiate the role conflict and ambiguity that the research shows to be ingrained within the role.

Literature on the high school department chair and how she uses reflective practice to make meaning of her role, examine its possibilities, and interrogate its context is non-existent according to the scope of this literature review. Furthermore, none could be found in which the department chair, acting as a researcher, sought to examine and critique her own work in action. Therefore, a self-study action research approach was chosen to study this phenomenon in order to examine how I as a department chair used reflective practice to negotiate the multiplicities of that role and to provide continued learning opportunities for my departmental colleagues and myself, and to critique the hierarchical inequities surrounding my role in order to create a more democratic and collegial working community. Given the lack of research on the department chair position and its non-connection with reflective practice as a means of professional development for the role, this study was significant because it built on the past scholarship, learning from it and moving it to a new dimension (Boote & Beile, 2005). Considering Dewey's (1933) definition of reflection, which "emancipates us from merely

impulsive and routine activity . . [enabling] us to direct our actions with foresight and . . . to know what we are about when we act" (p. 17), reflective practice provided the means to understand and negotiate my role as a department chair, making meaning of my positioning and my context and moving the situation and myself closer to emancipation and a space for moral action.

# CHAPTER 3

## POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER WITHIN THE RESEARCH

*Ms. Barbara Josephine Williamson's 10th grade U.S. History classroom was considered a paragon in my small, rural public high school, where the teaching philosophy was grounded in traditional sit-and-get instruction. Ms. Williamson extended that philosophy by believing "what's good for one is good for all." A typical day consisted of passively sitting in desks as Ms. Williamson read from her textbook, supplementing the book's content with her memorized script and expecting us to take verbatim notes on the "wisdom" her lips poured forth.*

*But on a particular fall day in 1983, Ms. Williamson's lesson plan varied as students were required to read aloud in turn from the U.S. Constitution. Like a drill sergeant instructing his wayward recruits, Ms. Williamson orchestrated the reading, interjecting a forceful "NEXT!" when she determined that a student had contributed enough. As the reading progressed down the row of desks, it soon became Isaac's turn. Isaac was a General-diploma, 17-year-old African-American student, known more for his ability to make people laugh than his academic dedication or success.*

*When the student in front of Isaac had read a few lines, Ms. Williamson bellowed, "NEXT!" and stared at Isaac. He remained motionless in quiet refusal. Ms. Williamson threatened, "Read, or I'm writing you up."*

*The classroom's only noise was Isaac's heavy breathing, and sounds that suggested he was trying not to cry. Ms. Williamson slammed her textbook shut and*

*briskly exited the classroom. Returning with the principal and an assistant principal, the trio walked to Isaac's desk, surrounded it, and looked down at him. The principal spoke, "Son, get your things and come with us, or this is going to get ugly."*

*Isaac rose from his desk, picked up his book bag, and skulked toward the door. As he exited the room, he dumped his backpack into the trashcan. The administrators followed him out. Ms. Williamson opened her textbook and instructed us to "pick up where we'd left off."*

*Isaac never returned to class. In the weeks that followed, we heard he had withdrawn from (dropped out of) school and was "hanging out downtown."*

## Making Meaning of an Early Incident

Although that incident in 1983 did not spawn an immediate commitment to a career in teaching, I never erased that day from my memory. That episode began to form the lens through which I saw the world, and no other single event from my past more directly awakened my spirit of Critical Theory, even before my doctoral studies provided me the language by which to describe and discuss it.

Reflecting on that day, I realized the educational system failed Isaac: he was barely literate. Isaac's actions that day weren't pure defiance and insubordination; he was a young man, struggling to retain his reputation among his peers as well as his dignity. It wasn't that he didn't want to read; he couldn't read, and the powerful educators made certain—through their instructional choices, their authoritative language, and their physical maneuverings—that Isaac would not only be denied his educational rights that day, but also that the other students in the room would be reminded of their place in the organizational structure and the consequences that followed for those who

did not follow rules. That school system and those so-called educators, rather than teaching Isaac the fundamentals or skills necessary for participation in a democracy, had taught him that he was not valued, not welcome, and certainly not equal.

Over time, I began to understand that classroom teaching provided me a space to take my own positive schooling experiences and help others find safety and successes there, too. Also, the classroom was an environment that encouraged me to be a perpetual learner. Facing the ever-shifting challenge of working with adolescents—attempting to make instruction both rigorous and relevant, all while building meaningful student-teacher relationships, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic situation, or ability level—provided opportunity for continual growth as a person and professional. As a teacher, I had power to fight injustices, such as I had witnessed as a 10th grade social studies student and subsequently faced repeatedly as a college student and young adult. Moving into my first full-time teaching position, I was determined not to "settle" for "just teaching." I did not want what Lortie (1975) describes as a feminized, socially devalued position. I wanted to be someone whose influence transcended curricula and classroom walls, who worked for greater social justice for her students and the organization. I believed there could be space in public schools to fulfill those dreams as a professional educator.

## Explaining This Chapter's Presence

Although most academic dissertations do not include a chapter where the writer explains her positioning in such depth, for the sake of this action research self-study, I needed to make the story of the question transparent—to share some defining incidents from my past that illustrated my beliefs and the reasoning behind those beliefs. As Fecho

(2002) suggests in his explanation of the complexities of a practitioner researcher attempting to situate himself and explain the story of the story, this is my *yeki bood*, my attempt to let the reader know "this is how it is" (p. 281).

This chapter presents, unpacks, and reflects upon a few key events that led to my positioning as a classroom teacher and department chair. Attempting to show "how it is," I used a series of vignettes from my past practice that were significant in my becoming the educator I was during the study's timeframe. The subsequent reflections on each of the vignettes were my attempts to make meaning of those critical incidents and point out the issues raised by each. In no way do I suggest that these incidents are absolute or complete. Instead, reconstructed from memory and presented in a reflective mode, this is the story behind the story—the ideas, which led me to this study and to be the educational leader I was at the time of the study. As I recall, this is how it was.

*Thriving Through Collaboration, Surviving the Subsequent Isolation*

As a first-year language arts teacher, I was hired through a privately funded grant to work alongside a social studies, science, and math teacher as part of a "Success Team" in a large suburban public school overseeing the education of 100 "at-risk" 9$^{th}$ grade students. The grant specified that we would focus our efforts only on those students and provided us additional release time—teaching only four sections and having two planning periods in the day—for remediating the students, planning collaboratively, and allowing time for parent communication and involvement.

On the first day the four of us met, we soon realized that collectively we possessed only three years of experience. Our lack of experience was compensated by

our enthusiasm and determination—we were committed to reaching these students. We collaborated on everything: lesson plans, assessments, and classroom management strategies.

Although the school day officially ended at 2:30, we knew that many of our students rode busses home to empty apartments and hours of unsupervised time. Together, we created an after-school program, where our students completed homework, received additional teacher assistance, and "hung out" in a safe and structured environment that supported and encouraged them. The commitment meant long days, but by forming meaningful relationships with the students, we saw their skills and attitudes toward school steadily improve.

One evening, as the last student left my room, I looked up to see Josie Tipton, a veteran language arts teacher, standing in my doorway. "Why are you *still* here? You only have 100 students; can't you get those few papers graded with two planning periods each day?"

*Making meaning.* Engaged and consumed by the collaboration with my teammates in that first year of teaching, I had built few relationships with others in my department, and until the evening mentioned above, I never sensed what the rest of the faculty felt for the "Success Team" teachers. Fellow teachers resented our lighter teaching loads, and many viewed our collaborative planning sessions as "young folks hanging out." Many had expressed concerns to the principal that such novice teachers didn't deserve "perks" like extra release time. The faculty seemed only to see the rewards of our positions but not understand the personal sacrifices and professional demands of the positions. Regardless of the success of our students or the marked

benefits of the collaborative efforts of the teachers, the administration decided not to continue the program. For my second year of teaching, I was returned to being "just another language arts teacher." But my departmental colleagues had no desire to be collegial, and I felt entirely alone.

Time and again, I attempted conversations with various colleagues, seeking out a planning partner or others with whom to exchange instructional and assessment ideas as I had done with the teachers on the Team. Each time, I met only resistance. They were "too busy" or "not interested," and I quickly realized that the camaraderie and opportunities I had been afforded as a part of the Team were not typical of relationships among these teachers. Finally finding one teacher, Becky O'Connor, who was willing to work with me on lesson planning and instructional concerns, I latched onto her as if she were a lifeline. She became my unofficial mentor and my new best friend. Most importantly, she was my salvation from professional isolation; her guidance, support, and collaboration helped me grow from novice teacher to confident educator.

This experience left me to wonder why collaboration was such an anomaly; why were teachers so territorial? Why were there such strong feelings of resentment toward assumed "privileges"? Why was there such angst about teaching experience and what rights it earned teachers? Why were the teachers so unwilling to work together as colleagues, and why were their concerns about teaching situations rather than focused on engaging and educating students, particularly at-risk ones?

## Facing Classroom Politics

"Class, how many of you have ever been on a memorable trip?" As hands shot up and stories were shared, I explained to my 9th grade Gifted Language Arts class that we

would study the archetypal journey and its presence in literature throughout time and place. The choice reading list generated clear excitement as students recognized a few titles, such as Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, and began to ask questions about others, such as Kaye Gibbons' *Ellen Foster*. Mindful that a segment of our community was quite conservative, I had marked a few of the books (such as Earnest Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying*, and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*) with a "mature" label and noted that parental approval was required prior to selecting the text.

Moving into the unit, students worked in small groups with their selected texts, reading, annotating, creating illustrations, and drawing conclusions about the journeys within the reading. During whole-class instruction time, I incorporated poetry, short stories, music, and art to enhance and layer the students' understandings. I witnessed their obvious engagement and was told that my students shared openly with peers and other teachers how much they enjoyed the activities. Many parents provided warm feedback about their children's growth and progress.

Tensions began mounting, however, when a more veteran teacher in the department, Carol Deacon, raised concerns over my teaching style and curricular choices. Carol had been our school's only 9$^{th}$ grade gifted teacher for a number of years prior to my being hired, but the growing school population demanded an additional teacher. Carol was a traditionalist, while I worked to be progressive and innovative in the classroom.

As students shared their reading lists from our "journey" unit, Carol approached our department chair Ruth, insisting that I be "reined in," as my text selections were "risky," hinting they might be "inappropriate" due to their "sexual content" and "lack of

rigor." Ruth approached me and asked to view my reading lists and lesson plans, saying that complaints had been lodged against me. Once she saw what I was doing, however, she backed down.

Carol persisted. Over the next two years, she repeatedly went to the principal, and even spoke negatively about my class and me to her own students. Influential parents began complaining that the classes weren't "equitable" and that "something should be done." Carol had seniority and influence with some of the wealthier parts of the community that the school served. Soon, the principal caved to Carol's demands and sent a memo mandating that all reading lists would henceforth be submitted for approval and that "any book endorsed by Oprah would not be permitted because it was intended for an adult audience." The memo also announced Carol's new position: Language Arts Department Co-Chair.

*Making meaning.* At the time of the principal's memo, I was stunned that any educator could make such a blanket curricular decision, which seemed to have little professional basis. Bordering on censorship, the principal's mandate showed me how educational leaders could fall prey to petty political maneuvers within faculties and communities. Although I had believed that our principal was a child-centered, progressive educator, and I had felt beholden to her because she had hired me for my first teaching position, that incident was one of many which forced me to examine her actions more closely, reflecting on and critiquing her decisions. I found she "played favorites" among the staff and often based actions on her own political gain within the community and system rather than on educational research; also, she negated the input of experienced practitioners.

At the same time, I was amazed at how an individual teacher could act so unprofessionally, crossing boundaries with students to criticize a colleague and using her professional cache to settle her grievances and enact her desires, and still be rewarded for those behaviors. How could the teachers of the department grow and develop under the "leadership" of someone who was openly vindictive, jealous, and manipulative?

Although I appreciated the notion of seniority among the staff, I was angered by its extreme power in the school's structure. I remained at the school for another three years, witnessing more and more examples of oppression from the administration. The promise that I once believed the school held as a place that promoted justice, encouraged learning, and advocated achievement was curtailed. Feeling trapped by my situation, as Isaac surely did in the chapter's opening vignette, I contemplated leaving teaching.

Too, I saw how little collegiality existed in this school setting. Rather than working together, teachers were adversaries, competing for resources, prestige, and authority. How could such competition and vengeance be tolerated? Why were school leaders blind to the happenings in classrooms and yet open to hearsay or pressure from individuals or small powerful groups? Were school officials and teachers pawns of community politics? Again, why were decisions made without consulting the teachers as a whole or the educational research? Why did it seem that students and their achievement were not at the heart of leaders' decisions or teachers' actions?

Rather than leaving the profession entirely, however, I decided to move to another school within our system. Some of the enthusiasm I had experienced in my student teaching days had been diminished, but so had my naivety. Although I still viewed the classroom as a space for and about students and helping them all—regardless of race,

gender, socio-economic status, or any other label, I also realized that my view was not universal. In fact, the machine of the organization, depending on who was driving its wheel, could be operating against the very students it claimed to serve. Most importantly, perhaps, was my newfound, first-hand understanding that the educational structure—the classroom, department, school, or system—was rife with politics. Yet, rather than turning away blindly, in this new school I decided to look for the politics, interrogate them, and be willing to fight against or use the political machinations that could help me achieve my larger purpose in the classroom and school: to provide more access for all students and all educators to become fully participative and achieve individual successes.

## Tasting the Sweet and Sour of Teacher Leadership

In the fall of 2002, Terry Flanagan, a teacher new to our department, was struggling in the classroom. Terry had been a community college instructor, working with adults for ten years, and had decided to move to the high school classroom. He was intelligent, kind-hearted, and eager. In the classroom, however, he seemed oblivious to what was happening around him. Students left the classroom as he wrote on the board, his back to his class for lengthy periods of time. Students talked back to him or even over him as he tried to teach. Terry never stopped to calm them or correct their behavior. When his patience reached its end, he would assign the entire class after-school detention, creating a near-riot from those students who had not been involved in the misbehavior. Terry didn't know how to manage a room filled with teenagers, and his instructional strategies were as lacking as his management techniques.

By the semester's mid-term, Terry had written more than 35 administrative referrals for students, and numerous parents had called to complain about his class. More than 50% of his students were failing, and the administrators were tired of escorting "escaped" students back to Terry's classroom. The department chairs, Patricia and Edith, realized his need for immediate support if he was going to survive until the winter break. They assigned me to be his mentor.

Each afternoon, Terry and I discussed that day's happenings and made plans for the following day. I observed him weekly, providing specific feedback to help strengthen his classroom management. Together, he and I developed a classroom management system that allowed him to monitor his students better by using the overhead projector for notes rather than turning his back to the class, and we developed an escalating discipline scale that helped him gain some sense of control. I encouraged him to write a daily agenda on the board for students to know the day's activities and to help ease transitions. And we worked on developing a variety of instructional strategies for Terry to use, rather than relying on the lecture technique that had been his mainstay at the community college.

More than once, though, I felt Terry ignored my attempts to help him. When planning together, I asked him questions, encouraging him to reflect on his previous lessons and to anticipate his future ones. I shared my own strategies for reflection developed throughout my teacher education training and my own lived experiences. He often cut me off, saying, "Oh, I see. Now I understand." But his classroom actions indicated otherwise.

*Making meaning.* Flattered by the opportunity to be a formal mentor to a colleague, particularly given my earlier interactions with Patricia and Edith as detailed in Chapter 1, I was also overwhelmed. In some ways, Terry was my senior: ten years older and with a more advanced education, yet I knew the school and departmental gossip paired with my own observations clearly indicated that Terry needed assistance in the classroom. Regardless of my own sense of uncertainty, my teacher instincts encouraged me to help him, even when it seemed that he didn't want my guidance.

Through our work together, Terry survived, but never thrived. At the year's end, he announced his intention to return to full-time graduate work and pursue a career in higher education. I had helped Terry, but I hadn't been able to help him grow into a great teacher. Regardless of my frustration that I could not magically transform Terry into an outstanding classroom instructor, I found joy in our working together. I felt satisfaction in working with a fellow teacher to find ways for him to be more successful. I enjoyed the opportunity to affect students beyond the ones in my own classroom. Furthermore, I thrived under the faith that Edith and Patricia had placed on me, that I might be able to help another educator reach his potential in the classroom. I considered my earlier frustrations with the lack of collaboration, and yet my work with Terry restored my belief in its power. Working with him had also enabled me to reflect further on my own practice, raising my consciousness about what I was doing and the effect it was having on student engagement and achievement.

But I wondered, once more, why our collaboration and my designation as an official mentor were not the norms? Why did a teacher have to struggle before a department chair or a colleague became involved in helping a teacher grow and develop?

Why did the system seem to encourage isolation and "private practice" for teachers? And why when help was offered to Terry was he so hesitant to accept it? Was there an underlying sense of utter failure if he admitted he was struggling? Was that why I had left my first school—because it was easier to run from a stifling and oppressive environment than to do the hard work of trying to transform it? Was a teacher powerless?

Surprisingly, through this incident, I found my next career challenge: to become recommitted to the potential within a teaching career; to refocus my reflection and subsequent action toward a stance of emancipation for my students, my colleagues, and my school's organization; and to become a teacher to and for other teachers in my work as a teacher leader, first as a grade level chair, and, eventually, as a department chair.

## Implementing My Philosophical Stance in the Department Chair Role

My beliefs as an educational leader were shaped by many things; these vignettes help to show that and explain why I believe what I believe as well as illustrate my development as an educator and provide insight into several incidents that shaped my teaching philosophies. Becoming a department chair, however, I found that those philosophies needed revision and refinement for the context of the teacher leader role. As Fecho (2002) says, "Our practice is in constant flux because the world in which we [operate] is also in flux" (p. 4). As discussed in Chapter 1, I believed there was no one "best way" to be a teacher, and likewise, I believed that an educational leader such as a department chair was also always in what both Bakhtin (1981) and Freire (1970) described as a "state of becoming." Reflecting on early incidents in my life as a student and teacher, such as the ones presented here, helped me understand how difficult and multi-layered the work of an educator is. Contemplating moving into an educational

leadership role, I recognized that enacting the department chair role meant negotiating innumerable contingencies and complexities. In reflection, I sought to identify, to name, and to describe those fundamental beliefs, which would inform my practice as a department chair and help me negotiate the many "fluctuations" within that practice.

As a student in class with Isaac, I had seen the oppression that could exist within a school's hierarchical structure. Then, as I entered the classroom as a teacher, I came to realize that the oppressive and liberating tensions within that structure are omni-present and always in competition with one another. Whether the hierarchy existed between student to teacher, supervisor to employee, or more senior colleague to more novice one, the school's organization was replete with structures that worked to further an oppressive spirit that limited, unified, and silenced individual voices. In each situation, however, I saw opportunities to speak out or work against those elements and move others and myself toward greater emancipation. As I moved into a formal teacher leader position as department chair, I remained reflective about my past experiences and subsequent understandings. Through them, I wanted to remain cognizant of the past to make meaning in the present and for the future. I believed my past experiences heightened my awareness of my actions and the contexts in which I worked as I measured each against that history and then, built my subsequent educational philosophical beliefs.

This section, then, attempts to name and describe five foundational philosophic beliefs upon which I built my practice as a department chair. These beliefs served as a barometer against which I measured my shifting positionalities, interactions with other educators, and subsequent responses to the duties and responsibilities of my role as a department chair. In essence, they served as my personal theoretical framework. In

order to "see" how these beliefs were made manifest, I have included examples of the first four beliefs in action from my department chair experiences prior to the start of the study. A particular lived experience led to my latest hard-won fifth belief. Therefore, that experience is presented in more detail. These examples have been reconstructed from memory and are presented with analytical reflections to create deeper understanding of the underlying belief.

*Belief: The Department Chair Should Be a Facilitator*

I believed that the department chair should be a facilitator of and for teachers within a subject-area department rather than a supervisor or manager. For me, the term facilitator related to the aspects of the department chair's role that deals with curriculum and instructional issues, and material resources; it speaks to the organizational structure of the department, and to my employment of what Bolman and Deal (1997) describe as the "human resource frame," where I employed a more egalitarian sharing of power and work toward a participatory management style. Rather than serving as the head of a department's hierarchical structure and making all decisions concerning resources, I organized a flatter, more democratic structure to encourage more teacher involvement, shared leadership, and departmental buy-in. As a facilitator, I didn't merely lead the department; I worked to create an atmosphere where all could be leaders.

*The Belief in action.* When we opened our school in the fall of 2003, much work was needed to prepare for the first day of class: curriculum and instructional decisions needed to be planned and implemented; books and materials had to be unboxed, inventoried, and put into place; and classrooms needed assigning and arranging. Rather than delegating tasks to each department member, I brought the group together and

shared my understanding of what needed to be done. I asked them to consider their own past experiences to help me "trouble-shoot" pitfalls and think of other aspects of a department's operations that I had failed to consider. Together, we fleshed out the tasks, and then, I sought volunteers to lead the completion of each.

As preplanning for the year commenced, one curriculum aspect that concerned many in the department was our perception that students did not read enough, knowing that many did not come from "word-rich" environments. To address that concern and encourage students to read more, we developed an Independent Reading (IR) program as a required component in all classes. Typically, with such a large, department-wide curriculum requirement, the department chair might be the one to oversee the program. I, however, realized that others in the department had more expertise in this curriculum area, so I sought a program manager from among the department members. Daniel Manetti, a teacher with approximately twelve years of experience and an interest in student choice reading, asked to coordinate IR. He oversaw the entire program and became the "go-to" person for questions concerning reading.

As my department chair tenure continued, I sought more ways to serve as a helpmate to my peers. Rather than trying to be the "expert" on all matters of the department, I looked to others to showcase their knowledge and skills. In a department with shared leadership, all members were able to work together on all issues, and various members were able to develop their own leadership skills by overseeing various aspects of our division's organization and management. Through this design, all voices could be

heard and each member gained an opportunity to be an active contributor to and leader of our department. For me, I became one among many rather than remaining one above many.

*Belief: The Department Chair Should Be a Professional Developer*

The National Staff Development Council's goal is "all teachers in all schools will experience high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work" (NSDC website), and I believed that the department chair was responsible for seeking opportunities for continual professional learning being mindful and respectful of the constraints of the workday and school organization. Too often professional development is a one-sided monologue where outside experts come into schools to impart quick panaceas for various educational ills. Occasionally, teachers are sent to short sit-and-get sessions, filled with slick handouts and decontextualized lessons or ideas. For me, the department chair's role provided opportunity to encourage dialogue and have professional learning become part of all teachers' daily lives: teachers teaching teachers**.**

*The belief in action.* Department meetings provided the ideal forum for a department chair to live her professional developer role. Rather than merely imparting procedural instructions or making announcements during our monthly meetings, I used the time to encourage professional learning via reflection, conversation, and collaboration. At our first formal department meeting in the fall of 2003, I explained that I would disseminate all announcements and instructions by email or a detailed handout; I expressed my belief that our time was too valuable to waste on these aspects of administrivia. From that time on, each meeting's agenda allotted time to discussing teaching and learning (Appendix B).

As the department members became more comfortable with the idea that these sessions were for us to learn and grow, they also became more comfortable with presenting topics for discussion and being a part of the agenda development. In hallway conversations between classes and before and after school, several teachers began sharing their concerns with one another that many of their students were not strong critical readers, even some students who had been labeled by the state's criteria as gifted learners. As more teachers voiced similar concerns, I was approached by two teachers, who asked that our next department meeting be devoted to some additional training in teaching reading strategies by our school's reading specialists. Upon hearing the request, I immediately arranged for the training. The conversation that ensued two weeks later led all to an increased passion for and competence in reading instruction. The professional learning was a part of the workday, delivered in response to a repeatedly expressed need, presented by a colleague, and appropriate for immediate application.

*Belief: A Department Chair Should Be a Nurturer*

A department chair must not only work to encourage professional learning, but must also act as a nurturer of the other teachers within the subject-area department. Although the term nurturer might suggest a return to a subjugated and overly-feminized positionality as Grant and Murray (2002) suggest has plagued educators throughout public school history, I believed that the department chair position provided innumerable opportunities to view other teachers at work within a larger context, and through that broader view gain perspective on ways to help others capitalize on their individual strengths and find means to downplay their weaknesses. Therefore, for me, the term nurturer had an underlying sense of empowerment within it, and the department chair,

using her broader perspective, gained the opportunity to nurture others individually and give each access to greater self-empowerment.

*The belief in action.* Within six months of assuming the department chair role, I realized one teacher, MaryAnne Cohn, had twelve years of experience but had taught ninth grade for the duration of her career. MaryAnne's classroom and instructional styles could be described as legalistic. I saw her as a strict disciplinarian. On all assignments, she gave clear and precise instructions, yet her assessment of the students' work seemed to be based more on following procedures than on mastering skills or knowledge. As department chair, I was summoned to several conferences with counselors, administrators, and parents because of what was perceived as her unyielding nature and unreasonable practices.

Outside the classroom, I knew MaryAnne to be a warm, kind-hearted person; I watched her interact with her own children and her students outside of the classroom, and she was friendly and approachable. In our department meetings, MaryAnne eagerly talked with colleagues and wanted advice on lesson plans and assignments. During one meeting's reflective activity**,** she even confessed, "You all make me want to be a better teacher."

Observing MaryAnne within the classroom, however, I saw little cheer or relationship building. She was secure in her content, but seemed stiff when interacting with the students. As she and I talked, she repeatedly expressed that "teachers must prepare students for the real world" and she was "determined to create a work ethic in these kids." I also heard her express frustration over the lack of organization and silliness that she saw within her students. She could not understand how high school students

could care so little about school and learning, or how they could overlook all the efforts she took—daily updates on her website; clearly, spelled-out procedures; a detailed and specific classroom management plan—to help them be successful.

Upon reflection, I realized that MaryAnne's focus on the organizational details, repeatedly expressing the minutiae of her expectations had led her to miss the big picture of clear communication and the need to know her students as individuals. Those actions she saw as organizational helpmates were too often perceived by her students as harsh and unyielding roadblocks. Furthermore, the impetus for many of these "helpmates" were the actions of the students—the silliness, the disorganization, the focus on socialization—all qualities that are a part of many freshmen's daily struggles with high school responsibilities, hormonal and physical changes, and insecurities about identity. I reasoned that ninth graders might not be the best age group for MaryAnne's behavior expectations.

After she and I continued to have numerous conversations about her past and present work as a teacher, I encouraged her to reflect on her future goals. I also asked her to consider working with older students. At first, she was hesitant, claiming that she "liked ninth grade," but also admitting she was afraid to pick up a new preparation. I assured her that I would support her through the move and help her find a mentor within the department who could plan with her.

As she launched into the new curriculum area, she initially struggled with the new material, but she soon found that she did relate better with the students. By the end of the first term, she admitted that she "never wanted to go back to ninth grade" and that she was "glad" I had encouraged her to try something different. I soon noticed that her

classroom with the older students was more relaxed, and she was warmer to the more mature students. In essence, she seemed willing to be more creative with her instruction because she felt less need to control behavior. Rather than attempting to "fix" or correct her behaviors in a negative, top-down action, I tried to find ways to nurture her strengths; through that, I found a way for all to benefit.

*Belief: A Department Chair Should Be a Servant Leader*

Yet I believed that still more was required of a department chair than acting as a facilitator, professional developer, and nurturer. A department chair should also operate as a "servant leader" (Greenleaf, 1997), building trust, loyalty, and commitment within and among a subject-area department. Rather than acting from a place of self-interest, I believed a department chair must focus her work on others' needs. Therefore, I tried to find ways to build relationships, continually making deposits into others' "emotional bank accounts" as Covey (1989) describes them, showing others that I was there to help them in their efforts to be the best educator and professional they could be. In other words, I was a resource upon which they could depend to make their jobs more do-able.

*The belief in action*. During September of our school's first year, the assistant principal for curriculum and instruction informed me that an additional section of Senior Language Arts was needed a month into school. My task was to find a teacher within our department who would assume an "extended-day schedule." Relinquishing his or her planning period, this person would teach all day and receive minimal financial remuneration.

I presented the "opportunity" to two teachers who were currently teaching seniors, and both quickly refused. Approaching the final senior teacher, Kevin Miller—who also

taught a junior class and the newspaper course—I reasoned he might be willing; as the sole income provider for his wife and three small children, he often sought opportunities for additional income.

Approaching Kevin in the hallway after school one Friday, I asked him if we could speak privately. I saw nervousness in his eyes and noticed the exhaustion his entire carriage seemed to suggest. Shutting the door, I offered him the extended day. His facial expression spoke his response. As he struggled to find the words to explain his position, I knew that I had asked too much. I quickly reassured him, "Kevin, it's okay. Please don't feel bad. I'll work it out."

Leaving his room, I sensed that he felt guilt for not taking the position. I feared that the feelings created in this interaction would be spread if I presented the extended day to others, so I took the only course of action I could. I told the assistant principal that I would teach the class. She strongly advised against it, reminding me that I had department duties to fulfill and that I already had two other preparations.

"I just cannot ask others to take on more," I told her.

My sense of servant leadership made my decision clear; I must be the one to teach the extra class. As a part of the department, I could not ask of others what I was not willing to do myself. By retaining a servant stance throughout my time as department chair, I gained the respect and appreciation of the department's other teachers. Through my actions, I showed that I was willing to give my time and energy to support them and their efforts as educators.

*Belief: A Department Chair Should Be a Role Model of Learning*

In order to serve as a leader of teachers, I believed a department chair should always retain a passion for personal and professional growth and a commitment to lifelong learning. Although a department chair may be recognized for her experiences and knowledge as a teacher, she must be open to reflection and improvement, rejecting any notion that she has discovered the "best way" concerning any aspect of teaching or learning. To lead others—whether students, fellow teachers, or other educators—a department chair must show a consistent dedication to improving her skills and her pedagogical and content knowledge. By continually being open to new learning opportunities and eager to challenge one's self and one's mind with new ideas, new perspectives, and new experiences—a department chair encourages others toward such a stance.

*The belief in action.* From the start of my education career, I embraced the idea of my own continuing education. In my first ten years as a classroom teacher, I sought additional certifications and training, including gifted certification, training to work with both the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, and leadership certification. Near the end of the course that would complete my leadership certification training, the professor pulled me into the hallway and probed, "Have you ever considered getting your doctorate?"

His encouragement, offered as a near-challenge, reminded me of my commitment to a stance of lifelong learning. That same professor was the principal who hired me as a department chair only six months later. More than ever, I knew I should model my appreciation for continual learning. Although I knew the department chair role would be

more demanding of my time and energy, I retained my commitment to the doctorate, attending classes on a part-time basis to supplement my work as a department chair and teacher. I also continued to pursue other less formal professional learning opportunities.

For the other teachers, I became a visible representation of someone committed to her work as a teacher and department chair, who also enjoyed, grew from, and shared the benefits of continual learning. I lived my values and expectations through a commitment to organized education. I was department chair and teacher; moreover, I remained a student.

*Belief: The Department Chair Should be Friendly Rather than Become a Friend*

Finally, but perhaps of utmost importance, a department chair must build a friendly relationship with each member of her department, based on mutual understanding, appreciation, and trust, yet she must never become too close to prevent her from fulfilling the responsibilities of her role as they are defined by the administration or the role itself. I came to this belief the hard way—through painful, frightening, and potentially-damaging lived experience.

*The living that led to the belief.* When I first became department chair, I had the opportunity to hire most of the department's teachers, but one particular candidate, Lillian McCall, had already been hired from a feeder school. Getting to know her, I discovered we had much in common. We were the same age, had similar tastes in music, and were both animal lovers. Lillian had a great sense of humor and an infectious laugh, and quickly, we developed a friendship. She seemed to be a solid member of our department's team.

The second year, however, Lillian changed. Her dress at school became increasingly less professional, and rumors began circulating that her classroom was one where little was happening. She had begun graduate school, and I had heard her speak of the overwhelming workload, but it troubled me that it seemed to be affecting her classroom and students. I tried to speak with her one evening, but her eyes filled with tears, and I backed away from the conversation, sensing that she was really struggling.

A week later, my phone rang. On the other end, Lillian was sobbing ferociously. She had left her house and was driving; her husband was leaving. Barely able to understand her, I knew she was in trouble, so I invited her to my house to talk. When she arrived a short time later, I listened, trying to console her. I desperately wanted to be there for her and be her friend.

Over the next few months, Lillian's work ethic worsened to the point that her students did seatwork daily as she sat at her computer, doing graduate work. Rumors suggested she had "cut a deal" with her students that if they "left her alone" and completed their packets, they were "guaranteed the grade they wanted." Making matters worse, she began calling in sick more often. One day, she did not come in at all. Calling her house to check on her, she screamed into the phone that she was "sick" and "just couldn't make it in." I knew she was crying and felt sorry she was suffering, but I reminded her of her responsibility to ensure her classes were monitored by a substitute. She slammed down the phone in response. Was I adding to her suffering and hurting a friend, or was I being remiss in my responsibilities as a department chair by not doing more? Was I guilty of succumbing to hearsay about a colleague, or had I failed as a supervisor by not having first-hand knowledge of what was happening in her classroom?

In early May, the situation escalated. While working at my computer during my planning period, I heard yelling from the hallway. As I arose to see what was going on, my door swung open and one of the male teachers, Chris Danillo—also one of Lillian's friends—bolted in with Lillian chasing behind him. She was screaming at Chris and flailing her arms. She accused him of "making her look bad" and "being a back-stabber."

I was shocked at the fight I saw unfolding before me. Rather than seeing two professional educators whom I considered to be friends, I felt like I was watching two children at battle. Their words and the volume of their exchange made the surreal scene more severe and frightening. Although I didn't know what had started the argument, I knew I had to de-escalate the situation. I yelled "Shut up" to both of them.

Lillian's head snapped toward me, and I saw true hatred in her eyes as she fixed them on me, "What did you say?" she scowled.

"I'm done with you," Chris said to Lillian, adding, "I'm out of here," as he quickly escaped from the room, slamming the door behind him.

My heart pounded, as I feared Lillian's anger would be redirected toward me; all I wanted was for her to calm down. I was scared by what I had witnessed and unsure what would happen next. At the same time, I thought, how had I ever thought of someone like Lillian as a friend? Moreover, how had I allowed her to be in a classroom with students? I knew I needed to get her out of the building and away from other teachers and students. I continued to try to calm her and suggested that she "check out" for the remainder of the day and that we'd "talk about it all when we weren't so emotional." She agreed and left the campus immediately.

In my efforts to be Lillian's friend and to be sympathetic toward her situation, I had been blind to the situation's reality and how it affected the department, the school, her students, and me. With regard to this situation, I had failed as a department chair.

Perhaps no scenario or situation affected my department chair work as much as my dealings with Lillian. In the end, my own failure to maintain some distance between the teachers and myself compromised my ability to perform my duties. Although I remained committed to building relationships with the department's teachers, encouraging collaboration, collegiality, and shared governance, I learned that I must remain detached enough to avoid personal feelings interfering with the responsibilities of the role. I came to believe that although a department chair is a part of the teaching corps, she must remain apart from it in order to be able to perform her duties in difficult times.

## The Significance of These Lived Experiences

Calling again on my educational belief in the theories of constructivism, each of the experiences described led me to become the type of educational leader I was at the time of this study. From my early influences in the classroom to the first tastes of teacher leadership—its politics and its potentiality—I continued to grow and morph from these first-hand experiences and by what I had witnessed others experiencing. Prior to assuming the department chair position, I had seen as student and teacher that the classroom and the school is a place of power. Yet the use of the power—to enable and empower or to isolate, berate, and oppress—was dependent upon the educator. I was determined to be conscientious in my department chair role to keep issues of power under

critique and to remain committed to promoting an educational environment that was collaborative, democratic, and beneficial for all members of the community.

Through the blending of lived experience, educational research, and my own reflections, I came to define, embrace, and operate under the five philosophies described here and used them to guide my work as a department chair in the time prior to and throughout the study. Recognizing that the enacting of the department chair role is riddled with complexities and contingencies, I knew there was no formula that would guarantee success. Instead, my own philosophies guided my actions and provided means to measure those actions' effectiveness in preparation for each subsequent situation. Furthermore, they allowed me to gain clarity of my identity as a classroom teacher, a collaborative colleague, and an educational leader and provided me a lens through which I could observe myself in each of those positions. By offering these vignettes, reflections, and beliefs, I have attempted to provide the reader a glimpse of who I was, what I believed, and how those positionalities manifested themselves in my work during the time of this study. *Yeki bood.*

# CHAPTER 4

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

## Introduction

The study's purpose was to examine how I, as a department chair and teacher leader, in one public high school (grades 9-12) used reflective practice as a method of action research to inform and negotiate the multiplicity of my position as part-administrator, part-colleague, and part-teacher. I also examined how a department chair, committed to an educational philosophy that promotes a democratic space open to growth for all members of the learning community, dealt with the hierarchies within her positions and the organization's structure. As stated in Chapter 2, an extensive literature review did not yield a single study that focused on a department chair's lived experiences from the *emic,* or insider's, perspective of the department chair. As a practitioner researcher, I used an action research self-study approach to document, describe, and interrogate my daily lived experiences.

Chapter 4 is devoted to descriptions of (1) the methodology behind the research, (2) the research design and its trustworthiness, (3) the research questions, (4) the research context, (5) the research participant and co-participants, (6) the data collection procedures, (7) the data analysis methods, and (8) the limitations of the study.

## The Self-Study Dissertation: Qualitative Action Research as Methodology

I began this project with the intention of aligning my practice more closely with my values. As a scholar, it was necessary to interrogate the spaces of tension between

my philosophical intentions and my actions; as a self-described reflective practitioner, it was important for me to continue the work of improving my practice. The core of action research's methodology requires continual "revisiting of issues and practices [for the purpose of building] a new kind of theory-practice relationship" (Noffke, 1995, p. 5). As such, action research resonated with Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) and Freire's (1970) ideas of "becoming" as were described in the theoretical framework in Chapter 1. Furthermore, believing that each interaction with a student, colleague, parent, or superior required an educator to consider the context and situation at hand, measure it against past experiences and knowledge (the theory), and enact a new action (the practice), the methodology of action research seemed in harmony with Freire's (1970) ideas of praxis. I also saw it as a way to engage in dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) with my work and context, seeking new understandings of my role and its potential.

But I believed the study must also reach farther, to be more than what Mills (2003) refers to as "any systematic inquiry" (p. 5) into my practice. Given my critical theory framework and my positioning as a researcher, the study should serve a larger purpose than merely building my own knowledge base; it must speak to others and provide "both the impetus and the blueprint for change" (Mullen & Kealy, 2005, p. 156) of the department chair role and practices, and perhaps for its place in the larger educational community. Because "action research involves the improvement of practice, of the understanding of practice, and of the situations in which practice occurs" (Noffke, 1995, p. 5), as a practitioner researcher, I believed that the methodology spoke to my desire not only to describe my work as it occurred, but also to be continually mindful of improving that work, even as it occurred.

Appreciating Stringer's (1993) notion that action research can be emancipatory and socially responsive in scope, I believed it was an appropriate methodology for my critical framework and commitment to improvement of my context and myself. Also, believing that all occurrences are affected by their contexts, action research's stance—that all findings and implications from the study are tentative in nature—offered more opportunities for additional critique rather than serving as an attempt to disclose or find fixed, unified, permanent answers or solutions.

*Conceptions of Action Research*

According to McKernan (1991), all action research seeks to "solve the immediate pressing day-to-day problems of practitioners" (p. 3). Originally defined and theorized by Lewin (1946, 1948), action research was described as a cycle of inquiry where a practitioner *plans-acts-observes-reflects*, to solve problems in real life situations, leading to organizational development and learning through the application of various actions to situations to evaluate their effects. Argyris and Schön (1974) later criticized Lewin's work, suggesting that enacting his theories led to short-term interventions and did not encourage sustained "continuous organizational learning" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 11). Despite those criticisms, Lewin's theory provided a means to begin democratizing the workplace and lay the theoretical foundations for researching from within a context and local problem solving by professionals in action. Since that initial theory, however, action research has broadened in scope to include various conceptions in numerous fields.

*Technical conceptions of educational action research.* Research indicates that educators have conducted research within their own classrooms since the late nineteenth century (McKernan, 1988). Corey's (1953) work at Columbia Teachers College—where

outside researchers worked with inside practitioners, collectively engaged in "local problem solving" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 12)— brought qualitative practitioner research into the forefront of educational scholarship. In this conception, which Masters (1995) labeled "Type 1: Technical," the outside researcher determined the intervention to be used, and then, brought the practitioner into the process. Without a collaborative effort, the researcher still held eminence as the overseer of knowledge generation. Other researchers throughout the 1950s (e.g., Shumsky, 1958; Taba & Noel, 1957) used action research as a strategy for creating generalizable techniques and strategies for teacher use in particular contexts to improve curriculum and instruction. Interest in action research in the U.S. waned in the 1960s and 1970s, though, perhaps due to an increased demand for pure positivist-empirical forms of educational research.

*Practical conceptions of educational action research.* Action research gained international prominence in the mid-1970s when it became a more interpretive theory of practice moving from a top-down oriented process to a means for teachers to work through "moral deliberations" within their practice (Elliott, 1987). The "Type 2: Practical" (Masters, 1995) conception of action research allowed researchers and practitioners to work together, identifying problems, examining underlying causes, and searching for possible interventions. This conception also moved action research from a group focus, working for generalizable solutions, to an individual focus, seeking context-specific understandings and responses. Recapturing the "moral basis of teaching" (Noffke, 1997, p. 328), action research's practical conception encouraged teachers to become problem-solvers and knowledge-producers in their own contexts. Schön's (1983) *Reflective Practitioner* brought a new paradigm to action research, wherein the

reflective-deliberative action became as important or moreso than other aspects of the inquiry process with a commitment to allowing the process to unfold naturally rather than being constrained by a rigidly-controlled series of steps or spirals as conceived by early researchers.

*Emancipatory conceptions of educational action research.*. "Critical-Emancipatory Action Research" (Masters, 1995) began with the work of Australian researchers Kemmis and McTaggert, and through a Critical Theory lens, this conception views teachers as research participants for the purpose of moving toward greater human emancipation even as they work to improve "the rationality and justice of their own social practices" (Kemmis & McTaggert, 1988, p. 5). Zeichner and Gore (1995) called for a furtherance of Critical Action Research, promoting a social reconstructionist approach that is emancipatory in nature by contributing to "the elimination of the social conditions that distort the self-understanding of teachers and undermine the educative potential and moral basis of schooling" (p. 19). With a "goal of liberation through knowledge gathering," Critical or Emancipatory Action Research is a highly interpretive and individualistic form of research. Involving a dynamic relationship between theory and practice, and expanding both, practitioners seek to understand their actions in their social contexts, work to uncover and dismantle constraints to equity within the context, and move all participants to a more egalitarian space, open for full participation.

*Educational action research today.* Regardless, Noffke (1995) argues that at the end of the twentieth century, an "absence" (p. 4) of practitioner action research work which addressed social justice remained; instead, the majority of the action research literature deals with questions of personal development and professional knowledge.

Interest in action research remains high, however, appearing in recent educational research literature under a number of identifiers, including practitioner research (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994), teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Fecho, 1995, 2004; Hubbard & Power, 1999), participatory action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), action science (Argyris & Schön, 1991), and self-study research (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Furthermore, action research has become one of the most visible forms of reflective practice and practitioner inquiry throughout education (e.g., Hatton & Smith, 1994; Lesnick, 2005; Pereira, 1999), and according to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), teachers inquiring into their own work remains one of the "promising avenues" (p. 22) for creating fundamental educational change.

*The Action Research Conception for this Study*

The conception of action research with which I approached this study resonated with Noffke's (1995) notion that action research takes "everyday things in the life of education and unpack[s] them for their historical and ideological baggage" (p. 5). As McKernan (1991) suggests, action research breaks down the theory-practice divide; this resonated with my Critical Theory frame and commitment to critical inquiry through praxis.

Adapting Kemmis and McTaggert's (1988) understanding, I defined action research as self-reflective inquiry undertaken in a particular social context in order to improve the rationality and justice of my own educational and leadership practices. By doing so, I developed a deeper understanding of the practices and the situations in which these practices were carried out to better interrogate the social context and move it to a more democratic place.

Following Noffke's (1997) understanding that all versions of action research have "professional, personal, and political dimensions" (p. 305), action research as my study's methodology provided the means to interrogate and develop my practice in all three dimensions. From a professional dimension, action research allowed me to reconnect with Dewey's (1933) value of the human experience for generating knowledge. Rather than conducting a study outside my role as practitioner or one in abstraction, action research allowed me to work on the work I lived daily. Too, it afforded me means to build upon my professionalism, releasing me from anticipating some hierarchically-imposed training on how to do department chair work or live the department chair role.

In the personal dimension, action research gave me space to explore the "layers of the self" (Noffke, 1997, p. 329), systematically examining my roles as teacher, department chair, colleague, and person. Further, it offered a lens to better understand my work through seeking out a deeper awareness of the contradictions between my espoused theories and my lived practice (Gore & Zeichner, 1991; Zeichner, 1993). Like Feldman (2002), I saw aspects of action research as an existential practice; as such, the methodology provided means to gain insights and awareness of my situation and myself that liberated me to embrace my ability to choose the way I would be and act within my particular context.

Finally, from the political dimension, action research provided the means for me to work as Noffke (1997) suggests toward greater power over my own work. The theoretical frame with which I approached this study was distinctly political in nature because I wanted to interrogate the issues of power and hierarchy and examine my role within that structure. For me, action research as a methodology was an act of resistance

against the rising tide of the standards movement in education and the decreased professional autonomy under such legislation as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and other state and locally constructed mandates. Through it, I was empowered to enact a study whereby I became the generator of knowledge that could help me understand and enact my role better while also interrogating the very structures that worked to limit that role. In a critical view, action research gave me room to work against the bureaucracy of my context and toward professional emancipation for my colleagues and myself.

## The Research Design of the Study

The research design was a qualitative action research self-study based in the origins of action research theory as identified by Lewin (1946) and enacted in a process similar to Kemmis and McTaggert's (1988) structure of a series of reflective spirals: beginning with the development of a general plan, action, observation, and then, reflection on that action leading to a new revised plan. Having identified several improvement areas within my department chair work through various reflective and evaluative means prior to beginning data collection, my past experience and the professional literature provided rich sources of suggested actions to increase my effectiveness as a department chair and instructional leader. Using an action-research design, I enacted ideas from these sources with my work, and then, and through reflective practice, I attempted to study systematically the effects of those suggested actions as I worked to provide greater support for the department's teachers and develop a deeper understanding of my department chair role and work. Each subsequent change in action led to new opportunities for reflection on that action as the study ensued. Furthermore, as a study framed by Critical Theory, I used reflective practice to interrogate the effects of a

hierarchical organizational management structure and how that affected my work as practitioner and researcher within that structure.

*The Research Questions*

1. What does it mean for a department chair to negotiate her role within the context of a school community that holds complex and simultaneous conflicting notions of that role?
2. In what ways does reflective practice enable that negotiation?

*Data Collection*

Using a qualitative action research approach to study my work as a high school department chair, I collected data through: (1) an initial survey of the teachers within the department, (2) a professional reflective journal, (3) various artifacts and emails regarding my department chair work, (4) two video-recordings of my work as a supervisor, (5) two interviews conducted with the former and current principal of the school, and (6) a personal action log. Throughout the study, I maintained a stance of reflective inquiry, open to additional data collection opportunities and methods, which emerged as the study ensued. I examined how these reflective practices as data collection methods helped me negotiate the multiplicity of my position as part-administrator, part-supervisor, part-teacher, and part-researcher/student; fulfill my responsibilities as instructional leader; and work toward greater professional learning for the department members and me.

*Attitudinal surveys.* At the start of the data collection in August 2006, I asked each teacher within the Language Arts department to anonymously complete a written attitudinal survey (Appendix C) and provide some initial information on their

understandings of a department chair's responsibilities and her potential in the role as an instructional supervisor, lead teacher, and professional developer. My intent was to gain a baseline understanding of the department members' expectations of the department chair position in general and what they expected from me as I enacted that role.

*Professional reflective journal.* Throughout the data collection phase of the study (August to December), I maintained a professional reflective journal in which I described various events in my job as a department chair. Within that journal, I reflected upon those events and pondered future actions, responses, and goals in response to those reflections. My initial intent was to write daily in that journal, but by the end of the study, I was writing in it bi-weekly due to the overwhelming time requirements of my many roles as department chair, teacher, and scholar.

*Two interviews with principals.* I conducted two individual face-to-face interviews, one with the school's current principal and one with the former principal, who had hired me as department chair. Each interview was conducted with the same interview protocol (Appendix D) and sought to determine the principals' understandings of and intentions for the department chair role and its enactment as a part of the school's organizational structure and instructional focus. Furthermore, I wanted to hear in their own words how they defined a department chair's role in comparison to a teacher leader and an administrator, and how they understood the ways a department chair figures into professional learning within a school.

The first interview with Dr. David Sparks, the current principal, took place in late October 2006, and the second interview with Dr. Charles Keats, the former principal, took place in early December 2006. Fieldnotes were taken during the interviews, and the

interviews were audiotaped. Then, the tapes were transcribed after the interviews were completed. Interviewees were given copies of the transcripts and allowed to revise them as they saw fit. Neither requested any change.

*Department meetings.* Two department meetings, which remained the central vehicle for me to communicate face-to-face with the department members and attempt to enact whole-group supervision and professional learning opportunities, were videotaped. The department met once a month between August and December, but because videotaping causes anxiety for some people and because there were a number of less experienced people within the department, I waited until the department had established some level of trust prior to videotaping a meeting. Hence, the meetings in October and December were videotaped. The camera's focus during both meetings was targeted on me as the central participant, but all voices could be heard. The videotapes were subsequently transcribed and shared with participants of the meeting for comments or revisions. Again, none were received.

*Artifacts, including emails.* Throughout the study, I collected all artifacts (including email correspondence and handouts) pertaining to my work as a department chair. I maintained weekly files in which I stored the artifacts. These weekly files were later collapsed during the early analysis as I sorted the documents by their type and content (e.g., weekly administrative bulletins, department meeting agendas, test data handouts, etc.).

*Professional activity log.* During the last two weeks of the data collection, I added to my data sources a professional activity log in which I attempted to detail my actions and interactions with others as closely as possible (Appendix E). As I had

continued to read and reflect through my professional reflective journal, I realized that I did not have a clear or objective picture of myself at work. I wanted to gain a more "outside" view of myself in action and wanted to determine a more precise picture of a day in my life by recording how my time was spent and on what aspects of my role. Therefore, I added the additional data collection method of maintaining a daily professional activity log to attempt to gain a more specific view of my day's activities.

*Obstacles to the data collection.* The data collection within this action research self-study had some inherent obstacles. The most apparent was the need to enact co-commitant roles as both practitioner and researcher with personal resources. Pairing the complexities of the department chair role with the limits of time and energy, I often found myself, throughout the data collection, conflicted by the need to focus on the data collection per se or on the reflections required by action research in preparation for subsequent action. At the same time, I navigated the pressures of living and responding in-the-moment to the responsibilities of the role as it unfolded in real time. Furthermore, there were added layers of complication in that although I was a department chair and had responsibilities based on that role, I was also a classroom teacher and had obligations to the students for whom I was acting as instructor, mentor, and assessor. Demands upon my time, energy, and well-being were extreme, and regardless of my original intentions, I found it impossible to be entirely consistent in the ways I enacted any of my roles.

Despite these obstacles to data collection, as the practitioner researcher, I had a distinct advantage that I believe outweighed the obstacles. I lived the data: as an insider and as the primary participant, I was continually in the midst of data collection, recording it, analyzing it, responding to it, reframing it, and starting out anew with new forms of

data collection. While a university researcher would have only a few or limited opportunities to observe and record a department chair's experiences, I had exponentially more opportunities for data collection as I enacted the various roles, and I found the various ways I listed above as means to make records of my actions and responses throughout the study's data collection frame.

*Timeframe of the data collection.* As mentioned previously, the actual data gathering began in August 2006 and continued throughout the school term, ending in December 2006. On the 4X4 block schedule, this single term consisted of the starting of school, meeting of students, and completion of four full courses by students, culminating in final course exams prior to the winter break. The fall term was the time when departmental and school policies for the year were solidified and put into motion. With that, there is no attempt to suggest that this study was an ethnography of the culture under construction in this context. Instead, I borrowed some ethnographic methods to create a systematic and intentional way to examine my practice.

*Data Analysis*

As a self-described reflective practitioner, various reflective practices, such as the professional reflective journal, served a "blurry" role in this study, becoming both a data collection process as well as a form of data analysis. This resonated with the way data analysis exists as an ongoing process for the action researcher (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) as she attempts to determine her next courses of action. Because this was an action research study conducted by a reflective practitioner, it was inappropriate to suggest that data analysis began only when the data collection phase of the study was over. Instead, from the moment data collection began, I studied, read, and

began initial categorizing in initial data analyses, even as I continued to seek additional data sources and determine my next course of lived response.

When the formal data collection ended in December 2006, I became more focused on data analysis, employing inductive qualitative procedures. However, because I was still living the department chair role, my lived experiences continued to affect my understandings of and thinking about the data. I repeatedly read the transcripts of the recorded material (the interviews and the department meetings) and other pieces of data, sorted them, placed them into some initial broad categories, and screened them for their applicability to the study's specific research questions. Although all sources could have provided additional insight, for the purpose and timeframe limitations of this dissertation, I limited the pieces used in the full analysis to the principals' interviews, the department meetings' transcripts, and my reflective professional journal. The selected documents were read multiple times, recurrent themes were noted, and instances of tension were compared to the themes.

As I began to identify the recurring themes, I noticed there were a number of critical incidents described and discussed at length within my professional reflective journal. These incidents, described by Graham (as cited in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001) as "nodal moments," were points of crisis where my understanding of the department chair role and its expectations "underwent a wrenching" (p. 16). Those events—which I later rewrote into narrative scenes—created a need to stop and reflect on how the context was shifting or how my actions were in need of revision. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest, humans are "storytelling organisms" (p. 2) who make meaning of our past lived experiences through stories. In "restorying" the critical incidents, I also

analyzed them by writing my way to "knowing," as Richardson (1994, p. 923) suggests, how they related to the recurring themes from the data set and what insights they offered about my practice, my department chair role, and the school's shifting organizational structure. The scenes provided another perspective to view the situation and my actions within that situation and to interrogate the significance of these events, which helped me make meaning of those lived experiences.

The most consequential aspect to my data analysis was my use of elements of Bakhtinian (1981, 1986) and Freirean (1970) theory as a lens to make meaning of the department chair role and work as well as the context as the data set and initial analyses portrayed and discussed them. I used writing as a method of discovery (Patrick, 2007; Richardson, 2001), employing ideas from the Bakhtin's and Freire's theories to "read" my lived experiences and subsequent reflections with new eyes, drawing conclusions about the notions of power, positionality, and potential within my department chair role and work and the context in which it was enacted.

In an effort to triangulate my interpretations, I sought the input of various critical friends to keep the presentation of my understandings "authentic" and make sure they would "ring true" as Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) insist self-studies should. Throughout the analysis, I also continually employed the theoretical frame of critical inquiry to provide an ongoing interrogation of my assumptions and understandings about the data.

As the practitioner researcher, I dove into the contingencies, attempting to remain mindful of "how complicated and contingent the work of reflection is" (Lesnick, 2005, p. 45). Throughout the analysis, I tried to pay attention to what was in the data, and mindful

that my own biases, past experiences, and/or desired outcomes might project interpretation onto the data. I conducted member checks (Glesne, 1999) and worked with three critical friends (Costa & Kallick, 1993) to try to maintain a "critical spirit" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 24) to my analytical and interpretive work.

## Situating the Study: Its Multi-Dimensional Settings

### *The Larger Context: A Profile of the School District*

This study took place in the largest school system in a mostly suburban county of northeast Georgia. The school district was composed of 106 schools and other educational facilities, designed to serve an estimated 151,000-plus students during the 2006-07 school year. Attendance zones, determined by geographical boundaries, were called clusters. Each cluster included three to six elementary schools, one or two middle schools, and one high school. The system's explosive growth in student population during the previous decade necessitated the formation of three new clusters, including the building of three additional high schools. The study was set in one of those new schools, Peachtree Ridge High School (PRHS), which opened its doors in the fall of 2003.

### *The School Context: Peachtree Ridge High School*

Because this was an action research self-study, I made no attempt to disguise the school in which I worked as the department chair. Instead, I presented the school, its history, its organization, and its leaders as I understood them, attempting to provide rich description that permitted me to paint a full picture of the setting. I did, however, give pseudonyms to the various people within that setting, and in several cases, I altered or combined specific details about the individuals or their situations, creating composite

characters to protect people's specific identities as much as possible while still remaining true to the events that occurred.

The construction of Peachtree Ridge High School (PRHS) began in March 2001, and Dr. Charles Keats was named the founding principal in November 2002. As such, he was charged with creating a community where previously there had been none, bringing unity to the cluster, and providing the students with an education, on par with the system, which operated under the mission of "pursu[ing] excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards" (GCPS website). The pressures of Bakhtin's (1981) authoritative discourse and its movement toward unification and standardization were at work in the larger context in which the school of study was situated. Dr. Keats began hiring for the school in January of 2003, and I was hired as the Language Arts Department Chair in February 2003.

While still enacting my role as a high school language arts teacher in another school within the district, I began to work with Dr. Keats and a small leadership cohort who had been hired to interview others and staff the school. Hiring was conducted in three-person teams, composed of an administrator, a department chair, and one other faculty member. Within each interview, the interview teams had been instructed by the principal to convey the expectations that the faculty and staff would be committed to a collaborative learning community, organized around the ideas of shared leadership and continual professional learning to ensure that all children had opportunities to learn. Expectations also included each staff member's involvement in the school's community beyond the classroom walls, whether as coaches or club/extra-curricular sponsors.

In assembling the staff and setting the tone for the school's opening, Dr. Keats established the school's mission as "teaching all students to read, write, speak, listen, and problem solve effectively," and repeatedly reminded the faculty, parents, students, and community of PRHS's promise to generate "another chapter of successes [and] another indelible mark on the community" (PRHS website). Dr. Keats' original vision and expectations resonated with Bakhtin's (1981) ideas of dialogism and Freire's (1970) notions of revolutionary leadership.

*The school's demographics and organization.* When the school opened its doors on August 11, 2003, the district had projected its enrollment at approximately 1500 students; however, nearly 1800 students arrived that first day. More than 300 students had no class schedule and were sent home until the counselors and administrators could find time to register them. The much larger-than-expected enrollment numbers necessitated hiring more than 10 additional teachers, some of whom were not in place until after the Labor Day holiday.

*Demographics of students and faculty.* Although the staff anticipated a mostly white, upper-middle class student population based on the district's projections, many were surprised by not only the size of our student population, but also the demographic diversity in race and social-economic status. At the study's onset in August 2006, the student population had almost doubled in size and the diversity had continued to grow, shifting from a student population that was 52% white in 2003, to one with 54% identifying as a racial or ethnic minority (Figure 4.1).

| | Fall, 2003 | Fall, 2006 |
|---|---|---|
| Total Faculty & Staff | 159 | 277 |
| Total Certified Faculty | 111 | 183 |
| Total Student Enrollment | 1879 | 2965 |
| ESOL | 8% | 8% |
| Special Education | 0% | 8% |
| Free/Reduced Lunch | 17% | 20% |
| American Indian | 0% | 0% |
| Asian | 22% | 23% |
| Black | 16% | 19% |
| Hispanic | 8% | 10% |
| White | 52% | 46% |
| Multiracial | 2% | 2% |

*Figure 4.1:* School Total Population and Student Population Demographics

Furthermore, the faculty and staff had vastly increased in size, creating issues of population management (Figure 4.1). As administrators tried to maintain some sense of order with the centripetal forces of the authoritative voice (Bakhtin, 1981) and various organizational structures, the increase in population size and the changes in demographics opened possibilities for the centrifugal tensions of diversity and stratification of ideas to move the school away from its original local and district conceptions.

*School management.* The staff and faculty were originally organized into 9 academic subject areas and 9 support areas, from which at least one representative met weekly as a Leadership Team to discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment as well as community issues. Academic department chairs were designated as the subject area representatives to the Leadership Team. But Dr. Keats made it clear that all Leadership Team meetings were open forums for all faculty and staff members, and participation was encouraged for all, and numerous other school faculty members did attend at various times.

The school's continued growth led to an additional division within the management structure, so that by the time of the study, the Leadership Team was made up of representatives from 10 academic subject areas and 9 support areas, and the various areas had grown significantly in size (Figure 4.2). Although continuing efforts had been made to recruit and employ teachers and staff members who mirrored the students' diversity, the majority of the faculty and staff remained white (89%) and female (69%). The vast majority of the diversity within the faculty and staff was found in the support areas of the nutritional and custodial staffs. A department chair was hired to supervise each academic subject area. Depending on the number of teachers within the department and responsibilities required of the department chairs, some department chairs received daily release time to accomplish some of their duties (Figure 4.2).

| *Academic Subject Areas* | *Size 2003* | *Size 2006* | *Support Area* | *Size 2003* | *Size 2006* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Business & Technical Education | 9 | 15 | Administration | 7 | 10 |
| ESOL | 13 | 8* | Counseling | 4 | 7 |
| Foreign Language | 0 | 13 | Media Services | 2 | 3 |
| Fine Arts | 8 | 13 | Nutrition Services | 12 | 19 |
| *Language Arts | 14* | 24* | Clerical Services | 11 | 20 |
| *Mathematics | 13* | 26* | Custodial Services | 17 | 17 |
| Physical Education | 8 | 10 | Technology Services | 2 | 4 |
| *Science | 11* | 23* | School Safety Services | 1 | 2 |
| *Social Studies | 15* | 29* | Community School | 1 | 2 |
| *Special Education (includes paraprofessionals) | 11* | 32* | | | |

*Figure 4.2:* Faculty and Staff Organization and Population (asterisks denote the areas in which department chairs were granted release time)

Under the auspices of maximizing instructional time by decreasing the number of class changes and offering students more opportunities for explorations of electives or advanced study in certain subjects, the founding principal instituted a 4X4 block schedule, with each student taking four classes per semester, studying a full year's

curriculum in one term's time. Each class met for approximately 90 minutes, and full-time teachers taught 3 classes each day and had 90 minutes for daily planning or professional learning, and providing time for collaboration. This same bell schedule remained in place during the timeframe of the study.

*An institution for academic, arts, and athletics.* As a part of the school's initial organization, the founding principal worked with a number of prominent parents and community members to establish the PRHS Foundation, a non-profit organization whose mission was "to create and maintain a community for the Peachtree Ridge Cluster of Schools in their quest for excellence in academics, arts and athletics, while maintaining excellence and integrity in all endeavors" (PRFoundation website). This group worked to raise funds to provide additional resources for the cluster schools's programs in addressing the needs of the whole child, both within the classroom and in extra-curricular endeavors. Because many parents and community members had made significant financial contributions to the Foundation and school throughout its first three years, many expected a great return on their investments and had been disappointed by the school's initial academic testing reports. By the start of this study, however, many parents and community members were pleased with the progress the school had posted, but the expectations to do even more remained intact. Once more, the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) sounded from outside the school, creating tensions on its practices and personnel.

*Sacred Monday afternoons.* Another structure and expectation initially put into place was the requirement of Monday afternoons as mandatory professional learning meetings. Each was designated for one of the following types of meetings: whole

department, whole faculty, or small collaborative departmental groups. These meetings were to be focused on curriculum-based collaboration and professional learning. Once-a-month faculty meetings were devoted to various professional learning activities, ranging from student-teacher demonstrations to small group discussions followed by whole group presentations to whole-faculty book studies.

Department chairs facilitated monthly departmental professional learning meetings, and on the remaining two Mondays of each month, the language arts department's teachers were divided into grade level/curriculum-based groups. As department chair, I appointed grade-level chairs to serve as facilitators of these groups. The collaborative meetings were opportunities for teachers with common curricula to discuss their courses, lesson plans, assessments, and students' progress to find means to better serve their students and yield higher levels of achievement. These meetings were scheduled from 2:30 – 4 p.m. and entailed a commitment beyond the traditionally contracted day, which ended at 3 p.m. Shortly after the school opened, Mondays became designated as "sacred" by the faculty and staff as we knew and accepted the expectation that our after-school time on those days would be devoted to professional learning meetings.

Numerous other opportunities for professional learning were also offered to and expected of the faculty, including participation in the school's peer coaching program. Dr. Keats encouraged attending and presenting at various local, regional, and national educational conferences by providing funding for those who were interested in doing so. Finally, he established monthly faculty-led, small group discussion meetings, where the faculty discussed the latest trends in educational policy and their effects in the classroom.

Dr. Keats provided a stipend for those who consistently participated in the meetings. Because this professional development meeting structure had been in place since the school's inception, in three years it had become the "norm" for professional learning at PRHS.

*The Context for My Work as a Department Chair*

Dr. Keats' direction provided incredible amounts of flexibility, tolerance, and empowerment for all members of what he described as our "learning community." Concerning his ideas about leading a school, he said in an interview,

> I used to think that if I could get people all thinking the way I think, okay, I would have a great school, and then, I learned that I have to get people who think completely different from me in order to have a great school You have to have that difference of opinion and you've got to have people who are willing to stand up and articulate that.

Believing and repeatedly expressing that all educators work "from the concept of autonomy," he viewed leadership as engaging individuals with the oft-repeated, passionate expression of a vision, and then, providing space to enact the vision. He described his style as "democratic leadership," aimed at giving all members of the learning community—teachers, department chairs, administrators, students, and parents—a voice in the school's daily and long-term operations.

As a department chair, under Dr. Keats' leadership, I wrestled with the freedom and ambiguity of my role. At times, I wanted him to be more forthright, more exacting. Following hooks' (1994) model of a conversation between positionalities and adapted from Ellis & Griffin's (2000) self-reflective interview exercise, I noted in a reflective

interview between my two positionalities as researcher and practitioner, that in my role as a department chair,

> In one fell swoop, I went from being a teacher in a large department . . . to the facilitator and guide for an entire faculty and the mouthpiece of all literacy initiatives. The stress was extreme, for I knew that each of my decisions and subsequent presentations had an immediate and deep effect on the entire faculty. It was also exhilarating; for the first time in my career, I felt like I had a principal who believed in me, who challenged and encouraged me, and who made me believe that school was a place where students and adults alike could work toward making all possibilities, all dreams a reality . . . [but] he never told me what my role was, [so] I felt like it entailed anything and everything that I saw as needing to be done.

Although I had initially entered the department chair position under the assumption that it would "give me more control," I found myself "beholden to everyone." By the third year of my work as a department chair, I had finally embraced the full range of the position. Dr. Keats' "democratic leadership" created a space to sound my voice and feel my agency within that setting.

*Changes in the context.* Although change is a constant in any context, the shift was more dramatically felt when Dr. Keats fell ill in the school's third year and left the principalship. Dr. David Sparks was appointed principal in January 2006, creating a shift in the performances of the entire staff. As Dr. Sparks became more assertive in his leadership, he announced to the school's Leadership Team that he would use the summer

of 2006 to “solidify processes and procedures” for the school, and that throughout the subsequent year, he would help us “get the house in order,” suggesting that the school’s management needed what Bakhtin (1981) described as a push from the centripetal forces; Dr. Sparks’ intent was to move our school toward unification with the larger authoritative discourse of the district.

As the final week of summer vacation opened, Dr. Sparks assembled the Leadership Team to preview some of his intended changes, which seemed fairly minor—teachers would need to standardize their course syllabi; teachers would be expected to email weekly progress reports; department chairs and administrators would meet as a Leadership Team bi-weekly rather than weekly; and departments would have an administrator to serve as a liaison between each department and the principal. He also unveiled a new schedule and new system for meetings and professional learning (Appendix F). According to Sparks, this new plan of professional learning was intended to liberate the faculty from the previous stringent expectations and to be more in compliance with the contractual expectations under which teachers were hired, but it suggested a move toward more “correct” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 270) processes as defined by outside authorities. Through these changes, Dr. Sparks transmitted his understandings of appropriate professional learning actions and school management structures.

## Participants of the Study

Although I was the primary participant of this action research self-study, the nature of the work of a department chair required that I act in concert with or in response to myriad others, including other teachers, school personnel, parents, and students. This study, though, was focused on my department chair work involving interactions with

three other specific groups from within the school's structure: the Language Arts Department's teachers, the other members of the Leadership Team, and the principals of the school. These others I thought of as co-participants.

*The Leaders of the Organization in the Study's Context*

As previously mentioned, illness forced Dr. Keats to resign from his position as principal in December 2005. Regardless, the effects of his leadership still echoed in the school's organization at the time of the study; therefore, I considered him a co-participant of the study as much of my work was enacted in response to the standards and expectations he had set for me initially in the department chair role.

*Dr. Charles Keats: The founding principal*. Dr. Charles Keats came to PRHS in 2003, having been an educator since 1972. Although he began his educational career as a middle school health and physical education teacher and football coach, he found his calling in educational leadership when named to his first principalship in 1980, in Greensport, New York. Completing his doctoral studies at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Carl Glickman, he became committed to "democratic leadership" and repeatedly searched for ways to bring "choice and voice" to school organizations, particularly for students. By the time he came to PRHS in 2003, he had worked in various public schools and systems, completing 3 years as an assistant principal and 20 years as a principal. He left PRHS in December 2005 for medical reasons, but returned to the system in March 2006 to serve as the principal of one at the alternative high schools. At the time of the study, he was 60 years of age. In addition to his public school work, he also taught as an instructor and adjunct professor at several local colleges and universities on evenings and weekends. His wife was a long-standing

middle school principal, and his three adult children had all completed college and were beginning their own careers.

*Dr. David Sparks.* Named the school's principal in January 2006, Dr. David Sparks moved from another school within the district where he had previously worked as an assistant principal. His teaching career had begun in 1993, as a science instructor in a middle school. After a year in that position, he moved to an alternative high school in the school system where PRHS was later built. He worked in the alternative setting for two years and then moved to another traditional comprehensive school within the system. There, he worked as a science teacher and department chair and administrative assistant for seven years. At that point, he was promoted within that school to the role of assistant principal and remained in that role for 3 ½ years prior to coming to PRHS. He, too, completed his doctoral work at the University of Georgia. At the time of his appointment, he had been an educator for almost 13 years but had never previously served as a principal. He was 37 years of age at the time of the study. He was married, and his wife stayed at home with their two pre-school daughters.

*The Leadership Team*

Originally conceived as a weekly meeting for conversation and curriculum- and instruction-based decision-making and open to all members of the school's faculty, Leadership Team meetings had been a time for shared leadership at PRHS. Representatives from all areas of the school, including academic and support areas—like the counseling, nutrition, custodial, and clerical staffs—were expected to attend. Rather than being a time to discuss "nuts and bolts" or issues of management, the conversations focused on sharing curriculum concerns and building cross-curricular understanding and

opportunities for improved achievement. At the time of the study, Leadership Team meetings were held bi-weekly, and the principal or an assistant principal ran the meetings and set the agenda for each. Beginning with an overview of test data, each administrator then reported information from his or her area of management, providing department chairs the opportunity to ask questions at each session. Representatives from the support areas were no longer a part of the meetings, and clerical staff members took turns attending meetings to take minutes. At the time of the study, the Leadership Team consisted of 24 members. Similar to the demographics of the school's faculty, the group was mostly female (58%) and mostly white (96%).

The Leadership Team consisted of people with generally little experience in their roles, but the disparity between administrators and department chairs in their respective roles was striking. More than 75% of the department chairs had been hired by and initially served under Dr. Keats. Perhaps most striking was the fact that all but one of the department chairs had been charter members of the faculty when the school opened in 2003, but only 60% of the administrative staff had been charter faculty members (Figure 4.3). Furthermore, many of the Leadership Team members were relatively new to their particular positions, with only a few members possessing significant experience with the roles they held during the timeframe of the study (Figure 4.3). Clearly, previous experience as well as familiarity with the context and its history produced a divide between the administrators and department chairs, regardless of the larger inclusive notion of "team" as suggested by the group's name.

| *Name (Pseudonym)* | *Area of Responsibility* | *Years at PRHS* | *Years in current role* | *Years in current role at PRHS* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dr. David Sparks | Principal | .5 | .5 | .5 |
| Diane Jefferson | Assistant Principal, Curriculum & Instruction | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Dr. Sarah Stilkins | Assistant Principal, Professional Development & School Improvement | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Gerald Bobbitt | Assistant Principal, 12th grade | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| Luke Kirk | Assistant Principal, 11th grade | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Dr. Lance Byrd | Assistant Principal, 10th grade | 2 | .5 | .5 |
| Claire Beale | Assistant Principal, 9th grade | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Mary Maison | Assistant Principal, Testing | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Dr. Dominick Mondi | Assistant Principal, Attendance | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Donna Finch | Assistant Principal, Community School | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Miles Armond | Assistant Principal, Activities & Athletics | 3 | 7 | 3 |
| Kim Armond | Department Chair, Counseling | 3 | 7 | 3 |
| Kay Andrews | Department Chair, Media | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Jan Sbretsky | Technology Coordinator | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| John Sheridan | Department Chair, Business & Technical Education | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Kathryn Timmons | Department Chair, ESOL | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Laura Parkett | Department Chair, Foreign Language | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Elliott Gregory | Department Chair, Fine Arts | 3 | 14 | 3 |
| Sarah Skinner | Department Chair, Language Arts | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Missy Greer | Department Chair, Mathematics | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Amber Thompson | Department Chair, Physical Education | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Susan Thomas | Department Chair, Science | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Roland Hoover | Department Chair, Social Studies | 3 | 9 | 3 |
| David Rooney | Department Chair, Special Education | 2 | 2 | 2 |

*Figure 4.3*: Composition of Leadership Team at Onset of Study

*The other department chairs.* The Leadership Team from the school's onset was expected to be a sort of round table meant to build collaboration and move our school toward what Dufour and Eaker (1998) describe as "small learning communities." However, the group of department chairs had never come together as a cohesive entity within the school. Although Dr. Keats had explicitly stated his expectation that the department chairs were to be knowledgeable of happenings in each other's areas and to

build collaboration among the curricular and instructional components of the school's operations, no formal structure had been established to have us come together as a management team. As all chairs maneuvered for resources—such as teaching positions, funding for supplies and ongoing professional training, and the "principal's ear" concerning curricular and management decisions— tensions escalated among the chairs over the school's first three years.

At the study's start, the new administration's shift of the Leadership Team away from a round table design with its yet-unrealized hopes of egalitarian participation to one of a more traditional pyramid organization created an impetus for change among the department chairs. Suddenly, we felt ourselves challenged to assemble into a single unit, positioned between administrators and teachers. But without a history of unity, how could we coalesce into a single, unified group? Were we better off to remain separate entities in the struggle for resources and position? Or would we bond together in the hope of finding means to negotiate the new structure?

*The Language Arts Department Co-Participants*

In addition to serving as a part of the school's Leadership Team, my closest affiliations were with the other language arts teachers, for whom I acted as facilitator. At the time of the study, the Language Arts Department was comprised of 23 teachers ranging in experience from first-year teachers to twenty-year veterans. Although the school's student population was quite diverse, the department more closely reflected the total staff, of which most were white females. Of the 23 members of the Language Arts Department, only 6 of the 23 were male, and only two identified as non-white (Figure 4.4).

| *Name (Pseudonym)* | *Years taught* | *Years at PRHS* | *Highest Degree* | *Additional Certification or Training* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Terry Adams | 3 | 0 | M.Ed. | |
| MaryAnne Cohn | 16 | 3 | B.S.Ed. | National Board |
| Brenda Day | 20 | 0 | B.S.Ed. | |
| Jasmine Donovan | 12 | 2 | M.Ed. | Reading |
| Steve Fordham | 8 | 2 | M.A. | |
| Carrie Frost | 0 | 0 | B.S. | |
| *John Green | 2 | 2 | B.S.Ed. | |
| Kelly Hackle** | 17 | 2 | M.Ed. | Gifted; Dance Education |
| Elizabeth Howell | 0 | 0 | M.Ed. | Latin Education |
| Jenny Jackson | 1 | 1 | M.Ed. | |
| *Rebecca Johnson** | 3 | 3 | B.S.Ed. | Gifted |
| *Morgan Kielgor** | 7 | 2 | B.A. | Gifted; Advanced Placement |
| *Kristen Little | 1 | 1 | B.S.Ed. | Leadership |
| *Carl Maxwell | 12 | 3 | M.Ed. | |
| Kevin Miller | 16 | 3 | Ed.S. | Gifted; Advanced Placement |
| *Becky O'Connor | 23 | 3 | M.Ed. | ESOL |
| Marilyn Raintree** | 21 | 3 | Ed.S. | Gifted; Advanced Placement; Teacher Support Specialist |
| *Robin Richmond | 10 | 3 | M.Ed. | Gifted Education & Teacher Support Specialist |
| *Dan Smith | 6 | 3 | B.S.Ed. | |
| Mark Spears | 7 | 2 | M.A. | Reading |
| Kimberly Thomas | 2 | 2 | M.Ed. | Reading |
| *Kim Valdez | 5 | 2 | B.S. | |
| Soo Yang | 1 | 1 | B.S.Ed. | |

*Figure 4.4.* Language Arts Department Composition, August 2006. (* involved in ongoing graduate or year-long certification programs throughout duration of study ** grade level chairs through the study.)

*The Researcher as Central Participant*

Action research typically adopts a stance of inquiry done either by or with insiders of an organization or community, and is typically based on the assumption that

the research will lead to some form of intervention (Herr & Anderson, 2005). As the "insider" seeking to study my own practice and improve it in the traditions of practitioner research and self-study (Anderson & Herr, 1999; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), I was the study's central participant. A white, middle class woman in my mid-30s, I had been an educator for 12 years at the start of the study and had worked in the same school district since beginning my career. Although I had worked in a single school district, I had taught in three different schools under the supervision of five different department chairs and three different principals, and had experienced a variety of leadership styles prior to assuming the department chair role. Furthermore, I had continued to expand my own professional and leadership development by pursuing additional coursework and certifications, including Gifted, National Board, and Leadership Certifications.

In the fall of 2003, I was, according to Dr. Keats, "in charge" of my department, supervising all department members and evaluating some. Although I served as supervisor to all, I was assigned to evaluate only beginning teachers within the department. Regardless of my own educational vision of creating a more democratic and participatory space within the department, I still felt disappointment that my department chair authority was still not powerful enough to deem me qualified to evaluate all teachers. I remained mired in the language of hierarchy and power, fearing I had merely moved from one level of a hierarchical system to a slightly higher one. I fretted that this administration valued evaluation (determining a teacher's ability to retain employment) as more important than supervision (helping teachers develop their craft)—and paradoxically, my desire to evaluate all teachers suggested that I perpetuated those same

hierarchical values. Furthermore, I was conflicted by the notion that in a department chair role, I might have moved into a middle management position (e.g., Turner, 1996; Wettersten, 1993b) within the hierarchy of the school's structure, helping to retain the organizational levels—living Marx's reproduction of a system rather than working to improve the system, its members, or myself.

Over time, Dr. Keats helped me realize that my job extended well beyond my assumed role understandings. Through his words and support, he helped broaden my understanding of authority as he worked to create a school environment based on shared leadership and communal goals and values. He provided opportunities and encouraged the asking of questions, reflection, and give-and-take dialogue, where meaning is under continual negotiation (Bakhtin, 1981). Rather than working toward some idealized way to "do school," he repeatedly expressed that our faculty members were colleagues working to grow and learn as a community. This stance promoted liberation from my past anxieties of being "just" a teacher to a vision embracing the idea that all educators must work together to unleash the power and potential residing within each person—students and adults—within the academic community.

When Dr. Sparks was named principal, I once again found myself uncertain about my role as a department chair and instructional leader. As a principal's designee and without the security of a contract, would I remain a department chair? How would my role in the school change? And what would being a department chair mean under new leadership? With these questions about my role and many other questions about my practice, I began the 2006 school year and the timeframe for this study.

## Limitations to the Study

Limitations did exist in this study. First, throughout the study's duration, I had to perform co-commitant roles, fulfilling my professional obligations as teacher and department chair while also maintaining a focus on the research objectives. As a part-time doctoral student and a full-time educator, I attempted to balance the time, energy, and resource expectations of professional, scholarly, and personal duties and responsibilities, often finding myself struggling to perform any of them well. Also, because this study was the basis of my dissertation, I was operating under a time constraint; therefore, the study's duration was limited to a single term (August to December) of one school year in a school operating under a 4X4 block schedule.

As a qualitative self-study action research design, other limits were inherent; yet, I did not attempt to provide objective, generalizable parameters to any aspect of the study. Instead, I relied on rich and thick descriptions, critical friends, and triangulation of data to ensure trustworthiness of my presentation and interpretation of the data to make it credible or "ring true" to those who provided the data (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 50). I worked to make this study an authentic telling, continually calling myself, my impressions, and my understandings and presentations into critique and seeking others' input to make it more complete. Nevertheless, the study was limited to the experiences, perspectives, and understandings of one high school department chair in a single large suburban high school in northeast Georgia.

### *Ensuring a Rigorous Design*

Rather than focusing on a rigorously-controlled experimental design as in much quantitative work, I concentrated on the quality of data being collected and tried to

remain faithful in the data's representation to provide an authentic and accurate accounting of the context, the participants, and the actions within the situation. Furthermore, Loughran and Northfield (1998) offer three suggestions for enhancing perspective, reliability, and validity in qualitative action research: (1) including sufficient detail of the complexity and context of the situation for it to "ring true" for the reader; (2) providing and demonstrating some data triangulation and a variety of different perspectives concerning an issue; and (3) making explicit links to relevant educational literature and other self-study accounts and literature (p. 13). To the extent possible, I employed all three suggestions to add to the overall trustworthiness of the study.

First, in the presentation of the study's context and motivators, I detailed the complexities within the shifting organization leadership and philosophies, and the multiplicities of my position as a department chair. Through the use of three critical friends (Costa & Kallick, 1993)—one former member of the department I chaired, one fellow graduate student who was also a full-time language arts teacher at another school within the same district as I worked, and one non-educator—I sought to provide other perspectives by which I might interrogate my interpretations and understandings of the data as it was collected and analyzed. Finally, I used the literature from the research as a backdrop against which I continually measured my lived experiences and subsequent analyses.

Because action research requires a dedication to "being honest, in criticizing yourself and accepting criticism from others, as a source of continuous development" (Pereira, 1999, p. 355), I remained willing to examine and expose "warts and all" as I investigated my own practices. I accepted that the reflection would be a "time-

consuming process" perhaps involving "personal risk because the questioning of practice requires that practitioners be open to an examination of beliefs, values, and feelings about which there may be a great sensitivity" (Imel, 1992, ¶ 8). Also, such openness can lead to "feelings of vulnerability, which follow from exposing one's perceptions and beliefs to others" (Hatton & Smith, 1994, p. 9). Regardless, I sought ways, such as the multiple data sources, the use of critical friends, and member checks, to ensure that honesty.

## Chapter Summary

An action research self-study approach was used to examine my lived daily experience as a high school department chair and how reflective practice helped me negotiate the multiplicities of my role and critique the hierarchical inequities within my role and context in an attempt to provide a more democratic and collegial situation for all.

As the practitioner researcher undertaking an action research self-study, I chose to include as co-participants all members of the subject-area department (N=23), all members of the school's Leadership Team (N=23), and the principals (N=2) with whom I worked as a department chair. The co-participants were selected because the practitioner researcher's department chair work was conducted in response or reaction to these other individuals, yet the focus of the study remained on the actions, reflections, and responses of the practitioner researcher herself. All co-participants were included because of their accessibility to the researcher as well as their involvement in the work that she daily undertook. Conducted as a part of the daily lived experiences of the participant and these co-participants, the study's site offered the practitioner researcher a high degree of familiarity with each of the co-participants and their trust.

The study began in August 2006, with conducting the attitudinal surveys, beginning maintenance of the professional reflective journal, and collecting initial artifacts. The first department meeting was videotaped in early October 2006, and the second was videotaped in December 2006, at the conclusion of the school term. The interview with the current principal was conducted in early November 2006, and the interview with the former principal was conducted in early December 2006. Professional activity logs were maintained for the final two full weeks of the school term, which concluded in mid-December 2006. The professional reflective journaling and artifact collection were ongoing throughout the term. Throughout this action research self-study, data were continuously under in-action analysis throughout the data collection phase of the study but was more scrupulously analyzed from January 2007, to April 2007, once the data collection was completed. Employing Richardson's (1994) understanding that writing is a way of knowing, analysis was ongoing as I wrote this presentation of the study throughout the summer and early fall of 2007. Furthermore, I continuously reviewed the research literature throughout the duration of the study and its analysis, from August 2006 to September 2007.

# CHAPTER 5

## RESTORYING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts
(William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*)

As a language arts teacher, I appreciated the power of Shakespeare's words, and as a practitioner researcher, I found I was like that "one man" who played many parts. Unlike Jacques, the speaker of the oft-quoted passage above, in my multiplicitous roles as department chair, teacher, and researcher, I enacted many roles not "in his time" but simultaneously. The complex and contingent positioning of the department chair role in a context shifting under new leadership perhaps made my acting and actions more suited for the Theater of the Absurd. By this, I suggest that my actions and work as a department chair in the time of this study were an existential practice, an attempt to make meaning of that role and its work. I argue that for the department chair the negotiation of roles is not merely a part of the position, it is the underpinning of the position. As an identity always under construction, borrowing from Bakhtinian (1981) theory, a department chair is always in a dialogic position, always acted in response to some other. There is no fixed and final role to describe. Instead, it is a role, or really multiple roles, to be lived. The meaning of what it was to be a department chair lay within the daily negotiations of the position and the particular context in which it was enacted.

This self-study was an examination of my use of reflective practice to negotiate the many layers and complexities of my various positionalities. It provided a space to examine those roles and not only describe their range but also potentially improve my enactment of them. At the same time, I interrogated the very structures out of which those roles emerged and within and against which those roles were enacted. The complexities of the department chair's multi-layered role created great tensions, moments and experiences rife with drama, rich for analysis and interpretation.

## The Chapter's Organization

This chapter was organized into three major sections: The Study's Research Questions and Arguments, A Bakhtinian Analysis of the Department Chair Position, and a Conclusion. In part one of this chapter, I provide a reminder of the study's design, research questions, and arguments. Then, in the second and longest section of the chapter, I use Bakhtinian theory as the overarching analytical frame throughout the remainder of the chapter, calling on Freirian theory as well to discuss what makes the department chair role complex. In the third section and conclusion to the chapter, I speak directly to how this study and its analysis answered the research questions.

The chapter's second section is further sub-divided into four parts, and words from the co-participants and data set are used throughout the second section to discuss the department chair role and work. The first part of section 2 examines the heteroglossic nature of the department chair position. Parts 2 and 3 of the chapter's second section examine the oppositional centripetal and centrifugal forces that act on and influence the department chair's position, its expectations and responsibilities. The fourth part of section 2 discusses the tensions that move the position toward balance and a space of

greatest potentiality. Throughout the entire second section of the chapter, I use "re-storied" scenes from the data to showcase the tensions at work within the work and role of the department chair. Herein, the co-participants' voices and my own voice as primary participant spoke, sometimes sounding as individuals and sometimes as a collective.

This chapter showcases the "warts and all" lived experience of one high school language arts department chair as she used methods of reflective practice to understand, negotiate, and interrogate her complex and contingent role and the context out of which it was enacted.

## The Research Questions and Arguments of the Study

As a reminder, the research questions the study sought to address were as follows:

1. What does it mean for a department chair to negotiate her role within the context of a school community that holds complex and simultaneous conflicting notions of that role?
2. In what ways does reflective practice enable that negotiation?

This dissertation attempted to answer these questions by making two arguments in response. First, enacting the department chair position is an existential practice in which the person negotiates a multi-layered, continually contingent space. And reflective practice is an essential means for the department chair to do that work. The study's findings supported and furthered these two arguments, but like most action research, did not lead to fixed and finalized answers concerning the role and work of the department chair. Instead, as Hubbard and Power (1999) suggest, it raised additional questions.

## Analyzing the Department Chair Position Through a Bakhtinian Lens

Repeatedly reading through the data set, I sought to make meaning of how the co-participants and I understood the department chair role and what we each expected from it; I began to feel burdened by the role's multi-layered complexities. As I contemplated negotiating the role and the various role senders' (Katz & Kahn, 1978) interpretations of the role I was expected to enact, I realized that even as I performed the role, I was making meaning of its expectations, limitations, and possibilities. Consequently, in trying to answer the research questions for this study, I wanted to do more than merely formulate some comprehensive description of my work and role; instead, I wanted to examine what it meant to live in the role and do its work, and to interrogate the elements that made the role and work so complex and contingent but also made them challenging and invigorating. The theories of the Russian literary scholar and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work primarily focused on the "dialogic aspects of language" (Fecho & Botzakis, 2007, p. 549), provided the lens to examine with more focus the work and role of the department chair as well as a tool to argue for what it meant to live within the complexity and contingency.

### *The Department Chair Position as Heteroglossia*

As noted earlier in Chapter 4, prior to the start of the study when the founding principal was still in place, I believed I had begun to have an understanding, a working definition for my role as a department chair, but with a shift in administration, I anticipated role changes. Rather than merely looking to cast blame upon the new administration for a changing role definition, however, I came to realize that enacting the role—because of its dependence on an ever-changing social context and its

responsiveness to ever-changing others—was an on-going process, always under creation no matter who might be principal. Just as Bakhtin (1981) argued that language is always in process, so I argued that the role of the department chair is as well. Much like language itself, a department chair lives in the space Bakhtin (1981) described as heteroglossia, moving among and responding to various tensions in the form of expectations, roles, and positionalities. Extending the comparison, her work simultaneously occurs in a space where all language and meaning intersect, with voices layered one on another and meaning residing in a state of continual negotiation. As such, she becomes part of a multi-voiced, continual dialogue, "speaking" to the others around her as well as with herself, sometimes in harmony with others' intentions and expectations, yet often experiencing dissonance, when her own understandings or expectations are in conflict with those received from others.

To discuss the heteroglossic nature of the department chair position, I provided two scenes, detailing two separate yet related meetings with my principal Dr. David Sparks to elucidate the heteroglossia within the department chair role. I included both because of their connectedness and their abilities to show the department chair's role complexities in action; additionally, both will be referred to again later in the chapter.

> *Scene One. My meeting with Dr. Sparks to discuss Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) has finally arrived, and his opening words suggest he has been given some negative impressions about the effectiveness of our school's current WAC program. From what he says, I believe he is under tremendous pressure from his district level superiors concerning our school's writing scores, which remain below those in the system's strongest school. He tells me, "I need your assistance to understand why our writing test scores are so low, and what we need to do to raise them?" Turning the questions more specifically to the language arts department and me, he asks, "What are you and your department currently doing to address the scores? And what do you plan to do?"*

*I feel conflicted by his expectation to focus on test scores because I have negative feelings about the various writing assessments used to measure our school and students. I believe our state writing test is significantly biased—against other cultures and experiences and socio-economic groups—and also have philosophical concerns (as I know the entire Language Arts Department does) about educational policy's current emphasis on testing and its instructional effect.*

*How can I lead any initiative whose target is to raise test scores when I'm opposed to the tests? Also, why is our conversation based on test scores and not about what the students are learning? In our meeting, Dr. Sparks never once asks if our students are becoming more literate or learning how to become more effective in their written or spoken communication. His worries are focused on the scores, the data.*

*As the meeting ends, he assigns me four tasks to further his goal of improved test scores. I am to create a worksheet/lesson plan that incorporates the WAC vocabulary but also helps teachers prepare students for the District Graduation Test (DGT). I am to email that worksheet to the other department chairs and convince them to use it as they encourage each and every teacher to continue the weekly WAC expectation. Dr. Sparks also instructs me to begin a dialogue with the Social Studies and Science Department Chairs and establish cross-curricular work on writing as we try to improve the DGT scores. Finally, he asks me to meet with the 9th and 10th grade Language Arts teachers and help them buy in to the idea of doing collaborative work with the Science and Social Studies Departments, including grading papers across disciplines starting in the spring. I leave his office wondering how these new expectations will fit into my already over-filled schedule. Furthermore, am I invested enough in Dr. Sparks' leadership and goals to make sure his expectations are fulfilled?*

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*Scene Two. Two weeks later, I ask to meet again with Dr. Sparks again to share some honest concerns about the school, the new administration, and the changes I perceive to be happening. I want him to know that I am a "friend." I express that I "want him to be successful" because "a school is only as successful as its principal." Having been at the school since its inception, I feel a great loyalty to ensuring the school's success. I want him to know that I am frustrated but not on the attack.*

*Talking with him for almost 45 minutes, I share many of my concerns and those I have repeatedly heard from other teachers—the lack of a clearly-expressed vision or mission; and whether our school is still focused on students, teaching, and learning or if test scores have usurped those other aspects of education. I express my feelings and fears that faculty morale is at an all-time low. Seeming shocked by my confessions, he says, "I've only heard good things—that people like what I'm doing."*
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*I suggest people are hesitant to express their displeasure, that they are worried and fearful of him. He responds, "But why? I'm not scary."*

*I remind him that the faculty only knows of him what he has shown: a passion for power point presentations and test scores as evidenced by his beginning every meeting with such a data presentation. I suggest this has sent a distinct message and one that differs vastly from the school's initially expressed vision. I worry that my honesty may anger him or damage my standing in his eyes, but I feel he needs to hear these things.*

*Because he seems open to and interested in my words, I continue, sharing with him teachers' feelings of resentment about the fall term's additional requirements—syllabi checks, creating websites, submitting instructional calendars, emailing weekly progress reports to parents—and the many shifts in school processes. I try to help him see that the amount of change is overwhelming, particularly without a framework or guide for why the changes are happening or their intended purposes. I share that many teachers feel their professional autonomy is under attack, and that many have expressed worries they are being punished or "demoted." I conclude by saying, "Folks are really concerned that our school is becoming a place where we are more interested in administrivia and public relations and less in teaching and learning." He listens attentively throughout the meeting, asking clarifying questions and showing genuine concern for these perceptions and my words.*

*As our meeting draws to a close, I hear the administrative team gathering in the conference room outside his office. Saying he wants to share my concerns with the administrators but keep the source anonymous, he suggests I leave by a back door to cloak my identity. As I near the back door, he encourages me to return at any time with similar or other concerns, saying he "appreciates" my honesty and sharing these thoughts. His final words sound like an invitation as well as an expectation: "I need you to be my eyes and ears in the field."*

*Examining the heteroglossia within the scenes.* These two scenes showcase some of the many department chair roles I faced as well as some of the expectations expressed by the principal. In the first scene, the expectations were targeted at enacting instructional leadership but also enacting the role of principal's messenger. The initial questions the principal asked in the scene positioned me as a content expert able to provide insights and understanding about the current state of the school's scores as well

as means to improve those scores. Yet, they also made it clear the department chair was to act as a support for the principal's focus and identified areas of concern, in this case, the writing test scores.

As our conversation moved from a diagnosis of the test score data and a description of the school's current response to the tests, he raised future necessary actions and my role in completing those actions, again assigning additional roles, duties, and responsibilities. In such, the expectations included generating curricular and instructional materials to address the principal's instructional focus, and acting as a facilitator among the other department chairs to ensure use of those materials. I was expected to work to build cross-curricular communication as well as promote the initiative among the Language Arts teachers, regardless of my own beliefs concerning the initiative. Furthermore, as the Language Arts Department Chair, it was my role to help the other teachers in the department understand the principal's expectations and generate "buy in" to the principal's instructional focus of targeting improved test scores, following much the original intent for a department chair to be an extension of the principal and a means for him to be more omnipotent (Lortie, 1975). As such, I was expected to assume the voice of authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981), co-opted into the work of pushing the teachers toward unified action.

In contemplating how I could fit these additional duties into my schedule, I also pondered the additional roles these actions would require and contemplated ignoring them, listening to what Bakhtin (1981) described as the internally persuasive dialogue that resists and rebels against the voices of authority. Already within the initial scene, it was easy to identify a number of roles I was expected to play as well as the conflicts

inherent within them. Was I the content expert or the promoter of the principal's vision? A colleague to the other department chairs or a manipulator of them? The spokesperson of the teachers' philosophies or the purveyor of the principal's wishes? Upon examination, I realized I was all of these, and as additional expectations were unveiled, my thoughts within the scene spoke of my efforts to determine how to negotiate their addition or the possible ramifications were I to ignore them.

The second scene opens with my enacting the role of spokesperson for the other teachers and myself. Also, in contemplating my statement that I was "there as a 'friend'," I tried to show that even as I spoke for other teachers, my intent was also to act as a helpmate and support to the principal. In doing so, I walked a tightrope between challenging his authority and aligning myself with it. But I was also acting as Freire (1970) suggested, trying to build possibilities for dialogue and cooperation.

However, by questioning and interrogating his actions, such as his "showing power point presentations," and critiquing his lack of building relationships with the faculty, who were "worried and fearful of him" because "no one really knew him," I assumed the role of risk-taker. As such, I was willing to align myself with those who spoke out against the principal and encourage a stratification away from his authoritative positionality, increasing the tension between my positioning and his. However, by enacting my role from a positionality as "friend" and "helpmate," his response suggested that he was open to my role as such. In fact, through the conversation, I garnered a new role of confidant, to be "his eyes and ears in the field," to help him understand the pulse and perceptions of the teachers.

*The issues raised: Interrogating the tensions within the expressed roles and expectations.* Each role and its expectations were replete with complications. In the first scene, I clearly felt concern over the principal's instructional focus but did not verbally address it with him perhaps from my own lack of role security or understanding or from my fear of operating outside the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). Not wanting to move too far away from the center of power, I listened passively to what he expected of me and wrestled internally with how those expectations were contradictory to my educational philosophies and those repeatedly expressed by the Language Arts Department's teachers. What kept me from sharing my concerns about the tests, his focus, or how they ran contradictory to the research on writing instruction? Why was I willing to assume his expectation of me as an expert and a problem-solver for this situation rather than willing to speak out against its underlying concept? At that point, listening to my "internally persuasive discourse," my own inner thoughts and understandings that often worked in opposition to the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) of a person in authority, such as the principal, I contemplated rebelling against the authoritative expectations. Yet Dr. Sparks' power position as principal, my professional superior, left me in a subjugated role, fearful to rebel in any overt way.

Furthermore, as the conversation ensued and the expectations and required tasks escalated, I expressed internally a sense of feeling overwhelmed, conflicted by the number of expectations and contemplating whether I was "invested" in these newly-described expectations or his leadership. Rather than a meeting with what both Bakhtin (1981) and Freire (1970) discussed as "true dialogue," this first conversation was more a one-way expression of a leader's expectations and a follower's reaction to those

expectations. As Freire (1970) would describe it, the "oppressor" provided a pedagogy *for* the oppressed rather than *with* her (p. 48). And in this case, the follower contemplated a passive refusal to attempt to fulfill those expectations, a quiet, subterfuge-like rebellion. Here, "oppression" was used as a relative term, and I in no way equated my oppression as an American middle-class, white educator with that experienced by the people Freire wrote about; however, the dynamics described were evident in the organizational structures of the school in which I worked and within the position of a department chair inside that organization. The power structure and the role players within that hierarchy enacted their positions accordingly.

Rather than using overt language of hierarchy or power structures, the first scene saw Dr. Sparks looking to me to provide him "assistance" and my views concerning the situation. At the same time, however, the scene showed that Dr. Sparks already had a sense of the answers he wanted, shown by his directives concerning his expectations for my subsequent activities targeted at achieving his goals concerning our school's efforts to address the test scores. Instead of engaging me in what Freire (1970) labels a "true dialogue" or with questions of inquiry, Dr. Sparks positioned me to be a receiver of the ideas he put forth and to do the work he deemed necessary for fulfilling his vision. His questioning—under the guise of open, honest dialogue—became the means by which to "manipulate" (Freire, 1970) my work as a department chair as well as the work of others through me. Indeed, I became the agent by which his power could be spread out to affect the work of many. His positioning as the head of command in our school's organization put me in a space to respond to his authority while also furthering its reach and intensity.

In the second scene, assuming a role as "revolutionary leader" (Freire, 1970) and willing to assume what Bakhtin (1981) termed a "dangerous" role as spokesperson for teachers and interrogator of the principal's actions, I showed a passionate commitment to the treatment of the teachers and their perceptions of a shifting positionality, of being "demoted." Was that a product of my still being a classroom teacher in addition to my work as a department chair or my proximity to the teachers? Was it because I was speaking from my own feelings of being positioned as much as serving as the teachers' spokesperson? Also, at the scene's close as I received a new role—"the eyes and ears" of the principal—other issues were raised. Was he once more co-opting me into the workings of a closed system, asking me to serve as a cog in a political machine? Was I now expected to act as a spy for the principal or a vehicle for honest communication and dialogue? Was my role, between teachers and principal, to act as a two-way conduit to bring the two closer, or was I being asked to be the means by which the principal could be all-knowing and potentially all-controlling as the literature suggests was a part of the role's original intent (Callahan, 1971)?

Most significantly, the two scenes clearly showed that a department chair must simultaneously enact multiple roles, some of which directly conflict with others, all of which combine to leave the department chair in a space being pushed and pulled by many voices. Caught in a space that has some power—imbued by its historical origins, its title, and its responsibilities and privileges—but is also relatively powerless in its position at the bottom of the administrative hierarchy, the department chair faced tensions that required her to define the role and work of the department chair. The role definition as

well as her sense of power emerged in the way she responded to those tensions and the subsequent actions she made as the department chair and teacher.

Yet these two scenes only begin to showcase the myriad layers to my department chair role and those elements that further complicated the work. The limits of time, energy, and other resources paired with fulfilling those myriad role responsibilities while still remaining responsive to my own students, their academic and personal needs, and their parents' expectations often left me in a quandary. Knowing my long-term goals involved leaving the classroom and moving fully into the administrative realm, I often found myself resolving one aspect of the role conflict within my department chair work by concentrating more on the quasi-administrative side of my positionality. As a multi-faceted position, shaped by others and the situations to whom it responds, I accepted the department chair role as the "go-between," linking organizational operations and the personnel's lived experiences and its emerging definition, determined by what was needed from each aspect of the school's organization. Rather than being a fixed or clearly described role or set of actions, it was a position of response, always in flux, always under construction.

In examining the data and attempting to name some of the many identities that were a part of my department chair position, in this chapter I identified and discussed a few of these to show some of the specific tensions that existed as the various role senders placed simultaneous and sometimes conflicting role expectations upon me. At times within my department chair role negotiation, I attempted to enact a form of hybridity (Bakhtin, 1981), trying to fulfill the multiple role senders' understandings about my department chair work and also living out my own understandings of that role and its

work. In the discussion that follows, the data spoke to various roles that I was expected to enact as a department chair, but the theory allowed me to examine and discuss the tensions created by these multi-layered roles and their expectations at all times operating along a positionality continuum of tension (Figure 5.1), moving from a role as a "transmitter" of the authoritative voice (Bakhtin, 1981) to a role as "transformer" through openness and mutual meaning making (Freire, 1970).

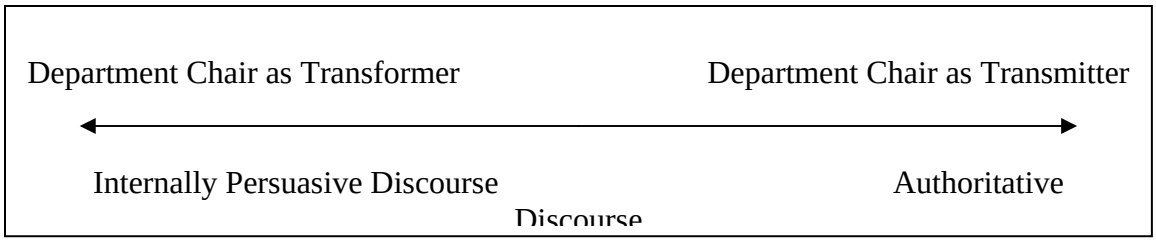


*Figure 5.1:* Positionality Continuum of Tensions in the Department Chair Role

At all times, though, as a department chair I positioned and was positioned by various tensions, which were always in play and always attempting to overcome the other, further complicating my role and work. In trying to make sense of that position, I identified numerous roles I was expected to enact; scenes one and two give a very specific sense of how I could be playing multiple roles simultaneously based on others' and my expectations. In interviewing and working with the various co-participants, I also found that there were a range of conceptions that added to the tensions at play within the department chair role. At any point, I could be playing one or more of the roles along with myriad others. Here are some of those roles that seemed to be most prevalent within the data and spoke directly to the heteroglossic nature of the department chair role, highlighting the competing tensions and the implications of those tensions.

*The department chair as leader.* Both principals expressed their expectation that a department chair would act as a "leader in their department," doing those things that

furthered the overarching goals of helping students learn, achieve, and grow. Dr. Keats explained that a department chair as a leader would "be able to work with people . . . [and] have good judgment" but also "be able to take a risk . . . by doing some unique something in the classroom or in the context of that department." His words suggested autonomy and opportunity and an expectation of creativity and individuality from the department chair's work. His conceptions embraced the idea that a department chair acting as a leader was someone who would listen to his or her internally persuasive discourse and perhaps use it to speak out again the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) when it was for the good of a teacher, a student, or the school as a whole. In contemplating the positionality continuum, Dr. Keats' ideas moved me more toward the transformational positionality, opening up possibilities and expanding the potential and power within the department chair role to become more supportive, innovative, and diverse in its conceptions.

Yet many department members believed a department chair should develop a vision or philosophical framework for the department, providing "some kind of overarching, comprehensive direction," "set[ing] goals for students' achievement and plan[ning] programs" concerning curriculum implementation. Therein, the teachers looked to the department chair to take on a somewhat authoritative language (Bakhtin, 1981), directing the course of action that the teachers should undertake. Was this because they had "internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines" as Freire (1970, p. 47) suggested, always looking outside of themselves for guidelines and fearful

of professional freedom? As such, they seemed to be pulling me back toward a more transmission-oriented positionality, with my work and ideas somehow assumed to be higher than theirs.

*The department chair as instructional leader and professional developer.* Both principals also spoke at length about a department chair as an *instructional leader*, which had more specific and targeted expectations than those applied to the general term of "leader." Dr. Keats described an instructional leader as a person with various tasks, including "being in the classroom . . . to see what's going on, to be another set of eyes, a critical friend in the context of instruction . . . able to take the pieces of the curriculum and fit the needs of the kids." As such, a department chair has room for a range of response, but Dr. Sparks believed an instructional leader must "be focused, just instructionally" and "able to go in and work with teachers to get the best out of our teaching instructionally. . . to look at data and make instructional decisions based on the data." Dr. Sparks' elaboration suggested an underlying presence of the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) within his expectations:

> we need somebody that can come to the department chair to ask the curriculum [and] instructional [questions, about] best practices. . . to have the freedom to really be able to discuss instructionally what is most appropriate in the department.

His language of "best practices" and "most appropriate" classroom actions suggested he had an idealized view about preferred classroom instruction, and it was a department chair's role to lead teachers to that way, moving the teachers toward a place more aligned with the authoritative voice or what Freire (1970) described as the "banking system of

education," presupposing some "right" way to teach and suggesting that a department chair's work is more towards the transmission end of the continuum. Rather than viewing this shift in definition as merely a difference in the two leaders, however, this once more pointed to the larger issue: the department chair role was always in a place of negotiation, with its role enactor charged with performing the role even as she attempted to understand it.

Although the principals saw the instructional leader role as essential in the department chair's work, no teacher used that label, suggesting the term hailed from the leadership research rather than that of classroom practitioners. Discussing the same activities the principals described as components of instructional leadership, the teachers labeled these processes, such as classroom observations, as forms of professional development allowing department chairs to "be aware of individual [teachers'] needs" and give "specific, constructive feedback about how and where to make improvements" in instruction. In essence, the teachers felt that department chairs should "provide the framework for teachers to help themselves" and are "there to help the department grow," with each member's professional development remaining in a constant state of "becoming" (Bakhtin, 1981; Freire, 1970). As such, teachers and the department chair work in concert in a give-and-take effort to improve the effectiveness of each as educators. Once more, though, there was the underlying tension that I was in some superior positionality, able to tell teachers what they were doing "wrong" and how they could improve. Even in helping them, there still existed the tension of my position in contrast to theirs.

As the teachers expected me to have an individualized understanding of their professional development needs, they spoke of embracing a stance like Freire's (1970) "problem-posing education," where learners work side-by-side for individual and collective growth rather than learners responding to some outsider's understanding of their areas of need. Furthermore, there was an underlying assumption among the teachers and the founding principal that much of the professional development had to be imbedded within the particular context of their classrooms in what Bakhtin (1981) would describe as an "authentic environment" (p. 272), helping each teacher move the instruction more toward an effective place within the context of a particular class or student. Yet Sparks' vision of professional learning contained the expectation that these individual professional development efforts would help teachers match some outside, authoritative, prescribed expectation of what good instruction was.

Given these various understandings, my role enactment was continually changing. As the department's leader, the expectation was that I would facilitate learning opportunities for my colleagues, but to what end? Was I there to work collaboratively, helping to open up teachers' instructional practices and seek out more stratified and individualized classroom behaviors, or was I to help teachers move closer to the unified, and pre-determined "best practices" of the field? Moreover, was it the hierarchical structure and my position of power that enabled me to do this work at all? And how was I supposed to reconcile that idea with my own self-expressed commitment to education as emancipatory practice?

*The department chair as manager and assistant administrator.* Even as I was expected to work with teachers and help them grow, I also faced the role expectations of

being a *manager* and *assistant administrator*, doing those things that enabled the department to function as a collective group, as individual classroom instructors, and as a part of the larger faculty. As Siskin (1994) notes, the department chair position was originally created to help the principal maintain and oversee the burgeoning faculties. Although various principals and administrations have defined and used the department chair role in different ways, it has nonetheless, remained a position of liaison, often assisting the administrators in fulfilling the administrative responsibilities necessary to operate a school (Weller & Weller, 2002). To that end, I became the visible representation of the "voice of the father" and linked to something, the administration, which was considered "hierarchically higher" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342) than the teachers. As a manager and assistant administrator, my department chair role once more moved me toward the right, transmission-oriented end of the positionality continuum (Figure 5.1).

The teachers described this part of my role as dealing with the nitty-gritty department organizational details, such as "setting the master schedule" and providing "agendas at team meetings," namely the department and grade level meetings. According to one teacher, the department chair was responsible for "keeping us well supplied" with classroom materials for teacher use. This involved continual inventorying, ordering, and maintaining a departmental budget. I became one of the cogs, which ensured the school's organizational machine continued to turn, and as such, I accepted the positioning of furthering the system as it was. Although some managerial components were necessary to ensure that teaching and learning would go in every classroom every day, many left me in a state of ambiguity when I had to respond to various personnel concerns on a daily basis, such as a teacher repeatedly calling in sick under dubious circumstances. In those

instances, I wrestled with my positioning. Should I act as an authority figure, interrogating the teacher and reminding her of her professional obligations and responsibilities? Or should I simply ignore those concerns and worry with the more immediate issues of substitutes and class coverage?

Although Dr. Keats described my department chair position as a "direct link" between his work as the principal and the happenings in the classroom, suggesting the role was a conduit for two-way interactions between teachers and administrators, Dr. Sparks looked to the department chairs as his representatives, suggesting his reliance on the original intention of department chairs as emissaries of the principal (Weller and Weller, 2002) and as a vehicle for promoting change as was apparent in the first scene described earlier in this chapter. Herein, my role was clearly intended to further the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) and to extend the power of the principal in an effort to contain and control the teachers, moving them closer to the principal's intentions for the school.

Still another aspect of my role as manager and assistant administrator was to help with hiring new teachers, but because I had been involved in the interviews of each of the teachers within the department, many viewed me as serving an on-going role in their continued employment, often referring to me as "boss" or "chief," even as I fought against the hierarchical labels, hearing the voice of authority ringing from them and feeling myself pushed toward the right side of the continuum. By playing a part in the hiring process, I was charged with screening applicants and determining whether they fit into the school's structure and vision as it had been defined and as I understood it. Again, I was acting to transmit and further the status quo of our school's organization.

With each interview, I considered whether the candidate would be a "good fit" for our department and school, but I also faced the tension of considering whether or not I felt I could work with the person. Therein, I wrestled with still more layers of complexity as I knew each new hire created additional departmental context shifts and I would be expected to manage them, furthering the expectation that I act with the authoritative voice. Simultaneously, I sought out candidates who were creative, innovative, and even liberal in their views concerning appropriate texts and ideas and means to engage students in their classrooms. My own internally persuasive discourse about how students learn affected each interview, drawing me to candidates who would walk the principal's party line but also dance around it as well.

Both principals also acknowledged that a part of a department chair's role often involved teacher evaluation, agreeing that issues that "come down to termination of somebody's employment" were administrative roles. Both admitted it would benefit the department chair in fulfilling other roles if he or she could operate without the responsibilities of teacher evaluation, a process of the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981), but because of administrative staff constraints, the principals implied department chairs were expected to figure out how to negotiate and balance the two responsibilities.

Therefore, regardless of the tensions and complexities created within the department chair role when asked to serve as both nurturer and evaluator—or any other conflicting positionalities within the role, the underlying assumption from teachers and principals was that the department chair herself would find the means to create a hybridity (Bakhtin, 1981), ready to be not one or the other of the roles, but simultaneously able to enact any of the roles as each situation required.

*The department chair as nurturer and supporter.* Regardless of the myriad, more professionally-oriented department chair roles, throughout the study, I repeatedly noted in my reflective journal the department members' constant need for me to be available to serve as a sounding board or a support system, such as MaryAnne Cohn's adjusting to new responsibilities with teaching the yearbook course, and Mark Spears' dealing with administrative censorship of the school's newspaper he advised, and Simon Butler's discovery of a student cheating ring. One teacher commented, a department chair must be "personable, compassionate, and supportive of me as a teacher." I was expected to enact a more personally-oriented role, to provide a listening ear and a shoulder of support and to recognize and embrace their individuality and celebrate their "becoming more fully human" (Freire, 1970, p. 57) as they strived to improve their practice even as they enacted it.

Simultaneously, though, other personnel concerns, which plagued the teachers and affected the teaching and learning, required department chair intervention. The issues ranged from minor concerns such as Jasmine Donovan's repeated absences to concerns as major as Brenda Day's weak classroom management and student engagement skills. As the department chair, the administration and teachers repeatedly looked to me to "fix" or "solve" these issues and to help these teachers grow and feel supported, but most importantly, the administration wanted the teachers to be more "in-line" with the expectations of appropriate teacher behavior. Here again, I was expected to further the voice of the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981), getting teachers "on board." Although both principals recognized the department chair's nurturing role, Dr. Sparks also suggested that through this particular role, information could be gleaned to

aid an administrator should a teacher need to be removed or not rehired. Therein, I felt the tension of remaining a teacher support while also potentially being co-opted as an informant for the sake of "harming" the very people I was supposed to support.

The teachers felt the department chair role as supporter and nurturer was most critical, viewing me as "a lifeline when we feel overwhelmed." By being "a leader who truly cares about us," a department chair became the resource teachers felt they needed to enable them to do their jobs even in the face of obstacles. Through a critical lens, the role that could enable true dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981), leading to "revolutionary leadership" (Freire, 1970, p. 95) and a more liberated environment for all members of a school's community, pulling a department chair's positionality toward the creative end of the continuum (Figure 5.1).

*The department chair as heteroglot.* With each situation, I found myself being pushed and pulled along the continuum, sometimes stretched in both ways simultaneously. Because I was never able to enact one role without consideration of the others, the various expectations necessitated my living in the space of tension, negotiating the space and making meaning of those negotiations with each encounter. One teacher summed up the department chair's role and responsibilities and the tensions within as follows:

> Embodying the values of the department in how [the department chair] teaches is job one. Secondary responsibilities include aligning human resources with needs (that is, working out the master schedule), supporting/empowering/etc. the department members with encouragement, resources, etc. to do their jobs well, serving as liaison

> between administration and department (cracking the whip without entering into an unholy alliance with Pharaoh), being a cheerleader for the department within the department and an advocate for the department away from the department. Also, taking care of nuts and bolts (books, supplies, etc.).

In effect the data suggested teachers looked to the department chair as their greatest and closest resource for professional and personal needs, their supporter, protector, and colleague. Expected to be available to them, she enabled them to work and grow while continuing to respect their autonomy and recognize their humanity. Furthermore, her work also included helping the teachers negotiate the school's structure and any aspects of that structure that impeded their work as classroom teachers, including helping them negotiate any authoritative expectations that might push them toward "unity" or "reification" in their work as teachers (Bakhtin, 1981). At the same time, the principals also wanted me to help teachers grow, but as I came to understand Dr. Sparks' intentions and my role as his representative, I realized he wanted me to work in a space and with a voice that moved others and myself toward a more centered, unified position, focusing on district and state benchmark and assessment guidelines.

In many ways, the department members and principals expected me to be "on call" and acting for them continuously even as I enacted my role as classroom teacher, which added still another layer to my department chair position. Yet, my remaining "in the trenches" with the teachers, as one teacher described it, was viewed as one of the most essential components of the department chair role. As Dr. Keats suggested, "By the nature of the fact [department chairs] are in a classroom everyday, [they] have more

credibility in the instructional piece than the administrator does. . . because they have the same thing going on." And Dr. Sparks saw one of the strengths of the department chair in her role as a "teacher of teachers," modeling the classroom behaviors that all teachers should have been enacting. Therefore, it was my positioning from the middle of the school's organizational structure while also remaining very much aligned with the daily workings of the teachers that yielded me the greater power and also created the greatest tensions.

Because, as the teachers noted, she "never suggests a task for another that she is not willing to complete," I was viewed as fulfilling my part as a classroom teacher and colleague. I was one of the teachers, still a part of "us," acting with my own internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) and living my commitment to the creative work of the classroom teacher. I had not become one of "them," the administrators, not fully co-opted by the voices of authority; I remained a part of the teaching corps.

However, therein lay yet another of the great tensions of the department chair role. I was one of "them," the teachers, but they were not one of "me," a department chair. At the same time they were appreciative of my role in understanding their lived experiences, I was isolated from having anyone else who could understand mine. I was both a part of the group, but outside of it, a colleague to others but without my own support system upon which to lean. And the myriad other roles required by being the department chair only sacrificed the time, energy, and availability I had to enact my role as classroom teacher. Even as I did the work deemed necessary to fulfill the teachers' and administrators' expectations, ironically, it was the students who often suffered most from my lack of attention.

As a department chair, I created the role even as I lived it, and my responses of rebellion—whether internal thoughts or attempts to foster honest conversation and sharing for the betterment of all—were attempts to avoid what Freire (1970) described as "anti-dialogical" acts, the shutting down of true dialogue. Regardless, perhaps my unwillingness to speak out in certain circumstances, my hesitancy to "rock the boat" or "misstep" against the principal in a way that might harm my future potential of moving into an administrative position spoke to my own struggle against the authoritative voice (Bakhtin, 1981) or my own fear of a more authentic existence (Freire, 1970). Although I had the power of being in the middle and able to privilege one side or the other in each situation, I was nonetheless continually aware that I operated in a context wherein my power had systemic limitations and faced the potential of destructive consequences should I move beyond my prescribed boundaries.

Adding to the tension, I constantly faced what Bakhtin (1981) referred to as the "Tower of Babel" (p. 278) a din of noise, because the many voices sounding simultaneously from the myriad roles I was required to enact within the department chair position. In those moments, role conflict sometimes turned to role overload, and in yet another form of resistance, I found myself wanting to shut down and provide no active response. Even though Bakhtin argued that to not respond is a response, in the actual lived world of the department chair, it led to a decreased effectiveness as I felt unable to fulfill any role's expectations fully. The tensions of living in a heteroglossic space led to a decreased ability to make meaning of the position, and therefore, a lessening of the opportunity to move my situation, my colleagues and myself closer to emancipation.

*The Centripetal Forces at Work in the Department Chair Role*

As shown in the previous section, the multi-layered positionality of the department chair role and its historical context as discussed in Chapter 2 show that the department chair is a position laden with the responsibility of speaking with the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). Even as a department chair positions herself as assuming a critical spirit, rooted in the work of emancipation for all within an educational setting, so she must acknowledge that she is both an agent of the centripetal forces (Bakhtin, 1981) at work as well as controlled herself to a degree by those very same unifying, limiting, and authoritative tensions that exist in any social situation. The following scene depicts a situation from within the data set to examine these centripetal forces at work.

> *Scene three. At today's faculty meeting, Dr. Sparks announced that a secret school-wide assembly would be held next week, but that teachers should not release any information about it to the students. Mentioning that more details will be forthcoming when he can release them, he lets slip that the governor will be attending. The teachers grumble audibly, fearing the assembly is a political ploy or the principal's public relations move, and most feel annoyed by the seeming disregard for the loss of academic instructional time.*
>
> *As the morning of the assembly arrives, balloons and ribbons decorate the school, and banners hang around the campus, displaying school spirit and welcoming the much-anticipated guests. An air of excitement looms as the school's student body enters the bleachers, class by class. A large stage sits on the gym floor, decorated with ferns and seating for numerous dignitaries, and the gym hums with the anticipation of more than 3000 students. The band awaits the director's baton to signal their playing celebratory music; and the cheerleaders, in full uniform, rock back and forth, anticipating the first chords to prompt their routine's start. Sounds of a helicopter's landing on our football team's practice field bring a momentary hush to the crowd. The gym erupts as the governor walks briskly from the landing site, and leaps to the stage to bestow the Governor's Cup on our student body for overall academic achievement and the greatest gains in SAT scores among high schools across the state.*
>
> *Although many teachers initially expressed ill will concerning the proposed assembly, the event swells into a raucous and joyous experience. The band's harmonies echo like a collegiate ensemble; the*

*students' enthusiasm better any prior pep rally; and the ceremony's close brings the crowning moment as Dr. Sparks steps to the mic and starts our recently-instituted school cheer, which soon sounds in unison from more than 3000 voices.*

*As students and teachers hustle back to classrooms at the assembly's end, I glance at my computer screen when I enter my room and notice an email in my inbox from Roland Hoover, our outspoken and often rebellious Social Studies Department Chair. Addressed to Dr. Charles Keats, our former principal, and blind carbon copied to me, Roland's note expresses his sorrow that the "one person responsible for the achievements of the day hadn't even been invited." (Later, I would learn that the entire faculty had also received the email),*

*The email reads as a blatant and swift attack on Dr. Sparks, who responds in kind. summoning Roland to his office and firing him as department chair, effective immediately. Assembling the administrative team to select a replacement, Dr. Sparks names a new Social Studies Chair only two hours after the email had been sent. In an emergency after-school meeting, the Social Studies Department gathers for the announcement of their new chair. Angered by the change and out of loyalty to Roland, a few of the teachers lash out at Aaron Cohen, the newly named Social Studies Chair, for accepting the position.*

*The next morning Dr. Sparks sends the entire faculty an email, briefly detailing the shift in leadership and thanking Roland for his service. Throughout the day, some teachers share the scenario with various students, stirring an already-heated issue. After school the following day, two teachers from within the Language Arts Department approach me to share a rumor that some students, many of whom were Roland's current or former students, are planning a protest against Dr. Sparks. Fretful, I ponder the situation. What is my role in this? Is the administration aware of the feelings or actions of faculty and students? Is it my responsibility to inform them? Furthermore, how am I supposed to respond to Roland, who is my peer, or to the teachers from any department?*

*Feeling too overwhelmed and confused to do much, I send Aaron a note of support, offering my assistance as he assumes his new position. Not knowing how to respond to Roland and not wanting to align myself with him, given his recent actions, I become reticent in my dealings with him and hope he will understand my position. Although I sympathize with many of his feelings toward and fear of Dr. Sparks, the new administrative policies, and our changing organization, I do not in any way approve of his actions or his methods in sharing that stance or his blatant attempts to undermine Dr. Sparks. In essence, I decide to lay low and hope that the whole fiasco will soon blow over.*

*The Inherent centripetal tension within the department chair position.* As was previously discussed, the department chair role's origins were in serving as a direct helpmate to and supporter of the principal in his duties to oversee teachers and control the happenings within the classrooms (Kaestle, 1983; Lortie, 1975). As such, the department chair became an agent of the principal, and in a hierarchical organization, such as a school, this "middle management" role became positioned in the space between serving as the continuance and furtherance of the authoritative discourse or the voice of rebellion, acting out against that authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). As the scene shows, however, to act against the authoritative discourse was also a dangerous position and one that could be "contained" by those in power through a "demotion" back "down" to the rank of classroom teacher, such as what happened to Roland. In making meaning of this scene, I purposely used the language of hierarchy and power because the centripetal forces of language and how they are played out in social situations are those that perpetuate power structures, keeping distance between those who oppress and those who are oppressed. By using "antidiological" language (Freire, 1970, p. 138), I highlighted the centripetal forces at work in the positioning of the principal as privileged authority (Bakhtin, 1981) or "master" (Freire, 1970, p. 132) and teacher as a subjugated positionality with the department chair operating in a space in between, negotiating the two yet still beholden to the actions and expectations of the dominant.

By speaking out against the new authority and showing a loyalty to a former leader, Roland broke rank with the current regime and had to be quickly silenced and moved out of his heteroglossic position as departmental spokesperson, supporter, leader, and administrative assistant. As the new person placed into the role, Aaron Cohen faced

an implicit expectation: act more in-line with those in authority, namely Dr. Sparks. Although never directly instructed to do so, there was the underlying assumption that Aaron needed to perform his role so that he would not operate in any overt way to defy the position of authority inherent within the principal's role. Furthermore, there seemed to be the underlying implication that it was Aaron's duty to bring the other social studies teachers more in line with the principal's expectations, an expectation which was met with open resistance and expressions of teachers' internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) as they spoke out against their new departmental leader, who was also a colleague and now viewed somewhat as a turncoat. Throughout this scene, the centripetal forces—moving individuals toward unification and a more centralized and homogenized place—were clearly at work.

Furthering an examination of those forces, I considered the questions I asked within this scene and my own admission of fear over uncertainty about my response to the situation and a concern of not wanting to "align myself" with Roland's actions of defiance, independence, and stratification away from the center of power. Thus, this scene showed how the centripetal forces work to contain individuals and "permit no play" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 343) in understanding the power structure at work. Fearing that I would find myself a victim of the authoritative discourse at work, I became still, offering only a minimal response to the situation, and yet in that "non-response," I was responding as Bakhtin (1981) suggested, trying to make meaning of the situation and deal with the pushing weight of the centripetal forces on my department chair role and my work in enacting that role.

Facing a context wherein the organization had shifted management structures so that department chairs and teachers reported directly to an assistant principal as the administrative point of contact rather than going directly to the principal, I had personally felt the centripetal forces (Bakhtin, 1981) at work as I felt myself distanced from the organization's hub of power. Furthermore, the department chair role in the school's leadership structure had become more limited so that our functions were "just focused instructionally," according to Dr. Sparks. But the scene re-storied above provided the most dramatic evidence that department chairs were no longer able to speak out publicly against the administration without facing rash consequences. Regardless of Roland's actions, the principal's response suggested to the faculty that he was an absolute authority, and department chairs and teachers were insubordinates who would be "handled" if they over-stepped their positions.

*The centripetal tensions at work in the data*. In examining the data set, I saw how the centripetal tensions manifested in the language of power and hierarchy affected not only my department chair role and work but also that of every teacher. At the start of data collection, the teachers reminded me in their attitudinal surveys how hierarchical and oppressive education can be and often had been for them in various schools. Teachers expressed concerns about administrators "hovering over us," and that "administrators seem to be authority figures rather than colleagues." Furthermore, department chairs needed to "protect [teachers'] interests," but the teachers also understood and accepted that the department chair role "dictates that she or he dictate policy from above." The language that the teachers employed clearly suggested past or potential experiences they deemed hurtful, where they were limited or even endangered by those who were "higher

up." They recognized the authoritative discourse at work, and even though they wanted a department chair to protect them from being squeezed or suffocated by the centripetal forces of the authoritative voice, they understood that a department chair was sometimes put into a position to speak with the same authoritative voice they feared or had previously been harmed by.

Even the former principal Dr. Keats noted the harmful presence of hierarchy within most schools' structures, saying "one of the biggest, hardest things we have to do in our business is to get away from everything being vertical. We've got to do some horizontal stuff," suggesting a desire for schools to work toward dialogism and a recognition of the individual (Bakhtin, 1981) in the process of enacting a more humanizing pedagogy (Freire, 1970). Schools with their organization of one principal supervising numerous educators—and typically one teacher supervising numerous students—are inherently arranged to operate as a hierarchical entity, stuck in a top-down structure, enacting what Freire (1970) would describe as "the practice of domination" and embracing the centripetal forces that move all members of the organization toward a centralized, unified, and standardized position (Bakhtin, 1981). As such, the structure itself seemed to work against recognition and appreciation of individuality.

Therefore, according to my self-interview, I worked "very hard to use language of support and learning rather than critique and evaluation" or judgment when talking with teachers. Repeatedly expressing my belief in the "power that comes with shared leadership, with a collaborative and collegial community, and with a commitment to the team mentality," I worried when some of the teachers would use language which imbued me with a title or positionality of superiority, such as "boss" or "boss lady," and furthered

the centripetal tensions operating within my department chair role (Bakhtin, 1981). Wanting to move closer to the teachers within the department and build a more collegial relationship, flattening the hierarchy between teacher and department chair, these labels seemed to create more distance (Freire, 1970), and align me more with the authoritative voice (Bakhtin, 1981). My reflective journal spoke of my discomfort with these labels of power and the effects of these centripetal forces:

> I worked very diligently to show [the teachers] that I was NOT their boss, NOT their superior, more of a colleague and facilitator. But that was and remains a really difficult hierarchy to break down. {Because] I attend Leadership Meetings, type up and facilitate department meeting agendas, attend county department meetings, and perhaps even because I have a title, I think that sets me apart from the other teachers.

Throughout the study, I became more mindful of the language I used, even in the smallest of situations, such as referring to the group as "my department" or "my teachers," and while I reasoned that I used those terms with affection or from a place of protection and nurturing, I questioned the effect such wording had on teachers' understanding of our roles and positionalities. Was my language perpetuating the hierarchy I professed to be working against? Was I acting as an "instrument of domestication" (Freire, 1970, p. 65), limiting the teachers' agency and acting in a way that was more patronizing with an undercurrent of oppression? Did my language belie my acceptance of being a part of the authoritative voice? Was I furthering the push of the centripetal forces, acting from the same top-down mentality that I critiqued and feared from the administration?

*Contextual shifts that increased the centripetal tensions.* Although all contexts are in a continual state of flux, there were some shifts in the local context that added to my awareness of the centripetal forces at play in my department chair role and work. As the term of the study wore on, many actions, which were unifying and standardizing in nature, operating with a centripetal force, were mandated from the administration. For example, departments were "directed to do" more standardized activities by the administration, such as develop, administer, and analyze common benchmark assessments in each course.

The Leadership Team continued to meet bi-weekly, but the content was focused on the principal's areas of concern and administrative needs. Department chairs were there to receive information rather than for collaboration. Frustrated by the limiting atmosphere of the meetings and responding to the centripetal forces that seemed to be pushing our school toward a more standardized organization, I expressed my perceptions of my positioning at one Leadership Team meeting in my reflective journal:

> I tried to raise several different questions about [a new policy] and point to some of the flaws in [the administrator's plan], but she seemed to have an answer for everything and was always smiling with that look which seems to say, "you're not going to win this one, so just go ahead and accept my way." I was the only one asking questions and challenging what was being said—which seems to be the new norm—so I finally just let it drop.

Where Dr. Keats had welcomed "increasing diversity of opinion" and "risk-taking" from department chairs and teachers, the new structure worked to focus and limit teachers'

actions and areas of concern with a more "streamlined" chain of command, as Dr. Sparks termed it, for both teachers and department chairs.

Further building walls between administrators and department chairs, Dr. Sparks told me that department chairs "don't need to be trying to be administrators because that's not a task we're asking them to do. We are supporting that [aspect of the school's operations] with an administrator working directly with their departments." Although he used language suggesting support, I perceived it as the "false generosity of paternalism" (Freire, 1970, p. 54) intended to move department chairs into a more prescribed space. Once more reminding me of the department chair's limited power, Dr. Sparks reiterated that the position of the department chair is "really discretionary completely; we can make a change at any time," suggesting that a department chair's continuance in the role is less secure, stable, and subject to change. His actions with Roland gave credence to his words and furthered the sense among teachers and department chairs that non-administrators operated in a tenuous space, one that could easily be "controlled" by the person in power (Freire, 1970, p. 59). Seeing my colleagues and myself relegated to the space "appropriate" for teachers—below administrators—I found myself desiring to work even harder to keep education's promise of liberation alive within our department and among my immediate colleagues in the hope that we could continue that work within our classrooms even as we operated within a more oppressive and limiting structure ourselves. Rather than a passive acceptance of understanding (Bakhtin, 1981) concerning my role and work as merely responsive to the authoritative discourse, beholden to the centripetal forces pushing upon me and responsible for transmitting the authoritative language, I felt my own internally persuasive discourse responding,

encouraging me to pull myself and others away from this positioning of standardization and unification. I found myself wanting to act out, to resist the centripetal push of centralization that can reify language and meaning until it is a "dead thing-like shell" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 355). Through reflection, I reached a heightened consciousness about the situation and realized the power I possessed within it.

> I see that I have a slightly subversive role in that I must remain 'on point' with the administration's message and help the department enact all the policies and procedures as painlessly and accurately and efficiently as possible—so I have to spend more time with nuts-and-bolts issues with the department—but I also must help the department continue to do its more philosophical and research-based work with curriculum and instruction.

To remain committed to my critical stance and my determination to realize education's potential as liberating, I moved myself into a more conflicted space, politically maneuvering myself and my department chair work, embracing the centrifugal tensions while still understanding and accepting the centripetal tensions of my work and role (Bakhtin, 1981). Through heightened consciousness I worked to enact praxis (Freire, 1970), attempting to maintain and enhance a department based on democratic principles even while acting as a cog in the machine that was moving us toward a more fixed, strident structure.

*The Centrifugal Forces at Work in the Department Chair Role*

> *Scene four. Jenny Jackson, a dynamic, energetic, yet perfectionist second-year teacher, sent out an email to our entire department early today, seeking advice and input concerning her work with her Junior Technical Language Arts students. Reading the email's final pleading*

*sentence, I see the extremity of her feelings: "I just don't know what to do. HELP!"*

*I venture to her classroom during her planning period to discuss the situation, and there Jenny confesses she feels "incompetent" to work with her hard-to-reach, at-risk students and doesn't know how to meet their needs. Although she knows she has additional classroom support because she is working in a collaborative environment with a special education teacher, Jenny still worries she is not doing enough to help her students learn. As a compassionate and committed young professional, Jenny believes it is her duty to help her students achieve academically, even when most of them have a history of poor performance in school and numerous behavioral issues.*

*As she talks, I hear Jenny's desire to build relationships with her students and to engage them in their learning; she wants to help them find a "fresh start" in school and to enjoy learning in her class. Furthermore, mindful of the high stakes assessments these students will soon face (the state mandated end-of-course and high school graduate tests), Jenny worries about balancing appropriate test preparation and "covering" the tremendous amount of curriculum in Junior American Literature. She also expresses concern over the students' weak communication, writing, and research skills, which she deems "essential" for life after high school. She finally confesses her biggest concern: "I just don't think I'm skilled enough to reach the students. Maybe I shouldn't be teaching the class."*

*Jenny tells me that Mark Spears, one of our Reading Specialists, has given her strategies to build the students' reading skills, but she feels she still needs more training and professional development. In talking with her one-on-one, I assure her that she's doing good things, but I continue to hear her frustration and fear that she isn't doing "enough." She repeatedly asks me to come and watch her teach, and help her "get better." I am worried she will stress herself out with her own worrying about this. She wants support and training, but more than that, I think she wants to feel less isolated and alone.*

*The dialogic aspects of a department chair's work.* As stated previously in Chapter 1, Bakhtin (1981) posited that the centrifugal forces in language are those that work to stratify and decentralize language, opening up the possibilities of meaning making and embracing a creative and generative space for understanding. In response to the unifying and limiting forces of the authoritative discourse, centrifugal forces keep language and meaning active and always under construction. Applying these ideas to

schools and to the department chair position, department chairs often become the most immediate enactor of the authoritative voice. By enacting what Freire (1970) termed "revolutionary praxis," with "*reflection* and *action* directed at the structures to be transformed" (p. 126, italics in original), department chairs assume the power to privilege centrifugal forces, giving space and opportunity for teachers to engage in true dialogue and reach greater levels of understanding about their work and situation. Rather than waiting for "answers" or direction from "on high" about how to act, teachers can find the power within and embrace the opportunities to act as professionals, increasing their abilities to think and work individually and collectively on improving their classroom instruction as well as the context out of which they are acting. Department chairs can do much to encourage and promote the centrifugal forces and move the organization and its members toward a more living and liberated place.

*The anti-dialogical forces that teachers must face*. The scene above raised several key issues concerning the desire teachers feel for collaboration, collegiality, and the opportunity to improve their practice and the factors that impede the dialogue. Many teachers, such as Jenny Jackson, feel their professional training is insufficient to address the various needs of the diversity of students present in public schools today. According to Grant and Murray (1999), America's teaching corps remains incredibly homogenized as a group of mostly middle-class, white females who were successful students and became college graduates entering classrooms filled with a student population that continues to become more diverse in terms of race, religion, creed, socio-economic status and mental, physical, and behavioral special needs. In that light, it is little wonder teachers, particularly more novice ones such as Jenny Jackson, feel "incompetent" when

facing classrooms representative of such an array of learners. From the perspective of critical theory, the average teacher in the classroom has much more the look and experience of the oppressive teacher, as Freire (1970) described her, who enters the classroom from a place of privilege, ready to pour knowledge into the students as if they were empty "receptacles" (p. 72), passively awaiting filling. Yet for teachers who have embraced the notion that education has possibilities for liberation and emancipation to help students engage in learning that could lead to their changing the structure, there is little training provided these teachers to help them learn to promote inquiry in their classrooms.

Also, as instructional expectations broaden and assessment and accountability requirements—such as state-mandated curricula and high stakes tests—widen, teachers face an ever-growing challenge to balance these aspects of teaching with their own training as educators, the implications of the educational research, and their professional judgments about what their students want and need, just as Jenny expressed in the scene. The pressures are there for teachers to enact Freire's (1970) "banking" concept of education, and in doing so, maintain a system that oppresses and keeps many students in their place at the bottom of society's hierarchy. Still another issue raised in the scene is teacher isolation. As Troen and Boles (2003) note, teachers operate in "egg-crate schools" (p. 30), performing a "private practice" (p. 71), isolated by building locations, class schedules, student loads, and the other external structures of schools. For many teachers, particularly less experienced ones, this isolation often exacerbates feelings of helplessness and insecurity. This isolation also furthers the likelihood that teachers will turn to more traditional, hierarchical means of instruction, meant to manage and direct,

more than invent, challenge, and liberate. As Freire (1970) suggested, communication between teachers and students, and I would argue among teachers, opens the possibilities to help all teachers build classrooms that are places of possibility and promise.

*The department chair as promoter of true dialogue.* The department chair's position offered a means to combat these issues. Collaboration and collegiality within a school do not merely happen; in fact, active efforts must be taken to overcome the isolation and hierarchies inherent within the system. For teachers to enact "problem-posing education" (Freire, 1970), they need opportunities for "inquiry-based professional learning" (Parr, 2004, p. 37) and opportunities to engage as colleagues around issues of curriculum and instruction, rather than acting as mere "consumers of other people's knowledge" about teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 88). Teachers must have space to engage with one another and to feel connected and yet still open for innovation, creativity, and possibility, willing to embrace the stratification of ideas and comfortable with the centrifugal forces (Bakhtin, 1981) that encourage educators to try new methods of instruction and assessment. Department chairs, in their more supportive roles and with the authority bestowed their roles as manager or assistant administrator, can work to structure these spaces and provide room for the centrifugal forces to be at play.

The data suggested that teachers longed for this space and its opportunities. As described in Chapter 3, the teachers in this department expected the department chair would "create opportunities for collaboration [and] facilitate idea sharing." From the moment these teachers were hired, they had willingly committed themselves to a stance of collegiality and openness to collaboration, and the school's initial structure—with its

commitment as part of Dr. Keats' vision for ongoing professional collaboration through "sacred Mondays" and "professional learning communities" (Dufour & Eaker, 1998) as discussed in Chapter 4—had time built in for collaborative conversations and working together on the work of teaching.

The data showed that the teachers in this study's context had found their commitment to collegiality and collaboration satisfying and productive, saying that "fostering a community for all teachers . . . to feel connected and important" was a "major role" for the department chair to ensure happened. Furthermore, they felt that one of the department chair's responsibilities was to "create opportunities for collaboration [and] facilitate idea sharing." These teachers, just as Jenny's actions showed in the scene, longed for opportunities to work together on the work of teaching and learning.

The principals echoed these same sentiments, asserting a department chair need a "passion for working with the staff" to build "communities of learners." By remaining "flexible," "understanding," and "open to new ideas and different opinions," one teacher argued, a department chair builds community. The co-participants' words acknowledged the forces within the school's structure that worked against teachers' desires for a communal spirit committed to mutual support and growth, and the teachers, in particular, felt it was a department chair's duty to ensure that these oppositional forces were kept at bay.

*One department chair's attempts to promote true dialogue***.** Believing whole-heartedly in education as an emancipatory practice and originally engaged in the department chair position by Dr. Keats' talk of "giving power away" through "delegating" and having factions of a school's community work collaboratively, I had

embraced the idea that in this particular context, education could become liberating. Knowing how much I myself had gained from collaborating with other teachers about planning, instruction, and assessment and recognizing the expectations of the teachers and principals for a department chair to "foster a community for all teachers in the department to feel connected and important," I believed department meetings were a logical place to build dialogic spaces. I provided food, played music and offered door prizes to meeting attendees, and began each meeting with a time of recognition or celebration (Appendix B) in an effort to create a collaborative atmosphere, conducive to conversation, celebratory of individuals and their full participation in this society (Bakhtin, 1981). Additionally, I remained devoted to a focus on professional learning during our meeting times. Most importantly, I looked to the department members to serve as the resources for these meetings, whether they presented the issues to be discussed; offered tips and personal experiences, activities, and suggestions for improved instruction or assessment; or participated in small- or whole-group discussions. I wanted to recognize and pay homage to the "practitioner knowledge" (Schön, 1983) within our department rather than looking outside of it for some external authoritative knowledge (Bakhtin, 1981), extending involvement through the discovery of a heightened awareness concerning our actions as educators, the context within which we act, and our influence on that context.

The data set showcased this commitment to collaboration and conversation within the videotapes and transcripts of two department meetings (Figure 5.2). Also, the scene

| Meeting Date | Meeting Length | Professional Learning | Meeting Topics | Topic Leader |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| October 9, 2006 | 1 hour, 7 minutes | 49 minutes | 1. Meeting needs of students with Asperberger's Syndrome;<br>2. Improving all students' critical reading skills;<br>3. Advanced reading skill instruction | 1. Special Education teacher from PRHS<br>2. Mark Spears & Jasmine Donovan (LA teachers & Reading Specialists)<br>3. Sarah Skinner (department chair as AP teacher) |
| December 11, 2006 | 1 hour, 3 minutes | 45 minutes | 1. Writing portfolio process, student writing & revision expectations, and teacher feedback | 1. Sarah Skinner as whole-group discussion leader |

*Figure 5.2.* Content and Composition of Two Language Arts Department Meetings**.**

Provided additional evidence that my efforts to create an environment where teachers were open to collaboration and collegiality were succeeding. First, as an inexperienced teacher, Jenny felt safe admitting to the entire department that she needed assistance. Troen and Boles (2003) argue that "seeking advice from other teachers is often considered [among teachers] an admission of incompetence" and outside the "cultural norm" for educators (p. 71). Therefore, without a sense of trust and safety in working with mutually supportive colleagues, such an admission would have been highly unlikely. In this instance, the environment was beyond this so-called cultural norm and a place where an inexperienced teacher found comfort in seeking assistance rather than feeling threatened or afraid to do so.

Next, even though I went to address her issues as the department chair and a colleague, another teacher had already reached out to her to provide collaborative

assistance, once more showing this department's physical commitment to act as mutually supportive colleagues. Finally, Jenny was eager for someone to come into her classroom to help her "get better." Again, this showed the teacher's willingness to be open to collaborative assistance for the sake of improving her skills in the classroom and better serving the students' needs. These teachers repeatedly expressed throughout the data a desire for a department chair to "provide opportunities for collaboration" and responded with enthusiasm when their desires were met.

*The tensions that continued to work against my efforts.* Regardless of my efforts to embrace the centrifugal forces and remain committed to helping structure a learning environment that was creative and open, there were tensions, oppositional centripetal forces (Bakhtin, 1981), which continued to push against my efforts. One of these was the danger of our department moving toward a "contrived collegiality" (Hargeaves & Dawe, 1990; Lam, Yim, & Lam, 2002), where our working together was more about appearances rather than an "authentic" (Freire, 1970, p. 130) commitment to dialogue, examining our intentions and outcomes and moving toward real change in our practices, our contexts, and ourselves. Because our Monday meetings as a department or grade level group were "sacred" and a part of the "normal" actions of our school, I had to fight continually against their becoming mechanical or procedural. I sought means to retain the reflective aspect of our conversations, so that our work together might remain true "praxis," rather than action without thought (Freire, 1970). As a department chair who embraced the notion of job-imbedded professional learning and a stance as a professional developer, I worked to further structures and situations to help the department's teachers and myself remain committed to a state of "becoming" (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Freire,

1970), where teaching as an act of language remains always fresh and responsive to contemporary concerns.

In spite of my efforts, though, the dynamics of the school's larger structure had a prohibitive effect on the continuance of collegial conversations and collaboration. In my reflective journal, I made note of one of these shifts:

> I did learn, towards the end of the [department] meeting, that many department members are concerned with the fact that we [no longer] have a common lunch, and the 9th grade teachers in particular are feeling tremendously disconnected and removed from the department. This has me worrying that the collegiality and collaborative environment that I have worked to build and foster within the department is in jeopardy.

On a larger scale, the shifts in administrative expectations for both the teachers and the department chairs, which seemed minor at the start of the study as noted in Chapter 4, began to have a greater effect on my ability to keep the department's meetings and overall philosophy focused on collaboration and professional learning. As suggested by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (cited in Popper, 2004) as well as role theory (e.g., Biddle, 1986), the less sure the teachers and I were of our roles and responsibilities, the more we desired to spend our time and energies on understanding "nuts and bolts" and organizational procedures to stay in line with the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). In doing so, we longed to reclaim a sense of professional and personal safety in a space prescribed for us by some outside authority, and we were seemingly willing to sacrifice our desires for autonomy or individuality. The teachers then looked to me as department chair to assist and comfort them through the changes, providing for their more basic

needs of security concerning day-to-day operations. Feeling the tensions of this context in flux, rather than always remaining willing or able to focus their energies on discussions and collaborations concerning larger instructional, curricular, or assessment issues, the teachers themselves sought stability, unification, and stagnation. These served as a direct challenge to the very things they claimed to desire: the professional space to enact the centrifugal actions of collaboration, collegiality, and contextualized professional development.

One other tension that directly worked against my desire to build opportunities for collaboration and collegiality lay in our school's organization, which divided us into what Siskin (1994) describes as subject-specific "realms of knowledge," which institutionalized the boundaries and division between academic departments in high school. As the head of one of those subject-specific departments, I lived and operated from the basis of my own "language arts realm." As such, I felt isolated and alone in my department chair role. Within our school's organization, there was no other single department chair with whom I could discuss my practice or anyone to help me work through issues or improve my actions.

Although some "alliances" seemed to be forming among various department chairs at the study's start in response to the new administration, as the term progressed, our interactions became less positive and were generally not mutually beneficial exchanges about improving our work. Regardless of Dr. Keats' belief that "no department can live in isolation," he had not established a forum for true collaboration and collegiality among the department chairs, and in the face of the new administrative structure, the department chairs' responses seemed to be those of "retreat" and "protect,"

perhaps in fear of the authoritative voice (Bakhtin, 1981). Even though I had some critical friends who helped me think through the various aspects of my dissertation study, for the purposes of my daily lived actions, I operated alone. My reflective journal writing became the most consistent means for me to think through my actions and plan for subsequent actions and a space for me to determine how to respond to the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) that was omnipresent within the school. My reflective practices became the tool by which I kept the centrifugal forces at play in my own work and responses.

*Reflecting on the attempts to increase dialogue.* The data and my reflections and analysis suggested that I could have furthered the centrifugal forces (Bakhtin, 1981) at work within the department and continued to increase opportunities for collaboration and collegiality had I more directly addressed the human connections being fractured by some of the administration's new structures and expectations. Rather than succumbing to the pressures of the authoritative discourse (Bakhtin, 1981) and moving toward more "nuts and bolts" procedural clarifications, I should have made time for one-on-one conversations and provided teachers a space to feel connected and become a person with whom they could share their concerns, joys, and selves. Although it would have added more time-consuming work and potentially required more personal sacrifice and involvement, the data suggests that those actions may have helped the teachers within the department feel more connected and more committed toward maintaining their stance of collaborative collegiality. Rather than waiting for teachers to approach the department chair in search of collaboration, I should have gone to them; rather than professing to be a proponent of collaboration and collegiality, I should have collaborated more and acted

more personally, as a true colleague, working to build "communion" (Freire, 1970, p. 133) with the teachers for the betterment of all.

Regardless of a department chair's stance toward collaboration and collegiality, it would be naïve to ignore the tensions that lay within a department chair's work in promoting and supporting such "openness" and liberty within an organization. Although both principals expressed a desire for department chairs to encourage collaboration, the administration's new policies and structures, such as mandating an ending time for all departmental meetings, created a centripetal pull toward a more closed and unified expectation for the scope of teachers' collaborative work. Furthermore, the very organizational structure that created my department chair positionality—subject-area department divisions—and the original intentions behind the department chair position as a principal's eyes in the field were other examples of the centripetal force at work, which created a more fragmented and rigid situation. Although I attempted to enact emancipating educational work and promote true dialogue and meaning making opportunities for teachers and their work in the classroom, department, and school as a whole, I nevertheless faced constant situations and constraints, which Freire (1970) would havelabeled as "anti-dialogical" actions.

Once more, the work of the department chair was seen to be heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981), residing in the space of tension, enacted among myriad voices and tensions with the department chair continually in a state of negotiation. By remaining committed to education as an emancipatory practice and recognizing the power of collaboration and collegiality as a means to promote individual liberation, I initially believed myself to be trapped in a positionality where I wanted to promote true dialogue, but felt the

organization's structures worked against that. I came to realize that with every pull of the centripetal force of the authoritative discourse, I still had the power to respond with the centrifugal push of my internally persuasive discourse. I could enact a form of "revolutionary leadership" (Freire, 1970) even within a hierarchical organization.

*Responding to the Centripetal and Centrifugal Tensions*

According to Bakhtin (1981), there are no "neutral" words; all language is layered with meanings and intentions, and all lived experiences are social manifestations of language. In examining the language and actions of the two principals, the teachers, and myself, I came to realize the power that under girded our social interactions. Language was the tool that enabled us to understand our situations, make meanings of them, and respond to them.

In pursuing the department chair position, I had been drawn to Dr. Keats' language of inclusion, possibility, and passion for teaching and learning and had fully embraced his commitment to what he termed "democratic leadership." Using abstract words like "vision," "culture," "democracy," "shared governance," and "community," he organized the school's structures to give all members voice and power. By working toward the creation of an organization where members can become what Freire (1970) described as "beings for themselves" (p. 74), working toward greater consciousness of their situation and their power to transform that situation from within through "committed involvement" (p. 69), Dr. Keats provided teachers and department chairs the opportunity to embrace their potentials. His repeated use of words like "diversity," "autonomy," and "risk" emanated with what Bakhtin (1981) described as a centrifugal force, moving the organization and therefore all members of the organization—including

the department chair—to a less structured and more emancipated space, open to possibilities and ripe for creativity. This provided an ideal—albeit convoluted, complex, and contingent—space for me to operate as a department chair, responding to the teachers' past limiting experiences and working to address their sense of oppression from the past.

With the new leadership, a new organizational model emerged, and a new language began to be spoken by administrators, teachers, and department chairs. Dr. Keats had been concerned with large, abstract ideas—democracy, choice, voice; Dr. Sparks expressed concerns about test scores, processes, and various "legal issues." His language was perceived to be more legalistic, beauraucratic, and exacting concerning the school, education, and the department chair role. Bakhtin (1981) would describe Sparks' focus on structure, policy, and streamlined procedure, as centripetal language, employing "the authoritative word" (p. 342). The new principal's actions suggested he did not operate from the language or position of the educational system as liberating. In his changes of our school's organizational structure, he positioned me as department chair to work toward his understanding of how to run a school. Through critical examination of the structure and the language employed to enact the new organization, I began to recognize what Freire (1970) terms the "dehumanization" aspect of this new hierarchy and began to embrace a position as a "revolutionary leader" (p. 95), working to raise teachers' consciousness of our situation and engage in true dialogue, moving us all toward greater unity.

More importantly, however, I came to realize that the organization's movement away from a space that embraced the centrifugal tensions encouraging individual

expression and total autonomy to one that operated with more centripetal tensions was not merely a product of a new principal. Instead, the shifting organization became a living example of language at work and the negotiation of meaning within societal structures. It was evidence that schools and the various positionalities within them, including the department chair role, are always under construction, in a heteroglossic space.

## How the Study Addressed the Research Questions

The two questions that guided this study examined what it meant for a department to negotiate her role within the context of a school community that holds complex and simultaneous conflicting notions of that role and how reflective practices enabled that negotiation. I initially understood the department chair's role as an outsider, having worked for a number of department chairs in different schools. By the time of the study, I had myself enacted the role for three years and had come to understand the role as multi-layered, complex, and contingent. As I sought a deeper understanding of the many dimensions and examined the role through a Bakhtinian lens, I realized that the role was even more multiplicitous than I originally assumed because it was one under constant negotiation, and always a thing in process with meaning being made in the living response. Much as Bakhtin (1981) described language as "tast[ing] of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life" (p. 293), so the department chair role is also "overpopulated with the intentions of others" (p. 294). The role is not a passive thing to be understood and enacted, but a living positionality to be created, even as one lives it, constructing the role's meaning with each response. And those

overpopulated intentions were the many layers of expectation within the many roles of the singular, but fluctuating positionality of department chair.

Furthermore, I came to understand that the meanings being made in each action and response were actually my attempts to negotiate the various tensions at play within the power structures out of and against which the department chair positionality existed. By living in the midst of various centrifugal and centripetal forces, I lived the heteroglossic nature of the department chair role, feeling the push and pull of various tensions acting upon the role but also realizing the potential power I had to affect those pushes and pulls. Through my responses, I had power to affect what discourses were privileged in each situation, and move the context toward a more unified space or one that was more emancipated and free.

Because the department chair role is often one enacted in isolation away from direct peers, as was my case during the time of the study, reflective practices provided a means to examine the heteroglossia of the department chair role and remain committed to a critical stance of interrogating the power structures at work within our organization and our educational practices, individually and collectively. Without an immediate peer group and in the face of a continually fluctuating context, writing became my method of making meaning of my practice. Within my journal, I wrote continuously, describing events and actions and then, raising questions about those experiences. I attempted to draw connections among them and conclusions about them. Through this ongoing reflection, I examined my actions, roles, and expectations; made meaning of them; and anticipated possible reactions to my responses to them.

With the fast-paced, often reactive nature of the department chair role paired with its multiple dimensions and many complexities, my professional reflective journal became a quiet space in which I could contemplate my work and raise my consciousness about it, preparing for the work that would follow. As a permanent record of very temporal moments and events in my lived experience, the journal further provided me the opportunity to step away from the situation and gain new perspective on the context and my role within that space.

Through the act of writing in a reflective mode and doing what Schön (1983, 1987) terms "reflection-on-action," I moved toward a heightened awareness of my actions and responses, raising my consciousness about them as I lived them, increasing my abilities to reflect and become more conscious about my role. Through this, I worked toward practicing a more "humanizing pedagogy" (Freire, 1970), by continually re-examining myself and my own actions and responses that were limiting or oppressive. Reflective practices gave me the means to make meaning of my role and the method by which to interrogate my work and continue my commitment to education as liberatory practice.

## Summation

In this chapter, I attempted to restory a few key experiences from my action research self-study to examine the ideas of Bakhtin at work within the role and lived experience of one high school department chair. In the chapter's three sections, I have recalled the research questions and seminal arguments of the dissertation, and discussed how the language and concepts of Bakhtin give breadth of understanding to the complexity of the department chair role. In taking a critical stance toward the study's

context and the expectations of the co-participants on the department chair role, I also used the theoretical work of Freire to deepen the analysis on the data and further my understanding of how the department chair role is complex and what that complexity ultimately means for a person trying to enact the role.

Finally, I reflected on how the research study directly addressed and answered the research questions, which guided the study. Through this study, I made the following arguments:

1) Because the role and work of the department chair is always in a state of flux depending on how others perceive it and what others need it to be, enacting the department chair role is an existential practice;

and

2) Because of the ambiguities and fluctuations surrounding the department chair role and work, reflective practices are necessary to enable a department chair to make meaning of her past, present, and future lived experiences.

This study helped me understand that while a shift in administration affects everything about a department chair's work, in actuality the work is in a state of perpetual negotiation because the context is always shifting. Therefore, acting as a department chair is an existential practice in which each enactor makes the meaning of the various roles for herself as she enacts the role. Also, because the position is too often isolated from others, whether they are other teachers, other department chairs, or administrators, reflective practices served as the means for a department chair to have a space to contemplate her past actions and prepare for future ones. Additionally, reflective

practices, such as a commitment to professional reflective journal writing, became the foundation upon which this department built her practice daily, and the study suggested that reflective practice remains an accessible and appropriate method for a department chair to gain deeper understanding of her role and work, negotiate and potentially improve that work, and continue to interrogate the work and its context, even as it is being enacted. Through reflective practice, a department chair helps others and herself move closer to education's promise as an emancipatory practice. Most importantly, however, the understanding of the heteroglossic positioning of the department chair role and the willingness to embrace and make use of the power inherent in recognizing the various tensions at play within and upon an organization and its many players give the department chair power to move an educational organization and its members to a more emancipated space; the complexity of the department chair role makes it a space of untapped possibility for revolutionary leadership.

# CHAPTER 6

# FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this action research self-study on the daily lived experiences of the department chair position and work suggest two overarching arguments concerning the high school department chair position. First, I argued that enacting the department chair role is an existential practice due to its complexity and contingency. Because the role is mired in a nebulous swamp of role understanding, it falls to the department chair herself to make meaning of the role and of the work that the role enactor undertakes. Secondly, in responding to those complexities and contingencies, for a department chair to make sense of her role, she must be willing to continually revisit and revise her understanding of her position, what the position entails, and what her actions should be. No fixed professional learning could be appropriate to prepare her for those situations she will face within her work and role. Therefore, I argued that the use of reflective practice is essential for a department chair to make sense of the complexity and contingency of her role and for her to enact her role while also continuing to improve that very enactment.

## Implications

To suggest that the department chair role is complex and contingent is not news, but this study sought to examine those things that make the role complex and what it means to live in the position that must negotiate those complexities and contingencies. In a metaphorical sense, it sought to understand what it is to live in the midst of an

organizational tug-of-war and come to understand that although seeming to be the "marker" in the middle of a game, she, too, possesses power to affect the game's tension and eventual outcome. This study elucidated four major implications for the role and work of the high school department chair, pertaining to its positionality in a heteroglossic space, mired in an inherently hierarchical organizational structure.

*The Challenge of Effectiveness for Inexperienced Chairs*

The first implication is that the complexity and contingency of the department chair role make it nearly impossible for a novice department chair to enact the role effectively. As shown in the literature and in this study, the department chair role is not a fixed identity to be readily defined or easily understood; instead, it is under constant negotiation of varied and sometimes conflicting role expectations, and enactors must wrestle with role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload as they work to fulfill the role's myriad duties and responsibilities. Just as I had to be nurturer and manager, supervisor and evaluator, administrative assistant and colleague at all times, these seemingly oppositional roles required simultaneous enactment.

A department chair learns the role and comes to understand the job, its parameters and potentialities, even as she lives it. Rather than trying to determine *the* way to be a department chair, I had to continually learn the ways to *be* the role. Also, because it is an entirely situated position, under construction at all times and ever in response to others who define its expectations, duties and responsibilities, possibilities and limitations, the chair must remain open to living in a fluctuating space, confident enough to move outside the system even as she works within and for the system. These complexities paired with the dearth of formal professional training and development provided to educators

appointed to or hired into the department chair role make it nearly impossible for an inexperience department chair to be effective in her role.

Rather than having space and time to examine her work or to study its effects or its possibilities, the novice department chair must work to maintain the appearance of competence in the role even as she attempts to determine what that role is or what the role senders expect of her in that role. Furthermore, given her close ties to the teaching corps and the point of reference that many teachers believe questioning or seeking assistance is a sign of incompetence (Troen & Boles, 2003), a department chair who has recently been moved into a titled leadership position may be hesitant to admit her role insecurity or her need for additional professional learning. The reticence only exacerbates her ineffectiveness in the role and further suggests that the hierarchical system once more serves to limit individuals and their potentials.

Because the department chair lives in the space of tension, pulled by both centrifugal forces of rebellion and individuality and the centripetal forces of authoritative unification, she must work to understand and embrace these tensions. Only then can a department chair begin the work to negotiate the tensions and meet the needs of the teachers and the administration while also maintaining a sense of personal identity. She must embrace her positionality as a voice in the middle but also come to understand that as she resides in the tensioned space of the push and pull in a school organization's metaphorical tug-of-war, she still possesses power to push and pull from the middle, having the effect of deciding which side will be privileged in each situation and even moving the two sides closer to the center. Given the difficulty and potential risk of these understandings, it is unreasonable to assume that an inexperienced department chair

could fully enact the role until she finds the means or builds the cache of trust, reliability, and respect to do so.

*Improbability for Scholarship from the Department Chair*

The heteroglossic positioning of the department chair role as a multi-layered positionality makes it a hostile place for the possibility of scholarship. Because a department chair must enact many roles simultaneously, negotiating the space in between administration and teachers as well as her own teaching space in a continual dance of response, the department chair position is a role rife with issues of stress, time management, and split loyalties. In a role that is "beholden to everyone," a department chair has little opportunity to explore additional opportunities for professional development or growth beyond those required as a part of the role.

For that reason, department chairs may be hesitant to add the additional burden and responsibility of pursuing formal scholarship in the structure of a doctoral program or formalized research project leading toward publication or the production of knowledge for public consumption. Because she lives her work, attempting to make meaning for herself, her close constituents, and her students, she is often over-extended so much within her professional life that she feels unable to add another aspect of responsibility to her professional identity.

Should she assume the work of scholarship, she must be willing to make additional sacrifices to her professional and personal life and add yet another layer to her already multi-layered identity, potentially pulling her farther away from effectiveness as a department chair even as she seeks to improve the role through rigorous academic study. Given the financial, professional, and personal sacrifices I had to make to complete this

doctoral study, I now understand more fully why I was unable to locate a single study written from an insider's positioning. The department chair role's complications and demands make it nearly impossible for a department chair to study her work and still fulfill the expectations of her job. Again, considering the tug-of-war metaphor, living in the space that is being pulled in opposite directions, it is unlikely that most middle markers would be willing or able to add the tension of another rope pulling at them. Therefore, it may not be reasonable to expect department chairs to assume one more responsibility and expectation in the form of academic scholarship, suggesting that the dearth of literature from the insider's position will remain as such.

*The Under-Realized Potential of the Department Chair Role*

As mentioned earlier, the department chair role offers principals an untapped resource for gaining a greater understanding of the teaching and learning occurring within the schools they lead. The role also provides the means for principals to build their rapport with teachers and create a more cohesive, collaborative, and productive faculty because department chairs are closest to the "real work" of schools happening on a daily basis. However, when department chairs are viewed by principals as another means to control or watch over teachers and classroom happenings or as a positionality beneath administrators, then the oppressive nature of the school's structure, implicit in its historical origins (Ingersoll, 2006; Lortie, 2002), becomes reinforced and can become reified. This leads to decreased opportunities for growth and change necessary for student and professional educator success.

As the position "in the middle," the department chair wrestles with being *neither* fully an administrator *nor* fully a teacher, and in schools, this middle-ground has too

often been used or enacted to maintain the distance between the two ends of the educator spectrum. Should the role be reexamined and repositioned to a *both-and* role that works to build understanding between administrators and teachers, helping all come to greater realization of their potentialities and powers within a true learning community, then, schools would have the opportunity to move away from a top-down structure that oppresses, belittles, and limits to one that is liberating, enriching, and limitless. As politicians, researchers, and educators look to ways to reform education and improve academic success for all students, perhaps the possibility for greater change lies not outside the high school in some form of legislative mandate but in an interrogation and upheaval of the organization's structure.

By opening the high school's structure and breaking down the hierarchy that keeps the department chair in a space of tension and limits, the department chair position could find the empowerment to reach its potential as it works to help all others reach theirs. As long as the department chair role remains underprivileged in the understanding of the power it possesses, department chairs will never be able to fully achieve the potential that exists within the role.

*The Limiting Nature of a Short-Term Role*

However, because department chairs live in a state of constant role negotiation and tension and because it is an undervalued and underprivileged position, this study implies that department chairs who possess a critical stance desiring education to be more liberating may be unable to enact the role for an extended period of time. Because the position has been viewed by some (e.g., Lankford, O'Connell, & Wyckoff, 2003), myself included, as a stepping stone to administration and because political and leadership skills

are gained and opportunities arise, many move out of the department chair role and either fully into the administrative realm, embracing those aspects of the department chair position or back into the classroom in retreat from the administrative duties and responsibilities. Living in an in-between space and trying to make the most of that space while also fulfilling all of the expectations being placed upon that space becomes too difficult for a department chair to enact the role for long. This struggle is particularly challenging if a department chair works in a critical spirit of moving the role away from its original intentions as a middle-management position that further the oppressive nature of schools with principals using department chairs as one more means to control or manage teachers and towards a position working for unity, emancipation, and liberation for all members of the school's organization. As such, this department chair's daily lived experiences are rife with danger and turmoil as she precariously walks the line between fulfilling her employer's expectations and satisfying the needs and wishes of her colleagues.

Fighting the historically hierarchical and the immediate oppressive responsibilities that a department chair who desires a more egalitarian school community must still enact, the department chair may not be able to maintain living in this state of tension for long. Seeing herself trapped in the middle, she is likely—due to issues of emotional exhaustion, stress, and work overload—to try to move into a position that offers more comfort, such as returning to the classroom, or one that seems to offer more control or opportunities to change the system, such as an administrative position. Once more looking to the tug-of-war metaphor, she may return to the teaching team with whom

she is more familiar or align herself more completely with the strength of the more powerful administrative team.

If the department chair does not move out of the space of tension and tries to stay in the position for a longer time, she may develop a tendency to become more complacent, more accepting of "how it is," and less critical in her stance and actions. She accepts her role as another cog in the organizational machine of schools, accepting her own oppression and her role in maintaining the oppression of others, namely her fellow teachers. Her critical spirit can easily become crushed without the presence of a peer group for support or some evidence that the system is shifting to provide her a greater space in which to fulfill the potentiality of her role. Without that emancipatory spirit and commitment to interrogating her own work and her context, she is destined to become less effective in her abilities to break down the hierarchies that exist between administrators and teachers or in her abilities to help all members of the school's community achieve "true dialogue" or satisfactory professional engagement.

## Recommendations from the Study

Considering the findings and implications of the study, I offer several recommendations for department chairs, school leaders, and educational researchers concerning the department chair role and work.

### *Recommendations for Department Chairs*

First, department chairs or those seeking the department chair position should look to its potential as a liberating and emancipatory space for all members of the educational community. Although this is generally not a role thought of for the department chair and the history clearly suggests that its original intent in fact worked in

an oppositional way, nonetheless, as a positionality in-between the classroom and the "front office," the department chair role is imbued with the possibility of changing the larger organization. Department chairs must take a critical look at who they are as educational leaders, what intentions they have within the role, and what possibilities for their role they have not yet explored. They should interrogate their reasons for pursuing the role, their understandings of their purposes within the power, and their positioning within the current's school structure. Are they in the role as a stepping-stone to what they view as a higher space in the organization's hierarchy or in search of more personal power? Are they looking for an escape from the pressures and responsibilities of a full teaching load? Or are they in search of a position that will lead to greater self-empowerment as well as opportunities to help others move toward more democratic and egalitarian participation in education? Are they willing to assume the challenges and dangers of being a voice in the middle that works to collapse the structure so that all voices may have a place to be heard?

Additionally, department chairs should seek to understand what their theories of practice are, and how their work as a department chair resonates or creates dissonance with those theories. Rather than viewing the department chair role as a position "higher than" that possessed by the classroom teacher or "beneath" the administrative tier of a school's organization, department chairs must try to describe and refine their understandings of their role so that enacting it from a state of heightened consciousness leads to a redefining of the organization's overall structure. Through a critical stance and a commitment to liberating the position from its original intent as another means for a principal to control and watch over less-than-competent teachers, a department chair can

work to build true dialogue, moving each end of the organizational hierarchy toward a more level field of play for all participants.

*The necessity of reflective practice for department chairs.* The best means for a department chair to accomplish this heightened consciousness is through a commitment to reflective practice about her role and work. Rather than looking to some outside source for training on how to be a "good" or "effective" department chair or how to do the "right things" in the department chair role, the enactor should embrace the openness of the position and look to the lack of fixed identity as an opportunity for continual growth and development in the position. By assuming such an understanding and knowing that the role is not one that has a built-in support or a formal professional learning system within the majority of schools, a department chair must look to other sources to find the means to continue to examine, interrogate, and improve her practice. Therefore, reflective practice provides the space for a department chair to make meaning of her daily actions and responses and to anticipate her future ones. Additionally, reflective practice provides the luxury of time in that many reflective practices lead to a permanent recording of actions and responses, which may be examined repeatedly over time. Gaining this distance from one's immediate practice often provides opportunity for increased clarity of understanding. In my case, as a practitioner researcher, the more time I had between the data collection on my work and situation the greater my ability became to be reflective about it and make meaning of the situations. Reflective practice as a professional learning tool gives department chairs a way to continually understand more fully and negotiate more ably their role, leading to a more effective enactment of their role.

*Department chairs should study their own practice.* Although finding time and energy to study one's own practice is incredibly challenging for department chairs already juggling myriad responsibilities and fighting the many tensions of effective role negotiation, the process does offer an intense and important professional learning opportunity and is therefore recommended for department chairs to consider undertaking. In the same vein as the National Board Certification process, formal self-study for the dual purpose of professional growth and academic scholarship yields an experience ripe in intellectual enrichment while also helping a department chair closely and systematically examine the work she undertakes on a daily basis. Requiring much personal sacrifice and a commitment of time and energy as well as a willingness to "pick up another rope" in the daily tug-of-war game that is the department chair's role, a self-study offers a department chair the opportunity to formalize her existential work of meaning making and to have her daily life writ large in hope of improving not only her practice and the immediate context, but those beyond her immediate situation.

*Recommendations for School Leaders*

The historical development of the department chair position shows it to be a role that is inherently positioned to be part of a school's hierarchy, limited in its ability to lead toward a more egalitarian or democratic organization. Therefore, although the role is nebulous in its job description and entirely contextual in the particulars of its expectations and enactment, principals should reexamine their understandings of the role and how they see it fitting into the school's organization. Rather than accepting the department chair as a person in-between administrators and teachers, principals should look to the department chair role for the potential of what it could offer them: a direct means to gain

understanding of what's really happening in the classrooms within the building and what should or could be happening in the scope of increased student achievement and continual school improvement.

Principals should reconsider how underprivileged the department chair position is and recognize the power that could be gained for the organization as a whole as well as each of its members individually if department chairs were given the resources necessary to explore the potentials within their positions. Rather than viewing a department chair as the "principals' banner carrier," imbued with the task of spreading the principal's message concerning his direction for the school, its teachers, and students, the department chair could serve as the mediator who helps administrators and teachers work together to identify target areas for school improvement. Additionally, she could help build a collective vision and mission, generating involvement, buy-in, and dedication from all parties.

At the same time, rather than positioning a department chair to act as a "spy" figure, scouting out inconsistencies or weaknesses in teachers as a means to address them in some punitive fashion, principals should look to department chairs to help leaders understand what growth areas exist within the learning community and what resources might be needed to address those areas. Additionally, should a principal look to a department chair to enable him or her to better understand the individual strengths of teachers in the building, the principal would gain the ability to be more authentic in celebrating those strengths and their subsequent successes. Furthermore, such proximity to the actual classroom activities would provide opportunities for a principal to have effective teachers model for others how those strengths and successes might be replicated

or furthered, suggesting that the principal recognizes and appreciates the instructional expertise of the faculty members.

In essence, when principals limit department chairs to a middle management position or one that is consumed with the bureaucratic expectations of keeping the school's assembly-line organization running smoothly from a management viewpoint, then the principal has limited the ability of the school and its students to achieve their potentials. Without creating the space for department chairs to work toward their potentials, the principal has shut out the possibility for any member of the school to reach the fully emancipated and engaged place of academic and personal excellence. For high school principals to be fully effective leaders, they must revisit their understanding and use of the department chair position and ask whether they have provided the means for department chairs to enact their roles fully. Or has the principal limited and oppressed the department chairs with their own limited understandings of and expectations for the role?

Finally, given the recent research that suggests many teachers leave the profession because of dissatisfaction with their local administrations (e.g., Quartz, Thomas, Anderson, Masyn, Barraza-Lyons, & Olsen, 2005), principals should look to department chairs to help them create working environments that are more conducive to teacher satisfaction and long-term commitments to working in those contexts. With the help of department chairs, principals can encourage faculties to become communities of learners, committed to student achievement and ongoing organizational improvement.

*Recommendations for Educational Researchers*

As stated in Chapter 2, the research on the high school department chair remains somewhat limited in general and is virtually non-existent from the insider's positionality. Although the obvious recommendation would be that the position needs further examination, a more important recommendation is for additional study on how the position might be reexamined and refigured away from its historical origins as a position furthering hierarchical oppression used by school leaders to maintain control over teachers' classroom actions. Instead, researchers should examine how educational leaders operating within a hierarchical structure work to redefine that structure and move schools and their personnel, particularly department chairs, toward a more democratic structure.

Also, additional research is needed to find principals who have redefined the department chair position and have encouraged department chairs to seek out and work toward the potentiality of the role. How do those department chairs and principals define the role and its expectations? How is the role changed by a more democratic school structure? How are teachers, their work, and their impact on student achievement affected when department chairs are placed in a more privileged position? But the research should not only be focused on the principal's role in limiting or liberating the department chair's position; instead, it should also work to examine how department chairs themselves define and enact their role in a hierarchical organizational structure and how they work to live within as well as break down those hierarchies.

Research is also needed to further examine my assertion that enacting the department chair role with a critical stance is a short-term position, and if my assertion is

correct, to further examine what happens to department chairs who leave the position and what factors caused them to leave the position. If additional study shows my assertion that the department chair is a short-term position is in fact a fallacy, then, research should be conducted that examines a department chair's position, role understanding, and effectiveness over time. Do department chairs who remain in the role for extended periods of time become more effective or less so? Why do they remain in the position for an extended period of time? Also, additional study should be undertaken to determine if there are other means beyond reflective practice to help a department chair understand, negotiate, and improve her practice, and to examine the effects of a commitment to reflective practice on a department chair's work over time.

Given the paucity of research on the department chair role and work, particularly from the insider's positionality, there is no limit to the recommended areas that need additional examination concerning that area of high school organizations and the various positions within those organizations. However, I believe that each recommended area of study should be grounded in a fundamental examination of how the role has been limited from its inception and throughout its existence and how those limitations have maintained its positioning as a "no-win" role replete with oppressive issues, contrary to the democratic promise of public education.

## Concluding Thoughts

The heteroglossic department chair position operates in a space of tension, flux, and negotiation, situated within the larger context of a school's organization. Because the position is one that is constantly under construction in an ever-shifting social context, reflective practice provides a department chair with a means to respond to and meet the

expectations of the complex and simultaneous understandings of her role that others within the context hold. Furthermore, reflective practice is, in fact, necessary for the department chair to make meaning of her role and work. As she carries out her role and work, she enacts an existential practice, trying to understand the context, its many players, and her own most appropriate response for each situation and in response to each player. Operating in a space that is rife with challenges and dangers as she moves between the authoritative voice of administrations and standards and the internally persuasive voice of individual teachers and the creative spirit, the department chair's position carries the power to affect the larger organization's effectiveness as well as each member within that organization by the way in which the department chair enacts her role. By embracing that power and continually interrogating the potentialities and pitfalls inherent in the position, a department chair has the opportunity to enable public education to move closer towards emancipation and egalitarianism and all members of the educational community towards greater liberation and personal satisfaction.

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# APPENDIX A

# DISTRICT DEPARTMENT CHAIR JOB DESCRIPTION

**Division:** **Educational Leadership**
**Department:** **Local School**
**Job Title:** **Department Chairperson**
**PeopleSoft Job Code:**
**Original Adoption Date:** August 1991
**Latest Revision Date:** November, 2001

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**Reports To:**
Principal or Designee

|
**Department Chairperson**
|
**Supervises:**
Teachers Within a Department

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**Employment Terms:**

Non-contractual supplement to be assigned by the principal annually.

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## QUALIFICATIONS:

**Required Licenses:**

**Education:**
A master's degree in the subject area supervised is preferred.

**Desirable Skills:**
Expertise in subject area, excellent human relations skills; demonstrated leadership/instructional supervision skills.

**Experience:**
Have completed at least three successful years of teaching in the field to be supervised.

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## PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY: (Indicate if a line or support staff position)

The Chairperson of the department shall provide professional leadership within his/her department.

**ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS:**

I. Staff:

A Supervises day to day operation of department.
1. Helps supervise substitute personnel for teachers who are absent.
2. Helps to supervise student teachers assigned to teachers in their department.
3. Encourages recommendations for all special programs.

B. Assists with interview of prospective teachers.

C. Assists in assessment of teachers.
1. Conduct RBES evaluations with teachers assigned by the principal.
2. Conduct GTEP evaluations with teachers as assigned by principal.
3. Supervises, in conjunction with local school administrators, any plans for improvement developed for teachers.
4. Conducts a post-conference with each teacher that he or she evaluates, at least once each year, at which time a completed assessment instrument will be completed.
5. Supervises, in conjunction with local school administrators, plans for improvement should teachers receive ratings of N and/or U on any category of the Teacher Evaluation Instrument.

D. Assists in and prepares suggested schedule for department teaching assignments by semesters.
1. Works with counselors in scheduling new students.
2. Coordinates individual student advisement within department.
3. Coordinates student pre-registration and registration including dissemination of information to all students.

E. Meets with staff on regular basis.
1. Shares research and program development.
2. Attends Department Chairperson meetings held by Central Office Program Coordinator.

II. Instruction/Curriculum Planning and Implementation:

A. Implements and maintains programs in department.
1. Assists teachers in instructional activities.
2. Implements new programs and informs other professionals and the community about these programs.
3. Sets instructional goals based on input from teachers and students.

B. Plans and conduct staff development where appropriate.
1. Reports back to county curriculum coordinator on effectiveness and usefulness of county staff development sessions.
2. Sends attendance records of systemwide staff development activities to county curriculum coordinator.

C. Meets on a regular basis with local administrators.

D. Meets on a regular basis with county curriculum coordinator.

E. Plans for and participate in open meetings, PTSA meetings, freshman orientation meetings with middle school teachers, students, and parents.

F. Coordinates the development of end of semester exams.

G. Ensures that the appropriate AKS are taught.

III. Instructional Materials/Equipment:

A. Participates in local school budget planning and review.

B. Prepares list of core material needed for coming year.

C. Prepares orders for instructional material, receives orders, verifies, follows up on errors, non-delivery, etc.

D. Assists media staff in planning for book, audio visual software, and hardware orders.

E. Assists in the recovery of lost and damaged textbooks each semester.

F. Prepares orders for equipment, secures service and provides for security.

G. Provides and maintains a resource center in the department for equipment and materials unique to a particular department where space is available.

H. Keeps an accurate inventory of instructional materials, books and equipment.

I. Assumes responsibility for departmental correspondence.

J. Reports and coordinates maintenance on equipment.

IV. General Administrative Duties:

A. Assumes other duties as assigned by the principal.

B. Assists principals in public relations.

C. Meets with appropriate administrators.

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**PHYSICAL DEMANDS:**

**APPENDIX B**

**SAMPLE DEPARTMENT MEETING AGENDA**

**LA Department Meeting --- 10/10/06 2:25 – 3:15 p.m., Room A112**

I. Thanks/Heads Up (5 minute)
- RBES
- Vertical Team to Stay
- Stop Worrying
- Oct. 16th – Meet with principal for round table
- Oct. 16th – AP teachers' meeting

II. SPED Dept. Rep. will be in to share a short video on working with autistic/Aspberger kids as that population continues to swell. (15 minutes)

III. READING and Rigor (20 minutes)
- Brenda and Mark
- Kevin
- Marilyn
- Sarah
- Others?

IV. The Technical Issue (10-15 minutes)

# LA Department Agenda – 11/13/06

I. Kudos Around & Celebrations

II. Announcement/Reminders

Noise in hallway/sending students to work there

Tardy policy

Food/drinks/vending machines/passes out/student locator log/leaving a note when you take your classes out

Warning – the end of the term (parents/pleas for leniency with deadlines, make-up work, extra credit, apathy, etc.); make sure progress reports are going out weekly – include notes for parents to be aware that you are NOT offering extra credit, and that students need to STUDY for their exams, which count as 20% of their overall grade!!!!

Dates to be aware of:

Learning Thursday: Thurs., 11/16 (planning periods)
RATR Committee meeting: Mon., 11/20 (2:30, Media Center)
PROGRESS REPORTS: Tues., 11/21 – enter grades into SASI ***prior*** to leaving for T-giving Break
GL meetings: Mon., 12/27
Last common assessment for term? (GL Dependent)
Faculty Meeting: 12/4
Dept. Meeting: 12/11
Performance Final Exam: Wed., 12/13
EOCTs: 9th—12/7-8; 11th—12/11-12
Department Party 12/14; Dates for Secret Santa : starts 12/4 (reveal at the party)
Final Exams: 12/19-20

III. CARE Team Info. – Carrie

IV. Registration News/Processes

SASI/CLASSXP info.

Registration "rules"

Dates to Remember:

**11/13** Dept. meeting: Review course sequencing and appropriate student placement as well as registration process for current students. (Teachers bring registration record forms and this timeline to the meeting.)

**11/14** Department chairs submit finalized course pathway/ placement information to curriculum office.

**11/15-11/17** Teachers discuss course options with current students and record course selections on the provided rosters.

**11/16** Learning Thursday will give an overview of the registration process and review technology tools available to help make good placement decisions.

**11/20** Teachers make a 2nd copy of course selection records and submit a copy to department chair. Department chair turns in all forms to curriculum office.

**1/2** Teachers review Fall course placements, adjust as needed.

V. New Master Schedule for Spring (let me know if you see errors/concerns)

VI. Textbooks/Readers' Companions for Spring? Do we have needs?

VII. Other? Questions?

**LA Department Meeting Agenda – 12/11/06**

I. Appreciations and Awards

II. Writing in our Department (20 min.: 2:25 – 2:45)

A. What are we currently 'expected to produce'/requiring at each grade level (start with the "end in mind" – 12th grade)?

B. Look at the types of writing skills expected by high stakes tests:

PSAT – basics of the writing process
Gateway – expository
HSGWT (the one that determines our AYP) – persuasive
SAT – expository/persuasive
AP – expository/literary analysis

C. Do our teaching papers match what our kids will be required to do?

D. How do we better prepare our kids for these assessments?

III. Writing Portfolios – beginning to revise the process for 2007-08 (10 min.: 2:45-2:55)

A. The Good? (What should we keep?)

The Bad? (What needs improvement?)

The Ugly? (What simply needs to be abandoned?)

IV. Teaching Research in our Department (10 min.: 2:55- 3:05)

What's currently taught/done/required at each grade level?

12th?
11th?
10th?
9th?

We will work to solidify a stronger scope-and-sequence of research/documentation & MLA skills at our January dept. mtg. for the 2007-08 school year – be prepared with your ideas then!

Questions to consider --- Are we teaching the steps of the process?
What's currently being done?
How do we help our kids understand the process better?
What basic skills should EVERY student leave PRHS with?
How many full-blown research papers should a kid write in LA at PRHS?
Other?

V. Nuts and Bolts for End of Term (10 min.: 3:05-3:15)
    I. Textbooks --- a book check, lost books, etc.
    II. Finals (and make-ups)---Processes on exam day
    III. Posting/Recording Grades (and contacting people who fail!)
    IV. Updates to registration recommendations (orange folders)
    V. Teacher Editions/Student Books
    VI. Students in Hall/Tardy Policy/Other school policies

V. Other?

## APPENDIX C

### Attitudinal Survey

Name (optional): _____ Gender: ___ # of completed teaching years: ____

*Please respond to the following questions about your past lived experiences as a classroom teacher and/or your desires for your current and future work as a classroom teacher. This survey's intentions are two-fold: 1) to gather initial, attitudinal information about teachers' feelings towards and experiences with teacher leaders, instructional supervision, and beliefs and attitudes toward the high school department chair role in general as part of my doctoral study, and 2) to gain information to help me serve you better as your department chair. You are NOT required to complete this survey; however, should you elect to do so, please return the survey with your responses to Sarah Skinner, no later than Friday, September 15, 2006. You will receive both paper and electronic copies of the survey. Either format may be used for your responses. You may respond to each question on a separate sheet of paper or via word processing—whichever method is most convenient and comfortable for you. Please indicate the question # for each of your responses. Questionnaire responses will be considered as a part of the study's formal data set and may be utilized as a part of the write-up that data; however, you may respond to this questionnaire and NOT have it included as part of the data set by letting Sarah know to omit your responses from the data set. Should you have any questions about this survey or the study in general, feel free to contact the researcher (XXX-XXX-XXXX) or her advisor, Dr. Bob Fecho at UGA (XXX-XXX-XXXX).*

1. What does the term "teacher leader" mean to you?

2. Whom do you consider to be a teacher leader? What makes a person a teacher leader?

3. Do you consider yourself a teacher leader? Why or why not?

4. What does the term "instructional supervision" mean to you?

5. Describe any past experiences with instructional supervision. Include whether or not you found those experiences useful to improving your work as a teacher, and the reasons for your opinions.

6. What should an "instructional supervisor" do for you and your professional work as a teacher? What do you expect from him or her?

7. Who helps you as a teacher develop greater proficiency in your skills as a professional educator? Who should help you?

8. Who or what hinders your skills development as a professional educator? How?

9. Do you consider the department chair a "teacher leader"? an "instructional supervisor"? Both? Neither?

10. What are/should be the roles and responsibilities of a high school department chair?

11. What department chair actions/behaviors have been useful to you in your development as a teacher?

12. What department chair actions/behaviors have hindered your development as a teacher?

13. What could/should a department chair do to help you improve your work as a classroom teacher?

14. How can I, specifically, as your department serve your needs better? What can I do for you in this next year to enhance your work as a teacher and professional?

Any additional general comments on the roles and responsibilities of a department chair, a teacher leader, and/or an instructional supervisor?

## APPENDIX D

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Definitions**

1. What does the term "teacher leader" mean to you?

2. What does the term "instructional supervisor" mean to you?

3. How do you define the role and responsibilities of a department chair?

4. What are the similarities between a department chair and an assistant principal? What are the differences in those two roles?

**The Department Chair Position—Your Experiences & Expectations**

5. Were you ever a department chair?
   If so, how did that affect your understandings and use of department chairs?
   If not, why not?

6. In your experience as a department chair or with them, what makes an effective department chair?

7. When you hire a department chair, what qualities do you seek?

8. What kind of training do department chairs need to be effective in their role?

9. How are department chairs trained for their role? How should they be trained?

**The Department Chair and the School's Structure**

10. What role do department chairs play within a high school's functioning?

11. How do department chairs figure into the professional learning in a high school?

12. How does a department chair figure into the leadership of a high school? Into the high school's organizational structure?

13. How does a department chair's work affect a department's operation? The high school's operation?

14. If you could do away with the department chair position, would you? Why or why not?

15. Any other comments on the department chair position, teacher leaders, or instructional supervision?

## APPENDIX E

## PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY LOG

**Department Chair's Log (Date: _____)**

Time arrived at school?_____
Time departed school? _____

Was there any *unusual feature* to this school day?

_____
_____
_____

(Instruction: Enter a tick ( ) for activity engaged in)

*LUNCH TIME:*

Which best describes lunch period?

Alone____

With LA teachers____

With other teachers____

With Leadership Team members ____

With visitor _____

With student _____

Missed _____

Supervising _____

On phone _____

Emailing _____

*EVENING (beyond contracted time, 3 p.m.)*

Please record school activities engaged in by you with their number or duration

Meeting ___ Duration ____
RE: _____
Phone calls _____ Number ____

Desk work _____ Duration ____
RE: _____
Grading _____ Duration ____

Planning _____ Duration ____

School-activity ____ Duration ____

Purchasing ____ Distance ____

Other _____ Distance ____
(Describe) Number ____
Duration ____

**Personal action log**

Date _____ Log No. _____ Researcher _____ Project _____

| Time | TG | TE | EM | RCH | CNF (LA) | CNF (LT) | CNF (OT) | CNF (ST) | ADM | D&R | CD & Plan | SUP | OBS & EV | GR | PL | BK & MAT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6:30 a.m. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6:45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 3:45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4:00 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

*Codes:* TG=Teaching; TE=Telephone; EM=Email; RCH=Research; CNF(LA)= Conferring with LA teachers; CNF(LT)=Conferring with Leadership Team members; CNF(OT)=Conferring with non-LA teachers; CNF(ST)=Conferring with Students; ADM=Administration (paperwork/office); D&R=Duties & Responsibilities; CD & Plan=Curriculum Development & Planning; SUP=Supervising; OBS&EV=Classroom Observations & Evaluations; GR=Grading; PL=Professional Learning; BK&MAT=Book and Supply Ordering & Inventory

## APPENDIX F

## PRHS MEETING SCHEDULE: 2006

**PRHS Faculty Professional Learning & Meeting Schedule** **2006-2007**

| Month | Faculty | Department | Collaboration* | Leadership | | Learning Thursdays | Book Study | Professional Learning Groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| August | 8/7 | 8/21 | 8/28 | 8/15 | | | | |
| | 8/14 | | | 8/29 | | | | |
| September | 9/5 | 9/11 | 9/25 | 9/12 | | 9/21 | 9/18 | 9/19 |
| | | | | 9/26 | | | | |
| October | 10/2 | 10/9 | 10/23 | 10/3 | | 10/19 | 10/30 | 10/24 |
| | | | | 10/17 | | | | |
| | | | | 10/31 | | | | |
| November | 11/6 | 11/13 | 11/27 | 11/14 | | 11/16 | | 11/28 |
| December | 12/4 | 12/11 | *During Final Exam Week | 12/5 | | | | 12/12 |
| January | 1/8 | 1/15 | 1/29 | 1/9 | | 1/18 | | 1/30 |
| | | | | 1/23 | | | | |
| February | 2/5 | 2/12 | 2/26 | 2/6 | | 2/15 | 2/13 | 2/27 |
| | | | | 2/20 | | | | |
| March | 3/5 | 3/12 | 3/26 | 3/6 | | 3/15 | 3/13 | 3/27 |
| | | | | 3/20 | | | | |
| April | 4/9 | 4/16 | 4/30 | 4/10 | | | | |
| | | | | 4/24 | | | | |
| May | 5/7 | 5/14 | | 5/8 | | | | |
| | | PLU Offered | PLU Offered | PLU Offered | | | PLU Offered | PLU Offered |
| | All Staff Members | Department teachers and specific ed. team teachers | All teachers within the same subject (ex. Biology) | Department chairs and administrators | | Faculty members will attend Learning Thursdays during planning periods | All full-time faculty members must choose 1 activity above | |

*9th Grade Academy Teachers will meet the first 16 minutes of the collaboration meetings

## APPENDIX G

## CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "A Reflection on Reflection: A High School Language Arts Department Chair's Use of Reflective Practices in Role Negotiation, Instructional Supervision, and Professional Learning, " conducted by Sarah L. Skinner from the Language Education Department at the University of Georgia (XXX-XXX-XXXX) under the direction of Dr. Robert (Bob) Fecho, Department of Reading, University of Georgia (XXX-XXX-XXXX). I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can stop taking part in the study at any point without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me removed from the research records or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to examine the use of reflective practices by a high school department chair and how those practices help her negotiate her various positionalities and differing responsibilities within the school's organizational structure, and also how those reflective practices affect her myriad roles. The design of this study is such that the researcher (a high school department chair) is also the primary subject.

The research questions which will guide this study include: 1) Using critical theory as a lens, how do I as a department chair use reflective practices for my own professional learning? And how do I use reflective practices to make meaning of my work as a teacher leader and instructional supervisor for the members of my department? 2) How do I as a department chair use my position to promote continued professional learning for the members of my department? 3) What do these various experiences in and with instructional supervision and reflective practice mean for rethinking the role of a department chair?

Overall, in this study, the researcher seeks to discover how reflective practices affect a department chair's work as an instructional supervisor and how those practices affect a department chair's professional learning as well as the professional development for the other teachers within the department.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I understand that throughout the study, the researcher/department chair, who is the primary subject of the study, will do the majority of the work and actions required as a part of the study. Others in the study, including myself if I choose to be a part of the study, are more secondary participants, and therefore, most data will be collected as I go about my typical actions and behaviors as a teacher and/or educational leader.

As an indirect/secondary participant, I will be asked to do the following things:

1) Listen to a brief overview and explanation of the study at one of the regularly-scheduled department and/or Leadership meetings near the beginning of the school year;
2) Meet with the researcher/department chair at my convenience if I have additional questions about the study or my involvement in it;
3) Complete a short, initial attitudinal survey, if a member of the researcher's department (15 minutes)
4) Be aware that my interactions with the researcher/department chair, including conversations, discussions at public and private meetings, email correspondence, interaction at social and professional gatherings, one-on-one conversations, and small-and-whole-group meetings, as well as artifacts created as a part of my daily work may become part of the data set of the study;
5) Recognize that the researcher/department chair as part of her role may observe teachers' classes and make observation notes about the actions seen willing to be observed during my daily activities as a teacher/educational leader and have observation notes made about those experiences;
6) Understand that any interaction I have with the department chair during the duration of the study may become a portion of the study's data set;

7) Be willing to consider taking part in other data collection methods (such as a one-on-one audio-taped interview) which might be deemed critical to the researcher's understanding of her role, the context, or some aspect of her work as a teacher leader and department chair;
8) Meet with the researcher/department chair, if I desire, to study the portions of the data set that directly involve me;
9) Read the researcher/department chair's analysis of the data, if I so desire, and offer feedback and/or check for accuracy in representation and interpretation.

I understand that the researcher/department chair will use pseudonyms and other masks in all artifacts collected and in all writing about participants; every effort will be made to protect the identity of each participant and maintain confidentiality. A list that correlates pseudonyms and actual identities will be maintained in a secure location away from the data set and away from the work environment to add security to the information. This list will be destroyed one (1) year after the completion of the study. Additionally, all identifying characteristics or situations that could disclose the identity of individual participants will be masked to enhance privacy.

At any point throughout the study, I may ask to view the data that has been collected which relates directly to me. I will also have numerous opportunities to consider the researcher/department chair's interpretations and representations and to offer feedback, amendments, and corrections wherever I deem appropriate. The time required for this portion of the study is totally dependent upon my own interest in and desire for involvement in the final products of the study.

There is the possibility of a number of benefits from this study. For a teacher, this study can heighten his/her own awareness of actions and behaviors as classroom instructors and members of a collaborative department. For an educational leader, this study offers the potential of heightened awareness of how the team's conversations and expectations are translated through and interpreted by one of the team's members and then, how those same things become communicated to, perceived by, and acted upon by one segment of the school's faculty, yielding greater understanding concerning this method of shared leadership within the school. In effect, there is the overall potential benefit of each participant of this study to become a more aware, effective educational practitioner. Through the interactions the researcher/department chair has with these educators, there is the potential benefit to improve instructional strategies and grow as educators.

No risk is expected from this study, but should I ever feel threatened by or uncomfortable about my continued participation in the study, I know that I may request to be removed from the study without any questions asked and without any consequences. The researcher/department chair will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project (XXX-XXX-XXXX).

I understand that I am agreeing by writing 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.

| Sarah L. Skinner | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| ***Name of Researcher*** | ***Signature*** | ***Date*** |
| *Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX* | *Email: sskinner@gmail.edu* | |

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| Name of Participant | Signature | Date |

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

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research

Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu