

VETERAN TEACHERS WORKING IN DIVERSE COMMUNITIES: *NOTICING*
STUDENTS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

By

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ABSTRACT

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Entering schools where cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity exists might hold challenges for the teachers who work there. There is much to glean as teachers not only begin to figure out how to connect the curriculum with students' worlds, but also begin to make connections with students and families who may come from and live in very different settings from their own. Using a sociocultural lens, this study initially examines the artifacts provided by 12 teachers who taught within two school districts serving a high percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch as well as high numbers of English language learners. Together, their combined time teaching in schools represented nearly 100 years and they teach in either elementary, middle, or high schools. The study then focuses more prominently on 5 of the 12 teachers who agreed to provide more in-depth information through interviews. The teachers in this study were members of a graduate class preparing them for ESL endorsement. The results of their participation in this research shed light on the extent to which these teachers noticed and attended to students, families, and school communities.

Noticing (van Es, 2011, 2008), within a sociocultural perspective, is the framework used most prominently in this work with a strong focus on teaching in high poverty settings. The first data chapter indicates how all of the teachers observed and reacted to the communities in which they taught as they shared their thoughts through a blog. In the remaining data chapters, five

teachers were the focus. Their life histories are explored as well as their ideas regarding their work with families and students within diverse school settings.

Findings suggest there are varied complexities of teaching in diverse schools and that much work is needed to develop more tangible ways in which to assist teachers in these settings. This may include rethinking the ways in which teacher education programs and professional development courses guide teachers. One of the participants noted that her coursework and professional development assisted her in noting the challenges of students and families in her school but no one had shown her solutions to those challenges. It also might be valuable to include ways that teachers might closely examine their life stories and investigate how those stories interact with those of their students and students' families. Finally, teachers may benefit from resources that include time for peer collaboration, as well as sharing in school decision making that might lead to greater teacher agency.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
CHAPTER ONE: Eye on Differences	1
Overview	5
Cold, Hard Facts	5
The Achievement Gap	6
Review of the Literature	7
Teachers within Diverse Settings	7
Teachers' Notions about Families	8
Culturally Responsive Measures	10
Funds of Knowledge in Diverse Settings	15
Teacher Agency	17
Noticing: A Framework	19
Summary	22
Dissertation Overview	23
CHAPTER TWO: Discovering Teachers' <i>Noticings</i>	24
Methodology	24
Data Collection	24
Setting	24
Participants	26
Researcher Role	28
The Class	29
Data Collection Methods	29
Instruments	29
Blog	30
Three Short Reflective Essays	32
Research Paper	32
Interviews	33
Life Story Interviews	33
General Question Interviews	34
Data Analysis	35
Blogs	36
Life Stories	39
Triangulation	39
Chapter Organization	42
Limitations of the Study	43
Researcher Positionality	44
CHAPTER THREE: Teachers as Bloggers: A Cohort of 12	46

Teachers as Learners	48
Blogging: Sharing Observations	54
Levels of Teacher Observations within Communities	54
Level 1: Surface <i>Noticing</i>	56
Level 2: Group Members' Questioning/Wondering	59
Level 3: Realizations	61
Level 4: Judgments	62
Unacknowledged Judgment	62
Acknowledged Judgment	64
Level 5: Classroom Connections	69
Student Connections	69
Family Connections	71
Classroom Connections to Teacher Selves	75
Discussion.....	76
CHAPTER FOUR: The Cultural Fabric of Five Teachers	79
Five Teachers' Life Stories.....	80
Meeting Five Teachers	81
Bobby: A Second Career	81
Dana: What Aren't They Motivated?	87
Mary: Uncertainty	91
Jill: Teaching as a Passion.....	96
Pat: Guided by Faith.....	101
Discussion	106
To Teach or not to Teach	107
Feeling Safe	107
Virtues	108
Faith as a Guide	108
Teachers' Experiences as Young Learners.....	110
CHAPTER FIVE: Teachers and Families: A Sticky Wicket	113
The Importance of Noticing Families	113
Five Teachers' Views of Families	117
Bobby	118
<i>Noticing Families</i>	119
Classroom Connections.....	122
Dana.....	129
<i>Noticing Families</i>	129
Classroom Connections	131
Mary	134
<i>Noticing Families</i>	135
Classroom Connections	136
Jill	142
<i>Noticing Families</i>	142
Classroom Connections	144
Pat	148

<i>Noticing Families</i>	148
Classroom Connections	149
Discussion	158
Change Agents.....	159
Backgrounds	163
Final Thoughts.....	164
CHAPTER SIX: Teachers and Students: Shades of <i>Noticing</i>	165
<i>Noticing</i> from Multiple Perspectives	165
Creating Classroom Community	166
Culturally Focused Pedagogies	167
Basics	169
Motivation and Relationships	171
Faith and Religion	173
Five Teachers' Views of Students	174
Bobby.....	176
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	176
The Basics.....	176
Motivation and Relationships.....	182
Cultural Observations and Funds of Knowledge.....	184
Faith and Religion	188
Dana.....	190
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	190
The Basics.....	190
Motivation and Relationships.....	192
Cultural Observations and Funds of Knowledge.....	200
Faith and Religion	203
Mary.....	204
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	204
The Basics.....	205
Motivation and Relationships.....	208
Cultural Observations and Funds of Knowledge.....	210
Faith and Religion	212
Jill	213
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	213
The Basics.....	213
Motivation and Relationships.....	216
Cultural Observations and Funds of Knowledge.....	219
Faith and Religion	222
Pat	223
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	223
The Basics.....	224
Motivation and Relationships.....	226
Cultural Observations and Funds of Knowledge.....	227
Faith and Religion	230
Multiple Dimensions of <i>Noticing</i>	234

The Basics	235
Backgrounds	238
Final Thoughts	239
CHAPTER SEVEN: Teachers and School Community – Hoop Jumping	242
Teacher Expectations within the School Community	242
Bobby.....	245
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	245
Rules	245
Colleagues and Administrators.....	248
Resources	250
Dana	251
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	251
Rules	251
Colleagues and Administrators.....	257
Resources	260
Mary.....	261
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	261
Rules	262
Colleagues and Administrators.....	264
Resources	266
Jill	267
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	267
Rules	267
Colleagues and Administrators.....	270
Resources	271
Pat	273
<i>Noticing</i> and Classroom Connections.....	273
Rules	273
Colleagues and Administrators.....	276
Resources	279
Discussion.....	280
Teacher Agency	281
Final Thoughts.....	283
CHAPTER EIGHT: Teachers’ <i>Noticings</i> : What Now?	284
Diverse Possibilities.....	286
Blogs	287
Teachers’ Stories	288
Families	290
Students	292
School Context	294
Implications	295
Teacher Education	295
Field Experiences	297
Recruitment	298

Certification	298
Professional Development	298
Policy	299
Further Research Suggested by this Work	300
Conclusion	302
APPENDICES	303
APPENDIX A: IRB Consent Form	304
APPENDIX B: Course Syllabus.....	307
APPENDIX C: ESL Certification Course List	312
APPENDIX D: Life Stories and General Interview Protocols.....	313
APPENDIX E: Information for Five Teachers.....	316
APPENDIX F: Examples for Idea Unites (Chapters 3, 5, 6, 7)	317
REFERENCES	319

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Tremont and Garnet Free & Reduced Lunch.....	26
Table 2: Tremont and Garnet Demographics.....	26
Table 3: Study Participants.....	27-28
Table 4: Blog Noticing Levels 1-5.....	37-38
Table 5: Level 2 and Level 5 Idea Unit Samples.....	39
Table 6: Views Toward Families--Idea Unit Examples.....	40-41
Table 7: View Toward Students--Idea Unit Examples.....	41
Table 8: Views Toward School Context—Idea Unit Examples.....	42
Table 9: Suggested Actions Based on Family Noticing.....	291-292
Table 10: ESL Course List.....	312
Table 11: Teacher Information.....	316
Table 12: Chapter 3 Blog (Idea Units).....	317
Table 13: Chapter 5 Families (Idea Units).....	317
Table 14: Chapter 6 Students (Idea Units).....	317-318
Table 15: Chapter 7 Hoop Jumping (Idea Units).....	318

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Achievement Triangle.....	4
Figure 2: Teacher Questioning/Wondering.....	55
Figure 3: Classroom Connections.....	56
Figure 4: Extent of Noticing.....	118
Figure 5: Noticing and Actions.....	176
Figure 6: Teacher Autonomy and School Context.....	245

CHAPTER ONE

An Eye on Differences

We need to look at the subtle, the hidden, and the unspoken.
--Malcolm Gladwell

Lateisha curled up in the corner of the room with her thumb in her mouth and acknowledged no one. Her mother resided in prison as Lateisha attended her first day of fifth grade in an urban Maryland classroom. Kurt, her classmate, pelted paper wads from the back row of the class; this was part of a behavior problem stemming from his frustration of living with an aunt after his father died and his mother abandoned him. Duane slumped in his chair, head down, and only later did the instructor learn that his mother, the sole family supporter of four children, was dying of cancer.

These students attended my class in a high-poverty school a little more than a decade ago. They were three of the 29 children in my classroom. The students were culturally diverse and lived in homes where poverty was prevalent. Except for their youth, they were not unlike the alternative education students I had worked with for more than a decade. Many times families did not have essentials. Often times it was difficult contacting families as they worked long hours, many times juggling several jobs. Many seemingly had social issues that were more pressing than the educational issues of their children.

My years as a public school teacher coupled with my own experiences as a young student has, over the years, prompted me to wonder how some teachers appear to easily connect with populations of students so unlike themselves while others seemingly have difficulty making those connections. I contemplated over what it was that made some teachers successful in low-socioeconomic schools while others seemingly floundered. Howard (2006) introduced the Achievement Triangle (Figure 1, p.126) and asserts that teachers within diverse communities

might best be prepared if they know their practice, their students, and themselves. Part of the process of becoming a teacher is to gain knowledge and pedagogical tools so that teachers *know their practice*. The importance of knowing subject matter and pedagogical methods is well documented in the literature (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008; Grossman 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Shulman, 1986, 1987; Van Driel & Verloop, 1998). Not only is it well researched but preservice teacher education programs continually address content and pedagogical knowledge, and teachers in training are required to attend particular courses to attain particular certifications. Teacher education faculty and staff must also work closely with other college and university departments to make certain that teachers gain the knowledge required of them. Those programs are closely monitored by State Departments of Education in order to verify the provision of appropriate content and pedagogical knowledge to students. But there is not the same focus on the second and third points on the triangle, *knowing my self* and *knowing my students*.

I am most interested in these two areas and they are addressed in my study. *Knowing my self* (Figure 1) is one area which, according to Howard (2006), appears to be lacking attention in teacher preparation programs and one might even argue that veteran teachers need guidance in this realm. In sharing their stories, preservice and inservice teachers might be provided a platform to be recognized as “competent learners who bring rich resources to their learning (Lowenstein, p.187).” However, their stories might also serve as a source that could allow them to recognize the differences between their lives and the lives of their students. As a teacher educator who promotes the use of cultural autobiographies, Florio-Ruane (2001) indicated:

For years as a teacher educator, I have extolled the virtue of teachers considering the relationship between children’s cultural identities and their learning of literacy. Yet I have not urged teachers to consider this issue in their own lives, especially as it affects their relationships with youngsters and their families. And, most disturbing, I have also

not examined this issue in my own practice. What is the role of autobiography in coming of age both as a literate person and an educator? How does our primary socialization in family and community influence our work as teachers and students? Why is it difficult to talk, much less write, about these issues as they have shaped us as teachers and learners?[p. 4-5]

Exploring one's own background to focus on race and culture might be considered a high priority, especially for teachers who bring to school different experiences and backgrounds as compared to their students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). According to Howard, "An unexamined life on the part of a White teacher is a danger to every student" (p. 127). For without knowledge about themselves, it might be difficult to recognize judgments or stereotypes made about particular groups of students or individuals. Although this study does not provide an examination of the use of autobiographies or other tools for examining self, teachers' life stories are used as a backdrop in order to better understand them and the work that they do in schools.

The last area of the triangle is one that I think quite fitting for this research as its focus is on *knowing my students*. But it is also important to note that to really *know* students might also include knowing students' families, their communities, and the school context. This is important because students bring their family and community orientations to school with them each day and according to Howard (2006), "The more we can know our students, the more we can authentically engage them in the learning process." Further, in order to know students, families and their communities, teachers need to hone their abilities to deeply *notice* in ways that assist them in recognizing opportunities that allow them to teach in the most fair and equitable ways. This research examines that idea.

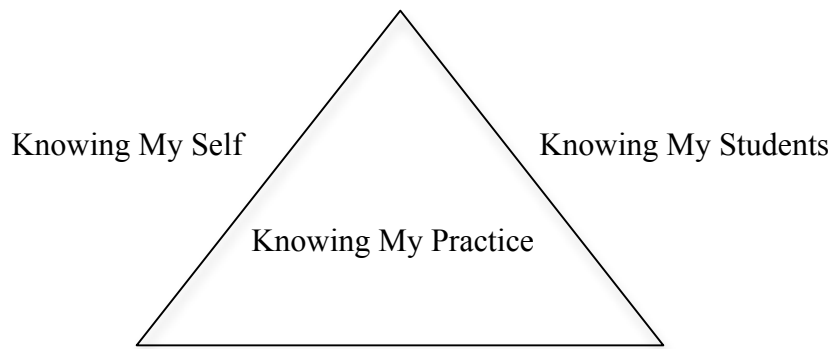


Figure 1: Achievement Triangle
Copyright Gary Howard

This study is focused on teacher noticing and is viewed through a sociocultural lens. It takes place within the confines of a community and schools that serve culturally and linguistically diverse as well as low socioeconomic families and students, most of whose lives are quite different from those who teach them. I introduce this chapter with a brief overview regarding the study. I then provide statistics that reflect the current state of families residing in the United States who live in poverty and this is followed by an examination of the achievement gap as well as the mismatch between teachers and the students that they teach. The literature review focuses on families, and culturally responsive pedagogy and its connection to the classroom as well as to teacher agency. Finally, I introduce the theoretical framework that is the focus of this dissertation's questions:

- To what extent do teachers who work in high poverty schools learn to notice their students, families and communities?
- To what extent might this noticing help teachers make connections with their teaching?
- How might teachers' own background influence what they notice?
- What, if anything, do teachers notice that might help them make connections between feelings of power and control in their classrooms and in their teaching?

Overview

The teachers in this study were members of a graduate course that I taught. *School and Society* was the last of several classes for this cohort, leading to ESL certification. Most of the teachers lived outside of their school communities and consequently experienced few opportunities to examine first-hand and/or think more deeply about the lives of the children within their classrooms. During the course, teachers made comments about students who many times attended school with challenges that disrupted learning. Some of these teachers claimed that many parents did not assist with homework, read to their children, or provide proper nutrition and fill other needs to prepare children for learning. During one class discussion, some of the teachers agreed that school appeared to be a *babysitting* service for some parents.

Teachers who adopt a seemingly deficit way of thinking may experience barriers to providing the quality education that a child is entitled to receive. If practicing teachers, indeed, hold these views, it is imperative to bring about changes in ways of teacher thinking and teacher actions. But it might also be apparent to some teachers that even if they understand student and family dynamics, they may have little to no agency when approaching their practice as they note the challenges brought about by larger societal issues as well as policy, (national, state and/or school policies) that might be considered a hindrance to actions related to practice. However if teachers do not show an awareness of and strategies for working with diverse populations, then there may be risk of continual discontinuity in some public schools which have high numbers of students who are culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically different from their teachers.

Cold, Hard Facts

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), children represent just 25% of the population but account for 36 % of all people who live in poverty. A report by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northwestern University (New York Times, September 19,

2011) indicates that more than one in three young families with children lived in poverty in 2009. Further, diverse populations felt the most impact of poverty with rates for African American at 27%, Hispanics just behind at 26% and Asians at 12.5%. (New York Times, U.S. Census Bureau.) In terms of households that lacked food sources, the World Hunger Organization reports that in 2010, about one in seven households were *food insecure*¹, the highest number on record for the United States (World Health Organization, 2011).

Schools are experiencing a large cultural and linguistic shift and it is reported that by 2030, nearly 40 percent of all students will be comprised of English Language Learners (Verplaetse and Migliaccio, 2008). That, coupled with rising poverty rates indicates a set of challenges for public education in the quest to accommodate the diverse student populations in ways that have not been anticipated. Anyon (2005) maintains that:

Living in poverty is to experience daily crises of food, a place to live, and ways to keep your children safe. All this can be debilitating; and can certainly dampen the enthusiasm, effort, and expectations with which urban children and their families approach K-12 education. [p. 61]

This presents a dilemma for educators and their administrators who must figure out the best ways to connect with the lives of their students and their students' families. Without those connections, it might be difficult to successfully conduct their work with all children.

The Achievement Gap

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) provided a catalyst to bring to the forefront the issues most troubling in U.S. public schools, especially when considering the achievement gap (NAEP, 2009) that exists between race and social class within low-socioeconomic schools. The

¹ The World Health Organization defines food security as “including both physical and economic access to food that meets people’s dietary needs as well as their food preferences. <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story028/en/>

2009 results for fourth-grade reading, for example, show no difference in that gap from previous years. There continues to be a 20 to 30-point gap in reading when comparing White students with Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students. That gap is also the same between students who received free or reduced lunch and those who do not. It is within these schools that policymakers, administrators, and teachers struggle with discovering the best ways to provide all students an equitable education as defined by the assessments administered to them. This gap is found in high-poverty, as well as in racially and ethnically-mixed areas and it is this gap that confounds those in education on all levels, including parents, teachers and policy makers. NCLB (2001) attempted to close the gap through closer scrutiny of schools that were failing and through adopting stringent standards to hold schools and teachers more accountable.

Review of the Literature

Teachers within Diverse Settings

Nearly 83% of teachers are White, 7% Black, and 7% Hispanic. The majority, 75%, of teaching positions, is still held by women. (NCES, 2007-2008). In an older but still cited piece, Wideen, Smith & Moon (1998) cite several studies indicating that the typical candidate for teacher education is a monolingual, White, Anglo-Saxon female from the lower-or-middle class who grew up in suburban or rural areas. The review (Wideen, et al., 1998) also indicates that very few of the pre-service teachers referred to have ever traveled more than 100 miles from home. In the foreword to Florio-Ruane's work, Au (2000) said,

Common in inner city schools, and likely to be common for the foreseeable future are classrooms in which students of diverse backgrounds are taught by Euro American teachers who grew up in suburbs or small towns. These classrooms become contact zones in which teachers and students must cross cultural boundaries to negotiate relationships. In the best cases, teachers and students creatively construct hybrid cultures, unlike those found in the home or typical classroom, in which communication and learning flourish. In the worst cases, teachers and students find themselves locked in a year-long stand-off in which neither side can afford to yield ground.

This may lead one to question how new and veteran teachers might gain new experiences or perspectives that may influence how they teach when working with diverse populations.

As the population changes, it is predicted that nearly 40% of all U.S. public school children will be English Language Learners (ELLs) by 2030 (Verplaetse and Migliacci, 2008). Teachers not only need to know the strengths, in terms of funds of knowledge (Moll, 2001), that students bring but they must know the nuances of race, ethnicity, and social class and how to communicate with parents and, at times, children through translators or by other means. This might provide challenges for teachers who are inexperienced and unknowledgeable about teaching in settings dissimilar to their own and that challenge has much to do with not understanding students, students' families, and communities representing various cultures.

Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest that teachers of color are more successful in diverse schools since, "Many come from economically poor backgrounds; if they are not poor themselves they are likely to have close relatives and friends who are. They also know from first-hand experiences that schools and society are not neutral and that to do well in school and in life, they cannot afford to ignore the perspectives and norms of the dominant group" (p. 33). However, teachers of color also need to prepare for teaching in diverse settings where they, too, may encounter the same cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic barriers to education as White teachers.

Teachers' Notions about Families

Teachers' work may appear isolating but, in fact, it has many facets that might require welcoming assistance. One, sometimes overlooked, teacher resource is families. However, families in low-income communities often are absent from school lives and Lareau (1987) points out that working class families often defer to teachers for decision making because of their

“professional expertise.” Parents let teachers do what they think is best for students. In *Colton*, the school set in a working class community, Lareau pointed out that parents were not fully aware that they were expected to participate and they looked up to teachers who had a “higher social and educational status” than they had attained. These realizations might assist teachers in finding ways to approach families and bring about ways to make them more inclusive in the educational lives of their children.

However, Lareau (2000) found that teachers in her study did not want equal relationships with parents, but they wanted parents to come to them regarding school decisions for their children. Lareau indicated that teachers:

...welcomed only particular types of parent involvement in schooling---involvement they defined as supportive and fruitful. Although they wanted parents to respond to their requests for help, they did not want parents at the school monitoring their decisions and trying to influence children's school experience. They resisted and rebuffed these attempts. [p. 35]

This way of behaving might indicate their own insecurities about teaching as they do not want parents watching over their shoulders or they might not recognize the contributions that parents could make. That stance disregards the funds of knowledge that parents might offer.

Edwards (2001), in her work with teachers, found that although an intervention was provided in her study that would help teachers realize the resources that children and their families brought to the schools, teachers still continued to relay “war stories” about their classrooms and perpetuate a deficit approach toward their students and families.

In training teachers to work with families, Stairs and Donnell (2010) found that “...the biggest challenge for the interns was confronting their assumptions about families.” Stairs and Donnell maintained that although teachers had courses that included information about families’ connections to schools, they still found it difficult to “step outside the boundaries of their own

values,” (Stairs & Donnell, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Thompson, 2003). These examples provide clues to the difficulties entailed in bringing parents and teachers together for the benefit of students.

In her work with three communities, Heath (1983) found that the teachers in her study set goals for themselves to improve school-community relationships and that involved increasing parent and community involvement in students’ academic lives. Heath noted that teachers “...did not want parents to judge themselves or their children as failures because they did not succeed by school standards” (p. 342). It appeared that teachers came to know the value of families and the wealth of knowledge and experience that might be helpful toward the education of their children.

Compton-Lily (2009) encourages teachers to learn more about their students and families who reside in low socioeconomic communities. Compton-Lily indicated that her work has brought about three realizations: not to make assumptions about the literacy practices and educational experiences of families, how to respond to colleagues who hold negative assumptions about families, and teachers monitoring their own judgments about families and students (p. 456). It is through acknowledging the vast resources and experiences that families bring as well as responses to colleagues and monitoring judgments that teachers might most be aware. Teachers may need explicit guidance in order to address those areas.

Culturally Responsive Measures

Teachers, who have little knowledge regarding the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds of their students, might find a need to become more familiar with their students’ lives in order to make change. Villegas and Lucas (2002) argue for the importance of “...gaining sociocultural consciousness, cultivating affirming attitudes toward culturally and

linguistically diverse learners, and developing the commitment and skills for becoming teachers who are change agents” (p. xxi).

Culture, defined by Villegas & Lucas (2002), refers to “the way life is organized within an identifiable community or group.” It might be seen as the attributes of race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status that students and their families bring to schools. It might also include the culture that is created within classrooms. It is within these schools where the achievement gap is prominent and it is also where the majority of teachers vary in their cultural backgrounds as compared to their students.

An abundance of work in the field of culturally-responsive and culturally-relevant pedagogies (Delpit, 2006, 1995; Gay, 2009, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Li, 2008; Sleeter, 2001) indicates that there are cultural nuances that teachers might consider when teaching in schools with a wide range of diversity. However, teachers bring their own experiences and knowledge of teaching from not only teacher preparation institutions, but also the ideas that they have accumulated through an apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). Teachers who have attended schools where mainstream middle-class beliefs are predominant may make assumptions about how students and families from other cultures may behave, and thus may pull those ideas into classroom practice. For example in regard to expectations for students, Baron, Tom, & Cooper (1985) found that the teachers in their study held higher expectations for white and middle-class students than for black and lower-class students. And Purcell-Gates (1997) noted that teachers’ use of stereotyping of low-status groups in urban Appalachia was common as she recalled, “We can still regularly hear references to ‘hillbillies’ and their lack of drive, denigration of education, slovenliness, and poor parenting skills while public references to ‘niggers’ or

‘drunken Injuns’ are no longer socially acceptable” (p. 188). These are examples of how teachers might slip, even unknowingly, into habits and dispositions that might disadvantage students.

It might be through understanding culturally responsive teaching (Irvine, 2001, 1992; Drucker, 2003; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and culturally relevant pedagogies (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1998,1995;) that teachers might begin to capture an understanding of culture. Gay (2000) describes the term *culturally* responsive as teaching that might take place after examining and taking into consideration the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of diverse students. This comes from the idea that the academic skills and knowledge might be connected to the experiences that students bring with them to the classroom (Gay, 2000). For those who promote *culturally-relevant* pedagogy, it is argued that this way of teaching is necessary for the academic success of African American and other children who have not been served well by public schools (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Through this approach, Ladson-Billings asserts that teaching is not about making students feel good, but that teachers need to focus on the academic needs of students and lead them to want to learn. Ladson-Billings indicates that teachers can do this in several ways:

- provide positive attention to African American males with social power
- use students’ culture for learning
- encourage students to use home language while acquiring a new language
- assist students who fall behind by providing individual attention to them
- create a community of learners
- encourage collaboration between students

Ladson-Billings (2005) maintains that large urban schools not only have less access to quality curriculum and fewer “qualified” teachers, but that there are a number of teacher educators who espouse equity and diversity but do not always follow up on their commitments to students in these schools. Other researchers (Delpit, 2006; Jiminez, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Li, 2003;

Purcell-Gates, 1997) also focus on what teachers might do to facilitate instruction in diverse classroom settings. For example, Li (2003) claims that the social realities of Chinese children need to be made apparent to teachers such as in addressing the model minority myth. Li also maintains that the blame question as to why some children do not learn to speak English as successfully as other Asian children should be examined. Purcell-Gates (1997) indicates that proactive teachers do not "...simply wring their hands when confronted with failure to learn" (p. 194). Instead, Purcell-Gates maintains that proactive teachers know how "...to nudge, to soothe, to challenge, to reinforce" (p. 194) their students in ways that keep them on task and push them toward goals. Jiminez (2000) shares that teachers can assist Latino students in recognizing that there is strength in the ability to communicate in two languages. Delpit (2006) also provides insight as to the changes in teachers' attitudes that can enrich students' lives and provides guidelines that fit into the culturally-responsive and relevant teaching perspectives. Delpit maintains that teachers should (a) teach more, not less; (b) teach strategies for learning; (c) promote and demand critical thinking (d) challenge racist views toward children and families; (e) help students make connections between their lives and the use of figurative language; (f) create caring and sense of family classroom; (g) continually monitor and assess student needs; (h) respect home culture and (i) facilitate and promote students' connection to the community.

Poverty and the cultural mismatch between students and teachers may be part of the problem. Since there may be a cultural disconnect for teachers placed in high-poverty settings, it is important to assist them in understanding how to be culturally responsive within their teaching. Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggest that teachers become socially conscious by doing several things: hold affirming views of students, see themselves as responsible and capable of

bringing about change, understand how learners construct knowledge, know about the lives of their students, and design instruction based on what students already know.

A meshing of ideas presented by culturally responsive pedagogies with teachers' knowledge might lead to assisting teachers to develop a sense of agency where they view themselves as capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable. A push for teachers to become more socioculturally conscious might be done through acquisition of affirming views that students bring rich resources to the classroom. This could be shown in the ways in which home cultures are shown respect as well as using student culture for learning. Holding these views might also allow teachers to build instruction based on what their students bring into the classroom.

In terms of curriculum and instruction for diverse learners, teachers might need to know how students construct knowledge and in teaching the curriculum there should be a push for more rigorous lessons and with that, explicit teaching of strategies that will assist students in learning the material. Within that curriculum there should also be a push toward lessons that promote critical thinking. Beyond that, teachers might continually monitor and assess their students and those who begin to fall behind might be provided individual attention.

In terms of making cultural connections, teachers might work diligently at creating a community of learners where all students feel valued. This might be done through creating a sense of family and encouraging collaboration between students. Within creating this community, it is important to know about the lives of their students and this might include encouraging students to use home languages, challenging racist views that are noticed, and providing positive attention to African American males with social power.

Funds of Knowledge in Diverse Settings

The need for teachers who effectively work with students from a variety of backgrounds might be crucial if students are to succeed in achieving higher levels of learning. It is imperative that teachers recognize and act in ways that provide for not only teaching knowledge and skills but to understand the pedagogical methods that might be used to bring their students to a higher level of learning. One way in which teachers might assist students is to recognize the funds of knowledge (Gonzalez & Moll, 2001) that they bring to classrooms and provide opportunities to access those funds. Dyson (2008) found that the teacher in her study used standardized instruction with a focus on the basics and she modeled from a white, middle-class perspective. For example, the teacher modeled writing by prefacing with examples of activities lived in her own life, which was much different from the lives of her students. The students who had brought their own ideas had been unable to express them through ways that would connect them with the “official” ways of doing what was expected in school (Dyson, 2008). Dyson concludes that promoting writing in ways that focus on “basics” for students who are believed to be “at risk” may not be the best way to help them connect their outside worlds with the activities of school. The funds of knowledge that students brought were discounted in the writing lesson, thus students were unable to connect their school work with their outside lives.

Purcell-Gates (1995) in her work with an Appalachian family found that administrators and curriculum specialists did not see school through the same eyes as some of their students as they lived in different worlds but engaged in the same activity of “schooling” and in the same place known as the “classroom.” Purcell-Gates (1995) supports the idea that instruction must begin with and connect with the individual’s world and it must begin with the learner’s primary discourse. Purcell-Gates (1995) noted the importance of understanding learners and cultural contexts where they have developed. Purcell-Gates maintains that students and their families

bring their cultures into the schools but are often dismissed by teachers who possess negative attitudes about families (Purcell-Gates, 1995).

Li (2008) provided a focus on culture through an ethnographic account of those living within the “Rainbow Underclass,” and suggested that urban education needs to be understood in relation to the culture presented by the learner and the interactions between the school and what students bring. Li (2008) posited that decontextualized practices of schooling does not work for diverse populations because children from the white working class as well as those of other minorities are trying to learn in a system that is modeled after middle-class values and practices and that the “make-believe” school curriculum does not have the multicultural substance needed to address the needs of students in diverse communities.

In their work in a low-income urban middle school, Barton and Tan (2009) noted a shift in classroom Discourse as students’ funds of knowledge were brought into the science curriculum. Barton and Tan indicated that, “Valuing diverse funds of knowledge and Discourse as legitimate science classroom resources positions minority students as rightful experts of certain knowledge directly related and applicable to school science” (p. 52). Funds of knowledge might appear to provide an advantage in low-income schools but other researchers have also noted the importance of teaching explicit information to students.

Cooper (2006) found, in terms of literacy, that teachers who were recognized as effective white teachers of black children stressed subskills for both reading and writing, citing their beliefs that students need skill-based instruction in order to become good readers and writers. The mastery of reading and writing with a clear focus on subskills was one of the main reasons black parents selected these teachers in the study as they felt that this was the best way for their children to learn literacy skills. Snow, Griffin, & Burns (2005) also noted the importance of

using explicit instruction when teaching comprehension strategies as it improved learning outcomes for low-achieving students. Delpit (1995) referred to this kind of explicit instruction as providing students with the *culture of power* since teachers, as gatekeepers, have the power to provide instruction that assists students in learning and applying the rules of the dominant culture.

Funds of knowledge and explicit teaching of skills appear to be important within classrooms but both might be done simultaneously, in order to attempt to include students' needs at all levels. However, many times teachers in schools, in particular Title I schools, have little input into the pedagogical and curriculum decisions made for their classrooms, thus possibly allowing little teacher agency for decision making.

Teacher Agency

Suggestions for integrating culturally responsive methods and ways of teaching to make classrooms inclusive of all students might depend on the relationships teachers have with families, as noted earlier, as well as their work with administrators. However, teachers' classroom goals may be stymied if flexibility to help make pedagogical and curriculum decisions regarding current school policy are not provided.

Teachers appear to be so consumed by the work played out in their classrooms each day that they seldom have time to think about or believe that they might have an impact on policy that relates to their instruction. Instead, policy may be viewed as “hoop jumping” and may really have little to do with what they teach. For example, the current emphasis on accountability has created a punitive atmosphere in the schools, according to Ravitch (2010), who also points out that the current administration believes that schools will improve if teachers are fired and schools are closed. Ravitch (2010) indicates, “They [policymakers] do not recognize that schools are

often the anchor of their communities, representing values, traditions and ideals that have persevered across decades. They also fail to recognize that the best predictor of low academic performance is poverty—not bad teachers.” Teachers who might want to implement practices best for diverse student populations might find it difficult because of the accountability pressures placed on them. The pressures, at times, appear to be so foreboding that recent examples of teacher cheating scandals, such as in Atlanta where “nearly 200 teachers and principals admitted to tampering with standardized tests to raise students’ scores...” (New York Times, August 7, 2011).”

Lasky reports that teachers in her study believed in public schools but also believed that:

...their professionalism was being systematically eroded by the current reform context. They felt impotent to change this. They experienced inefficacious vulnerability as they watched valued work conditions rapidly disappear. In this context their change ‘agency’ (Fullan, 1991) was compromised, as the locus of control for generating change became more centralized at the provincial level. Teachers in effect thus became reform mediators, rather than reform policy generators. (Clune, 1990)

This is in line with the findings of Villegas & Lucas (2002) who note several factors that prevent teachers from becoming change agents. Those include (p. 56):

- Institutional factors which include the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the educational system.
- Insufficient time.
- Insufficient opportunities for collaboration with colleagues.
- Challenges of learning to teach during the first years of teaching.
- Resistance by those in privileged positions to equity-oriented changes.
- Lack of personal understanding of oppression and empathy for those who are oppressed.
- Despair that change is possible.

Several of these points might stand out as easily addressed, but it is incumbent upon policymakers and the institutions who set the rules to allow teacher voices in the conversation.

This research, as seen through a sociocultural lens, attends to the observations that teachers make about their students, families, communities, and school context. As noted in this review, there is much written about the ways in which teachers might approach their practices with a more culturally sensitive stance. Teachers' stories might also play into the work that they do especially in regard to recognizing the perspectives they might hold toward the cultures of students and families who differ from them; hearing those stories might assist in adding to the work of culturally responsive pedagogies. It might be important to examine the ways in which teachers, including those in training, are led to the recognition of their own biases, as well as strengths, as they move into diverse classroom practices. I argue that noticing (van Es & Sherin, 2002) that is made explicit might be one way to provide teachers with a tool in which to make authentic connections between themselves and the communities in which they teach. "What makes noticing consequential, of course, is that people act on what they notice" (Schoenfeld, 2011). The observations and actions of the teachers in this study might provide ways in which to think about how they come to notice and act. The theoretical framework for this dissertation is based on the van Es (2011, 2008) framework of noticing.

Noticing: A Framework

Erickson (2011) indicates that he began researching the noticing field in 1981 when little research had been done regarding what teachers paid attention to while teaching (p. 17). Erickson poses the question, "Does the teacher attend more to the students' moving pencils or more to their moving thoughts..." (p. 33)? This is a provoking idea that suggests that teachers have

many ways of noticing and choices about how they might respond to those noticing. But not enough is known about how noticing might be used in classrooms and Erickson contends that:

...we also need to learn more about the what, how, and why of teacher noticing itself, whether that noticing be focused on student understanding or on the myriad other objects of attention that teachers need to be noticing from within the midst of the real-time conduct of their teaching. [p. 33]

Erickson pulls from Dewey's notions of "inner" and "outer" attention in regards to noticing.

Outer attention, as described by Erickson based on Dewey's work (p. 18-19), involves a "surface appearance of attending" and these might include behaviors related to deportment as students were expected to follow the rules of the classroom. Erickson described inner attention as a notion more difficult to observe, as it may not be present in the child's behavior (p. 18). It might become problematic if teachers rely only on outer attention as that may be deceiving, especially since "...what teachers notice---about deportment or anything else---ends up affecting what students notice" (Erickson, p. 22).

Erickson also points out, in one of eight propositions, that teachers "bring differing prior experiences and differing pedagogical commitments to what they notice" (p.32). Teachers may be engrained in particular ways of noticing in such a way that they have difficulty noticing the difference between inner and outer attention. This might indicate a need for teaching explicit ways of noticing as teachers are moved from a "condition of sleep to wakefulness" (Jackson, 1990, 1968, p. xix) in terms of what they attend to in their classrooms.

The teachers in this study report their ideas through artifacts for the course or through general and life history interviews. The teachers' reports might appear to be based on the *routines* of their work with families and students. They also provide accounts regarding the outside communities in which their schools are situated as well as the context of their school communities. These responses regarding teachers and *routines* are precisely what researchers

want to capture (Sherin & Star, 2011, p. 68): “The ability to recognize and respond to classroom phenomena in a routine way might be at the core of what we want to understand” (Sherin & Star, 2011, p. 68).

Starting with the framework for noticing teacher thinking (van Es, 2008, 2010), this study investigates teacher observations regarding students and their families as well as their ideas about the school context and their outside communities situated in low socioeconomic areas. Noticing, as defined by van Es and Sherin (2002) is comprised of three key aspects that include: (a) identifying what is important or noteworthy about a classroom situation; (b) making connections between the specifics of classroom inter-actions and the broader principles of teaching and learning they represent; and (c) using what one knows about the context to reason about classroom interactions. Within this study, van Es and Sherin’s ideas about noticing were adapted to investigate teachers’ thinking and noticing within the course that they attended together as a cohort. Specifically, the study investigates the extent to which the teachers (a) identify important ideas related to the students, parents, and community in which they teach; (b) begin to make connections between what they observe in the community and within their schools and classrooms, and the connections they make as they engage in classroom discussions, readings, and writing as it relates to their teaching; and (c) begin to use the knowledge and experiences that they bring to assist them in understanding the student, parent, and administrative challenges brought to their classrooms.

In this work, van Es provides a frame that focuses on preservice teacher thinking in regards to *what* and *how* they noticed in selected video-club data. The framework consists of levels of noticing which includes (1) Baseline noticing, (2) Mixed noticing, (3) Focused noticing, and (4) Extended noticing. This framework was adapted and used within my study to provide a

focus on veteran teachers and the levels of noticing and actions they report through artifacts and interviews. The blog interactions provided a way in which to observe twelve teachers' views on families and children in low income communities. Five of the teachers' renderings from reported life stories, written work and responses to general interview questions provide ways in which to understand how and what they noticed about communities, families, students, and school context.

Summary

As the number of cultural, linguistic and low socioeconomic student populations grows, so must the awareness of a teacher workforce who will be charged with assisting in the education of these students. The achievement gap sheds light on the issues that reside in schools located within low socioeconomic communities. Further, most teachers in those settings come from backgrounds unlike their students. The noticing framework (van Es, 2008, 2011) might be one way to focus on teachers' observations and actions. It has been used to assist teacher educators in working with preservice students with the use of video (Rosaen, Lundeberg, Cooper, Fritzen, & Terpstra, 2008; Star, Lynch, & Perova, 2011; van Es and Sherin, 2006;) and it has been used extensively in the field of video and mathematics (Mason, 2011). Much of the work in noticing has focused on the use of video as a means for noticings in the work with pre service teachers. I argue for the explicit use of noticing situated within the context of low income schools and their communities with veteran teachers and preservice teachers. In this study, I build onto the notion of noticing as others have envisioned it, but I combine field and classroom experiences with teacher collaboration, thus providing an authentic component from which to make observations. I hope this work might lead to more focused efforts within teacher education and professional development to assist teachers' noticing in more explicit ways. Additionally, the sharing of those

observations, such as through a community blog and classroom discussions, might be helpful to teachers and their colleagues as they share common ideas as well as misperceptions in a safe and trusting venue. Teacher educators may assist as they note misperceptions and address those through assigned readings and course discussions. Further, the role of the autobiography or teachers' life stories might provide another avenue for teacher noticing. As they examine their own lives, they might begin to recognize important aspects of their teaching that may be influenced by their own early experiences.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is organized into eight chapters. The following chapter, Chapter 2, provides information regarding the methods used to conduct this research. The subsequent chapters include the results of teacher noticing in regards to communities, families, students, and school context. Chapter 3 introduces us to the cohort of twelve teachers who used a blog as a means to communicate their observations regarding the communities in which their schools were situated. Chapter 4 narrows the focus to five of the teachers and provides life stories for each of them; the focus on those teachers continues throughout the rest of this work. Chapter 5 provides a focus on teacher observations about families within their schools. In Chapter 6, students are the primary focus of teacher observation as well as actions teachers take regarding students. Chapter 7 provides an examination of teachers' views regarding school context. The final chapter, Chapter 8, offers a summary as well as suggestions regarding implications for teacher education and professional development as well as recommendations for policy.

CHAPTER TWO

Discovering Teachers' Noticings

Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is. It is a strange science whose most telling assertions are its most tremulously based, in which to get somewhere with the matter at hand is to intensify the suspicion, both your own and that of others, that you are not quite getting it right. (Geertz, p. 29)

Methodology

This qualitative study focuses on what teachers in two low-income school districts, Tremont and Garnet (pseudonyms), observed about their communities, families, students, and schools and what, if anything, they did with those observations. Their work involves teaching students who are culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse and whose experiences differ markedly from the teachers' own school experiences (Lortie, 1976). I was curious about the students in my graduate level course whose lives were immersed in these settings and I wanted to know more about their work, in particular what they observed and how those observations connected, or not, to the work that they do. The questions for this study include:

- To what extent and how do teachers who work in high poverty schools learn to notice their students, families and communities?
- To what extent might this noticing help teachers make connections with their teaching?
- How might teachers' backgrounds influence what they notice?
- What, if anything, do teachers notice that might help them make connections between feelings of power and control in their classrooms and in their teaching?

Data Collection

Setting. This study was conducted with a group of 12 teachers who were enrolled in a graduate level course in a small, private liberal arts college located in a mid-sized Midwestern city. The college enrolls about 2,500 students within its graduate and undergraduate programs.

The School of Education offers accredited elementary and secondary teacher certification programs. It also offers three graduate programs: Masters of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.), The Master in Science Education (M.S.E) and Masters in Education (M.Ed.) which offers initial certification. There is also a choice of 29 endorsement areas, one of which is English as a Second Language.

The teachers participated in *School and Society*², one of six graduate courses along with a practicum required for the ESL endorsement. An arrangement was made between the college and the administrators for Tremont and Garnet schools. An on-site location at a Tremont elementary school was provided in order to offer convenience for teachers and provide the training needed for working with the schools' English as a Second Language (ESL) populations. Teachers within the two districts formed cohorts. They were experienced teachers who taught at the elementary, middle school and high school levels. The school district provided teachers with reimbursement for the courses and teachers could count the courses toward a graduate degree.

School and Society was taught in an elementary school located within the Tremont School District. This district is located in Banton, a small city that abuts the boundary line of a mid-sized urban district and also shares area with the Garnet School District. Tremont serves nearly 5,000 students (Table 1) with 70%, (up from 64% in last year's count) of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. The school's population has changed within the past ten years as the White student population moved from 71% to 48%. The largest growth was shown with the Hispanic student population that grew from 5% to 32%. The Black and Asian populations remained about the same (Table 2). There are ten schools within the district including four

² The names of places and participants have been replaced with pseudonyms.

elementary schools, one early childhood center, one intermediate school, one middle school, two high schools, and one alternative education center.

Garnet is a smaller district. Its schools are situated within two small cities, Banton and Camden. Garnet serves nearly 2,500 students and currently has a 75% free or reduced lunch rate (Table 1). Although the data for 2000 was unavailable, the 2010 demographics show similar statistics as the Tremont District. Both districts show a large number of Hispanic students (Table 2). There are seven schools within the district including one early childhood center, three elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, and an alternative education center.

Table 1 Tremont and Garnet Free & Reduced Lunch

Schools	(2009-2010) Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	(2010-2011) Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	Total Number of Students Fall, 2010
Tremont	64%	70%	Nearly 5,000
Garnet	71%	75%	Nearly 2,500

Michigan Department of Education

Table 2 Tremont and Garnet Demographics

Schools	2000 White	2010 White	2000 Black	2010 Black	2000 Hispanic	2010 Hispanic	2000 Asian	2010 Asian
Tremont	71%	48%	20%	18%	5%	32%	4%	2%
Garnet	NA	42%	NA	21%	NA	27%	NA	7%

Michigan Department of Education

Participants. Twelve graduate students gathered together for, *School and Society*, the final of six courses required for ESL certification. The group was made up of eleven women and one man and all were White teachers. Together, their time teaching in schools represented nearly 100 years (Table 3). They taught within two school districts and in schools that included

elementary, middle, and high schools. Most of the teachers had spent the majority of their careers within the district.

The course took place during the spring semester of 2010. It was arranged as a five-week class. The teachers knew one another well as they had taken the previous five courses together. I was the newcomer. They appeared at ease with one another in their discussions as they bantered about the topics, sometimes excitedly. They were a lively group. However during the summer, three of the teachers received new assignments: Dana moved from middle school math to working with English Language Learners (ELLs) at the high school. Mary moved from her 3rd – 4th grade position to a literacy coach job sharing position and Jill moved from 9th grade special education as well as her work with ELLs to morning courses at the middle school and afternoon course at the high school. Her position required teaching English language arts to ELLs.

I saved the teachers' written work as part of my normal teaching habits. After the course, I asked for their permission to use their work for my dissertation and all twelve teachers agreed. I present all twelve teachers within the next chapter, but I narrowed the pool to five teachers who agreed to interviews following the class. The interviews of the five teachers took place eight months following the class. Their responses are most prominent in Chapters 4 through 7.

Table 3 Study Participants

Name	Race	Gender	Grade Level	Content Area	Artifact Consent	Continue Study Consent	Years as Teacher	Years in this District	School District
Ruby	*W	Female	8	Science	Yes	No	8	8	Tremont
Alex	*W	Female	1	All	Yes	No	2	3 (prior staff)	Garnet
Mary	*W	Female	3-4	All	Yes	Yes	9	9	Tremont
Laura	*W	Female	5-6	All	Yes	Yes	11	11	Tremont
Marcy	*W	Female	K-5	ELL	Yes	Yes	5	3	Garnet
Bobby	*W	Male	4	All	Yes	Yes	4	16 (prior staff)	Garnet

Table 3 (cont'd)

Dana	*W	Female	7-8	Math	Yes	Yes	6	6	Tremont
Pat	*W	Female	3-4	All	Yes	Yes	15	15	Tremont
Jill	*W	Female	9 SPED and ELLs	ELA	Yes	Yes	11	4	Garnet
Julie	*W	Female	5	Language Arts	Yes	Yes	12	10	Tremont
Karen	*W	Female	Pre-K	All	Yes	Yes	5	5	Tremont
Molly	*W	Female	4	All	Yes	Yes	9	9	Tremont

*W=White

Researcher role. Within this course, my main role was that of instructor, which also provided me the role of participant observer. I created the assignments and selected the readings. I led the teachers through the course materials, observations, discussions, and blog assignment. As an Assistant Professor at the college, I also taught four other courses including multicultural education, introduction to education, and several literacy courses, all of which were embedded with cultural readings and discussions. Although I was provided a syllabus template for the course, I chose readings, and designed assignments to lead these experienced teachers into thinking more deeply about their practices and how they approached their work in diverse settings. One of my aims for this study was to "...uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to understand, account for, take actions, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation" (Huberman & Miles, 2002, p. 103). Such was the case in this study, where I was privy to their ideas as a group through the blog assignment and through class discussions. I also came to understand them and their work as individuals as related through the course assignments and, eventually for five teachers, the two interviews.

I realized at the onset of the course that I was the outsider within this group. They had already taken five other courses together over a two-year period and came to know one another well. Before classes each week, they casually chatted with one another about their jobs, families,

and other topics related to their lives. I had five weeks to not only get to know them but for them to know and trust me to guide them in the work that we were doing.

The class. School district personnel and college faculty worked together to design the onsite program for the teachers, which included six classes and a practicum. It had been designed to offer more convenience to teachers' schedules without diluting the substance of the materials. In order to do this, the teachers were required to meet for 15 hours for seminar, 15 hours of online time, and 15 hours of field observations. More specific instructions were provided in the syllabus. The course objectives included the following language: (1) Demonstrate an awareness and understanding of instructional pedagogy for the local student in a global context (2) Reflect and refine your philosophy of education as impacted by your current practice and the content of this course (3) Participate individually and with others as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a literacy community, (4) Understand the role of multicultural and global literature in today's society and the implications of both for instruction, (5) Explore and become informed about our local communities along with the resources and people located within them, (6) Understanding the interaction of different cultures within a school setting, (7) Understanding the effects of recent attempts to reform U.S. public schools.

There were two required books for the course that included Dewey's (1990) *The School and Society* and *The Child and the Curriculum* and Delpit's (1995) *Other People's Children*. There were several required journal articles as well as articles that were not mandatory that I offered to students who might be interested in further reading.

Data Collection Methods

Instruments

Several forms of data were collected for this study. The original twelve participants in the class allowed permission for the use of all course artifacts which consisted of: (a) responses to a classroom blog, (b) three short essays, (c) one formal research paper, (d) tape recording from the last class, (e) notes from classroom discussions, (f) Powerpoints used to facilitate course discussions, (g) course evaluations, and (h) informational sheets about teachers' learning. The twelve teachers' blog accounts were analyzed and are the focus in Chapter 3. None of the other artifacts were considered for the group of twelve. However, all of the artifacts were used in order to triangulate the data (Huberman & Miles, 2002) for five of the participants, who are the primary focus in Chapters 4 through 7. All of the artifacts were considered and/or used for the five teachers who also agreed to two semi-structured interviews.

Blog. The blog was integrated into the course as part of a required assignment. It was arranged through the college internet course system and it required a password for access. In other words, it was a *safe* venue in terms of a secured access in which to communicate with one another, although there was a certain amount of risk taking as they shared their ideas. It allowed a forum for teachers to continue discussion beyond the walls of the classroom. The assignment required that students spend five hours observing within the communities in which they taught. My assumption was that most teachers drove into their schools each day but had not spent time within the communities. I thought it important for teachers to make connections between their work and the communities in which they teach as part of their jobs entailed working with families and possibly knowing about helpful resources within the community. Eight of the twelve teachers lived outside of the schools' communities. The assignment allowed them to spend time in stores, restaurants and other venues that they may not have had previous opportunities to visit. I did, however, have a hesitation in creating the assignment as I hoped that

it would not become a way in which to reinforce stereotypes or promote the once controversial “culture of poverty” mentality (Cole, 2010; Gorski, 2008; Lewis, 1961). Similar kinds of activities have met with suspicion, Boomer, Dwarin, May, & Semingson (2008) focus on professional development modules where teachers are provided roles in which they simulate the lives of “poor people.” An example is from the work of Ruby Payne³, where teachers are asked to simulate the lives of people in poverty. However, the assignment for my course was not based on a simulation that asked them to pretend, only to observe and report.

As teachers made observations, they were asked to share them with colleagues, and they were encouraged to use course readings (although not mandatory) and class discussions to support or negate what they noticed. The assignment required that teachers provide at least three initial blog postings based on observations, over a period of five to eight weeks. They were also required to provide another three blog postings in response to colleagues’ posts. All students fulfilled the requirement and some provided more than required responses. However, some teachers did not provide substantial comments or insights; they only responded in ways that verified another colleague’s observation.

I was cautious about the blog assignment because I did not want teachers to share deficit comments that might lead to teachers only recognizing and focusing on the negative aspects of their communities and schools. I provided them with instructions to observe the community in nearly any way they desired. As full-time teachers, I knew that their schedules were busy, so I wanted them to make the most of their observations in an authentic manner. I indicated some areas that they might consider such as a park, restaurants, grocery stores, and laundromats. They

³ Ruby Payne’s *A framework for understanding poverty* workshops provide professional development training to teachers within low-income communities.
<http://www.lecturemanagement.com/speakers/ruby-payne.htm>

could choose. I asked them to be considerate about their observations as the intent was not to make judgments but to observe and talk about how the communities might connect to the work that they do as teachers. I encouraged them to ask questions of one another and to respond to questions posted.

As the course instructor, I commented within the blog very infrequently, choosing to observe their comments and views and not interrupt the flow of conversation that might have pushed them to write in ways to please me instead of writing in ways that projected their own interpretations of the communities' sites. However, each week before seminar, I pulled comments from the blog that tied closely to the readings for each week or to readings we had already discussed. I was cautious about pointing out any blatant views that might embarrass the teachers and wanted, instead, to provide subtle and gentle prompts as I wanted them to continue an open discussion. I had hoped that they might begin to understand in their own ways without my pointing out misconceptions and running the risk of a shutdown. This artifact produced a 122- page document of these twelve teachers' time together and this collection of blog entries is explored more fully in Chapter 3.

Three short reflective essays. The blog observations required five hours in the field and the remaining *ten* observation hours were focused within the school, culminating in three short reflective essays. I tried not only to connect the assignments to the course objectives, but I felt it imperative to make the observations convenient and authentic. I started by requiring that their last ten observation hours be spent in their schools evaluating resources, observing colleagues' classrooms, and interviewing colleagues or administrators about topics related to our in-class discussions and/or readings. The essays were reflective in nature and, many times, seemingly held surprises for the teachers. For example, when Mary visited a colleague's classroom for the

purpose of the assignment, she appeared enthralled with this teachers' way of reaching students and Mary indicated, "Ms. Back is changing the way that I teach and challenging me as well. For some reason she makes me want to become a better person, a better teacher but I, myself, do not even know why" (p. 2). These essays were included as artifacts used in this study.

Research Paper. As graduate students, they were bound to the regulations of the graduate program, which required that they submit formal research papers for each class they undertook. I encouraged them to write about topics that were most pressing to them and that might help them with their practices. The main requirement was to make certain to connect the paper to the readings and/or discussions that had been conducted in the class. The work that they submitted included these titles:

(a) The effects of homelessness on children in the classroom, (b) Debunking myths for teachers working with Latino children in Low SES schools, (c) Teaching students of poverty, (d) Literacy and African American students, (e) School connectedness, (f) Needs for achievement and the fight against social reproduction, (g) A focus on Dewey, (h) Home visits, (i) Can educational goals be fulfilled through tough choices, tough times? (j) Reading and academic achievement for ELLs, (k) Bridging the gap between home and school, (l) How motivation affects second language acquisition.

Interviews. The five teachers who agreed to further contact following the class agreed to a life story interview (Appendix C) and a general question interview (Appendix C). Life story interviews were arranged at the convenience of the teachers and took place in mid-November. General question interviews took place from December through February and were conducted via Skype or by telephone. I had not seen the teachers since our class meetings as I had since relocated to a different state.

Life story interviews. I began with the first of two interviews, the life story interview (Atkinson, 1998), as I wanted to reestablish rapport with the students. I thought that asking them about their lives might allow for a reconnection of our relationship but in different roles this time; we were not teacher—student, but rather, researcher—participant. I also thought that this might not taint their views for the subsequent interview. Had I provided the general questions interview first followed by the life story interviews, they may have unconsciously (or consciously) attempted to tell a story that might have more focus on what I wanted to hear as they would have been exposed to the general questions. I also anticipated that these interviews might provide insight into how they approached their work within low SES schools. I wanted to know more about their backgrounds in order to more fully understand their thinking and ideas regarding their work.

I met the teachers in various locations. For the first interview, I arrived at a local coffee shop to meet Pat, a place she had chosen for an early Saturday morning meeting before she headed off to her elementary school to get work done. I asked permission to record the conversation and we spent a little more than an hour together. Another day, I met Dana during her planning hour at the high school. She found a quiet room where we could talk and she provided permission to record the conversation. We spent about an hour together. I met Mary at a local fast food restaurant just before she had to report to work. We sat in the corner of the sparsely occupied restaurant and I was given permission to tape our conversation. We spent a little more than an hour there. Later that same day, I arrived at the elementary school where Bobby worked just as the school day had ended. We spent more than an hour in recorded conversation. My last interview took place with Jill. I met her after school hours at the high school and we spent more than an hour in recorded conversation.

General question interview. The general question interviews (Appendix D) took place between December and February, 2010. The teachers agreed to use Skype or telephone for our communication in this interview. I preferred Skype as I could better gauge their reactions toward the questions such as when to clarify or slow down. However, Mary and Dana had to make last minute changes as they were unable to access Skype. Again, I asked if teachers would allow me to record the discussions and each agreed. The general question interview focused on their day-to-day work in the classroom, and more specifically, their work in low-income schools. I also presented general policy questions regarding their work. I wanted to know about their thinking in terms of the daily responsibilities they had in working with students, their families and within the context of their schools. Their noticings to these important questions hit at the heart of what I wanted to learn about their work.

Jill, Pat and Bobby asked if they could meet before the holidays and we arranged a date. Jill was first; she accessed Skype from her school computer. Our interview lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. Bobby, too, accessed Skype, for the first time, from his classroom computer. The interview lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. Pat met with me on the same day early in the evening. We spent one hour and 20 minutes in conversation. This was her first experience using the technology. Dana set up our meeting with the intent to use Skype but discovered that she did not have the required equipment and after briefly trying to set it up, she decided it might be better to talk by phone. Our interview lasted a little more than an hour. My last participant had difficulty setting a time to meet. Her many obligations and two young children prevented her from setting a time that would allow for the questions. We arranged our meeting on Skype but it was a telephone meeting as she, too, did not have access to equipment. We spent about an hour in conversation with slight interruptions as her children were in the background.

Data Analysis

The data was collected over two different periods, spanning eight months. All teachers in the study provided permission to use course artifacts that included written communication within the blog, three short reflective essays, a research paper, open-ended questions regarding the class, and a course evaluation. I also had saved Powerpoint presentations, some course notes from class discussions, and an audio recording from the last night of class. As stated above, five of the teachers agreed to two semi-structured interviews: a life history interview and a general question interview.

I began by using within case analysis (Huberman & Miles, 2002) as I read through each of the sets of artifacts to begin to learn common themes. I used printed and electronic copies of the transcripts and searched through each of the documents several times. I used hard copies of the data to begin identifying and coding common themes. For example, I began with the blog transcripts in which I categorized common themes but I found that I had narrowly focused on those themes and there were too many categories. I also found that I had begun to stray from my original questions, so I returned to the work with a focus on my questions to create a different, more focused structure. I categorized responses based on my dissertation questions and grouped them by participants' responses. I created tables for each of the documents with a focus on the questions which included:

- To what extent and how do teachers who work in high poverty schools learn to notice their students, families and communities?
- To what extent might this noticing help teachers make connections with their teaching?
- How might teachers' background influence what they notice?

- What, if anything, do teachers notice that might help them make connections between feelings of power and control in their classrooms and in their teaching?

Blogs. The collected blog data became the primary focus of Chapter 3. Data from all twelve teachers was used and some voices were more pronounced than others. Based on the noticing framework (van Es, 2008, 2011; van Es & Sherin, 2003), I leveled teachers' observations into four areas based on what they noticed as well as the depth of those observations. The framework (van Es 2011; 2008; van Es & Sherin, 2002) pushed me to think about the ways in which my participants noticed at various levels, although I did not use the same headings as the van Es & Sherin framework Level 1, which included *surface noticing* whereby teachers provided general descriptions of their visits (Table 4). This level focused on the general observations that teachers made within their community visits. Level 2 focused on *questioning or wondering* of teachers about things that they observed but did not know much about and which they shared with their colleagues. Level 3 included teachers' *realizations* of something for which they might have grasped an understanding. Level 4 provided a focus on teachers' *judgments*. Some teachers acknowledged their judgments while others did not. The acknowledgements may have stemmed from my request to be cautious about making judgments. Although I had not asked them to acknowledge judgments, many of them did so. They may have begun to influence one another's focus on acknowledging judgments. The last Level, 5, indicated the *connections*, adapted from van Es (2011, 2008) and van Es and Sherin (2002), that teachers made between their observations and thinking about classroom connections. I counted each time they made reference to students in conjunction with their statements about the community.

Table 4 Blog Levels 1-5

Levels of Noticing	Example 1	Example 2
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Table 4 (cont'd)

Level 1: Surface	Sitting at the table, I observed a bunch of elderly men enjoying their coffee and donuts. I had a sense of strong community knowing each of those men knew each others' stories.	It struck me again and made me somewhat envious to be reminded of how totally unselfconscious young children can be as they play---dancing, twirling, making faces, and expressing themselves in varied ways.
Level 2: Questioning/ Wondering	"Do parents have a clear goal for their child's future?"	"I wonder how different it is for students to live in one culture at home and another at school?"
Level 3: Realization	"As I drive through Banton each day, I do not feel that I know the people who live there."	"I think one think I have realized is that, yes, it is very hard to not be judgmental, however, I think talking about all of these topics has helped me to think of people's stories."
Level 4: Judgment: Acknowledged	"I find myself judging others before knowing about them."	"Both of the parents I judged as inattentive, uncaring, though I realize I really had no basis to make such a presumption."
Level 4: Judgment, Unacknowledged	"Often my students come from homes with little structure."	"I figured she (mom) was drunk and hung over and school was the last place she wanted to be."
Level 5: Classroom Connection	"When they come in with sad or tired eyes, I try to be more sympathetic."	"I ran into my students and family at the store but could not easily communicate [because of language differences]"

I read the 122-page document multiple times and marked the levels according to the adapted van Es (2011, 2008) and van Es & Sherin (2002) framework. I acquired an electronic copy to assist me in the process. I used *idea units* (Table 5) to assist me in coding. The units were provided in the form of several words, a sentence or a few sentences that could be identified with the code attached to it. I asked two friends, who are educators, to look at my data units for the blog to provide their points of view regarding how the data fit into the thematic structures. Levels 2 and 5 appeared to be the simplest to code as there were certain "trigger" words that assisted with that such as posing questions or making statements about things they questioned or wondered about, such as "I wonder" or the use of a question mark for 'questioning'. Level 5

statements were chosen when teachers made a statement regarding their classrooms based on the blog observations.

Table 5 Level 2 and Level 5 Idea Unit Samples

Level 2 Questioning	Level 5 Classroom Connections
“I wonder how different it is for students to live in one culture at home and another at school?”	“I ran into my student and family at the store but could not easily communicate [because of language differences].”
“Do parents have a clear goal for their child’s future?”	“When they come in with sad or tired eyes, I try to be more sympathetic.”
“So what does a district do to stop students from dropping out?”	“In schools our expectations are raised to fit the middle class standard, and if teachers don’t understand that some students don’t come equipped with some authority patterns or social arrangements, then classroom management can be a nightmare.”
“Upon visiting a family home, the teachers asked the mother about her veil, “I asked her if this was customary and she said ‘But of course!’ I felt a little dumb!”	“Maybe we need a more efficient counseling service. The “border-line” students need someone to advocate for them. Give them support. Guide them back to school or find a program that will work best for them.”

I counted the number of times individual teachers responded to Levels 1 and 5. These levels were the least difficult to quantify as subjectivity in identifying data within these areas was less than some of the other levels. The number of instances within these levels were recorded in Excel and figures were created based on the numbers. Those figures are provided in Chapter 3.

Life stories. The life story interview data represented the narrowing of the pool of respondents as it focused on the five teachers who agreed to further participation in the study. I began coding the data based on themes within the life story data. The five themes that occurred included decisions to teach, feeling safe, virtues, faith as a guide and teachers as early students. Two of the themes resulted from direct interview questions (Appendix D) and include responses about their decisions to teach and their lives as students. The other themes emerged from the data. I used additional artifacts to make connections between their life story interviews and what they noted in those artifacts. For example, in her general question interview, Dana talked about

how some of her students were so easily ready to give up and she could not understand their lack of motivation. One might understand her stance when learning that Dana had grown up in a family with a strong work ethic and a drive to never give up.

Triangulation. In coding the data that eventually led to Chapters 5, 6, and 7, I carefully read through, several times, the artifacts and looked for responses that related to the areas of families, students, and school community context. I used these codes as they were based on my questions. I coded responses on separate spreadsheets using all of the artifacts. However, the responses to general question interviews by five teachers (Appendix D) played a primary role in the evidence related to the three categories. I began to note common responses from the artifacts and then grouped them into what I noted as *deficit*, *caring/ sympathetic*, and *above/beyond* views. These codes reflected the stance that teachers projected about families. Deficit views focused on how teachers viewed particular families in ways that were seemingly negative. I choose ideas that referred, in some manner, to families even though the term “kids” or “children” might have been included in the phrase. Caring and sympathetic included ways in which teachers tried to understand the challenges families might face. Above and beyond denoted things that teachers did for families that was more than required of them in their work. A sample of the idea units that determined the code structure is provided in Table 6.

Table 6 Views Toward Families - Idea Unit Examples

Deficit	Caring/Sympathetic	Above/Beyond
I can pick out the kids whose parents actually cared.	They’re working two or three jobs each just to stay afloat.	I think you need to start with just even...like potlucks.
I think the kids see that there are no real repercussions at home.	Now I realize that even talking with the girls, they are the ones raising their brothers and putting them to bed.	Thought the family did a good job and student did well so submitted an academic award based on behavior and academics.
Children just aren’t valued.	I want her to know I’m on her side.	Helped Rosa advocate for her son.

Table 6 (cont'd)

I've got to help these kids and sometimes that's being a mom.	It's like I'm helping family.	Arrived to school early to offer time to work with students.
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Likewise, I coded data that focused on the deficit, caring/sympathetic, and above/beyond views of students. These codes emerged from the data. I used the same format as indicated in the coding for families. Again, I used all artifacts, but the general interview artifact provided a strong portion of the data.

Table 7 Views Toward Students – Idea Unit Examples

Deficit	Caring/Sympathetic	Above/Beyond
"Many times I've said to myself why do these kids act the way they do? It's their normal."	"They take on the stresses of adults not knowing where they will be one day to the next in some cases."	Knew how to joke with student to facilitate a relationship that would push her student toward reading material.
"They want the work done for them; they're lazy."	"A lot of them have difficult financial times so they have a lot of depression or anger and it's always trying to figure out what's wrong with the child."	Wake-up calls for students and rides to school as well as a trip to Burger King as reward for attending school.
"Some students don't come with a lot of strengths such as vocabulary or other skills needed for school."	"Some of my ELLs are illegal. They can't have social security numbers....they're fighting against the odds."	Offer early morning tutoring to students each day.
"The two move ins moved in and brought drama with them."	Noticed a high number of African American males who were sent to office for discipline	"I don't let kids sleep in class: I'm waking them up and doing what I can to keep them working."

In focusing on school community context, I coded the teachers' responses within themes that included *lack of autonomy*, *seeking solutions* and *voicing ideas*. The three titles all represent autonomy in some form from a low (lack of) to a high level (voicing). These emerged from the data of all artifacts as common themes. I grouped them based on the levels of autonomy they seeming possessed, or not, within their work. *Lack of autonomy* indicated the statements that had

shown some level of keeping power from teachers that might seemingly be important in performing their jobs. *Seeking solutions* indicated statements that showed how teachers were attempting to provide solutions that might assist them in their work. *Voicing ideas* indicated that teachers spoke up to those in power in order to make gains toward helping students. I counted each teacher's response within those areas and provided a figure, within Chapter 7, to demonstrate their ideas. I used idea units to represent the data under each category (Table 8).

Table 8 Views toward School Context – Idea Unit Examples

Lack of Autonomy	Seeking Solutions	Voicing Ideas
They're requiring us to teach more...teach deeper not wider.	Have one building per grade level for more and better collaboration between teachers.	Suggested to administration what might be done to address MEAP data.
Administration is top down.	Need a big picture approach where information isn't just jammed into kids' heads.	Brainstorm with other teachers for new ideas.
Don't have tech resources.	Homework assignments should be meaningful.	Talked to the person in charge of data system to voice concerns.
Don't feel like you teach because you are told what to do.	Need more time to work with students who struggle.	Took concerns to assistant superintendent.

Chapter Organization

I decided it would make the most sense to create the chapters based on the questions for this study. In particular, my first questions focused on the extent to which teachers in high poverty schools notice their students, families and communities. Chapter 3 addressed the outer community, where the teachers' schools were situated. I used the data from the blog as a focus in this chapter and leveled teachers' noticings to indicate the extent of the observations provided by the twelve teachers. By focusing on all 12 teachers, I provide a view of the learning context in which the sub-set of 5 teachers participated.

Chapter 4 was formed with the purpose of introducing five teachers more prominently within this work but also to address research question 3 that asked how teachers' backgrounds

might affect what they notice. Most of the data from this chapter was taken from the life story interviews, but the information from the chapter was referred to in later chapters when discussing families and students.

Chapters 5 through 7 focused on questions 1, 2, and 4 as I provided data that focused on the extent to which teachers noticed students, families, and school context as well as how those noticings might have assisted them with connections to their teachings. The last question allowed focus on feelings of power and control and sense of agency that teachers may or may not have within their classrooms, as reported by them. In Chapters 4 through 7, I analyzed only the artifacts provided by the five teachers. I had considered using artifacts from the entire group but thought it might be too confusing within the format I had established, especially as I was trying to explore connections between the five teachers' life histories to the other data provided by those five teachers.

Limitations of the Study

It might be noted that there are possible limitations to this study to include group size and dynamics, population demographics, time, and trustworthiness. The response of the small group of twelve and then five participants is not generalizable to the full population of teachers. This group was also unique in that all the teachers knew one another well. Although they taught in various buildings (and districts), they had attended five prior graduate courses together as a group. The group conversations freely flowed and their writings, within the group blog, hinted at a comfort level in their responses to one another. Although the group's cohesiveness was not a limitation for this study the same kind of grouping may not be possible for similar future studies.

Another area that might be limiting is that all of the teachers in the study were white. Their perceptions and sharing may have been different within a course that consisted of a diverse

group of teachers who did not know one another or who were not all from the same race. Time was another area that might present limitations. The course took place over a timeframe of five weeks, although another three weeks was provided for the completion of reflective papers and the final course paper. Again, it was helpful that the teachers knew one another as this probably made the group dynamics stronger for this kind of work. Trustworthiness might be of some concern as the teachers led busy lives outside of the class and may have presented work in a hurried manner or in a way that they filtered some of their thoughts. It might also be a concern in the life history and general interviews where teachers might not recall specific details of what happened or they might supply those details in a way to provide a particular picture.

Researcher Positionality

Within this research, I contend that I may have been influenced by my own work as a teacher as well as my experiences as a younger student. In my own early years of education, I attended seven different schools by the time I was in fifth grade, most within a poor urban school district. Raised by a young, divorced mother with an eighth-grade education, I became accustomed to moving and changing schools. We were transient. We had no car and sometimes little food. My mother had no one to assist with childcare or with other needs she may have had for my younger sister and me. Years later, I came to realize how these experiences assisted me with understanding how my own students and their families struggled; I knew it was important to provide an inclusive classroom where I provided relevant instruction and held them to high standards, possibly something I had observed in my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Hing.

As a teacher, I have spent more than 25 years in classrooms that include elementary to the college level within four states. I began teaching, shortly after receiving my teacher certification, for an Adult Basic Education program in an urban factory town. For about five

years, I held General Educational Development (GED) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes within schools, a factory, and through a social service program. I then spent seven years teaching alternative education students in a program near another urban area, but instead of a town dependent upon producing automobiles, this one was dependent upon steel mills. The student makeup in both of these settings was diverse and included a mix of English language learners, and students who had dropped out of their high school programs. Many of the young women were pregnant and some of the young men were given the option to attend alternative school or go to jail.

A move to California, led me to teach English language arts to middle school students at a small private Catholic school. Two years later we moved, this time to Maryland where I taught fifth-grade students situated in a high-poverty elementary school. Our subsequent move back to the Midwest provided an opportunity for me to work with the Federal TRIO program, serving a diverse population of students, at a small college. I later became an Assistant Professor of Education at that college.

These experiences have influenced the way in which I think about and work with students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. It was within these settings that I continually questioned not only the lack of resources provided for populations that seemingly struggled, but how some teachers were able to work, seemingly, with more ease than others. There is no doubt that those experiences have assisted me in this work; however, I am clearly aware of those experiences as potential influences. In Chapter 3, we learn more about 12 teachers who work in low income schools and then we take a closer look at five of those teachers in Chapters 4 through 7.

CHAPTER THREE

Teachers as Bloggers: A Cohort of 12

Finding a balance of using equality based on a child and their history and not having students feel that favoritism is occurring is really a fine balance. For me, Pat, I have thought about taping myself while teaching. I know that I should but the fear of watching myself interacting with my students scares me! I'm afraid to see the reality that exists from another point of view versus the picture I have in my own mind. (Mary, Blog Post)

In this chapter, I describe some of my own goals for engaging my graduate students in noticing the community in which their schools are situated and then I focus on the extent to which 12 teachers report their observations about the communities in which they teach. This chapter serves as a backdrop for chapters 4 through 7 where five of the 12 teachers agreed to participate in follow-up interviews.

For five weeks, 12 teachers from adjacent school districts teaching at varying grade levels met together. In this course, *School and Culture*, I attempted to create assignments and promote readings that might assist teachers in the questions they might have about their roles in diverse school settings. In the assignment with which this chapter is focused, I wanted the teachers to dig deeper into the fabric of the community so that they might discover the contributions that families bring to schools and the challenges that some families and their students might encounter when performing in the “school way.”⁴ I also wanted to create an opportunity for teachers to carry on conversations with one another beyond our course meeting times.

I chose a blog as the tool that might help promote those conversations and to assist with meeting at least one of the course goals, in particular to *participate individually and with others as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a literacy community*.⁵ The

⁴ “School way” was a term used by students in one of the blog conversations and referred to the middle class expectations by teachers.

⁵ There were 7 course objectives as listed in the syllabus (see Appendix A)

assignment leading to the blog use required that teachers spend five hours observing within the communities in which they teach. They later spent another 10 hours observing within their schools. Within this chapter, the focus is on the five community hours. As eight of the twelve teachers drive from outside of the community, I thought it important that they view the community by what it had to offer in terms of restaurants, stores, and other businesses. I cautioned the teachers that their roles during observations were that of observers and to think about the observations in terms of what it meant for them as teachers within their communities. The goal was to assist them in building a capacity for noticing and, hopefully, noticing on more than just a surface level. One of my goals was to facilitate a structure whereby they might share honest observations that might lead to conversations to enrich their knowledge and prompt them toward recognizing other ways of thinking. I wanted to assist them in recognizing and acting upon those recognitions, or reframing (Kumashiro, 2010; Lakoff, 2004) their notions about community as I held an assumption that teachers who drove into their jobs each day might do so with blinders attached and may not understand the workings of the communities in which they spend their work lives. For most occupations, this may not be an important aspect but as teachers, I thought it important that they know about the communities so that they might make better connections with the students and families who come into their schools each day. I also thought it might be a place to begin, or continue, focusing on culturally responsive measures that might assist them in their work. That knowledge might provide them with the background that they need to work through problems with families and students instead of viewing them *as* the problem. In this way, I intended to reframe the discussion on diversity and equity in an approach that might best reach these teachers in an authentic manner as they were steeped within the communities and held to accountability through discussions and responses.

In order to facilitate this assignment, teachers had to be open and willing to participate in sharing their ideas in ways that might not always be comfortable. In other words, the blog provided a forum that involved a level of risk-taking in order to participate. Taking a professional risk also put them at risk for professional vulnerability (Lasky, 2005) as no one wants to appear in seemingly negative or unknowing ways in the presence of their peers. But, they did have a history as a cohort and many of them had worked together at some point. I was the outsider in this group and took my own risk that they might embrace this assignment in ways that assisted them in thinking about diversity and equity within their classrooms rather than simply performing an academic exercise.

In this chapter, I begin with a focus on the twelve teachers who gathered for our class. I present justification for incorporating a blog and I present the levels at which I noted teacher observations. I then present examples based on the levels followed by a discussion.

Teachers as Learners

It was late Wednesday afternoon in January 2010 as the twelve teachers eagerly chatted while entering the meeting room based at the local elementary school that housed the first of five face-to-face meetings. There was noticeable excitement among the teachers as this was the last in a series of eight classes leading to ESL certification. The end of this class would signify a freed-up week night from coursework as well as an endorsement that might provide them not only with specialized knowledge but possible job security in their schools where English Language Learners (ELLs) were prevalent. The room, a large rectangular space, contained a bank of windows on each side of the door. Rectangular tables in neat rows faced the front of the classroom on one side and large round tables dotted the other half of the room. Large whiteboards ran the wall length in the front and rear of the room. A projector hung from the

ceiling, connected to a computer on the desk at the back of the room. Although the day's last school bell had rung more than an hour before, the school was still bustling as parents and other caregivers continued to retrieve children from the child care center; many of those passing glanced through the wall of windows as the teachers prepared to be students for the next three hours. The teachers chose to sit at the large round tables and appeared to know one another well even though they taught in different schools and at various grade levels scattered over two adjacent districts.

On that first night, students generated a list of what they said they knew about their students and the families within their districts. With the years of teaching experience, coursework, and professional development behind them, I was surprised by the teachers' responses, which tended to show more about what students and families could not do as opposed to the tools that students and families provided. Their frustrations were quite apparent. The group's ideas were recorded on a Powerpoint slide:

- Students don't come prepared for the content and standards we're expected to teach
- Lack of parental support
- Parents aren't knowledgeable about how to help their children: such as in math, long division [as an example]
- I've never sent math homework home because of that (parents not able to help)
- Many parents can't help with homework
- My conference [parent-teacher] is to teach parents to help their kids to read
- Different cultures have different needs
- Someone from Mexico will be much different in cultural and political views
- Those [students] from low SES are at least two years behind their peers

- Lack of background [student] knowledge
- Their background knowledge doesn't match the curriculum...such as [for] MEAP
- Other things in their lives take over and if they don't have basic needs [met], they can't focus
- Students don't come prepared for the content and standards that we're suppose to teach.

Their responses included concerns about the students and families within their school communities as well as concerns about their responsibilities as teachers. Many of their observations included words that suggest they were viewing through a deficit lens (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). As seasoned teachers, they not only pointed out the challenges that diversity brought into their classrooms but, as noted in the next set of comments, how they might attend to their students' and families' concerns and needs. I was somewhat surprised at their comments. Although I had set up assignments meant to help them think more deeply about their work with a diverse student population, I did not anticipate the level of angst within their shared comments. I speculated that they came to this course with a unique set of experiences (Lowenstein, 2009) that helped them make sense of their work and that as veterans in the district, they might think beyond deficit views. On that first night I inquired as to what they might *want to know* more about and they responded:

- What does research say about this [families and students]?
- We always do a lot of awareness [PD and classes]...but now what ...what do we do?
- [What are the] Myths that we buy into?
- Accountability? Responsibility? How much do we hold them [students] accountable?
- Is this a global problem?

- How does this [family and community] affect our testing or assessing students? What does that mean and how does...will the state ever recognize that?

Their responses indicated that they wanted more information about how to work with families and students within their school communities, perhaps suggesting that they did not have solutions and/or resources for how to teach the diverse student populations in their classrooms.

Although the teachers had completed all classes except this one and their practicum⁶, they seemed to want more tangible information to guide their practices. For example, one student mentioned awareness: *We always do a lot of awareness [PD and classes] ...but now what ...what do we do?* This suggested an understanding that there was diversity in the classroom, but that translating that awareness into student achievement might be a difficult task beyond their current efforts. The teachers may be expressing these ideas as they may be confounded by the “multiple and sometimes conflicting ideals of our schools” (Kennedy, 2005).

In continuing our discussion on that first night, I invited their views on the purpose of education. This was a precursor to our discussion for the following week of *Public Goods, Private Goods: An American Struggle over Educational Goals* (Labaree, 1997). The article focused on one way of looking at the purposes of education and provided a view that there were goals for the good of the public and private goals. Public goals focused on all students and pushed social efficiency and democratic equality while private goals might benefit certain individuals in terms of providing opportunities for social mobility.

Although the teachers listed several ideas about the purpose(s) for students, they also listed areas of concern, especially for themselves since several statements indicated that the

⁶ See Chapter 2 for a list of the courses required before this course.

scope of their jobs had widened to include more of a role to socialize their students, implying possibly, that they did not think that was part of their job. They shared their thoughts:

- The list has grown for subject area materials: character education, technology~things keep getting added to our plate
- We're nurse, counselor, nutritionist, mom
- We're asked to prepare kids for them [parents]
- [Prepare students] to contribute to society
- Problem-solving skills
- Learn how to learn: they must learn thinking skills and problem-solving skills...they aren't learning how to learn
- Problem solvers: becoming good citizens
- Parents look at it [school] as babysitting
- Kids aren't learning responsibility at home and we try to instill that and we get in trouble because they [students] can't do it

Although teachers responded that the purposes included preparing students to become problem solvers and to become good citizens, they also included areas that were problematic for them as teachers such as extending their work to become babysitters, and nurses, as well as instilling character education and providing technology skills which one respondent maintained "*things keep getting added to our plate.*" It appeared that they viewed their roles more in terms of providing content but before students could learn, teachers seemingly realized that they must first address other roles so that they might teach and learning might take place.

The teachers' responses provided me with some insight into their thinking regarding their practices. It appeared that they had authentic concerns not only about the population of students

and families that they served, but concerns about how they might be most effective within their work. I wanted to push the teachers to explore their ideas about students, families, and the *communities* (geographic area) in which the students and families resided. And further, I wanted to know what they might accomplish with that noticing in terms of the work that might get done in their classrooms.

Blogging: Sharing Observations

Blogs have been in use for a little more than a decade (Williams & Jacobs, 2004) and have filtered into teacher education classrooms as a tool to facilitate communication. It is a tool that not only offers interaction between peers, but a high level of autonomy (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). I incorporated this tool in order to provide a forum, other than the classroom, for teachers to interact in a setting where they might be inclined to recognize and discuss, possibly questioning their own cultural identities (Wassal, 2008). In this way, I attempted to reframe how teachers observed and possibly connected their observations with their practices. I also wanted them to experience the ease of using a blog so they might view it as a pedagogical tool that might be incorporated into their practices. It is a free tool that provides a sense of ownership that might lead to productive communication (Kim, 2008; Tolmie & Boyle, 2000). It is also a benefit for English Language Learners as it assists with writing performance. (Arsian R, & Sahin-Kizil, A. (2010).

This course blog was instituted as one of the required course activities and it was arranged so that teachers might communicate their ideas, observations, and wonderings. Wonderings include teachers' expressions of curiosity about particular field observations, or about colleagues' comments. Their responses were noted after spending five hours over a period of several weeks within the school district's extended community, a place where people attend to

business and other activities. Since eight of the twelve participants lived outside of the communities in which they taught, I asked that they immerse themselves in the community. I provided direction for the teachers to visit parks, restaurants, grocery stores, laundromats, or other venues that allowed them to observe the daily lives of students and families within the community. The term *family* did not necessarily refer to those from the teachers' schools but children and adults who participated within the local community. I also asked that teachers focus on observing and attempt to refrain from making judgments about their observations. The course outline required participants to provide six postings to the blog, to include three initial observational postings and three responses. I suggested that the teachers, if inclined, attempt to make connections between class readings and discussions as they wrote about their observations. For the most part, these teachers surpassed this requirement as they shared their observations and responded to their colleagues' findings. The blog served as an instrument of reflection and sharing as well as a log of conversation. I will draw from these twelve teachers' reported observations and the level of specificity of those observations.

Levels of Teacher Observations within Communities

The twelve teachers discussed in this chapter shared and reacted to stories through the use of a blog. Their blog participation brought together their shared experiences and observations from the work that they do as teachers. However, their observations were shared with the cohort and me. The choices for observations were flexible only in that they had to be within the communities in which they taught. They chose to observe in:

- Drugstores and small discount stores
- Doughnut shops
- Large discount grocery and clothing stores

- Video stores and movie theaters
- Libraries
- Laundromats
- Coffee shops as well as family-owned and chain restaurants
- Gas stations
- Pawn shop and a book exchange

All of us brought white, middle-class perspectives even though each of us was connected to various ethnicities and many other experiences before joining together in this venture. I present an array of responses based on teachers' noticings. I have leveled those responses based on my adaptation of the original framework of van Es (2011, 2008) coupled with the work of van Es and Sherin (2002). I examined the teachers' observations within levels one through five, which focused on: description (*surface noticing*), *questioning*, *realization*, *judgment*, and *classroom connections*. I provided a preview of teachers' responses regarding questions that they asked (Figure 2) and classroom connections that they made (Figure 3). More about how and why I chose these two areas can be found in Chapter 2. In the next sections, I present narrative snippets in order to demonstrate how the teachers viewed some of the venues that they visited.

Figure 2 Teacher Questioning/Wondering For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.

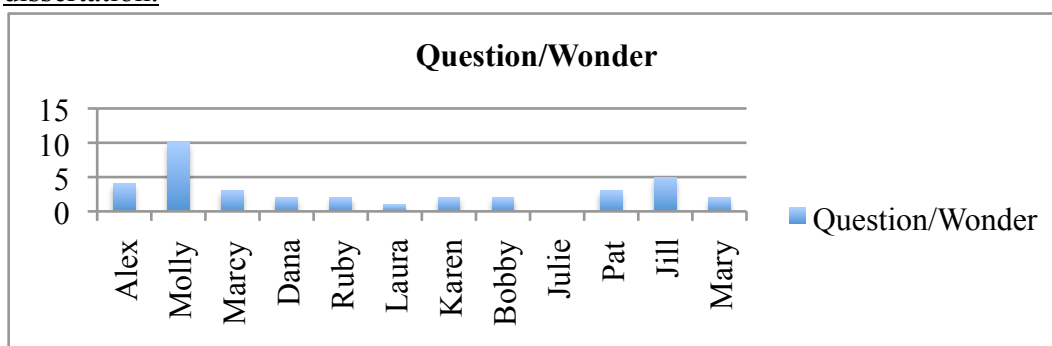
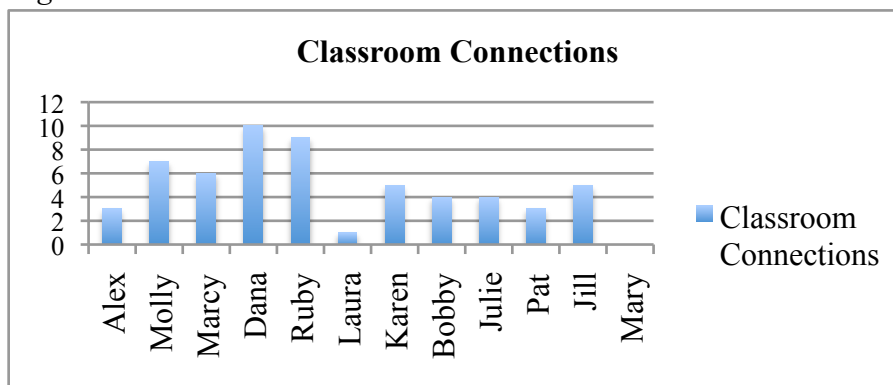


Figure 2 might be seen as important as it represents the teachers who began to question either what they were observing in terms of why something might be happening in the community or questioning the system in terms of how to address particular challenges that might filter into their schools. I thought it was important to note that teachers began to question the reflective responses that they or their colleagues provided as it appeared to take them beyond just observing.

I also provided a preview regarding their responses relative to classroom connections.

Chapter 2 provides more extensive information about how I produced Figure 2.

Figure 3 Classroom Connections



This was another area in which teachers made connections between the community and their classrooms. Some appeared to turn their observations into opportunities to connect to their classrooms. Some appeared highly tuned into the connections, while others appeared not to share much of substance.

Level 1: Surface Noticing

The participants provided descriptive accounts of the venues they had observed, something I termed *surface noticing*. There were far more comments that included Level 1 but it

was necessary to provide that information in their blog posts, in most cases, because it set the scene and provided context for other levels of observation.

In one of her visits, Laura shared a description of her visit to a local mall where she described the play area in the center of the mall as she watched children and families:

It struck me again and made me somewhat envious to be reminded of how totally unselfconscious young children can be as they play—dancing, twirling, making faces, and expressing themselves in varied ways. Much of the play behavior I observed was repetitious in that a particular child would do the same thing over and over and over. I saw a lot of parallel play but little engagement with each other.

This level of observation set the stage for making another connection to parents as she noted that as the children played, some parents were active with them while others watched from the side of the play area. She also noted that most of the families appeared to be from white, middle class backgrounds. Her observations at this level provided an awareness of families and children, but it did not provide a reflection of the people within her community as she noted mainly “white, middle class” families. This comment was provided at the beginning of the assignment, so it may have been a convenient location to begin her assignment as she shopped. I had hoped that the teachers would try to incorporate the work for this class into their very busy lives with the idea that this authentic task might push them to think about their noticings beyond the span of the course.

In another venue, Ruby described the Laundromat that she visited. She noted that a few people were doing laundry when she arrived. There were two Vietnamese women employees who were “friendly and very polite.”

One lady was pregnant and while we were there she was cleaning all the machines or wiping them down. It didn't matter if you were trying to place your laundry in the machine or not she worked right around what you were doing. The other lady was sweeping and mopping the floor. I didn't see any signs being placed out about the wet floor. I was rather surprised that they were cleaning the floors and machines while people were there. I have worked in retail before, not at a laundromat but we waited till after hours or before hours to do any of the cleaning.

In this observation, Ruby described the business and those working there. She indicated the ethnic background of the women, possibly because she wanted to focus on diversity but possibly because her work with ELLs made them stand out to her.

Molly also provided a Level 1 and Level 4 response in her description of the grocery store she visited within the community, one in which she had never shopped:

When I began my shopping trip, I noted that most of the people inside of the store were not Caucasian. Some were Latino while others were African American. I felt as though I stood out because I was a white blond haired woman with no children walking through the store. As I walked around, there were very few employees within the store, but the shelves were neatly stocked and the store seemed quite clean. Though I didn't recognize many of the brands, I was impressed with the large selection of ethnic foods. All of a sudden I jumped at the sound of my name. One of my students and her family was in the store. Not often do I get the chance to see my students off campus.

Through this description, it appeared that Molly was well aware of the differences between her and the other customers but there also appeared to be an underlying expectation that the store would not be the kind of store she might shop in as she indicated surprise that the “shelves were neatly stocked” and the “store seemed quite clean.” She also indicated another difference in that the brands were not familiar to her and there was a large selection of ethnic goods, possibly indicating to her the diversity of those who lived within the community. The fact that she ran into a student in the store, helped her to make connections with a Level 4 observation, as it forced her to make connections in her thinking about this student from her classroom.

In her connection with the community, Dana visited a local doughnut shop and noted how everyone seemed to know one another:

Sitting at the table I observed a bunch of elderly men enjoying their coffee and doughnuts. I had a sense of strong community knowing each of those men knew each others stories. I noticed a mother helping her toddler, who was bundled up in his pajamas, eat a nice warm doughnut. I imagined the moment as a "special morning" where they got to stop for doughnuts, one my daughter would love. I am not sure if this was regular stop for them or not. I observed a man dressed up in a suit purchasing at least a dozen of doughnuts.

Dana honed in on the shop that sold doughnuts, but she observed that it was a shop with an established community. She analyzed the surroundings and made assumptions about the patrons. This might make one wonder if she tended to do the same kind of thing within her classroom. We learn more about Dana's observations in subsequent chapters.

Each of these teachers chose varying locations in which to make their observations: a mall, laundromat, grocery store and a doughnut shop provided backdrops for teachers' observations. I had hoped that the teachers would try to incorporate the work for this assignment into their very busy lives with the idea that this authentic task might push them to think about their noticings beyond the span of the course. Shopping and other activities were common to the teachers' lives, so taking those every day tasks to a different location and prompting them to observe provided them with a close up look at the lives of people within their school communities.

Level 2: Group Members' Questioning/Wondering

Members of the blog group appeared to wonder about many things. Maybe it was a way in which to make connections with one another or maybe a way in which to fulfill the course requirement, but just the same, the participants provided many examples of their observations that resulted in their questioning or wondering. I reminded participants to be cautious with their observations so that judgments did not turn into a large fueling station for deficit views.

In her trip to the store, Molly was parked in the lot when another car pulled up next to her and she observed what she thought to be a mother with three young children:

Since she was parked next to me, I could see that no one was wearing seatbelts and one child, about five years old was in the front seat. I wonder why the mother didn't insist they wear seatbelts or sit in a safer place inside the car. The mother looked too young to have three children and didn't seem to have the patience for them either. I noticed that

only the youngest child was dressed for the colder weather with boots and a coat. The other children wore fleece or sweatshirt material coats (Blog, January 26, 2010).

Molly wondered about this mother's decisions that might affect the well being of her children (Blog, January 27, 2010). This level of wondering appeared to lead to comments of judgment, thus it promoted a deficit lens. It might also mean that as a mother she may have had a difficult time understanding another mother who operated in such a fashion with her children. Pat responded to Molly's posting as she shared her experience in participating in a school professional development day where she took part in a poverty simulation. She was given a role to play as a mother who had many tasks to accomplish. She said:

By the end of the simulation I was so tired. I ran out of transportation tickets and needed to ask the special needs 12-year old to watch the children. Would I in real life ever ask a 12- year old to watch a 3- and 4-year old? Never! I wonder how many people are tired of their situations and act in ways that they never would if they had all their basic needs met in an easier manner. I wonder if the mom that did not buckle her kids up would have insisted they be safe, if she was not tired.

Pat wondered in a manner that might let Molly know that there may be reasons that some people act in certain ways. The school poverty simulation had seemingly prompted Pat's reply to Molly's concern. One might wonder how Pat's response, based on her professional development, translated into what happened in her classrooms as she gave no indication regarding solutions based on the PD. If parents are tired, that might be one way to explain why students might not be able to perform, thus letting the teacher off the hook.

In Julie's visit to a local drugstore she struck up a conversation with the check out-clerk, asking her if she attended school in the Garnet District. The clerk indicated that she had but never graduated.

She said that she had a baby her junior year and went back to get her GED. She informed me that her son goes to our early childhood center. I wonder how many other girls dropped out of school because they were pregnant. I wonder if the school offered daycare or a discount on daycare if that would help our dropout rates. She really got

me thinking. I know that there were at least 5 girls that I graduated with that had babies. I also know that 3 other girls had babies, but never walked with us. I am not sure if they transferred so I never saw them again. Are there school districts that offer daycare? Are their dropout rates any different from schools that do not have that type of program?

Her question posed to the clerk led Julie to think about students who dropped out of high school. Because her school district presented a 56.7% graduation rate (Michigan Department of Education, 2009-2010) it might be an important area to consider, one that might have great meaning to all of the teachers sharing their ideas within the blog. This tool provided the space to share those ideas.

Level 3: Realizations

This level represents teachers' observations that led to an alternative way of looking at their surroundings. For example, Molly expressed her views about the community in which she taught:

Though I drive through Banton each day, I do not feel that I know the people who live there. I began my student teaching in Banton in 2000 and have continued employment ever since. (January 26, 2010)

Molly lived in a rural area about ten miles from the district. In relating this blog post, Molly appeared to realize how little she knew about the community in which she had taught for the past decade. Perhaps she realized that she might learn more.

Karen's observations and sharing those with her colleagues led her to realize that it was difficult to keep judgment in check:

I think that one thing I have realized is that, yes, it is very hard to not be judgmental (because I was also thinking during the incident, 'can't you get your kid to stop throwing this tantrum?') however, I think talking about all of these topics has helped me to think of people's stories. I may know nothing about how their day has been, or where they come from.

The sharing appeared to assist Karen with her ideas about families and students, but the comment appeared surprising especially since she has worked in the district for five years so might have already observed that. Possibly there was not time to think more deeply about the lives of her students since there were so many other tasks to take her attention. It might also speak to a need for a place in which teachers might share their ideas not only about the challenges that families and students might have but also how to recognize and work with the knowledge that families and students present (Moll, 2001).

In response to Bobby's posting, Julie realized that parents who did not have proficiency in English, might have difficulty using the U-scan lines at the grocery stores and she also noted Bobby's comments about not using reusable bags:

I agree with Bobby, the reason for the U-scan lines being short could very well be that they would have been embarrassed to ask for help and not be understood. Also, the screens are in English and perhaps they are unable to read them. I also found it interesting that you were the only one with the reusable bags. Where I typically grocery shop in Byron Center, I see those blue bags everywhere. You'd think they only cost \$1, however, that \$1 could be a loaf of bread for a family who's struggling to put food on the table.

Julie realized that grocery shopping might be a daunting task for many as language might be a barrier. She made good points about how screens were inaccessible because of language, so many did not have choices about how to pay for their items. She also pointed out the choices in terms of families who may want to use reusable bags, but the costs could be prohibitive. These two thoughts might push her to think more deeply about the students who attend her classes.

Level 4: Judgments

Unacknowledged judgment. Judgments, at times, filtered into the teachers' observations. Many times they did not recognize that judgments crept into their noticings, but

other times they were quite aware and acknowledged that within the forum. I begin with the acknowledged judgments.

In another account, Dana, who lived outside of her school district's community, shared her experience in a local store within the Tremont community

There was a younger mother in the store with her two children. She was at one end of the aisle while the children were pulling items off of the shelf at the other end. The mother was Caucasian but 'judging' by her appearance I would say from a lower social economic status. She seemed oblivious to the fact that her children were making a mess of the store. An employee had to end up saying something to the children in order for the mother to come and grab the children. What is interesting is that she didn't even scold or discipline the children for 'touching' store items. (Blog, January 26, 2010)

Dana made observations but also attached her expectations to those observations. She appeared surprised with the idea that the children were not disciplined, instead making some assumptions about their caregiver's form of discipline. Through observations, it appeared that first impressions were made quickly—not so much about discipline, but about the person who did not carry through on discipline for 'touching' store items. One might wonder why that was an important observation to her, at least important enough to report. Perhaps it was something to write for the assignment or it might stem from other factors that drove her attention to that particular scenario. In Chapter 4, we learn more about Dana's background that might provide insight into the expectations for families and children.

Molly pulled into a parking area of a local store and observed a woman with several children in a nearby vehicle:

I happened to witness one single-mother with three children exit her car. Since she was parked next to me, I could see that no one was wearing seat-belts and one child, about 5 years old was in the front seat. I wonder why the mother didn't insist they wear seat belts or sit in a safer place inside the car. The mother looked too young to have three children and didn't seem to have the patience for them either. I noticed that only the youngest child was dressed for the colder weather with boots and a coat. The other children wore fleece or sweatshirt material coats.

Molly appeared to make several judgments within this short quote. She made assumptions that the children belonged to the woman. She then made comments regarding the woman's age and parenting skills. This might be an example of how easy it is to jump to conclusions and carry those ideas into other settings. One might wonder if Molly had the tendency to make those observations within her classroom and possibly dismiss important clues because of preconceived notions.

Marcy's trip to the Dollar Store led her to observe a woman with a young girl. The girl had approached her and Marcy described the interaction and her view:

She was a little dirty and her long red hair was everywhere. She began our conversation by telling me, "I wants this, but my mom says we don't got enough money for it". Then off she ran. Her repeated conversations with strangers could be heard all over the store. As I turned the corner of the greeting card isle I saw a young woman in her mid to late twenties wearing a mans thermal shirt and old dirty sweats looking at the cake mixes. I wondered if she was the little girl's mom. Out of nowhere came the little bundle of energy and once again the little girl began to plead with her mom, "Mom please, I really really wants this!" It was different watching the interaction and not just hearing it. The mother clearly was tired of the questions but lovingly told the little girl, "NO not this time, but maybe next time." They left the store soon after this. It did not appear that they bought anything at all. I observed that this woman and her daughter were probably lower SES and most likely lived in the trailer park across the street. The little girl had free reign of the store and was a little forward in her conversational manner. Her speech showed signs of a family that might be uneducated.

Marcy's observations led to many assumptions, although her assumptions gave no clue as to what she might think about the situation. Her idea about an "uneducated" family might lead to the idea that the family might operate at a particular level in life or it might lead to the idea that the mother and child were in need of much help. It would have been helpful for me to push Marcy's thinking in order to understand her full view of the situation.

Acknowledged judgment. It was noted that teachers also acknowledged their judgments as they shared their observations. That may have been prompted by the fact that I had asked them to attempt to keep judging out of their observations. However, I did not ask them to make

explicit their judging nature when it occurred. The first example focuses on a visit to the supermarket where Molly commented on the number of children in the store and noted the apparent frustration that some of the shopping moms appeared to show.

For example, one mother was struggling with handling four children and a shopping cart. I could tell she had reached her breaking point. She looked back at me with a half-hearted smile. It is not easy to shop with four children, especially hungry ones. I saw one mom break down and open a bag of cookies as the kids were jumping all over the place. Another mom asked for a total half way through her cart. She ended up only buying about two thirds of her shopping cart. The people behind her were getting annoyed with how long it was taking to check out. It was obvious that all of the people shopping here were on a strict budget. My first observation went well. I wonder I will ever be able to stop making judgments and merely make observations. (Blog, January 26, 2010)

Molly found her comments judgmental and shared this observation with the group. Although she did not pointedly describe the judgment she was making, the fact that she pointed out that she was judging might indicate that she was thinking more than she shared. This might be an important aspect of their observations since it might indicate that teachers were beginning to notice when they made inappropriate comments. Possibly it was done for the benefit of classmates or for the instructor, but it was made explicit in a public forum. In another posting, Karen shared an experience about observing a tantrum-throwing event in one of the community stores.

I think that the one thing I have realized is that, yes, it is very hard to not be judgmental (because I was also thinking during the incident, ‘can’t you get your kid to stop throwing this tantrum?’) However, I think talking about all of these topics has helped me to think of other people’s stories. I may know nothing about how their day has been or where they come from. Maybe they are just having a bad day or maybe they don’t know what to do. I also need to remember this about students that walk into my room...I need to remember their stories and remember that their lives are not easy and they deal with so much and this affects everything they do. (Blog, February 2, 2010)

Karen’s realization of judgment transferred to her students. It appeared that both Karen, with five years in the district, and Molly, with nine years, had not given much thought to the ways that life outside of school may have an impact on students in their classrooms. The blog may have

provided them the opportunity to bring about an awareness that they had not held before. Karen did not provide any insight about actions she might take regarding her observations but, rather, she attempted to observe without judgment, a first step. In another outing, Laura caught herself as judging as she observed in the community public library:

The children's section was pretty busy and all of the youth computers were being used. I observed only one parent at a computer with a child, interacting. I saw another little girl of about four who tried to get her father (I assume) to play with some puppets with her in the puppet theater, without success; he looked fairly young and impatient. Another young girl, whom I judged to be around three, repeatedly attempted to get her mother's attention with a book she plucked off the shelf but call "Look at the book!" at least three times. She was not successful either. The mother looked hurried, a little unkempt and did not respond in any way. Both of these parents I quickly judged as inattentive and uncaring, though I realize I really had no basis to make such a presumption. I could have more positively observed that at least they were at the library with their children. (February 1, 2010)

As with the other two teachers, Laura found herself making a judgment regarding how much parents cared about their children but began to rethink those comments; again, a first step.

Although Karen, and the other teachers, had been cautioned about judging their observations, she still provided what might be seen as an honest account and shared with the others that she had made a presumption. Like the other teachers, she had the opportunity to polish her comments before posting, but it appeared that she chose to share that she was making presumptions. Jill, too, also provided her view attempting to observe and not judge people and she cited a course reading (Delpit, 2006) to help with an explanation:

'A white applicant (in a teacher education program) who exhibits problems is an individual with problems. A person of color who exhibits problems immediately becomes a representative of her cultural group' (p. 38). Her words made me wonder how often I am guilty of doing this with my thoughts. Therefore, for my observation I tried really hard to just report observations and leave out judgments or assumptions. (Blog, January 22, 2010)

Jill indicated that she had a heightened awareness and used a course reading to explain her feelings. Although she may have attempted to integrate the reading based on what I might have

expected for the course, it was a profound quote, that apparently made her think about her judgment of others. She also related this incident in response to a colleague's posting:

Isn't it fun observing? I enjoyed reading your detailed descriptions of people. In your Blockbuster description, I noticed that you described how others in the store responded to the obnoxious group...turning heads away, turning eyes down, moving away from the group. Often when a student is being disruptive in my classroom, I am too focused on the disruptive student to notice the reactions of the others in the class. However, when I have caught glimpses of the other students in class, I do notice similar actions...averting eyes from the disruptive person, physically angling their bodies away, looking to me to see my reaction. I am curious as to the race of the obnoxious group? I pictured them as Caucasian. Then I wondered why I pictured them as Caucasian. Was it the reference to the cheerleading squad? I'm just reflecting on the stereotypes that I hold (Blog, January 26, 2010)

She caught herself thinking about and questioning the stereotypes that she held. Jill's final sentence admitted to stereotyping or judging...a realization that she held these biases and that the biases appeared to arise automatically until she made herself aware of it. She also connected this observation with what happened in her classroom when students were disruptive. She did not attempt to provide specific examples, but the fact that she mentioned it might mean that she clearly notices nonverbal cues of her students. The fact that she purposely watched for those moments might indicate how teachers should be explicitly taught to observe classrooms, communities, families, and students with an eye toward potential judgment or stereotypes. However, one must first be knowledgeable in order to recognize the injustices.

Mary, who lived within the district, also noted how she jumped to judgments of people and formed stereotypes. While in the lobby at the movie theater, she noted this scenario:

An older white woman ate popcorn and she sat across from me; two middle-aged African American women sat in between us on another couch. They had a quiet conversation-taking place. I couldn't help but notice the older woman didn't glance at me once but watched the African American women like she was in a movie theater while munching her popcorn. She practically stared at and I was very embarrassed and I felt bad for the women. I wanted to ask her why she was staring at them. They seemed to ignore the stares much better than I and kept their conversation to a quiet level. After awhile, the three women left about that same time. When the ladies left, it occurred to me I was surprised by

the quiet conversation the African American women had. To me, I expected them to be loud and full of expression as they talked. It struck me as odd and I realize this was one of my preconceived notions again about how I think that African Americans “should” act based on my previous encounters or from television shows or my previous experience. (Blog, February 8, 2010)

Mary’s candid account raised a point about how the role of media along with previous experiences not only prompted but also provided an indelible mark upon those who were exposed. Even with Mary’s experiences, which will be related in the next chapter, she still tended to think about how a particular racial group should act.

Ruby, who lived outside of the district, also shared her realization of judgment while eating in a local establishment.

Many times when I see African American families in public it is not always what I would consider the typical family. It is usually the mother and children with another adult, sister, aunt, or mother. I usually do not see a mother, father, and children when I’m in public. I can’t help but judge and stereotype but this is what I usually think of as an African American family, a single mother with another adult. Many times when I see African American families in public it is a younger lady or younger ladies with their children. In the classroom this is what I have noticed as well. Many times the mother is the one who I talk with or see at conferences and the fathers are not around or do not have much to do with the child’s life (Blog, February, 11, 2010)

Ruby shared her preconceived idea of what an African American family “looked” like, as she indicated that these have been her experiences with African American families. If she believed that her African American students come from single-parent families, her expectations might be different for those students and their families than they would be for two-parent families. Within that same posting, Ruby writes about another family:

The Hispanic family that I noticed across the restaurant was a father, mother, three young children and what looked like to be a grandmother and grandfather. This was something that I think stereotypically happens in a Hispanic community. Multi-generations are connected on most occasions and do a majority of daily tasks and rituals together. It is not often that I go to dinner with my family along with my in-laws or my parents, unless of course it is a special occasion. (Blog, February 11, 2010)

The difference in how she perceived each family group was interesting. She had one idea about African American families and a completely different idea about Hispanic families. Again, it might be interesting to see how those observations filter into her classroom as she works with children and their families, but it also might indicate the work that needs to be done to point out the seemingly hidden ways of thinking that might privilege one cultural group over another.

Level 5: Classroom Connections

Student connections. The teachers, at times, proceeded in thinking about how their observations might impact what happens in their classrooms. Marcy, for example, shares her ideas from a course reading within a blog posting:

Delpit points out, “....schools must provide these children the content that other families from a different cultural orientation provide at home. This does not mean separating children according to family background, but, instead, ensuring that each classroom incorporates strategies appropriate to all the children in its confines.” We as teachers really need to pack into the first weeks of school much assessing of our students needs, likes, dislikes, learning style, etc., in order to meet their individual needs. However, with (the) looming date of the LMAT test, it is hard to focus on anything by LMAT prep. So much valuable time is spent on prepping our students for the test, when we really need to be finding out who is in our classrooms and what they need. (Blog, January 31, 2010)

Marcy expresses frustration that teachers were not allowed to spend time developing a community within their classrooms as it was more about attending to the test and seeking acceptable scores. Marcy proposed a need to know students. She did not, however, provide reasons for why that was important for her and other teachers as they tried to prepare the lessons needed to move them to the next levels. It might be possible that Marcy and some of the other teachers realize the importance of knowing what their students bring in terms of Funds of Knowledge (Moll, 1992) as well as building a community of learners (Bruner, 1996) so that they might better attend to their needs. Dana responded to Marcy’s post:

I have never struggled...I don't know what it means to really be hard off. I am going to get a better glimpse at it now that I am only part time. We were just talking last night about what we need to cut or what we can do to make more income to make up for the amount of pay I've lost. All the staffing changes had a huge impact on my life and has brought me closer to understanding how hard it is to focus on something if your life is not stable. I will sit down and begin to read for this class and then find myself having to reread because my mind was distracted with budgeting, daycare, and job security. My point is that your observation reminded me of hardships and struggles and how often do our students come into our rooms with so much baggage that it isn't a wonder they aren't motivated. The million dollar question then becomes: what do we do to help keep them distracted from home life long enough to learn? I would love it if every day I had a fun way to do math but those state standards make it hard sometimes.

Dana takes the realization a bit further in that she surmises that the curriculum (state standards) keeps teachers from teaching in a manner that is engaging for students; thus her frustration with her work. She appeared to understand the challenges and empathized but she also took another step in suggesting that the curriculum was a barrier to classroom work.

Karen also tied her observations to students in her classroom and tied a course reading to her comment:

I think being a part of the community in this way helps remind me of the students that I work with. We see them come into the classroom and sometimes forget what their lives outside of school may be like. Their culture, their families, and their daily lives are much different than most of us may be use to. Delpit says 'If we are to successfully educate all of our children, we must work to remove the blinders built of stereotypes, mono-cultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased research and racism. We must work to destroy those blinders so that is it possible to really see, to really know the students we must teach.' (Delpit, p. 182). I think that she has a point, that in order to teach these kids, we have to understand and know where they come from and that means their families and their lives. (Blog, January 27, 2010)

Karen made connections with her course reading as well as related the observation to the students who attended her pre-K class each day. It might be noted that Karen, although teaching in the district for six years, had her own ideas about what students and families brought into the school and that the community visit helped her to see how life outside of school for families and children might impact what goes on in school. She directly thought about and shared how “we”,

teachers, usually only think about the direct classroom connection to students. This might be understood as her connection to the importance of meshing what happens on the outside with what goes on in classrooms. She stopped at that point without indicating how that knowledge might directly assist teachers with providing the academic instruction the children need. Another student, Molly, responded to Karen's post:

I liked your observation of an entire family doing laundry together. Fortunately, I don't have to use a Laundromat, but I can relate to doing laundry with my husband. We don't sit around together waiting for the laundry or put it away together, either. If I had to drag my children to the laundry mat, they would have complained and thrown a fit. I thought about this a lot. Knowing that my students need to help with laundry outside of the home along with the other struggles of living in a single family household or in one where there isn't enough money, helps me to better understand my students. When they come to school with a sad face or tired eyes, I try and be more sympathetic. A fourth grader should love school and I feel that it is my duty to help students to love being at school. (Blog, January 31, 2010)

Molly connected to Karen's observations through empathy as she examined how the same scenario might impact her own life at home. She also made the comment "*When they come to school with a sad face or tired eyes, I try and be more sympathetic*", but she stopped short of indicating what that might mean. Does sympathy translate to understanding students in a way that allows them more breaks or privy to a bargaining chip (Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusick (1986) or possibly might it indicate that the students receive more assistance with their academics in terms of tutoring or other special advantages offered by the school or teacher?

Family connections. While most of the postings focused on students and classrooms, some of the participants commented on parents' roles in the schools. In response to a blog posting, Molly commented:

I wonder some of the same things too. Do parents have a clear picture or goal for their child's future? Are manners important? I wonder about my fourth grade students. So often, they come in with sad faces. Sometimes they walk into the room without any regard for others. Many days, I feel like a parent for the first 15 minutes of my day. But, if I don't take that role, the day doesn't go as well. Do you feel the same? Today, I had a student

constantly interrupt with noises, desk slamming, locker slamming, outbursts, etc. Finally I just asked her why she was acting so like this. She responded, 'Well, I get it from my dad. He is loud and so I am loud, too.' I asked her if he liked her being loud at home. She replied, 'he doesn't live with us. I hardly get to see him. My mom isn't loud. She is real quiet at home.' Children come to us "acting like they have been taught" even if it isn't the best teaching. So, at the end of our conversation, I told her, 'Mom's are wonderful even quiet moms. Your mom would love it if your could act like her.'

In Molly's response, she shared her noticing of a student who lived at home with her mom and found that dad did not live at home. In this realization, she gained some important information that might help this student with behaviors that could be disruptive on a continual basis. Molly could have chosen to send the student to the office or other disciplinary measures, but she chose to investigate the source of the student's behavior. Although she reacted in this way, she also made note about parents having *a clear picture or goal for their child's future*, possibly indicating that she was, in some ways, blaming parents for this child's reactions. In another post, Ruby commented on the low turnout of parents at a school function:

The other major thing that I noticed was the lack of interaction between parents and students. Parents were there to see their child perform and they really had no interaction with their teachers. I stood at the doorway to greet my students as they arrived and as they left the performance [musical performance]. Students came to the classroom by themselves and their parents would not come all the way to the doorway to pick their child up. They stayed back and allowed the child to see them and come to them. This all took place during my last week of teaching at [this school]⁷. I was rather surprised at the lack of concern by parents. Not one parent talked to me about the fact that their child was moving to a new classroom or that I was leaving. I was bother by this and didn't know quite what to think. Did they care that their child was receiving a new teacher? Did it matter that I would no longer be their teacher? Did they not think I did a good enough job and therefore it didn't matter if I left or not. Many questions ran through my head as I drove home. I felt that these parents were not concerned about their children's new teacher or the fact that the relationship that I had with their child was ending, a semester too soon. (Blog, February 3, 2010)

Ruby had been with these students for all but one semester but did not really know the parents. Their reported snub of Ruby had left her questioning why they had not been vocal about her

⁷ Downsizing in the district moved this teacher to the middle school and her students were combined with another first-grade class.

transfer. It also might speak to the lack of relationship that had been built with parents during that semester. The teacher, too, might be seen as the initiator and parents may have waited for a welcoming signal from her. Parents, too, may have been reticent as they may have perceived teachers as unapproachable or they may not view school as providing equality or possibly they had their own bad experiences with schools and teachers (Okey & Cusick 1995).

Pat, who lives in the community, responded to Ruby's post, agreeing with her about the lack of parental interest in after-school functions:

I also have been involved with various music performances within the district. There have been many times when I felt my role was to be the babysitter for the parents. The parents drop the child off at a certain time. When the performance is over, cookies and punch are being served in the lobby. Some parents rush to get their kids and beat the traffic, others talk to their friends before picking up the children. Either way, communication with me was not at a high priority....Although I'm not part of a district like Breman⁸ I would assume that these informal meetings (like music performances) are used by Breman's parents to create and enrich a relationship with the teacher. (Blog, February 3, 2010)

Pat agreed with Ruby and both appear to be perplexed with parents' attitudes toward meeting with them during more informal school activities. She pointed out the opportunities within a wealthier district that enabled parents to build social capital; whereas the parents in her school do not participate in a way that might benefit their children. Although this and the previous postings regarding parents fell into the realm of *enactment*, it also might be pointed out that a deficit lens might be in play as teachers wonder "*if parents have a clear goal for their child's future*" or at the after school activity where the teacher was "*surprised by the lack of concern of parents*" and in the last posting where the teacher indicated, "*...communication with me was not a high priority.*" It might be inferred that teachers expected that parents wanted to be active participants

⁸ A county district that is known for its rich resources and high test scores.

within the school and it rested upon parents to make that happen and if it did not happen, then parents were not doing their jobs.

Two of the teachers talked about their experiences with home visits, something they said helped connect them with families and their children's lives. Marcy shared her views:

This week I went to visit two families of my ELL students. The first family I saw are refugees from Iraq. As I entered their clean and tidy apartment, I noticed that everything had a function and a place. I wondered if this was culturally true of people from Iraq or just of this mother's housekeeping. I noticed also that the mother kept her head covered as I entered the home and when someone came to the door, but she removed it when we were sitting together in the home. I asked her if this was customary and she said, "But of course". I felt a little dumb! The father and mother were loving yet firm with their daughters and redirected them when they became too excited. They surprised me with a full dinner! We sat down to dinner of a meatball yogurt and mint soup. It was very tasty! Everyone ate in a communal fashion. The family was polite and encouraged me to eat more. After dinner we talked and went over homework questions that the children had and the Father showed me his homework from English class. I was deeply moved by the hospitality that they showed to me. I only hope that I too can be this gracious to others.

This experience seemingly assisted Marcy in her views about families and the lives of the students in her classroom. This not only provided her with clues to the supportiveness of the parents but Marcy appeared to learn something about herself when she indicated, "I felt a little dumb!" It might have prompted her to learn more about the varying cultures of her students as well as placing herself on guard when inquiring about particular cultural practices. Marcy also shared her observations after visiting another family's home:

The second family that I visited lived in a small older home close to 3rd Street and Main Street. There are four girls in the family. The parents moved to the states in 1994 from Vietnam. The home was cleaned but definitely lived in. Only dad and the girls were home because the mother was working. My students were very excited and kept bring out things for me to see. The father expressed his gratitude over and over again to me for visiting. Education is very different in the states he told me, "In Vietnam you are beaten if you get bad grades". Unlike the first family the girls just kept getting more and more excited and the father never asked them to be quiet or to calm down. I wondered how often the girls acted this way at home. The father told me that he works long hours and wishes that he had more time to spend with his girls.

Marcy appeared to glean much information about the families during her visits. She knows that the parents want what is best for the children and most likely the visit helps to develop a sense of trust between her and the families. She did, however, note that one family was strict about the children's behavior, while the other seemed oblivious to the children's behavior. It might make one wonder if Marcy were evaluating the behaviors that her students bring to her classroom were indicative of home behaviors.

Classroom connections to teacher selves. Teachers shared a brief conversation in the posting that brought to the forefront the importance of noticing the students in their classrooms.

Pat commented:

I was thinking about the descriptions of Native American Students in "Other people's Children and was thinking about how they described professors looking at them and talking about and to them very differently than they looked and talked to white students. It makes me want to place mirrors or cameras in my classroom so I can monitor how I look when speaking to students with different ethnic backgrounds than myself. (Blog, February 15, 2010)

This statement might indicate the depth to which Pat noticed that she may not be speaking to all students in the same manner. The reading appeared to push her to think about the possibilities of how she reacted to students and the blog provided an open forum to share her idea. Mary responded:

I also wonder at times how I look at all my students when I'm teaching. Do I look at some with a gentle and loving look while being stern with others? I can say that I probably do. For instance, this year I have two African American boys and each one reacts very differently when the message is conveyed for them to complete their work. One is from a middle-income socioeconomic group and the other is from a lower socioeconomic group. They also have very different personalities and previous experiences in their lives. Both of them struggle to stay on task for longer than 10 minutes if I am not right there to work with them or they are not able to socialize with one another. One of the students must be redirected with very gentle questioning or he will start crying. The other student, I have to be very firm within I redirect him or he does not respond with doing any work. He will continue to play even as I am watching him if I am not firm. All of this to say, I think that for each child, we need to take an individual approach to working with them. Finding a balance of using equality based on a child and

their history and not having students feel that favoritism is occurring is really a fine balance. For me Pat, I have thought about taping myself while teaching. I know that I should but the fear of watching myself interacting with my students scares me! I'm afraid to see the reality that exists from another point of view versus the picture I have in my own mind.

Mary reacted to Pat's comments by admitting her own insecurities about how she might behave toward students. Her revelation of fear in watching her interactions might be a formidable prospect for many teachers. In this way, the blog became a catalyst to push teachers to think more deeply about steps they might take to figure out problematic ideas. Laura added her ideas to this:

As I was reading through these last responses and thinking about how we respond to students and how they perceive us, it brought to mind a difficult conference I just had. The mother of the student brought up the observation that her student does not feel that I like him. This in turn affects how he responds to doing the work that I ask him to do. I have found this student to be difficult to deal with, but somehow I have failed to communicate that I do indeed like him. Seeing how I interact with students would probably be a great thing to do, but I too share your fear, Mary, for all of the same reasons you have discussed. Maybe we can help each other take this step. Maybe it's like getting out a sliver or pulling a tooth or better yet, like the labor you have to go through in order to have the baby born. Let's talk some more...it is so valuable for all of us to engage in dialogue about our teaching practices. I value the input. Right now, though, I am exhausted after getting the paper done!!!!

Within these last few interactions, it was noted that these teachers have realized that they may not really know enough about their teaching to enable them to provide more care to their practices. Their noticings seemingly brought about a realization that there is much more to their work than they have realized but they also demonstrated a vulnerability about the idea of examining their work more closely, such as through videotaping themselves. However, Laura pushed it a bit more in propositioning teachers to take a challenge, and a risk, that might result in furthering their practices.

Discussion

This course blog assignment appeared to assist in pushing veteran teachers to examine their school communities in deeper ways and the blog discussions allowed them to puzzle out their observations with colleagues. The blog appeared to provide a special forum for teachers to grapple with a multitude of perceptions regarding those who participated within their school communities. The teachers projected a comfort level within what might be viewed as a very vulnerable space. In order to allow that sharing to take place, they had to take a risk that may have exposed them to a certain amount of *professional vulnerability* (Lasky, 2005). Although there were times that general observations were made, possibly to meet course requirements for postings, most teachers provided reflective writings even if they did not always appear to be culturally sensitive. In fact, there were times when teachers were seemingly unaware that their ideas might be culturally insensitive but they appeared to share in an open, risk-taking manner. The fact that they shared their observations with colleagues, in sometimes a deficit manner, might indicate that they may not be aware that their comments were deficit. Further, because they openly and unabashedly shared these comments, they may have an understanding that their colleagues may feel the same way.

The teachers gleaned many ideas through their observations and collaboration. Through Level 1, they chose particular venues in which to open themselves to an awareness of their surroundings. Their travels to stores, restaurants, laundromats and libraries within their school communities may have provided them with another perspective regarding their students' lives. Their exchanges also offered many questions or wonderings about what they observed with some things like wondering why a parent did not buckle a child in with a seatbelt to having a strong curiosity about the dropout rate in her school district. These could lead to more enhanced class discussions. Their realizations, Level 3, offered clues to what teachers may not understand as one

indicated that even though she has driven through the city for many years, she still does not know much about the people within the community. This might lead her or others to think more deeply about their communities. Level 4, judgment, provided insight into the kinds of deficit views that the teachers might hold. But, more than that, teachers began to recognize and share the times that they made judgments. The final level provided ways in which teachers noticed students and families in connection to their classrooms. Those observations might assist them in thinking about ways they might help children and families.

Because the blog provided a written record, it has the capacity to provide teacher educators with knowledge about student thinking, thus it might assist in planning for future readings, and focused discussions to assist students to dig deeper into their views. However, it also might take a certain amount of vulnerability and building of trust on the part of the teacher educator to work with teachers on issues that are, at times, very sensitive. Decisions might be made about how, and when, to address issues within the group in such ways as through the use of readings, videos, and other means to assist them with perceptions that might be unhelpful and maybe push those views that might be insightful for their practices.

The results provided within this chapter may have provoked curiosity about some of the teachers. It also sets the stage to assist with understanding the learning community in which five of the teachers, who will be the primary focus in the next chapters, participated. I focus on the life stories of these five teachers through interviews, which probed the teachers' backgrounds, to discover what they might possibly notice about families, students, and their school communities.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Cultural Fabric of Five Teachers

In my first couple of years teaching I was so frustrated with students' behavior and what seemed to be a lack of knowledge on how to behave. I soon discovered that they needed to be taught the "school way" and that not every child is and was raised the way I was.
(Dana, Blog, January 26, 2010)

The prior chapter introduced twelve teachers who completed a blog assignment requiring them to observe their schools' communities. It focused on the extent to which teachers noticed families and children outside of school but within their teaching communities. In this chapter, I focus more fully on the life stories of five teachers who agreed to participate in interviews.

The teachers work in one of two school districts. They have nearly 50 years of combined experience among them. They instruct at various levels (Appendix F). Three of the teachers live within their districts. The questions (Appendix D) for the Life Story Interview focus on cultural settings and traditions as well as the participants' educational experiences⁹. I chose to focus on their cultural lives since besides genetic makeup, cultural heritage has a strong influence on people (Atkinson, 1998). I included the teachers' prior educational experiences as I thought it fitting to inquire about those experiences prior to joining the profession. A life story might help us better understand the participants as we focus in subsequent chapters on how they notice students, families, and communities. I chose to more fully introduce these participants through life stories, not to attest that their beliefs *cause* them to notice particular attributes of families, students and communities, but how their prior knowledge and experiences may *influence* what they notice. This access to their stories might assist us in understanding how teachers' prior experiences mesh with or push against what they may notice or do within their practices. In one study, Garmon (2004) noted that the attitudes and beliefs that preservice teachers brought to their

⁹ Life Story questions (without transcripts) can be found in the appendix (??)

teacher education programs served as filters as they learned about diversity. This was only one factor of several described by Garmon, but may be an important consideration, as student populations have become more diverse and new teacher populations have remained relatively unchanged. Teachers bring their own ethnic cultural stories to the classroom and those may be contrary to the stories of their students' and families' stories. In her work, Florio-Ruane (2001) contends, "...ethnicity remains an important component of our life history and provides background knowledge influencing how we behave and make sense of others' behavior" (p. 9). Teachers' life stories, once made explicit, might assist not only in helping them with ways of observing their students, families, and communities but it may assist teacher educators in providing appropriate levels of instruction. That instruction might help connect teachers' histories with their students' and families' backgrounds.

These teachers had been teaching in their communities for a number of years and, as will be indicated in the following chapters, they continued to struggle with some of their perceptions of families, students, and their school communities as well as how to address those views. In this chapter we learn about their lives through a distant lens as they recall particular aspects that had meaning for them.

Five Teachers' Life Stories

The five teachers introduced in this chapter are the focus in this and subsequent chapters. They have worked a number of years in low socioeconomic schools and have recognized the differences between their lives and the lives of their students. They willingly shared their stories with me as I posed questions from the life story interview (Appendix D). Their accounts were reconstructed from the memories that they held as well as the stance they wanted told. Bruner (1987) maintained that, "One imposes criteria of rightness on the self-report of a life just as one

imposes them on the account of a football game or the report of an event in nature” (p. 14). The teachers in this chapter shared intimate details of their lives, and those stories provide the base for this chapter.

Within their stories, I found common ideas which included struggles with decisions about becoming teachers, the importance of growing up in *safe* working-class or middle-class communities, *virtues* instilled by the family, teachers’ *experiences* in school, and *faith* within families. As I developed this and subsequent chapters, I thought about how life experiences and education might influence how teachers’ conduct their work. In telling their stories, the teachers paint vivid images of the expectations set for them by their parents and their teachers. They claimed that they grew up in safe communities where children were taught to respect adult authority. Some of them, as shown in later chapters, had difficulty understanding the lack of respect that some children bring from their communities that are not steeped in middle-class values. They also talked about the roles of faith within their families and, in later chapters, we see how that filters into their work as teachers either through the ways in which they use it as a calming tool or the through struggles they have regarding the boundaries set between religion and public schools.

Meeting Five Teachers

Bobby: A Second Career

Bobby’s work as a custodian in the Garnet school district lasted for 12 years until he pursued a teaching position. As a 4th grade teacher, Bobby indicated that he has taught all subjects except writing. By the time I arrived, students had been dismissed for the day and after buzzing into the entry, the school secretary directed me to Bobby’s classroom. It was a fairly large classroom space with about 30 desks lined up in rows facing the front of the room. Bobby

was not in his room, so I wandered around, looking at student work placed on the wall as well as posters that encouraged students to do their best. He soon entered the room, smiling and ready to get to the interview. We settled into small chairs at a kidney-shaped table at the front of the room. I asked Bobby why he became a teacher and he said that the assistant superintendent of his school district convinced him to finish his teaching degree requirements:

I didn't start teaching until...well, this is my fifth year and I'm 53 so I didn't start teaching until I was 48. I worked as a custodian in the school district here in Garnet for 12 years. That helped me more than anything. It would have been totally different if I had gone right from high school to college into this type of ethnic background school. It would have really been a hindrance. Mainly because....and I went to Christian College, which was all middle to upper middle to upper class students that all grew up in a fairly white neighborhood.

Bobby maintained that his background as a custodian in the district may have influenced his ability to teach in a diverse school setting. His experiences in college appeared to be vastly different from the school in which he teaches and admitted that it would have been difficult to move from his college environment into his school setting. It may have been his attempt to explain how very difficult it was to assimilate into a setting for which he was not prepared.

In examining his ideas about being raised in a setting different than his students, a look at his life growing up renders clues to his thinking. Growing up in a Midwestern town, Bobby recalled it as an “*all white suburb but had a very broad ethnic*” flavor. He said that everyone spoke English in his neighborhood but some of the parents spoke other languages. There were 2,200 students for three grade levels in his high school and 835 in his graduating class. He described the composition of the student body as, “All white. Didn't have a single African American in my school. Very...I mean...house, driveway, house, driveway, house, driveway; very tight neighborhood.” Bobby also maintained that he grew up in a:

Very safe neighborhood. Never had any fear as far as walking around at night or anything like that. I could just about, if there was any trouble, go to any house and they knew who I was and my parents would know all the kids in the neighborhood and

PTC (Parent-Teacher Committee) was very strong in the elementary school. Most mothers didn't work.

Bobby explained that his community was one in which children listened well to adults and that children could be instructed by any parent to "...quit screwing around and you'd quit screwing around." He maintained that children respected adults no matter who they were and adults were never questioned. He said this also was the expectation in church as he grew up attending a very conservative church and if someone in church told a child to stop messing around, they stopped: "...grandpa or grandma...grandma, oh my goodness, she was a southern woman who told you to quit messin' and you'd better quit messin' or she'd get the wooden spoon out that was a solid maple spoon and you just got whacked." Bobby's dose of respect in terms of not questioning adults and being mindful of their authority appeared to have been embedded in the community, home, and church. Children were expected to be compliant with adult requests and there were consequences, sometimes in terms of physical punishment.

He was raised in a family with a strong sense of faith and indicated they were taught "very strong Christian beliefs" in the Baptist church that he attended. He said that the church was the main driving force behind his parents and within the family where strong Biblical beliefs were promoted. Bobby recalled that his family had worshipped in the same church since the day it had been founded:

There's no question. You went to church Sunday morning, Sunday evening. My dad always went on Wednesdays. He was an elder in the church...for as long as I can remember. There had been a [family] member of Madison Avenue Baptist Church from the day it was founded, a family member [from Bobby's family] was part of that church and very strong. That was the core of our social network, the church.

Bobby's experiences might show that his faith coupled with strong expectations to comply with authority provided him with a lens of how a child, at least in his experience as a child, should

behave. For Bobby, this idea may have a profound influence on how he viewed behavior in his own classroom, as might be noted in the following chapters.

Bobby also talked about his own experiences in school, as a student. He recalls that school was, “Not really a priority. I was a ‘C’ student for the most part. Pressure from my dad was ‘pass...just pass, Bobby.’” Bobby said his grades were average except for receiving an A in U.S. History and everything else fell in the B and C range:

I did not have the self discipline to be the student I should have been. Obviously when I went back it was different, but....but my main driving force in high school was to stay eligible so I wouldn't have to miss any games because we had weekly eligibility.

His focus was on sports and friendships, and academics were not at the top of his priority list. But his grades were acceptable to his Dad who said “*pass, just pass Bobby.*” It appeared that he was fairly disconnected from academics, thus never really observing how that played a role in his life as a student.

His decision to become a teacher stemmed from his interest in sports during high school. Upon leaving high school, he had gone to college with the goal to become a teacher and a coach. But, he said, after two-and-a-half-years of college, his grades were not what they should be and he decided to leave college. It was later in life, while working as a custodian when the assistant superintendent of his school district encouraged him to return to school to obtain teacher certification. He said his focus had been set on becoming a coach. Baseball was his chosen sport throughout high school. He had wanted to become a baseball coach while teaching physical education but in returning to college later, he claimed that, much to his dismay, the coursework leading to a physical education degree had changed:

And when I went back I was still thinking about phys ed as a minor until they explained about the kinesiology...a whole lot different back in the 70s. Phys ed wasn't a real difficult degree but the science behind it had changed so much and my advisor told me all

that I would have to take to get the phys ed minor and so I switched it to a social studies major with an elementary minor.

For Bobby, his prior plan to teach physical education and to coach was detoured because of the course requirements that had been “*a whole lot different back in the 70s.*” He entered the elementary school, seemingly, by default. With a mindset on athletics, it may have been a disappointment to enter a 4th grade classroom--- an entirely different outlook as well as audience.

In becoming a teacher and securing his own classroom, he lamented that classroom management was not what he anticipated and that he could probably do a better job. He shared that he had maintained good control in the cafeteria as a custodian but indicated that facing the students in the classroom was much different than his interactions with them as a custodian. He said in reference to the classroom, “It did take me quite a while to understand the classroom management side of teaching...it’s not just come in, sit down and be quiet.” Bobby’s expectations of students had been that of compliance as he stated earlier that he was raised with the expectation that children respected adult authority and again when he talked about how the student teachers might not understand why students do not respect authority. Bobby said that teaching in his own classroom was entirely different from being a custodian and said he felt as if he had received more respect from students in his prior job as he was not assigning grades., “I can get in their face but I’m not giving them A’s or B’s or C’s and in the class it was definitely different.” Bobby also claimed that the graduate courses leading to ESL certification that he had taken helped him in his role as teacher:

That really changed my thinking and understanding of the students. And I think that’s the biggest thing that you as the teacher have to understand and to change to their cultural understanding. If you sit there as a white, Anglo Saxon Protestant that I was and try to force those kids to be the way I am in my culture, you’re there to teach to them subject matter and life lessons and that kind of thing but you’re not there to teach them that

their culture, because it's different, is wrong. You have to accept how their understanding and cultural beliefs are...you're not going to change that. And you have to work with that as opposed to against it and that's the biggest thing that I had to learn in the classroom.

Bobby explicitly attributed his classroom misunderstanding to the idea that his home culture, as he grew up, was different from the culture of the children in his classroom. He also attributed some of his newer understandings to the fact that he had taken classes that assisted him in puzzling out the cultural piece that was so very different from his own ideas about culture but one might wonder how it assisted him. He appeared to understand that there were differences, but he still seemingly continued to retain his stance from a white privileged position as he maintained that, “you have to accept how their understanding and cultural beliefs are...you’re not going to change that.” One might wonder if he had previously wanted to change his students, but his courses taught him that it was wrong. It appeared that his statement reflected that was something he “had” to do, therefore he would but maybe he was not quite certain how to do it.

Still, Bobby indicated that it is, at times, difficult to teach in a school that is so diverse and he expressed concern about the student teachers who come to his school:

I see it [problems} with the student teachers from Vision University There are very little if any student teachers of color. They're mostly white and mostly come from white, middle class. And I see the frustration when they come in not understanding because they grew up in an environment much like myself when an adult told you to not do this or do this or asked you to do something, you did it and you were expected to do it. Well, not so with these kids [in the classroom]. I think that the biggest hindrance is not understanding their cultural background.

Bobby had the idea that his struggles with teaching in a diverse classroom might well be the same as the student teachers that he observed with the biggest problem appearing to be focused on the way that children did not always do what adults asked them to do. For Bobby, this appears to be a clear frustration. As noted earlier, Bobby grew up in a home culture where children were respectful and obedient towards adults.

Dana: Why Aren't They Motivated?

I arranged to meet Dana during her 7:30 planning time on an early Monday morning at Tremont High School. I entered the large maze-like building, old but well kept. As with Bobby's school, I buzzed in, located the office and was asked to sign in. The desk assistant began to provide directions to the class that she thought I was subbing for but I indicated that I was visiting Dana. She apologized and then provided directions to Dana's class. I met up with Dana as she was leaving a classroom and she indicated that we could return to a quiet meeting space in the office. She indicated that this was her first year in the high school as an ESL teacher, working with students in grades 9 through 12. She reportedly spent five hours each day working with English Language Learners (ELLs). Dana, in her 7 years of teaching, has also taught second grade as well as middle school math. Dana appeared a bit reticent, possibly because it was our first one-on-one interview. She provided short, concise responses to my questions. She became more animated and extended her replies as the interview progressed. We talked about her decision to become a teacher. "I was not going to because my mom was a teacher. At this point my older sister was going to be a teacher and I thought, 'I'm going to do something different. I'm not going to follow the path.'" Dana explained her route into teaching came about because she liked to play softball and was recruited by a Christian college and softball was her main focus. She had considered interior design as a profession but her chosen college did not offer that program, only a few art classes. Her friends, according to Dana, were in the education program and talked about how they enjoyed their field placements. She decided to take the introductory class and said, "So I tried it out and went and worked with a student at an elementary school and he had a hard time and didn't want to do his work and I was able to get him to do it and complete it so I thought, 'You know what, this is what I want to do.'" In her story, it might be noted that

she envisioned herself as impacting the lives of students. The success that she had in the field placement may have allowed her to see the possibilities in aiding students, especially those who struggled, a theme that Dana carried in the following chapters.

Her entry into the profession came with some preconceived ideas and she said:

I thought I'd just be able to come and teach and that every student would want to learn and I now realize that's not the case and there's a lot that interferes with it as far as attendance goes; kids showing up to class.....them understanding why they should do well. They don't care if they pass or fail or I mean...I'm sure deep down they do, but it's hard to get to, you know?

Dana may have been drawn to students who struggled, but she did not know the extent of some students' challenges until she entered her own classroom. It appeared that her success with students in her introductory course, in part, may have nudged her back onto the family teaching path as she indicated a strength that she had in helping students to do their work. However, as she entered the profession she began to observe that there was a possibility that she could not help all students because, "They don't care if the [they] pass or fail."

Dana recounted that her family moved a few times as her father was in the military and they settled in the Midwest. Her parents bought a home situated on 40 acres about 20 minutes from town. She recalled riding her bike to neighboring houses, about a mile from home, to visit friends and she spoke about spending a lot of time with her family. The family was close and she recalled how supportive her parents were and how they encouraged her toward a stick-to-it mentality. She recalled the importance her family placed on making good choices, standing up for one's self, and not quitting:

I played basketball in high school and there was a coach. I was a freshman on varsity. The coach was a yeller. The senior girls were just mean and they blamed everything on the freshmen 'we're losing because of you and...I came home one night crying and said I wanted to quit and my dad said...I had a poem hanging up in my room that said 'sometimes life gets rough..' and he said, you like that poem for some reason. And he just encouraged me and said that times get rough sometimes and if I didn't want to go out again next year that's fine, but if you're in the middle of something, don't give up.

To this day, I still have that poem and I pull it out for my students and I just think it's important for them to know that things will get hard and rough, but if you push through, it has value.

Dana's parents' expected her and her sister to complete high school and move on to college. Her mother and father had been trained as teachers, although her father went into another profession, but it was understood that she would attend college. This expectation, she said, made it difficult for her to understand her students. "Dealing with my students now, that's [higher education] not important to them [her current students], so that's hard for me to figure out...why aren't you motivated to do this?" Dana had the idea that one finished high school and then moved on to higher education and although she realized that many of her students may not have the same resources that she had, she has the idea that motivation was the key. "...the idea that you have to work to get what you want is a huge influence on me so it's frustrating to see kids come in and think they don't have to work or that they don't have to go to school." Although Dana had taken classes toward ESL endorsement along with professional development, she still appeared to have difficulty understanding why her students would not work. Although she was aware that many of her students live in poverty, she possibly did not fully understand the meaning of "resources" as related to her students. More has been provided about this in subsequent chapters.

Playing sports was a priority for Dana during her school years. She talked about how athletics kept her involved in school as she participated with a group of friends. She also recalled the academic side of school being relatively easy and could not remember having struggled except maybe to get an occasional 'C'. The only thing she recalled as somewhat problematic was "a couple of battles with my mom at the table about math homework, but I had a good experience." She compared that to the students in her high school classes today as she indicated:

I don't remember having as much homework. I'm only 30 years old so I hope I could remember that but coming here to the high school and seeing how much they do, I'm

thinking, 'did I really do this in high school because I don't remember it being that hard. It seemed easy for me.'

The work for her students appeared to be more difficult but she did not explain why that might be so. It may be that not only were resources different for them, but many of them were learning a new language and, possibly, many had basic challenges such as family life that resulted in truancy, transiency, and other issues that prevented them from completing their work. And, the curriculum may not have connected with students' lives and interests, thus promoting a lackadaisical attitude.

In considering a favorite high school teacher, Dana shared a story regarding an English teacher, her mother's friend. The lesson she learned from this teacher was the importance of linking learning to students and building personal relationships with them. She recounted a time when this teacher had used the vocabulary word 'tenacious' during a lesson and she connected it to Dana and her skill in basketball. Dana's focus was both on sports and academics and her English teacher appeared to leave an indelible impression through the personal attention she had provided to Dana. It was more than an impression that was made, as Dana realized how very important it was to connect students' lives to the work in the classroom.

The role of church was also a big part of her life. Her parents, members of the choir, took the family to church every Sunday. Many times she was not attentive, but she said that the experience of attending church followed her when she began attending services as an undergraduate at Mountain College, a small faith-based college with affiliation to the Reformed Church of America (RCA). She indicated that her family ties to church: "...led me to when I got to Mountain College, to start experiencing it on my own and building my own relationship with God with them [parents] instilling that in me."

Dana shared that religion was still important to her today, but did not provide much on how it remained in her life except that she is thankful for the blessings she had been given:

....I'm just thankful that I have my family and I have another day and that I have what I have because I've seen so many people around me who don't...who struggle, and ...especially these kids here. I wish...I always say I wish I could take them home and just see what a difference it would make if they had a stable place to live and meals and didn't have to worry about...and structure.

In her reference to taking her struggling students home, Dana might present the idea that she can *save* some of her students. She observed that they did not have the same kind of home life that she experienced and if she could spend time with them, in her mind, she may be able to mold them in ways that would enhance their lives.

It was interesting to note the tension that Dana exhibited as she wondered about why students were not motivated to learn and at the same time she thought that if she could take them home, she might have more impact on their lives. Dana admitted that her ideal teaching situation was in an elementary classroom when she first became a teacher and she felt comfortable with that and then was switched to the middle school where she admitted with a laugh that she “soon realized that the idea of control or being able to say ‘ok, sit down’ was not going to be enough.” We learn more about her observations of her students in Chapter 6.

Mary: Uncertainty

Mary has been a teacher for 10 years, all within the Tremont district. During the time of this interview, she worked as a literacy coach with kindergarten through sixth-grade students and their teachers. She said it was a job-share position that better fit her family's schedule. She had previously worked full time in a 3rd - 4th grade multiage classroom. Mary agreed to meet with me at a local fast food restaurant before having to report to work. I asked Mary about her decision to become a teacher and she indicated that she had not started college with the idea of going into

teaching, but had spent two years focused on design at an art college. She claimed, “I realized how cut throat advertising could be which was the area I was going into and I decided that it wouldn’t really bring me a lot of fulfillment. I needed to do something for someone. And I loved children so that’s when I decided to teach.” Mary and Dana had not considered teaching as a profession, but for various reasons, their first choices did not work out. But, unlike Dana, Mary did not come from a family of educators.

She described how becoming a teacher has interlaced with her ideas about the profession as she conceded, “The older I get, the more I realize how much more compassion I have for children from when I first started teaching. I have more patience. I think a lot of that compassion comes from my experiences but also from being a parent...from having my own children.” Mary admitted that her life experiences have provided her with more patience, thus influencing the way she viewed her work. And although Mary had not decided on teaching as a career when she started college, she knew that she would attend college as her parents instilled that in her and her sisters. She said that her father had gone through a year or two of college before starting his own business and her mother had become a dental hygienist. Her family started out in a mobile home, she said, but by the time she went to college her father was making \$300,000 per year. She said her father emphasized the need to attend college so that she and her sisters would always have a job choice in that “...if something ever happened to your spouse, you would always be able to support your family ” She said that she and her siblings went on to college.

Mary recalled the small town atmosphere where she and her four siblings grew up where everyone knew everyone else’s business and it seemed as if people were always keeping an eye on and critiquing her and her twin sister. But, she said, it was a place in which people looked out for one another. She and her twin sister spent a lot of time playing together. She also recalled

family trips to Florida on spring breaks and “up north”. They went on family cruises and spent time traveling to popular vacation destinations such as Jamaica and Yellowstone National Park. Mary said the family visited South Africa on a few occasions because her dad had friends who operated a “hunting ranch” for safaris. She said,

...we traveled across the countryside from Cape Town over to the top part of Africa...and that was difficult because we saw the shanty towns and people that they're friends with--- actually have slaves that they keep at their house. They wouldn't call them slaves, they'd call them "help" or what not because they pay them but it's the same concept because if they leave, they wouldn't have much work. They took care of them well but they treated them lower than them; that they didn't know as much, although they [slaves] were financially supported.

Mary appeared conflicted about the family friends who owned *slaves*. She seemed to understand the inequality in this when she visited, but she did not provide further comment as to how she and her parents may have talked about those observations. It appeared to make an impression on her. Mary also shared information about her own family that indicated a strain between other cultures, sharing that there was turmoil in the family as her father's dad was a violent man who created a lot of problems in the family. She said he had racist tendencies:

When I was dating the man that I'm now married to, who is from the [West Indies], he [grandfather] told me that if I ever brought him on his property, he'd shoot him. So, I think some of that stems from my great grandpa who was a KKK with the...he was a head knight for the KKK so I think there was a lot of hatred in that way which is completely surprising to me that my dad has none of that. He doesn't treat my husband any different. He doesn't treat my children any different. He says that racism is ignorance...so, I'm very blessed.

Together with Mary's traveling experiences and her observations regarding her grandfather, her life may have been influenced toward a deeper cultural awareness. Instead of following the lead of her grandfather, she developed her own sense of culture through her parents and recognized the various inequalities and tensions that might be presented between cultures.

Integrity was one of the other values passed on to her and her siblings. She said that the most important thing was, “Being honest, telling the truth no matter what the outcome is.” And she also added that she was taught, “...not to judge people unless you’ve ‘walked in their shoes’, unless you find out what’s happening in their life.” Mary said that her mother encouraged the children to ask questions to find out why someone might be acting in a particular manner. In this way, Mary may have become more observant about her own children, and possibly those that she taught. We learn more about her student observations in Chapter 6.

Christianity formed the basis of the family beliefs as she indicated that it was important to forgive other people. She added that Christ was needed in order to make changes in one’s life. Her family practiced Catholicism and although she indicated that she is no longer Catholic, she practices Christianity in another church. Although religion seemed to be part of the family ritual and her upbringing, she did not share as much about that as Bobby and Dana regarding the extent to which it may have influenced her life.

In sharing her memories about school, Mary said, “I loved going to visit my friends at school but school was very difficult.” She said that she had a difficult time paying attention for a long period of time, but she stated that she loved to read and she admired most of her teachers. She later questioned her decision to go into teaching when she admitted that she kept asking herself, “Why in the world would you ever want to become a teacher, you didn’t like school.” She convinced herself that she enjoyed school but did not care for the discipline of school, which she defined as the discipline to stay on task for long periods of time.

School was a place where Mary formed relationships with not only other students, but some of the teachers. She recalled one teacher who built a strong relationship with her. She had

not taken a class with this teacher, but Mary said that she would volunteer in her classroom with special education students. She remembered:

....she was very relationship based with her approach and very real. She would speak to me about what was happening and just be concerned about what's happening on a day-to-day basis with me and not just about the curriculum. Even with her own students...it wasn't about the curriculum or the work, it was about how they were doing and the curriculum just came; the work just came along side that.

Mary, like Dana, recalled how a teacher took a personal interest in her. That interest may have impacted some of Mary's thinking in regards to treating students in certain ways and valuing what they brought to the setting. But not all of her school experiences were without problems.

She recalled a 2nd grade teacher whom she feared following an embarrassing moment in class.

From that experience, she has made it a practice to tell her students that they should not be afraid to ask her anything:

It is my way of helping them to let their guard down because so many times we are told just to teach, teach, teach the material that It's really easy to forget that you have a child in front of you that I think sometimes that you put that to the side so I try to share with them some things that have happened to me in my life...appropriate...that they can relate to and think, 'Oh, she's just as human as we are.

Because of her great awareness based on her recounting of a personal incident with a second grade teacher, she is clearly aware of how it feels to be a child who needs positive attention from a teacher as well as having a keen perception that might prevent her from embarrassing a student. She explicitly stated that it influenced her life as a teacher. It appeared that both the positive and negative school experiences had a profound impact on Mary.

Although Mary said that she still loved her profession because of the relationships with students, she noted that some aspects of school is difficult for her, especially the top-down procedures “with legislation telling us how we should teach or what we should teach; many of them have never actually taught children in the classroom.” She laments:

It, honestly, makes me not want to teach anymore. I want to have an impact, but I think, well, I can do that with my own children. It kind of leaves you feeling a little hopeless because you feel like you don't have very much control over how to teach them when you know that one method might be better than something you're being told to be done.

Mary's frustrations seemed apparent in that she was passionate about her work as a teacher but particular rules or regulations kept her from what she thought might be best for children. More of Mary's ideas about rules and other aspects of teaching will be focused on in Chapter 7.

Jill: Teaching as a Passion

I met Jill on Tuesday after school. The secretary directed me to her classroom on the 2nd floor, but like the other classrooms, the door was locked. A good number of students were in the hallways for after-school activities. I returned to the front office, where the secretary was able to locate Jill in her office on the first floor. Her small office off the main hallway was attached to a classroom and contained a small desk, a few chairs and a computer.

Jill has been a teacher in the Garnet district for 5 years. She has spent another 7 years in schools similar to Garnet. Her flexibility as a teacher seemed apparent as she stated:

Every year I think I've done something different at Garnet. I've taught 9th grade regular ed. I've taught...I've been a literacy coach. I've been in a special ed 9th grade co-teaching situation. And I've taught 9th grade struggling readers. In Lakeview I taught various combinations of 7th, 8th, and 9th grade English classes. When I was in a western state, I taught 6th grade and 8th grade English. [Jill, General Interview, p.2]

At the time of the interview, she was teaching five classes: a 7th grade reading class for students who read below grade level and an 8th grade class with ELL students. She then transitioned to the high school during her planning hour where she taught three sections of 11th grade general

education English Language Arts classes. I asked Jill when and what prompted her to become a teacher:

When I was five (laughs). I don't know....maybe it was my mother [who] was a teacher. I don't know. I loved everything about school. I loved playing school at home. I loved it when the teachers came over and they let me correct the papers. I loved pretending that I was a teacher thinking about being a teacher. I loved kids. I...in high school I'd much rather babysit and play with kids than go out with my friends and drive around in circles and be bored. And my friends would joke about it like 'oh my gosh' I'd always say yes to babysitting jobs. But to me it was money and I loved it; I just loved kids. Honestly, I pretended in high school that I wanted to be a lawyer but I really in my gut, I knew I'd be a teacher.

A “gut feeling” was how she described her decision to become a teacher. But, her decision was possibly influenced by the comfort that she may have felt toward the profession as she had been surrounded by teachers and their work, seemingly apprenticed early on as an *insider* (Lave & Wenger, 1991). She admitted that she became a teacher with the idea that she could make a difference in the lives of children:

I really don't think I would have gone into teaching if I didn't think that...I think the way I'm wired is that I would not have gone into a profession if I didn't think I would make a difference or have an effect. I didn't want a job where I couldn't affect persons' lives. I think I was called to be a light in a dark world, so, ah...no, I think that's one of the reasons that I went into teaching.

In this explanation of why she became a teacher, she might fall into Lortie's (1975) *service theme* as one of the five attractors to teaching. Her strong faith may have led her to focus on saving children who were not as fortunate. Her early indoctrination into the profession coupled with a desire to serve, may have created an ideal profession for her.

Jill talked about how becoming a teacher was exactly what she had anticipated:

I think because I had a mom who was always so honest with me and transparent with her teaching experiences, I think I had a pretty good idea of what I was getting into. And, even while I was going to college, I always felt that I learned more from my mother than I did any professor because we'd talk. We'd have lots of conversations about kids and students and teaching philosophies and in her professional development...teaching...she'd come across new textbooks and trends and she'd share them with me and we just always had this ongoing conversation. So I think I really left

college pretty realistic about what I was going to see in the classroom based on all my conversations with her.

A small Christian elementary school marked the beginning of her education, she said, adding that her mother volunteered at the school and then served as a substitute teacher. She, again, talked about the importance of her work with her mother, who gave more to her in terms of knowledge and support than she seemingly received from any professor. This created a clear picture of her view toward teacher training institutions and the hoop jumping that she might do toward a credential. Seemingly in her eyes, the real learning took place as an apprentice from someone who intimately knew the job of teaching.

She said her mother had friendships with the other teachers. Jill added that the teachers spent a lot of time at her home doing their laundry and having dinner with her family. In retrospect, Jill recalled how church, family and school were interwoven:

So my school, church, home was this one big safety net. But this school which was more traditional, you had your reading groups and you did math but the math was very...oral, reciting over and over again...memorization of facts and chanted with the teacher. You know reading and writing was grammar and you had spelling tests. We had to memorize Bible verses and I memorized long passages of Scripture, which was unique as it was a Christian school and yet very kind of traditional approach. Science, we didn't have money for labs and interesting science things so everything was out of a textbook so I guess that was...social studies out of a textbook, not a lot of hands on so it was more about the reading and writing literacy infused through everything because there wasn't money for the other activities; maybe that was the age too. Maybe in the 1970s it was just more of the worksheets and drill and practice approach.

Jill seemed to implicitly compare her own experiences with the experiences that take place in her school as she seemingly looked at pedagogical methods of “drill and practice” as an approach from the 1970’s, possibly indicating that was an antiquated way of approaching instruction. But, she also described her education as “one big safety net” one that would certainly save students from the possibilities of failure or neglect. In Chapter 6, we learn more about Jill’s disposition toward instructional goals for her students.

Growing up in a small town, Jill said she lived in a “nice neighborhood, a nice small home.” The home was more than 100 years old and in an older neighborhood where she had a few friends but it was mostly made up of elderly neighbors, or, as she claimed with a laugh, “...at least they seemed elderly to me at the time.” It was a place in which she felt safe, “...so we biked and it was safe and, you know what I mean, we’d bike around the block or go play house or play in the tree. But it was a very safe community.” Safety was coupled with respect and authority as Jill indicated these were manifested within the community. She said her mom was quite social and so she came to know all of the neighbors:

So, I knew Mrs. Oleski and we’d take her desserts at Christmas time and we’d go sit in her house and hear her stories. And there’s Mrs Wahaski and Mrs. Paulson and then...I’d forgot her name who lived around the corner. But we knew them all and we’d say hi to them and we’d wave to them and learn to respect people’s authority and that kind of thing in our neighborhood.

The idea of safety appeared quite important to Jill and she experienced it in her home and her neighborhood. It was a neighborhood quite unlike the neighborhood where she currently taught as it was mixed with transient families who were culturally and linguistically different from the community in which she grew up.

The seeds of respect, as well as other ideals built into the family were passed on by her grandparents who were immigrants working in the factory:

....you just did things right and you did them on time and ...didn’t question them; you just did them. That was another thing: authority. You didn’t question authority. You were told to do it and you did it. And respect for elders. The elders in the community. I would accept what they told me and would never talk back. I would do it.

A sense of respect and adult authority were instilled in her, just as Bobby had experienced. Those attributes may provide some understanding as ways in which they view their students. That idea will be explored further in Chapter 6.

Work ethic was also strongly promoted as Jill recalled her dad promoting work ethic in the family, but the idea of work went beyond just preparing for it. She recalled his words, “Don’t do a job unless you can do it 100 percent.” She said that was the only option for her and her siblings and recalls one incident:

I remember that one time we shoveled the driveway and we didn’t get down to the cement...we had a layer of snow or ice left. And we went inside and he made us get all of our snow clothes back on and go out and do it until we could do it. And we went to the edge until we could see the grass...you’ didn’t cut corners. And that was it for everything...you didn’t cut corners. You did it; you did it 100 percent; you did it well and you did it with a good attitude. I don’t mean to say they were strict or mean because they weren’t. They were very loving parents. But there was definitely a structure to our home and expectations and you had to take responsibility for things and so that culture came out of that German strong work ethic.

A strong work ethic connected with Dana’s view of never giving up. This view of the world might allow them to work hard and continue to believe that things will work out, even if the odds seem against them. This might be a desirable attribute for teaching in schools where the work might be daunting and present many roadblocks.

That same work ethic has been passed to her children, said Jill, as she talked about her husband who is of German and Swedish descent:

I see even with his family, again, a strong work ethic and his mother still bakes some of the German dishes and brings them in to my children now. And she’ll talk about Sweden. But it’s still kind of that European immigrant if you work hard...you’ll find success if you work hard. So I think that we are instilling into our kids a love for Christ and a love for other people, which go hand-in-hand. An acceptance of other people and a love for other people. We’re also telling them that if you work hard you’ll have success and education is important and reading...they have an English teacher for a mom and a pastor for a dad (laughs)...they have that culture all around them.

Working hard brings about success according to Jill and that is something she appeared to value as that ideal had been passed from her parents to her and then onto her children. In this

sense, it appeared that she valued the idea that anyone, regardless of social class or situation, who worked hard enough, could achieve the goals that they set for themselves.

Faith was another important part of Jill's life. Jill talked about faith and her family because she grew up in a smaller town where she and her siblings were raised in the church. She relayed that Christianity had a very strong presence in her family: "We went to church and elementary school was private so my church friends were also my school friends. So that was kind of my world. A strong Christian culture." She described faith as being infused into everything with prayers before bed and a sense of getting "guidance from Jesus or God." She remembers watching her parents read scripture and praying when they had to make decisions so, she recalled, "it was just kind of woven into the fabric of our being, almost." She said the strong sense of faith continues into her family today, especially as she married a pastor. She indicated that her Christian beliefs held her accountable as a teacher:

Because I don't have the personal baggage, I can give more to my kids and I also believe that to how much is given so is the responsibility. I believe I've been so blessed, given so much. I mean my Christian faith believes that I'm going to stand in front of God one day and he's going to say 'What did you do with it?' and if you weren't given much, he's not going to expect much, but if you were given a life like me, you're going to have to account for it. So part of me feels a little bit of pressure because I've been given so much and I've got to give back. I've got to help these kids and sometimes that's being mom...just listening to what they need or pulling them aside and giving them a pep talk or sometimes it's just giving them those academic skills they're going to need to survive. Pushing them onto college and encouraging them to take that route; maybe the only person who's ever mentioned to them the possibility of college, but I feel that I can do that because I have been given so much. So I guess that's how that blessed life feeds into this.

Faith, according to Jill, pushes her to notice students who are struggling and then she attempts to provide them with words of encouragement. It appeared that faith also may have provided her with a missionary view toward her students as she attempted to provide them with the kinds of emotional support that she had received in the *safety net* of her home, church and community.

Pat: Guided by Faith

Pat has been a teacher in the Tremont district for 16 years. The community was familiar to her as she grew up and attended school there. She taught 27 students in a 3rd - 4th grade split. She indicated that her responsibility included teaching all subjects except art and physical education. Pat also noted that she had consistently taught in multiage classrooms as she worked in a school that promoted this format.

As I entered the coffee shop on an early, gray Saturday morning, Pat met me with a hearty laugh and a hug. She explained that weekends provided her time to catch up on work for the week. Every Saturday she spent the day at school planning and grading papers. Pat pointed out that she had taken only one Saturday off so far in the school year when an aunt from out of state had visited. Pat indicated that she and her husband decided that it would be best that he stayed home and cared for their children while she worked. “Things like my family life suffer and I know that, so I do this job...in my opinion, to do this job well, you have to have someone else take over control of your home so that’s why my husband is home.” Teaching was not the job she thought it would be:

It doesn’t mesh at all. I thought it was an 8 to 3:30 job and I got my summers off. And it is a 7 to 5:30 job and weekends for 3 to 5 hours and summers I do try to take most of them off except for reading and you know...I try to make that family time and my husband wonders what I do all day since I’m there so much.

In her idea of teaching, it appeared that she viewed it as a profession that required full immersion in order to do the job well. Lortie (1976) reported that many people, predominantly women, chose this profession as it was compatible to the lifestyle suited to raising a family (p. 32), however, Pat saw teaching as an all-encompassing profession and not conducive to having a family where both parents worked.

Pat’s decision to enter the teaching profession, she said, was in part because an aunt had been a teacher. She idolized her and had wanted to be like her. Her trek into teaching, however,

was not instantaneous. She recalled questioning her decision to enter the profession since that had not been a goal at the onset of college. It was after working at a summer camp that she made her decision to become a teacher.

Pat was raised in a family that included five children. They lived in the same home for her first eleven years. Their home, she said, was situated on a cul de sac and sidewalks connected one house to the next. Her aunt and uncle lived one street over and she said it was “very safe.” She recalled, “...there was never a concern about dangers in the neighborhood.” According to Pat the family received inheritance money allowing them to move to a larger home in a community, which Pat described as middle-class or upper-middle-class. The house had many amenities including a pool, large backyard and nearby creek but did not have sidewalks, which, Pat indicated, made it difficult to converse with neighbors. Things were different there and the family became more involved with their church community and less involved with the people within their new home community.

The church played an instrumental role in her family and, ultimately, in her life. She indicated that faith was more than just attending church and Sunday school and involved a “much more every day relationship with God.” Faith also required priorities and Pat was taught that “God is number 1, family number 2 and everything else will follow in your [her and others’] chosen priority.” Pat said that her faith had filtered into everything, even within her practice as a public school teacher as she noted, “I would not teach at a private school because I believe that these children [within her classroom] would not always see good models.” Even though she indicated that there were some good teachers in the public schools, she said that they did not always provide the kind of relationships that some students might need. She, as Jill, seemingly approached their work from a service orientation (Lortie, 1975). Both seemingly viewed their

work as a mission to help children who did not get help that help from home. More of Pat's views and work with students are provided in Chapter 6.

Pat talked about faith as interwoven into the fabric of the family to the point that their Pastor knew that he could call upon her parents for assistance with children or teens from the church who needed a place to stay as they were having trouble in their families. She said her parents eagerly accepted them into the home and she recalled going on a shopping trip each time a teenager came to live with them and if money were tight, she said they would shop at Goodwill. "My mom and dad always took care of everybody," she remembered. Church and school were central in their lives, according to Pat, and she indicated that her parents chose to place her and her siblings into public schools throughout their K-12 education. After graduating, Pat continued on to a Baptist College and returned to student teach in her district. Subsequently, she was hired as a teacher and commented, "*So, there was a blessing. At the time I did not know how God was going to bless me and that was truly a blessing to have that.*" Her life as a child appeared to be intertwined with the lives of many others and much of it was through the church. Her family's stance on helping provided her with a way to observe that when people were in need, someone would be there to assist. That, as we might later observe, was carried into her work as a teacher.

As a student, she experienced a very traditional education in that students sat in rows and the expectation was to sit quietly filling out dittos while the teachers sat behind their desks at the front of the room. She indicated that in her own teaching, she realized that, "You've got to give power to the kids." Pat does not fully explain what *power* meant, but her experiences with sitting in rows and completing dittos might indicate that she wanted her own students to experience

education from a constructivist slant. It also said much about her role as teacher and one might infer that she chooses to not sit behind a desk.

Pat talked about the kind of student she was in school, recalling that she was not a great student. She recalled attending summer school and often practiced handwriting. It was in high school that she became a serious student and figured out how to become a better reader. She recalled experiences with her teachers, and maintained that there were kind, as well as unkind, instructors along the way. One teacher, in particular, once brought a cat to her home as she claimed that the teacher knew that her family would take it. What impressed her was that the teacher seemed to be what she termed *a real person*. But she also recalled a second-grade teacher who did not treat her with respect:

....a teacher that looked at me differently and she would say things like 'didn't you wear that shirt yesterday?' Well, it's possible that I wore the shirt yesterday, but more than likely if I did, mom didn't wash the night before. It was in the pile again or I pulled it out of the drawer. So, she would say something like that to me or poke fun at me, or what I was wearing or 'Oh, did you really brush your teeth today?' She was that rude to me.

Her experiences with the first teacher who saved the cat left her in awe as she discovered she was a real person. The fact that this teacher was someone who cared enough to bring a stray cat to her home impressed her as she may have connected that with the pastor who brought people to her home for shelter. But, the teacher who was rude to her left an indelible impression and one that she had not forgotten. She, like Jill, recalled negativity from early education and tended to hold on to that picture.

Pat related some of the challenges faced by her students and the empathy that she has especially when children come to school hungry, quickly adding that she never experienced hunger as a child, but that “there were times that there was a light dinner.” She said she understood that dilemma but did not understand the views for English Language Learners. She

rehashed the struggles her grandfather had shared about his arrival in America from the Netherlands as he learned English. He told his family they *would* speak English. She also admitted that she did not understand the struggles of learning two languages, as she was fluent in English only and she expressed her frustration of not knowing a second language:

So, I don't have that [language] struggle and sometimes I wish I did so that I could cry with them when they cry because they can't get the language the right way and nobody understands what they are trying to say. I think I can sympathize but not empathize, if that makes sense. I feel sorry for them and I do everything in my power to help but by not going through the struggle, I'm a little bit of an outsider through that.

As much as Pat had empathy for people and their lives, she appeared to be perplexed as to why ELLs did not just learn the language. This might speak to the influence her family must have provided with the attitude of ‘we did it so why can’t they?’ For the sense of empathy for others that she had gained during her life coupled with teacher preparation and more specifically preparation for ESL, it appeared a conundrum that she might hold that view toward ELLs. It might indicate a flaw in her training or it could reflect the overwhelming cultural influence she may have experienced.

Discussion

The shared life stories of these five teachers may assist us with understanding the possible influence of their stories on their teaching practices. The teachers’ shared stories provide a window into their private worlds which, as I will discuss in later chapters, appeared to have an influence on some of the ways in which they observed and reacted to the work that they do in classrooms. Five themes emerged across these five stories:

- To teach or not to teach
- Feeling safe
- Virtues

- Faith as a guide
- Teachers as early students

These themes are explored further as teachers' reported views are contrasted to provide the reader with a more vivid picture.

To Teach or not to Teach

Teachers shared multiple reasons for entering the teaching profession. But only one of these teachers, Jill, decided early in life that she would pursue a teaching career. It might make one wonder why four of these teachers did not make it a first choice. There might be a plethora of reasons but for some it seemed like a second choice as Dana and Mary were clearly headed toward other career paths. Pat questioned her motives as she had admired an aunt so she did not immediately set out to become a teacher. She also noted that her perception of the job was a 9 to 2 work day and summers off. That idea disappeared after she began teaching and realized the intensity of it, especially in a low-income school. Bobby had wanted to become a coach and he could best do that through teaching, but grades stopped him in the beginning. He faces challenges, as will be shown later, that might indicate that his views did not mesh with the realities of teaching.

Feeling Safe

In their family stories, the participants provided information about the safety of their communities after they were asked to talk about the communities in which they grew up. All of the teachers recall growing up in *safe* neighborhoods where adults kept watch. Pat, Bobby, and Jill used the word "safe" to describe their communities while Mary indicated that "people were always keeping an eye on us" and Dana talked about living a mile from neighbors and would ride her bike to friends' homes. Mary and Dana did not specifically mention "safe" but it might

be inferred that they felt quite safe as one might when peddling a bike quite a distance or having people always keeping an eye on them. So, one might wonder about why safety is an issue worth mentioning. When they think of children, might they wonder about the safety of their students and show concern about that within their teaching? Because of their secure feelings within their own family environment it might be an expectation.

Virtues

A commonality among the teachers was a focus on the virtues that were expected of them as children. The teachers reported that their families promoted ideas such as respect for authority, a strong work ethic, never giving up, always telling the truth, and not judging people. These qualities appeared to be important to them and, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, they expected their students to be equipped with the same kinds of traits so that classrooms might operate in a smooth, efficient manner because if students did not enter the classroom ready to learn and were not respectful of the rules, then it might be more difficult to impart the curriculum goals. But, as will be noted, teachers observed and voiced that students did not always have those traits. Some of the teachers reported that some students, many times, did not respect their authority, or they did not seemingly have a strong work ethic. The group of teachers discussed in Chapter 3, also indicated that they were expected to instill virtues within their students, indicating that students needed them to be parents. They noted that they were expected to teach social skills as well as motivate students to learn.

Faith as a Guide

Faith played a prominent role in the teachers' lives; for some more prominent than others. All of the teachers claimed that their practice of faith as children was an expected part of family routine as they attended church each Sunday but for Pat, Jill, and Bobby it was a lifestyle that

carried on beyond Sunday. Pat was raised with the idea “God is number one; family, number 2; and everything else will follow in your chosen priority.” She also said that her relationship with God was a “much more every day relationship” as it filtered into all that she did, even into her life as a teacher. She entered the public teaching sector because, she said, children in her school need to see good models. This comment might lead one to believe that she has a mission to teach children in this school district and she might serve as their model.

Jill described faith as being “...woven into the fabric of our being.” She is the only one of the teachers who had attended private school, at least until middle school and then attended a public university, unlike the other teachers who attended private faith-based colleges. She recalled that the church, school, and community were a “safety net” for her and she continues her involvement in her faith as a pastor’s wife. Jill’s faith provides her with a mission to help her students as she indicates that sometimes it means being a “mom” to her students or just listening to them.

The Baptist church stood out in Bobby’s mind as a central part of his family as he grew up, indicating that there had been a member of his family attending that particular church from the time it was built. He indicated how expectations for good behavior and respect for authority were just as prominent in the church as outside of it. This idea also seemed to filter into the notion that it is difficult, from his perspective, to teach in such a diverse school setting.

“Christian beliefs were the basis of our beliefs and forgiving other people and to make real changes in your life you need Christ.” Mary said that was a belief passed on through her family. Mary did not spend much time talking about the role of faith in her life, either past or present, but just to indicate that it was important to her family. Dana, also said very little about the role of faith in her family. She said that, as a child, her family attended church and her

parents were in the choir and it continues to be an important part of her life as she indicated that she feels blessed, especially after observing the challenges that some of her students face.

These five teachers were provided a strong faith base as children and all of them continued on that path to some extent. It appeared that faith and virtue were interwoven in that they commented upon how both were promoted as well as how those two pieces were reflected in some of the work that they did with students. The idea of faith and virtue might lead to the idea of missionary work; to assist in the development of someone who might need that help. Jackson (1990) said, “Like the missionary, the teacher has only a limited time to complete his work” (p. 134). Jackson provided examples of teachers who subscribed to the missionary view in that they felt rewarded when children succeeded in the work that teachers provided. In this chapter, we saw that teachers practiced at various grade levels, but the one thing they had in common was working with a diverse group of students, all who lived within marginalized communities and all of who might be viewed by these teachers as subjects of missionary work. Added to that were the time constraints, as will be addressed in Chapter 7, of teachers who attempted to move students to acceptable levels of performance. In essence, their missionary views might have collided with the expectations set for them.

Teachers’ Experiences as Young Learners

Four of the five teachers claimed that they were either not very good students during their early school years or sports was the driving force in why they liked school. Jill was the only student who claimed to be a “model student” as she did everything that was requested of her and she prided herself on neat work. Jill’s mother, like Dana’s had been a teacher so that may have pushed her to be that model student. She also had contact with many other teachers who came to her house to do laundry and eat dinner and she was able to grade papers for them. Perhaps, Jill

was apprenticed early (Lave & Wenger, 1991) into the community and learned how to participate in school as she was immersed in it both at home and in school. In this way, she may be viewed as having a closer attachment to her work as she entered the profession seemingly already indoctrinated into it. For her that might have provided the mechanics of school in terms of expectations to plan and grade students' work from a middle class Christian perspective, but it may not have provided her with a world view of the students that she would eventually teach. Not only were there cultural and linguistic differences, but poverty also factored into her work.

Bobby and Dana looked forward to school only because they were able to participate in sports. Bobby said academics were only important to him in order to retain eligibility to play sports. He recalls his father telling him "pass Bobby, just pass." As sports was a driving force behind his attendance and completion of work, and his duties as a teacher do not involve sports, one might wonder if his current position as a 4th grade teacher is as fulfilling. His reason for wanting to teach was actually an explanation toward wanting to coach. Sports had been such an important part of his school world, that he wanted to continue with that, although that did not come to pass. Instead, his work in a classroom of elementary students took him on a different route, one that may not be as fulfilling, as we may note in future chapters.

Dana, too, looked forward to school mainly because her friends played sports and she was able to be with them and it also taught her to work hard and to never give up. But, she also indicated that the academic side of school was easy for her and she worked hard to please her parents. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, she continued some of the same attitudes toward her students, indicating both frustration and optimism. She felt frustration in not understanding why students were not motivated and optimism that if they work hard and never give up, they can achieve their dreams.

Pat recalled that she "...was not a great student." She had to attend summer school and practice handwriting. She also remembers teachers who were rude to her. One might wonder how that translates into her practice especially in the way that she observes and reacts to students, as she might be more sensitive to the way in which she treated children and built relationships with them. Chapter 6 will provide more about this view.

Mary, too, found school to be challenging since it was difficult for her to pay attention. She said she enjoyed school only for the social aspect of it but the academics were difficult for her. Her difficulties might translate into how she observed her students and, like Pat, how she may have related to them. If she found academics to be difficult, she may consider that her students may have some of those same struggles, and possibly construct ways in which students might be connected to tasks under her instruction. More about Mary's observations and actions about students will be presented in Chapter 6.

This chapter focused on five of twelve teachers who were enrolled in the graduate class and builds a deeper sense of these teachers. It sets the stage for understanding how background may influence these teachers' inclinations toward noticing families, students and communities and how that noticing might be addressed in their classrooms. It might be through teachers' noticing of their own backgrounds and then closely observing students, families, and school communities that they might assist in building productive spaces for learning.

In the next three chapters--Chapter 5, 6, and 7 --I report the teachers' observations and, in some cases, actions that they took in regard to families, students, and the context of school community, and explore possible connections with their life stories.

CHAPTER FIVE

Teachers and Families: A Sticky Wicket

The pain---the frustration. I mean you deal with alcohol and drug addiction. You deal with parents just not being present. You deal with lack of home support. You deal with kids being hungry. You deal with kids---it brings on a whole set of problems with kids not being supervised. (Jill)

In the previous chapter, we learned about the lives of five teachers. Their backgrounds might provide readers with a better sense of them as individuals. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the importance of understanding how teachers perceive families¹⁰ and how that might influence their actions within and beyond the classroom. Then I present the teachers' observations regarding the families that they work with in their schools. I have organized this chapter to focus on individual teachers so that the reader might better understand the teachers, how they noticed families, and how or if they responded in words or actions to their observations. In the discussion section, I show how teachers' reported or attempted work with families may have offered them power and control in their classrooms, thus, allowing the potential for becoming change agents.

The Importance of Noticing Families

Because teachers' work includes continual observation, it is important to remember that observations not only focus on students in the classroom but on colleagues, administrators, community, and families. Families play an instrumental role in facilitating the educational lives of their children. They serve as children's first educators as they provide academics and socialization through talk, books, and play well before children enter classrooms. The way in which parents facilitate home lessons¹¹ differ from one community to the next and from one

¹⁰ The term family is used to represent one or several parents as well as caregivers.

¹¹ Lessons referring to the way parents interact with, teach, and socialize their children.

family to another. Heath (1983) pointed out that parents in the three communities that she observed held different ideas about how to work with their children, but by the time they started school they had “learned their community’s ways of using language to get along with the people and to accomplish their social goals” (P. 145).

Because of the struggles that accompany poverty, the ways in which families help to socialize and provide academics to children in low-income communities may differ from the expectations held by schools in a middle-class society. Parents from low-socioeconomic schools are also less likely to be involved in schooling than parents of more affluent families and those schools are less likely to promote parental school involvement, thus limiting the benefits for children in those schools (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Teachers may observe families with difficulties and may attempt to understand constraints that families face while helping students, or they may tend to blame families and do little or nothing to assist families and their children. Purcell-Gates (1995) indicated that teachers who taught children of low-income Appalachian families held negative attitudes and indicated that they “felt hopeless in their attempts to teach them” (p. 37). In high-poverty communities, families provide resources but not necessarily the resources that might assist their children in navigating public schools where there may be a mismatch between the expectations of the school and what students bring. Unlike more affluent families, less affluent families may not easily provide their children with tutoring, field trips, or time to spend with their children as jobs, educational levels, or other special circumstances may not offer flexibility to assist with academic and social skills at schools. Those expected skills may fall to teachers who might assist families who do not necessarily have knowledge or resources to navigate the school world. Homework and grades are an example of an area that parents have little knowledge of as Heath (1983) indicated that parents in the white working class community

of Trackton did not ask about homework projects and they viewed C and occasional D grades as acceptable. If parents remained unaware of the special workings of the educational system then it might be difficult to provide students with an education that offered the best options for them as they completed their K-12 education. Teachers might act as the best conduit in providing that information. But teachers also may need to have a better understanding of parents in low-income schools. Edwards, McMillion & Turner (2010) provide two terms that assist with that understanding: *differentiated parenting* and *parentally appropriate* (p. 123). *Differentiated parenting*, according to Edwards, provides that parents may want the same things for the children as do teachers but might have their own ways of assisting their children toward those goals. And, *parentally appropriate* refers to parents, who for a variety of reasons, might not be able to assist their children with schoolwork brought home.

Academics are not the only focus in schools. Social skills are another important factor allowing for work that gets done in classrooms and communication between parents and teachers on this issue is important. In regard to social skills, DeMarrais and LeCompte (1999) identify three major purposes of schools with the emphasis on the social roles that they play:

1. Promotes a sense of social and oral responsibility.
2. Serve as sites for the solution or amelioration of social problems.
3. Supplements the efforts of other institutions of socialization such as family and church.

As a group, the cohort of educators introduced in Chapter 3 expressed uneasiness with the idea of having to socialize students who did not come to school with the expected behaviors needed for learning. If teaching also encompassed assistance with socialization of children, teachers might find it helpful to communicate with parents in order to strive for desired social and academic results. Okey and Cusick (1995) studied families whose children dropped out of

school, and they maintained that “families love their children, want them to do well in school, at least initially ...try to get them in line with school expectations The school, too, cares about the children and wants them to do well.” Okey and Cusick suggested that the concerns of teachers and parents might be a way to increase communication between them. But, communication cannot happen without teachers’ awareness that it needs to happen and the recognition of situations that call for conversations between teachers and parents. This research suggests that teachers first need to intentionally notice that there are reasons for parental conversations and then, based on their observations, seek a plan for working with parents in ways that are constructive for students.

When teachers in culturally and linguistically diverse schools work with families, one might assume that these teachers automatically know how to address the challenges that differ from the challenges presented in more affluent communities. Teachers bring with them training and experiences, an apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1976), as they watched not only their own parents interact with their teachers but also how their teachers handled situations with parents. These experiences may have assisted teachers in their ideas about what it means to work with parents. Within this chapter, I will present five teachers who shared their experiences about working with families within their schools. I provide teachers’ responses that focused on:

- The observations of families reported by five teachers
- The way in which teachers made connections between their observations of families and their classrooms

The kinds of observations teachers made about families were important since they might have the potential to lead to actions that may benefit students. Teachers might be recognized as holding a certain amount of power within their positions that might be seen as unequal (Jackson,

1990) or tipped to the advantage of the teacher as compared to the parents and caregivers of children, but that power may also be usurped by families who unwittingly provide roadblocks to teachers' power. In this chapter, I consider how the power, or lack of power, that parents provide to teachers may play a role in teachers becoming change agents within their classrooms, schools, and communities.

Five Teachers' Views of Families

The five teachers featured in this chapter work in either the Tremont or Garnet school districts, situated in low socioeconomic communities, serving diverse populations. Tremont reported a 64% free and reduced lunch rate and 71% was reported by Garnet¹². The teachers shared what they noticed about families who live under these socioeconomic conditions.

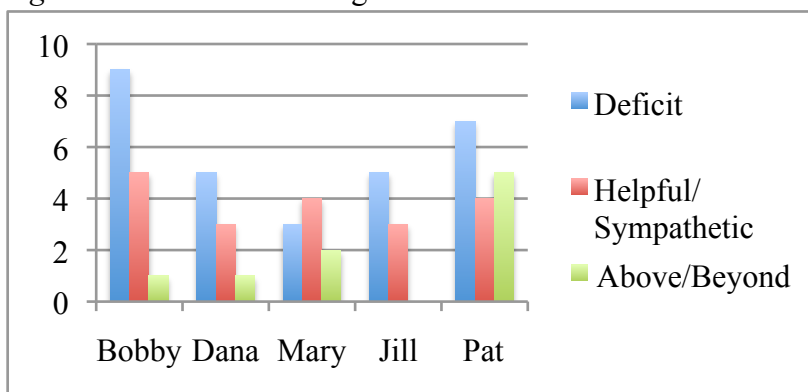
The teachers' cases that are presented below are based on their voluntary responses to the general interview questions posed (Appendix D), and additional evidence came from the course artifacts that included observations teachers made about parents. In the sections that follow, I organize my discussion of each teacher's view into two sub-sections: noticing families and classroom connections. In the final section, I discuss issues of classroom power and control, thus moving from describing *what* they notice to how their noticings may affect their actions.

Figure 4 reveals the findings that include the extent to which teachers noticed and acted upon their observations. In determining how teachers viewed parents, I constructed a table and placed short phrases under the headings of *deficit*, *helpful/sympathetic*, and *above and beyond* to denote the ways in which teachers responded. Those phrases were drawn from all artifacts that included information about families, but were mostly taken from the general interview, as that was the origin of most family comments. The items within the categories were counted. For

¹² Statistics from the Michigan Department of Education Center for Education Performance and Information (2008-2009)

example, Bobby provided the most number of comments that were identified as *deficit*, related to families while providing *one above and beyond* example (Figure 5:1). Deficit views (Milner, 2010) include teachers' mindsets that devalue families. This might include ideas such as lazy parenting and parents not caring. Helpful/sympathetic ideas include those ways that teachers sympathized with parents and talked about building relationships with them. Above and beyond included concerted efforts to create situations to assist parents or to build relationships with them. However, not all examples in this category may be necessarily positive, especially when it crosses boundaries of the work that teachers might be expected to perform.

Figure 4 Extent of Noticing



Bobby

Bobby, a 4th-grade teacher in the Garnet District for five years, worked as a custodian in the district during the twelve years prior to teaching. He observed families who had difficulty working with the school and teachers in order to assist in their children's education. He presented a predominantly deficit view of families, and I will consider how some of his ideas may have been influenced by his own cultural background. But he also showed some tendency toward helpfulness.

Noticing Families. Bobby shared his views about parents and how, when he had worked as a custodian, he saw more involvement by parents in the elementary school than the middle school and he could “pick out the kids whose parents actually cared, held them accountable and typically they were really well behaved” (p. 4). Bobby equated well-behaved students as hailing from families who cared because they took the time to work with their children. As we learned in Chapter 4, Bobby grew up with expectations to behave in obedient ways and families were responsible for teaching those behaviors.

I can't say how they were academically because I only dealt with them in the lunchroom and the hallways and that sort of thing but they were the ones who had the parents at home concerned about them that they weren't the ones with behavior problems. They weren't the ones who would disrupt the school and disrupt the class because they would get the attention at home in a positive way as opposed to what I am seeing is they're not getting the attention at home and if they do it's usually a negative response. That's at least attention. So, they carry that into the classroom and their only behavior is negative because at least... "Mr. Burton is yelling at me, he must care" or that...it's definitely huge. Class work, you know help with homework and understanding and working with multiplication facts, flash cards ...I can tell, usually within two or three weeks which parents are concerned and really involved with their students' education. [p.4]

He said that some of his students' negative behaviors led to getting the attention at school that they may not be getting at home. He blamed parents for students' poor behaviors. Although he made these observations, Bobby did not share the ways in which he might reach out to parents with the knowledge that might assist them to become part of their children's school lives. In this example, Bobby seemed to hold deficit views of families who did not hold their students accountable for behavior and academics.

Bobby also indicated that students in his class showed very little respect for each other as well as teachers and other adults and he added, "...many times I hear and have said to myself, "why do these kids act the way they do, don't they know any better?" Bobby did not blame the children but instead said:

....it's what they've learned. It's their normal and that's the biggest thing for me to try to understand-what their normal is so that they gain an understanding of maybe their normal is not society's normal. You can't continually be rude; you can't continually be only worried about yourself because that's not society's normal.[p. 16]

Bobby was cautious about blaming students but in an unspoken way, he did blame families when he said that their “normal is not society’s normal.” Bobby seemingly held middle-class expectations. He was aware that some students entered classrooms without knowing the expectations, but he appeared perplexed by how to handle them. He admitted that their behavior was difficult for him to understand possibly indicating that was not sure how to adapt some students’ “normal” to the expected ways of normal in his classroom. This observation might be seen as holding a deficit view as he blamed parents for not preparing their children for “society’s normal.”

In a focus on work with his families, I asked Bobby to clarify what he meant in his final course paper (p. 5, March, 2010) where he indicated that, “I see teachers ask parents from a higher social status to be room parents or go on field trips. The administration will typically approve specific requests from a higher status parent as opposed to parents from a lower status.” He said that he could not believe that he wrote that but then went on to explain:

I've seen teachers when they would get multiple parents to respond to go on a field trip and typically it's the parents that are from a higher socio economic advantage...just because they are typically educated to the same level and have the same basic understandings as we who teach and have come from an upper middle class environment...it's... it's ...I think it's because of an understanding between them...it's a commonality. I don't know, maybe it's an embarrassment to have the lower class mother that maybe doesn't dress quite so well and has tattoos and the piercings and all that kind of stuff that you don't want to take them out and that's what your district is associated at because that's what people are going to look at. And it might be a great mother. So I think there is a ...just listening to...in the teachers' lounge. They're talking about the different parents...who they want to deal with and talk to and who they don't want to and all that. And I think that's true of any...I don't care where you teach. You know, that's there. [p. 16-17]

Bobby's admission that there may be barriers between some of the teachers and families provided insight into the chasm separating teachers and communities where students bring cultural, economic, and linguistic capital different from that of their teachers. Although it is only one teacher's observation, it speaks volumes to the work that might need to be accomplished in chipping away at cultural barriers. The fact that Bobby admitted that he "couldn't believe that he wrote that," provides us with a clue that he may realize his inconsistency in sharing these thoughts about parents, especially since he went on to clarify and to state that there was a lot of talk in the teacher's lounge about that topic. The reported "talk" might cause one to wonder if that were a common disposition held by teachers.

Some of Bobby's views reflected the understanding that he had for parents. He maintained that challenges with families might stem from the idea that there are many single parent homes and that parents were struggling economically:

...they're working two or three jobs each just to stay afloat. They just don't have or make the time to sit down and work with their kids in their schooling as they should. We have three people who are in our PTG (parent-teacher group). When we go to a PTG meeting, there's only two to three parents and that's it. And that's in elementary school.
[p. 4]

Although some of Bobby's comments may reflect negative views of parents, in this instance he attempted to show some understanding as to why parents have such challenges, thus providing a sense of empathy. He also maintained that there were "many single-parent homes" indicating he may assume single parents might struggle more than those in a two-parent family. He made note that only three parents were at the PTG¹³ meeting. In Chapter 4 he had indicated that almost

¹³ Parent Teacher Group: a group of parents who formally meet to decide upon action for the schools in their communities which may involve fundraising and other activities.

every parent was involved in the PTC¹⁴ when he was in school. It seemed that he attempted to understand that some parents of children in high poverty schools have challenges when he said they worked many jobs to “stay afloat”, yet it appeared that he did not fully comprehend that when he commented that there were few parents who served on the school’s committee. His background may influence these ideas, but possibly the coursework provided to him in his graduate program and professional development has begun to assist him in changing his views about parents in his school.

Classroom Connections. In a more specific observation of families, Bobby reported having challenges with a child who was consistently off task and Bobby shared his belief that the student had an attention deficit disorder. Although he said the boy’s mother began the process to “get him diagnosed so that he can get on medication so that he can learn and he can stay focused,” he said that the boy’s mother did not follow through. The mother had four children enrolled in the Garnet District and Bobby concluded, “It’s not a real stable home situation and I don’t think the mom really wants to make the effort to help them” (p. 3). He speculated that the family may have received financial aid like Medicaid and the cost of medication would not be an issue (p. 3).

I think it’s just a sheer lack of lazy parenting on her part. She’s told us ‘You fix, you fix Kate’...that’s his sister. “You fix her” We called to talk to her about possibly having a half-day schedule for Tom because in the morning he’s not bad but after lunch he becomes---that’s when we get into our language arts where we’re doing a lot of our sit-down seatwork. And towards the end of the day and that’s where he progressively digresses in his behavior. So we said, how about setting up a half-day schedule. We’d like to meet with you and she said, I mean she literally cussed and swore at us over the phone...very vulgarly and said “I’m a taxpayer and you’re gonna keep him 8 hours a day” so, there you go .[p. 4]

¹⁴ Parent Teacher Committee: same as PTG

In his comment, Bobby focused on the family's background and came to some general conclusions about the parent but he did not question beyond that speculation. *Lazy parenting* might be a way for Bobby to explain why a student may not perform in the classroom.

His concern was focused on the student's lack of attention in the classroom, but one might also question the child's propensity toward seatwork. Bobby had not seemed to consider that perhaps there was a mismatch between teacher expectations and the student's needs. Bobby noticed that communication with the boy's mother appeared to be broken. This was seen in the response by the parent's comment, "You fix" the child and Bobby's report of the way that the mother spoke over the phone. Although he did not elaborate on the idea to take his student from his fourth-grade classroom to a part-time status, he was more concerned with the parent who told them to "fix" her children. In understanding Bobby's frustrations, it might be noted that he was raised to respect authority as well as other middle class values. Possibly his ideas about what school looked like were in conflict with this parent's seemingly unwilling statement to assist her son and teach him to respect teachers. Cusick and Oakey (1995), in their study on high school dropouts, focused on the conflict between "school people" and families' values, suggesting that those working in schools are "innately biased against the lower classes" and further suggested that conflict between family and school could be "softened" (p. 265). Possibly the "bias" here might be Bobby's expectations for parents to do their jobs as parents and socialize their children before they enter school so that negative behaviors did not interrupt classroom academics.

Bobby also shared how parents who forgot to sign permission slips for after-school activities affected some of the students in his classroom. He said, "Many times the slip is not signed by the parents because they simply forget to sign the permission slip and I see the disappointment on their child's face when they are told it's too late to sign up." The after-school

classes referred to a school homework club and a Bible club that met after school. Bobby said that the Bible Club attracted the largest number of students in attendance and parents were required to pick up their children at a specified time. He said, “The Bible Club is obviously a program that parents feel is important for their children to attend if they are willing to pick them up afterwards.” He observed that the Bible Club was popular and he admitted that parents did not always sign permission slips to attend the clubs. Bobby appeared to blame parents for not allowing their children to attend either of the clubs. It may be that parents forgot to sign the slips or perhaps they purposely did not sign the slips for their children to attend a homework or Bible Club. Perhaps the Bible club conflicted with cultural values in their home or there may have been a multitude of other reasons such as lack of transportation, after-school work at home, or parents may have simply forgotten. No matter the reason, Bobby viewed parental participation on a surface level and provided his evaluation about “disappointment” on children’s faces. He may not understand that there are many reasons as to why children are unable to attend after-school activities such as transportation issues, childcare, or other family activities.

Another observation reported by Bobby provided a more concrete understanding of his stance when he talked about how one of his female students from “a very good family” left the district to move to Arizona. He said, “It’s one of those families that you hate to see leave the district,” and he said the student stood out in his mind because the family had much presence in the school as volunteers. He described them as, “very, very involved parents” (p. 6). He was impressed with the student and indicated, “I sent in for a national...a national academic award based on behavior and academics and stuff...she really sticks out in my mind...she did very well and she will continue to do well.” (p. 6). Here, Bobby noticed and attached positive attributes to this student’s family and he took the time to submit her name for an award. This was the only

student and family that he spoke about in this manner, thus providing the idea of his caring nature for students and families who worked hard. Bobby also appeared to show his middle-class expectations laden with virtue, which was something I noted in Chapter 4 and he had talked about at length. Here, he had a student who fit the mold of his expectations and he went beyond observing to taking the initiative to promote the student for a national academic award. One might wonder what it might take for teachers to recognize the potential in all families.

Bobby shared that there was very little parental backing and many times, he said, kids were on their own. He added that there had been much talk in the teachers' lounge regarding the lack of parenting where he said the conversation included:

We are having to do as much parenting skills as having to teach....there are some parents who just won't do what we suggest or they just show no interest. And to get a child to try to do what you ask them to do and there's no parental support...it's very difficult. [p. 3]

Bobby appeared befuddled that parents did not support their children in his school and he thought the effects of that were transferred to the classroom when students did not conform to expectations. The teacher lounge talk, although not elaborated on, suggested that more than one teacher had observed that problem but Bobby did not share ways in which to address the issue only that parents were not better supporting their children. The idea that children do not adhere to classroom rules might be worrisome in that learning cannot take place in a chaotic setting but Bobby did not suggest ways in which parents might be most helpful, nor did he indicate specific instances in which he contacted parents and indicated that they "show[ed] no interest." Again, it might be noted that Bobby expected families to be the lone guides in teaching social behavior and it might not be teachers' responsibility. As noted in Chapter 4, his childhood consisted of a deep respect for adults and it was family who instilled that sense in him.

Bobby shared ideas about the difficulties in teaching within a low SES school and how it was frustrating for several reasons, citing that “we’re trying to teach half the time and parent half the time.” He also talked about how difficult it was to plan activities such as field trips since there were usually costs associated with that and many students could not afford it. Other costs were not affordable for parents such as sending basic supplies to school:

...it gets frustrating not understanding why parents don't supply their kids with things but they can't afford it so they just naturally assume that the school is to provide everything---which is hard because if we're having to buy the notebook paper out of our class money which we get which isn't a lot. I have to spend a lot of it on pencils and basic supplies the parents could provide, then I could use that money towards books for the library and maybe get the more expensive high-end things whether it's a technology type of situation that would help overall. [p. 8]

The inequities that filtered into his classroom were perplexing to Bobby. The lack of family funds and resources equates to fewer classroom resources that might assist his students' learning. In other words, his work as a teacher stands to be negatively impacted by the families' low economic status and he tended to blame them by indicating that he did not understand why parents do not supply them with resources. If children do not have pencils, paper, crayons and other important supplies, it may lead to an interruption in classroom work. And if parents cannot afford the items, then schools might need to rethink the purchases that they make for the academic year. Although this may be a critical problem, Bobby's deficit view did not allow him to think beyond what could be done, which might include seeking outside donors or bringing it to the full attention of administrators. Instead, he blamed parents.

In another scenario, Bobby shared that his students' lack of real-life experiences made it difficult to teach in his school. This comment may have hinged upon a general comment in the course seminar (instructor's seminar notes, February, 2010), which led to a lengthy discussion one evening, when a class member expressed disbelief that most of her students had never visited

a large local lake during the summer. Discussion ensued that lead teachers within the cohort to comment about reasons that parents might not take their children to the lake. Several members agreed that parents might be lazy but I pushed them to think of other reasons. They came up with ideas about lack of transportation, not knowing how to get to the destination, having conflicting work hours, and not knowing how to swim. During his interview, Bobby brought up the scenario once again when he attempted to explain that his students did not always have requisite background knowledge:

Lack of experience of the students...not having the availability of the parents to take the kids to Lake Wallaby. 70% or more have never seen Lake Wallaby. Because the parents don't take them to museums, to libraries, helping them to self learn. Just basic experiences that most kids get the opportunities to enjoy that these kids can't because the parents either aren't home or they can't afford it.[p. 9]

Bobby realized that his students came to school with far fewer experiences than children in more affluent schools. This idea was brought about in the class seminar when the teachers discussed reasons why so few students travel to the lake in the summer and why they might not go to museums or other venues that may be a distance from home. Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), they seemed to understand, was limited for many of their children. Bobby noted that he understood that parents could not allow for capital-building experiences because they were not at home or could not afford to do so. This might be evidence of Bobby's understanding that parents are not always lazy, but they may not have the time, money, or knowledge about what to do that might help their children gain specialized knowledge.

In terms of parents assisting with school projects, Bobby indicated that about half of students' projects were returned to school finished, indicating that it was difficult for families to participate in more complex homework assignments. He said that there were mentors sent by a local church to assist students and they "just sit and talk with them, play games with them and

help them with homework that they might need for an hour a week.” He did not indicate the criteria needed for mentors to be assigned, and it appeared that their work focused more on social skills than academic skills, possibly something that was deemed as necessary for the children who did not comply in classrooms. He indicated that although parents were not involved much now, in his first couple of years of teaching they were very involved:

If we put out a call for ...say for Christmas we need food...or Thanksgiving we had a special thing...all sorts of parents bring in food. They don't mind doing that but I only had one parent that came and helped in the classroom. Obviously you don't want too many (laughs). But the availability for a lot of them...isn't there anymore. They're working. They can't afford to take the time off from work to go on field trips and that sort of thing. [p. 5]

Bobby noted sporadic assistance by parents for the classroom both in terms of helping their students as well as assisting in the classroom. His comment about parental assistance in terms of sending food was the only thing that he talked about as far as parental assistance. He also insinuated through his comment about not “want(ing) too many parents” that it is possible that parents were more of a hindrance than a help or possibly a threat to the work that took place in the classroom or Bobby may not want someone else observing the “unruly” behavior that might take place. Parents may also be seen as a hindrance as teachers might realize that their education and/or language levels might not allow them to help without much guidance. The teachers also may not recognize the funds of knowledge or the rich cultural knowledge that families and their children bring to schools (Moll, 1996; Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 2001).

Bobby's observations provided a view of his stance toward parents. Although he indicated that parents had a difficult time because they had to work several jobs to stay afloat, he shared an overwhelmingly number of deficit views that portrayed parents as lazy, unsupportive and not doing their jobs as parents. It also might be noted that his life experiences may have influenced some of his thinking.

Dana

As a teacher in the Tremont District for seven years, Dana has taught in a number of positions including second grade, middle school math, and at the time of the interview, she was assigned as an ESL teacher at the high school. Dana held strong deficit views along with caring views toward families and she attempted to promote ways in which to build relationships with them.

Noticing Families. Looking back to the course blog assignment discussed in Chapter 3, Dana wondered how schools might provide a more welcoming atmosphere for families:

Do our schools give parents that type of welcoming? What makes Donut Delight¹⁵ feel so warm and like the heart of Banton? How can we recreate this environment throughout the community [school]? [Ch. 3, p. 76]

Dana wondered about places in the community that provided a strong sense of belonging for those who lived there and then wondered how that same atmosphere might be transferred to schools. This sense of helping to create a parent-teacher community differed from Bobby's ideas regarding lazy parenting and parental inability to provide supplies and experiences to their children. Her view in this comment might be seen from a positive stance as she began to wonder about how to make her school community more welcoming. It might be noted that Bobby's observations might be legitimate, but he did not provide ideas about how to work around his observed obstacles.

Dana shared that when she had taught second-grade, a literacy fair was organized where parents were invited to view teachers' literacy strategies. She said that very few families attended. Dana maintained that a function like this was not necessarily where the school should begin if their purpose was to hone relationships with parents:

¹⁵ A local donut shop frequented by members of the community where many patrons knew and greeted one another.

I think you need to start with just even...like potlucks. Get in there and get to know people, you know? I think they've got to, again, build relationships. They've got to build those relationships before they can feel comfortable---because for some of them, they probably don't know some of the educational stuff. They, themselves, maybe only have a 7th grade education. So, you know, I think to get them involved it needs to be first outside of education and just kind of a get-to-know-you type thing and then they can move into the how do we get, you know, involved in the education piece. [p. 20]

Dana had suggested families might be more comfortable in an informal gathering where relationships might be better forged. Families may find this more enticing since a more formal gathering, such as a literacy presentation, with teacher as leader and parent as subordinate might connote the unequal distribution of power and authority. The fact that Dana observed that some parents may not have a strong educational background might suggest that she understood the possibility of an unlevel playing field for parents and possibly wanted to assuage that scenario. But one might also keep in mind that parents might not be willing or able to attend such functions. In some cases, families may not view potlucks as an enjoyable activity, but just another school function, and some families may not always view schools in a favorable light.

In a move toward building relationships with parents, Dana had suggested to school colleagues that they offer a spaghetti dinner but, she said, “that didn’t get too far.” She thought teachers were prone to be nervous about spending lots of time with parents as they are “almost worried maybe that you’ll be *questioned* about what you do if that happens.” I asked Dana to clarify and she responded that, “Questioned as far as ok, well are you doing your job the right way” (p. 20)? The idea that parents might hold expectations of accountability appeared to be a daunting prospect for Dana. This might be explained by the fact that she was new in her position at the high school and may not want parents to think that she was inadequate in her position. Or it may be that as much as she might want to assist families, she may not want them to scrutinize what she did in her classroom. Bobby shared a similar reaction when he jokingly indicated that

maybe he did not want too many parents in the classroom. It is possible that these teachers sometimes experience inadequacy in their positions as classroom expectations cannot always be met and they might not want parents to observe that or they may not want parents there who might not be able to contribute without a good deal of assistance.

Classroom Connections. As teachers and parents come to understand one another, classroom connections might lead to an important part of the teaching that gets done. Dana talked about how difficult it was to interact with all of the families that she had when she admitted, “It is sad to say but those students where parents are more involved tend to get more of my attention.” She maintained that the primary difficulty, when she was in her prior assignment at the junior high school, included responsibility for 120 students and she said:

...if I had a parent that emailed me or called, I’m more likely to pay more attention to their student or stay on top of their grades or get them to stay after because that parent is on top of me saying “ok ...you know ...where the other ones if they don’t have an advocate and you have so many kids, it’s hard to manage them all. And I feel bad saying that. I’d like to say that you’re able to spend as much time on every student but the reality is that you can’t. [p. 19]

In Dana’s way of thinking, parents were advocates for their children, and if they did not have communication with her, then children could slip through the system unnoticed because of the number of students needing attention. She provided a seemingly honest account of the overwhelming responsibility to keep tabs on and coach 120 students through a system that had so many obstacles and parents were not always available to serve as advocates.

Dana shared an incident she had observed at school where she encountered a brief interaction between a father and a son where the boy turned around and walked away from his father while he was talking. She said, “just the way he responded to his father explained a lot to me about the way he responds to teachers.” She admitted that middle-class parents have more time to help support kids and that maybe there are not as many stressors so that parents might

focus energy on helping their children if they do not respond in appropriate ways. Although, this might be a widely-held assumption, affluent families also may have their share of challenges. In respect to the father and son encountered in the office, she may not have considered that the boy, as a middle-school student, may have been embarrassed by the surprise encounter. Dana provided another example that she said helped her to realize how very difficult it was for families when she talked about two sisters, who had been in her classes. Since their mother worked a late shift, they were responsible for taking care of their little brothers.

...and now I realize that even talking with these two girls, those two girls are the ones raising their brothers and putting their brothers to bed. They asked me what time I put my kids to bed and I said between 7 and 8. And they go, 'Well, they don't go to bed until 11 or 1 o'clock. And I was like 'what?' because their mom's working, you know? [p. 19]

This conversation with her students helped her to understand that families' lives were complex. Dana viewed family life through a lens that was much different from her students'. On one hand, in the earlier scenario, she was appalled at student behavior that showed disrespect toward a parent but then she seemed to understand the plight of her students who were in charge of their younger siblings. Family life was hard. Family life, as she knew it, did not necessarily connect with the family life experienced by some of her students. This was noted in Chapter 4 where Dana, as a student, experienced a secure and supportive family centered around her needs. Teachers may want to respect culture, but some cultures do not fit into the frame of how they have lived their lives (Lortie, 1976) and what they have observed about how to "do school." Dana's experiences with her family, as noted in Chapter 4, were far removed from the experiences of her students and their families and it might be noted that Dana appeared surprised by the girls' admission that their two young brothers were up so late. That was not a lifestyle that Dana had lived so she found it difficult to understand.

Dana commented on her students' motivation and how she thought that the family played a large part in providing their children with the motivation to do well in school. She added, "...growing up, that's what, you know, it's not like I did it for me. I did it for – I wanted my parents to be proud." She said that when talking to her students' parents, she had the impressions that there was not much support at home

I'd like to be able to call a parent and say ... 'Your student's failing, your child's failing' and then have that parent step up and say 'Ok, they're staying after school or problems are at home or something but it doesn't happen and so, I think the kids see that, you know, there's no real repercussion at home...you know-- it doesn't seem to bother them. [p. 5]

Dana admitted that her goal as a student in school was to make her parents proud. As discussed in Chapter 4, Dana talked in depth about the expectations that her parents placed on her and her sister in terms of an education. Although she showed compassion for families in her school, she does not seemingly understand how families do not support the mission of school. She also said that she would "like to be able to call a parent." She does not mention why she did not do this, only that she would like to be able to. She observed that certain conversations may need to take place but did not come up with ways to spark those conversations. In this way, she is powerless to do the kinds of things that she might do to aid students as connections with families might assist with that. It is clear from her comment that she envisions few choices in her work with parents.

Dana talked about how parents many times kept some of her students from attending school or getting to school on time, which made it difficult for her students to do their work or earn credit. She offered her thoughts about some parents:

In talking with a couple of my kids, parents are either sleeping and they don't want to wake their parents up or they don't have a ride because their parents are working...umm...or, I had a situation where a girl had to stay home and take care of her mom because her mom had a disc in her back...something was wrong and her mom couldn't do a lot of stuff and she had to stay home and take care of her mom. So, issues

like that are huge and then the more they miss. You know, the more they get behind and umm....I have another student, it was for the first half of the year. "I don't feel good, I don't feel good" And she was to the point where she was failing classes and as a parent...from my parents it was always "You're going to school unless you're throwing up." [p. 4]

Dana's concern is tied directly to how parents neglect to push students to attend school and how sometimes they are complicit in keeping them from attendance. It is noted that she compared her own parents' stance with the parents of her students in that she would be forced to go to school unless she was "throwing up." This comment was insightful in that she held parents to those same expectations, that if families only sent their children on time, every day, then education might have a more important role in their lives. It may also have been a valid concern, and one over which she had little control.

In her work, Dana held deficit views of parents when she indicated that there were no real repercussions at home, many parents were not available to ready their children for school, and many did not serve as advocates for their children. But, she also justified some of her observations by indicating that parents might not have the education or the time to deal with school challenges encountered by their children. She also proposed an idea to colleagues that she hoped might enhance relationships with parents. Like Bobby, her background appeared to influence some of her thinking in regard to families.

Mary

As a teacher in the Tremont District for the past ten years and one who lives within her school community, Mary has held a number of positions within the school district. At the time of our interview, she served as a reading specialist in schools serving kindergarten through sixth-grade students. In the prior year, she had worked in a third-fourth-grade classroom. Mary, too, held some deficit views of parents when she indicated that some children were not valued as they

should be. She also held a greater stance toward caring for her families and her helpful stance surpassed that of deficit.

Noticing Families. As Mary lived in the community in which she taught, she seemed to view some of the families in a different light as she directly observed the struggles that her neighbors face. She talked about Rosa, a neighbor and mother of three who had grown up in Mexico and who had experienced a “hard life.” But, Mary admitted that her friendship had been a catalyst that sparked her “to be a better person.” She noted how Rosa was well aware that she had no control over certain circumstances in her life and that she “can’t change her circumstances but she changes her attitude.” Mary said she had tutored one of her children in reading during the summer. The child, who was an English Language Learner, was struggling and Mary accompanied Rosa to a few of his conferences in order to help Rosa advocate for her son.

He was really struggling a lot and some of it was ELL and some of it was ADHD--- which Rosa didn't know anything about. I explained it to Rosa and gave her some information in Spanish and she was able to look it up and read about it. They did end up putting him on medication and it helped him, but I don't know why they didn't offer that at school. Like I had to bring it up to the teacher and ask them and they said... 'oh yah, he doesn't have a very long attention span'--so why wouldn't you say anything earlier? [p. 18]

Her presence in the community assisted Mary in participating in the lives of those around her. In the case of Rosa, it was more than a mere observation of a neighbor as she took initiative and assisted her with a task that Rosa was unable to perform with her son. Mary also helped her with maneuvering a system that might sometimes be difficult for parents who do not understand it, thus helping her to become an advocate for her son. If Mary had not assisted Rosa, her son may not have received services and special attention to which he was entitled. The comment by the boy's teacher might lead us to see that this teacher had not observed him at a level that might assist him with his education and that it took an insider to open up the conversation. Although

Mary exhibited a great amount of empathy for this family, it is not known if she had participated at the same levels with other families, including those in her classroom. However, her actions might indicate the extent to which she might go to help families.

Mary had worked in and visited many schools and noted that schools receiving a high level of support from families also seemed to have a family-like atmosphere. “Even in the schools where there is a low level of support from parents, we have churches that are involved.” She also maintained that families within the community are tight knit and even though most members in the community do not have much money, they come to support one another during times of tragedy.

Mary appeared to recognize the value that families contributed to schools. She also observed the role that churches played in creating a family-like atmosphere. Within school, Mary talked about the loyalty she felt toward families when she said,

I can tell they [families] care about each other and I want to do the best that I can for them...because I know that they take the teachers who care about their kids...they take them in as family. I still see families. I taught at four different schools and I went back to one that I taught at for four years. I couldn't leave the building without talking to parents. [p. 4]

She added that teaching for her is “more than a job. “You know...it’s like I’m helping family.” Mary saw a strong connection between her work and the families that she served. She held an affirming view of families in that even though families may not have many resources, they still wanted the best for their children.

Classroom Connections. Mary, as a reading specialist, was well aware that she worked with a high number of students who lived in poverty and maintained that, “It has an impact on reading ability.” She also said, “It’s not that parents don’t care—they don’t have time because they’re trying to work so hard to put food on the table and they’re trying to meet the basic needs so they haven’t time to think of anything beyond that.” Mary observed that her students’ reading

abilities were impacted by poverty but she also indicated that parents did care about their children but because of time constraints and challenges within their lives, they were unable to help in the ways that might best help their children.

Mary, too, spoke about her loyalty to families. She said, “I can tell they care about each other and I want to do the best that I can for them because I know that they take the teachers who care about their kids—they take them in as family.” She indicated that her work did not feel like a job but instead, “it’s more of a mission,” and it might be viewed as mutual support and respect. She went on to add that she does not feel an alliance with the district as much as an obligation or an alliance with parents, stating that what she does in the classroom is for parents, “I feel obligated toward what I do in the classroom for the parent’s sake.”

She indicated that she was not concerned about getting into trouble at work for not doing her job, but her main concern was letting a parent down because “if they don’t feel that I’m doing what they need done for their child in teaching.” She described a time in her early years of teaching where administrators were not supportive of special education services in the building. She related a story about a family who was trying to get services for their child and although she kept telling the principal about the family concerns, she said the principal indicated that they did not do testing and that Mary would need to find ways to better support the student. After a conference with the parents, she found that the parents had asked another teacher about testing and she told them to write a letter to the school, something that Mary had not told them to do as she was unaware of that as a viable solution. She said:

...ever since then...and up until then they had trusted me to do what was best for their child. So, in the end I felt like I let that family down. And to me that’s more disappointing than say if I were reprimanded by the principal [p.7]

Mary appeared staunch in her support of families, even if it meant that she had to say or do things that did not please them or that might run contrary to the administration’s views, thus

creating a positive stance as she used her judgments about what she thought was best for students and their families.

As much as she supported families and indicated that her obligations were with families, she also noted that her number one challenge was the lack of parental support. She maintained:

There's the piece of not being able to help enough---parent communication because the parents are working so much....I think they're exhausted. They don't want to spend the time on the phones when they've got so much else to do...to be on the phone talking. It's not their priority so, that can affect being in the classroom and trying to do a good job in making sure that the child sees the connection between what the teacher sees important and what the parents do as well. That can be a lot of stress.[p. 11]

She appeared to understand the plight of parents and that their lives were fraught with challenges that might prevent them from a focus on education. Mary observed that education was not a priority in their lives, insinuating that it was possibly something that they must contend with until their children left or finished school, thus, placing much “stress” upon the teacher who was left to the job of educating students without assistance. But she, like Dana, also maintained that parents were not always available to reach on the phone and so communication potential was lost and this might be important to the smooth operation of the classroom as well as the progress of the child. Their views appeared to differ from Bobby’s who tended to blame parents for their children’s challenges but there were no possible solutions raised as to how to assist parents.

Mary also spent a good deal of time thinking about a particular student when she was last in her third-fourth grade split classroom. The child cried a good part of class time and after consulting the parent, the parent’s response was, “oh, yah, that happens at home.” But the problem was never resolved. He reportedly became agitated in and out of class and would cry for up to twenty minutes, which she indicated, was very disruptive in the classroom. Mary hypothesized that it stemmed from having many older brothers and possibly having some problems at home being treated unfairly.

It appeared that Mary was trying to make sense of how to handle this situation, one in which many students might be affected because of the nature of the distraction. She spoke with the parent who agreed that it happened often at home but she did not elaborate on any further actions taken that might have helped this student, especially since he would move on to a new teacher and classroom of students in the following year. However, this was just one student in one classroom with one teacher and an example of the diverse situation that teachers in low-income schools might address each day. It also might be noted that Bobby, too, mentioned the difficulty of students who come to his classroom with behaviors that are disruptive to learning.

Although Mary was supportive of parents and the challenges they faced, she also commented that, “Children just aren’t valued. A lot of children aren’t valued the way they should be.” She talked about one particular student who usually attended an after-school program but was unable to on one particular day as she relayed what her student told her: “No, my dad got drunk last night and I have to go home and try to fix that to make sure I don’t forget him”---so, she said that it was those issues that made it difficult as she said for many families “it’s the norm but it should not be the norm” (p. 3). Her observations about how families did not always do their best for children appeared to contradict her statements about how she thought families were trying their best but it also speaks to what teachers notice in complex classrooms and how that noticing might appear paradoxical. On one hand, parents might be seen as lazy and uninvolved and on the other, they were working too hard outside of the home and it was difficult to help their children. But Dana and Mary, and to some extent Bobby, do not harshly blame parents, instead it might be seen as a cultural norm and one which might have an impact on schools in low-income communities where students attend schools led by teachers, most with white middle class ideals. For example, although Mary observed that the child’s father had challenges, she did

not so much blame the parent as to indicate “it’s the norm,” since that was the way in which life was lived in this student’s home. Mary’s concerns were much like the concerns held by Dana and Bobby. Bobby, in fact, indicated that the way of life for many of his students was “their normal,” but he indicated that their normal “wasn’t society’s normal” which might point to his middle-class expectations. Although Dana and Mary observed the good things that parents provided for their children, they also observed, along with Bobby, those areas that are challenging.

In one incident with a parent, Mary shared how she had used her voice when communicating with a parent. She shared an incident where she was trying to explain to her third-fourth grade students that some families were “mixed and have different skin color” as she said one year she had several kids from mixed families and she indicated that students were asking her about why her own children were not the same color as she was. She said that this a good opportunity to explain to them and help them feel more comfortable about race and ethnicity:

...so I said, “Well, at home when I’m talking to my kids to explain to them why they don’t have the same skin color but our hearts are the same color on the inside. That it’s kind of like mixing milk and chocolate together...you just get chocolate milk and wow...I had a parent who came in while the principal was on a trip and he was irate that I brought up that scenario. He...he did not want me to encourage his white daughter to date African American males. He said that’s what I was doing. I shouldn’t be touching that stuff at school. He wanted me to never mention that again or never bring up my family history to the kids again or he would pull his child from my classroom.[p. 9]

Mary said that was a defining moment for her and she said she told the parent that she was sorry if her words offended him but she would not retract her decision to address diversity in the classroom. She told him that she would continue to send the message that diversity was good and indicated that the district supported that stance. She said it was a defining moment for her because she had to make a decision to stand by her choice but at the same time she did not want

to anger him in a way that affected her relationship with his daughter and she pointed out, “Which I think I did really well and never gave the notion to her that I was angry with her father” (p. 9).

Promoting diversity in her classroom was an issue that Mary strongly supported. It might possibly be important to her as her life story indicated that her grandfather had not accepted her marriage to a man of a race different from hers. She also indicated that she was sensitive to the lives of her own children whom she said were “considered minority” (Life History, p. 3). In this case, she took a strong stand against this parent to support her strong belief in teaching differences.

In another uncomfortable moment with a parent, Mary had made a decision to contact Child Protective Services because of a situation with a child in her classroom. She said it was an uneasy position as she personally knew relatives of this child’s family, but it was a situation in which she had to do what was right for the child. She said it was one of those moments that speaking the truth to the family was important because, “...if you don’t speak the truth to parents about their children then the family is losing out...not just the child.” She said she was not concerned because she knew it might be something to benefit the family over the long run. This might speak to the level of observations made by a teacher and the, sometimes uncomfortable, steps that teachers must take in order to protect a child. Instead of trying to figure it out with colleagues during lunchroom talks as Bobby had done, she addressed the situation on her own.

Mary showed great concern for parents. She indicated how she felt more obliged to parents than she did to her administrators and her main concern was that she “might let a parent down.” Living and teaching within the community, she knew first hand the struggles of many families and she indicated that they cared about one another. But she also maintained what might

be called deficit views when she admitted that many children are not valued as they should be. She provided excuses for families in that they were too tired and school was not a priority for many of them. Her views were scattered between a deficit and a caring stance toward families with a strong leaning toward care. In one instance, it might be noted that her background may have influenced her role to share diversity issues with her students even when confronted by an objection from the parent.

Jill

As a teacher in the Garnet District for the past five years, Jill has taught both at the middle and high schools and most of her work has been with students within English Language Arts, Special Education and ESL. She also spent seven years within other districts, some out of state, most within low-income communities. Jill held a sympathetic view toward families, as she seemingly realized that their lives were difficult and she indicated that she wanted to provide more not less to their children. However, she tended to notice many challenges encountered by families, thus projecting a deficit view a little stronger than a helpful view.

Noticing Families. As a teacher within the middle and high schools, Jill observed that most of the families that she worked with were from varying cultural backgrounds as she mainly taught ESL classes and she reportedly observed the vast poverty within her school district. As indicated in the quote that opened this chapter, she shared her views on the emotional toll that comes with issues of poverty:

The pain---the frustration. I mean you deal with alcohol and drug addiction. You deal with parents just not being present. You deal with lack of home support. You deal with kids being hungry. You deal with kids---it brings on a whole set of problems with kids not being supervised. [p. 10]

Jill observed the challenges faced by families and recognized that some students had little home support and, in some cases, lacked meals. In a sense she understood the challenges, but it also

appeared that she was concerned about students who were left unsupervised and that brought about another set of challenges, as no one was home to guide teens in ways that might be beneficial to them. She also indicated that students in more affluent schools did not have the same challenges as her students since they “tend to have educated parents who are pushing them to go onto education for the most part; you’ve got parents who are engaged in their kids’ lives and have the means and the resources and the time to invest in their children so that they don’t need me.” Jill’s observations, like Dana’s, led her to believe that there were not challenges in more affluent communities as students had their parents to assist them because of the resources they possessed. That may be true to an extent in that tangible resources might be more plentiful in those settings, but similar sets of problems were found within more affluent families (Luthar & Latendresse, 2005).

Her work in low SES schools was the work that Jill said she most valued as it might most impact the lives of children. By stating that children in more affluent districts had parents who could impact their lives, it appeared that she observed that the children in her schools may have required more than academics; they needed a parent and she was there to incorporate that into her practice. Within Jill’s life story discussed in Chapter 4, she commented, “So part of me feels a little bit of pressure because I’ve been given so much and I’ve got to give back. I’ve got to help these kids and sometimes that’s being mom...just listening to what they need or pulling them aside and giving them a pep talk or sometimes it’s just giving them those academic skills they’re going to need to survive” (p. 9). Jill has not appeared to entirely blame families, although it appeared that she attempted to fill a perceived parent gap for her students, thus insinuating that families could not advocate well for their students. In this way, Jill exhibited a stance toward “saving” students as she saw her role as not just a teacher but also a parent to fill a perceived gap

for some of her students, although it also portrayed a deficit view in that she projected a belief that parents could do nothing to help their children.

Classroom Connections. Jill commented on the specific struggles that she observed with some families, stating that she wanted to be compassionate but realized that parents who worked the night shift or two jobs might not provide the needed support:

...just a lot of stuff going on at home so you try to be compassionate when they don't have homework done or they're missing a lot of school. At the same time you realize that the only way to help them is to get them an education. You want to make sure they've got high standards with your curriculum and so forth. [p. 3]

Jill not only realized there were some challenges her students' families faced, but she noted how that might affect her students and how she wanted "to be compassionate." She did not explain how compassion for families translated into her classroom but she wanted to convey an understanding of family struggles. She also showed a realization that students needed to be pushed toward high standards but one might wonder how that might be done without parental assistance. In the next chapter, we will learn more about how Jill addressed students' needs.

Jill claimed that it is often difficult to help English Language Learners because "...you can't communicate a lot of times with the family or the student is acting as translator or go between" (p. 2). Parents may obtain an obscured version of the teacher's comments, intentionally or unintentionally, if translated by the student. A full discussion might not be possible between teacher and family, thus obscuring issues that may need to be addressed for the good of the student. Teachers may not know the best ways to connect with parents so may, at times, ignore some of the issues such as the problem Mary observed when she assisted Rosa during a meeting with her son's teacher and commented that she was surprised that teachers had never brought up the issue with Rosa. Maybe it was easier to ignore the issue than try to communicate it to the family.

Parental disregard for attendance was another concern for Jill as parents often made choices to take their children from school for long periods of time during the school year.

I have two kids from the same family right now. I have an 8th grade girl and I then I have her sister as a junior at the high school and I also had her other sister as a 9th grader last year and they...in the past...go to Mexico for like two or three weeks which hurts...in high school they have to put in a certain number of hours to get the credits...and when they go to Mexico for two or three weeks they lose credit....and so the oldest daughter has lost a lot of credits. Partly because of that and partly because of poor choices that she's made and so now...just kind of dealing with this family and trying to help the mom understand that in America if you choose to do that you are really hurting your kids' education ...graduating on time and what that can mean and she...well, the oldest daughter now is kind of frustrated and just trying to tell her mom..."don't take my sisters." Her mom doesn't take her but...you run into those kind of family cultural issues in my community because the community in which I teach is so different from the community that I was raised in....and the community that I live in. So I find myself dealing with the community and the families in a cultural way...learning about their culture. We also deal with poverty at our school so just sometimes, as a teacher, I think it's hard. [p. 2]

In this instance, Jill observed that families take their children from school and that they may not realize the ramifications of their decisions. Missing school leads to failing classes and students may find that they have to stay in school longer or they may leave the system as they may view it as an easier solution. Jill said that she found herself “dealing with” the community and the families in a cultural way as she learned about their cultures. Jill appeared to realize that her students might need some extra attention because they come from homes where education was seemingly not the priority. The families, as she noted, were busy with jobs and other challenges of poverty that might affect what children were able to do in her classroom. She tended to understand the problems but did not explain how she worked with parents to overcome some of the challenges. It appeared she was highly concerned but held a bleak view of parents who experienced such challenges.

The piles of work that high school teachers must contend with can be daunting and according to Jill, she has one 40-minute class with ELLs that is considered a homework catch-up

class. But, even when she is “buried under paperwork,” that she could undertake during this homework time, she chooses to provide extra lessons and individual attention to students. In Reflection 2, based on a classroom assignment to observe classrooms, Jill stated that she worked with students to provide them with additional English language skills needed to push them. “I will do what parents are expecting me to do—teach their son/daughter. I will do what Lisa Delpit encourages. I will give them more not less” (p.4). Jill recognized that parents had a stake in their children’s education but they could not necessarily assist them with homework or other activities that might allow them a more equitable education. Her eagerness to assist students and do what parents expected was thoughtful and idealistic in that she planned to provide “more not less” education. In Chapter 6, with a focus on students, we learn more about what Jill does in terms of “more” for her students.

Although Jill understood that parents could not always be helpful to their children, she is confounded by the parents of one of her Vietnamese students whom she has had as a student in her classes since 9th grade. She described the 11th grade student as being very “right brained” and said that he enjoyed drawing. She observed him constantly sketching and drawing, while he struggled with reading. She said he also “struggles with culture between what mom and dad expect of him as a Vietnamese son,” and she learned about his conundrum through a class memoir he had written. She indicated puzzlement by the idea that his parents did not allow him to take art classes. Jill said his parents have high expectations for their son, a trait that Jill learned about in one of her ESL courses from a Vietnamese teacher:

I interviewed a Vietnamese teacher in another district and she said that all Vietnamese parents want their kids to be computer specialists, doctors, or lawyers. Those are your three options if you’re a Vietnamese kid. You know, make lots of money and take care of your parents. And she said that she (the teacher being interviewed) even had a hard time with becoming a teacher...like her parents kind of balked at that....that it wasn’t good enough, you know. [p. 7]

Jill said the student had a clear artistic talent, but his parents did not want him to take that path. She also noted that he wanted his family's approval, so he would follow their wishes and Jill appeared to be powerless in working out a viable solution between the boy and his family. She clearly observed his talents and understood what he wanted from school, but she also realized that his parents would not change their minds, at least from her current point of view. Her observations led her to want the best for this student, but family authority trumped her vision for him. Her role, again, appeared to be that of a parent as she interjected her ideas.

In another example, Jill indicated that her high school students brought with them challenges from their families that they could not control so she told them, "You're not going to change your parents and you're not going to change your living situation because we need you to graduate...so, what can we do? How can we be creative" (p. 4)? It is clear that Jill well understood the challenges faced by students who came from families who struggled or whose cultural views were different from hers and she attempted to help students work out viable solutions. But she also seemingly stepped into the role of parent, and although she may have attempted to push students to think beyond family challenges, she may have asserted her authority in a negative light by suggesting that students needed to change their families.

Jill shared that she observed the effects of alcohol addiction within families and that parents were not always present to help their children with school, thus promoting a deficit view. She also observed that attendance and homework was an issue. But she appeared to sympathize when she said there was "a lot of stuff going on at home" and that students needed a mom. Although she projected sincerity and caring about families, her statements projected a deficit stance. It might also be recalled that her work with families was an obligation as learned in her life history where she indicated that she had been given so much that she needed to give back.

Pat

Pat's sixteen years of teaching have taken place within the Tremont District. She was a graduate of the district and she continues to live with her husband and children within the community. In her interviews and course work, Pat provided limited information and her observations about family were quite general. However, she described many ways families could connect with her classroom. Pat provided many observations that indicate the depth of care that she had for families. However she also showed a tendency to express deficit views of her families that surpassed a helpful stance. Pat also showed a tendency to observe and act in a manner above and beyond expectations.

Noticing Families. Pat shared that there were both rewards and challenges to working in a low SES school but it was a school that she preferred to teach in:

You know one thing that might not necessarily be a reward but is definitely a benefit...when you're working with those higher SES groups, you have those parents breathing down your neck about "my child is number one. And what do I need to do?" When, oh my gosh...—I don't really have that as much and I don't have to worry about that pressure. I can meet the child anywhere they're at and just build them up from there. [p. 12]

Pat observed that parents from the higher SES groups might put more pressure on teachers so she preferred the school in which she taught. This was an area that Bobby and Dana mentioned as well, that teaching in low SES schools have a large set of challenges but they did not have to worry about aggressive parents. This might speak to how teachers in some schools can still close their doors and teach in ways they view best and how that might allow for more autonomy, as there is one less group to please or to have keeping watch over them. It might also speak to a different set of problems that teachers in more affluent schools might experience.

Pat, like Dana, contended that she would like to experience a more family-like atmosphere within her school and she suggested ways to assist her school to become more

welcoming to families. She had suggested the promotion of activities that allowed families to communicate with teachers in a more informal manner before they were contacted by phone for adverse reasons such as during parent-teacher conferences or phone calls regarding student concerns. She stated that many families “are afraid of teachers.” She said that when families were forced to come to school without a comfort level with teachers, they have an attitude, “The school. I have to go up to school,” and she said that there were other ways to make inroads with families. She wanted them to say, “Hey, I get to hang out with Mrs. Pat tonight.” Pat closely noticed families and, in many cases, reacted to those noticings. In the following section, her observations were connected with those reactions.

Classroom Connections. In an attempt to begin school outreach to parents, Pat said she had approached a colleague with a plan to host Friday family nights once a month that included card games and movies for the children but, she said, “...it was shot down before I even got all the words out. I was so sad.” But she also said that her colleague explained that she had to take care of her own family as her husband worked on many Friday evenings and she wanted to spend that time with her own children. Her colleague appeared to have set firm boundaries between work and home, while Pat appeared to view school and families as an extended family. It might be pointed out from Chapter 4, that Pat had experienced an intertwining of community with family while growing up.

Pat’s attempt at starting a regular family night at school did not come to fruition, but she decided to try a class activity that would include families. She sent flyers home announcing a movie night and encouraged parents to take their children to a nearby “cheap” movie theater on a designated night to watch a movie together, based on a book they had read in class. She described her attempt at bringing families together at the movies:

And Thursday night...there my son and I were and the movie was five minutes away from starting and no one was there and I was like oh no, this is really sad. And I had even told the lady, I was so confident people were coming. I told the clerk up front, "Hey, I'm a teacher and all my kids might be coming tonight, so you might want to make some extra popcorn. So we sit down because it was five minutes before the movie was starting and whoa....there was...my students started coming. And some of them came after the movie started but they came. [p. 14]

She said there were about twenty-two people and described one student who was "impoverished" and came with another family because her mom and dad could not come and she said "they couldn't afford it but they could afford for her to come." Pat also said she wished she could do more of this within the school so that teachers appeared more approachable to families.

Pat was aware that building relationships with her students' families might help them to feel more connected with her and less fearful of school. Pat appeared eager to assist parents in feeling more comfortable within the school but she also had difficulty organizing a school-wide program that might assist in this task. Dana, too, had suggested that activities might be offered to parents in order to build relationships such as the literacy night that had been planned but had not been well attended. She then suggested to colleagues that a spaghetti dinner or other informal event might attract more parents in a more informal atmosphere in order to facilitate relationships. Pat and Dana observed a gap between their work with parents and students and wanted to fill it, but had difficulty with the task. One might wonder whether teachers really might be expected to take on the task of planning and holding regular after school events for families, especially on top of other pressing responsibilities within their classrooms. Possibly after-school events might help build stronger relationships, but there may be a cost that results in beleaguered teachers who cannot afford to continue giving so much to schools in such seeming distress. It also might be considered that parents cannot attend such events for the same reasons they cannot attend during-school events. Transportation, work schedules, and young children might be just a few of those reasons.

Although Pat made connections with families, she indicated that they were not active participants within her classroom. During one December her class participated in a secret elf activity where the names of adults who worked in a classroom were drawn and they were provided secret gifts. She said the students were excited about it and told their parents who, in turn, began to “elf” the classroom by sending in treats of cookies and candy. But she also realized, as we talked, that little was done to encourage parents to visit the classroom on a regular basis: “...but I would say that’s kind of a downfall right now...to really pull the families into my classroom. That’s part of my fault that I’m not getting there.”

It appeared that Pat did not push her families enough to visit her classroom and took the blame for that, perhaps making a realization that she had not encouraged families enough or maybe even helped families to feel more welcomed in the classroom. The interview appeared to push her to recognize that she needed to focus on that. Just as in the remarks by Bobby and Dana regarding parents in the classroom, it might be an area that was uncomfortable for Pat.

In considering her role with families, I had asked Pat to say more about her comment in one of the blog¹⁶ entries indicating that she sometimes saw her role as a babysitter for parents. She indicated that her views had changed now that she was “building relationships.” She said she no longer looked at it in that way but, instead, she realized that some parents are tired “because of life...the deck they got dealt and they need a break from their kids.” She talked about how she arrived to school early in order to be there for some single moms who drop their children in her classroom and she knew that one particular mother did not work outside of the home but her child was there at 7:30 every morning. She said she understood that maybe it might help him with routine, or maybe “it’s easier for her not to have him around.” Pat added that some parents

¹⁶ Found in blog entry (Chapter 3) p. 16.

may “take advantage of her generous nature,” but she said that “life happens” and everyone needs to have a little vulnerability. It was interesting to note that her views seemingly changed between the time of her blog entry (February, 2010) until our interview (December, 2010). I might have probed more to understand how that change happened.

Although Pat showed a tendency to judge, she is quick to defend a parent whose child may not receive the academic services to which he may be entitled. She indicated that Tim was the first of three children, born when his mother was 15. Pat, as Tim’s teacher, had looked at his cumulative file and noticed he had received speech services and that his mother had not attended his last IEP for speech. She also said that he had poor behavior and he attended the resource room for an hour each day so that he could have a “smaller environment.” She describes one interaction with Tim’s mother:

Well, when I saw mom yesterday because Tim had to be picked up early. And I said ‘Mom, you know, what kind of services did Tim get at school?’ I just wanted to get her to talk to me. I want her to know that I’m on her side. And she said, ‘Oh, we just got speech.’” [p.10-11]

Pat wanted to see how much Tim’s mother knew about his services and to “get her to talk” to her. Although Pat did not mention at what point within the school year that this took place, she appeared to set up communication with this parent, possibly because she knew that there may be other challenges that Pat needed to address with Tim’s mother. This did not seem an uncommon approach for teachers but Pat’s intentional discussion with the school psychologist may provide a deeper look at her stance when she told him that Tim’s mother had not been aware that her son received services and she indicated his response:

Well of course she didn’t, she didn’t even bother to come to his IEP. I’m thinking ‘oh my gosh. Where are you?’ and then he brought that up: “you know, she was like 15 when he was born and blah, blah, blah.” And it’s like ok, so what? You’re just adding on to why she doesn’t like schools. You’re just making this environment difficult for her. When I was telling him about the ADD issues that I’m noticing in the classroom

and that was in his cume [cumulative file], he said 'yeah, she's been told at every single school that he's ADD and she just won't do anything about it.' [p. 11]

Pat noted that his response made her wonder if he would respond in the same way if he were talking about a child from a more affluent family and the family decided against medication. She admitted that in her profession it is difficult to watch how lower-income families are treated. Although she was outspoken about her ideas, little was said about her extended contact with the parent and how she assisted with the challenges that Tim experienced in her classroom because of his "ADD." She referred back to how she invited children to come into her classroom each morning before the school day began, indicating, "I know their lives aren't easy and whatever I can do for them, I'll do it. I'm there. That why I have a job." In recalling Pat's life story in Chapter 4, it might be noted that she was exposed to a constant stream of people within her home who needed assistance and her faith over the years may have helped to instill the need to help others who were in need.

In a more challenging situation with a student, Pat talked about making numerous phone calls home and conversing with a parent regarding a student but she said that the day after the calls the boy came to class and told her how the family had gone to dinner and a movie. She said, "I was like...where's the consequence?" But she said she "gets it" and understood that they were going through turmoil and it was easier for them to handle it in this way. She said she would not be disrespectful to the parents because she understood that there were always problems that could not be resolved and those problems may lead parents to say, "'Yes, I'll follow through' and when the rubber meets the road for your own mental health, you can't do it because otherwise you're going to go nuts" (p. 7-8). Pat appeared to struggle with what she knew parents *should* do in holding their children accountable, but she indicated that the family was also in turmoil, which might have kept them from doing what they might need to do to hold their son

accountable. The behavior might have impacted what happened in her classroom, since parents could not help with the classroom behavior presented by their son. Bobby, Dana, Mary, and Jill were in agreement in this area as they noted that they each experienced frustration with the lack of parental assistance with students. They each noted the difficulties of trying to teach classes where some students were disruptive as well as inattentive and unmotivated. Overall, the teachers voiced a seemingly resounding plea for parents to assist with the task of educating children.

Although Pat noted that parents might hold students accountable, she also described how challenging it was for some families in a low SES school:

You know the lack of education on the parents' side that doesn't allow them to help with homework and when the child's struggling and you really need them to have support at home but yet when they get home either mom...you know, I have people who work in fast food jobs and their job is mainly second shift so there is no adult there or they just don't have the economic...or knowledge to help their child....so homework is a big issue. [p. 11]

Pat understood that her families experienced difficulties, but she also knew that if homework was not completed, then it affected the work that got done in her classroom. It appeared that she struggled with her sense of compassion and that butted against her duty to instill students with measurable academic skills. Pat appeared to hold little power for this challenge because if the work had not been completed at home, then it would need to be addressed in the classroom, thus causing delay of skills sets that may need to be targeted. Jill, too, shared this struggle as she wanted to show compassion, but still hold students accountable for class work.

Pat provided some insight about the parents of English Language Learners (ELLs) and how difficult it was to assist them. She said that the language barrier is such that many of her students must act as translators when talking with parents. Even when translators were provided for parent-teacher interactions, it was not always the best result for teachers as Pat recounted an

incident about a Vietnamese translator whom she found out later, translated what he felt best for students.

Mr. Tran feels very conflicted during conferences. Although he wants to interpret what the teacher says, the good, the bad, and the concerns of the teacher, he also wants to protect the safety of the child. Depending on the family and his knowledge of their treatment toward children, he may choose to rephrase or ignore some of the teachers' comments. [Observation 3, March, 2011]

The translator made decisions about what should be translated, depending upon what he had observed about the family, so teachers and families that he translated for might run the risk of having a watered-down version of the intended conversation. This was also the case with Jill, and to an extent, Mary when she served as a translator. Jill found that she often had to use students to translate conversations with families. Mary, on the other hand, found herself assisting a parent of an ELL as somewhat of a translator as she assisted her during a parent-conference meeting. This might be noted as problematic when teachers in schools with high numbers of ELLs cannot easily and efficiently communicate with parents.

In another example, Pat shared a time when she assisted a family in receiving services to which students should be entitled, but may not receive. Pat told the family that their daughter could possibly receive more one-on-one services because she was close to meeting criteria for special education services. She told them:

She's good at math; do math every night. Do extra math. Ask for me and ask for math pages. I'll send you extra math. Work on the reading, it's good...work on math because you have to have that strong suit, you know. And I'm right out with them I say that "For her to get that special service, she has to shine in something and she already does shine some here and so you get her even stronger and you're going to get her services. So, I'm pretty straight up....maybe that's not legal, I don't know. But that's what I tell them. I go behind the system.[p. 12]

In this example, Pat pushes even more. Earlier, it was noted that Mary demonstrated similar ideas that helped garner services for a student, even though she went against what the principal had advised. These examples might offer more than relationship building, as it may tend toward

opening up “hidden” information to parents. She did this with the reality of possible repercussions when she said, “I go behind the system,” as she told them how to make the system work for their child. Pat was the privileged insider who guided parents toward using the system to their child’s advantage. She held the power to help parents who were not privy to the rules that might help them receive services for their child.

In her observation of one family, Pat recalled the challenges faced by one of her former students whose parents were in the midst of transitioning within a job¹⁷ between the school’s community and a school community about 60 miles away. She said that the parents were in a faith-based job that took much time and the child who was in her classroom had experienced some challenges and she questioned the parent’s dedication. She said:

Instead of putting God, first, then their family and then their job, they put God, job, family. I think they have it a little mixed up. When they have God first, then everything is in the right focus, you know. When you look at it through God...and maybe I’m not making much sense, then you see things in the right perspective but if you are looking through the mission and then out then you’re going to be a little askew. So I felt that they were putting the mission before their mandate from God to be good parents to the child. So I don’t believe that they were doing the child or their mission anything...[p. 20]

It was during this conversation with me, that she paused and checked herself as being, what she claimed, judgmental, something she had also done several times as reported in Chapter 3, within the blog. She said, “And slap your face Pat, grow up and knock that off; you know what I mean? I need the reality too.” Pat’s judgment about putting “God first” was something noted in her life story chapter where she talked, in depth, about the importance of her faith and her family. In this particular realization, she overrode the temptation to judge but admitted that she was doing so and that she would need to watch herself closer. I wondered if her observation about this family made her realize that she had judged these parents or if our conversation had led to that

¹⁷ The parents were involved in a faith-based profession that transferred them from one city to another in the midst of the school year.

realization. Pat, in her observations of parents, brought faith into observations. In thinking about her strong faith-based background, it might be considered that she struggled to maintain her obligations as a public school teacher and that of a person of faith. She admitted to struggling with the judgment of others who may not put God first. It might also be noted that Pat's Christian faith influenced her, as shown in Chapter 4.

Pat's sense of faith, once again, may have impacted how she connected with a parent whom she indicated had a similar belief and she talked about how she helped a parent by sharing some information related to faith.

I don't share my faith because I know that I can't but when I do know there is someone of like faith, and if we're currently studying about animals and it's just supposed to be the classification about animals. Now every single movie that we watch talks about evolution and coming from the faith that I come from, I don't believe in that...evolution. And I have Biblical reasons not to and scientific reasons not to. [p. 19]

She said that on a recent trip to the creationist museum in Kentucky, she had picked up some resources for her own children, as she knew they would be exposed to evolution in the public school classroom and she wanted them to have another view that promoted their family's religious beliefs. She indicated that she knew one of her student's mothers and believed she was of like faith and decided to offer some of the resources to her if she would like them, but she was quick to say that she did it after school time, claiming that, "...there is a line that I maintain." Her faith-based beliefs pushed her to assist a parent with what she said were like beliefs.

But she also indicated that would never share faith-based ideas with her students unless parents provided permission for her to do so when she said, "I will never talk about my faith in front of the children. If the children ask a specific questions I always say, 'If you have a note from your parents, I'll answer your questions. But other than that...you could probably guess where I come from.'" She indicated that she did once have a note from a student whose parents

asked her to tell that student something and she did, but she did not say more about that “something.”

It was curious that parents might ask a teacher to share faith information within a public school. It might make one wonder what led to that scenario where a teacher had that sort of request. It was just as curious to find Pat had observed that a parent might want videos providing Biblical explanations to particular events. She was well aware of the “fine line” between the public school policy and her faith, but she also recognized that parents might benefit from the ideas that she had to offer. Pat’s background and current way of living have been deeply dependent upon faith, as she reported. This might block her from acknowledging that there could be issues with her choices in what she provides to parents.

Pat showed many ways that she observed families and acted upon those observations. For example, she provided an opportunity for an evening family outing and she attempted to plan Friday night family gatherings at the school. She also arrived early in the mornings so that families might drop off their children for homework help or a place to stay if parents needed to work. But, like the other teachers, she tended toward deficit views when she indicated that, at times she felt like parents used her as a babysitter and her frustrations when there were no consequences in the home. Her background may have also influenced her observations in that she was raised in a household that continually intertwined family with community and helping others in need.

Discussion

The teachers depicted a range of observations regarding families. They reacted with care, sympathy and understanding. However, they also held many deficit views regarding the capability and willingness of families to assist their children. At times, it appeared that they

contradicted themselves as they provided that families were both helpful and unable to provide the academic and emotional support needed for their children to be successful in school. They shared many *parentally appropriate* examples as they provided reasons that parents were unable to assist but acknowledging that did not help them with their work. They did not, however, provide examples of *differentiated parenting* as they did not seemingly understand that parents might want the same for their children but they might provide their assistance in different ways. In that respect, teachers did not note families' funds of knowledge and that families bring resources (Heath, 1983; Moll, 1996). Teachers were also at a loss for how to address behavior and motivational challenges as they appeared to understand that those were family issues that might be best addressed at home. However, DeMarrais and LeCompte (1999) suggest that schools have a role in promoting social responsibility, serving as sites to find solutions for social problems as well as supplementing efforts of family and church to assist with building responsibility.

Change Agents

The teachers in this study, no doubt, care about their families and students. But, they also appear to show tendencies toward views that might undermine relationships with families. In this way, teachers might be disarmed of any power they may have to become change agents. Lasky (2005) indicated that a "person's sense of agency and his or her ability to act cannot be separated from the effects that mediational systems have on shaping him or her (p. 902)." Teachers do not act alone in schools. The mediational systems might be defined as the constraints, seeming or real, that keep them from their work. Teachers indicated that parents were too busy, too lazy, and had too many problems to help with what teachers identified as challenges in the classroom. Teachers said they understood that parents might be unable to assist in helpful ways such as with

homework or attendance issues because of family challenges. Those issues that neither the family nor the teacher could control, might leave teachers with the perception that they have less power and control in their classrooms to carry out their academic work. If students are not at school or do not return homework, teachers may scramble to provide them with help, but may not be equipped to do so in constructive ways as it may take extra time or focus on those students, thus they may lose power and control within their classrooms to assist all students. This loss might lead to reduced teacher agency, since they blame families instead of finding other ways to address the issues. Pat, to an extent, portrayed agency as she opened her classroom in the mornings to assist students with homework, but even then she may have found that she could not control attendance of all students who needed help with homework.

In another example, Bobby talked about a parent who told him, over the phone, to “fix” her child. However, the incident, which involved suggesting that a fourth-grade student only attend half days of school, might make one think that more than a phone call might be in order. The incident resulted in a standstill. Bobby still had the misbehaved student who disrupted learning, and communication with the parent seemed to be terminated. Had Bobby observed early on that the student had presented unacceptable classroom behaviors and had he attempted to work more closely with the parent or others who might assist, then the behaviors might have been quelled so that his time was not sapped by pleas to the remaining students to ignore students who were disruptive. He loses his power, thus agency to change classroom dynamics.

Just as with Bobby, Dana’s observations may have led her to feelings that she held less power and control as she was not able to control outside factors that students often brought into the classroom. She observed students who had family responsibilities that may have kept them from pursuing extracurricular activities; activities that might help them build added knowledge

about the outside world as well as social capital that may benefit them. She also reported that students missed school to assist with home challenges or they did not have rides because families were working or sleeping. Even though she indicated a need to build relationships with families and was willing to make efforts to do so, a multitude of outside factors related to parents reflected on what students brought to the classroom and the control or lack of control that she had over those issues.

Mary lived and worked in the community and she demonstrated ways in which she helped families and wanted the best for them. Her observations portrayed how families were foremost in her mind and she wanted to help them but she also realized that some families did not value their children, thus insinuating a deficit view that some children did not get the help that they needed. Just as Bobby and Dana had noticed, families were often times absent from the lives of their children which made it difficult for children to complete assignments and attend to class work, a topic focused on in the following chapter. Mary, too, may have experienced a lack of power and control in her classroom as absent parents could not help with issues that arose. This, too, might lead to an absence of agency as Mary had seemingly little control over the completion of homework. Some students may be ready for the lesson while others, who had not completed the homework, might be lost.

Jill, like Mary and Dana, appeared to want the best for families and students but her observations about families gleaned that they needed assistance in the form of a “mom,” a role that she was willing to undertake. In essence, Jill had little or no assistance that led to power and control in her classroom. She, like Bobby, Dana, and Mary, observed that many parents, for the most part, were unavailable to help their children with the basics such as providing supervision, homework assistance and general advocacy skills. Even when parents were available, other

challenges such as lack of translators prevented them from having serious conversations. This too, led to a seeming lack of control, thus little teacher agency in controlling the conversations.

Pat showed through her reporting, some power and control, thus a sense of agency by first observing close details about families and then attempting to provide assistance to them. She did this in several ways. First, she worked with families to assist them in obtaining the services for their children to which they were entitled, even if it meant that it might not be “legal.” She planned an after-school activity at the local cinema and she provided early morning tutoring to children whose parents could drop them off. She also observed a parent who might be interested in faith-based videotapes and shared those. In these ways, it might be noted that Pat showed a tendency toward power in terms of working with families.

But she also might be seen as feeling as if she had little or no power in the other circumstances. For example, although she was able to plan an after-school excursion, her quest to provide a weekly family get together at school was “shot down” by a colleague who stated that it interfered with her own family, thus setting boundaries. Her work with a translator was another area in which she found that control was difficult as the translator interpreted in ways in which he thought might be best for families. Although she provided an early-morning open-door policy allowing students to arrive early, there may have been some students who were unable to take advantage of it. She, like her colleagues, also observed that parents were not always available to assist in the ways that might be most helpful for students.

It also might be noted that Bobby, Dana, and Pat made comments about the work in their schools that allowed for parents not to scrutinize the work that was taking place there. Bobby joking mentioned that he wouldn’t want too many parents in the classroom while Dana said that she thought that other teachers might not want too many parents around to “question” the work

that went on in classrooms. And, Pat said she would not want parents “breathing down my neck,” as she indicated that teachers experience that in more affluent schools. This might be an indication that they prefer not to work in schools where parents were so involved that it made their jobs more difficult. Or it might reflect that they might want to cover up the challenges that they experience in the classroom. The next chapter will focus on some of those challenges.

Backgrounds

Teachers’ backgrounds appeared to influence some of their work. Bobby shared that students’ “normal” was different from the “normal” experienced within his white, middle-class expectations and he also could not understand why there was not more parental involvement in his school, as he recalled the involvement when he was in school. Dana admitted that she did not have to raise siblings, so found it difficult to understand that parents worked shifts that interfered with family life. She also could not understand the lack of motivation displayed by her students as she had always sought good grades for her own parents. Mary’s insistence with a parent regarding classroom issues surrounding diversity may have been influenced by the angst that she felt when her grandfather did not accept her marriage to a man from a race that differed from hers and the idea that she knew first-hand, the struggles that her children might face from being of mixed races. Jill’s stance on giving so much to her students may have been influenced by the idea that she had been give much and was expected to give back, something that was promoted within her Christian faith. She observed families’ plights and was there to help them. Pat’s background experiences consisted of intertwining family and community as she grew up. This, along with her strong Christian beliefs, may have influenced the care that she sought for families. These examples might be difficult to discount as we noted how they entered into teachers’ work. The examples might also provide an indication of the strong differences between the teachers’

and families' backgrounds. It might be noted that even after teaching a number of years in their schools as well as continued training through professional development and college courses, their responses continue to indicate views toward families that might not be helpful to them in their work, thus affecting their sense of agency.

Final Thoughts

Families are an important part of education and want to be more involved in their children's education (Lareau, 2000), so it might make sense to assist them with resources needed to involve them within the school. Most of the teachers observed the important role that families might play, but they did not necessarily have the knowledge or tools available to promote relationships. This lack of contact and understanding may have promoted a lack of power and control in their classrooms thus providing for limited teacher agency. Instead, teachers fell to blaming families, but in ways that projected sympathy. Teachers, for a variety of reasons, found it difficult to make positive connections with parents especially when it was needed to assist with classroom challenges. However, teachers might be empowered to realize that they do have power and control, but they may need assistance in obtaining it. For example, families need to feel welcomed into and supported by schools. Teachers first might benefit from professional development and education classes with embedded assignments that require work with families in ways that might enhance classroom instruction. Teachers also need to have support of administrators who can provide for rich, meaningful conversations and work between teachers and families. More of this discussion will be provided in the final chapter. The next chapter provides a view of teachers' observations of students.

CHAPTER SIX

Teachers and Students: Shades of Noticing

I understand everything you're telling me in this is what we're dealing with....that part I get and I'm ok with. But you're not telling me what I need to do in my room to help them; you know---besides supplying them with pencils and the backpacks. We can do that to help out but how do I get a kid who---they don't know whether they are going to be in this house one month or the next. If they are taking on stresses of an adult, how do I get them to focus on solving slope intercept form? (Dana)

The preceding chapter focused on what teachers observed about families and how they addressed those observations, if at all. This chapter pays attention to what teachers observed about students and how they acted or did not upon their observations. I begin with a brief discussion about teachers' and noticing from multiple perspectives. I then examine what it might take to build classroom community and the obstacles that might prevent a community from being created. Culturally focused pedagogies are presented as a consideration for teachers, some of whom exhibit aspects of that as they discuss the basics, motivation and relationships, cultural observations and funds of knowledge, and faith and religion within their work

Noticing from Multiple Perspectives

Teachers who work in low socioeconomic communities might encounter pronouncedly different situations from their peers in more affluent schools as these students and their schools may differ in both home and school resources. In low-income schools, there are more linguistically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse students. Within their classes, teachers may find an eclectic group of language learners and they may also work with social challenges such as those identified in Chapter 5, where many students reportedly arrived to school hungry, tired, and with cultural differences that teachers might identify as hindering classroom work. In order for teachers to assist the diverse groups of students, it might be imperative that they first intentionally notice their students' needs before they begin to address the issues. Noticing,

according to Schoenfeld (2011) becomes *consequential when it is acted upon* (p.230). However those actions may not happen if teachers do not *see* what it is they must do to foster academics. This study is built upon van Es and Sherin's (2002) aspect of noticing, however the idea of noticing is related to and built from Goodwin's (1994) professional vision. This view of professional vision, according to Lefstein and Snell (2011) is not a "singular, cognitive ability. Rather, we find it more productive to think in terms of plural, competing professional visions, which as social practices of seeing involve social skills and sensitivities alongside dispositions to notice and capacities to reason." Should teachers hold plural, competing visions, those visions might be influenced by their personal identities.

Creating Classroom Community

In order to understand the work that teachers do with students, it is important to understand what teachers notice about school culture, which is characterized by Bruner (1996) as "creating communities of learners" (p. 84). Schools might be recognized as places in which teachers build a thriving community where collaboration, respect for one another, and learning takes place. But in low-income communities, that task might appear more difficult as Burner indicated that, "racism, social-class entitlements, and prejudice, all of them amplified by the forms of poverty they create, have powerful effects on how much and how we educate the young" (p. 26). Children may attend schools in communities where they may be living in ways exacerbated by poverty. Although some teachers may attempt to view education as an equalizer and think that students may have choices for their lives' path, it can be unsettling for teachers to realize how poverty plays out in school in terms of how resources that children have access to differ from children's resources in more affluent settings, or how those settings differ so much from the settings in which the teachers were educated. Teachers might recognize the need to

respect student culture and value what students bring to classrooms, but they may also recognize the difficulty in building on what students bring. The teachers who participated in this study were in their seventh course leading toward ESL certification, and as this chapter will demonstrate, they were seemingly confounded about how to work with students from diverse racial, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Although they were exposed to culturally responsive measures in this course, and assuming the same within the other ESL courses, in this chapter we will see that they experienced difficulty making connections in how they viewed students, their relationships with them, and their ideas about the funds of knowledge that students brought. It might also be pointed out that their backgrounds, in particular faith and religion, may have played a role in influencing their views and ideas about teaching in diverse settings.

Culturally Focused Pedagogies

Throughout the last two decades culturally responsive pedagogies (Irvine, 2001, 1992; Drucker, 2003; Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and culturally relevant pedagogies (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 1995) have become recognized as important to teachers' work and they are therefore a key perspective for understanding what teachers notice. Gay describes the term *culturally responsive* as a way that teachers take into consideration the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of diverse students in their classrooms as they plan and operationalize their classes. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that *culturally relevant* pedagogy requires a way of teaching that is necessary for academic success of African American and other children who have not been served well by public schools. This might include (1) providing attention to African American males with social power (2) using students' culture to promote learning (3) honoring students' home languages as they acquire a new language (4) providing individual attention to students (5) creating a community of learners and (6) promoting

collaboration between students. Teachers in K-12 classrooms as well as in teacher preparation programs are provided training to assist them with understanding culturally focused instruction. Training might be conducted through professional development as well as within planned courses that pre-service and in-service teachers must take in order to receive teaching certification or specialized credentials. While this information might provide teachers with some assistance in diverse settings, it may sometimes not be enough to provide this list to teachers as they may require more specific examples as well as opportunities to attempt new ideas and reflect upon them with colleagues who are doing the same.

Sleeter (2012) argues that culturally responsive pedagogy is simplified and identifies four areas of simplifications to include cultural celebration, trivialization, essentializing culture, and substituting cultural for political analysis of inequalities. I will show how some of the teachers in this study appear to have experienced the first three of these areas. Sleeter describes cultural celebration as sitting at the “margin of instruction” and disconnected from academic learning hence, Sleeter maintains that, “learning ‘about’ culture then substitutes for learning to teach challenging academic knowledge and skills through the cultural processes and knowledge students bring to school with them” (p. 8). In describing trivialization, Sleeter maintains that the information provided in culturally relevant instruction is reduced to “steps” rather than seeing it as a model for teaching and learning. Essentializing, according to Sleeter, assumes that culture is a “*fixed* characteristic of individuals who belong to a group” and who may be identified solely from the country or race from which they have come. If cultural pedagogies are not presented in ways that teachers can integrate them into their repertoire of strategies then teachers, indeed, might find it difficult to teach in ways envisioned by researchers promoting culturally focused methods.

Basics

When examining culturally relevant pedagogy, one of the tenets Ladson-Billings (1995) promotes is use of students' home culture to support learning so examining what teachers notice about this might be important to understanding how they view their work. The culture that students bring might include various languages or practices that teachers find difficult to integrate. For example, if the family culture relates to poverty then there might be particular ramifications of poverty that teachers may not easily address. The teachers in this study focused on 'basics' that students brought to school. For example, basics might include observations about students who arrive at school without proper nutrition as well as the needed tools for learning such as pencils, paper, and other needed items. Some of the other challenges might include sporadic attendance and transiency, taking care of parents, sickness and depression, and ways of behaving that made it difficult for other learners in the classroom. Those issues might be entrenched within families who do not have the resources to maintain stability. For example, transiency might be common for children whose life is disrupted by moves such as for migrant workers who move to find work in warmer climates during the school year. Moving might also be promoted by unstable situations within low-income communities.

In 2009, 45% of renters or owners with children had one of three housing problems: inadequate housing, crowded housing, or cost of housing (America's Children Key National Indicators of Well Being, 2011). Those issues might provide situations that are not always conducive to the expectations placed on children and their families by schools and their teachers such as expectations for homework or attendance. Other socioeconomic-related issues might also include emotional and behavioral difficulties exhibited by some students. In 2009, 8% of children living below the poverty level and 7% of children in families with incomes 100-199 percent of the poverty level had serious emotional or behavioral difficulties compared with 4%

of children within families with incomes of 200% or more of the poverty level (Indicators of Well Being, 2011). So, teachers in low income schools with high numbers of students receiving free or reduced lunch may be nearly four times more likely to work with students who have emotional and behavioral issues. These are tangible challenges that are not necessarily covered within the culturally focused pedagogies. Though teachers might be keen to the examples provided by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2002), they may not wield the power to address some challenges stimulated by poverty. Members of a group called *Broader, Bolder Approach to Education* (Edweek, March 7, 2012) have recognized the challenges faced by teachers in low-income schools and maintain that schools, by themselves, cannot eliminate the effects of poverty. The group has called for a more inclusive strategy within schools to work with health, housing, parent and after-school programs to meet some of the challenges (Edweek 3/7/12).

This study's teachers worked in low-socioeconomic schools. Teaching in low-socioeconomic schools might prompt some teachers toward assisting students beyond what culturally responsive instruction calls for in terms of knowing their students and creating a community of learners. In some cases, teachers may assist in untangling the implicit *rules* (Eisner, 1985) to make those rules more explicit. Not only might they know their students well but they may assist them with social or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that might allow them an academic advantage. This may also be viewed as teachers assist with uncovering the nuances of the implicit curriculum. In describing the implicit curriculum, Eisner (1985) provides examples of how children conform or are expected to conform to classroom and school decisions. Those who become savvy about how to take tests and follow the classroom rules quickly learn that it pays off. Those who do not learn rules of the implicit curriculum may struggle to adhere to the system's rules and run the risk of failing or dropping out. This might be

evident in terms of the number of high school dropouts, especially in low SES and racially- and ethnically-diverse schools.

Through observing students closely and acting in ways to support them, teachers may not only show care about students and their families, but that they may want their students to be privy to the seemingly hidden opportunities that might be availed to them. For example, this might be shown in the form of explaining to and showing students the expected ways of discourse in the dominant society such as learning the mechanics of writing. It might be seen through a teacher's prompting and guidance toward figuring out an educational path after high school. It might show as teachers build close relationships with students and, thus, know their strengths and weaknesses and use that information as they provide instruction.

Motivation and Relationships

Another important aspect of noticing is the way teachers view student motivation. We will see that some teachers maintained that their students were lazy but others provided reasons for lack of motivation mostly stemming from outside factors over which students did not always have control. Some of the teachers also worked to build close relationships with their students. Anyon (1981), in her work in a low-income school, found that student resistance to school work was present and indicated that "sustained conceptual or 'academic' knowledge has only occasional, symbolic presence here." Students presented both active and passive resistance to teachers who tried to teach the curriculum (Anyon, 1981). When asked about why students misbehaved, Anyon reported that students wanted teachers to "Teach us some more"; "Take us alone and help us"; "Help us learn." It might be clear from these comments that some teachers in Anyon's work were not aware of children as individuals and what might motivate them, which might have been apparent had relationships been fostered. Nel Noddings' (1984) work on care

might also be considered as a way in which teachers did or did not show care toward their students which, if instituted, might assist them in building relationships. But care may also be taken too far, according to Noddings, when the one providing the care oversteps bounds that may discourage independence of the person being cared for in the situation.

As noted in this chapter, some of the teachers appeared to observe strengths through funds of knowledge (Moll et al, 2001) that students brought to school. Gay (2002) and Ladson-Billings (1995) also maintain the importance of knowing the culture that students bring to classrooms as a measure of cultural awareness. These funds of knowledge (Moll, 2001) may not only include knowledge based on cultural and linguistic resources but also the resources brought by students from low socioeconomic communities especially in terms of literacy (Purcell-Gates, 1997). For example, some of the teachers in Purcell-Gates' study could not see past stereotypes about their students and families thus, did not consider that students brought their own understandings of literacy such as how to read a bus schedule or a television guide or ability to create grocery lists. Moll et al. (2001) noted in their household research that teachers began to recognize the richness of experiences that students brought such as the experiences they had in traveling between Mexico and the United States and the amount of time that they spent in Mexico that might bring a different slant to classroom discussions and other work. In noticing and attending to students' vast resources that they bring to the classroom, teachers might very well assist students in connecting to and engaging in the curriculum. Although students might bring rich resources from their families they also tote challenges into classrooms fueled by living under low socioeconomic conditions.

However, we will see that in this chapter that the ways in which teachers in this study used students' funds of knowledge may not necessarily be the intended usage as put forth by

researchers. Although teachers might take into account those funds, they also placed expectations on families. Lareau (2000) points out that teachers have expectations of parents, which include reading to their children, reinforcing the curriculum, and responding to teachers' requests. Lareau indicated that teachers also want parents to respect their professional expertise. These expectations might be in conflict with the cultural understandings in diverse and, particularly, diverse low-income schools where teachers may observe the cultural funds but not know how to use them in ways to academically benefit students. Thus, teachers may be inclined to blame parents for not doing their jobs even though they may understand that parents might have more pressing challenges to work out.

Faith and Religion

Teachers' backgrounds, such as their faith and religion, may be another influence on teachers' noticing. I will show how, in this study, teachers shared ideas about the role that faith played in their work. For some it provided solace when the teaching practice had not progressed, as they thought it should. For others, it was an all-encompassing part of their lives as they were active in their faith and tied it to their work. It may not be surprising that these teachers brought faith, in some form, to the classroom as all of them had indicated within their life stories that they attended a faith-based institution at some time in their lives which might be considered as part of their identities. Although a review of the literature by Akkerman & Meijer (2010), citing Beijaard et al. (2004), maintains that there is not a clear definition for professional identity Akkerman & Meijer argue for "elaboration on the conceptualization of identity so that the concept does not only intuitively make sense, but also informs our way of studying and describing teachers and their development" (p. 10). In examining identity and its connection to teacher education, Fairbanks, et al. (2010) examined why some teachers were more thoughtful

than others and pointed out four perspectives to explain that idea. In examining identity, it was noted that, “identities are learned but not static; people improvise within events in ways that are novel or uncharacteristic and identities are practiced, revised, and resisted in specific contexts, such as schools” (Fairbanks et al., 2010; Holland et al., 1998). Further, Fairbanks et al. (2010) indicated that teachers use their identities each day as they position themselves in a variety of roles such as taking on advocacy roles, authority roles and class assessors as a few examples. (p. 166). This might be the case for the teachers in this study who participated in various rituals or practices, in particular, related to their faith. Geertz (1973) grappled with the role that religion played in shaping culture and he defines culture in that “...it denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by knowledge and attitudes toward life.” If faith has possibly been engrained into the fabric of a teacher’s identity, then it might be said that religion might, indeed, begin to shape communities and school culture within that community by those who have the authority to do so.

Five Teachers’ Views of Students

In this chapter, I focus on five teachers and their reported observations regarding *students*. This chapter differs in structure from the previous chapter as I present general observations coupled with how, or if, teachers responded to the observations and I provide themes within each of the cases to include the *basics*, *motivation* and *relationships*, *cultural observations* and *funds of knowledge*, and *religion* and *faith*. I use the term *basics* to indicate how teachers view what students bring to classrooms in terms of basic needs and social skills that might assist in building classroom cohesiveness. *Motivation and relationships* offers teachers’ views of students as well as their own efforts within those areas. I also provide teachers’ reports on *cultural observations* as well as how they recognize *funds of knowledge* that

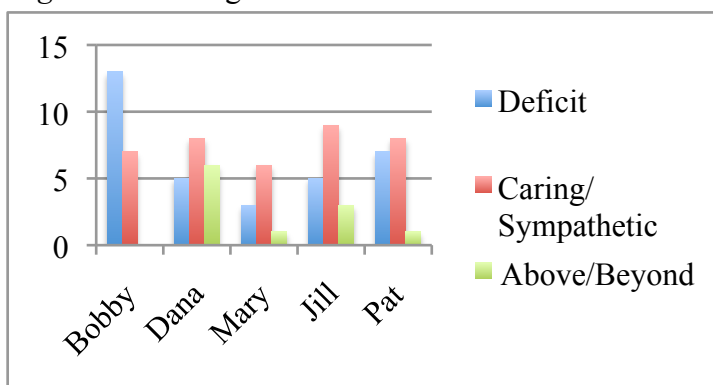
connect them to their work (Moll, 1996; Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 2001). The last area, *religion and faith*, provides a view of how teachers use faith to assist them in their work and how religion might be seen as a conundrum for some teachers who try to balance their religious beliefs with their work in public schools.

I continue with Bobby, Dana, Mary, Jill, and Pat as I provide evidence that demonstrates their reported and various shades of observations and how they addressed those observations. The teachers' cases are based on voluntary responses to the general interview questions posed (Appendix D) and additional evidence that was provided by course artifacts. I organize my discussion into cases and provide themes throughout the cases. Those themes indicate the kinds of observations made as well as how teachers did or did not address the observations. In the final section, I focus on the multiple dimensions of teacher noticing as I examine how the teachers observed the basics that students brought to the classroom. I also indicate how the teachers' backgrounds may have played a role in what they observed. I end the chapter with some final thoughts regarding the findings for this chapter.

To begin, I provide a general view of teacher noticings and actions (Figure 5). Just as in the previous chapter, I group their observations using the terms *deficit*, *care/sympathy*, and *above and beyond*, except in this chapter, the focus is on students. I used the same procedure as in Chapter 5 as I counted data from all artifacts that included teachers' views and actions with students. I included words or short phrases that indicated either a deficit, care/sympathy or above and beyond response. Examples of deficit views include teachers' comments about how students come to school hungry, with behavioral challenges, and do not bring knowledge. Care and sympathy denotes views where teachers see the value in what students bring and when they observe particular student challenges, they attempt to address them in ways most beneficial for

students. Teachers who went above and beyond, provided ideas or actions that went beyond what might be expected of their teaching duties. For example, a teacher who observed and addressed behavioral changes in students may have done so beyond expectations. Another teacher who offered wake up calls and rides to school may also have gone above and beyond, but not necessarily in a positive way.

Figure 5 Noticing and Actions



Bobby

Noticing and Classroom Connections. As a 4th grade teacher in the Tremont district for the past five years, Bobby observed and described his work in a low socioeconomic school. In this chapter, I show how he presented a similar deficit view of students as noted of parents in Chapter 5, but he also projected a caring view (Figure 5).

The Basics. In building a classroom community, teachers might expect that students arrive at school ready to become active members of that community. This might include students having *basic* needs met as well as social skills that might contribute to an orderly and respectful learning community. The teachers' expectations might vary greatly as compared with what they observed.

Bobby described the ambiance in his classroom, as "very talkative." Students in his class showed little respect for each other as well as teachers and other adults and he added, "...many

times I hear and have said to myself why do these kids act the way they do, don't they know any better?" Bobby did not blame children but instead, as we learned from the previous chapter, he blamed parents and indicated that students behave the way they do because "It's their normal." In blaming parents, he did not appear to take time to consider the circumstances that families might face, thus in expressing it was "their normal," as he did not look beyond at what they might have to offer nor did he express ways in which he tried to understand or assist families. Certainly his observations did not lead to culturally responsive measures such as cultivating affirming attitudes (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), examining and considering cultural characteristics (Gay, 2000) and focusing on what teachers might do to facilitate instruction for all students. Bobby shared his judgments about families and students, one of the areas that Compton-Lily (2009) recognizes that teachers need to monitor.

Bobby indicated that he provided students with examples of normal expectations for behavior but he did not share, at this point, the ways in which he might help them to adhere to those expectations. In this comment, Bobby appeared to be confounded by the behavior, something that he had learned as a child when it was instilled within him to respect authority. He talked about another student he had observed on the playground before she was assigned to him and he indicated she was a "pistol" and lamented, "Oh man, I hope I don't get her." Yet, she did become a student in his class and he indicated that she was one of his best students because she had a "concerned mother" who put her on medication.

The student he was concerned about having in class became one of his best students. According to Bobby, she was on medication and had a *concerned* mother. Bobby did not appear to note the positive attributes of the student, only to say that she was better once on medication. The idea that he did not investigate what the child brought in terms of knowledge or other

culturally-focused capital might shed some light on how Bobby thought about the ways his classroom might be structured and the ways that students might be taught (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll et al., 2001). In Chapter 5, I indicated that Bobby had referred to another parent who did not follow through on medication, therefore making her an unconcerned parent. The fact that he saw such a change in this student because of medication may have instilled the idea that medication might be the best solution for fidgety, unsettled students and that it was the parents' responsibility to seek medical help for their children. He did not mention alternatives to medication that might have assisted the child in her work such as lessons that he might provide to encourage engagement. Another point was that he had already targeted this "pistol" on the playground, thus setting himself up for negative views toward the student. In this way, his judgments of this student coupled with the seeming lack of knowledge about culturally responsive measures may have clouded his vision of what the student might accomplish (Compton-Lily, 2009; Gay, 2002).

Teaching in a diverse school was not easy, indicated Bobby, "They don't teach you how to teach in college, they teach you subject matter." Although Bobby did not explain, he may have been referring to cultural differences and behavioral challenges that he was not prepared to handle even though he was in his fifth teaching year. He recalled his first year of teaching when he had 19 students and "they were a good bunch of kids." He claimed that having such a good class may have spoiled him as the following year he found there were five or six students who were not so cooperative. "I needed an octagon (shaped room) so that I could put eight kids in the corner" (Life History, p. 11). Bobby credits a lower class size that may have assisted him when he began his first year of teaching as he called them "a good bunch of kids." That smaller number may have assisted him with observing the children in a different light and perhaps

having the ability to act upon his observations. In terms of having an eight-sided room, one might question the techniques that Bobby used when he addressed student behavior that might not allow for building a strong community of learners, one of the tenets of culturally relevant instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Bobby indicated that at times he had to monitor his actions toward his students as he stated “your human nature comes forward” (p.6) and he noted that he made a conscious effort not to be so hard on particular students and, at times, told them they were doing a good job. Bobby did not share particular stories about particular students and the work they performed. Instead, he observed the missing *basics* of certain students.

Bobby shared another way in which he attempted to control his classroom and indicated that there were two students in the classroom who were having difficulties:

...well there's two right now...but the main one I isolate and put him in the back of the room where he's not around other students. He's extremely hyperactive and very attention deficit disorder; ADHD-extremely. [p.2]

This is the same student that he had referred to in Chapter 5, where he noted that the child's mother was not cooperative in trying to attain medication for the child. He faulted the boy's mother for not following through on obtaining medication for him. Bobby grasped for solutions that might allow him to regain classroom control and he indicated that when he disrupted class, he called the boy's mother to pick him up because of the distraction to his classmates:

I'm very blunt with them. I say, "The more you pay attention to Kurt, the more he's going to keep doing what he's doing and it's going to cost you learning." The other 4th grade teacher will take away recesses for behavior. I never want to take away a recess--to me they need to go outside. They need to run around. I do use a check system. If they get three checks---then there's usually a consequence. I'll call a parent---usually if the child is disrupting so much I will call a parent and they will tell the parent on the phone what they have done and why they're in trouble. That way it's coming from the student as opposed from me and the parent is aware of what's going on. [p 2]

The child that Bobby referred to appeared to hold the class, including the teacher, hostage. Bobby observed the challenges, but only provided one solution—the child had to leave. Although he did not indicate the number of times that this had happened, it appeared he was frustrated by the situation and was not certain about how to react to it. He pled with the other students to ignore the child, thus possibly negating his authority as a teacher in their eyes. Bobby's techniques might indicate that he, as the authority, used a technique that drew the class apart from one another, thus thwarting any efforts to build a community of learners, another culturally relevant tenet (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This situation may also reflect the challenges cited by the Indicators of Well Being Report (2011) where more students are in need of assistance for behavioral or emotional support in high poverty schools. This scenario might indicate a need for more enhanced training and resources for teachers who might work in these schools.

Bobby also shared that the students in his class, at the time of this interview, were rude and that they interrupted as others attempted to talk. Bobby noted this as a distraction instead of digging deeper into what students were talking about and then using that as a way to connect it to classroom lessons and activities. Students may bring a wealth of knowledge to the classroom such as the experiences they bring from home with the family and had Bobby understood and been able to apply culturally relevant teaching methods such as providing individual attention to students and attempt to create a community of learners, he may have created a different learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll, et al., 2001). He recalled that his students were always “in other people’s business” (p. 7) and that “There’s no self-responsibility in their actions” (p. 7). He indicated that their lack of respect for teachers in words and deeds was palpable and recalled his own time as a child in classrooms:

...if I'd said that to one of my teachers when I was a kid, you'd better duck. I know that we can't use horrible punishment, but a lot of times our hands are tied. You know you can sit there and get in a child's face about how he's not showing respect or the rudeness...they are so rude. They'll just come in and they will just cut in front of anybody...they'll sit there and if I'm talking to another student, they'll butt in and start talking. Not even think twice. [p. 7]

Bobby appeared surprised at the behavior of his students. Even though he had worked in the school district for 12 years as a custodian and the last five years as a teacher, he failed to understand their behavior or how to address it. I refer back to his life history where he recalled the expectations held for him and other children as he grew up. Children were taught to respect all adult authority and behave in ways that were expected. Perhaps he has found it difficult to instill order with this group of students because his expectations have revolved around those ideas from childhood and his own experiences, as he recalled "...If I'd said that to one of my teachers when I was a kid, you'd better duck." He also maintained that he could not use a "horrible punishment" and although he had not indicated what that might be, it was possibly something he had experienced in school. Bobby's earlier experiences as a student where he learned strict obedience toward teachers may be so engrained into his own identity as he positioned himself in the role of authority as cited by Fairbanks et al. (2010) and used his knowledge from an apprenticeship of observation stance (Lortie, 1976). It also might be pointed out that student lack of respect was not just on the part of students as Bobby's actions may be just as inconsiderate, "you can sit there and get in a child's face." It appeared that he observed many negative qualities about children but held uncertainty about the best ways to handle those situations and it may be that students did not connect enough with Bobby through relationship building, thus projecting an active and passive resistance (Anyon, 1981) as Bobby attempted to teach them.

Classroom ambiance continued to change each year, according to Bobby, as the district had many transient students and he noted that his current class dynamics had changed:

And the two move ins that moved in brought drama with them. They didn't add to the positives of the class. They've added more to the negative side of the class. So, I would say that's how it changes. Early in the year...it does somewhat. Unfortunately we have to use reward systems just to get expected behavior out of them. [p. 2]

Bobby observed how the classroom dynamics changed and indicated “we” used reward systems. He did not explain the system but said they were “unfortunately” used leading to the idea that bargaining with students was not a good idea. His expectations might be such that children enter a new setting ready to carry on the work, but the *drama* they brought might reflect their insecurities or angst about joining into a new setting. Bobby observed the surface facts about these students but did not appear to dig deeper into why the students have “brought drama” or how to assist them. Certainly, the view of students who brought drama might push Bobby from making decisions that might assimilate them into the classroom community. Perhaps Bobby’s behavioral expectations for students had kept him from really knowing them. He noticed the “drama” and, as indicated in the life history chapter, Bobby had been raised to understand that children should obey adults no matter the circumstance. Possibly, he could not see beyond that expectation, could not recognize, attend to, and build upon the qualities that these students had brought with them. However, if Bobby were to create a culturally focused learning space, he might consider using these students’ culture for learning and encourage collaboration between students with a focus on lesson objectives that would hold accountability for all students (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Motivation & Relationships. Bobby shared little about the motivation of his students except that they complained about the required work in class “...they want things done for them. They don’t have to want to have to work for it” (p. 1). Bobby observed students in his class

whom he said were lazy and not intimidated by consequences. The lack of motivation, however, might also be tied into the decisions he made regarding classroom behavior, as the behavior appeared overwhelming to him. The students' behaviors might indicate the resistance toward Bobby's reported attempts toward instruction (Anyon, 1981). As I did not observe in his classroom, I wondered about the content and the pedagogical means that he used to deliver that content and the role that may have played.

Bobby shared that he attempted to build classroom relationships with his students and indicated that, "I try to put my arm around them. I shake all my kids' hands when they come in, in the morning and I give them a high five on the Fridays when they leave and umm...but I just ask them, individually, how they're doing (p. 6)." This was the only way that he mentioned his attempts to build community with his students---shaking hands and "high fives" on Fridays. This might be seen as a, quick-fix approach to work with students in diverse classrooms. He made no comments about knowing his students in ways that would foster relationships, although he recalled the negative energy that students brought to the classroom, which might have prevented him from making more positive connections. Bobby's idea of building relationships appeared to be surface activities that did not involve building a trust relationship with his students. Deeper, more meaningful relationships may have been fostered had Bobby been provided ways in which to do this such as talking one-on-one with students and finding ways to connect to students through their parents. Instead, he judged parents since they provided their "normal" to their children and Bobby had to deal with it. Purcell-Gates (1995) relates that judgments of deficiency or dysfunction are "...made by educators who cannot or will not, step out of their ethnocentric world to attempt to see their students from another perspective" (p. 186). Lareau (2000) found in her work, that not only did teachers in the working class community of Colton resist working

with parents, but that parents deferred to teachers in making decisions about what was best for their children as they recognized them as professionals who could make the best decisions.

Bobby's projected stance appeared to blame the classroom challenges on students and families because that was their "normal" and it conflicted with classroom expectations.

Cultural Observations & Funds of Knowledge. In terms of student connections with the curriculum, Bobby shared concerns about how students' lack of prior knowledge impacted his classroom work. He pointed out that many students could not relate with classroom stories because they had no experiences that helped them make connections with the curriculum that he had to teach. This might reflect Bobby's lack of knowledge about how to recognize the funds of knowledge brought by students and assist them in making connections between the funds and school tasks (Moll, 1996). Instead of viewing students from a value stance indicating that they brought a wealth of knowledge and resources, he appeared almost as an outsider, viewing the skills that students lacked in order to progress. Bobby found that instruction was particularly difficult with English Language Learners, "...it's just that they don't get a chance to experience a lot of things" (p. 9). Bobby noticed that ELL students, in particular, did not bring funds of knowledge that might enhance their work or, again, he did not recognize how to mine those funds. Instead, he noted that they did not have opportunities or he discounted what they did have to offer. He had not described ways in which he assisted students to connect to the curriculum, using their own wealth of experiences. It might be that Bobby clearly understood that students did not have resources for school-expected curriculum, although he did not provide a deeper evaluation of how he might use the existing knowledge that students do bring to school. It may be possible that Bobby essentialized his students' culture, lumping them in together and not considering individual needs (Sleeter, 2012). Bobby might have better results if he were to find

out more about his individual students' lives such as in viewing positive portraits of households who provide a "great potential utility for classroom instruction" (Moll, 2001). Those views might help him to understand the best ways to connect their home knowledge with school knowledge.

Bobby noted changes in diversity within his district from the time he had begun working there as a custodian in 1994. He admitted that working with diverse student populations was the "one thing" that he really had to learn and admitted that college courses for his ESL certification assisted him. Although he had one class in his undergraduate training, he said there should be more than that, noting that student teachers in his building seem to struggle with teaching students in his school:

They're mostly white and mostly come from white, middle class. And I see the frustration when they come in not understanding because they grew up in an environment much like myself when an adult told you no not do this or asked you to do something, you did it and you were expected to do it. Well, not so with these kids. I think that's the biggest hindrance is not understanding their cultural background. [p. 2-3]

In this comment, Bobby noted how student teachers were frustrated by students' "cultural backgrounds." He did not elaborate on what that meant, specifically, as it appeared that it could also be intertwined with behavior. It might be noted that he used "culture" to denote not only race and ethnicity but also the culture of behavior that students brought to the classroom and the mismatch of that with the perceived expected norms of the student teachers and himself. Bobby also spoke about students' culture, as related to the race or ethnicity of students as he indicated that the students in his classroom seem to get along and "accept each other's culture" (p. 15).

It doesn't matter what type of student comes to my classroom now...they are so used to being in a culturally diverse situation in their neighborhood, in their school, in their churches that it's not a problem for them. It's not a problem. I don't see kids making fun of each other because of their cultural beliefs. [p.15]

His time in the district has allowed him opportunities to view changes, albeit, only during the last five years within the classroom. This change has been typical of many districts as the linguistic,

culture, and socioeconomic composition has and is constantly in flux as indicated by Verplaetse & Migliaccio (2008) who point out the rapid change in student demographics around the country. Bobby observed the differences in cultures, but did not talk about how he might integrate students' cultures into the classroom. He provided the first step in observing that students bring culture to their communities and to school, but he did not reportedly use those rich observations to enhance classroom work.

Bobby claimed that his "eyes were so opened" after taking classes for his ESL certification. In one class, he had to study cultural backgrounds and his group chose to focus on the Vietnamese culture. That is when he first discovered that students from this culture might behave in ways contrary to teachers' expectations. For example,

...when they're getting in trouble they smile. Well that's counterintuitive to us. When we were kids, if we had someone getting in our face and we were smiling at them, oh my goodness, you're going to be in a whole lot more trouble and it's not a disrespectful thing, that's the way they are. And that was the biggest thing for me was learning the cultures and understanding how to teach them through their cultural background.
[Bobby, *Life History*, p. 3]

Bobby admitted that classes had been helpful to him, but it appeared that they were only helpful in allowing him to know cultural attributes. He also focused on behavior in this example more than he focused on how students might learn. What he appeared to miss was information that might have guided him to assist students in ways that connected to their cultural worlds. For example, Delpit (1995) indicated that one cultural characteristic for African American males is that they "...exhibit a high degree of physicality and desire for interaction." This knowledge might lead a teacher to develop classroom activities that offer more student interactions, thus creating a culturally responsive classroom. Villegas and Lucas (2002) indicate that in order to be culturally responsive towards students' needs, teachers might (1) help students in constructing knowledge (2) build on students' personal and cultural strengths (3) help students look at the

curriculum in many ways, (4) use varied assessment practices and (5) help to create a classroom that respects all students.

Bobby pointed out that his cultural background was much different from his students' backgrounds. Bobby used what he learned in his ESL certification classes "...to communicate with them on a cultural understanding" (p. 14). He indicated that cultural diversity in classrooms pushed teachers to respond to students in different ways. For example he said:

Culturally, you have to respond to them differently. I can be fairly loud to African American students because, culturally, that's what they're used to. You can get on them vocally louder than you can say...my Vietnamese students. If they're doing something wrong, all I have to do is look at them and say "quit" and they'll quit because that's what they're used to---I dare say that most of my attention is, unfortunately, toward the kids who are cutting up. The one kid that I have, I mean that he takes up so much time. The kids who are good, unfortunately, they don't get as much as verbal response from me as the ones who are in trouble all the time. [p. 6]

Bobby said that he recognized that all students needed to be treated in different ways although his examples portrayed the idea that children may have to be treated as individuals but if they were part of a particular racial or ethnic group, they might be treated as a group, or as Sleeter (2012) noted, essentializing culture. So, speaking to African American students in a loud manner might be something that he has come to understand as acceptable but one might wonder if his "fairly loud" approach to speaking with his African American students might exhibit continual shouting or a demeaning stance toward students. Also, if African American students are allowed to be "loud" because "culturally, that's what they're used to," it might not just disrupt learning for others but for themselves. The disconnect students may experience from the classroom does not allow for learning the "culture of power" described by Delpit (1995) as a way to know other expected behaviors in settings outside of their homes. But, he may have gained his knowledge from Delpit's (1995) book, which was a required reading in our class, but Bobby failed to read or understand the suggestions that she offered to teachers regarding African

American students. Not only did he use his knowledge of culture related to African American students to assist him to understand “vociferous” behavior, but he used his knowledge about Vietnamese culture to keep order within the class as he said Asian students followed adult orders. That knowledge assisted him in his attempts to maintain order in the class. Both of these examples indicated that Bobby had learned some attributes about certain cultures, but he may not be certain as to the best ways to use that knowledge nor did he possibly glean information that may have assisted him. Sleeter (2012) warns of the danger of teachers adopting a check-off list of things they might do to integrate culturally responsive measures. In a sense, Bobby trivialized the information that he had learned about culturally responsive teaching measures and adapted it to fit his own needs to retain control in the classroom (Sleeter, 2012).

Bobby shared his frustration about a young Hispanic girl in his classroom and his understanding of the culture related to gender.

I have noticed in my classroom over the last five years. There's not a great emphasis on the education of the female Hispanic as opposed to the male Hispanic. There's still a pretty strong divide that I still see as far as the importance of the male in the society over the female. [p. 15-16]

In observing that there were not high educational expectations for his young Hispanic female students, Bobby attempted to remedy that by providing stories of strong women portrayed in history so that they might understand that the importance of equality for women (p. 16). His attempt to portray women in this light indicated his awareness and willingness to address gender issues for those students who may not have that knowledge from home. In this move, Bobby had noticed a deeper cultural issue and had responded in a way that might benefit the student.

Faith and Religion. In another example of how Bobby made connections with his observations, he talked about the reward system put in place for “the kids that are doing what they’re supposed to be doing” (p. 2). He said that they were rewarded with a Christmas party and

the kids who “cut up” would not be allowed to attend the party. In his management style, Bobby said that he tried to promote good behavior through a reward system. In one case, he controlled his management system by offering a Christmas party for those children who obeyed the rules. The party may or may not have meaning for all students as many may not celebrate the holiday, so may not attend the party because of the conflicts it may present with their own cultural beliefs. It is also ironic that by excluding students as a form of punishment was not the seemingly right thing to do for a holiday that promotes Christian values. Bobby’s faith identity appeared to be strong enough that within this authority role, as Fairbanks, et al. (2010) described, he had not seemingly considered other’s views of religious holiday practices.

In one other area, Bobby talked about how faith influenced him as a teacher. Faith was an important area for him as a child and as an adult and he admitted that faith has been a “sticky wicket” for him in the classroom as he could not share his beliefs unless parents asked him.

We have kids that are Muslim, we have kids that are...Buddhists and there’s such a wide variety. At Christmas time we do try to---I have a Christmas tree and I have some decorations but ----I give a writing assignment based on the holidays, I always make sure I don’t just make it Christmas because not everyone celebrates Christmas. I make sure that I emphasize... ‘Tell me about your favorite family holiday tradition.’ [p. 14]

Bobby showed awareness of crossing the faith line as a public school teacher and he appeared well aware of the students who did not celebrate Christmas, but he privileged his own tradition by making it the center of celebration. He then presented an “add on” to those who did not celebrate, by allowing for writing assignments that focused on traditions celebrated by “others” Although it might have been a noteworthy step, Bobby appeared to be unaware that he may have created a classroom climate of “them” and “us” as he made Christmas a priority topic during the holiday season. Gay (2010) maintains that, “Individuals from various ethnic backgrounds have different beliefs about and ways of approaching ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity as curriculum content, instructional techniques and relationships with students.” In this way, Bobby

may find it wholly acceptable to continue the same routines that he has instilled such as celebrating a traditional holiday that he has always celebrated without thinking about the possible ramifications of his decisions. In other words, he has not learned or figured out that it might be inconsiderate to particular students. Gay (2010) maintained that ignoring the different ways of interacting and understanding students might lead to misunderstandings that can affect learning.

Bobby's observations provided a view of his stance toward students. He observed them in a myriad of ways but seemed at a loss for how to act upon many of his observations. It appeared that he held a largely deficit view of students, nearly twice of the care/sympathy that he exhibited. He attempted to use course and professional development knowledge to assist him but he did not appear to use that knowledge in ways that were considerate of his students. Possibly he misinterpreted the intent of the material he had been exposed to in classes or he may have not have been provided with the best information. It also might be noted that his background may have unintentionally influenced him in ways in which he was not clearly aware.

Dana

Noticing & Classroom Connections. This was Dana's first year as a high school ESL teacher, but she had also taught at middle and elementary schools during her seven years of teaching within the Tremont District. She appeared to hold a high sense of caring for her students (Figure 5) but was not certain about how to help them. Some of her methods went above and beyond teacher expectations and may have enabled students to become dependent upon her but her actions were performed in ways that reflected Dana's care for them.

The Basics. As an ESL teacher, Dana was responsible for several self-contained classes where she assisted English Language Learners (ELLs) and indicated that she was not sure of her

role in that class at the start of the year. She said “I have a lot of students in there who are failing so I’ve been using the hour to help them complete assignments.” Dana’s efforts to individualize instruction for students who did not finish their homework may indicate the depth of what she noticed in students and how she tried to assist them. Although Dana appeared to be aware of culturally focused instruction, none of the tenets addressed failing students or how she might address that challenge except to begin working with them one on one, a technique that students in Anyon’s (1981) research had requested. She also co-taught in several classes, or as she claimed, “one is pretty much I’m like a glorified babysitter or I feel like a parapro,” (p. 2) as she did not have much opportunity to take a lead role.

Dana shared more about what it has been like to work in a low SES school and, as noted in the quote that opened this chapter:

....it’s hard because you know that so many of their basic needs are not being met. And, I think of all the professional development that we’ve had in the district, I mean it’s obvious that they try to make you more aware of situations that kids are going through which to me, ‘ok, I get it, I understand. I’m sympathetic to that but I don’t feel like I’ve been supplied with or given any PD on what do we do then. [p. 9]

Dana observed that students’ challenges were difficult to overcome in order for learning to take place and claimed that professional development stopped short with only pointing out problems. Her expectations seemed to be that classes might provide her with solutions needed to teach in her school but PD and college courses had only provided her with what she already knew. She needed tangible solutions to address her observations. This raises questions about the kinds of training she had received. The courses that she had taken apparently had not provided her with concrete ways in which to address the challenges her students brought to the classroom. Dana appeared to notice her students in ways that confounded her as she attempted to assist. The challenges were clear to her but her assistance to students was not helpful. Her lack of control in the classroom coupled with outside-of-school challenges had not allowed her to help students in

ways she thought might be beneficial. As indicated by America's Children Key National Indicators of Well Being report (2011), more students in low-income schools may have more needs than what one teacher might be able to handle.

She maintained that her largest hurdle had been to coax students to do the work as she said, "In all classes, it's really hard to get kids to do things" (p. 2). Dana talked about some challenges that blocked student learning citing attendance and arriving to school on time. She said that her students indicated that parents were either sleeping, they did not have rides to school, or they were required to help out at home. As stated in Chapter 5, Dana indicated how students might have to stay home to take care of parents and that one student continually used illness as an excuse to stay home, something that Dana recalled her parents would never have tolerated. Dana seemingly had no control over what tasks students would or would not perform in classes and attendance was a problem. These were areas that Dana noticed and wanted to address but seemed unable to do anything about, as they were areas seemingly out of her control. Dana could certainly use culturally responsive and culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) techniques to engage her students, but it appeared that her students were not at a point where those suggestions might assist especially if they were arriving late to school or not at all (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Dana appeared to be striving for solutions and in the next section I will show how she addressed attendance, as well as motivational, issues with selected students.

Motivation & Relationships. Although Dana provided comments that focused on what she observed about students, she provided many more comments that showed connections between her observations and what she did in the classroom. She talked about one student who had been in high school for five years and had failed every class. He attended her ESL class but

would do nothing for her. They had started out the year talking where she expressed to him that she wanted to help him:

But it just seemed...he was falling asleep in class and again, I had to stay [near him] the whole hour, practically if I was going to get him to do anything. And I couldn't because I had 13 other kids. And he wasn't, again, doing anything in his classes. I talked to the other two ELL teachers and they said 'It's been like this for...you know.' He went through SC [skills center] and he did nothing there so they sent him back, but yet he comes to school but doesn't want to do anything. I think he finds comfort in the school, people and...but the academic piece is not important to him at all. [p. 8]

Dana said he was capable of doing the work, but he chose to neglect it. She indicated he had shown some interest on that very day when he was provided instruction via computer. She was surprised that he had worked on it and indicated that she decided to place him on one of her five classroom computers. Here, Dana observed that the young man did not do any work. Instead of ignoring that, she spoke to colleagues about him. Although Dana could have easily given up after attempts to reach the student, she continued looking for solutions. This might indicate the in-depth noticing that Dana was able to do and then act upon through peer collaboration and observing what might best engage the student, but it also meant that other students in her class may have been neglected. But, her observations led to various concrete decisions to assist him. This keen interest appeared to spark him, an area where Anyon (1981) indicated that students wanted teachers to teach more and to individually assist them.

Another area where Dana showed concern was that her students might not have choices after leaving high school so they may not view high school as a path to the future. She talked to them about the possibilities but they responded with hopelessness as, she reported, some of them were in the country illegally and did not have social security numbers that would allow them to apply to college. She recognized that they were “fighting against really tough odds,” but she

continued to encourage them (p. 18). She also supported the Dream Act, legislation that would allow for certain students to achieve conditional U.S. residency but she recalled their stance:

'Why do this? We can't do anything. We can't go anywhere. So, why even bother?' ...so just trying to repeatedly let them know and show them ok there's opportunities and it might take you a little bit longer than everybody else....and the whole issue of being able to afford college---you know. Letting them know that you can take one class at a time and work and pay for it---just trying to give them answers. But it's hard, because I don't know all of the answers. [p. 7]

Once again, Dana's sense of understanding was noted as she talked about the hopelessness that many of her students, especially ELLs face. Her observations regarding their feelings were coupled with her tenacity to find solutions for them. She was also aware of legislation that, if passed, student might take advantage of it. She went beyond hoping for legislation as she provided them with, possibly unviable, solutions when she told them they could "take one class at a time." Dana opened up what might be taken for an implicit curriculum. Eisner (1985) indicated that students were expected to follow school norms and rarely question authorities, thus possibly participating in a system that may not provide clear direction for them. Anyon (1981) provided a glimpse of the hidden curriculum as the inequalities faced by children from various social classes and pointed out that the perceptions of teachers toward their students in lower class schools where teachers looked upon many of their students as lazy, but Dana pushed beyond that when she made it her personal goal to assist the students that she noted were most disengaged and provided them with information that might assist them with their futures. She began to assist them in examining ways in which they might usurp their challenges by "taking one class at a time." In this manner, she acknowledged those challenges and showed students how she cared about their futures.

Dana maintained that her major challenge surrounded motivation and lamented, "How do you get kids to care about their grades? And, how do you get them to work hard at wanting to do

well” (p. 10)? She appeared concerned that this roadblock was difficult to cross. Dana, as noted in Chapter 4, had not experienced that issue in school as she worked hard to please her parents and the work was not so difficult for her. As much as she wanted to assist her students, she appeared to concede that she could not do it without their help. This might be seen as part of her identity that came from her idea that if she worked hard enough, she could accomplish anything.

Dana did provide a great sense of hope for her students and continued to push them. She talked about a boy who had failed math and the difficulty in prompting him. She sat with him throughout her class one day and assisted with his homework. Later that day his math teacher had told Dana that the student had done really well in class as he had paid attention and actively participated (p. 10). Dana was pleased with that but she indicated, “I don’t have enough time to pre teach before he gets to --you know--each class” (p. 10). Dana observed this struggling student, honed in on his challenges and found success but appeared to have a sense of helplessness as she realized that this was one student out of many who might thrive with that one-on-one assistance but it was impossible to consistently offer that to all students. Dana recognized the capabilities in her students, but she also expressed frustration at the amount of time and effort it took to help those students along. She recognized that every student had potential and with that, she appeared able to move them along, albeit, with difficulty because of time constraints that led her to ignore others in her class who may have needed her attention. The differentiation of instruction that takes place in high-poverty schools might be seen as specialized. The fact that 15% of students (Wellness Report, 2011) have the potential for behavioral or emotional challenges along with the 34% of ELLs might push the idea that teachers in high poverty schools not only need specialized training but they also need assistance. As Dana, pointed out that she could not attend to every student’s needs on her own. But Dana

appeared to show a strong sense of cultural awareness and responsiveness through her efforts to notice and attend to individual's needs as she attempted to help teach them more and help them learn (Anyon, 1981) by believing in them and not giving up. This might also speak to the way in which she positioned her identity, taking on the role of a caring facilitator who would not give up on any of her students and she found ways to work with those who needed her the most (Fairbanks, et al., 2010).

Although Dana took control of situations with students, she admitted that there was not enough time to help all who needed assistance. She indicated, "every kid can learn" (p. 7). She said her weakness was lack of enough time and if there were more time to spend with individual students "we'd be amazed at some improvements" for particular students whom others might tag as lazy. She observed that many of the students just gave up:

I think that they get to a point where they're so far behind that it's just...to them...they just feel overwhelmed. So they give up. So, I see potential in every single one of them but some...the weakness of them is that they don't have the motivation to keep trying. ...you know, when things get tough, they just want to quit instead of keep trying. [p. 7]

In Chapter 4, I reported that Dana talked about never giving up and she recalled a poem hanging in her room that said, "sometimes life gets rough." She talked about the way her dad encouraged her to keep moving even if she were in the middle of something that was not pleasant. "To this day I still have that poem and I pull it out for my students and I just think it's important for them to know that things will get hard and rough, but if you push through it, it has value." It appeared that she held the same expectations for her students. Even though she was unable to control how students reacted or behaved, she still continued to believe in them and expected them to keep going. Again, her background appeared to play an important part in how she thought about students. Dana's identity positioned her to continue to prod her students toward academic success (Fairbanks, et al., 2010).

Dana said that if she could change something it might be to slow things down, especially for her ELL students. She indicated that she would slow down the curriculum and focus on making the material more comprehensible instead of just getting things done or inputting a lot of short-term memory items (p. 11). In her short high school tenure Dana observed that students had not learned much. She observed them copying board work and filling out note sheets and using a vocabulary strategy but she noted that the short-term memory pieces were not helpful to students' concept learning nor did it help to facilitate motivation. She added:

I constantly think that there's got to be a better way to do things so I'm always looking at...how can I improve, how could it be done better? How can I teach this better? In my team-taught classes this year, I'm just trying to think how can I contribute to make this so it's more understandable not just for my kids, but for all the kids because this being my first year in the high school I was a little...it's a lot. [p. 8-9]

Her short time as a high school teacher had shown that Dana closely observed her students and reacted to those areas that she believed they needed assistance. But, the constraints of her role as teacher coupled with the constraints from challenges that some students brought to school did not allow Dana to do the work that she envisioned for her students, thus frustrating her. However, Dana showed an aptitude toward puzzling out ways in which she might reach her students. Anyon (1981) had found that students knew when their teachers cared because they assisted them with learning and addressed students at an individual level just as Dana had attempted.

Dana also shared a story related to two sisters who had been in her class. They had missed many days of school so she approached them one day and *jokingly* asked if they needed a phone call to get them up for school. They said yes and soon Dana was providing them with a wake-up call in the morning as well as picking them up for school when their dad could not take them. But she had some reservations about her decision to help so much, "How do I stay professional with the amount of stories that come out about teachers and students and you know where is the line for mentoring and for----like, how do I do this? Am I going to get in trouble for

picking them up to bring them to school” (p. 17)? Although she questioned this ethical dilemma, it did not seem to be an issue while she picked up the students. Possibly, her desire to assist them with attending school was stronger than the idea that she might be acting in an unethical manner. In this respect, Dana might have shown her capacity to care for her students in ways that may have not been helpful as her care about the girls led her to move well beyond what was required of her as a teacher, thus, prompting an interdependence that might not necessarily be a positive aspect of caring (Noddings, 1984).

Dana was cognizant that the girls missed many days of school but she took it another step by *jokingly* inquiring about a wake-up call. Possibly her informal manner helped her to build a relationship with the girls so that they responded in such a way to let her know that, indeed, they needed help. This was another example of Dana’s ability to not only closely observe what her students might need, but to tap into and offer assistance. She continued to work with the girls:

I told them if you can show up all week and you’re here and you stay and you’re on time I’ll treat you to Burger King. So I took them to Burger King after school because they made it that whole week. Then the next week she [one of the sisters] had a U.S. History test and she ended up scoring a 91%. She came in the next day and I was quizzing her and she knew....you could tell she studied and she put the effort in at home and I was like this is awesome. You know...I think that putting that extra effort in and making that connection and now they’re like talking to me and she’s telling...she told me yesterday morning that she’s getting in a fight with her mom and she’s you know, she wants to leave and just being able to build those relationships and then she was able to come in and score 91% on her test (p. 7).

Dana ventured well beyond the work expected of her as a teacher to assist these girls in order to push them to achieve. She saw the academic capabilities but she also observed the struggles as the girls were helping to raise their younger brothers and, she reported, that at least one of the girls had a tenuous relationship with her mother. Dana was privy to all of this information as the students invited her into their worlds. But Dana is one person charged with educating a number of high school students. Her compassion stretched beyond expectations and the result of that

might well put her in jeopardy of burn out. The sisters appeared again in conversation, as she talked about when the sisters returned from Christmas break. She had called them and they had made it to school on time but when they arrived at her third-hour class, they said they were going home. She told them to stay but one of the sisters said she could not:

'I don't want to be here. I feel' ...she said, 'I feel trapped. I can't ...I don't want to stay here.' But that two weeks off school, you know, so in those two weeks that I didn't have contact with them and then she came back and said, 'My mom kicked me out again,' and it goes back and forth. [p. 7]

This might help us to realize the complexities of teaching in a low-income school and the frustrations that go with it. In one moment Dana felt the power of having a student succeed when the student received a high passing test grade. In the next moment, she experienced the impact of her student's words, "I feel trapped." It appeared that Dana blamed herself when she maintained that the two-week break did not allow contact with them. Dana's push might be seen as a push toward inequitable societal issues brought about not only by cultural issues but by the issues of poverty that prompted her students to stay up late at night and only recognize their roles as household helpers, taking care of their younger siblings and not so much as the roles of students who had something to gain from attending classes each day.

Within her work, Dana maintained that building relationships with her students was important and that if she could, she would add a homeroom component to the day's schedule because it would allow teachers to build stronger relationships with students. She indicated that she was fortunate to make those connections because of her work as an ESL teacher since she saw them often in the day. She said other teachers in the high school only saw students for 50 minutes each day so it was difficult to know students well enough to assist them (p. 12). Dana noted the value of connecting to her students and the change it might bring in building a community of learners (Bruner, 1996).

Dana noted that relationship building might be a good way to get to know students and she lamented the difficulty for teachers in doing that as they have so many students to know. The advantage to that might be that teachers better observe challenges for students who are on the periphery of classroom instruction and if they are able to establish relationships, as Dana reportedly had, they might be better equipped to help pull failing students into the center of instruction. But, as noted, the number of students and short amount of time does not afford those opportunities. However, Dana continued to problematize her work in the classroom as she found ways to best meet the needs of her students. Dana's work pushed beyond culturally focused pedagogies as she attempted to figure out ways in which to treat her students who had so many varied needs.

Cultural Observations and Funds of Knowledge. Dana observed that, "students don't have a lot of strengths" (p. 10). Although this may be noted as a deficit view, she understood the importance of having preliminary skills so that students could be taken to the next level as she noted, "They don't come in with a lot of strengths because, you know, growing up they are not introduced to as many words; vocabulary concepts that middle class students get from home and so coming into school, trying to teach them the curriculum" (p. 10). Dana's perceptions were correct when considering the gap that exists in vocabulary between students from affluent families as compared to those who are from less affluent families (Hart & Risley, 1995). Dana realized that her students came with little preparation for the work that they must complete and she said they, as well as teachers, face much pressure from the administration and from the government but students were not prepared to meet the standards set for them. But, possibly she has not tapped into the knowledge that they brought and attempted to tie it to curriculum. It appeared, from Dana's description, that the curriculum was provided and taught in a manner that

did not consider students' funds of knowledge, thus providing a disconnection for students between home and school.

Dana talked about how students are tuned out from the work that they do as they were provided regimented ways of learning. For example she indicated that students throughout the school used a linked-vocabulary strategy. The strategy encompassed a written definition, a reminding word, placement of the word into a story, and a drawing that represented the word.

I can't get them to do it...they'll write the word, they'll write the definition because it's right there in front of them but when it's time to think...you know where they have to come up with a reminding word or how could I put it into a story or draw a picture of it, they kind of stop at that point. [p. 2]

Dana honed in on a potential pedagogical challenge. Possibly, students appeared to use this strategy so often that it became automated and held no meaning for them. She observed that they were going through the motions to meet teacher expectations without *thinking* about the process. This was an area where Dana might have provided personal connections for students as they built vocabulary, but many times, Dana was unable to change assignments that were administered by other teachers, including her co teachers. Dana did not work against the grain (Cochran-Smith, 1991) of instruction where "...teachers are the creators and interpreters of curriculum, not just its implementers." Instead, Dana chose to follow her co teachers' lessons. Dana also indicated that students did not perform expected tasks in the classrooms that she co-taught:

Copying, even notes, as we're going...as the teacher's going over it...getting them to write down notes. I have to constantly be on their case: 'Ok, write this down, you need this here'If they have independent time, I know another teacher does this....fill in the blank notes so they have to use their book and go through it word for word in the book. It's not that complicated...at least what I think and what she thinks because it is word for word and they follow along in the book and just fill in the word and so having them do that--it's hard to get them to do that. [p. 2]

Her description of the in-class work appeared to be a mundane task for students, like the vocabulary strategy. It appeared that they performed the expected motions without any connections to real-life situations. Dana indicated that the assignment was “not complicated” and wondered why they could not complete it. In this example, she did not appear to view the assignment as inappropriate. Instead, she appeared perplexed that they could not follow through on the work since it was such a seemingly easy task. Dana did not seem to observe that the kind of work expected of students might seem tedious or unrelated to their lives, therefore allowing disconnections for them.

Her role as co teacher was often unpredictable. She assisted with what the lead teachers wanted from students and she was not always sure of the best way in which to assist them. At times, she pushed in¹⁸ and other times she pulled out students as ways to assist them within the main classroom, much of which consisted of “copying stuff from the board” (p. 3). She said that many of her students had difficulty with transferring the notes since they had to continuously look up and down from board to paper. After observing that, she assisted them:

So, I copy it on my paper and let them use that to copy from and that's worked well as far as notes go. They fill in the blank notes. I think sometimes it's overwhelming, so it's hard to do because of the classrooms. They don't have much room to work, to pull small groups and work with me....so, I either take them out of the classroom and back to my room and we'll do it together and other times I've kind of rewritten so it's not as long---like a shorter summary, but again they didn't use the book for it. I kind of went through and we talked about it together. It's hard in team-taught classes because I struggle with how do I not totally exclude them from or make it obvious that they're doing something different and I don't know...I don't know. [p. 3]

Dana was well aware of her students' struggles and she was aware of trying to help students without appearing that she was assisting so that they did not appear different among their peers. Her assistance with notes was a way to provide students with the information they needed yet she

¹⁸ “Push in” is a term that denotes the work of a specialized teacher within the classroom so that students receive extra help but not at the expense of leaving classmates and the lead teacher.

indicated that they did not use their books for anything. Again, this appeared to be an attempt to help students move through the motions of teacher expectations yet Dana provided no comment as to the depth or meaning that students gained from the work. Although Dana showed a deep sense of care for her students, her techniques in the classroom may have fostered an interdependence that was not necessarily helpful to her students (Noddings, 1984).

Faith & Religion. Faith may be, in part, what kept Dana from giving up on the work that she did with students. She claimed that it was faith that allowed her to work in her school when she said:

I think it allows me to, you know, not to judge; not to judge people and I think that allows me to work with the kids that I do to....to know that ...that God has given everybody a gift. To know that these kids...that there is something that they are good at and just working with them; I don't want to give up on them in the classroom...and I think my faith, too, allows me to not to explode when they don't do something or to be more understanding and umm....I don't know...of their situation. [p. 16-17]

Dana's faith appeared to be an important factor in how she viewed her work with students. She envisioned the good in her students and claimed that each one had potential. In Chapter 4, I noted that she talked about the importance of faith within her family and how it provided solace to her when she needed it. It appeared that she continued to hold that stance and it assisted her with the difficult days in her classroom.

"I think I spend more time on those who seem to not to care." Dana admitted to the idea of attempting to *save* particular students. She struggles with "Ok, I've got to save them, I've got to save them. I've got to be able to get them to pass to show them that they can do this" (p. 6). She lamented that she put lots of extra effort into assisting the students who did not work while she claimed it might not be fair to those students who were working.

...maybe they need extra help but they don't ask because I think they see me trying to get the other kids, you know, the other kids to do their work. And so then it's like what do I do...do I let them go? Let them fail? And it's really hard for me to do....just to

watch them sit there and do nothing. But at the same point, I have kids that are trying and could probably do so much better if I had helped them. [p. 6]

In this instance, Dana took charge when she observed that there were some students who did not seemingly care about being in the classroom. She was pushed by the idea of “saving them” which might be seen as a missionary stance, possibly influenced by her identity as she took on a role to possibly save her students (Fairbanks, et al., 2010). She honed in on those she observed needed her assistance the most but also recognized those who were not getting her assistance. The situation was a conundrum; sit next to and encourage those who did not work or she could pay more attention to those working and help them move further. Either way, students might lose out as she could only devote so much time to each student.

Dana provided a caring stance toward students, and she spent much class time and personal time attempting to assist students with their reported challenges. She appeared to continually ponder on her observations and think of ways in which to best assist her students through relationship building and one-on-one attention, although she was not certain of the best approach toward promoting academics. Her background may have influenced some her beliefs about students in that one should never give up. Her faith also appeared to influence her, especially on difficult days.

Mary

Noticing & Classroom Connections. When the general interview took place, Mary was serving her first year as a reading specialist within several kindergarten- through sixth-grade schools. She had spent ten years teaching within the Tremont District and was also a resident of the district. In this chapter, we will see that Mary holds a predominate view of caring (Figure 5) toward children but she also tended toward a deficit stance, especially when she was at a loss for solutions.

The Basics. Mary talked about her work in the 5-6¹⁹ buildings where she noted there were many ELLs as well as low-income students receiving services for special education. Mary claimed a tie between poverty and reading ability but did not blame parents, "It's not that the parents don't care; they don't have time because they're trying to work so hard to put food on the table and they're trying to meet the basic needs so they don't have time to think of anything beyond that" (p. 2-3). Mary appeared to have a high level of general knowledge about the population of students with whom she worked. Although she was new in the position of reading specialist, she saw first hand the struggles that students had with attaining appropriate reading skills. She did not blame parents possibly because she was aware of their struggles and she lived in the community so could observe that first-hand.

Mary claimed she had wanted to teach in a low-income school after finishing her teacher preparation program. She said she believed that all children should experience a good education even if they were financially unable to have the best education. Her comment may lead one to think that she had understood this population of students and parents well and that she might have some impact on their educational lives. Mary spoke about teaching in a school with so many children receiving free or reduced lunch:

...it's actually very tiring. It's easy to get burned out. It feels like a lot of kids come to school tired or hungry---they just almost need like a parent in the classroom, so you're not just doing the teaching. You have to be willing to stop and talk to them...and sometimes you have to be willing to stop and ask yourself how much of the curriculum works---because if they aren't getting the basic needs met they're not going to be listening to what you say. So it's almost this pressure and hole between 'I'm supposed to teach this but this child isn't ready to learn. [p. 11]

She indicated that the challenges that students bring to school impacted the environment because basic needs were not met for children. She indicated that teacher relationships with students were

¹⁹ The 5-6 buildings in the district are only for the fifth and sixth-grade students.

important and knowing her students well was instrumental so that work might be accomplished. These attributes relate to those proposed by culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies (Drucker, 2003; Gay, 2002; Irvine, 2001, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Mary, like Dana and Bobby, noted the same areas of concern in that children were not prepared to do the work presented to them as the curriculum was beyond what students were ready to learn. Their observations appeared to be in line with the members of the *Broader, Bolder Approach to Education* group who maintain that schools need to acknowledge the impact that poverty has on schools and develop comprehensive strategies to assist with the challenges of poverty (www.bolderapproach.org).

Mary also talked about parental limitations that kept them from assisting with their children's education, but she pointed out that they were tired because they were working so much and were exhausted. She claimed awareness that parents did not want to spend time on the phone talking as it was not a priority for them. The lack of communication affected learning that might take place in classrooms and Mary claimed that caused a lot of stress and she observed that:

....a lot of them seem--especially those who are having very, very difficult financial times. A lot of depression with some of the kids or anger and so it's just constantly dealing with trying to figure out what's wrong with the child. We're in a different setting [her own children] and I think about my daughter's [private] school. Most of the kids generally come to school seeming-- you know, content and happy and just well taken care of. But you can see a huge difference when you go to a low SES school because they seem depressed or lonely or sad about something and they didn't try to hide it. One kid who came to school the other day and I asked 'are you going to [school program] after school?' And she said, 'No, my dad got drunk last night and I have to go home and try to fix that to make sure I don't forget him' ...so it's running into those type of issues all of the time [that] come up and it's almost...it's the norm, but it should not be the norm. [p. 11]

Mary's reported observations painted a seemingly bleak picture. She observed some students to be lonely, sad, depressed and, at times, taking on the role of adults as did the student who felt

compelled to look after her father. She supported parents by stating that they were “exhausted” which might indicate that the challenges in many families might not allow for the kind of participation needed for students to become successful, a theme that was also found in Chapter 5. Just as Bobby and Dana realized that many children’s lives outside of school were challenging, they also indicated how these challenges impacted what they attempted to do in classrooms. Although this might appear as a deficit view, these types of observations have been substantiated by Mary, Dana, and Bobby. They observed that students brought many challenges with them and those issues appeared to be a barrier to instruction. This might lead one to believe that teachers might need more assistance with their work in low-income schools.

As a reading specialist, Mary shared some of the challenges with students and one of the biggest, she noted, was that students did not have enough support available at home in terms of having someone to read with them and provide them with emotional support. Because this was one of her observations, she decided to pair her struggling readers with those who were reading at a higher level so that they experienced one-on-one support. She said there was also an after-school program that encouraged a tie from in-class curriculum to the work that they did in their program and remarked that the program helped with the literacy support that students needed (p. 7-8). Mary might have shown a level of care for her students and families as she noted the struggles that students had and how parents had little time to communicate (Noddings, 1984). However, like Dana, her care may not have assisted with the academic support that her students needed. She maintained that parents were too tired to talk on the phone, thus, providing a reason for not contacting them. This kind of care might be seen as a way to talk about her concerns without a follow through.

Mary also indicated that emotional and not academic support was the problem and that not having enough time with an adult impacted student learning. Although she did not explain what was meant by emotional support, it might mean that students needed to be recognized by adults for the work that they were accomplishing and an adult other than the classroom teacher may need to help with that. Unlike students who are provided with one-on-one encouragement in many affluent families, the students within low-income schools may not receive that attention, thus falling behind when they attend school. Again, another consideration might focus on additional assistance.

Motivation & Relationships. Mary observed that her students' experiences were different from her experiences. She observed that students' families did not promote higher education following high school:

I talk to them [students] in terms of their future and what it can bring. I don't necessarily say just college because I think that some students do well in college and I think some students do well with on-the-job training. But I think every individual is different in what their needs are. So I asked them 'what is it you want to do when you're older,' you know? 'Have you thought about what you're going to do when you're older? Are you going to school? Going to college?' Just trying to make sure that they know that's available to them. [p. 10]

Discussing opportunities for students beyond high school allowed students to see the possibilities. Although Mary taught students in the elementary grades, she introduced ideas to them at that level, possibly conversations that most elementary teachers do not necessarily promote as part of their jobs. Dana, too, provided these kinds of conversations with her students allowing them to see the possibilities. In this way, they appeared to provide explicit knowledge that was not necessarily mandated by curriculum. This may be viewed as an example of making the implicit ideas about school more explicit, thus Mary observed that students did not necessarily know about the process of seeking higher education and then assisted them with that seemingly closed information (Eisner, 1985).

Mary talked about one fifth-grade student whom she worked with in reading. She observed that the student had “a lot of energy” and “speaks her mind.” She recalled one conversation with the student whom she could not motivate to read:

...Tuesday I tried to help her find a book that would interest her. She said, “nope, I hate reading, I hate reading.” So I went through all different types of books...do you like this? Do you like that? ‘nope, nope, nope.’ So, I didn’t...I never yell at her and said you’d better get busy or you’re not coming back. I just kind of, you know, talked to her the rest of the time and then I let her leave a little bit early. And then the next day that I had her in class...umm we started out by talking with each other and she was joking around with me and then she told me ‘Ms. Mary, your pants are floodin’ And I said ‘I know my pants are floddin’ and I just realized it before I left home and I’d have to wait till I get home to change them,’ and she was like ‘well, that’s really bad--they’re floodin’ and I said, ‘well that’s too bad, I can’t do anything about it right now because it’s too late.’ So, she later--she says ‘no offense, but most white people don’t know what floodin’ is’...she’s African American---and she asked the girl next to her what floodin’ is and the girl said what, huh? And she said, see, that’s what I mean. She said, “I’m not trying to be racist but they just don’t know’...so after that she said, ‘Ms. Mary, can you get me girls’ magazines? So I was like maybe she was trying to talk to me like I’m trying to get her a book...”maybe she’s just another teacher who just wants to get me a book, not thinking about what I like or what I am.’ She might be thinking, ‘I’ll test this teacher and she can bring something in, I may as well try it.’ [p. 5- 6]

Mary’s observations allowed her to tap into communication with this student through the use of humor mixed with a cultural knowledge of language to do so. As reported by Mary, the girl appeared surprised that she knew the term *floodin’* and that opened the door to communication; in a sense, she found a connection into this student’s world. Further, she used this as an opportunity to find out how she might push the student toward reading. In going outside of the classroom to find reading to connect to the child, it might indicate Mary’s flexibility in using her knowledge about the student and knowledge about appropriate magazines to bring about a literacy opportunity. She anticipated what the student might be thinking, “*I’ll test this teacher....*” thus, extending her observation to a projected outcome and also placing pressure on Mary to remember to carry through with finding magazines. Earlier, it might be noted that Dana acted upon her observations in the same way. She found out something about the student and

then “jokingly” suggested providing morning wake-up calls. Both teachers focused in on relationship building in order to break through to students. These teachers not only noticed students in a more personal manner, but they acted upon those observations in proactive ways that helped the teachers make connections to the students’ worlds. This step toward relationship building is an important culturally responsive measure toward building classroom community and suggested for teachers in diverse school settings (Compton-Lily, 2009; Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Purcell-Gates, 1997).

Cultural Observations and Funds of Knowledge. Classroom diversity was familiar to Mary, but, at times, she indicated frustration with how to meet all students’ needs. She talked about a student from her classroom when she was teaching in a third-fourth split class. The student spent a good amount of time crying and she indicated it was “very, very frustrating for me” (p. 5). She said it was very disruptive to others in the class and many times she had to escort him to the office or to the counselor. She had also spoken to his mother who had been well aware of the problem, indicating that he had the same challenges at home. Mary appeared to run out of resources since nothing seemed to change with the student after meeting with the counselor or through conversations with the parent. One might wonder how much time and energy a teacher expends in working with a student who has such a challenge and how much time it might take out of other students’ learning. Mary’s trips to the office with the student and constant interruptions might have prompted a negative effect on instruction as the consistency of that instruction may have been compromised.

In terms of diversity, she tried to address children’s needs based on the observations that she made about them, “For instance I know that with African American students, they enjoy having loud, vociferous conversations, you know? And trying to make sure in points of the day

that I allow that so they are getting their needs met because that's how they learn best. But then you have other students who enjoy being really quiet--who want to work quietly so you have to have a balance that you meet" (p. 5). Mary, like Bobby, mentioned the idea of how African American students "enjoy having loud vociferous conversations." Not only was she aware of this, but she also claimed to build time into the day where they were able to communicate in a way that might get "their needs met," but, she did not elaborate on the pedagogical methods that she incorporated. She shared Bobby's views that all African American students like to have loud conversations thus making a blanket cultural statement, however, she claimed to build in time during the day for students to talk, whereas Bobby implied that the chatter was ongoing. Mary's observation led to particular classroom pedagogical practices that would incorporate what she knew about groups of students into lessons, therefore holding affirming views of students (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). She also used student culture to promote learning, whereas Bobby essentialized the culture by claiming all African American students were vociferous and then allowed them to talk without connecting the conversation to academic needs (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2012).

Mary also shared a general observation that indicated her level of observations within her school:

I do see a problem with African American children in the intermediate building, especially. My office is located within the principal's office...that area. So, I see a high number of African American males who come down to the office. And they are not the majority of students in the building, so I question why...why do we have so many African American males coming down to the office versus what seems to be any other group in the building? Umm--that bothers me. I don't ...to me it has to be a lack of understanding between the teacher and the student. I don't see how else that many could come down. This is 5th and 6th grade...the upper grades. I don't see that in the elementary. I also see less tolerance [by teachers]for disrespect or any type of behaving in the intermediate building (p. 8).

In this instance, Mary observed a school-wide challenge that affected a number of male African American students and she questioned the understanding between teacher and student. Mary's observation was in line with observations in Lareau and McNamara-Horvat's (1999) research where African American males were reportedly singled out more often for disciplinary issues. In an educational system where African American males are disproportionately charged with unacceptable behaviors and receive a large number of disability diagnoses (Noguera, 2003) it might be wise to promote discussions among teachers regarding these realities and find ways to help them use cultural knowledge to build relationships. In this particular scenario, Mary clearly observed what others did not---that large numbers of African American males might be singled out. Although she made this observation, she did not indicate that her concerns had been reported to an administrator.

Faith & Religion. Mary, just as her colleagues, shared ideas about how faith played a role in her work as a teacher, especially when she was not certain about how to handle particular situations. She noted that faith helped her to forgive students. She indicated that faith helped her with patience and compassion. She said, "I end up being more patient with the kids. I don't react and get upset with them" (p. 15). She also indicated that faith has led her to stay in the teaching profession and without it she probably would not remain. "I would find something else to do. "Just not happy as a teacher right not---not at all. It's a very frustrating time" (p. 15). She said it was difficult "...being patient for eight hours in the day when you have 50 different questions and you're working five days a week..." (p. 15). Although teaching requires that kind of patience, it might be noted that teaching in low socioeconomic schools might require even more patience as it is not just about the "50 different questions" but about how to address all of the individual needs based on race, ethnicity, and social class. Noticing and acknowledging

differences may be a start, but attending to the multitude of differences might be a challenge. Just as Dana had used her faith to promote calmness, Mary did the same. Mary's faith, as part of her learned identity assisted her with the day-to-day classroom challenges (Fairbanks, et al., 2010).

Mary shared a caring view toward students and indicated that many arrived at school tired, depressed, and hungry and it was a matter of trying to discover what was wrong with the student. Although this might indicate deficit thinking, she reportedly tried to get to the root of students' challenges. She went beyond general observations and attempted to piece together clues that might help her to reach her students. As noted, background influences and experiences may have assisted her with this thinking.

Jill

Noticing & Classroom Connections. Jill has been teaching within the areas of English, special education and, ESL for twelve years with most of her experience spent with "at-risk kids," as she claimed and she lived within the community. Her student teaching placement was set in a major urban city, which she said, changed her thinking about what it meant to teach in high-poverty schools. Although Jill adhered to some deficit views, she showed much care toward her students as she attempted to build relationships and provide instruction that held meaning for them (Noddings, 1984).

The Basics. Jill described how she organized a typical day in her classroom. "I've found that maybe it's my personality or maybe it's what I've found works for kids or maybe it's my management or discipline system, but my room is generally structured in the sense that kids come in and they know exactly what they need to do." She reported having three to five arranged activities throughout the designated time so that students were not performing the same work for an hour. She also offered a "good news" time each morning so that students could share news

about their lives. This helped her to know about their lives, something that is promoted in culturally responsive and culturally relevant teaching (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995). “Good news” is followed by grammar and then discussion of a literature piece. “The ambiance isn’t chaotic at all. It’s probably not like some fun teacher; it’s much more--I don’t know if traditional is the right word but it’s a lot more structured.”

She claimed that some days were emotionally challenging because of poverty issues filtering into students’ lives that affected how they attended to their schoolwork. She pointed to the hallway and said that many students stayed in school after the bell and each day as she left school she observed them wandering up and down the street appearing bored and “looking for trouble or something.” She said that the pain that students bring to school grinds on teachers. She shared an incident that took place around the holidays when, she said, tensions were high with conflict and there seemed to be much going on in students’ homes:

...I walked into the middle school and I had walked into the cafeteria and this girl...she’s a middle school kid. She’s yelling across the cafeteria to this other girl and she says, “well, yeah, your daddy likes me and he likes licking me”...and I’m like just disgusted and I’m thinking that’s disgusting and it’s sad that a middle school girl would even know about that or even think about that or even be willing to yell that across the cafeteria - you know, it just almost breaks your heart; like, I wasn’t there in middle school. I didn’t have that. I didn’t have that kind of mouth; I didn’t have that thought process. I was naïve and innocent and it was a good thing. So, you get a lot of pain...like you need a Christmas break (laughs nervously). [p. 10-11]

Jill appeared to realize that the challenges students brought to school were far different from those that she had experienced as a middle-school student. She recognized that students’ outside problems were not dropped at the door in the morning; instead the residual lingered and, at times, may have become problematic for the smooth operation of the school and classroom. She suggested that the holiday *breaks* that teachers took were needed, as the emotionally-charged days in some schools could be trying. Jill presented a deeper, more personal issue as she suggested the loss of innocence that students might bring to school. In order for Jill to connect

fully with students in this setting, it might be important for her to begin to understand learners and their cultural contexts so that she might better understand how to assist them instead of judging their situations (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Purcell-Gates, 1995). However, her formed identity about the proper ways that students should behave may have prevented her from addressing the situation in a way to benefit students (Fairbanks, et al., 2010).

Jill also reportedly acted as a parent authority in one of her positions where she noted that students needed a mom. Because some students brought language to school that she found unacceptable she told them, "...that might be appropriate at your house, but at school we don't talk like that or we don't use those words." She indicated that they did not talk like that to be defiant or to get into trouble, but she saw it was "their norm." Jill's reaction was much like that of a concerned mother and possibly not uncommon as Jackson (1990) pointed out that much like mothers, "teachers have responsibility for definite aspects of their students' growth." But, it also might point out her way of assisting students to understand the dominant cultural expectations of behavior as she makes the implicit rules of the school more explicit (Eisner, 1985).

Through this comment, Jill focused on "life lessons," and assumed that her students did not get those lessons at home, or at least the kinds of lessons that might assist them to fare well in a society where expectations differ from the family norms they bring to school. She viewed part of her teaching duties as parental duties, attempting to instill in them the "proper" mainstream expectations, just as she had learned from her own family. It also might be noted that Bobby and Dana also mentioned that the students' *normal* of what they brought to school was not the *normal* expected by teachers and administrators. Dana and Jill observed this and, in a sense, suggested that students be provided the culture of power (Delpit, 1995) as they attempted to provide them with the capital that would assist them with melding into the culture of power.

Bobby, however, did not appear to share explanations with students regarding why they might adapt toward that goal.

Jill indicated that she attempted to meet each student one-on-one for academic challenges. She not only focused on subject area challenges, she also assisted students with the emotional challenges that they brought to class so she listened to them and, at times, sent them to the school counselor for issues beyond her expertise. One thing she learned was that a change in behavior is a signal that there is a problem,

...if you see a huge change in behavior; like they've been coming to school and they've been doing well and all of a sudden they're not, find out what that challenge is. Try to figure out how to help them get past it or around it. [p. 8]

Her role as a teacher extended well beyond the work of planning and implementing pedagogical content knowledge. It was work that took a close level of observation and then assisted students past the barrier that might prevent learning from taking place. Jill attempted to pull these students from the periphery of instruction into the community but finding out about the specific challenges and helping “them get past it or around it.” Her stance was similar to those of Dana and Mary but quite different from Bobby’s views who found that behavior challenges were problematic for him, thus dealing with it through rewards and punishments. Jill appeared to focus on all students, whereas Mary and Dana mentioned a few situations where they assisted individual students.

Motivation & Relationships. Jill talked about how the students in her school needed much more support than students who attended more affluent schools whom, she said, “tend to have educated parents who are pushing them to go onto education for the most part; you’ve got parents who are engaged in their kids’ lives and have the means and the resources and the time to invest in their children so that they don’t need me.” She viewed her work as that of someone who might make an impact on the lives of her students. “You know, I could teach them (affluent

district students) English. There might be one or two who need someone to listen to them, but I can't impact their lives that much. They've got their parents for that." Jill viewed her work as a teacher as more than content and pedagogy; she viewed it as a position of advocacy in supporting students who may not have the support from outside of school. But, it also might be noted that many students in more affluent districts do not always have parental presence, but they might be provided more tangible resources in which to build cultural capital such as tutoring, and a large choice of extracurricular activities.

Jill noted how she struggled as the school setting was so very different from the setting in which she grew up. She noted that working in such a setting caused her to "notice things and pick up on observations" like a sponge. She said she struggled

...as being a white woman who has been extremely blessed---how do you put me in this setting with so many hurting kids and maybe I'm honest just because I'm in a different world...and I genuinely want to be a good teacher. [p. 19]

Jill admitted to the white privilege that she brought to her classroom and realized that she was from a different "world" but struggled with the right way in which to reconcile that with her actions. On one hand she noted that privilege but on the other she wanted to "save" her students, implying that they had lives that needed saving—that she knew the right way for them to live. In a sense, she did not know how to react towards or assist her students who struggled possibly because of her own background which pushed her to "save" them in the only way in which she knew best and it was based on her white, middle-class upbringing.

One of the areas of concern for Jill was that of motivation. Students came to class tired and did not always want to do the work that was presented to them. She said that part of her tried to force the work even if they did not want to:

I don't let kids sleep in my class, you know, I just ethically don't let them. So, I'm waking them up or doing whatever I can to try to keep them working. When I had special ed kids

in 9th grade...a lot of those kids just shut down by 9th grade. They just wanted to sleep and put their heads down and they didn't want to work too hard. [p. 6]

Just as Bobby and Dana had observed, Jill noted that students were not motivated. The challenges that they observed might cause one to wonder about the lack of motivation. It might have been that the curriculum was too difficult, or possibly students' language skills prevented motivation, or it might be that the curriculum did not connect to their lives and they found it to be boring. It was also curious when she indicated that students often "shut down," thus, prompting the idea that it might be common for students to behave in this way and possibly other teachers might experience this sort of apathy. Jill observed her students' behavior and discovered that she could assist them:

I found if I truly scaffolded the learning down to a level that was attainable for them, and made it so that they could be successful on it, they would try it. So, I think a lot of times it's me doing the work to scaffold to give them the work ethic because I think that they really want to try---it might be a laziness but if you can make it simple enough and try to trick them into it or make it fun or interesting or try a different angle that you can still often times hook kids, even if they don't have a strong work ethic. [p. 6-7]

Jill observed apathy in her class and she did more than notice, she attempted to "scaffold the work" so that students might understand and attempt it. Jill's actions showed that she wanted to teach them more and help them learn (Anyon, 1981), much like Dana's actions, and she attempted to find ways to do that. As Delpit (1995) recommended, she scaffolded student instruction. She did not indicate what the particular work was, but she knew that unless she made it understandable to them, they might not approach it. She also noted that she can "trick" them even if they do not have a strong work ethic. As discussed in Chapter 4, the idea of work ethic was an area that resonated with Jill as she talked about how important that attribute was in her family. Here, she attempted to instill that within her students as she came up with different ways in which to present class lessons.

“Good news” sharing and writing were ways in which Jill learned about her students. At the start of class each day, she encouraged her students to share news and she paid special attention to what they said and what they wrote so that she had an idea of the special events in their lives. She said that even when they discussed literature, she heard their thoughts, which helped her to establish relationships that might lead to a strong classroom community. This part of the day allowed her to connect with students in ways unique to the standard school day. This was a chance for her to discover challenges and strengths within her students and to create classroom community as she might find clues to how she might see through the eyes of her students who may share different worlds from her (Purcell-Gates, 1995). It also may have allowed her a way to show how she cared (Noddings, 1984) for her students, which in turn, provided her avenues for instruction related to her students’ lives.

She seemingly understood that home life for some of her students might be chaotic and she provided an example:

I know that you are taking care of your brothers and sisters but you still have to find a way to get homework done, what can we work out - what can wecan you get here a half hour earlier and sit in my room and do homework? What other solution can you come up with? You’re not going to change your parents and you’re not going to change your living situation because we need you to graduate....so, what can we do? How can we be creative? [p. 3-4]

Jill indicated that she wanted to instill in students that they had power to make decisions for themselves and she also realized the importance of teaching them life skills such as “time management, organization, politeness, how to have a conversation” (p. 3-4). Jill’s work did lead her to a deep observation of students where she tailored those observations to assist students, not only in “passing the test” but in skills that would help them beyond high school.

Cultural Observations and Funds of Knowledge. Within her current classroom, Jill explained that her students come from settings where most students did not use *academic*

English. She worked with a large number of ESL students as well as students in poverty and she said, “I know that because of their family and community most of our kids don’t speak in academic English and so I feel my job is to give them that academic English so that they can be successful in school and school beyond high school so I don’t know if that clashes with family and community or working around family” (p. 4). In her quest to teach “academic English,” Jill said she was conscious about phrasing the work as such to reflect skills needed for the work and academic world and that, “I always say, the language that you speak at home or the way to talk at home is fine, that’s fine, but when you are in a classroom setting, this is how you need to talk and this is the way you need to speak. I approach it from that way” (p. 4). Jill also said that the materials she used in her English classes were far removed from the students’ family cultures. For example, she led the class in reading William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily,” set in the early 1900’s. She noted that the material was very disconnected from the students’ backgrounds but she also realized that the ACT contained some “pretty tough literature type reading on it and they have so little background cultural knowledge. I think I’m doing a lot of building of that.”

Jill viewed the need to teach reading, grammar and vocabulary skills to students who have no prior knowledge but she also realized that the stakes were high; the ACT determined college eligibility and Jill made a conscious decision to inform students that they must learn “academic English.” In this respect, Jill might be seen as opening the door to the implicit curriculum as she attempted to assist students uncover the gaps they may possess so that they might be competitive in their choices following high school (Eisner, 1985). She credits Delpit (1995) for providing her with permission to teach explicit skills to her middle and high-school students:

For the first time I was reading about the things that I had always struggled with. I mean I definitely struggled with this whole language concept. In fact I kept seeing that my kids

can't write but everything that I was reading was telling me that I shouldn't be teaching grammar, you know. But I kept thinking, yeah, but they need it but yet I'm told not to and it was like this first voice that I had that was saying, 'No, they need it.' [p. 17]

She claimed that the curriculum did not provide a place for teaching grammar and that workshops, conferences and other English teachers viewed explicit teaching of grammar as “old school or bad” and that students were expected to aptly place commas “through osmosis.”

She (Delpit) confirmed what I was seeing is that these kids who don't speak in academic English at home have no sense of our academic writing rules because they don't speak in an academic language. And the fact that she was African American just made it all the better because I think that sometimes there are things that as a white teacher I can't maybe say and yet to hear from an African American saying “no, you're doing these kids a disservice if you're not teaching them academic English--- if you're not teaching them to write academically or read as an academic. You're setting them backyou know...you're doing a disservice. [p. 17]

Delpit (1995) was a required reading in our course and that reading encouraged her to try something different in her classroom. In a sense, the information pushed her toward other ways that might work with her students. She said students began to connect with the information as they found their errors, “Oh my goodness Mrs. Jill, I found a subject-verb agreement error---I found a pronoun-antecedent.” She indicated that they found errors and also understood that when they received marked-up writing from her, they knew the meanings of the markings. She said, “You know it's like we're finally giving them the rules. It's like we were hiding the rules from them before and expecting them to play the game. You know it doesn't make sense to me. Now that I'm giving them the rules and the language and they can put that together to know why those red marks are on their paper.” Jill's new procedure appeared to provide her with enthusiasm to do more in her classroom. Her students' reported responses indicated that they made sense of the work. Although she did not indicate that she worked against the school curriculum, she does say that most other teachers and workshop presenters steered teachers away from teaching explicit skills. Her decision to move against the expected manner of teaching might provide us with an

idea of how deeply she noticed her students and how she looked for ways to meet their needs.

She also indicated that the composite of each of her classes was very different:

They each take on their own personality as a class. Like my 4th hour class, they tend to be kind of quiet. They do their work and when I ask for “good news” maybe one kid....they’re nice and personable kids. My 5th hour comes in and they’re loud and vociferous and they have lots to say and they’re hard to get quieted down and when we discuss literature they’ve all got something...I mean they’re smart kids...they’re not being disrespectful or rude--there aren’t discipline problems. It’s just that they’re a loud group. They’re funny...and some of my smarter kids. Then I’ve got my 6th hour which is probably my smallest ...only 13, you’d think that I could connect with these kids and do some really great things with them...but they’re lazy and [have] attitude and they don’t like English and it’s 6th hour...just kind of this room of negativity, you know? This is the 11th grade...all literature; grammar and literature. It’s interesting how they take on their own community even though I didn’t develop it...I’m the same teacher, doing the same thing, the same lessons ...but there are very different cultures, communities in my room. [p. 8]

Jill was quite aware of the differences between the students in her learning communities. She tagged them as “smart,” “quiet,” “lazy,” and “funny.” The last class of the day appeared to be the least compliant. This may speak to the difficulty of making it through the day both for the teacher and students. Jill has been teaching the same material three times in a row and the students have been in classes all day so one might wonder if those two factors might play into the lack of energy. It is important to note, however, that Jill is very much aware of her students and the way in which they perform individually as well as within a group. Again, these close observations of students and the ways in which she attended to the students might speak to the culturally-responsive stance that she appeared to hold (Delpit, 2006; Jiminez, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Li, 2003; Purcell-Gates, 1997).

Faith & Religion. Referring to Jill’s life story, it might be noted that she had always wanted to become a teacher. Her life was immersed in teaching so that she had a good understanding of the mechanics of the profession. She also had, and continued to have, a strong

faith that pushed her to help those she viewed as less fortunate and she said that anyone who chooses to teach in a low-income school should be passionate about the work:

I think if you are genuinely passionate about what you are doing and about the kids you have sitting in front of you...you are always seeking how you do this better ...how can I better connect with them? How can I save that one that's not different because of me...how can ...so I think I'm always seeking answers and so in order to...so if you are seeking and you have questions in your head, you're always paying attention to what clues might help you get the answers. [p. 19]

Jill felt that it was part of her duty to “save” children. As much as she seemingly cared about her students, she provided a seemingly deficit view of what they brought to school. It might also be pointed out that Jill’s background may play a part in her goal to help her students. Her strong sense of faith, which might be seen as a strong part of her identity, both growing up and currently as a pastor’s wife might add to the idea of saving her students from the perils that they face outside of school (Fairbanks, et al., 2010).

Jill observed that her students had many challenges, many of which she attributed to the poverty in their lives. She projected a high sense of caring for her students and wanted to assist them such as providing time before school to work with those who wanted assistance. Her views about saving children provided a deficit view of what students and their families might add to the educational process. However, she applied various strategies to build relationships with her students such as asking them to share good news, watching for behavioral changes and scaffolding instruction to meet their needs.

Pat

Noticing & Classroom Connections. Pat has been in the Tremont District for her 16 years of her teaching career. She also lived within the district. At the time of this research, she was teaching a 3rd-4th split, a level that she has taught for several years. She had nearly

completed the requirements to receive an ESL endorsement²⁰ and she had also been through several professional development programs provided by the school. Pat appeared to show a caring attitude toward students, but she also showed a substantial lean toward deficit views (Figure 5).

The Basics. In terms of what Pat observed about her students' physical needs, she indicated that they were not a huge concern to her, instead, academic concerns were foremost on her mind. She said that most of her students from low-income families have their food "taken care of." Although Dana, Mary, and Jill had indicated that lack of the basics affected how their students performed, Pat did not see that as a problem.

Pat shared some of the rewards and challenges of teaching in her school and she spoke highly of a young student who had transferred to her school. She said, "he makes applesauce out of apples" and indicated that he had amazing work skills. He was a 4th grade student working at a sixth-grade math level and a ninth-grade reading level (p. 7). But she also said his home life was difficult:

Mom was injured and she... she got injured and then she and her husband divorced while living in Florida. Because of her injury, she cannot live alone and they got divorced so they had to move here to Michigan so he had to leave Dad and Sister, come up here to Michigan. He now shares a bedroom with his mom and they live with Grandma and Grandpa in an apartment. So, it's not the best situation but boy, what does he do? He makes applesauce out of apples. You know, he just...he looks at life and says, 'How can I make it better?' So, he's a really neat kid. [p. 7]

Pat noted Grant's hurdles and she marveled at the way in which he managed to thrive and even advance. She spoke fondly of the young boy and her tone indicated an intimacy toward the family in the way she used the terms Dad, Mom, and Sister to denote that she clearly connected

²⁰ This graduate course and a practicum were the only two of six courses to be completed.

with Grant's life. However, it appeared that even though she did not know the family well, she knew their story, although she did not indicate how she knew so much about the family.

Pat talked more specifically about a student, David, who had arrived in her classroom.

She had read his cumulative file and noted several challenges such as a tendency to bully:

And his last school, before coming to me, hadn't seen him for three weeks before joining me because he was the school bully or had that reputation and on the--waiting for the school bus, he bullied some boy who had brass knuckles who beat the tar out of him and he has scars by his eyes from when he was beaten by this child. So, we were not quite aware of what his behaviors were...until the cume²¹ came but even before the cume came, he already started showing some---just some behavior differences from the rest of my students. [p. 9]

Pat was well aware that David was on the periphery of her class. She appeared to have significant information about the boy before his folder arrived. It might be noted through previous examples, that Pat nearly always had a sufficient amount of information about her students and their families, although there was no indication where the information came from. She reportedly made her own assessment of the student and then once his file arrived began to make further determinations. She shared an incident in her class that involved him when he stuck his tongue out at two girls in her class. Classmates were watching them as she addressed the issue. "Well, David and girls, you know the whole class is watching and that's ok because eventually everyone's going to have problems and they need to know how to solve it. And so the girls shared what they had to share and then David---well, I said, "David, what do you have to say? 'Cause I want to understand. Let's seek first to understand and then to be understood" (p. 9). She talked with him as the class watched until, she reported, he realized that he should apologize to the girls. This scenario provided a picture of Pat's stance after she had garnered knowledge about this student and then pushed him to make the *best* decision—even what might

²¹ Cumulative folder containing detailed academic and behavioral information about individual students.

be seen as a moral decision. We see that she first looked closely as to how his behavior fit into her classroom. She then read his cumulative folder. And with that information, she worked quickly with a situation that could have been dismissed by many teachers as a childhood prank; a child sticking his tongue out. Pat appeared to know that she immediately needed to capture the moment in order to begin to reel David in from the periphery of her classroom. She also indicated that this was a situation that involved all of her students so they should all assist in problem solving or at least figure out how to solve problems in a reasonable manner. Pat's actions might be viewed as deep care (Noddings, 1984) for her students although as Dana had done, she may have stepped too far into the care role, thus, promoting her own moral stance.

Motivation & Building Relationships. Pat talked about the students that she did not always take notice of and the guilt that she felt when that occurred. She shared a story regarding a “very timid boy” whom she had not observed during the day and realized, later that evening, her neglect of him.

And I said to myself, no and that was stupid of you, you know. You didn't validate him. So, the next day I actually apologized to him. I said, 'You know Darryl, I don't know what it was yesterday. I just didn't see you and I want you to know that I value you and if I don't see you, you raise your hand a little bit more for me and you make sure that I call on you and I'll do my best to make sure I see you.' Because it's easy to miss those kids who are quiet, you know. [p. 24]

Pat attempted to show how she observed all students, especially those who were quiet. Possibly this was one way that helped her to build relationships and allow students to feel included within the classroom community. She also indicated that she had to work hard to treat boys and girls equally as she tended to “have stronger relationships with girls than boys” (p. 24). Her awareness portrayed thoughtfulness by the way she reportedly worked with children. Her candid admission about preference toward gender was insightful in that it allowed a view of Pat's thinking about what might be fair in her work with students. Possibly, the role of her Christian background

influenced her identity (Fairbanks, et al., 2010) in ways to think more deeply about her students and their feelings especially when she said, “It’s not okay not to have bonds with everybody” (p.24).

Pat made general observations of students but she also made classroom connections with some of those observations but she said she does not treat all students in the same way. She indicated that she attempted to let students know that “Equal is not always fair. Fair is not always equal” (p. 6). It appeared that she implemented culturally responsive methods within her classroom as she considered individual student’s needs and she provided individual attention to them and attempted to create a community of learners (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Cultural Observations and Funds of Knowledge. Pat provided an example of a young ELL student who entered class every morning and began working with a language learning software. Pat said that none of the students questioned her about that because she had already told them that certain students get certain privileges and there are good reasons for that.

They all know she’s on there because she has to do some extra work. It’s her choice to come in early. I think it really helps that at the beginning of the year. I have a student with diabetes who has a port that is surgically implanted. And we always start out the beginning of the year...either the first or the second day talking about Kayla’s port because when she was younger, little ones would come up and try to lift her shirt because of the cord, you can see it as it dangles underneath her shirt and when she was younger, people did try to pull it out of her. [p. 6]

Pat indicated the actions she took for each of these students. It appeared that she not only knew her students well but she also took the opportunity to build community within her classroom.

The “Equal is not always fair. Fair is not always equal,” approach seemingly allowed Pat to have an open dialogue with her students, thus creating an atmosphere of trust and relationship building and allowing them to know that certain students might appear to be privileged over others but for special reasons. These conversations may be difficult, at times, because it makes particular

students stand out. For example Lily and Kayla became the lesson about fair and equal and that might work well if both students were in agreement.

Students brought many talents and skills with them and Pat took notice but she also indicated that many of the teachers in her building did not connect with students in ways that were helpful. She indicated that, “We look at one tiny aspect of their life with their education and not try to bring their everything to the school.” Behaving in this way, she said, teachers miss out on the children who might not soar in academics but who are really good at other things (p. 21). She indicated that it was a teacher’s responsibility to recognize the potential in all students and if that did not happen, then students end up making poor decisions. She said she helped her students by noting their strengths, “You know I notice that you’re really good at making people laugh” and “You can really sell someone on something and maybe you’ll be a good salesman later on. And just let them know what some of those options are when you see them shine in areas” (p. 21).

Pat indicated that it was not just about observing what children bring to school but it also meant that teachers had to use that information in some constructive manner such as “...maybe you’ll be a good salesman later on.” Pat, like Dana, Jill, and Mary, seemingly attempted to understand that if she could recognize her students’ needs, then she might approach her teaching in a way that could possibly reach all students who bring varying funds of knowledge (Moll, 2001) as well as particular attributes to her classroom.

Pat provided an example where she indicated an uncomfortable feeling as well as a lack of confidence in how to work with certain kinds of cultural curriculum:

...sensitive things like the underground railroad and I have African American students in my classroom. I had read a piece...umm...I can’t recall how many years ago, how African American students tend not to look at their teacher when their teacher’s reading about the Civil War, about slavery, and so after reading that, I’m very conscious. What

do I do? Do I look at them or do I try to ignore them? What's natural? What's appropriate? How do I make them feel comfortable when we're talking about that piece of our history and yet give them the honor to know that they're valued and gosh darn we screwed up as a country. So, there are times where there's cultural sensitivity that needs to take place when there is that kind of reading. [p. 23]

The idea that Pat is uncomfortable with broaching the topic of slavery may shed light on her lack of awareness regarding the power that she holds in society as a white woman. As Delpit (1995) maintains, “those with power are frequently least aware of---or at least willing to acknowledge --its existence.” Pat’s lack of comfort with the topic did not seemingly allow her to include information that might be important to creating history lessons. Though she had taken courses with a focus on multicultural education, she shared that has been an area of weakness for her and she was not sure how to handle it. One might wonder if ESL or professional development courses had attempted to move into the discussion that focused on not just attributes of students, but how teachers handled their own quandaries and insecurities when working with students from diverse cultures and settings. It appeared that she was seeking permission from an expert that might allow her to talk more openly about a topic that she may have felt would alienate some of her students. Readings that pose these issues might be drawn into courses, just as Jill had used Delpit’s (1995) words to guide her work, but Pat had not figured out how to connect that knowledge to her classroom.

Pat indicated that building class cohesiveness was not always easy as the teacher does not always have control over students, especially those whose home or cultural understandings clash with the expectations in the classroom. Her concern over a disrespectful student in her classroom led her to discuss the problem with a friend who was married to a man from the same cultural background of the student. The friend told her that within the Cuban culture, she had observed that it was commonplace to show disrespect toward women:

She would go with him to his house and he'd be screaming at his mom and she's like "It's so disrespectful to your mom" and he said, 'That's just the way our culture talks to each other.' [p. 7]

Her friend's example assisted her with understanding the boy in her classroom whose mother would not scold him but it also might raise the question as to cultural issues that should be raised during professional development or college courses.

And interestingly the mom would not yell at the child...this adult boy but he could yell at her. Unfortunately, I could never figure out how to communicate with this boy. He would always argue with me whether he was right in arguing or not right in arguing. You know, if you said 2 plus 2 is four, he could find an argument to provide that you're not right. It was very...the atmosphere was very...I did not like it. [p. 7]

Pat attempted to glean answers through a friend who was married to someone from the same culture as her alleged unruly student. This appears to be an example of essentializing (Sleeter, 2012) as she tended to think that all people from that culture might behave in the same ways. It appeared that the situation was such that she needed to find answers to allow her to handle the challenge with the child, but it appeared that it never came to fruition when she said, "he could find an argument to provide that you're not right." She did not have the control that she needed to assimilate this student fully into the classroom. She spoke about this student often throughout the interview, although he was not a current student. It appeared that he made an indelible mark upon Pat.

Pat appeared to make generalizations about one student from one culture as she tried to puzzle out the situation. The Wellness Report (2011) confirms that low-income schools handle more behavioral and emotional challenges, and that may have been at the center of Pat's observations but she had been attempting to find an answer for the challenges so looked to his cultural background as the source of distress, instead.

Faith & Religion. Pat was also aware that resources were limited to students. During the Christmas season, the school offered a Secret Santa Shop where students were allowed to buy

items to distribute for the holiday. But she also observed that many of her students could not afford to buy any of the items, although they were not costly.

It's--you're just dying every day for them. I spent so much money for my kids. Now, one of my students went to that Secret Santa Shop and she just has one sister and her eyes were on something that she knew her sister would love and she doesn't have the money for it and I said, 'Well, you know I have a box on the table and just throw it in. Whatever's in that box, I'll buy.' There were several students that I bought stuff for because I'm not going to have them going home with junk when there was actually something nice their sibling would want. I don't always tell my husband what I spend my money on (just between us). I don't lie to him. He knows I spend money. He just doesn't know what it's for. [p. 13]

Pat spent her own money on items so that children might provide gifts to family members during the Christmas holidays. She encouraged students toward gift giving during the holiday and this may stem from her strong Christian values, as noted in Chapter 4. This appeared to be an important area for her when she indicated "I'm not going to have them going home with junk." She may have noticed that they did not have the resources for gifts, but she made no mention as to knowing if all of her students participated in the holiday. This might be seen as though she were imposing her views and traditions or she may have been attempting to build an inclusive community. As indicated in Chapter 4, Pat was heavily invested in her Christian life and beliefs, possibly to the point where she unintentionally did not fully consider the views of others. Just as Bobby favored Christian holidays over the other cultural holidays of students in his school so, too, did Pat. The Christmas holidays appeared to become the center of school activity with a Santa Shop geared for students and families and Pat was there to make sure that students could participate as fully as possible, even if it meant that she assisted them in buying gifts. Bobby and Pat appeared to be quite focused on the importance of celebrating the Christmas holiday. Perhaps that was an identity position (Fairbanks et al., 2010) in that faith was so engrained into their every day experiences. It is not to say that they were purposely focused on the holidays, it may just be that they are not fully aware of the roles they played might be facilitated by their faith.

Although Pat indicated that she tried to make the classroom a place in which everyone solved problems together, she said she sometimes struggled to not offend children in her class especially when it came to the Christmas holiday. She indicated that for the Christmas holiday during the time of this research, she brought instrumental holiday music to class, something that she claimed to have not done in the past.

I felt comfortable enough to play that because I felt like...you know, they hear this instrument music in the mall and I didn't think it would hurt them to hear instrument music and so...yah, I'm very cautious with what I do. I don't want to offend, like the Muslim boy that I have in my class. I don't want to offend him. He's part of my environment and if I'm offending him by something I do or say, then I've just alienated him and that's not okay. And that I'm not ok whether I was a teacher or any job--as a Christian I can't alienate anyone; I'm accepting of everyone. Cause God made them in his image, so I can't be offensive. [p. 19]

Pat appeared to be quite aware of the Muslim boy in her class and recognized that Christmas was something that he did not practice. She also indicated that she did not want to offend him but then she also brought Christmas music to the classroom and earlier she had helped students purchase gifts for Christmas at the Secret Santa shop. She appeared torn between her views as a Christian and her responsibilities as a teacher. She seemingly wanted to share the Christian tradition in the classroom without alienating her students of other cultures but it was not known how she accomplished that. She was aware of the fact that he was from another culture that did not recognize Christian holidays. Bobby, too, was aware that his Muslim and Buddhist students did not share in the Christmas holiday, but he still held Christmas parties and talked about tradition, although he also encouraged them to write about their own traditions. One might wonder how uncomfortable the space was for students who did not share similar beliefs, as Christian traditions were the prevailing topic; however, it is noted once again that the teachers were aware of their potential biases, but continued to do what they have seemingly always done in regards to the holiday.

Pat spoke about how she was aware of and cautious about recognizing religious and cultural backgrounds and said she attempts to honor and “give credence” to different holidays other than those from a Christian stance and shared a story about a Bosnian boy in her class who was of Muslim faith:

And he said ‘oh, you know I missed school yesterday.’ And it wouldn’t just be that he would have to hide and be afraid to talk about his faith in the classroom even though it’s very different from my faith. I still want to give him the right place to know that this is a safe place for everyone and his opinions matter and his beliefs matter. And so we will always talk about that and...this area is very Dutch. And last week was St. Nick’s Day and we talked about St. Nick’s Day because somebody had put their shoes by their Christmas tree and their shoes were filled with candy and so we do try to honor those things. [p. 3]

Pat also indicated that she encouraged students to talk about their traditions during the “good news” that they shared in the morning. But, she also noted that the “curriculum, itself, unfortunately cannot be centered on those types of things because of state mandates and standards, but I try to honor the families and their beliefs and their cultures as much as I can” (p. 3). Again, Pat shared her views on how the holidays and, seemingly, faith entered into her classroom. She mentioned that she wanted all children in her classroom to feel safe in sharing their religious views, but she only cited one example of how that was done and that was focused on St. Nick’s Day, a Christian holiday. She appeared to care deeply about making all children feel comfortable with their family beliefs and culture, but she continued to promote Christian views and then she cited state mandates and standards for not allowing more talk about other cultures. In looking back at her *life history*, one might recognize how engrained her religion has been within her life, so much so, that she may not recognize how much it might influence her work in a multicultural classroom and the conundrum she faced while making curriculum decisions.

Pat shared her ideas about the role of faith within her classroom and indicated that she would never share faith-based ideas unless parents provided permission for her to do so:

I will never talk about my faith in front of the children. If the children ask a specific question I always say, 'If you have a note from your parents, I'll answer your questions. But other than that, umm...you could probably guess where I come from but I can't tell you where I come from.' And I did have a student...I actually have a note from her mom and dad and they were of a similar faith that I was and they asked me to tell them about something and I did and that is where that came from. But, I do have to maintain that balance because God is more important than my job and yet I don't want to be...[p.19]

Pat clarified her stance on the role of faith in her classroom, knowing quite well that she had boundaries to follow. Pat and Bobby held similar views in that Bobby indicated that he would not share ideas about faith unless he had a note from parents. It appeared that both teachers were clearly aware of those boundaries. Pat understood that yet, as observed, one might notice how she tended to fall into the comfort zone of her own faith. Again, she, like Bobby, noticed students with varying needs but appeared to continue on a path with what might be most comfortable for her to speak about--Christianity. It also might be noted that as much as she seemingly knew about her students' personal lives, she did not share much in terms of how she approached the curriculum with them.

Pat tended toward a caring view of her students and spent time trying to build relationships with them, similar to her stance on families. But, she also held substantial deficit views as she indicated that she needed to save her students and, as another example, she provided Christmas celebrations without much regard to the diversity of students within her classroom. Her views of students and culture were limited, according to comments, as she shared more personal stories about students but did not provide her stance on academic challenges or solutions. Her background appeared to influence some of the decisions that were predominate in her classroom.

Multiple Dimensions of Noticing

These teachers reported areas in which they observed students' strengths and weaknesses and it might be noted that their observations may have possibly become consequential when they acted upon them (Schoenfeld, 2011). Bobby, Dana, Mary, Jill, and Pat provided numerous examples of actions that they took based on their observations, with some of the teachers providing more examples than others. The observations that they made might be based on many variables including knowledge they had gained from structured courses and professional development as well as from their developed identities but their stories provided deep insight into not just what they noticed but how they did or did not attend to what they observed. In relating this to the work of Lefstein & Snell (2011), moving beyond noticing and into professional vision, they argue that it is not a "singular, cognitive ability." Instead, Lefstein & Snell (2011) suggest that professional vision has multiple dimensions and that "social practices of seeing involve social skills and sensitivities alongside dispositions to notice and capacities to reason." This research moves beyond the video work of van Es and Sherin (2001) as well as Lefstein & Snell (2011) to present tangible, every day lived classroom experiences of these five teachers who observed students in a multitude of moments and who attended to, or not, to those moments. These teachers not only observed, but they acted, and sometimes reacted, in a multitude of ways.

The themes identified in this chapter included the *basics* that integrated sustenance and deportment as well as transiency and truancy challenges. The other themes included *cultural observations* and *funds of knowledge, motivation* and *relationship building* and *religion* and *faith*. Some of the teachers talked in depth about what they did with observations to promote academic growth while others used observations to deal with classroom behavior.

The Basics

When recognizing the *basics*, Dana, Mary, and Jill claimed that children did not have many of their basic needs met and they came to school with stresses that made them appear lonely, depressed or sad. Pat shared her observations about David, a transient student, who appeared to be a bully. Bobby, however, focused exclusively on deportment where he indicated frustration about ways to address unruly behavior that students brought. Jill was also concerned that her high school students were not supervised and she noted that fights often broke out during the holidays, citing tension at home. Pat was the only one to claim that students had physical needs met but she indicated concern over academic needs as students “lost ground” over the summer. Teachers’ observations about *basics* might suggest that they have learned ways in which to think about students either through their lived experiences or the professional development or training they have taken that focused on diverse student populations.

As noted in the motivation theme, some teachers did work with the notion of motivating students. For example, Dana appeared to want to assist her high school students to get to school every day and on time, so in response to her observations, she made phone calls and picked up two of her students. She also took them to Burger King after they attended school for one week without being absent. Bargaining might seemingly be a tactic to encourage participation, but, as she soon discovered, it left her with little control when her students returned to truancy (Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusick, 1986). Although Dana attempted to find ways to entice her students to become interested in their education, she may have ventured beyond what was expected of most teachers. She also noted that students did not arrive at school with an abundance of academic strengths, indicating that she had little recognition for the funds of knowledge that they brought (Moll, 1996). Although she tried to connect with them, she did so through ways that were time consuming and possibly enabling, and sometimes involved ignoring

other students. She realized that working one-on-one with particular students was inefficient, but she wanted to “save” those who seemed most in need.

The teachers used various methods to encourage motivation, and to build classroom community (Bruner, 1996) especially toward students who were most difficult to reach. Dana used humor to build relationships when she “jokingly” asked the sisters if they needed wake-up calls. Mary, too, used humor and showed popular culture knowledge when attempting to find a way to interest her student in reading. She was seemingly successful, but it took a special knowledge of the student mixed with humor to accomplish the task. Jill noticed that her students would attempt to sleep during class so she would do “what I can to keep them working.” Jill said she began to scaffold her instruction to a level that students could understand and then found that they complied. So, Jill, Mary, and Dana observed particular challenges in their classrooms and thought of ways in which to influence those observations. Bobby, to an extent, thought of ways to assist him with his observations, but much of his observations focused on deportment, therefore, he attempted to fix the problems by isolating students, rewarding students, and calling parents. Pat said little about what she did with academics. She offered observations that focused on relationships with students as well as how she provided an early morning homework time. But, she did not indicate as Jill, Mary, and Dana, deeper accounts of how she assisted particular children with the work that needed to be accomplished.

One other area where some of the teachers participated was that of making implicit information more explicit. Jill did this by observing students’ needs for explicit instruction in student writing and carrying through, although other professionals had told her that it might not be the best way to teach English. Dana and Mary also shared what might be thought common information about the avenues to school once high school was completed, possibly an area that

not many teachers covered as part of their curriculum. By doing this, these teachers appeared to assist students in uncovering the sometimes implicit curriculum as described by Eisner (1985) as he argued that what schools do not teach might be just as important as what they do teach. For Jill, it meant going against other colleagues in order to do what was best for students. For Dana and Mary, it was about providing ongoing encouragement regarding their students' futures.

Backgrounds

Life stories may shed light on how these teachers' practices may have been influenced by their earlier lived experiences and formation of their identities, which, according to Fairbanks, et al., (2010) are "learned but not static." If teachers' identities are not static, then one might assume that the learned behaviors might need direct attention by teacher educators or trainers, in order for them to be addressed with the possibility of pointing out what might be problematic in a public school. Teachers may need guidance or possibly challenged to explore their identities and how their identities might shape their observations and actions. For example, although Bobby and Pat were aware of the fine line between public schools and religion, and what they could say or not say within their classes, they appeared to find it acceptable to carry on particular traditions such as Christmas parties. This might speak to how they did not view this as a possible intrusive event for some of their students not of a Christian faith. Possibly assisting them with other ways to address this might be one way to work with them.

Nearly 50% of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001) and the teacher turnover rate in high poverty schools was 5.5% above the average attrition rate (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003), yet these teachers have remained. Dana, Mary, and Jill admitted that their faith provided them with the patience to continue their work and it might even be gleaned that the influence of their faith

provided them with a mentality to *save* or *parent* their students. Pat, and to some extent Bobby, brought faith into the setting in ways that promoted it. They observed that students might enjoy Christmas parties and the celebration that came with it but they did not appear to highly consider students from other cultural backgrounds. However, in understanding their life stories, it might be easier to understand the influence that faith played upon their lives as public school teachers and the tensions that they may have felt when school and faith issues met.

There were also other examples of life history influences. Bobby's observations that his students were unruly and that he would have never been that way toward teachers, speaks to the idea that his students did not arrive at school prepared. Dana's push to "never give up" is projected onto her students as she observes those who need her most and then attempts to push students toward the goal. Jill's observation of a middle student girl making inappropriate remarks led her to admit that she did not understand since she had never experienced that as a child. And Pat's strong Christian values may have prompted her to assist students in buying gifts for family members during the holidays.

Final Thoughts

Dana shared her thoughts at the start of this chapter, lamenting how she knew about the characteristics of students in her school but did not have enough information about how to work with her students. This might assist one to think about the kinds of structures and resources within low-income schools. Some of the teachers appeared to understand the challenges and worked toward promoting community through building student relationships, an idea promoted through culturally responsive teaching measures (Compton-Lily, 2009; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Li, 2008; Purcell-Gates, 1997; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In fact, relationship building was one area that teachers addressed in depth whether it focused on poor

classroom behaviors or as an attempt to motivate students. But it is clear that the teachers in this study experienced seemingly deficit views of their students, even after the length of time spent working in their schools and the training they received. However, it might be noted that other circumstances might stand in the way of the work they attempted to promote in their classrooms. Teachers' lack of understanding about students' funds of knowledge as well as holding an enabling stance toward students might push teachers further from the work they might envision. They might find more success with closer scrutiny about the funds of knowledge that students bring and incorporate that into the curriculum. Some of the challenges that the teachers discussed appeared to be overwhelming to the point of frustration for them. The fact that 15% of students (Wellness Report, 2011) in high poverty circumstances experience more behavioral and social problems might provide evidence to back teachers who observe the spectrum of behaviors ranging from apathy to defiance. Knowing that teachers receive a wider spectrum of behavioral, cultural, and linguistic differences in low-income schools might prompt policymakers to rethink the numbers of students placed in those classrooms as well as consideration of the special resources needed to assist teachers in their work, including specialized knowledge about students. In order to assist teachers, the idea of smaller class sizes as well as added collaborative assistance in the classroom may be ideas to explore. Also, specific professional development geared toward the work within their communities which focus on cultural differences might assist teachers in puzzling through the challenges that they observe.

However, there may be another issue in that some of these teachers have learned to use cultural celebration, trivialization, and essentializing culture (Sleeter, 2012) as they explained some of their work with students. This might represent a disconnection from what they have learned in their courses and how they applied the information in the classrooms. If, like in

Bobby's case, teachers use a "step" approach to working with diversity or if they tend to, as in Pat's case, essentialize culture by grouping everyone into categories, then it might be difficult for change to take place. On the other hand, culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogies might not go far enough in providing teachers specific examples of the tenets promoted in culturally focused pedagogies. As Dana pointed out at the start of this chapter after stating that she understands about diversity and she also indicated that "But you're not telling me what I need to do in my room to help them." The frame of CRT provides awareness, but it might push further to provide real life examples of how teachers are grappling with these same issues. Possibly, some of the techniques used by the teachers in this study that focused on *how* to build relationships as Dana and Mary did; or how to *identify* unfair treatment of students as Mary noted with the African American males sent to the office, might be a start. Close observations might provide a start, but then teachers might need more comprehensive study in what to do once an observation is made. In the next and final data chapter, the teachers' observations about school community are examined.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Teachers and School Community - Hoop Jumping

You know, they keep pushing things down ...and they aren't giving the foundations and the house is going to collapse. (Bobby)

The preceding chapter focused on what teachers observed about students and how they addressed those observations. In this final data chapter, teachers' views of community are explored. *Community*, in this chapter, represents the workspace that teachers attend to each day. It includes the policies that guide the schools, the colleagues and administrators who work together, and the resources that assist teachers in their work. I begin with a conversation about general expectations for teachers stemming from the enactment of No Child Left Behind. I then organize the chapter to look at individual teacher's views regarding their communities. In the discussion section, I indicate how teachers' work with students may or may not provide them with power and control in their classrooms that might lead to becoming change agents.

Teacher Expectations within the School Community

Teachers are under much scrutiny as the expectations have tightened for them to bring students to passing AYP²² levels, as planned for in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. This piece of legislation brought about a great deal of attention to low-socioeconomic schools and pointed out the inequalities that took place in many of those schools, but the legislation has also resulted in narrowing of the curriculum as well as adding "complex rules" that require adequate yearly progress for schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010). When schools fail to meet AYP, they must begin a series of steps to remedy the situation or they become in danger of reconstitution. It is within high-poverty districts that some schools are required to use scientifically based materials, but even if research has shown a program to be effective, it does

²² AYP is a test accountability measure that represents "adequate yearly progress" or proven levels of performance that schools using Title I funds must meet each year.

not mean it will be effective for all children in all schools (Gerstl-Pepin & Woodside-Jiron, 2005). This kind of reform with students in low-income schools can have a negative impact as “exit testing, increasing surveillance, monitoring behavior and attendance, and expanding administrative authority over teachers and the curriculum will force many adolescents out of high school” (Sedlak, Wheeler, C, Pullin, D., Cusick, P., 1986, p. 180).

Children who live in poverty or who are from homes that are culturally and linguistically different from their schools, might find a disconnect between the funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992) that they bring from home and the work that is presented to them at school. Some students may need more time to make connections and process the material presented to them but teachers may find themselves under duress to teach to the test, thus providing information that students may not be ready or interested in connecting to. This might bring to light recent scandals as in Georgia, mostly in Atlanta, where teachers in one in five elementary schools were investigated for changing test answers (New York Times, February 11, 2011).

The measures instituted by some administrators who need to push teachers and students toward passing tests, might involve teaching in ways where there is little student connection to the delivery such as in the “banking” of knowledge described by Freire:

It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of 'banking or preaching in the desert.' [p. 96]

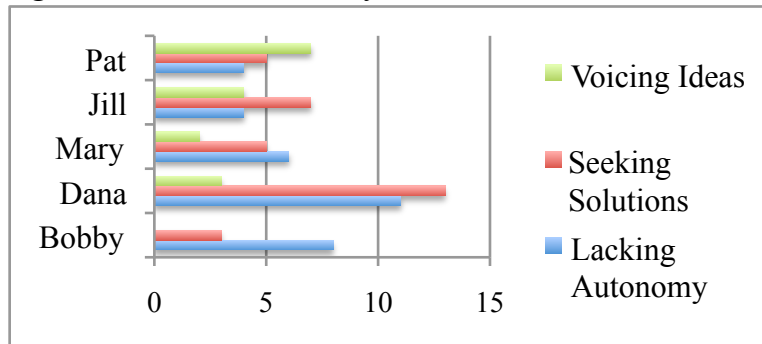
If teachers are pushed toward a banking model, as might be expected in high stakes schools, they may find their work stifling as well as stressful when they are unable to teach in meaningful ways that help students build connections.

In the previous two chapters, five teachers' observations regarding families and students were explored as well as how these teachers acted upon the observations. This chapter offers exploration of what teachers notice about *community* and the ways in which they act upon what they observe. The term *communities*, refers to the context or the immediate school community and the observations that teachers make regarding school resources, colleagues, administrators and rules. Rules in this chapter refer to the policies made at school, local, state, and federal levels that might impact what happens in classrooms. The structure of this chapter remains the same as the previous chapters as I begin with Bobby, who has the least amount of time in the classroom, and move to Dana, Mary, Jill and Pat. I begin with how each participant defines policy and then move to their observations about rules, colleagues and administration, and resources as well as changes that each might envision. I also comment about the power and control that communities may, or may not, provide to teachers. Most of the evidence was obtained from the general question interviews, but evidence from course artifacts that related to community were used as well.

Some teachers had more to say about their communities than others. I have provided a view (Figure 6) of the teachers' stances regarding their views on the lack of autonomy within their community in terms of the rules, colleagues and administrators and resources. As I did with information in previous chapters, I sorted out the statements regarding community, from all of the teachers' artifacts. I looked for phrases with particular words that might indicate that they reportedly lacked autonomy, or were seeking solutions, or they actually spoke up to either an administrator, colleague or, in one case, the teachers' union (Appendix G). I have also provided their views regarding issues that they indicated might help with their work as they sought solutions. And, I have indicated when they provided information that reflected their ability to

use *voice* or to speak up for how they carried out work in their classrooms or within the school community.

Figure 6 Teacher Autonomy and School Context



Bobby

Noticing and Classroom Connections. In the previous chapters, I reported that Bobby showed some ways of caring about families and students but he also held substantial deficit views about them. In this chapter, I will show that Bobby indicated that he had little control over policy that guided his instruction. He was knowledgeable about rules, colleagues and resources and provided strong opinions to me, but he admitted to compliance when he working with the administration.

Rules. Bobby defined policy as “certain regulations.” He added that it included, “certain things that are established by the school district whether it’s the superintendent, curriculum director, or the school board---that is to be followed and stuck to by the district staff, usually without question (p. 12).” He indicated that policy was “usually for the good of the majority (p.12).” Bobby’s view did not indicate a strong voice that teachers might need in order to run cohesive and successful classrooms.

Policy appeared as rules “to be followed” and for the “good of the whole school.” He seemingly viewed them as items that might be questioned, but must be followed, possibly

because he did not want to show negative feelings or ideas toward those for whom he worked.

He indicated a frustration centered around teaching students to take the state test:

... the biggest problem I have with our curriculum in the way it's driven is they are requiring us to teach more...teach wider and not deeper. They say you have to teach this and this and this and this and in the mean time nothing is going deep. Everything is just surface knowledge and they [students] lose it...they just forget it. I have kids coming into the 4th grade that still can't add and subtract yet I'm supposed to teach them how to multiply and divide. [p. 10]

Although Bobby claimed to follow the rules, he showed his frustration with policy that supported wider over deeper instruction. The strict guidelines for teachers in schools might prevent students from learning valuable information needed to move to the next level. If rules stated that teachers must present particular curriculum on particular days, even when students were not ready, then one might wonder how students found success. Bobby observed that many of his students did not have the requisite foundational knowledge and he appeared frustrated that teachers had little voice in the decisions, stating that those deciding on state curriculum were not educators and did not understand. In the opening of this chapter, Bobby commented on the instability of the foundation:

... put them [policy makers] in a classroom of 4th graders and let them try to teach these--things that these kids aren't ready to be taught. You know, they keep pushing things down---and they aren't given the foundations and the house is going to collapse and I think that's happening and I think data would show that too. [p. 11]

Although Bobby indicated that he adhered to policy, his frustration appeared evident as he talked about his observations of some children who were not ready to work at the pace in which teachers were required to teach. One might question how this discrepancy in knowledge took place. It may be that the skills have not been focused on in earlier grades or it might be that students in high-poverty settings have not captured the material well enough to move on, for a variety of reasons. Or it might suggest that teachers do not recognize and build upon knowledge

that students bring. As indicated in the previous two chapters, teachers noted that homework did not always get done and students came to school with lack of knowledge, or at least knowledge that did not mesh with what teachers were expected to teach. Added to that, were teachers' observations about attendance and timeliness, transiency and other pressing issues such as lack of food and shelter.

In his final course paper, Bobby stated that Dewey faced some of the same issues his school is now facing when Dewey (1956) lacked adequate funds, experienced administrative difficulties, and could not pay teachers the wages they deserved. Then he explained:

Today's teachers feel as though their freedom to teach is being taken from them due to the advent of state mandated assessments requiring them to "teach to the test." No Child Left Behind has caused some of this feeling. Despite the variance of students each year we must increase our student's "Adequate Yearly Progress." The state has changed the curriculum standards in Social Studies and Science twice in the four years I have been teaching. [March, 2010)]

Bobby suggested that teachers' "freedom to teach is being taken away" as they were expected to teach to the test. Although his frustration was clear, he provided no alternatives for how low-income schools might best serve their diverse populations in ways that allowed for narrowing the achievement gap. But, as stated in previous chapters, teachers were hard pressed, in many cases, to connect their students with the curriculum which many times, might be indicative through the reported lack of motivation that students projected.

Although Bobby appeared frustrated, he maintained that he followed what the district required of him:

I've always been one, well, if they tell you to do it, you just go ahead and do it (laughs)...., I'm not...I don't have the type of personality to--that if I feel there's something wrong or an injustice being done then I'm going to step up and say this needs to be changed or that needs to be changed. I usually will let somebody else do that [p.11]

Although Bobby appeared unhappy with the policy decisions at district level, he also indicated that he would not stand up to policies that he thought were harmful. His lack of voice on this

issue may stem from the fact that he is the newcomer in the building, or perhaps he does not, as he indicated, have that “kind of personality”. But it may seem apparent that he and colleagues have continual conversations about the policies that affect them in the classroom.

Colleagues and Administrators. As part of a 10-hour observation for the course, Bobby was asked to visit a colleague’s classroom and observe/interview that colleague about his work. He spoke with Matt about his role as a teacher in a diverse classroom and reported on Matt’s ideas:

The diversity of the students has changed dramatically and Matt feels they are less prepared for third grade. He feels he was a better teacher when he first taught than what he has become. Matt attributes this to being able to do cool projects when he first began teaching as opposed to now. Time only allows him to get the basic stuff done. He feels the students did better on assessments then because they were able to secure the fundamentals. The standards in 1996 were more grade-appropriate than they are today. Products are now done for STATE tests or required for the administration regardless if the students are fundamentally sound in the subject. [Reflection 3, p. 1]

Bobby relayed that Matt’s view of teaching had changed. It may be that the restrictions placed on teachers by administrators had possibly forced teacher compliance to standards and that may have changed his view. Bobby also inquired about the diversity of Matt’s students:

Matt stated that after awhile he does not look at his students’ ethnicity when he teaches. Delpit addressed this when Vivan Paley stated in ‘Other Peoples Children,’ “Well-intentioned teachers utter, I don’t see color, I only see children.” Delpit suggests that “if one does not see color, then one does not see children.” Matt says that the cultural diversity has not affected his teaching yet, but does fear this will happen down the road. Most of his students he feels are accepting the culture they have moved into and see things from his point of view and his culture. I find this very sad that Matt is not allowing the rich heritage and culture of his students to be important. [Reflection 3, p.1-2]

In this reflective piece, Bobby used a course reading to explain what he had heard from this colleague. He appeared to understand the impact of Delpit’s words as he used them to describe Matt’s view of his students. It was interesting to note that Bobby recognized Matt’s view of students, but Bobby had not appeared to integrate culturally-responsive teaching methods into his repertoire, as indicated in Chapters 5 and 6. Perhaps he was able to see this in his colleague

because he had attempted to connect his course readings to the interview. Bobby continued to share his colleague's views, which included comments about the district's leadership in that they focused more on a business management model that has affected classroom operations:

Matt said there is more focus on the product of the students than on the continued training of the teachers through professional development. He feels the emphasis now is to do anything to get the scores up than to get the students to where they need to be. Matt feels the teachers in our district are backed by the administration but are left out of the loop when decisions are made that will affect the classroom. This administration seems to be top-down as opposed to bottom-up. [Reflection 3 p.1, March, 2010]

Bobby shared Matt's view that teachers might be in a quandary but in part because of decisions by the school administrators who valued the bottom line business model of teaching over the human side of teaching. His reflections appeared to promote the angst that he and his colleagues might have as a result of top-down rules that do not allow for teacher input.

In working with colleagues, Bobby noted that he would like to see grade-level buildings instead of all grades within one building so that all teachers might work together. "Having all six 4th grade teachers all working together in a building and throwing ideas back and forth. I think that would be---I think the behavior situations would be better ...you know not having kindergarteners mixed in with fifth graders" (p.10). Providing separate locations for grade levels was an idea that Bobby said might be advantageous for students and teachers. It appeared that he wanted more communication with the teachers who taught the same level as they could "hash around" ideas for not only curriculum but also about students who might be struggling in the classroom. As noted in Chapters 5 and 6, Bobby might have benefitted from collaboration with colleagues to assist him with some of his struggles. Bobby also indicated that another change he would suggest was to mandate year-round school for the elementary school, a move that he welcomed. "That would be one policy that if I could change, I would....it's antiquated. The school year that we have here is antiquated. There's no reason why these kids have to be off for

three months in the summer. They lose too much. If I could change one policy it would be year round schooling for elementary age” (p 12). He appeared to realize the ramifications of long months that students spent away from school. Although this generally may not be a popular choice among teachers, he voiced his idea in support of it—a move that might be in conflict with his admittance to not having a voice. He also indicated that the first six weeks after returning from summer break, teachers spend preparing for the state test in October as they “go over everything they were suppose to learn (the previous year) and forgot in the summer” (p. 12). He indicated that shorter breaks throughout the year might best benefit students. Bobby observed the problems that accompanied long vacations, most notably, the time it took to bring students up to speed in order that they were prepared for the state test.

Resources. Bobby said that he has become a better teacher but claimed that he was always learning. He indicated that one difficult area was technology, as he did not grow up in a society that used it:

...I can see where I do a disservice for my kids but I also know that if I take them to the computer lab, I can't help them. I can't help them get online into this and to get onto that. ...that would be the biggest thing. Getting an Elmo for my classroom just because I know how important it is for the kids to see the visuals. Through the ELL program and understanding...they're such visual learners and we don't have the visualization available to give to them---to try to help them understand. [p.10]

Bobby realized the importance of tech tools for his students, especially his ELLs, but he did not have the training or the resources. Although he knew that using an “Elmo” or a document camera would be helpful for his ELL students, the absence of these resources might keep him from providing instruction through the ways he knows will work best, especially for particular populations of students. I inquired as to why he might not have that resource:

[Administration] ...they won't pay for it. They say the money's not there. That's the bottom line. We're getting one for every building; one Elmo for every building and I would use one every day. In almost everything that I teach, I would put that on. You know being able to put the reading books and the social studies books up on there so that they

can see the maps and all of these other resources that I have---. [p. 10]

Bobby had learned that visuals were very important to his ELL students, although he did not provide extended ways in which to use the equipment except as a way to show pages in reading and social studies books. One might wonder how the inequities that begin with untrained teachers and the lack of technological resources might hinder students by denying them the competitive edge that these tools might offer.

Bobby appeared frustrated with reported examples that pointed to a lack of teacher autonomy. The inflexible rules combined with continual changes in those rules seemed to be foremost on his mind as he talked about the policy within his school and how difficult it made his job. He provided two examples as to how he was seeking solutions, which included support of year-round schools and placing all grade-level teachers in the same building so that they might share ideas and support one another.

Dana

Noticing and Classroom Connections. In defining policy, Dana said that it was made up of “rules that come from administration.” She relayed that there were policies that came from varying levels, but when she considers policy, it is generally at the school district level. She, like Bobby observed many deficiencies related to policy but she also provided possible solutions to the challenges that she observed.

Rules. The pressure from the administration to meet state mandates has been very challenging, according to Dana, an ESL teacher at the high school. She said the challenges begin with how “to get them [students] to grade level when they’re at a sixth-grade level,” and she claimed that teachers do not receive much assistance in trying to achieve the goals set for them. She suggested:

I would slow things down, for sure...on...especially for my ELL students. I would focus

on what's important and slow it down so it [curriculum] can be more comprehensible instead of it seems like a lot of thing like a lot of short- term memory like how do I get them to pass this one test instead of really understanding the concepts? [p. 11]

Dana appeared to follow the same path as Bobby in suggesting that material should be taught more deeply so that students understood and could apply the knowledge. Dana did not explain how slowing the curriculum might assist, but she appeared to know that students were not grasping the concepts. As indicated in the previous chapter, Dana noted that students were unmotivated and failed their classes. She also talked about how they did not seem to grasp what teachers wanted them to as they used a vocabulary strategy and note outlines during their lessons. There may be a mismatch between how teachers perceive what students need and how lessons might be taught. It might also have been that students truly were not at a level that they might acquire new material, but teachers continued to use the same teaching methods. Dana provided an example of what she meant by short-term memory items as she used an example from the history classes that she taught. She indicated that there was too much information jammed into a short amount of time. There were three teachers in this class. Dana co-taught with one teacher and a special education teacher was there to assist with students who required accommodations. She explained that her co-teacher was away and she and the special education teacher planned together, making vocabulary a priority at the start of class so that they could “make it stick.” Again, she did not elaborate on the method, but the two colleagues observed that students were not connecting, so they worked together to find solutions such as providing a slower pace and a different strategy.

Another struggle Dana noted was that testing schedules did not allow students to rest and be more refreshed for other tests as so many of them fell close together and it was difficult for students to remember so much information, especially the ELL students in her SOS class.

“They’ve got two or three tests that fall within two days of each other. So, I want to know...how can I just get them to pass. So, it’s not...I can’t reteach, you know” (p. 11). In the previous chapter, Dana recalled the success of one student who had been failing a class but she began to provide individual attention and he did well, but she also stated that she could not reteach all of the material to him. This might indicate the need for having more individualized instruction available to students and, as Dana mentioned, a better structured test schedule. But, Dana said structuring tests in such a fashion might be difficult since the teachers do not know one another’s schedule but, as a co-teacher, she observed the flaws of the test system. However she was afraid to broach the issue:

So as far as when they were going to have tests... I struggle too and I’ve said this to my other ELL teachers hoping that they would maybe step up but they haven’t said anything. But I’m in a tough position because last year I stood up against the union and said that we need to start doing something for our school and making some compromises so that we don’t have to have teachers cut in the middle of the year and kids didn’t have to have that shift...so I don’t have a very good reputation (laughs)....a little cold. And, now I’m at a new school so I’m a little cautious with what I say but I think it needs to be brought up that there has to be some kind of maybe...schedule...but figure something out. But it’s so overwhelming. I mean you should have seen the number of tests and projects that they had right before Christmas break. [p. 11]

As in the prior chapter, Dana exhibited a high concern for her students. She noted that teachers did not necessarily work together for the best interests of students. She was reluctant to raise issues because of politics in the new school, but she appeared to observe many things that did not work for the system. She indicated that she “stood up against the union,” but did not elaborate except that it had to do with making switches in the middle of the year where she had been teaching and indicated that the students had to make big adjustments.

Dana also talked about how there appeared to be ongoing changes that seemed to be overpowering at times because the changes in curriculum were overwhelming,

...we get these new standards and now they’re talking about national standards. So, I

think it takes the wind out of some people's sails. You try to get stuff lined up and again, you know, that as far as curriculum goes, it's just getting through it. And if we don't make AYP this year, I believe we'll have to enter restructuring. So, it seems like we are...they've said you've got to use this strategy, you've got to do this ...you've gotta collect it and grade it and put your data in here. You gotta keep track of which ones you're using, so it seems like it's taken the focus off of....ok you have to do this, this and this, that you don't feel like you get to teach because you're being told much of what you have to have that it doesn't leave time for creativity. [p.13]

Her frustration over the continual changes in standards was apparent when she said, “it takes the wind out of some people’s sails.” Her observations regarding the changes were out of her control as she was told what to teach and that the outcomes had better meet requirements, or the school may be in danger of failing. Dana, indeed, noticed that the work was difficult because of the mandates and she observed that students suffer, but she seemingly did not have a voice in the rules passed to her through the administration, nor did she have much voice within the courses that she co-taught as she experienced little preparation time with teachers, some of whom reportedly treated her like a paraprofessional. It might also be noted that her observations and actions with students and families in previous chapters presented their own sets of challenges.

She talked more specifically about how the policies affected the work in her classroom. For example, she indicated that she previously provided projects that had taken two or three days to complete but she said that they no longer have the luxury of time. She also said that information gleaned from tests was not always used to students’ advantage:

...for example in the science class that I am [in]. The teacher that I teach with went through the [State Test] data, looked at how kids performed and noticed that all the questions that they did terrible on were Earth Science and Physical Science. Well, they don't get any of that at the high school level, they get it in 7th grade and that was it. So, we have an environmental science class, which is a lower class. It would be a good place to squeeze in that information. However we can't do that without being approved by one, the principal because it's not what's in the standards for this class. Two, we have to check with the other high school to make sure they want to switch units around because you have to have the same units at the same time and you know, so it seems like it's all these hoops to get through just trying to adjust to teaching what your kids aren't understanding. [p. 13]

Dana observed that teachers were blocked from doing what they thought might help students. As professionals, they culled data and developed a solution but they needed to get through “hoops” in order to put a solution in place. Administrators appeared to have tight reins on teachers’ decisions and authority.

Another area that Dana had observed to be problematic was the attendance policy as she said it promoted failure. She indicated that students automatically failed classes if they missed a set number of days. “So, I have students who are passing a class but because of attendance, they have to fail it.” Dana had indicated, in the previous chapter, that absenteeism was a problem and, at one point, she handled it by offering wake up calls and Burger King. But, it might be possible that she did that so her students would not fail. She said that attendance was not always an issue that students had control over as she indicated, “...for some kids, they have to work after school or they have to get home to help out with little brothers or sisters. It seems to me that if they are able to pull the grade, they should get the grade.” She concedes that the policy perpetuates failure, but one might wonder how students could obtain and retain their schoolwork if they were consistently absent. Dana did not offer an explanation for that.

In relation to policy, Dana said if she could make changes she would suggest smaller class sizes that would offer more individualized instruction. She would also add a homeroom to the day as it was not part of the current structure. She said it would allow teachers to build relationships with their students and figure out their “attitudes” as well as their strengths and weaknesses. She indicated, “I think if there were more of a big picture approach we could focus on kids actually comprehending things instead of like I said, short term memory or just jamming stuff to get through stuff, you know” (p.12).

Smaller class sizes would allow better relationship building, according to Dana. Building

relationships might allow her to better hone in on the needs of students and be better prepared to individualize instruction. Again, she focused on pushing students to understand more than the short-term memory jamming that takes place or the banking (Freire, 2006, 2000, 1970) method presented by many teachers. She said more about how smaller class size along with more flexibility in how curriculum is taught might help students in that it would allow opportunities for “kids to think.” She said, “One of the things we see, or I see, in my co-taught classrooms is that they are so busy worrying about what they have down ...’is it what the teacher wrote down?’” Dana noticed that students were so intent in capturing the teacher’s words that they did not think about what the work really meant. Dana said that she had assigned students to create a brochure in her World History class, using the knowledge from the class. She indicated that she figured they would be excited about the assignment but it did not work out:

But they couldn’t pull out the information on their own, you know. And that was only maybe one page of one section. So that goes back to the fact that we probably in one day have to get through a whole section, and, you know, again, if we had more time to be able to break down a section over a couple of days and not just over one day, they’d have more opportunities like that to be able to read something and decipher what’s important and what’s not. [p. 16]

Dana attempted to connect students with a different approach to learning the material but observed that they could not pull out the important information. This might speak to the way in which instruction was disseminated in this school. A Freirian model may not have been the model used but instead teachers retained control of the knowledge, releasing it in bits so that they might provide what the curriculum prompted them to teach. It appeared evident that students were not able to pull information from the materials as they, too, were probably indoctrinated into the ways of strategies and note taking, which might not require as much from them.

Homework was another policy area mentioned by Dana. She indicated that homework should be something that is meaningful to students as she had parents tell her that they could not

help their children with math:

I think we need to look at our district as far as are we sending homework because at every high school you have homework or they need to be responsible or is the homework meaningful? Is it something that they can do or are you just assigning because? In math, why do we have to have 50 problems when 10 of them are the same

type? So, how would....some kind of consistent homework policy that is meaningful.[p.16]

Dana appeared well aware of the policies that affected what goes on in her classrooms but there seemed to be some confusion about the expectations and reasoning for homework at the high school level. It may be that it is Dana's first year at the high school or it may be that she has observed that it does not work the way it should and a new policy or at least a look at the existing policy might be considered.

Colleagues and Administrators. For her third class reflection,²³ Dana chose to interview Ken, a teacher who has been teaching in Dana's high school for the past seven years. He is a team teacher of social studies for ELLs and students with disabilities. He told her that teaching was much different from when he went to school:

The family structure, culture, and socio-economic status have become more diverse. The students I see do not have the motivation to do the work not just outside of class but in class as well. The pressure to get students to achieve is overwhelming. The push used to be to get the students to pass, which is extremely hard when they do not care. It has now become administrators showing graphs comparing teachers in departments and the number of I's, D's, C's B's and A's each teacher has. The pressure is now not to just get students to pass but that D's are not good enough. I agree that D's are not exemplary work but for some of these students getting them to that point was extremely hard. At times, I wonder if they truly understand how difficult it is to get students to put in the effort. (Reflection 3, March, 2011).

Dana's interview with Ken indicated a sense of hopelessness from him, just as Dana had described the hopelessness she had experienced at times with her students. Not only did he describe unmotivated students and the pressure to bring them to the required levels of

²³ Refers to the required class reflection based upon visiting and/or interviewing another teacher within the teacher's district or building.

instruction, but it appeared that the administration began to pit teachers against one another, adding another layer of angst for teachers. But, not all was bleak as Ken talked about how he attempted to connect with students, something Dana, too, had talked about:

Every day I get to come to school, have fun, and build relationships. Being a coach in the same building that I teach has also been rewarding because I can make those connections with the students in and out of class. Building those relationships is one way that has helped me motivate some of my students to achieve academically. It is also rewarding to see students succeed. The other day I had a student who got a B on her test when she normally fails them. She put in the extra work, studied, and got the results to prove it. It was nice to say, "see, you can do it." (Reflection 3, March, 2010).

This teacher's view offered a paradox: as difficult as it was to motivate students and to work against the tides of standards and assessment, teachers could "have fun and build relationships." Dana, too, in Chapter 6 talked about the importance of building relationships and motivating her students to do more.

In one last observation, Dana wrote about Ken's meeting with his principal where they had talked about how education had changed and what might be done to help students today and how this realization helped her:

There was mention of home visits, on-line classes, and so forth. This conversation made a connection for me, and this class²⁴. As educators, we need to change to meet the needs of our students. Our students are faced with some circumstances that they cannot control whether it is language, learning disabilities, single-family homes, poverty, or gangs. Our job is to get ALL students to learn despite the challenge in doing that. (Reflection, March, 2010)

Dana admitted to making a change in her ideas about how to approach students who may not have the resources to enable them succeed in school. She maintained that a teacher's job was to prompt "ALL" students to learn, but as might be observed in the family and student chapters, it's a task that might be easier to talk about than to implement.

²⁴ The graduate class from which this artifact was collected.

Dana said that change did not occur easily even though many teachers brainstorm to think of ideas which might make things better, especially since she indicated that “this is a huge year for them as far as if they don’t make AYP...again, [we are] dealing with the motivation issue every day” (p.14). She said teachers talk every day about it:

....it’s a daily lunch conversation, believe it or not: what we could do and I know everybody...well, what if we do this? Well, we tried and they won’t even look at it. We tried and they won’t do this....without you know, it goes against maybe what the superintendent’s belief is or the Assistant Superintendent. I don’t know but it seems as if people are brainstorming...how can we do things better but...but when we ask SIT²⁵ people on the SIT...what do we do to get there? And, they’re like, ‘I can tell you right now how the administration feels so they’re not going to go for it.’ [p. 14]

Dana observed the roadblocks placed before her and other teachers who in their “daily lunch conversation” spent time brainstorming ways in which do their jobs more proficiently. Although, she said that she was not speaking up so much, she appeared to continue to speak up as she offered ideas to address AYP. It appeared that many teachers wanted to put solutions in place, but were stopped by the administration, another indication of the top-down bureaucracy that might keep teachers from doing the work they were hired to do.

Not all teachers agreed on what was best for children. In one other area, Dana indicated that she sometimes struggled with the views of particular teachers whom, she said, did not always have kids’ best interests in mind. She indicated that teachers were part of a mentoring program and each teacher was assigned five students. Teachers were expected to have lunch with them, meet with them, check on their grades and see how they were doing. She said, “...teachers had a hard time with that as far as, well, you know, you’re asking us to do more and more and you’re taking money away from us. And to me it’s not even a question. This is my job and that’s what I do--that’s why I’m here” (p.14). Mentoring became another task added to the teachers’

²⁵ SIT refers to School Improvement Team.

list of challenges to contend with while working in a low SES school. Dana observed that students might benefit from this and was determined to carry through with her mentoring duties, but she noted that many teachers drew boundaries in regard to how much time they could afford to spend on tasks other than those that directly impacted their instructional goals. One might also recall that Dana's propensity toward caring for her students went well beyond expectations as discovered in the student chapter as she provided wake-up calls, trips to Burger King, and individual attention in the classroom.

Resources

Just as Bobby indicated that technology was an area that he needed to know more about, Dana, too, talked about the pitfalls of this resource when she indicated that "the internet, projectors, computer programs, game systems have all added to my classroom instruction." She indicated that she uses clickers and PowerPoint and would do more but she does not have the resources or time.

The second half of this year is the first I have had a projector in my room. I lucked out because the only rooms that have them are science rooms and I am sharing my room with a part-time science teacher. The time is another factor of being able to use technology. The district has only a few tech specialists therefore when I have issues downloading or pulling up programs it is hard to get an instant answer. To become comfortable with new things you need time to use them, which is not given in professional development. We are always told to use best practices but are never given the time to learn some of them, like technology. Unfortunately, using the review games on clickers and so forth take time to prepare. At the end of day, when you have battled the unmotivated, faced the pile of papers on your desk, stressed over curriculum timelines, and contacted parents to keep them informed it is extremely hard to spend the sparingly free time creating and preparing tech savvy lessons. [Observation 2, February, 2010]

Resources that might be seen as assets in schools were looked upon by Dana as just more tasks to be dealt with in her work. She talked about the lack of technological resources but also the lack of professional development needed as well as the time it took to feel comfortable in using technology to enhance instruction. Dana observed that these were important resources but she

had no control over the resources that were within her classroom or the professional development that might assist her in integrating technology. Again as Bobby noted, technology might create more work for teachers as they tried to integrate it into lessons.

Dana observed that the challenges that she and other teachers face have much to do with policy that takes “the wind out of people’s sails.” She indicated that the policies did not allow students to learn in ways that are comprehensible to them and teachers need more assistance with figuring out how to lead students to success. In Dana’s description, it might be noted that teachers appeared to be like machine operators and students the widgets as policy dictated that teachers think about getting out the end product with little regard to the process. Although Dana observed many barriers that blocked autonomy, she also sought solutions and used her *voice* (Figure 6) to address some of the challenges she encountered.

Mary

Noticing and Classroom Connections. In her definition of policy, Mary indicated that she viewed it as structure or guidelines set into place for everything done at the school and she described how it affected children, parents, and teachers. She also maintained that policy tended to be developed by a top-down approach and started at the federal level by a small group of people in Washington, DC. She said: “They may have no clue what it’s like to be teaching in not just one setting...but in very different settings, across different groups of people and different communities. I think the reason that is---it would take too much time” (p. 13). Mary’s view of policy decisions showed a keen interest in how work was pushed from the top down and how and how teachers were discounted in policy creation. She brought up the idea that “they” have no clue about teaching to varying groups who live in varying communities. In this way, she provides the idea that those making the decisions are far removed from the realities that she

works with each day. She, like Bobby and Dana, contended that teachers needed to be part of the conversation regarding changes in their schools. Mary also reinforced the idea that accountability still needs to be present but added, “I think it should be implemented by the people who are actually working in the environment” (p. 13-14).

Rules. The rules governed by policy are frustrating, according to Mary as they do not provide an opportunity to “give your say.” She said that teachers are never consulted on policy issues such as the National Core Curriculum and that it is done in “private and there weren’t many educators involved from the very beginning of it.” It appeared that her perceptions were that of defeat as teachers at the ground level were not invited to participate. She did not indicate how she knew this information or how it might fit into what she taught, only that it was not inclusive of teachers.

Mary indicated that the results of policy such as the Common Core filters into the classroom because teachers “have no control to how you best can help the child and it’s frustrating and it makes you want to find a different job where you have more autonomy.” She provided an example of this:

...let’s say that there’s in the area ...a type of play that has nothing to do with the current curriculum that you are teaching, If you can’t find a way to link it with what you’re teaching that quarter, then you’ll be denied access to going to that play. It can’t just be for the pure benefit of the story or it can’t be for the experience for the child...it has to be somehow specifically connected to the teaching material. Even if it’s something that they’ve previously had the year before or something you’ve done in quarter one and it’s quarter three and that’s just ...I just don’t see how that’s beneficial. It just leaves less opportunity for the teachers to help children have experiential learning versus teach to the test...[p.12]

Mary wanted teachers to have more input into curriculum standards but she also wanted to loosen the pedagogical restrictions placed on teachers. It appeared that she wanted to provide children with cultural capital but her efforts were seemingly stymied by strict bureaucratic decisions about curriculum. A teacher wanting to and observing the value in her children

attending a play might be welcomed in many communities, but in her school it was dismissed, as it did not match the curriculum at that particular time.

Mary also observed how frustrating it was for teachers who had no input in the decisions being made within her school system and she said it gets to the point that some teachers do not want to teach anymore:

They feel for some reason that the last few year's decisions are not being made in the school but decisions are being made by administrators and teachers are told what to do. Before we would have more meetings with administrators to make these decisions. Now they're just being made and we're told what to do. Even if we know that that might not be the best thing to do...it might be something that won't work. [p.14]

Mary's frustration seemingly stemmed from the idea that there was no professionalism in the teaching profession as teachers' views were not valued and that everyone else knew what was best for classroom practice. It might be difficult to know if that were only related to her school or district, or if that, indeed, was a common view held by teachers in a time when there was much focus on what happened in schools.

Mary provided an example of the mismatch between classroom practice and top-down expectations as she talked about an administrator who did not understand that it would take more than a quarter for students to complete and teachers to grade three writing assignments at the elementary level.

...so I wanted to change to three different quarters and when I went to talk to the person in charge of the data system...she said "oh, no no no...we can't make those changes without having it go through the assistant superintendent first." So he did...he came over and I talked to him and I had to go through the complete explanation and he said, "well, yeah. Make your recommendations this year for next year." Like it should it have been obvious to me. And it was obvious to me ...it was just that I can't do anything without getting approval so it takes longer to get something done. [p. 13]

Her work, as a literacy coach, required approval to make a change that involved formative assessment scores but the time frame to obtain good samples was unrealistic. On one hand, administrators wanted teachers to do what was best for students but the bureaucracy forced them

to become paper pushers such as Dana indicated about the standards that “took the wind out of people’s sails.” Mary indicated that the assistant superintendent had appeared perplexed as to why the writing samples should take so much time:

You just have to be in the classroom writing with students and teaching the lessons to find out that you need more processing time for that for children. ...it’s not like going to a meeting with an adult and telling them they need such and such done by a certain time; they [children] need more support than that. [p.14]

The use of top-down authority frustrated Mary since those at the *top* did not seemingly understand the inner workings of a classroom. She said that the administration had, at one time, worked with teachers to make decisions, but it had changed in ways that excluded teachers, thus making it difficult to do meaningful work such as the number of pieces required for writing. Mary seemingly portrayed a picture of walking on a treadmill that never slowed down or stopped. Teachers were seemingly expected to continue an output that met expectations of those in charge, but they were given little credence to the ideas that they held as front-line workers.

Colleagues and Administration

Mary had lived and taught in the Tremont District for ten years and she appeared attuned to the challenges that came with her job. She talked about one particular teacher who stood out among her colleagues. She visited her classroom as part of her coursework²⁶:

The most difficult students were placed in Mrs. Smith’s classroom because she is known for turning the most difficult students into success stories. Many of my teaching cohorts are astounded by her teaching methods. Even a teacher who I think is brilliant and exceptional beyond many teachers I have seen teaching thinks that Mrs. Smith is beyond her teaching capabilities in working with difficult students (Reflection 3, March, 2011).

Mary had been impressed with this teacher’s abilities long before visiting her classroom, but she was able to observe her in action as she worked with a student and noted the way in which she

²⁶ Coursework refers to the observation and reflection required in the course that she took with me.

communicated with him. She said that Danny, from a Latino family, had brought a “degree of machismo” to the classroom, but the teacher turned him around. She noted that he had only been in her class for a few weeks, but anticipated that the positivity would continue.

The observation led Mary to hypothesize why Mrs. Smith was so successful with this seemingly difficult child. She was close enough to hear the conversation and surprised that a teacher who appeared to have figured out how to tap into his world cleverly guided this particular child. But it was the way in which Mrs. Smith included this student into her classroom that caught her attention; the conversation, although seemingly trite, showed an openness and acceptance for him and his family. Mary had observed Mrs. Smith’s class at an earlier time and noted a Dewey-like atmosphere where children worked together in cooperation as if working together within a community. Dana indicated that students in Mrs. Smith’s classroom were much like she had envisioned Dewey’s class to look as students moved about, working in groups and stopping their lessons to help one another in a cooperative spirit. She also indicated that an outsider might find her classroom “confusing” as she said:

*...the classroom is double the normal size and students talk with a low voice so there is the ability for students to work through cooperation. If students want to be in her classroom and the formative test results are showing that students are gaining proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics, I think Mrs. Smith’s teaching defines students who are working with social cooperation and focusing on community life.
(Reflection 1, February, 2010)*

It might be apparent that Mary respected the way in which this colleague taught. But, more so, her visit and later reflection allowed her to observe and envision other ways of doing her work. There was not just one way to teach. In this reflection that she fulfilled for my course, she also integrated Dewey’s work and compared Mrs. Smith’s class to how Dewey might have structured his class. Mary appeared surprised that this kind of teaching method was used in a classroom and reportedly it was successful for this teacher, possibly something that she did not think teachers

could do because of the current climate of policy. Mary had not visited her classroom until the class assignment, when she was required to do so, perhaps leading to the idea that visiting colleagues and observing their work might be beneficial for teachers.

Although this experience assisted Mary in connecting with another colleague, she also indicated that many of her colleagues were not connected:

....well, there seems to be a lot of distrust amongst the staff in the building I'm in this year.²⁷ ...and I'm not really sure why that is. But to have some type of ability to bring those people together for team building or...to get those issues cleared. Because it's very difficult to work in that setting and to try to help out when they don't get along. [p.12]

The uncomfortable feeling made it difficult to work “in that setting” and one might speculate the reasons. Teachers were accountable for bringing their students to academic levels that they may not be able to meet. As reported by the teachers in the previous chapters, teachers also were challenged by a wide array of issues with students and families that might affect learning outcomes. Those challenges may solidify colleagues who understand the work that is done in high-poverty schools but tensions might prohibit a cohesive work group---a community of practitioners dedicated to provide the tools and structure needed to assist students.

Resources. Mary contended that there was an inequitable distribution of money to schools serving low-income families. She maintained that resource distribution should be “equitable and not based on punishing or consequences for not meeting a guideline but based on the needs of families.” She indicated that resource distribution is based on politics when it should be based on finances. Although she did not elaborate on this point, she also pointed out that *time* was a resource that teachers sorely needed: “I would probably take more time to engage in professional development that I need. And I actually have a budget for that. And especially for

²⁷ The school referred to is different from the school in the previous year where Mary visited Mrs. Smith's classroom.

this year I am required to do a lot of training without...with no professional development this year (p. 11).” Although Mary indicated that schools needed more money, she also claimed to have money for professional development but did not have the time to engage in it. One might wonder if the *time* constraints in low-poverty schools were a factor leading to burn out and job dissatisfaction as the amount of time it takes to work with non-curriculum-related issues, This was also noted in the Chapter 6, where teachers struggled with students who were not motivated, who were sad and depressed, who did not attend school.

Mary said that policy was ever present within her school and teachers had little to no power in decisions that were made in her district. She also mentioned that there was much distrust among colleagues, although she did not share examples of that. She did, however, talk about one particular colleague whose class she observed and found her teaching particularly inspiring. Although Mary shared many statements pointing to a lack of autonomy (Figure 6), she also sought solutions.

Jill

Noticing and Classroom Connections. When defining policy, Jill laughed and said, “Rules...this is our policy, these are the rules, this is what you have to do. We have to have things done by this time. That’s our policy. That’s our rule.” (p. 13). She focused her response on school-level policy, as the other teachers did probably because it was foremost in her mind and applicable to what she does at the ground level. Her response did not include the idea that everyone worked together toward a common goal, but instead, provided insight into the expectations for teachers.

Rules. Jill indicated how policy related to her work, “depending on the policy, it can help or drain you. Some policies are intended to make sure we’re doing our job.” She continued on

with an example about how teachers in her school must “prove” what they have done with literacy instruction. Every two weeks, she indicated that sample papers needed to be submitted to the principals along with a rubric to show what they have done with students.

...you sometimes feel like...ok, I have to quick get a writing assignment in just so that I can meet this two-week deadline. Instead of maybe doing a writing assignment that takes longer because then I have to rush to get itor with our test--our common assessments that we have. They have to look ACT-like. They have to be ACT style and sometimes I feel like I'm not testing the curriculum, I'm not testing what I'm teaching because I'm too focused on making every test like a mini ACT....and that's policy so it makes me feel that I don't even want to weight the test very high because it doesn't reflect what I'm teaching. I don't know...it's just little things that sometimes we're doing just to meet an administrator's...dictum or what they've mandated and you feel it's a waste of time. You feel like ok...I'm just jumping through hoops and just doing this because I have to when I'd really rather be spending my time doing something else. [p. 13]

Jill's observations about administration and their expectations filtered directly into her work with students. In creating the practice tests to look and feel like an ACT, she was unable to focus on what and how she taught. The ACT test building might provide students with practice for a specialized test that may provide them with specialized knowledge, but, as Jill indicated, it held no real meaning for her students as it did not connect to the curriculum. Mary, too, had noted the absurdity of expectations when it came to providing writing samples at such an unreasonable pace. But, she also indicated that she did not become overly concerned about rules:

...I don't get too wrapped up in the politics or too worried about policies because they change...at least in education they seem to change all the time. Depending on how the pendulum is swinging and I think teachers ...we learn to just deal with them. We learn to jump through the hoops. ...we learn to work around them if needed. ...but our ultimate goal is always working with the kids so I'm not a person who gets too much into the politics or wrapped up in the policies. We still, as teachers, have the ability to close your door and handle what goes on in your classroom....sooo.....I don't think that answered your question but maybe...it doesn't concern me or affect me as much. I'm going to find a way to get around the policy or deal with the policy through hoop jumping... ...or embrace it if it's something I believe in. But my ultimate goal is to just teach the kids who are in front on me everyday. [p. 14]

Hoop jumping was something that Jill pointed to as an attempt to maneuver around the “dictum” provided by those in power. She pointed to the idea that teachers can go into their rooms and

close their doors, thus, confirming the power that some teachers retain even when under the pressure of tightly-woven rules. In a sense, the door closing represented one way to respond to the observations she had made about what did not work for her and the quiet choices she made in not following the rules.

Jill also indicated that time could be a valuable asset to her and her colleagues as it would provide teachers with the time to work together to plan:

I really think that if you found a way to give teachers more release time during the day and to hone and work on their practice and to collaborate with other educators in the building, I think you could take things farther, faster. I really do think there's enough of us here in the building who are committed to kids that if you could get us together and give us time during the school day; you know, not evening meetings...but during the school day to discuss what we can do for these kids. How can we get them to thinking higher level? I think some neat things could really come out of it. I think ...for myself, there a lot of things about my practice that I would change if there were a policy that gave me two hours to plan instead of one. [p. 14-15]

Jill said that she would have time to “spice” up the curriculum and make it more relevant especially for her ELLs and struggling students. It would provide her more time to scaffold her instruction. She also said it would allow her more time to focus on “my gifted or smarter kids.” She appeared to realize that individualized instruction might produce better results, but there were so many ways in which teachers in low-income schools must individualize including specialized instruction for students who are not on grade level, those learning a new language, transient students who need to catch up, students with disabilities, and motivational issues—all within the same classroom. Her concerns might ring true for many teachers who have that same dilemma of reaching such varied populations of students.

Jill showed a keen interest in wanting to communicate with staff but she also lamented that not all staff members were optimistic about the work that they did:

It would be nice to have a staff that is a little more motivated to make some changes for students or some...we have some really good team members but we have some people who are just negative and....annoyed all the time and...you're suppose to look at data all

the time an analyze it and see how you can improve on your practice and improve things for your students and they just roll their eyes and the bottom line...what do we have to do and they don't understand part of the process and discussions that go with what we're supposed to do is the important part. So, I guess that I wish that I could take a few of the people in my department, specifically, and change them so that they'd be more focused on ... "let's do some good things for kids" ... and...umm...otherwise I think if I had more time to plan with colleagues who are positive and are looking for ways to better help students [p. 12].

Jill observed roadblocks that prevented some teachers from doing their jobs in ways that might best benefit students, but she also noted that she had no control over that except maybe to be provided with more time to work together.

Colleagues and Administrators

In working with colleagues, Jill indicated in her final class paper that she would like to have the opportunity to share her teaching experiences with colleagues, especially in her efforts to implement culturally-responsive teaching measures into her practice:

It seems that the best way to take this approach is to reflect on my teaching, write down my reflections, and share my reflections (which will include questions, concerns, struggles, and "aha" moments) with my colleagues. Charles M. Payne, in an essay at the end of Depit's (2006) book writes, "What it [Other People's Children] tells us is that if we can learn to question our presumptions, we all have a chance to make a difference" (p. 192). My prayer is that I can be the teacher of integrity I need to be—to be strong enough to question my presumptions through thoughtful reflection and honest discussion with other teachers. [Final Paper, March, 2010, p. 13-14]

As Jill reflected on the culturally responsive measures espoused in Depit's (1995) work, Dana took it a step farther in showing an awareness and need to share these reflections and "honest discussion" with her colleagues. But she did not indicate that teachers were able to do this on a regular basis, or if at all.

The school in which Jill worked was small, as she claimed "There's only 550 kids at my high school." She said that she and other staff have come to know the superintendent very well:

I could walk over there. He knows my name. He knows who I am. He knows where I live. He knows my husband's name, my kids' names....a small district so if you're willing to put in the work and we have lots of committees you can sign up for and lots of

opportunities to have your voice heard....you can definitely put yourself as a leader...in this district and in this school. Yes, you can have a lot of force in making changes in the climate and so forth. [p. 13]

Although she claimed to have opportunities to change the climate, her earlier statements offer roadblocks to changing some unmotivated staff members, and the rules that were placed upon teachers were referred to *hoop jumping*. So, although Jill portrayed a friendly family-like atmosphere at some points, there might be deeper issues brought about by outside forces that might need to be reckoned with in order that teachers work together with opened doors.

Resources. As this was Jill's first year teaching new classes she, again, talked about needing time that would allow her to enhance the work that she was doing. She said she would like to provide more projects for her 7th grade students but since her classes were new to her, she had difficulty just keeping up with the new information she had to teach and to make her lesson plans, borrowed from the previous teacher, her own. Jill indicated that she would like to provide more interesting pieces to her lessons such as You Tube or movie connection clips to enhance her lessons and to create lessons adapted for her ELLs and special education students but it comes down to "sheer time," as she said:

It's like I know what I want to do and I know what I should be doing but it's kind of like you're in survival mode. I get here at 6 a.m. in the morning...two hours before and I usually don't leave until 3:30 which is a half hour after and I give up about 50% of my lunches so I'm giving up a lot of my time already. I can't give more. So this year, I think, what I wish I could do is just have more time to do the good teaching strategies that I know are there and that I 'm not doing because I'm kind of in survival mode this year. [p. 11-12]

The one resource that Jill indicated she needed more of was time. She did not, however, speak to the time spent outside of the classroom—the time she spends at home in the evenings and on weekends preparing for her classes and grading papers. Part of her challenge with time was that she was teaching new classes for the first time, something that she has become accustomed to:

Well, I think it will come with time, but if they allowed me to teach the same classes more than one time [laughs] ...if I could teach the same classes for two or three years; allow me to teach it...because I'm often just learning it and then they switch classes and I'm like no, no, no...If you let me teach that longer, I can really make it something and then once I've poured in my curriculum, then I'm not so worried about that and...like now-- I'm not collecting a ton of writing from kids because it takes so long to grade. And I have to spend more time on planning this year whereas if I had taught the class a few times, know the stories, kind of know the curriculum and those kinds of things, then I could collect more writing because I'd have more time to grade. [p.12]

Changing her course structure often provided Jill with a sense of urgency in terms of how to handle all that needs to be done. The writing samples required of her students cannot be collected until they have completed the writing process but Jill is backlogged as she indicated that she was still learning the new curriculum, thus, it held her back on work that might need to be done by students. As a teacher of English and ESL, she has a heavy grading load and that cuts into her planning time. She chooses not to collect “a ton of writing.” Time for planning may well be a misunderstood duty in the eyes of administrators. Not only does planning for new classes take an inordinate amount of time, planning for diverse populations can add to the planning in order for differentiation. Again, Jill indicated what it might mean to have more time as she teaches from 7:40 until 3:10 with a short lunch:

...you don't really have time to spend on bettering yourself as a teacher much less thinking about individual students, so I think that any school could really benefit from giving teachers.....more time, but that would require hiring more teachers and that means more money and I get that...I get that. But I really think...I'd love to read more research that would better inform my teaching...when am I going to do that? [p. 15]

Jill shared her frustrations with the time crunch where the day is packed with back-to-back classes and very little time to plan and participate in the ancillary activities that are part of the teaching day. There is no time built into the day to allow for research or for planning individualized lessons for students. It appeared contradictory that teachers might be expected to not only have the knowledge and skills to work with challenges that students and families from low-socioeconomic communities might bring as well as conforming to policy as well as

preparing and grading lessons but were also expected to have knowledge of best research practices. Jill might be on track with the question, “When am I going to do that?”

Although Jill talked about how teachers were held accountable in her school, she did not seemed to be deterred by it as some of the other teachers reported. She shared much about what she did or could do for her students if she were given more time to plan and meet with colleagues. One of the reasons that she may not have been daunted by rules was because she maintained that when teachers have had enough, “we can close our doors.” This stance appeared to assist Jill in her calm demeanor toward policy, unlike Bobby and Dana, in particular, who appeared to be more threatened by policy and what it meant for them or their students. Jill exhibited a high level of solution seeking, just as Dana had shown (Figure 6). And, her reported experiences indicating a lack of autonomy were equal to her comments that had shown a strong sense of speaking out.

Pat

Noticing and Classroom Connections. In her definition of policy, Pat indicated it was a “set of regulations for the betterment of a group of people.” She did not expand upon that definition but in the subsequent writing, she provided her observations about various kinds of policy and how it is related to her. She appeared to observe community through a lens, unlike that of her colleagues, as she noted that teachers in her school enjoyed much autonomy.

Rules. In one of her blog entries, Pat had responded to a colleague when talking about the “school way” and she wondered how many kids might be discouraged by the “school way.” She suggested that teachers may need to create a more constructivist approach so that the school days were not laden with teachers’ mantras of “sit down, be quiet and work.” I asked her to say more about this and she brought up David’s example again:

And when I think about the “school way” well, whose “school way”? Who’s setting the “school way”? Everyone has their own ideas when you think about school and if you want it to be the “school way” what is the general American going to say? It’s going to be the shut up, sit up, raise your hand. Well, I’m sorry that’s not life. In a real conversation, we work through problems. We have a dialogue. It’s not “you’re going to face me and everyone’s going to sit stiff and....” no way. We’re going to have those natural conversations with each other and when there are situations like when the boy is sticking his tongue out, we’re going to be able to say, “You know, that isn’t appropriate because what’s going on and how can we fix that and how do you handle that in society? And the “school way”...I do not like that terminology because your school way is probably.....you know for her [speaking of another teacher]...very traditional. Sit up and shut up and that’s not appropriate. How are people learning that way? Who learns that way just by sitting there and listening to someone? It’s like Charlie Brown. [p. 21-22]

In suggesting “whose school way” Pat brought up a point that may be quite relevant in today’s school settings. The “school way” appeared to be her idea about the pedagogical decisions made by teachers and providing lessons that connect to students’ lives so that they might become engaged in the lessons. It appeared that she leaned toward a constructivist way of the “school way” but she also indicated that she addressed classroom challenges with the assistance of her students and stated that her students would one day face many kinds of challenges in society and needed to learn the tools that might assist them in facing those challenges.

Pat maintained that teachers have to recognize those things that need to change and that they have the power to do so although they may not realize that:

I think that sometimes teachers don’t recognize that they are the ones who have that power. And, you know, they are fearful of what their bosses might do or their job...their tenure. But you have to be the person in charge. You have to recognize when things need to be changed. [p. 15]

Pat appeared to believe that teachers had power to make changes, but she also knew the realities that they faced when trying to do so. Those realities certainly might keep teachers from speaking out as they might be threatened with job loss or denied tenure. This might well feed into the idea that some teachers seemingly lose their voices as they begin their careers and do not have tenure. It too, as Bobby admitted, may be a personality trait. Bobby, for example, clearly indicated that

he would let others do the talking. Even Dana, who had stood her ground against the union, learned to soften her voice on issues about which she was passionate.

Although Pat did not address specific rules, she provided an in-depth knowledge of the programs within her school and how they impacted the state test. She indicated that her school, where teachers work in multiage grades, carries the highest scores in the district on state tests and in some areas like science and math, and she claimed that they scored above the state level.

Pat, more than her four cohort colleagues, focused more on what it might take to move students along on the state test and less on the obstructions that were presented by the hurdles created through rules imposed on the teachers. This may be the result of working in a school where teachers appeared to have more autonomy in decisions or it may be related to the longevity of her career, or it might be the result of the hours that she reportedly spent in planning and grading as she worked long days and weekends. Pat provided evidence to support the autonomy and voice of teachers. They had just met regarding the National Core Curriculum. She indicated that there was a push to buy a different literacy program and teachers were told by the literacy curriculum leader that if they were purchased, they would all need to conform to the use, as instructed by the assistant superintendent:

Well, our school doesn't really use basals or anthologies...as the way that they're written for the company. We use them in our own way and it was asked of her..."Well, what does that mean if Larry says everyone is using them?" And she said, "Well, everyone uses them." And I think she was kind of surprised. She's kind of new at this job that way. We use them as a resource." And they might be reading out of an anthology but they're reading out of an anthology for a purpose because there's a group of stories about animals and we're learning about animals right now. So, she was a little bit taken aback and she said, "well, I don't really know. Does Larry know right now that you're not using these anthologies? And, we said, "Yah, he knows. He comes into our rooms. He knows what's going on". And she's just like, "Well, you'll just have to tell him that you're doing the same thing that you've always done and I'm sure he'll be fine with that." And I am too....I'm sure he'll be fine with that. [p.15]

Teachers reportedly pushed back on this idea as they asserted their professional opinions. They

did not adhere to the textbook way of teaching, but instead relied on their training and experience to teach in ways they thought were best for students. It also appeared that they were comfortable with the relationship established with the assistant superintendent and were not intimidated by the literacy leader's responses. This defies what the other teachers had noticed about the lack of autonomy for teachers and the top-down management style. Although Pat taught in the same district as Mary and Dana, they did not teach in the same schools or at the same levels.

Colleagues and Administrators. Pat talked about how teachers in her school worked together in ways that allowed respect even while disagreeing, but she also shared observations in her final course paper about how there was sometimes a lack of connectedness between teachers and students:

As I work with my colleagues on implementing school connectedness, some common barriers come into place: the lack of teacher to student connectedness, lack of teacher collaboration, and the current structure of the school setting. (Final class paper, March, 2010, p. 3).

Pat later indicated:

With a lack of collaboration teachers are overwhelmed. When teachers cannot have time to collaborate, they cannot use each other's expertise to create engaging and rigorous curriculum, when students are not receiving engaging material, they do not attend to the material at hand. [p. 3]

The idea of collaboration appeared to be a focal point for Pat. In part, it may come from professional development within her school that promoted "connectedness" but also it may stem from the observations she has made about families and students and how connecting with them has worked for her. It is also interesting to note a contradiction in that Pat had maintained earlier that colleagues worked well together, but here she noted how teachers lacked school connectedness and little collaboration with one another.

One of the areas that Pat wanted to see colleagues take the initiative was with more willingness to do things after hours. In Chapter 5, I reported that Pat talked about a "grandiose

plan” to implement once-a-month family nights but “it was shot down” by her colleague before she even finished. Her colleague did not want to take away her own family time in order to do more at school, even if it were to attempt relationship building with families. Pat hoped that her partner would be enthusiastic about a plan to hold Friday night gatherings for families so that the teachers might build strong relationships with them. On one hand she shows understanding on the part of her colleague, but on the other hand she appeared disappointed that they could not make it happen. Again, Pat spent much time on her work and as she observed areas that she could improve, she took on those initiatives. But, as noted in Chapter 4, she also maintained, that teaching was a full-time profession for her. Her husband was home with the children and she also lived in the community in which she teaches. Those two facts might help with understanding her stance toward her work as a teacher.

Pat also worked with staff members other than teachers and explained her work with one of the school translators who helped her during parent-teacher conferences and who assisted her with understanding the Vietnamese culture related to school expectations. She explained that Mr. Lanh indicated that when parents hear negative reports from teachers, the parent feels as if the teacher is scolding the child even if the child does not have control over the situation.

He shared that when a teacher was explaining to the parent that although the child has many English skills, but is not at the same comprehension level that the child's native English speaker peers are at, the parents view this as a rebuke. When parents hear phrases like “special education,” the parents feel like the child is bringing shame to his parents. Many Vietnamese parents will use corporal punishment on the children if the parents had to be “rebuked” or “shamed” at conferences. Mr. Lanh feels conflicted during conferences. Although he wants to interpret what the teacher says, the good, the bad, and the concerns of the teacher, he also wants to protect the safety of the child. Depending on the family and his knowledge of their treatment toward children, he may choose to rephrase or ignore some of the teachers’ comments. I hope that Mr. Lanh can educate teachers on how to discuss their concerns with all families. (Reflection 3, March, 2010).

This may pose a large problem for Pat as she no longer had control over the information that was

provided to the family. Although she saw Mr. Lanh as trying to assist, she also understood what might be at stake for the student. It might be problematic if teachers cannot communicate fully with parents and it was just as problematic to realize that Pat had learned this information from a translator and not through a course or professional development that might provide her awareness and some solutions to the challenge.

In terms of school administrators, Pat said they are “pretty strict” about what teachers teach but she claimed that teachers are given “leeway with creativity in the classroom” (p. 14). As she described, Pat and her colleagues are given the opportunity to teach in ways they think are best such as with language arts, where they do not need to strictly follow the basal or anthology adopted by the school. She said that the administration also allowed them “to make an alternative assessment as long as in our report card we write ‘Curriculum Adjustment’ and send a copy of the assessment that we gave them so that he knows that we are still matching the standard” (14).

Pat said that teachers were responsible for what took place in their classrooms. This might speak to the autonomy that she and other teachers were allowed within school, as they were able to make alternative tests. This is different from her cohort teachers who noted that they had little flexibility in their work and they were seemingly scrutinized based on their curricular choices. She indicated that some students have a difficult time attending to their work but teachers:

I mean, I have an ADD student in my classroom who just literally can't sit still and it is a chemical imbalance. But, boy, you hear about chemical imbalances in 27 kids, come on, there's a reason why; there's something happening there and then where does the blame need to happen? It's not on the kids. If the whole class is not listening, you need to take ownership of that and figure it out and change your ways. And you're in charge. You're the one in control of your classroom. You're in charge of what's going to happen whether the learning is going to happen or not. [p. 22]

She insinuated that some of her colleagues may have some challenges when they want to continually blame chemical imbalances on children instead of using classroom behavior techniques and more engaging instruction. She appeared to have a very solid stance about how to control her own classroom, as indicated in Chapter 6 and recognized that teaching was more than just having a presence in the classroom.

Resources. In terms of resources, Pat observed that existing school resources should be shared with the community, which includes parents:

....we have computers that are available and we have ELLs. Why can't they come in and use our computer lab when people aren't in there and allow them to use Rosetta Stone or how about use our library? Bring their little ones in. They're dropping off their elementary students then they could go down to the library and read books with their younger children. Just have more of an open door policy. And, not just open the door but actually create some type of way to get them in. Serve things to them. "Oh, I'm sure that little preschooler would like to have a donut in the morning. Or, something more healthy probably. [p.17]

Pat offered a plan to bring families into the school. Just as she had tried to increase parent communication as noted in Chapter 5, she provided a plan that would offer school resources to those who might benefit. It appeared that Pat consistently thought of ways to improve school-parent communications.

Pat also talked about a program called *Reading for Rent*, which provided incentives to parents who came to school and read to children for a certain amount of time each month in exchange for a savings on their rent. She thought it might be a great way to push parents to come into the schools.

....we don't just love the kids, we love their families too and we need the families to know that. It could be a really awesome situation if policies were built that we support the whole family and not just the individual that's in our classroom but we can look at every person in that family and how we can support them. And I know everything is tied to money so, that's probably the issue....too bad. [p. 17-18]

Pat brainstormed ideas toward policy that might be more inclusive of parents. Her insights into

how the school might create policy for the betterment of the community might provide a clue as to the ways in which she connects with and supports the community.

It appeared that she supported the policy backed by her school district or at least in her school. Pat noted that teachers sometimes did not realize the power that they had, indicating that she had not been intimidated, like many of her other colleagues, about the power structures in place at her school. In fact, she said, teachers work together with administrators to create the best learning space for children. This environment may have provided her with the ability to speak up (Figure 6) for what she thought was best for students.

Discussion

The teachers defined policy with a focus at the school level. Although they were well aware of the state and federal push on policy, all of them looked at how policy directly affected them in their schools and classrooms when it came to observations, noted by Darling Hammond (2010), about narrowing the curriculum and adding “complex rules” to help meet AYP. And some of the teachers noted that some of the curriculum did not work for all students, just as Gerstl-Pepin and Woodside-Jiron (2005) had pointed out.

These teachers noticed how often standards change, how much content must be taught with a focus on surface knowledge instead of deeper knowledge, how time was spent practicing for the state test, how a banking knowledge approach was used by some teachers, and how little voice they had in the rules that were set. They reportedly had little input with how they structured their classrooms or what they taught except for Pat, who said that she and her colleagues were provided much autonomy within her school and she also indicated that teachers “have the power” to do what they need to do in classrooms. At the other extreme, Mary indicated

that the stringent enforcement of rules have led her to struggle with ideas about leaving the profession.

In terms of resources, they also had little input as most resources required money such as for technology or other kinds of materials. In fact, some of the teachers provided their own funds to pay for items such as mentioned in previous chapters where teachers purchased supplies and ancillary items for students. Time, as a resource, was also a focus of some teachers but that, too, was out of their control. In terms of work with colleagues, many of the teachers relished time for colleague communication that would assist them with instruction or with behavioral issues or even planning after-school activities. But not all teachers might be inclined to work collaboratively as it takes extra time and coordination in order to do so.

Teacher Agency

All teachers, except Pat, noted how little assistance they had received from administration in terms of how rules were negotiated. The teachers reported frustration with administration that reportedly micromanaged their work and did not give credence to suggestions. For example, Bobby noted how there was “no foundation” for his students and how difficult it was to teach students who were not prepared to learn the material. He also noted that resources were limited, especially in terms of technology tools, where the administration claimed there were not enough funds. And, he noted his own lack of knowledge and skills with the use of technology but was willing to attend professional development to assist him. He, however, suggested some areas for improvement such as having one building to house all fourth-grade classrooms so that there might be more collaboration between teachers. He also suggested a year-round school model, as he indicated that students forgot much of their knowledge by the time they returned in the fall. In essence, Bobby had little power and control over how the administration might assist in his

classroom. It also might be noted, as reported in Chapters 5 and 6, that he had little power in regard to families and students. He admitted that he had little voice when it came to standing up to administrators; perhaps he uses that same voice with families and students, as well.

Dana, too, provided a picture of work that received little backing from administrators who reportedly did not listen to teachers. She described kinds of work that kept students from learning, such as too many short-term memory items but she indicated it was the policy that indicated that they must teach within that structure. She noted that the policy on attendance pushed many students to fail as students' home life, as noted in Chapter 6, did not always conform to school policies. Dana also noted how teachers many times did not work together with students' best interests in mind. Although Dana noted many areas that might pull autonomy from teachers, she also provided possible solutions for many of the challenges that she observed. Beyond that, she voiced her ideas to those that she thought should hear them even if it did not get her anywhere. In terms of power and control, she appeared to be frustrated as she had many solutions in mind, but no one, reportedly, listened.

In terms of the policies noted by Mary, she found the same issues as Bobby and Dana in a top- down approach to administration. She noted that previously teachers had held more power but it had been taken away. She also indicated that there was much distrust among teachers. However she, like Dana, provided a number of solutions to the challenges that she noted such as wanting to be included in decision making as well as allocating more public resources to low-income communities. She also voiced her concerns to administrators, although it did not appear that it was helpful. Like Dana, she thought of many solutions, but the lack of autonomy might be seen as lessening the power and control in her classroom, thus limiting teacher agency.

Jill, too, noted how stifling the policies were to teachers. Not only were teachers required to “prove” what they had done with literacy instruction, there was no time built in for teachers to receive professional development to assist with challenges or to meet with one another. She, like Dana and Mary, provided many suggestions for solutions but these were areas in which they had little control. Jill, however, did have control to a point as she admitted that she finds “a way to get around policy” and she indicated that teachers can “close our doors.”

The only teacher who seemingly had little issue with administrators was Pat. She indicated that they were helpful, for the most part, and teachers could teach the ways in which they wanted to teach but they had to stick to the content. The only area that Pat noted was problematic at times was that of a lack of collaboration between teachers. Pat appeared to have more power and control within her classroom and school, and she voiced her ideas, but there was not always good teacher collaboration. Although she had the freedom in her own classroom, she may not have had much power and control over how other teachers worked with students.

Final Thoughts

Most of the teachers observed that rules were oppressive, some resources were limited, and colleagues and administrators were either helpful or unaccommodating. These reported views may not assist schools that have so many challenges for teachers. As noted in the family and student chapters, teachers found many challenges and appeared to continually think about how to address the next issue that might arise. The community, which might be seemingly supportive, appeared to add another layer of intricacy onto their already focused efforts to assist families and students. It might seem that communities would find more productive ways in which to work with another, creating a professional venue; one in which everyone might be valued. More of this discussion will be offered in the next, and final, chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Teachers' Noticings: What Now?

If all is in conformity, we adapt and may even stop noticing, as we stop noticing the touch sensation produced by our clothes or the lint on the lens of our eyeglasses.
(Bruner, 1986, p. 46)

The teachers in this study were not newcomers to the profession nor were they novices in their work in low socioeconomic communities, yet they observed factors about families, students, and the school context that reportedly inhibited them in their work. In relating what they noticed, most projected views that indicated having little or no teacher agency although it appeared that they attempted to secure agency. Villegas and Lucas (2002) present factors that prevent teachers from becoming change agents. One feature includes institutional factors related to the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the system, which includes having sparse time for planning, grading, and professional development that might help them in their diverse settings. These teachers experienced that. Villegas and Lucas also noted little time for collaboration with colleagues as another factor. These teachers also reported this. Some of the teachers also seemingly lacked personal understandings of oppression (Villegas & Lucas) in regard to the families and students within their schools, a third factor. These challenges were noted throughout the chapters as all of the teachers provided their observations about the general community through blog interactions and five of the twelve teachers reported noticings continued through interviews and course artifacts.

The teachers, at the end of the course, agreed to provide feedback about their experiences and to anonymously share what they had gleaned from the readings, discussions, and writings. These comments provide a useful summary for what we have learned about their observations:

- I'm not alone in my frustrations yet I still want to know strategies to help with behavior.

- The most I learned was opening my classroom in an open format more often and allowing the students to interact more.
- A broader perspective on the problems and issues facing teachers and all involved in education. A greater awareness of social justice!
- Culture plays more of a role in our students' learning than what we think.
- I have viewed things from a narrow perspective. This class opened my eyes to how others view education.
- Know your students, their backgrounds, their family life and try to not to think of stereotypes.
- All students deserve an equal chance to learn.
- I've gained more insight into where the parents of my students are coming from.
- I view teaching differently. I see my students with different eyes.

Their responses might indicate that they gained some new perspectives, or, possibly they were attempting to please me, the instructor, with their comments. Not only have these teachers been in classrooms for a good many years, but the course they had taken with me was the final of six courses for ESL certification. Yet, they appeared to notice many deficit views regarding families, and children as seen through the blog entries reported in Chapter 3 and showed frustration about how to work with challenging situations related to students and families. The five teachers, who continued with interviews, also reported their noticings in many deficit ways. Even when they attempted to assist in ways they thought were helpful, such as providing wake-up calls for students or planning potlucks for families, it did not seem to reflect positively on their work. They struggled with ways in which to work with families as well as students who were from diverse backgrounds.

On a national level, principals and superintendents also notice that teachers struggle with

the same issues as the teachers in this study, as reported in a U.S. Department of Education study (September 20, 2011) where they reported dissatisfaction with the training programs for many of their teachers:

- 79% of teachers were not prepared to work with parents
- 72% were not prepared to address the needs of students from diverse backgrounds
- 70% were not prepared to address needs of students with disabilities
- 84% were not prepared to address needs of English Language Learners
- 67% were not prepared to address behavior and discipline within classes

This news might be disheartening but at the same time this work might provide valuable information that might be included with teacher preparation programs to assist in teachers in their work with diverse students and families. However, this is a very complex endeavor and as Young (2010) noted, “The void in scholarly research is not in the knowledge of theories but in the knowledge of how to implement them, particularly in a way that has a wide-reaching and sustainable impact on teacher education.” This topic must be addressed not only by teaching institutions but also by administrators who plan for professional development, allocation of resources, and who make decisions about curriculum. It is also imperative that policy makers take into consideration the complexity of this work in these schools where teachers and, many times, their administrators struggle to meet the demands of those who might have their best interests in mind but may not understand the complexities.

Within this chapter, I provide a brief summary of each prior data chapter. I then suggest implications for teacher education, professional development, school communities, and policy. I conclude with suggestions for further research.

Diverse Possibilities

Blogs

The class blog (Chapter 3) provided a venue for teachers to share their observations about the community, based on the class assignment. However, it also provided levels of discussion regarding those observations, so we were introduced to the various depths of teacher noticing. Teachers shared their comments with one another with a sense of trust. No one ridiculed or presented condescending ideas but, instead, gently nudged one another, at times, to think of alternative views. This possibly occurred as they had already begun to create a sense of community before the class began.

It also set the stage for teachers to examine biases and to think more deeply about the communities and the people that they serve within them. Some of the teachers began to recognize their own judgments or stereotypical statements and admitted that they needed to be more cautious about that. In other cases, teachers shared ideas that were clearly deficit, although it was clear that they did not recognize that they were deficit. The conversations might assist teacher educators in evaluating the depth to which their students might need other tools to help them think about their work. The blog provided a written record and the data from it might be easily used by instructors to discover gaps in understanding, thus, allowing for planning lessons related to those gaps. This might also be a useful tool in which to share reflective observations with colleagues regarding culturally responsive pedagogies. This could be arranged through teacher training institutions that can provide experienced and knowledgeable leaders to assist with planned courses or professional development within schools with diverse populations. Not only might it assist with inservice training, but also preservice teachers might benefit from the collaboration. Often, reflective journals are built into courses, but the instructor, alone, generally

views those. Blogs offer a platform in which to share ideas and view how others notice and attend to what they notice. Assignments on which to integrate blog sharing might include:

- purposeful field placements/experiences
- class discussions
- readings related to culturally responsive pedagogies
- video cases offering discussion points

Teachers' stories

In examining the life stories of five teachers, five themes were developed. Themes included (a) to teach or not to teach, (b) feeling safe, (c) virtues, (d) faith as a guide, (e) their experiences as young students. It might be important to know how and why teachers began their trek into the profession, as it speaks to the importance of teacher training institutions and their role in providing clarity about the profession. For example, Dana noted that she had not intended to become a teacher until her friends encouraged her to take a course with a field placement. The success of that placement convinced her, but she found out after becoming a teacher, it was not so simple. Field placements should be arranged in schools where there are challenges so that teachers are provided experiences that might not be familiar to them. Further, preservice teachers might be introduced to the realities of the work and debunking the idea that it is an 8 to 2 job, as Pat admitted or that students automatically come in, sit down and are attentive, as Bobby had perceived.

The teachers' expectations for virtuous attitudes regarding behaviors, work ethic and motivation were prominent within the student chapter. The five teachers' experiences as young learners, themselves, led to a perplexing view as to why their students did not behave in the same virtuous ways. This is an area that teacher educators might address explicitly, however, it is not

just a discussion of the differences, but how teachers react to those differences in terms of recognizing the experiences and knowledge that students bring to their classrooms and building upon those.

The role of faith was seen in some manner with all of the teachers. Three of the teachers used it to help them through difficult times within their schools. Two of the teachers struggled with the boundaries between the teachings of their faith and how they controlled that within their classrooms in terms of how they taught science to how they shared holidays with their diverse student population. This might be an area of further exploration as it might suggest that faith could act as a coping mechanism as well as serve as a calling, thus, prompting teachers to remain in low-income schools. However, this may also be a difficult prospect for some teachers especially when working in publically-funded institutions.

Most importantly, teachers' life stories might provide the opportunity for preservice and inservice teachers to examine how their past experiences influence their expectations for their students, especially in diverse settings. Life stories may assist in:

- Helping teachers to notice the differences between their early family lives and the expectations held for them as compared to their students' lives.
- Pairing their school experience stories with expectations for their own students.
- Making explicit observations and reflections about how those stories have impacted them and sharing those with colleagues.

Although teachers did not share their stories, as it was part of the data collection, I see the value of doing so within a course as I observed connections between their stories and how they attend to their work as teachers. Florio-Ruane (2000) provides a clear method by mixing autobiography, conversation, and narrative and in doing so "...challenges our assumption that the knowledge

teachers ‘need’---in this case about culture or power or inequality---is “out there” for the taking. How can we change the terms of the conversation about culture so that it is empowering of teachers rather than alienating of them” (p. 155)? Stories, indeed, may well need to be explored as potential ways in which they influence teacher thinking and acting.

Families

Teachers reacted with care, sympathy, and understanding towards families, yet, they also displayed deficit views regarding the capability and willingness of families to assist children. Teachers appeared to be at a loss for how to address behavioral and motivational issues with parents, something that they thought should be taken care of at home. Many of them expressed that they were more like “moms” (Aker, 1995) instead of teachers as they disciplined, motivated, and doled out advice. Several of the teachers also expected parents to contact them with concerns, but that did not happen. Two of the teachers indicated that parents would not approach them at class functions, possibly indicating that teachers’ expectations were that families come to them, whereby (Lareau, 2000) indicated that parents in low income schools are reticent as they defer to teachers as the experts in matters of school. Many of the disconnections between teachers and parents appeared to lead to less power and control and ultimately, less teacher agency in their classrooms. Although teachers reported interest in having family assistance, there was not much activity that took place between them and, in fact, the teachers appeared to be content with the families held at a distance as Pat indicated, for example, she did not like the idea of parents “breathing down my neck.” This might indicate the level of attention that is needed to provide teachers with concrete ways in which to discover the funds of knowledge (Moll, 2002; Moll, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) that parents bring.

Teachers observed and reported many challenges related to families and there might be ways in which to reconcile those challenges through possible actions as well as courses and professional development for teachers (Table 9). Teachers noted that families might lack tangible resources at times when it is noted that students come to school hungry or lacking other resources. Teachers also alluded to this in the family and student chapter. This might raise the issue of how schools might better assist families. For example, although Tremont offers breakfast and lunch and Garnet offers lunch, there still might be assistance, such as information about food pantries or other, more global, services for families. Teachers also noticed that the use of translators (either hired or through student assistance) was not always an optimal means for communication with families. An enhanced system offering trained translators when needed should be available to all parents and teachers. If we want teachers and families to work together, translation should not become the barrier. Teachers had also noted that parents did not always have the education or language skills to help their students or to communicate with teachers and they noted that families struggled financially. Although teachers cannot offer direct assistance, larger plans by schools might formulate long-range plans to provide services for families. Teachers, too, noted that parents were not available or were not helpful when it came to homework or general issues regarding their children. This might suggest that they build stronger relationships with parents in order to find ways in which to assist them. Another area that might be helpful is assisting teachers, through courses and professional development, with the knowledge and collaboration needed to help them toward teacher agency.

Table 9 Suggested Actions Based on Family Noticing

Observed	Possible Actions	Courses and PD
Parents not helpful/unavailable	Build relationships through home visits, phone calls, and encourage classroom visits and chaperoning.	Required readings, discussions, blogs focused on deficit views and families in low-income communities.

Table 9 (cont'd)

Translators unavailable	Trained translators always on call Tech translators available in all classrooms	Readings based on cultures Teach ways to communicate with parents using technology translators Send letters, newsletters and others materials in home language
General Resources	Admin provides a common area for supplies and other resources for students	Learn to write mini grants that might provide for classroom resources
Parents cannot provide for basic needs	List of resources that might be available such as local food pantries, pro bono health and dental care, and other services	Required readings that focus on societal issues affecting low-income families Field visits/placements within social service agencies

Students

The themes within this chapter focused on the *basics, cultural observations and funds of knowledge, motivation and relationship building and religion and faith*. Teachers noticed cultural differences and talked about how they acted upon that knowledge. For example, Bobby shared how he used knowledge about his students' culture to keep them in line with behaviors or used his knowledge as an excuse as to why, for example, African American students might be "vociferous" within class. Jill used her knowledge to enhance the curriculum, even though it was not the accepted way of teaching.

The teachers' observations also leaned toward behavior and motivational issues and also focused on promoting academic growth. They each seemingly struggled with challenges outside of their control like transiency and truancy, hunger, and other outside issues that were brought into the classrooms. The two high school teachers stated the difficulty of building good relationships with students as there was no homeroom, and both schools (as is the case in most high schools) shuffled about 120 students per day to teachers, thus, providing little time for relationships to be formed. Teachers appeared invested in their jobs, but their observations led to

noting the difficulties of doing their jobs. Religion and faith, as indicated within the teachers' stories, provided some sense of solace as they attempted to work with challenges within their schools.

All of the teachers shared ideas about how they acted upon their observations, but all efforts appeared to be trial and error attempts. For example, Bobby spent much time trying to control his class. He blamed students and parents for the behavioral problems and indicated, jokingly, that he needed an octagon-shaped room at times, in which to place all of the misbehaved students. Dana, on the other hand, noticed the struggles that students had in motivation and her response was to provide wake-up calls, rides to school, and tempt them with fast food. Their actions may seem unorthodox, but the challenges of working in schools that are so complex, might call for measures that are seemingly unorthodox when compared to schools without these challenges. In thinking about the work that might be done to assist students, teachers placed great emphasis on time. They indicated that they needed more time in order to plan, grade, and collaborate with colleagues. They stated that little time was devoted to that and they needed the support. Four of the teachers talked about the importance of building relationships with students but that might mean having smaller class sizes at the elementary level and a restructuring at the middle and high school levels that might allow for more teacher mentoring, possibly through homerooms.

Teachers also noted how students were expected to grow up faster as many had pressing challenges at home. For example, Mary indicated that one of her students could not stay for an after-school activity, as she had to go home to check on her father who had too much to drink the night before. Dana talked about how her two students had to ask advice about when to put their young brothers to bed, as they were responsible for them. Pat indicated that one of her students

had to help an ill parent. These are the realities for many students in low-income schools.

Programs to assist with those challenges might bring about some relief so that students might be offered more flexibility between their home and school lives. Ways of doing that might include:

- After school tutoring with available child care for younger siblings.
- After school activities that allow students to explore areas such as music, dance, culinary, yoga & pilates.
- Other activities they may not have opportunities in which to participate such as field trips or cultural events.

School Context

Although their work with families and students may have shown some barriers that prevented them from a sense of agency in their classrooms, the school context may have exacerbated that sense of agency. The teachers reported that there was little time for collaboration with colleagues and all but one of the teachers experienced strong hesitations by the administration to listen to suggestions. They appeared beleaguered by some of the expectations held for them such as teaching students content that they may not be ready for and trying to meet standards set by “top-down” management who did not seemingly understand the issues that they addressed in their classrooms. They also reported that resources and training were limited. This sense of having little control with lack of collaboration and little input on curriculum may have led to less teacher agency and contributed to “jumping hoops” to contend with the pressures. However, one teacher, Pat, appeared to have more control, thus a sense of agency as, reportedly, she and colleagues worked together with the administration to assist with the work in their classrooms. Suggestions in this area might include providing more time to meet with colleagues for planning for lessons and communicating about students and families. School

administrators might also attempt to invite teachers into the decision-making process regarding curriculum. Even if the rules are provided by outside agencies and administrators have little choice, they should still make the attempt to keep teachers in the discussion. Administrators should also have a clear understanding of the school resources needed and attend to providing those resources. Translators, technology, and professional development are important to the function of the school.

Implications

The results of this study might indicate a need for a stronger push toward embedding culturally responsive pedagogies within teacher education and professional development and in ways that are explicit and authentic. In this work, twelve teachers were pushed to *notice* the communities in which they teach and to respond to those noticings. And it was through the interviews of five of those teachers where their reported observations provided more insight about the work that might be done in schools that are so complex. Darling Hammond (2006) indicated that "...schools of education must design programs that help prospective teachers to understand deeply a wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts, and teaching and be able to enact these understandings in complex classrooms serving increasingly diverse students..." To add to this, teacher noticing might, indeed, be part of this mix since what they notice is important to how they might learn about the other ideas presented to them.

Teacher education

The implications for teacher education might point toward integration of noticing activities within courses and field instruction. Noticing is trainable, according to Schoenfeld (2011), who also cautions that "...we will need a more refined set of questions to address what people can be trained to notice under what (personal) circumstances, and when teachers can be in

a position to notice things and act profitably on them” (p. 234). This study might add to Schoenfeld’s ideas. Teachers in this study were not trained to notice, but they provided clues to the kinds of noticing that they automatically undertook in regards to communities, families, students and school context. These findings might serve as benchmarks for training teachers to notice specific areas using a sociocultural approach. Teachers in this study began to notice when they made judgments or used stereotyping. They made connections from their observations to the work they undertook in classrooms. They also presented their questions/wonderings they might have regarding observations. Further, teachers acted upon their noticings in various helpful and unhelpful ways as they attempted to provide parents and students with tools and information that might assist them through the education process.

Teachers in this study experienced difficulty with the power and control that it takes to become change agents. All of the teachers, some more than others, provided deficit comments about particular parents and students and admitted to the difficulty of working with students who did not have academic and social support at home. This might speak to the need for teacher training programs to provide a required course specifically focused on families or at least embed readings, discussions, and other valuable information about families within required courses. However, the information should not be just an “add on” in courses. It needs to be substantial and provide solid research-based ways in which to work with families.

Teachers’ observations provide clues as to the areas that might be addressed both in teacher education classes as well as through professional development. It is not enough to provide teachers with facts about low-income communities; they require more concrete information to assist with the challenges they observe. For example, college courses and professional development might consider adding *tailored observations* to the curriculum as well

as course discussions focused on those observations so that teachers might work together to begin puzzling out solutions to the challenges they encounter. Instead of commiserating about how parents were unavailable and unhelpful, teachers might work together to find ways to make positive parental contacts leading to a more inclusive environment. That might entail home visits, phone calls, or more substantial endeavors such as encouraging classroom volunteerism and chaperoning field trips (Table 9).

Teacher education programs might also strongly encourage, or even make mandatory, study abroad programs where preservice teachers are fully immersed in cultures that are culturally, linguistically, and possibly socioeconomically different from their own cultures. To experience the ways of being different from dominant societal norms might bring them closer to understanding cultural differences.

Field experiences. Assignments that require noticing of particular persons, places, or things might be arranged in order for teachers to begin to consciously notice and reflect upon. For example, teachers in this study were asked to observe families and children who lived within the schools' communities. They were provided open-ended choices for observations and it allowed me, as the instructor, to notice where my students took the assignment. I learned much about their stance as teachers through their choices and the conversations based on their observations.

Preservice teachers might be taught noticing skills early on as they are provided with very specific assignments that include particular observations. Students should not be sent into a setting to "observe and reflect" but there should be objectives for the noticing. Maybe the focus is on students one day and teachers another time. Maybe the focus is on behaviors of students. The point is to narrow their vision so they are not taking in all of the activities in the classroom.

It might also be important to provide preservice teachers with a veteran teacher who might assist them with noticing; even the mundane parts of the school day might need to be explicitly referred to so that teachers point out the “inner” and “outer” kinds of noticing as referred to by (Erickson, 2011).

Recruitment. In accepting students into programs, their level of noticing might be measured. This might be especially important for new teachers planning to teach in low-income schools that are filled with complexities. Purcell Gates (1995) maintains that we “...must recruit and train teachers who know, accept and celebrate the cultures from which children come” (p. 192). Villegas & Lucas (2000) have even suggested measuring dispositions of those who want to become teachers. I do not necessarily promote that those wanting to become teachers already have the desired dispositions, but they must be willing and open toward dispositions that might lead to becoming change agents in schools with diverse populations.

Certification. This may be an area of consideration for teachers who plan to teach in low-income schools. Although it is important that all teachers are trained in culturally responsive pedagogies, it might be particularly important to have teachers in low income schools who are trained in ways that might best prepare them to work with the challenges they might encounter. Besides the general courses for teacher preparation, additional courses might include more intense focus on psychology and sociology as related to students and families whose cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic resources are unlike those of their teachers. Also, field placements might be arranged within social service agencies, hospitals, or other areas where teachers might view families and students from different perspectives.

Professional Development

If possible, teacher-training institutions might work closely with schools to develop programs that would focus on the issues addressed in this dissertation. It is clear that these veteran teachers did not understand aspects of the cultures that they worked with as they shared their frustrations as well as questions regarding their work. It is also important that the work is conducted in a way that uses current readings, research, and discussions. Further, since this work noted several areas where teachers' life histories may have influenced their work in the classroom, it might help to have teachers explore their histories in relationship to their work. Although that was not done in this study, there appeared to be a connection between teachers' stories and their expectations of families and students.

Policy

This study has provided the shared observations of teachers in two low-income school districts. The work is challenging, as they have shared. We expect much of teachers in these settings as they are not only teachers of the expected content areas but, according to their observations, they seek to motivate, mediate, provide resources, and individualize toward so many varied needs and do it with the expertise that will raise students' test scores. Policy might place an emphasis on:

- smaller class sizes
- providing additional personnel in classrooms
- offer more time for teachers to collaborate
- institute year-round school programs
- place an emphasis on teachers use of students' funds of knowledge within the teaching process

Policy might also assist in providing low-income schools with assistance that helps them to do their work. It might assist in helping the school become the heart of the community, and open their doors to provide a list of services to assist families such as

- a push to provide GED and ESL services for parents within schools.
- incentives to bring in community pro bono services to assist with families' needs (medical, dental, legal).
- support a food pantry program for schools.
- funding toward providing programs, as mentioned earlier, that might provide students with opportunities in extracurricular activities such as music, art, dance, and other interest-based programs.
- Provide a social service agency representative on site at least once each week.

Teachers provided a picture of the struggles as they observed them. There is a need for action that might assist with some of the challenges and it calls for a unified effort of policymakers, communities, teachers and their administrators to work together toward solutions.

Further Research Suggested by this Work

Noticing has been used within preservice teacher training with the help of video in order to assist those teachers in noticing what happens in classrooms, and with veteran teachers in noticing mathematics instruction, however, it does not appear that anything has been done in the field with veteran teachers focusing on sociocultural issues. This study shows the need to investigate more thoroughly the use of noticing and how it might help teachers to catch themselves in preconceived notions and judgments about the students and families within their communities. Specifically, Dewey's notion of inward and outward noticing as described by Erickson (2011) might further be explored in order to understand how and if teachers "see" each

of these areas and their actions toward what is observed. Furthermore, offering preservice teachers specific ways of noticing might lead to a clearer understanding of what teachers need to do first in classrooms.

Further research might also focus on the use of teachers' life histories and the influence that these histories may have on teachers' work in schools with diverse communities or at least diverse in ways that are different from the teachers' background. As noted earlier, there appeared to be a strong connection between the teachers' backgrounds and their classroom practices. This is seen through Bobby's and Pat's strong religious views, instilled in them as children, and the notions they held about the curriculum. Experiences also appear to play a role in Bobby's expectations of his students and in Mary's way of looking at diversity. Dana's quest to motivate her students led her to believe that all students could be motivated. Jill's strong Christian upbringing played into the focus of the work that she wanted to do within low socioeconomic schools. These are just a few examples, seemingly powerful evidence from life stories that might indicate a strong connection between those stories and what teachers notice and attend to in their teaching. I speculate that it is difficult to "shake off" those cultural ideas that are so engrained within us. One might be able to shift perspectives but unless an awareness is enacted, and that may not even be enough, it seems that we slip easily back into the automaticity of those deep cultural entrenchments. I propose that further research might help to clarify the influence that life histories may hold on teachers' noticing and attending to their work, especially with populations of students whose backgrounds are dissimilar from their own.

One other area of exploration might be to observe how and what students and administrators notice about teachers. It might be important to investigate what students notice (Erickson, 2011) about their schools and teachers in order to provide another view of not only

classroom life, but how they notice their families, communities, and teachers in relation to their school lives.

Conclusion

As Dana indicated in Chapter 6, “..ok, I get it, I understand. I’m sympathetic to that but I don’t feel like I’ve been supplied with or given any PD on what do we do then?” This study provided a glimpse into the way in which noticing and attending might affect teachers’ practices as they figure out their work with students and families in diverse school settings.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB CONSENT FORM

Veteran teachers working in diverse communities: *Noticing* students, families and communities

Consent Form

Dear Student:

As part of your participation in the Course 222, you had been learning to think about Schools and Society. We are asking whether you would allow the use of your written work completed for Course 222 to be used in Jackie Sweeney's dissertation study entitled **Veteran teachers working in diverse communities: *Noticing* students, families and communities**, directed by Dr. Cheryl Rosaen, Michigan State University. We are also asking if you are willing to be interviewed about your work as a teacher as well as responding to questions regarding background information. It is anticipated that the interviews will require approximately two one-hour sessions.

The study will investigate the extent to which the course assignments and experiences assisted you in thinking about your role as educators in 21st century classrooms, many of those classrooms with diverse student populations. Your work might help further our understanding of what it means to teach in diverse settings. Sweeney will closely examine the work that has been created in EN 596. The assignments, activities, and, in some cases, interview data will be analyzed to help her learn more about teacher thinking. The results of the study are intended to be shared with teacher education colleagues, at professional conferences, and through publication of journal articles.

Participation is voluntary in that you may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. No one, but the approved researchers (Jackie Sweeney and Cheryl Rosaen, her dissertation director), will have access to the artifacts collected or the interviews taken. You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the understanding educators have about working in schools with diverse populations.

If you decide to participate in the study by allowing Jackie Sweeney to include your written course work, and/or by volunteering to participate in additional interviewing as a case study participant, we will insure confidentiality in a number of ways. For example, we plan to use pseudonyms if we refer to your work so that your identity will be protected. Your identity will only be known to the two researchers, and reports of our research findings will not permit associating you with specific responses or findings. We will not indicate which semester the work comes from so those reading about the course would not be able to figure out whether or not you were enrolled in a particular section during a particular semester. There are no known risks associated with this part of the study. If you also volunteer to participate as a case study

participant, there is a slight risk that classmates familiar with the situation may be able to identify you, however, publication of those findings would not directly be of risk to you. Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Confidentiality of records with identifying information will be maintained in a locked cabinet for up to 10 years, and only the researchers will have access to them. No organizations or agencies will have access or receive research data or results, except the IRB which is required by Michigan State University.

We hope you will be interested in participating in this research project. Please call or email the Primary Investigator, Dr. Cheryl Rosaen (517-353-0632 or crosaen@msu.edu) if you have further questions.

Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Rosaen, Principal Investigator
Jackie Sweeney, Secondary Investigator and doctoral student

Veteran teachers working in diverse communities: *Noticing* students, families and communities

The purpose and research activities of this study have been explained. If you agree to participate, please check the items below to indicate your level of participation, sign and print your name, and indicate today's date.

_____ You grant permission for your written work from Course 222 to be included in the study.

_____ You grant permission to be interviewed for approximately two one-hour time slots. The interview will be audio taped.

Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. To insure confidentiality, your identity will be protected. A pseudonym will be used if the researchers refer to your work. Your identity will only be known to the researchers, and reports of research findings will not permit associating you with specific responses or findings. Research reports will not indicate which semester the work comes from so that those reading about the course will not be able to figure out whether or not you were enrolled in a Course 222 section during a particular semester. Your name or any identifying information will not be used during conference presentations or in any published work. If you also volunteer to participate as a case study participant, there is a slight risk that those familiar with the situation and the teacher preparation program may be able to identify you, however, publication of those findings would not occur until after your graduation from the program. Confidentiality of records with identifying information will be maintained in a locked cabinet for up to 10 years, and only the researcher. No organizations or agencies will have access or receive research data or results, including the IRB.

Participation is voluntary, you may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at

any time without consequence. If you choose not to participate, you will not be penalized. If you request them, results of the study may be made available to you. You will not directly benefit from your participation in this study. However, your participation in this study may contribute to the understanding educators have of preparing teachers to work in diverse school settings.

If you have questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report and injury (i.e. physical, psychological, social, financial, or otherwise), please contact the principal investigator, Dr. Cheryl Rosaen at 517-353-0632 or crossaen@msu.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this research study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, Michigan State University Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, FAX 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu, or regular mail at: 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please Print Your Name _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM *as soon as possible in the provided addressed/stamped envelope* TO: Jackie Sweeney, Secondary Investigator

APPENDIX B

COURSE SYLLABUS

Course 888: School and Society

Spring, 2010

Course Meets: January 3, 20, 27 and February 3, 10

All Final Course Work submitted by March 3rd

Instructor: Jackie Sweeney

Day/Time: Wednesday, 4:15-7:15 p.m.

Location: East Tremont Elementary School

*What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child,
that must the community want for all of its children.*

-John Dewey, School and Society, (1900, 1915)

Course Description: Through the lens of literature, theory, and narrative, this course analyzes public education in the United States along with the issues of a global society, as a way of informing and empowering teachers toward a stance of production and as agents of change. Components of that context include multiple perspectives of theoretical, cultural, political and economic forces. Using a multicultural critique as a foundation, the course investigates the effects on schools of changes in social stratification, especially poverty, as well as racial and ethnic demographics. In addition, the course investigates the disparities of wealth and basic human needs existing in the world today. Pre-service and practicing teachers should understand, in the age of a global economy, the needs and demands of not only their local students, but students around the world, and how each affects the other.

This course will encourage you to draw from your personal and professional experiences as you read the assigned readings and share those ideas and insights with your colleagues. The intent of this course is not to provide you with the “answers” but to assist you to explore various angles related to schools and society. This course will focus on the various themes and struggles within the American educational system.

Course Goals and Objectives

Emphasis will be placed on the following objectives:

1. Demonstrate an awareness and understanding of instructional pedagogy for the local student in a global context.
2. Reflect and refine your philosophy of education as impacted by your current practice and the content of this course.
3. Participate individually and with others as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a literacy community.
4. Understand the role of multicultural and global literature in today’s society and the implications of both for instruction.
5. Explore and become informed about our local communities along with the resources and people located within them.
6. Understanding the interaction of different cultures within a school setting.

7. Understanding the effects of recent attempts to reform U.S. public schools.

Required Texts:

Delpit, Lisa (1995). *Other People's Children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.

Dewey, J. (1916) *The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Additional Readings and Instructions on College Internet Course Program

Course Structure:

This course is structured in a format that allows for 15 hours of class time, 15 hours of online time, and 15 hours of time in the community. The work done throughout class time will focus on reading, writing, and discussion. A seminar format will be held so that we are able to share ideas gleaned from our readings. A variety of reading sources have been selected; other than the two required books, a group of readings have been posted on course connect which will assist us with our exploration. While **reading**, you may want to focus on several areas: (1) What is the author trying to say? (2) What is the author's purpose? (3) How do the author's ideas fit with your understanding and beliefs? It is essential that you read the material and make notes related to the ideas presented. This will also assist you in your discussion. **Writing** can often be a daunting task for many of us. The writing done in this course will assist you in processing your understanding of and beliefs about the readings. Please use APA style when citing your work. Because this course is structured as a seminar, participation in **discussion** is important to your learning as well as your colleagues' learning. Please be prepared to share your ideas and listen/respond in thoughtful ways with your colleagues.

Course Assignments:

1. Classroom Participation:

- Prepare for by making notes from the readings, devising questions, and other preps that will assist you
- Participate fully in course activities and discussions
- Class Readings: Dewey, Delpit, selected articles (Preparation with your colleagues for this)

2. Project: School and Community Project (15 hour community) (SEE COURSE GOAL #5)

- **Part I:** Select Community (District/School/Class)
- Community Focus (Suggestions)
 - Spend at least 5 hours observing within the community
 - Demographics of the community
 - Visit stores in the community and make notes
 - Visit parks
 - Visit laundromat and observe the people there
 - Visit restaurants
 - What are your wonderings?
 - What do you know about the people in the community and students in the classroom?
 - Post these reflections on the Course Connect Discussion Thread post at least 3 by these dates: January 27, February 3 and February 17th (between 400-500 words)

* Post responses by February 3rd, February 17th, and February 24th
(no word limit, but provide thoughtful and insightful responses)

Part 2: School Focus: Response Journal (Personal Response Journal)

- Select/visit at least one school
- Spend at least 10 hours observing in the school
- What do you notice in terms of resources?
 - ~ Facilities (buildings and classrooms)
 - ~ Materials (books, technology, etc.)
- Parent/family involvement?
- You may focus on your own classroom but also choose one other classroom:
 - ~ interview teacher (you may tape in order to refer to your notes for your postings; be sure to ask permission)
 - ~ demographics of the classroom
 - ~ teacher's perceptions of her work (what's difficult? Rewarding?)
 - ~ observations in classroom (what do you notice about the make up of the class?)
 - *What do you notice about the interactions: student-student; teacher-student)
 - *What do you wonder about? Please keep notes of your observations as they will be submitted with this assignment.

Post these findings in the drop box on Course Connect for this assignment: (DUE February 3, 10, 17)

- Keep a personal journal to record your noticings/wonderings so that you can use these to write your responses
 - Your drop box reflection should consist of at least 500 words for each of the designated weeks, focused on this project. You might consider to base writings on:
 - Why you chose this community/school/classroom
 - Refer to readings or class discussion when you can make connections (*be sure to include this*)
 - Provide information about your findings in the classroom; teacher-student interactions; student-student interactions. Remember to use pseudonyms and be sure to get permissions needed for interviewing, observing, etc.
 - Teacher interview to find out about issues raised by our readings.
- **Share your findings** on the last day of class, keeping in mind confidentiality of your subjects. **(DUE: February 10th)**
3. Prepare extensive notes for class that will assist you in course discussion. Within these notes, provide questions, comments, and quotes that will help you and others in your group to make sense of the readings. You may be asked to share at least one of these ideas during discussion. Please show that you have notes for each class period (within a notebook, sticky notes, other)
 4. Interest: Write a 10-page paper that provides a thesis related to the ideas we have read about and discussed in class. Support that thesis with evidence (ie...quotes, information) obtained from your readings: provide at least 7 citations within your work, two of which must come

from sources other than those used in class. The piece should follow APA guidelines, presented as double spaced, and 12 pt New Times Roman as well as proper grammar and mechanics as well as a reference page. **(Final Paper Due by March 3rd in Drop Box but you will share your ideas on the last night of class)** Narrow your topic so that you can cover the information within 10 pages. Examples may include:

- *Culturally-responsive teaching in a 21st century school: what might this look like?*
- *Debunking the myths for teachers working with Latino children in low SES schools*

5. Hot Topic: This is your turn to bring a topic to the table that focuses on events in education that are appropriate to schools and society in the 21st century. Please sign up for a date to bring in your topic. The topic should lead to an informal discussion. You may find your information in newspapers, specialized journals, television presentations. Provide a brief overview of your “hot topic” and explain how this relates to those teaching in the 21st century. A short discussion may take place.

- Use current media sources; one good link is for Education Week:
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/index.html> You can get a free 2-week trial and I believe you can read some articles full text. It is one of the most up-to-date news resources in education that I have come across
- You may use other sources...but make sure they are geared toward our class focus☺ Those sources are plentiful...you may even think about showing a clip from one of the news outlets that provide podcasts (CNN, CNBC, Fox, NPR, etc) Just make sure it's not too lengthy as we have a short amount of time devoted to this.

Summary of Course Requirements and Evaluation:

School and Community Project:	30 pt.
Course notes/Discussion	10 pt.
Final Project: Synthesis paper and informal presentation	30 pt.
Hot Topic	10 pt.
Class Participation:	20 pt.

Incomplete Grades:

When special or unusual circumstances occur, the instructor may postpone assignment of the student's final grade in a course by use of an I-Incomplete. *The I-Incomplete may be given only when:* The student (a) has completed at least 6 of the 8 weeks of the semester, but is unable to complete the class work and/or take the final examination because of illness or other compelling reason; and (b) has done satisfactory work in the course; *and* (c) in the instructor's judgment can complete the required work without repeating the course.

Teacher Education policy: A student must maintain a cumulative grade point average of 2.5 or better to continue taking education classes. A grade of “C” or better must be earned in all major, minor, and education classes.

ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION and COMMUNICATION:

Class Participation: Your attendance and active participation in class will count in your grades because it is vital to the course and to your learning. Your colleagues and I depend on you to

share your load of reading for meaning, analyzing cases, generating ideas, making presentations, participating in peer teaching activities, giving feedback on lesson plan drafts, sharing classroom observations and experiences, and so on. You cannot do your share if you are not *present and active*. Technological devices to assist you with classroom activities is encouraged and expected but the **personal use of computers, cell phones, or text messaging during class is not acceptable.**

Please make sure you call me (555.5555) *in advance* if you are unable to attend class. You are responsible for the content of any class that you may miss.

Interviews: Use pseudonyms and screen or mask identifying information when reporting interviews with children or youth or adults. If an assignment requires you to interview an adult other than your CT, you should clearly state or give the interviewee, in writing, the purpose of the interview and the uses you will make of the material.

Photographs, Videotapes, Audio Tapes: Always ask permission of the classroom teacher to make photographs, videotapes, or audiotapes of students. Occasionally there are circumstances that require a student's whereabouts to be kept secret and photographs may not be allowed. Some schools and districts require written permission from parents/guardians for taking any photographs, videotapes, or audiotapes. Be sure to check with the classroom teacher on what is needed.

COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS AND RESOURCES

Student Services

The Student Achievement Center provides support and assistance to all students. Services include tutoring, planned study groups, accommodations for disabilities, and writing assistance. For further information or to schedule an appointment, call 555.555 or 555.5552 weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. The Student Achievement Center is located in Building 2.

Academic Integrity

Written or other work that a student submits must be the product of her/his own efforts. Incidents of plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty, including dishonesty involving computer technology, are taken very seriously and will be pursued. Students are strongly cautioned not to copy any text verbatim on class quizzes, tests, reports, projects, lesson plans or other class assignments without using appropriate quotations and source citations. Further information on Academic Integrity can be found in the current college catalog.

APPENDIX C

ESL CERTIFICATION COURSE LIST

Table 10 Course List

Course Title	Credit Hours
Linguistically & Culturally Responsive Teaching Practice	3
Introduction to English as a Second Language	3
Advanced Methods and Materials of Teaching ESL	3
Assessment and Evaluation in ESL	3
Second Language Acquisition	3
Theories of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism	3
* School and Society	3
Practicum: ESL Education	3

* current course taken where data used for this study

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview #1: Life History Questions

Tell me about growing up.

What was your neighborhood (community) like?

Your family life?

What social class did you belong to?

What is the ethnic or cultural background of your parents?

How does this help/hinder you in your job as a teacher?

Was there a noticeable cultural “flavor” in the family that you grew up in?

Explain, if yes.

What cultural values were passed on to you and by whom?

What beliefs or ideals did your parents try to teach you?

Was religion an important part of your upbringing?

If so, is it still important to you?

What cultural influences are important to you today?

If cultural influences are important, how do you show that?

Tell me about school. What was that like for you?

What was your best memory?

What was your worst memory?

Did you have a favorite teacher?

If so, explain.

What has been your most important lesson in life outside of the classroom?

What kind of a student were you throughout your school years?

When did you decide to go into teaching?

What prompted that decision?

Before becoming a teacher, did you believe that you would have control over your classroom and would be able to make a difference in the lives of children? Explain

How does being a teacher mesh with what you thought it might be?

What do you see as the purpose of education?

What special people have shaped your life?

Interview #2: General Interview Questions:

Noticing Questions:

Tell me about a typical day in your classroom. Describe the “typical” ambience.

How does family or community enter into how you think about teaching?

How much does family or community play into the work that gets done in your classroom?

Do you think that you respond to all students in the same way? Probe here to find out how they see themselves responding to and interacting with various students.

Think of this past year in your classroom or over the past few years.

Tell me about the students in your classroom this past year (probe ideas presented)

Tell me about your students...(challenges/strengths they may have).

If there are challenges, provide examples and how you assist with those challenges

Are there particular moments in your career as a teacher that you began to look at your practice in a different way? If so, how and what might have pushed you to think differently?

Are you teaching in the kind of school and with the kind of children that you had always thought you would teach? Explain

What is it like to teach in a low SES school. Probe here for information.

Policy-Focused Questions:

What are some of the rewards and challenges of teaching in a school that primarily serves low SES students? **Probe:** compare current school experiences with experiences in other schools in which you have taught.

If you could make changes in your practice, what might that look like?

If you could make changes in your school, what might those be?

How do policies related to curriculum and assessment affect your work? **Probe** for how other policies/factors affect teacher work such as those related to student groupings/assignments, class size, attendance, mobility...and other)

Do you believe that you have the power to make changes in your practice?

In your school?

Within the district?

Probe for whether the teachers believe they have the power to make changes to policies related to curriculum, assessment, or other issues previously mentioned.

What is your definition of “policy”?

Probe to determine whether they are thinking of school, district, state and/or federal policies.

If you could make changes in “policy” what would that look like?

How could changes in policy affect what you do in the classroom?

Explain the “policy” you would suggest for your school, district, and all low SES districts in general.

APPENDIX E

FIVE TEACHERS' INFORMATION

Table 11 Teachers' Information

Name	Lives Within District	Grades/Subject(s) 2009-1010	Grade(s)/Subject(s) 2010-2011	District	Years Teaching	Total Years In District
Bobby		4/all but writing	4/ all but writing	Garnet	5	*17
Dana		7-8/Math	ESL: High School	Tremont	7	7
Mary	X	3-4 /All	K-6; Reading Specialist	Tremont	10	10
Jill	X	9/ ELA, SPED-ESL	Middle School, High School: ELA, ESL	Garnet	12	5
Pat	X	3-4 /All Subjects	3-4 /All Subjects	Tremont	16	16

APPENDIX F

EXAMPLES FOR IDEA UNITS (CHAPTERS 3, 5, 6, 7)

Table 12 Chapter 3: Blogs—Questioning and Enactment

Questioning	Enactment
I wonder how different it is for students to live in one culture at home and another at school?	I ran into my student and family at the store but could not easily communicate [because of language differences].
Do parents have a clear goal for their child's future?	When they come in with sad or tired eyes, I try to be more sympathetic.
So what does a district do to stop students from dropping out?	In schools our expectations are raised to fit the middle class standard, and if teacher don't understand that some students don't come equipped with some authority patterns or social arrangements, then classroom management can be a nightmare.
Upon visiting a family home, the teachers asked the mother about her veil, "I asked her if this was customary and she said 'But of course!' I felt a little dumb!"	Maybe we need a more efficient counseling service. The "border-line" students need someone to advocate for them. Give them support. Guide them back to school or find a program that will work best for them.

Table 13 Chapter 5: Families

Deficit	Caring/Sympathetic	Above/Beyond
I can pick out the kids whose parents actually cared.	They're working two or three jobs each just to stay afloat.	I think you need to start with just even...like potlucks.
I think the kids see that there are no real repercussions at home.	Now I realize that even talking with the girls, they are the ones raising their brothers and putting them to bed.	Thought the family did a good job and student did well so submitted an academic award based on behavior and academics.
Children just aren't valued.	I want her to know I'm on her side.	Helped Rosa advocate for her son.
I've got to help these kids and sometimes that's being a mom.	It's like I'm helping family.	Arrived to school early to offer time to work with students.

Table 14 Chapter 6: Students

Deficit	Caring/Sympathetic	Above/Beyond
Many times I've said to myself why do these kids act the way the do? It's their normal.	They take on the stresses of adults not knowing where they will be one day to the next in some cases.	Knew how to joke with student to facilitate a relationship that would push her student toward reading material.

Table 14 (cont'd)

They want the work done for them; they're lazy.	A lot of them have difficult financial times so they have a lot of depression or anger and it's always trying to figure out what's wrong with the child.	Wake-up calls for students and rides to school as well as a trip to Burger King as reward for attending school.
Some students don't come with a lot of strengths such as vocabulary or other skills needed for school.	Some of my ELLs are illegal. They can't have social security numbers....they're fighting against the odds.	Offer early morning tutoring to students each day.
The two move ins moved in and brought drama with them.	Noticed a high number of African American males who were sent to office for discipline	I don't let kids sleep in class: I'm waking them up and doing what I can to keep them working.

Table 15 Chapter 7: Hoop Jumping

Lack of Autonomy	Seeking Solutions	Voicing Ideas
They're requiring us to teach more...teach deeper not wider.	Have one building per grade level for more and better collaboration between teachers.	Suggested to administration what might be done to address MEAP data.
Administration is top down.	Need a big picture approach where information isn't just jammed into kids' heads.	Brainstorm with other teachers for new ideas.
Don't have tech resources.	Homework assignments should be meaningful.	Talked to the person in charge of data system to voice concerns.
Don't feel like you teach because you are told what to do.	Need more time to work with students who struggle.	Took concerns to assistant superintendent.

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