WHO KILLED WALTER FRENCH? A NEW CULTURAL HISTORY OF CHARTER
SCHOOL GOVERNANCE, COMMUNITY AND OWNERSHIP IN MICHIGAN,
1996-2004

By

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ABSTRACT

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Walter French Academy (WFA), a charter school in Lansing, Michigan, opened its doors in

1996. After eight difficult years of operation, its chartering agency, Central Michigan University

(CMU), chose not to reauthorize its charter, and WFA was forced to close in 2004. As a case

study history employing an historiographical approach related to the new cultural history, Walter

French Academy's establishment and trajectory can be seen as an emergence related to events

taking place at a particular point in time. In this project I explore the intersection of and

relationship among these diverse and often chance events, in order to theorize the complexity of

choice and charter schooling as examples of current movements in education reform. I also

examine competing claims for control and ownership of the school with its overlapping

structures of both public and privatized governance. For the new cultural historian, language is

not neutral, and is always ideological. Throughout the work I therefore analyze particular

language related to community and consensus, to ownership and control that was deployed by

various stakeholders who impacted the school's history in order to understand the ways that

power circulated among them, making possible certain actions and foreclosing others. The

question, "Whose school is this?" provides a thread that runs throughout this project. To answer

this question, I include the voices of many of the adults who were connected with the school

along with my own. I argue that the emergence of competing claims and claimants as well as

their departure affected the trajectory of WFA in critical ways and impacted its failure and

closure in 2004. It is a cautionary tale.

DEDICATION

For my father and mother, David G. Marquardt and Janet G. Marquardt, who have lovingly honored my pursuits in life; and for my son and daughter, Andrew D. Meier and Elissa A. Meier, who without a word helped keep this goal in front of me.

ACNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

It was August 1996 when I sat in the school cafeteria with my journal, writing bits and pieces of impressions of the scenes of the drama that was unfolding around me as the opening day of the new charter school loomed perilously close. Noticing my ever-present notebook, someone remarked to me laughing that the story of Walter French was indeed one that would need to be told some day and that I might be a good candidate for the job. I laughed too, thinking that it was in so many ways an absurd notion, and though early on there was a plethora of material for my journal, I had no idea at that moment of the intensely chaotic, sometimes laughable, sometimes tragic events that were to follow.

I was an original member of the teaching staff at what was first called Walter French Academy of Business and Technology and later renamed Walter French Academy (WFA). I stayed on for most of its run as a charter school. I left the school in late 2002, when I was certain that I could no longer carry on there, and the school closed for good in June 2004. When I left, I had no plan to write the school's history, yet I remained drawn to the events of those years and their implications for education in general and charter schools and school reform in particular. In almost a tongue-in-cheek gesture, my first impulse was to write the story of WFA as a murder mystery entitled *Who Killed Walter French? The Death of a School*. It could be a who-done-it where the mystery is investigated by examining artifacts for clues and interviewing witnesses and suspects.

Since that time, I have shifted my understanding of historiography and therefore my approach to this project as a result of my research informed by the new cultural history of education,[1] a critical approach to both the reading and writing of history. Among other things, new cultural historians do not assume that history is continuous and therefore that the future is predictable. Through this lens historians can look for and analyze the details of ruptures and breaks rather than causal links among facts and events. Both presentist and historicist approaches to writing history are possible within new cultural history. Fendler (2008) considers both as she examines curricular change:

> Historicizing approaches to accounts of curricular change explain events as particular to a time and place, and strategically presentistic accounts take the inevitable effects of current perspectives into account. Events are assumed to be exemplary of a specific historical moment, having no necessary or rational relation to events that came before or afterwards, in other words, educational phenomena are produced by circumstances of historical contingency. (688-89)

Applying this approach, the establishment and trajectory of Walter French Academy can be seen as an emergence related to events taking place at a particular point in time.

My project is in part to explore these events, looking at the intersection of and relationship among these diverse and often chance events, in order to theorize the complexity of choice and charter schooling, as examples of current movements in education reform. According to Fendler (2010), Foucault's historical work "restores chance to its rightful place in history... when he

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[1] See for example, *Challenging Orthodoxies: Toward a New Cultural History of Education,* by Sol Cohen, 1999.

repeatedly reminded us that much of history cannot be explained by anything other than `the iron hand of necessity shaking the dice-box of chance'" (2).[2]

Following an historiographical approach related to the new cultural history of education, I employ the linguistic turn as a complementary lens through which to analyze the history of Walter French Academy. Hayden White has influenced this type of exploration by pointing out the rhetorical and literary nature of historical texts and the work of the historian as a storyteller who combines a "certain amount of 'data,' theoretical concepts for 'explaining' these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation…" (White 1973, ix). Those who argue that history is (or should be) more science than art, have a particularly difficult time giving much attention to the fictive elements of history writing. White says, "…in general there has been a reluctance to consider historical narratives as what they most manifestly are: verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (White 1978, emphasis in original, 82). White argues that facts are arranged by historians in a particular way that construct or emplot them in order to give meaning to these facts. He suggests four plot types: romance, comedy, satire, and tragedy, expressed singly or in combination. I do not wish to essentialize these categories, since there could be more added to this list and there are undoubtedly different ways to organize this thought. What is most important is the way such plots serve to make the past structurally familiar and meaningful to its readers.

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[2]Michel Foucault's (1998) "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (361), in *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*.

My research and subsequent shift in lens has moved a mystery story to a history of a school that affords other types of analyses. A purpose for my project is therefore to examine the trajectory of Walter French Academy in order to analyze the external as well as internal forces that both supported, and eventually undermined it. In studying the life of Walter French Academy, I historicize and particularize its history, in order as Geertz (2000) says, "to preserve the individuality of things and enfold them in larger worlds of sense at the same time" (xi).

Walter French Academy is a school culture that offers an example of the difficulty Tyack and Cuban (1995) see in the effort to reinvent schooling. They argue that a paradigm or "grammar of schooling" exists that inscribes schooling and school systems in the United States in a way that makes them highly resistant to change. Ventures that originate outside this paradigm are, therefore, likely to be met with resistance that challenge their very existence, let alone their potential to create significant change. Charter school legislation in Michigan did not come about as a result of a grass roots movement among educators or parents or community leaders. Rather, a relatively small, conservative group of politicians and policy organizations supported by then governor John Engler were able to attach charter school legislation to bills that moved through the Republican-dominated legislature. Many groups such as teachers' unions and school districts opposed this legislation. Created in this way, charter schools have been sites of tension from outside, representing as they do, a shift from localized, democratic control of schools to a market approach to governance based on private choice.

The resistance to change is not only connected to external pressures but also to forces within the school. At WFA all the artifacts of traditional schooling were present. The building itself and its

configuration of classrooms and offices helped construct a familiar notion of what schools look like and how students are housed and controlled within them. Teachers, principals, board members and staff alike brought their own schooling, teaching and/or management experiences to decisions about how WFA should look and how it should be run both inside and outside the classroom. With experience come normalized assumptions that subtly conflict with a charter school's mission proposed by policy makers, legislators, and educators to change the paradigm of schooling.

"Whose school is it?" is a critical question that has shaped my study and that is implicated in the conflicts and challenges that existed throughout the school's history. Traditional public schools are the pride and responsibility of the community that surrounds them geographically. The citizens of a community send their children, support their schools financially, and elect school boards to oversee them. Given this understanding, the question is answered fairly easily. However, the question is not so easily answered when it pertains to WFA. There were no clear neighborhood boundaries and likewise there were no clear governance boundaries. Many groups claimed the school, and competed for control of it, but near the end, they all relinquished their claims and moved on to other projects. The thread of ownership and governance runs throughout this study. It begins with the founders of WFA whose story is chronicled in the first chapter and with the staff that hoped to run the school democratically as a consensus community. It continues with the board of directors at WFA, The Leona Group (TLG) that served as management company, and Central Michigan University, the chartering agency, all who asserted their authority over the school.

Organization of this Dissertation

In Chapter Two I chronicle WFA's eight years as a charter school in Lansing, Michigan. I blend my voice as a member of the original staff with those of others who served in a variety of capacities from 1996 to 2004. A chronicle is a particular type of historical writing. Hayden White (1987) describes the chronicle as wishing to tell a story but failing to a degree in that endeavor. He writes, "The chronicle is usually marked by a failure to achieve narrative closure. It does not so much conclude as simply terminate" (5). While both the chronicle and "history proper" as White calls it, describe events in chronological order, a chronicle is seen by White as an unfinished story lacking in resolution. This position assumes the narrativity in both forms and a structure of relationships that allow for making meaning within the history.

I use the term chronicle to assert my intention to report the happenings in chronological order as those connected with WFA experienced them, in order to give readers a framework of events on which to hang the analysis. Peter Gay argues, "Historical narration without analysis is trivial…" (Gay, quoted in White 1987, 5). White (1987), paraphrasing Kant, suggests that "historical narratives without analysis are empty" (5).

I understand that writing history of any kind without analysis or interpretive elements is impossible. Writing a chronology requires a beginning, middle, and an end point, and each respondent tells her/his story or part of it with a beginning, middle and end. Each has ordered the basic facts in a particular way to make meaning. I argue that stories are not so much found as they are constructed in order to encapsulate and assign meaning to experience. Given this caveat, the chronicle of the events pertaining to the opening, years in service, and closing of WFA represent the times and serve as backdrop for further analysis of the overlays of governance, of

notions of community and consensus, and of school choice and charter schools as a reform movement.

Chapter Two is in part autobiographical since I served as part of the initial teaching staff at WFA. My experiences are wound with those of other staff members who share their biographies. Prior to joining the staff at WFA, I had been away from teaching for several years while living rurally and helping a friend run a small business. Though I had previously been fairly successful as a teacher, coach and assistant athletic director in the public school system in Lansing, Michigan, I had always felt dissatisfied with my work and working conditions.

Like most novice teachers, managing curriculum and students initially occupied the majority of my thought and time. However, as I matured as a teacher, my interests broadened to consider the impact of schooling on students and the impact of school systems on school personnel. I did not want to serve as principal, but somehow wished for a different kind of opportunity that would permit other kinds of participation. At a point when I wondered if I would ever re-enter the teaching profession, I found a half-page ad in the local newspaper announcing the opening of a charter school in September 1996, in Lansing, Michigan, that would serve grades 6-12. My part in the story of WFA begins there, but the chronicle begins earlier with the Partnership for a New Education, the laws passed in Michigan that changed the way schools are financed, the involvement of CMU in the charter school movement, and all of their connection to the founders of WFA. The chronicle ends in June 2004 when WFA closed its doors for the summer and for good.

In Chapter Three I briefly survey major theoretical issues in history and history of education to engage with the issues that are currently being debated within this field, and to make sense of projects that have influenced new directions in historiography. My purpose is both to make sense of past and current debates and to join the conversation as an historian of education whose lens is the new cultural history.

First, I acknowledge the challenges historians face within the discipline as new understandings and methods confront traditional or dominant ones. Then, since ideas push against one another, I also attend to social history and social revisionist history in education, and to intellectual history, then and now. In juggling all of this terrain, I point to the problems that accompany the production of historical discourse.

Next, I offer the work of several researchers from different fields who have influenced cultural history or the new cultural history, as it is more recently called. I name categories and spaces of intellectual endeavor with caution, recognizing the problems that come with assigning names and thus essentializing spaces. The name "new cultural history" serves in Cohen's (1999) words as a "flag of convenience" used to encompass a broad spectrum of interest. Popkewitz, Pereyra, and Franklin (2001) also caution against the "expression of a new totalizing project" (33), since there are multiple approaches taken within the rubric of new cultural history.

Given this proviso, I highlight the main tenets of the new cultural history as a critical project that attempts to serve as a lever to open new spaces for thought about the present and the past, rather than as a mirror that reflects normalized understandings of the past (DePaepe and Simon 1996).

Fendler (2010) further explains the metaphor of the lever and mirror: "Objective history is meant to function like a *mirror* that provides us with a reflection of the past. By contrast, effective history is meant to function like a *lever* that disrupts our assumptions and understandings about who we think we are" (42). Describing the potential of the new cultural history to education, Sol Cohen (1997) argues that it can be "useful in challenging orthodoxies in education, raising questions about 'solutions' in education, providing historical contexts for critical thinking about the present moment in education, and helping to make our colleagues, our students, and the general public more sophisticated consumers of history" (28-29).

Finally, I suggest the type of historical analysis I am able to do as a result of the lens I have chosen. I point out the critiques of the new cultural history and suggest the challenges that one faces within the academy as a new cultural historian.

Chapter Four analyses one particular facet of the school's history by focusing on a particular construction of community. One way to understand the trajectory of the school's history is to study the ways that the concept of community was deployed in order to construct a particular identity and therefore to stake out a territory in what has become a new educational landscape. Using an approach in the tradition of new cultural history, I analyse Walter French Academy by critically examining its attempt at creating and becoming a consensus community. In so doing I suggest two tensions that impacted the project of community development at WFA and its chances for success. The first tension relates to Furman's (2004) understanding of "community" both as a product, an entity with foundation and structure, and as a process from which one conceptualizes an "ethic of community." The second tension refers to how the discourse around

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consensus community served both to build solidarity and to discipline, to include as well as to exclude. Since community and consensus building are generally thought of in positive terms, this analysis serves to point out unexpected consequences of such efforts that may silence rather than give voice to its members. As part of this exploration and by denaturalizing the term 'community', I shed light on these and other questions: Why did community building seem attractive to WFA staff and leadership? How was "consensus community" understood at WFA? How was the language of community and consensus deployed in order to engage in democratic decision making by the staff? How did that language also serve, as Foucault has called it, as a technology for control of the self and others? What were the tensions as well as unexpected consequences of this type of governance?

To make sense of both the construction and later dissolution of Walter French Academy, I draw from three different types of sources in order to view the community from different perspectives. First, using a semi-structured interview approach, I interviewed multiple members of the original staff at Walter French Academy, including teachers and administrators. The second source is the review of relevant documents that shed light on the school's history. Finally, the third source is my own connection as a former teacher and lead teacher at WFA. Thus, I wind my insider knowledge of the world and people of WFA throughout the essay. Those in support of an insider position argue that this is an important way to know and speak of the world. Merton (1972) sheds light on the complexities regarding insider and outsider lenses:

> Only through continued socialization in the life of a group can one become fully aware of its symbolisms and socially shared realities; only so can one understand the fine-grained meanings of behavior, feelings, and values; only so can one decipher the unwritten grammar of conduct and the nuances of cultural idiom. (15)

Conversely, those arguing for a more detached, outsider research lens hold that to be an outsider is to be more open to knowledge about particular groups and not prejudiced by membership within them. I argue alongside Merton who asserts that no matter the lens, the researcher is drawn to certain questions and peculiarities and not to others. This is a dilemma not to be solved but rather to be acknowledged and managed with care.

In Chapter Five I connect my historical study with current research literature that focuses broadly on the issue of school choice as a type of school reform. While much of the literature regarding school choice engages with the ongoing debates about the efficacy and viability of vouchers and charter schools, issues of justice, jurisdiction and individual rights versus the public good are implicated in these debates. Wishing to examine these concerns in the context of school choice as a reform movement, I divide the literature into three categories for analysis: market-based conceptualization of reform; jurisdiction in the governance of education; and choice as a moral issue. I then expand on each category by making references to my study of Walter French Academy. Within each section, I compare and analyze the literature in light of the data I have collected about WFA through interviews, documentary evidence and my personal recollections as a member of the original staff.

Michigan entered the charter school movement relatively early in comparison to other states, and is a rich site for the collection of data that tracks the momentum and impact of this movement. Research that analyzes charter school demographics and student achievement is now available to support arguments on both sides. This work, important as it is, does not and, I would assert, cannot tell the whole story. White (1987) argues that the scientistic historiography:

Which deals in large-scale, physical and social, anonymous 'forces,' is not so much wrong as simply able to tell only a part of the story…. It produces the historiographical equivalent of a drama that is all scene and no actors, or a novel that is all theme but lacking in characters. It features all background and no foreground. (174)

I thus choose to paint a fine-grained portrait of the short life of Walter French Academy to help develop a particular understanding of the challenges that accompany the charter school movement. It is about a particular time and particular notions about school reform.

Finally, as a conclusion to this study, in Chapter Six I examine the questions posed regarding ownership and control. Whose school is it? Who takes ownership of this school? Who gets to determine the trajectory of the school? Who speaks for the school? Who defends it? Who killed Walter French? I place its history in a particular time in Michigan and the United States when the language of reform was (and still is) being voiced from academia to government to corporate world. I merge my interests as historian and storyteller and emplot the history of WFA as a tragedy and cautionary tale. It is written for those individuals and organizations, non-profit or for-profit that embark on the pioneering journey to open new schools. It is written both for those who favor and those who oppose charter schools.

CHAPTER TWO

A Chronicle of Walter French Academy

I portray the advent of charter schools as historically situated. Thus, in order to better understand

Walter French Academy's eight years as a charter school in Michigan, it is important to consider

the particulars of events that came together and made possible and impacted its beginning, and

eventually, its end. In this chapter, I chronicle the Michigan charter school law and laws that

changed the way schools are funded in Michigan. Following, I document the transition of

Michigan Partnership for New Education (MPNE), a non-profit organization, to The Leona

Group (TLG), a for-profit charter school management company. Next, I document CMU's

beginnings as an authorizer, and WFA's founder's story and the hiring of original staff and the

view from board members. Finally, I chronicle the opening of school in September 1996 to its

closing in June 2004.

The Context: School Choice in Michigan

I begin with an overview of the history of choice policy in Michigan that arguably had its start

with the passage in 1994 of Proposal A, a property tax reduction plan. Prior to 1994, Michigan

schools were funded primarily by local property taxes. Over 60 percent of education revenues

were generated locally, thus making Michigan property tax rates among the highest in the nation.

Property tax relief became a political issue tackled by several gubernatorial administrations from

the late 1980's to the early 1990's. The issue of fairness in school funding also gained

prominence as the divide between the "have" school districts and "have not" districts continued

to widen. School districts containing valuable property could build and maintain lavish school

programs without seriously increasing tax rates. "Property poor" districts had to make do or set higher tax rates to account for the lesser value of their taxed property. Several ballot initiatives were turned down during the 1980s. When Republican John Engler was elected Governor in 1990, he continued to call for property tax reduction. Then state senator Debbie Stabenow, a Democrat from the Lansing area, brought a proposal forward in 1993 to eliminate property taxes as a way to fund public schools. Her proposal combined the interests of both sides of the aisle, one looking for a way to cut expensive property taxes, and the other seeking greater equity in school funding. Both houses approved the plan, after which, in a kind of cart before the horse manner, they went to work to develop a new way to fund schools. Governor Engler made it clear to the legislature that "he would not sign any funding bill unless major educational reforms were being considered" (Furst, quoted in Fendler 2003, 196). Voters approved Proposal A in 1994, dramatically reducing property taxes while increasing sales tax from four to six per cent (Arsen and Plank 2003).

Besides offering property tax relief and the possibility of a more equitable distribution of education revenues, Proposal A effectively moved financial control of education from the local boards to the State of Michigan. Prior to Proposal A, revenues collected in local districts belonged to them and they could ask their constituents for more if they wanted. After Proposal A, the per pupil revenues that funded school districts were controlled by the state and, in effect, by the students who brought their dollar amounts to the school they attended. This change in financial control was timely for Engler and advocates of school choice plans, since it made possible a funding plan based on parental choice rather than strictly on property value within a school district. Attached to Proposal A was Public Act (PA) 284 that created public school

academies, or charter schools. It was superseded by Public Act 362 and its constitutionality was

challenged on the basis of its oversight or lack thereof by the Michigan State Board of

Education. After PA 362 was found unconstitutional, PA 416 was enacted in 1994 to resolve the

problem of governance by making the State Board of Education the governing body to which all

charter schools would answer. The challenge to the charter schools initiative went all the way to

the Michigan Supreme Court in 1997, where the constitutionality of the charter school law was

finally confirmed by a 5-1 margin.

Education reform has remained strong as a national interest over several decades. Fuller, Elmore

and Orfield (1996) offer three social and economic conditions that have moved school choice to

the center of policy debates. First, the Civil Rights movement brought about national mandates to

desegregate the schools. Choice plans first developed as a white defensive strategy that allowed

students to transfer from their neighborhood schools to others within the district. However, the

Civil Rights Commission reported that this freedom of choice resulted in no whites choosing

black schools and many black families afraid to choose white schools. Segregation was

preserved and the "entire burden for small scale change [was placed] on black students and their

families" (Orfield and Ashkinaze 1991, cited in Fuller, Elmore and Orfield 1996, 5).

Second, Fuller et al. argue that the American dream had faded and upward mobility had lessened,

even though there had been more funding for education in the hopes of increasing student

achievement and in turn spurring economic growth. Finally, they cite the growing cultural

pluralism of the American society that developed interest in offering varying types of schooling

in uniquely different communities. Concurrently, debates about the efficacy of central controls

and big government moved policymakers from both the left and the right (though for different reasons) toward small, localized control. Enter the "new policy medicine of family choice" (Fuller, Elmore and Orfield 1996, 9) and the market as decentralization.

In 1991 Minnesota was the first state to implement charter school legislation, followed shortly thereafter by California in 1992. Six states, including Michigan, passed charter school legislation in 1993. The chart found in Appendix A shows the extent of charter school implementation to date nationally.

Inter-district choice plans soon followed, and magnet school or intra-district policies flourished in order to compete with charter schools that proliferated from mid-1990 until the present. Choice advocates have failed to get voter approval for voucher proposals to use public funding for private schools. Michigan's constitution contains some of the strictest clauses of all state constitutions on the use of public funds to support private and religious schools, and state-wide, Michigan voters have continued to vote in alignment with this principal (Lubienski 2001). Voters turned down the most recent voucher proposal in November 2000.

Charter schools did not come into being in Michigan as a result of a grass-roots movement for educational reform, and it never became a ballot issue for voters to decide. In surveys, most citizens reported satisfaction with their school districts, the exception being in generally under-funded urban areas where finance is more of a concern than governance (Lubienski 2001). The Mackinaw Center for Public Policy, a think tank that promotes privatization, Governor Engler, and key legislators joined forces to move the reform through the Michigan legislature. TEACH

Michigan, a group founded by conservative Republican State Representative Paul DeWeese, was influential in the push toward charter school legislation.

The political history of the charter school movement in Michigan sheds light on the interests that have driven the creation of school choice policy. While charter school advocates have sought support in part by portraying choice as a civil rights issue, one might argue that the politically powerful and well-funded Right was likely interested in enacting programs that represent more far-reaching change in the governance of Michigan's schools in order to serve its own particular interests (Fendler 2003). Some feared that school choice proponents might have sought a way to allow the predominantly white middle class, whom they represent, to choose its way out of public schools and into both religious and secular private schools paid for by public funds that could admit or reject any element deemed dangerous or unworthy. Garcia (2010) offers support to this notion, arguing that "some pro-charter school policy makers did indeed view charters as a segue to vouchers" (35) that allow public funding for private and parochial schools. In this way, the group traditionally best served by education policies would continue to reap the greatest benefits. For-profit education entrepreneurs who saw the opportunity to move into Michigan and open numbers of schools, along with reform minded educators, carried the banner for better schools for underserved children. However, equity was defined by choice advocates not in terms of equality of outcomes, but rather in terms of equality of access. "Essentially, the focus on equal inputs and access means equal educational opportunity for parents all the way up to the schoolhouse door, de-emphasizing concern for equal outcomes" (Lubienski 2001, 643). Wells and Crain (1997) argue that most Americans are not ready to move beyond the equal opportunity agenda to one designed to produce equal results, and thus are not prepared to move from

struggles to acquire civil rights to "struggles over actually redistributing educational, economic, political and social resources" (Bobo, quoted in Wells and Crain 1997, 6). One of the questions that must be addressed now and in the future is, "What are the effects of school choice and charter school policies on school districts and on students?"

Initially, those opposed to the advent of public school academies feared that the top students would enroll in charter schools, thus skimming the "best and brightest" from traditional school districts. For the most part, however, the reverse has been true. The majority of charter schools are located in urban areas, where the difficulties faced by public schools make them a good target for competition. According to Arsen, Plank and Sykes (2002a), choice policies have had the least impact on school districts whose students come from families of high socioeconomic status. Well-educated, high-income families can afford to move to areas of their choice where schools are well funded, tend to be less diverse, and may be less likely to participate in inter-district choice plans. Districts in which enrollments are expanding can afford to lose a few students to choice alternatives. Dewitt Public Schools, located in a suburb of Lansing, Michigan, continue to experience population growth, thus are not affected to any great extent by charter schools in the Lansing area and do not accept inter-district student transfers.

Districts most affected by the competition brought about by choice policies are those in poorer districts that are not as well-funded as their more affluent suburban neighbors and those districts whose school-age population is declining. In either of these situations, any loss or gain of students directly impacts the district bottom line. In interviews with intermediate school district (ISD) superintendents, Arsen, Plank and Sykes (2002a) found that 54 percent of Michigan's

ISDs had hired marketing specialists to launch "specialized programs aimed at least in part at attracting non-resident students to the district" (11). According to data collected by Arsen, Plank and Sykes, older suburban areas such as Royal Oak in the Detroit area have used television, radio and print media to draw students to their schools that have a good reputation but are losing school-age population. In East Lansing and Waverly, both in the Lansing area, more than 10 percent of all students enrolled in 2000 were non-resident students, while in Haslett and Okemos, also in the Lansing area, 6 percent and 4 percent of their student enrollment were non-district residents. Nearly 700 students from the Lansing district had transferred to these four districts by 2000 (Arsen, Plank and Sykes 2002a). In terms of competitive markets, there develops a "food chain" of student movement where students move from lower prestige school districts to higher prestige districts. Thus, at the bottom of the food chain, districts like Detroit Public Schools face the loss of students and the revenue they bring. Situations like this make it very hard for Detroit to improve its programs. Choice advocates have stressed that competition forces districts to improve or go out of business. Most often public schools are unlikely to close even if they continue to perform poorly. Competition between traditional districts and charter schools within an urban area becomes in large part a matter of attracting bodies just to stay afloat. Improved educational experiences and innovation seem secondary under these circumstances.

So, what of the impact of charter schools that ring the cities, drawing on urban families that are dissatisfied with their local school districts? According to data from the State of the State Survey (SOSS, 2003), while respondents still favored charter schools, the level of support had diminished since 1998, except in Detroit, where support remained strongest among African-American families (The Education Policy Center, Michigan State University; Policy Report

Number 18, 2003). A large percentage of Michigan's charter schools are located in metropolitan

areas. Arsen, Plank and Sykes (2002a) offer three main reasons for this in their policy paper

School Choice Policies in Michigan: The Rules Matter:

1. The student population is sufficiently large to support additional schools, even if transportation is not provided.
2. Parental preferences are diverse enough to allow charter operations to tap 'niche' markets and open schools that respond to the preferences of specific groups of parents.
3. A sufficient number of parents in urban areas are dissatisfied with the performance of local schools to support charter schools and other alternatives.(29)

Charter schools in Michigan must finance school operations totally on the basis of per pupil state

funding, along with federal entitlement funds for which they qualify. The initial capitalization

required in starting a charter school is high. Building rental and maintenance all must come from

one source, whereas public schools fund their property and buildings through separate sources

and can levy taxes locally to support physical plant upkeep and improvement.

Michigan Partnership for New Education of 1989 Becomes The Leona Group in 1996

The case of the Michigan Partnership for New Education is an illustration of larger trends in the

United States about who governs U.S. schools and who regulates U.S. teacher education. This

story provides the backdrop for my study of Walter French Academy, which arose as one of the

many charter schools in this wave of school reform.

The Michigan Partnership for New Education (MPNE) began in 1989 as a school reform

organization whose purpose was "to improve the educational outcomes for Michigan's children"

(quoted in Fendler 2003, 187). The Partnership brought together prominent business, education

and government officials who began their work with a multi-million dollar budget. Michigan

State University was deeply invested in the partnership. According to Fendler, "the keystone of the Michigan Partnership was the establishment of Professional Development Schools (PDSs), in which the Teacher Education Department of Michigan State University worked closely with local schools to provide professional development and school improvement" (187).The former chief operating officer for MPNE (and later of The Leona Group) described their original mission as "education reform within K-12 education, [with] the specific mechanism for that education reform focused on teacher preparation" (J. Smith, pers. comm.).[3]

However, in 1994, five years into the venture, MPNE changed its leadership and direction, according to Smith, as the result of "a seemingly unrelated [series of] events that all came together at the same point in time that kind of serendipitously led the evolution of the partnership to The Leona Group" and to the management of Walter French Academy in 1996 (Smith, pers. comm.). The governor of Michigan held a permanent seat on the partnership board. In 1990, Democrat James Blanchard was defeated by Republican John Engler as governor of Michigan, and Engler's reform interests regarding education included making more options for choice available to Michigan families. Judith Lanier, the executive director of MPNE and then dean of the College of Education at Michigan State University, stepped down in 1994 and was replaced by Dr. William Coats.[4] Lanier's interest in the partnership and that of Michigan State University had been in strengthening teacher education by way of professional development schools, not by authorizing or managing charter schools (Fendler 2003). In fact, as a political statement on the

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[3] This is a pseudonym.

[4] Dr. Coats served as a superintendent of schools in Anchorage, Alaska, and in Fort Wayne, Indiana, before joining the Kellogg Foundation.

issue, under Lanier's leadership, Michigan State University refused to charter schools.[5] Coats

was appointed to the position by A. Alfred Taubman, a wealthy developer and main financial

contributor to the partnership. The two had met when Taubman and Coats worked at the Kellogg

Foundation.

According to Smith, about that time, it had become more and more difficult to generate the

millions of dollars that had funded the partnership over its first five years. Smith attributes this in

part to the fact that the board of the MPNE began to ask for empirical evidence of successful

results in teacher preparation where there was little to point to "other than anecdotal sorts of

information" (Smith, pers. comm.). In a 1994 article in *Education Week,* Georgia Van Adestine,

education policy advisor to Governor Engler, is quoted as saying, "They [MPNE] need to

document more of their successes and be more knowledgeable about what needs to be adjusted

or dropped. The more we can see the dollars and talents making a difference, the more support

they'll get." The partnership was at a crossroads, and decided on a new direction. According to

Education Week, MPNE announced that it would "downplay its role in fostering professional

development schools…. Instead, the partnership [would] look to new ventures such as audits of

educational programs, and, possibly, the direct management of public schools."[6]

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[5] According to Arsen, Sykes and Plank (2002), Michigan State University, General Motors, and the Mayor's office among others, together mobilized support for Lansing School District against the threat posed by competition from charter schools and neighboring districts. See Working Paper #10, The Education Policy Center at Michigan State University.

[6] See *Education Week* article published 12/14/1994 at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1994/12/14/15lanier.h14.html?r=886367821.

By 1994 the charter school initiative had passed through the Michigan legislature (though the court challenges to follow were not finally settled until 1997). According to Smith, Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the Partnership, Engler saw the Partnership as a vehicle for building infrastructure and support for the charter school initiative. This relationship between Engler and the partnership was bolstered according to Smith by the fact that the Department of Education and State Superintendent were not strongly in favor of charter schools. Too, Engler was at odds with the Michigan Education Association on many issues along with charter schools. According to Smith, Governor Engler proposed a new direction for the Partnership, support of the charter school movement. Smith describes the next series of actions as follows:

> So [Engler] proposed to the partnership board that while the partnership's initial mission for teacher preparation appeared not to be sustainable in the upcoming years, that the State of Michigan really could use some assistance in infrastructure for charter schools and that he would appreciate that kind of help. So…initially…one of the first things we did was hold the workshop for interested groups who wanted to take a look at starting charter schools…. I know that first workshop had over 400 people, which astounded us…. In that last year of the Partnership's operation, we really were transitioning and minimizing our anticipated role in teacher preparation into the future and beefing up what we perceived as a new role relative to providing support for the charter school movement in its infancy. (J. Smith, pers. comm.)

During this time, the Partnership provided a number of services to groups or individuals who were considering opening charter schools. MPNE brought legal resources, provided assistance for writing charter applications, and informed groups about the authorizers that had come forward in the state. They facilitated a round table of authorizers, in order to try to build a more uniform structure of approving charter school applications, and created the Michigan Authorizer Network. They wrote federal Public Charter School Program grants submitted by the Department of Education that were to help fund the expenses involved in starting charter schools.

Concurrently, J. C. Huizenga[7], from the west side of the state, founded the Michigan Association

of Public School Academies (MAPSA) to support charter schools. According to Smith:

> That led pretty quickly [to] the governor's conclusion that he did not need the MPNE
> providing infrastructure to charter schools and MAPSA providing infrastructure, and he
> chose, if that's the right word, MAPSA…. The west side of the state politically is
> dramatically different than the east side of the state. The governor [Engler] is from the
> west side of the state. J.C. Huizenga and some of the people he was closely associated
> with were major contributors to the governor's various campaigns, so for objective and
> subjective reasons, MAPSA became the entity to provide the infrastructure and that led
> us, the Partnership, to consider our organization's viability for the future. (Smith, pers.
> comm.)

About that time, one of the first charter schools that MPNE helped get started asked if the

partnership would consider managing the school for them. They decided to sign a contract with

Cesar Chavez Academy. Smith says:

> It had a domino or snowball effect. A number of other entities also asked us to consider
> that. At that same point in time, the decision was made to really dissolve the Partnership;
> that its first and second purpose was no longer necessary or vital or viable for the future.
> The Partnership entered into dissolution and at the same time, with the charter school
> management contracts as a basis, The Leona Group (TLG) as a for–profit entity was
> formed. (Smith, pers. comm.)

Central Michigan University (CMU): Charter Schools Authorizer

On January 14, 1994, former governor John Engler signed charter school legislation into law. In

March 1994, CMU's Board of Trustees approved the plan whereby CMU became the first

charter school authorizer in Michigan and according to CMU data, the first university authorizer

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[7] Huizenga is founder and chairman of National Heritage Academies that began in 1995 with
one school in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and now runs 67 charter schools in 8 states. See
http://heritageacademies.com/about-us/our_story/

in the United States. To date, it remains the largest charter school authorizer in the state with 58

schools, and the largest university based authorizer in the U.S.[8]

According to Dr. Harry Ross, associate director of the charter schools office, there was good

reason that CMU took up the charter school reform movement. He states:

> Well, obviously John Engler had the legislation written. [He] lived out here, four miles,
> born and raised, and he wanted charter schools and he appoints the members of the board
> of trustees. So, I'm sure he prevailed upon them to take an interest. (H. Ross, pers.
> comm.)

Dave Hinds[9] who worked in the Charter Schools Office at CMU from 1998 to 2002 offered a

similar perspective:

> Almost all of the public universities have at least chartered a school….and they did that
> because the governor was encouraging them to or forcing them to. The governor
> appoints all of the board members to all of those universities. It doesn't take
> long…maybe a governor's term and a half before you have control of the university
> boards…. Michigan State [University], Wayne State [University], and [University of]
> Michigan [who chose not to authorize charter schools] all have elected boards, so the
> governor didn't have that kind of power over them. (D. Hinds, pers. comm.)

According to Ross the board of trustees at CMU decided to jump into charter school

authorization in a big way. "The board of trustees wanted charter schools. If we're going to get

in, let's get in, kind of in one bite" (H. Ross, pers. comm.). In April 1995 they authorized 31

schools, and "then we went for another batch and we were at 61 in short order" (Ross, pers.

comm.). With 31 schools to oversee, the entire staff in 1995 consisted of four people. Ross' job

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[8] See http://centerforcharters.org/ a website sponsored by Central Michigan University's Center
for Charter Schools.
[9] This name is a pseudonym.

was to take care of all the governance issues and oversight of CMU's charter schools. When he

began, he said that he and a student secretary were all who comprised the oversight department.

On the subject of expansion and oversight, Hinds suggests:

> The governor was in such a rush to get charter schools open under the law that CMU and other universities gave out charters like they were candy. If you had a good idea, you got a charter. Go open up, do your best…. They had a staff of two or three and then a bunch of retired superintendents that made visits and had coffee with the administrators. They had no oversight system, whatsoever. It took them a long time to grow as an institution too. (D. Hinds, pers. comm.)

Innovative Learning Solutions (ILS): Original Founders of Walter French Academy of Business and Technology

In the state context of charter school innovation, there was a specific entrepreneurial venture that

impacted the history of Walter French Academy. Judy Haught, a special education teacher in

Lansing School District (LSD), and her son Brian Haught owned and ran a company called

Innovative Learning Solutions (ILS) in which they sold equipment for the blind. She also

developed computerized reading programs that she had used at both the high school and middle

school levels as a special education consultant and teacher. She says of her decision to found a

school:

> When the charter movement came, Brian and I got very excited about starting a school where kids would have [a] more hands on approach to their educational day than the regular schools were providing. Public schools were getting rid of their shop classes. They were going to, you know, every student would go to college, accelerated levels. Unfortunately, not all students would get there, and would still need some sort of training to sustain them in society….I think every teacher who teaches students thinks there has to be a better way and I think that I can do it. (J. Haught, pers. comm.)

Haught's plan was to open a middle school/high school that would serve grades six through twelve, an ambitious and high-cost plan, since elementary schools are less expensive to run. Too, high schools must manage state graduation requirements, and provide all the multiple courses and counseling supports needed by high school students. When asked why she chose this more difficult path, she explained, "Because that is the group that nobody wanted, everybody was afraid of, and that was the group that was close to my heart" (Haught, pers. comm.). For her, these students were the ones that were lost after they left elementary school. This is relevant to the issue of charter schools because the reasons for opening charter schools in the wake of Engler's push to enact legislation are multiple. Engler wanted charter schools, but others brought their own purposes and plans to the table. Put simply, I would argue that some were about profit, some were about shifting the governance structure of schooling, and some were about providing services to children based on the perception of need.

In May1996, Central Michigan University hosted the first ever Charter Schools Expo in Lansing, Michigan, as a way to raise awareness of the charter school movement and inform possible school founders, parents, and education policymakers. Haught and an associate Lynn Warren were in attendance. This was one step of many on their way to founding Walter French Academy. Haught and her son Brian Haught and Lynn Warren and her husband Jim Warren soon joined forces under the ILS umbrella to plan a middle school and high school that employed the most advanced technologies available at that time. Together they submitted the charter application to Central Michigan University for approval in order to open Walter French Academy of Business and Technology in September 1996. They worked with CMU and MPNE to get general advice and help writing grants. They sought partnerships with corporations to help

with funding and other supports, pointing to the school's vision as a school of business and technology where most of the curriculum was to be delivered online and without textbooks. Furniture for the school would come from a company specializing in office furniture, instead of from traditional school supply sources. The most adventurous and expensive plan was to provide an Eshed robotics laboratory to train students in high tech engineering. ILS had plans to contract with Aim High, a basketball program that would attract elite athletes to compete nationally.

Harry Ross from CMU remembers: "This is supposed to be a high tech school, [to] have satellite access and all this and that, which is why we were interested in it. This has got to be a real go getter" (H. Ross, pers. comm.). CMU accepted the ILS application in spring 1996 for the school to open in September 1996.

When ILS placed a half page ad in the *Lansing State Journal* announcing the fall opening of the school and two meetings for prospective families and two for prospective teachers and staff, the meetings were well attended. In fact, they received so many applications for admission after these meetings that a lottery was required by law to fill the 672 spaces that were available from grades six through twelve. The night of the lottery, families cheered when their names were called and cried when they found they would not be able to enroll. Several respondents reported that ILS' initial marketing was very good, which may account for the excitement that the school generated. Too families may have responded to the breadth of luxurious promises that were made by ILS as they envisioned their school. There was to be something for everyone. Madeline Jones,[10] one of the original board members, referring to the marketing done by ILS, noted:

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[10] This name is a pseudonym.

> They had done great marketing….So, you had a thousand folks showing an interest [in coming] to this school. [In hindsight] I realized [with] that massive marketing Judy [Haught] was saying one thing when she was talking. The Warrens were saying another. So, they were all making promises to every type of kid out there(M. Jones, pers. comm.).

Appendix C shows the original half page announcement regarding Walter French Academy's opening. It also announces both upcoming informational meetings for prospective students and families and for teachers. The announcement was published in the *Lansing State Journal* on May 22, 1996. Appendix D shows the information handout from one of the announced teacher recruitment meetings held June 1, 1996.

The First Bubble Bursts

A number of things went wrong for ILS as the time grew short before WFA was to open. Members of the board and CMU began to question whether ILS had secured or were able to secure funds enough to run the school. A number of contracts had been signed with furniture, computer, internet and software providers, and these vendors were becoming restless and as to when payment would come. The school was empty with only new carpet on the floors and paint on the walls and in the hallways. There was no system of phones, but only a public phone booth on the main floor. There were no books or office supplies. No systems were in place to make schedules for students.

Vendors were not the only restless ones. Board members were beginning to question the ability of ILS to take WFA to its opening. Ernest Wakeman, Ph.D.,[11] the first board president at WFA, had been contacted by Judy Haught around May 1996 to see if he would be part of the board at

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[11] This is a pseudonym.

the new school she was starting. He worked at the Michigan Department of Education and was interested in "a change in schools because, [to him], schools were writing off half of the student population that wasn't succeeding" (E. Wakeman, pers. comm.). The first meetings were very informal, according to Wakeman. The group did not meet at school, and there was no presence on the part of CMU. To him, it seemed "more wishes, desires and goals than anything. [There were] no real plans, no solid anything" (Wakeman, pers. comm.). However, as the lead time to the opening of the school shortened, he assumed based on their discussions that a sound business plan was in place that had been approved by CMU as the charter authorizer.

Tangential to financial issues, Wakeman was also concerned that ILS had made oversized plans for the school and its offerings. In retrospect, he described the plan this way:

> It was a dream…. As we discovered later, they were so out of whack in terms of the finances that the school was going to go broke before it implemented even a part of the plan, because…they aimed for luxury without limit, from computers to furniture to a cafeteria that had the look…and a feel of an upscale restaurant with tablecloths and service and things. In other words, nothing like a school would be…. We started getting the outlandish dream approach…that besides being an upscale place that had all kinds of furnishings and computers and things that promised everything, it was going to be a…minor league for would-be athletes…. The school part was beginning to look less and less like a part of a plan and more like someone who's in the cake business, but only had icing…. We only had the decoration and it was frightfully expensive. (Wakeman, pers. comm.)

Harry Ross at CMU received a call sometime in August 1996 from the vendor who was supplying much of the technology for the school. He felt there was some irregularity in his contract. In fact, he had two sets of papers. The first was the bid that he made to ILS. The second was the price ILS was going charge the board for the equipment. Ross said there was a $680,000 markup. He said:

So Haught was out issuing a proposal for a bid with all the itemized equipment on it and the original equipment manufacturer submitted the bid to him. Then he [Haught] wanted to place himself in the position… [to] sell the equipment to the board for the school. And in so doing, [he] went down the list, item for item and marked it up a hefty… $680,000…. This is pure and simple fraud (Ross, pers. comm.).

It was at this point that Ross determined that Walter French Academy would not go forward with ILS. What remained were decisions about how ILS would be fired and whether or not the school would open at all. Wakeman, the first board president, remembers being stunned by the phone call that he received at his home in late August from Ross. Ross put it simply that if the board could not get another management company, there would be no school. Wakeman remembered:

Really, the decision was kind of left up to me. Do we forget… the school totally [or] maybe put it off? And really, to leave it up to me to decide right on the phone, right there. And what I was thinking was okay, there are a lot of kids, hundreds of kids who had registered…. So, we decided we'd give it, we'd give it a try (Wakeman, pers. comm.).

Ross gave him the number of the MPNE. According to M. Smith of the Partnership (and shortly thereafter, The Leona Group), he received two phone calls in rapid succession, one from George Eyde, the owner of the Walter French building, and one from Harry Ross. Both said that WFA which had been authorized was in serious difficulty. Both wanted to discuss the possibility of MPNE managing the academy. Smith reported:

Walter French had a vision for implementing a very large academy with highly unique aspects and provisions intended to serve the community..., but all that was being implemented with no funding, and as a consequence, the academy had a staff…, had a building at its disposal that it was not paying the rent for, and had purchase orders literally in the millions of dollars…. [There were also questions about the founding group] and their capacity and their backgrounds. It was, I think, technically what you would call a giant mess. (M. Smith, pers. comm.)

Harry Ross remembers meeting with CMU lawyers who recommended they pull the plug on the contract with WFA. After a late night meeting, Ross called Mary Kay Shields from the

governor's office around 2 a.m. regarding their recommendation. Her response, according to Ross was, "By what authority?" Ross said, "Looks like whether we like it or not, we got a school to run" (Ross, pers. comm.).

Bill Coats and John Smith agreed to meet and then to attend the emergency board meeting along with Harry Ross, George Eyde, the ILS team, and much of the teaching staff that had been hired by ILS for the 1996-1997 school year. At the first meeting, ILS was asked to respond to the charges of padding the bids and was required to bring proof of financial underwriting to a follow-up board meeting that would be held several days later.

According to Judy Haught, they were blindsided at this meeting and had not attempted to profit on technology contracts. Though ILS put together a money package and re-wrote bids and contracts to comply with board mandates, they did not realize that the decision to remove them as the management company had already been made and that this extra meeting was just procedural. At the second meeting, the board that they had put in place fired them and hired MPNE which would in short order become the for-profit TLG. Haught spoke of what she described as a takeover:

> A lot of people say there's a lot of money in charter schools and TLG wasn't TLG until they got our school…and overnight they became TLG because they couldn't take over the school as the company they were [MPNE] which was put in place to help charter schools. I felt there was a lot of collusion going on because they had prior information about us that we shared with them that they used against us. (J. Haught, pers. comm.).

The Opening of Walter French Academy, September 23, 1996

WFA looked forward to its opening day with optimism and guarded enthusiasm. Innovative

Learning Solutions had been fired, and The Leona Group, under the leadership of Dr. William

Coats was established as the management organization for the school.

When the board made its decision to contract with MPNE/TLG in late August 1996, much of the

teaching staff had already been hired and had been working regularly since early July. Several

resigned their positions at the management shift, having experienced enough turmoil and chaos

in two months to determine that more was to come. However, most stayed on, encouraged by the

resources TLG brought to the project and loyal to the people with whom they had significantly

bonded. With the drama swirling around, sometimes in the background and sometimes not, the

staff met each day, designing the school they envisioned. In a way, they owned responsibility for

the school, and without a principal to guide the group, several leaders came forward from among

the staff to organize project groups. These were heady, exciting times, as many reported.

Mike Shervan[12], part of the original staff remembers an optimistic and hard-working time:

> I was hired in late June, early July and that whole summer of 1996 I was just thrilled with
> the prospect [of working at WFA], as we had a staff that was working together firing on
> all cylinders and just helping each other out, putting in lots of hours building a
> community, really building the school (M. Shervan, pers. comm.).

Dina Straub[13], who was hired as a teaching assistant but later moved to the office, saw the

exchange of ideas as exciting among the initial staff.

> I do remember being in the cafeteria at the time, sitting down, brainstorming with
> everyone and people just encouraged the ideas to start flowing…and [we were] finally

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[12] This name is a pseudonym.

[13] This name is a pseudonym.

kind of one, [coming] to our mission statement or consensus as to what we wanted the school to be…and what direction that we wanted it to take….It was really, I think, a wonderful school from the standpoint [that] everything was growth and emergence of ideas. [The] creativity was there…. There was just a real good flow of ideas and a respect for each other (D. Straub, pers. comm.)

Dan Meadows, also part of the initial teaching staff recalls that everyone pitched in to open the school:

I remember just doing things that in a typical public school you'd never do because it's not in your contract. We were all unloading trucks when furniture came and just doing all kinds of stuff because we had real ownership of this thing. This school was our baby… like no other school I've ever been a part of. (D. Meadows, pers. comm.)

The change of governing organizations had an impact on staff. The staff had already signed contracts with ILS when MPNE/TLG was hired to replace them. They had bonded as a group and had produced their own leadership by the time Coats and Smith (CEO and COO of what would become TLG) found them in the hot school cafeteria where they had been working for nearly two months trying to put new school plans in place.

I remember this as an extraordinary event. The cafeteria was full of teachers and other staff that had been recently hired. Parents also were present. I sat at a table across from the teacher hired to develop a music program. While he was telling me that he had been fired by TLG, parents walked up to ask him about the upcoming music program. I watched in disbelief as he tried to talk about music at the moment when Coats told the soon to be former music teacher that he needed to leave the building immediately. Strong words were exchanged after which the music teacher was escorted from the premises.

Perhaps as an act of solidarity or just as a move to a more intimate space where the chaos of the scene was lessened, the group moved to a glassed in room in the cafeteria to talk about the firing of ILS and hiring of TLG and what it meant to individuals as well as to the group. Seeing this, and probably misunderstanding the action of the group, Coats entered the small room and spoke to them. He said that if they (MPNE, soon to be renamed TLG) were going to do this deal (taking over the management of WFA), the teachers needed to exit the room immediately and drive to the MPNE headquarters for a meeting. To many it seemed quite ominous and threatening, and a few made the trip to their offices, but never returned to WFA. For many, that action marked the beginning of a change in direction for the school from one that was democratically run to one that was run more akin to corporate operations by businessmen in very fine suits. Too, the first principal chosen by TLG to run the school took the reins of control with a different vision of how decisions should be made at the school level.

The second contract that the teachers signed was with MPNE and each one contained a ten per cent raise. Shortly thereafter, a third contract was signed by all who stayed on, and this one was with the newly formed TLG, moving them from the non-profit Partnership (MPNE) to for-profit management company (TLG).

A flurry of activity followed, as teams of newly hired employees from TLG became aware of the fact that there was no office, no phone system, and no way to schedule 672 students who were scheduled to start school, except by hand. There was no furniture, no supplies, and no athletic equipment. There were no computers to deliver the curriculum that was marketed by ILS as completely online. In fact, the old, three story brick building built in the 1920's was not even

wired for intercoms or computers, and the phone system was archaic. As a result, the opening of school was pushed back by two weeks, until September 23, though wiring a computer set up would take months to accomplish.

The first school principal was hired the Friday before school opened on Monday, September 23, 1996. In the early afternoon that Friday, Coats and Smith arrived saying they had an exciting announcement. They had found who they thought would be the perfect school principal. However, the new principal had little time prior to the start to get to know teachers or understand the staff that had bonded both as a result of the trauma that accompanied the switch in management companies and the opportunity that they had taken up to "own" all aspects of school decision making.

Walter French Academy was initially founded with the idea that the staff and eventually the students and their families would embrace the school as their own. They were presented with a vision of a school that was to meet individual needs by way of technologically enhanced curricular innovation and effective team building and leadership. The staff would participate in a democratically run consensus community. Anecdotally, I recall the first staff meeting in which the terms of the community were highlighted. The staff was to elicit buy in on the part of the students and their families, enabling them to feel ownership as well. We were also to own our actions as they related to the community of the whole and were responsible for the functioning and well-being of the school and each other. The first project in the late summer of 1996 was to design the structure of the curriculum in terms of time. We met in small groups and talked about block scheduling versus a six or seven class period school day. This project, though provocative

in terms of the discussions that followed, was worrisome to me and perhaps to others since the

proposed opening date in early September 1996 seemed too close for these types of discussions.

The eagerness and earnestness with which the group came to a consensus about this and other

decisions about the school and its operation is a testament to the stimulation and creativity this

arrangement presented to new and experienced teachers alike. First year teachers responded that

they were looking for an opportunity to create a teaching and learning environment different

from the one they had experienced as students or as student teachers. Veteran teachers were

looking to have a voice in big picture school matters and to work in some different way than the

isolated conditions they were accustomed to in traditional public schools. Barry Kosner[14] spoke

about the staff he sought and the community he wanted to build:

> I was looking specifically for people that were not only willing to team but had the
> personality that would enable them to team. Not just say they were on a team, but to
> team. That's when I started to throw the idea of a consensus community at ILS…. If
> you're going to allow me to present this as, 'Hey, we own this, we all own this,' we're
> going to make [staffing] decisions based on that. (Kosner, pers. comm.).

Kosner continues using the language of ownership as he describes further his staffing decisions:

> What I looked for in the interview process, was somebody [who was not only] willing to
> be a team player…, but [also] we wanted people that were willing to offer their
> thinking…and how they thought we could make this a better educational institution….
> We were looking at having everybody be owners on this so that we can even have our
> students take ownership of their own learning, as opposed to having everything come top
> down. (Kosner, pers. comm.).

The language of school ownership by the entire staff and eventually the students and their

families is clear in Kosner's explanation. Kosner finally adds, "If the teachers are truly heard …

and listened to, then they will take ownership in the building; they will take ownership in what

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[14] This is a pseudonym. Barry Kosner directed curriculum development as part of the original
staff.

they're doing" (Ibid.). At first, WFA was to belong to the staff who directly decided how the

school would look and how it would work. The staff would then extend that ownership to the

students and their families as they worked together to build a successful school community.

Kelly Sampson,[15] part of the original staff, spoke of ownership in terms of the number of

different roles teachers and staff took while at WFA. Her language also suggests the bottom up

nature of democratic decision-making.

> I think we all played different roles. Lunch, custodian, counselor…only because it was
> our school and this is what had to be done. No one asked or said you have to do this. It
> was still very much a grass roots kind of thing. (Sampson, pers. comm.)

While the sense of ownership was strong among the teaching staff, in the weeks that followed

the opening of school, the new principal rather quickly began to shift from democratic decision

making to more top down, autocratic control by tapping several teachers to become "deans" (her

name) of the high school and middle school. The committee of the whole was converted to a

committee of five and the meetings shifted from public to private.

I would argue that *community* is a term that qualifies as a "floating and empty signifier" (Burgos

2003, 55) in that its meaning is ambiguous and thus is able to be deployed in many ways in

educational discourse. As I will demonstrate in chapter four, the staff reported multiple

understandings of community and consensus. Early on, empowered democratic decision making

and connection among all was the dominant thinking, even though there were a few who saw it

more as, "Do it this way or else." Once school started and the first principal began her

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[15] This is a pseudonym.

administration, community language was still very much in evidence and in that sense, it quelled dissention for a time.

However, community began to connect more often with words like *family* and *loyalty* and *duty* and much less with consensus and equal voice. The language of family constructs a different set of power relations that are more top down and less democratic. The shift in meanings is made possible because of the ambiguity of the signifier, *community*. While the words remained the same, the approach that staff was to take shifted little by little from discussion and decision making to following directives. The language of loyalty was also deployed as part of the consensus community and had the potential to develop into a problematic system of surveillance that thwarted honest disagreements. This I argue in Chapter Four. However, with the start of school and insertion of a more autocratic principal, loyalty meant loyalty to her vision and her directives that came in the form of her daily announcements and memos and communications to staff by way of the deans. The deans were appointed by the principal rather than being elected by the staff. The deans became the eyes and ears of the principal and reported to her. Strict adherence to her directives was required, and according to more than one respondent, the staff began to divide into two camps, those who were deemed friendly to the administration and those who were seen as enemies. Sampson continued:

> I think really when [the principal] started to appoint people, there became a definite crack in the staff…. You either got on board with [her] and you toed the party line and you were rewarded, or you didn't [and] you hung with the minions and you did what you thought was right and you probably got your wrists slapped once or twice because of it…. We were still trying to operate [as] a consensus community. [The administration and deans] are going to bellow, but we're still going to do it our way. (Sampson, pers. comm.)

By the first semester of the second year (1997-1998), student enrollment had dropped

significantly enough that staff cuts were announced for the second semester.[16] It appeared to the

staff that those laid off were teachers who had voiced their opinions about school and staff

issues. One teacher in particular was very successful with students and had more years of

experience than several others in the same department. Several interviewees took the position

that those singled out for layoff were still working under the original understanding of

community in which they were expected to contribute opinions and ideas. It was their school

and they were arguing on its behalf. However, the community of inclusion, so often repeated in

memos and announcements and faculty meetings, had been lost to the friend and enemy camps

that in their own way had both become exclusive.

A kind of "resistance underground" developed to thwart the school leader and leadership team.

According to respondents this happened in part because of the strong bond that had been

developed among staff prior to the principal's hiring and because of the belief in ownership that

had been instantiated early on. That resistance eventually led to the first principal's firing by The

Leona Group (TLG) at the end of the second school year (1997-1998). Mike Shervan from the

original teaching staff described the events after the layoffs of winter 1998:

> Those of us who remained knew that this was a great wrong and searched for ways to
> respond…and it was essentially like an underground…. We went directly, well indirectly
> to TLG and we essentially got [the principal] fired…. It's funny, because I don't think
> any of this could have happened if we hadn't had that strong community to start with….
> We'd seen our fellow teachers who we loved and respected, just wronged and we wanted
> to respond to that…. You don't get rid of your best workers. (M. Shervan, pers. comm.).

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[16] The November 10, 1997 edition of the *Lansing State Journal* published a chart showing
enrollments for both local charter and traditional public schools, comparing their numbers for the
start of school in 1996 and 1997. All Lansing charter schools had increased enrollment.
However, at WFA the numbers dropped from 613 to 394 students, or a 35.7 per cent decrease.

Sampson added a comment on shifts in the feeling around the school:

> There was a shift from the administration, but I think down in the ranks of the teachers that shift hadn't [taken hold]. 'You appoint whoever you want, [but] we know how the school really operates. If decisions have to be made we're going to make it together.' I don't think we wanted to lose sight of that or let that go, but the administration kept strong arming that out…. At first it was laughable but then it became kind of serious. (Sampson, pers. comm.)

Shervan continued, using language that speaks to the division and hostility within the school by 1997:

> A group that wants to have a say in what's going on isn't going to just roll over to a dictator. So, you ended up with this big collision and our side suffered many losses in that semester, but we won the war in that case because we got her [the first principal] ousted. (Shervan, pers. comm.)

Staff members secretly took their case against the principal and the deans to TLG, who eventually responded. J. Smith of TLG noted said, "I would tell you [that the principal] getting in just a major contest with the majority of her staff is what ultimately led to her demise" (J. Smith, pers. comm.).

Although the second principal to take the reins at WFA was more open to consensus building and democratic decision making, there were multiple personnel changes over time that weakened the original sense of community, and the strength of commitment to ownership of the school and big picture decision making diminished continually from this point on to 2004. Too, other entities began to assert ownership of the school more forcefully.

New Principal, New Struggle for School Control: CMU, TLG and the Board at WFA

In the fall of 1998, the second of a series of four principals began as school leader at WFA. Formerly, she had worked as a principal with Dr. Bill Coates, CEO of The Leona Group, when

he was superintendent of schools in Anchorage, Alaska. He called her several years later when she was living in Florida and asked if she would be interested in coming to work for TLG as a principal at one of their schools. She agreed and said that when she first arrived, she was told WFA was Leona's school and that TLG could do what they wanted, implying that the school board and CMU were secondary. Her understanding regarding the relationship among the WFA board, CMU as authorizer, and TLG as management company was: "It was basically we're [TLG] going to tell them more what we're going to do" (James, pers. comm.).[17] She continued: "So that was the way it was at the beginning. It's our school, TLG's school, and we're going to run it and CMU and the board just kind of have to keep out and we're doing it" (James, pers. comm.).

As the authorizer, CMU's responsibility in terms of oversight was to work specifically with the school board to make sure that the charter agreement is upheld and that the board abides legally with all laws pertaining to the school's operation. Central Michigan University normally sent representatives to attend school board meetings at WFA. Dave Hinds[18] worked in the charter school office at CMU and for a time was assigned to Walter French, in part because he lived in the Lansing, Michigan area. He noted that the way TLG brought the monthly financial reports to board meetings made it very difficult for board members to understand and then vote to accept the report. There was little, if any explanation offered, and TLG's financial representatives at board meetings seemed to him to be not only unwilling but unable to explain the documents they brought (Hinds, pers. comm.). Dr. Harry Ross, the associate director at CMU's charter school

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[17] This is a pseudonym.

[18] This is a pseudonym.

office during WFA's years of operation, offered a similar view of the way TLG related to the

board. Referring to TLG's financial officer at the time, Ross stated:

> Come budget time, he would walk into the meeting…. This document is yea thick and it involves 670 students. Numbers of millions of dollars, and [he] comes in here with a budget that's an inch, inch and a half thick, throws it in front of you and proceeds to ask you for a motion to approve the budget. I said, 'You know what I would do with that? I would throw [him] and his budget out the door. This is an insult.' (Ross, pers. comm.).

To Ross, TLG encroached on the school board's charge and therefore overstepped their sphere of

responsibility. Referring to this problem, Ross offered his position on management companies:

> Most management companies have it in their mind, regardless of what the contract says and what they signed and what they agreed to and what the law is, they keep working diligently…every day of the year to encroach upon the board's prerogatives and level of decision making and try to do it themselves. And in a lot of cases, they get away with it over a period of time…. [At some point] it becomes very apparent to anyone that's halfway trained. The board isn't making the decision. The decisions are being made by them [management company] and they're [the board] rubber stamping it. (Ross, pers. comm.)

Authority and Control: Central Michigan University and WFA School Board

Starting with a staff of two or three, the main job at CMU's charter school office early on was to

approve applications for new charter schools. According to Hinds CMU had little to no oversight

system in place at this time and much of his job was to protect the university and its interests as

an authorizer rather than to assist schools. He was assigned to schools considered to be in

trouble, and WFA was one of them. "Any time a school was at risk of losing its charter, I would

invariably be assigned to make sure that CMU's backside was covered" (Hinds, pers. comm.).

Shortly into her time as second principal at Walter French Academy, during the years from fall

1998 to fall 2000, Susan James noted that the role she had understood had changed dramatically.

According to James, CMU as the largest charter school authorizer in Michigan was facing

criticism by the state for its lack of charter school oversight. Their response was to start "overseeing us and micro-managing us 'til it nearly killed us. Paperwork, paperwork, do this, this law, this regulation" (James, pers. comm.).

At the same time, as reported both by Ross and Hinds those in the charter school office at CMU were losing confidence in TLG as a school management company. Initially, TLG managed a number of schools that were chartered by CMU. However, one by one contracts with TLG were terminated or not renewed, leaving WFA as the last school managed by Leona and chartered by CMU.

According to Hinds (of the charter school office at CMU), there were multiple complaints from charter school boards and staff about the fees charged and the quality of service provided by TLG. Many school boards and administrators argued that they were not in control of their school. Instead, TLG controlled it. Hinds stated that "any time [the board] made a request, there was a bristle and often a reminder that, 'you know we did loan you a million dollars.'" And they always felt like, like they were under this thumb. (Hinds, pers. comm.)

Walter French Academy opened two weeks late and its years of operation were frequently marred by scandal and/or allegations of fraud. News coverage was generally unfavorable over the years, and undoubtedly CMU was concerned about their reputation as an authorizer, especially since WFA was located only a stone's throw from the capitol building in Lansing, Michigan, where lawmakers had easy access to the school. Harry Ross, Associate Director of

CMU's charter school office, acknowledged that CMU as a charter school authorizer had shortcomings early on. He reported:

> I could see that we were, we were weak in certain areas and we needed certain expertise and more bodies and we got them; developed policy. And then I could see that in the area of oversight, not only were we weak because *I* was oversight, one person and a secretary [who] was a student, [but because] then we went for another batch [of schools] and we were 61 in short order. (Ross, pers. comm.)

The Board Liaison and the Struggle for Control of WFA

Given this situation among others, Ross began to construct procedures for school oversight. In 1996 he instituted the *board liaison* position at many CMU schools, a position hired and paid by the charter school board. Ross agreed that he was "the inventor, the author and creator of such position" (Ross, pers. comm.). Describing the position Ross said the board liaison is the "hand maiden to the board; a person qualified like the clerk of the court who keeps certain records for them, attends meetings, takes minutes, [and] does all the thing that administratively the board is required to do…."(Ross, pers. comm.).

The language of this description suggests a secretarial (and traditionally feminine) role and not one of significant authority or power. Ross said that the liaison was a person with whom he could communicate and be certain that his communiqués reached board members. All other paid positions at WFA were employees of TLG, so this was a person whose employment did not depend on TLG. Explaining the role of the board liaison, Ross also expressed hostility toward TLG:

> What the board liaison or executive officer does is to make sure that the board gets everything done that they're supposed to do by law on schedule and so forth, whether or not it chafes the management company. How can a management company employee go to [TLG] and say, "You know, you are negligent. You failed to turn this in to the board." Well, [TLG] would run her out of the office. (Ross, pers. comm.)

The first board liaison at WFA was a law student with an accounting background who earned

$12,000 per year on a part time basis and remained in this position until her graduation from law

school. The second board liaison hired by the school board at WFA started in the fall of 1998 at

the same time the second principal began her tenure. The new board liaison was not new to

WFA. She had been the board vice-president during the 1996-1997 school year. Over the four

years Madeline Jones[19] held this position, the job title, salary and roles of the board liaison

shifted in ways that impacted the trajectory of Walter French Academy significantly.

Jones began in 1998 on a part time basis, but in a relatively short amount of time, her position

had become full time. According to respondents from TLG, CMU and the WFA staff, Jones was

earning $60,000 to $70,000 in salary. This is significant on at least two counts: First, the

increased salary indicates a change in role. Second, this salary seems high in light of the debt

load WFA carried at the time, and in light of the limited resources available to run the school, to

provide for the needs of students. When I interviewed Jones and asked her what the job entailed,

she responded that this was a "watchdog position" (Jones, pers. comm.). She also entitled her

position *board liaison officer.* Both statements suggest a shift in interpretation of roles and

authority as it relates to this job. An *officer* bespeaks authority and upper ranks in an

organization, certainly as compared to a *handmaiden.* How different too is the role of a *watchdog*

as compared to a person who takes minutes and keeps records. A watchdog is involved in all

activities, in order to make sure everything functions in a particular way. Jones eventually set up

an office in a wing of the building that was separate from the main office space yet close enough

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[19] This is a pseudonym.

that she could spend a lot of time in both places. Her office was freshly painted, with new

carpeting, new furniture and separate phone lines.

M. Smith of The Leona Group considered the board liaison position as a serious mistake. When

asked why, he responded:

> I don't think that role was ever very well defined. And even if it was, the person in the
> job didn't pay much attention to the role. They viewed themselves as the alter-ego to the
> leadership of the school and the de facto supervisor of the management company. And I
> think both of those are serious problems. (Smith, pers. comm.)

While Susan James was principal, WFA went from a middle school/high school to a K-12

program that included a free Montessori program in the early grades. The enrollment had

stabilized and many felt optimistic that the school had turned the corner, and that its chaotic past

was becoming a faded memory. That was not to be. According to Allen Richards,[20] part of the

administrative team, James and the board liaison officer were battling over the management of

the school, with James as principal invoking the doctrine of site-based management. At the same

time, a small group of teachers who were unhappy had begun to meet secretly. According to

Richards, Jones "was able to manipulate [the group] to go to the board, meet with individual

board members, and then with representatives of TLG" (Richards, pers. comm.). He believed

that the teachers were manipulated in order to get James out of the way.

 It did not help that James was battling cancer at the same time. She took no time off while

managing cancer treatments, including through the summer of 2000. One day in October 2000 in

a surprise move, groups of staff members were called to a meeting room to speak with an official

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[20] This is a pseudonym.

group that included the board liaison and two members of Leona's staff about what they described as the low morale at WFA. James was fired two days later.

Another New Principal and the Working Board

I remember hearing Madeline Jones, the board liaison officer, respond to a question about board function by saying, "Well, we're a working board." I thought it was an odd statement, since all boards work in some capacity. Dave Hinds of the charter school office at CMU remembered this language too. He asserted:

> Walter French became, in many ways, governance-wise, the embodiment of [Harry Ross'] vision of what a board should be. Ross believed, wrongly in my view,… that charter schools should be governed by what he would refer to as a *working board,* which means that they would have their own office, they would have their own separate phone line, they would have their own…full time employee to meet their needs…. You don't need a separate board representative who is…an active part in decisions that are made at the school…. What it ended up doing is really twisting a very simple governance structure into something that interfered with the normal operations of the school. (Hinds, pers. comm.)

John Dorlin[21] became the third principal in late October 2000 and had no idea in 2000 of the intensity of the competition for power and control being waged at WFA among the board represented by the board liaison officer, The Leona Group and Central Michigan University. As an employee of TLG, Dorlin worked closely with Steve Bollier, a vice president at TLG assigned to assist Walter French Academy. Together they instituted several new programs at WFA, the most significant probably being the house system begun in fall 2001. The K-12 building was divided into three smaller units called houses. The idea was that each unit would have more autonomy to set schedules and make budgetary decisions. A leadership team or SPMT met regularly and included Dorlin, Bollier, Madeline Jones (board liaison officer) and a wide variety

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[21] This is a pseudonym.

of staff members. The SPMT was to be democratically run, but very quickly Jones took control

of the group. Dorlin, in retrospect, felt he was partly responsible for this situation:

> I have to take some blame here…. Rather than take her on full blast, I may have
> acquiesced quite a bit to maintain harmony, rather than [participate in] a full blown
> power struggle. So she would essentially set the next meeting date…and then she would
> set the agenda for the next meeting and pass it out and kind of chair the discussion.
> (Dorlin, pers. comm.)

According to Dorlin, his authority as administrator at WFA had diminished greatly by early

spring of his second and final year (2001-2002). He did not recognize until much later that

Bollier, who had taken a middle position between Dorlin and Jones, was "gradually having to go

toward the people that were paying his salary, toward the board that was paying The Leona

Group". He added: "Bollier had to make a choice and the choice he made was [in favor of]…the

school board and the school liaison person who really literally controlled the board" (Dorlin,

pers. comm.).

In July 2002 Dorlin was fired and Madeline Jones, former board member and board liaison

officer, was hired as principal of WFA by TLG. She was the fourth and final principal to serve in

this capacity until WFA closed in June 2004. Her appointment seemed surprising at first glance,

since she had no education credentials. Some reported this move as her final coup. Dave Hinds

of CMU's charter school office saw it as a last ditch effort on the part of The Leona Group to be

retained as the school's management company should the school be reauthorized in 2004. Hinds

hypothesized:

> Leona hired her as their employee and assigned her to that school. So, you bring the
> enemy into the fold, which is, in my view, what they did, thus probably getting
> themselves another contract after their contract was up [in June 2004]. [Jones] probably
> signed, like every other employee did, a non-compete agreement that said…she couldn't

work for Walter French Academy if they dropped Leona [TLG]. It was a survival move, I think, on the part of Leona. (Hinds, pers. comm.)

Ross of CMU added his take on the strategic move made by TLG in hiring Jones:

> They [TLG] hired her because they knew that they wouldn't have to fire her. All they'd have to do is remind her that she's depending on them now for her livelihood. Not the board. (Ross, pers. comm.)

The Final Bubble Bursts

The school board and the new school principal faced major challenges during its last two years of operation. First and foremost among these was the project to successfully complete the reauthorization process being coordinated by Central Michigan University. Walter French Academy's charter was authorized in 1996 for five years. The second authorization in 2001 was for three years and ended in June 2004.In fall 2003, CMU sent a lengthy list of projects for the board to accomplish as part of WFA's improvement plan. Jones, the principal said the board at WFA worked to complete the tasks. One of the most contentious decisions was whether or not the school would stay with its K-12 configuration, or whether they would drop the high school and perhaps the middle school to operate a less costly and more manageable program. According to Jones, the media became aware of these deliberations:

> And then…it became a media frenzy, because then you had folks on the outside that were hearing all of this stuff. So then you started having a lot of outsiders show up for the board meeting, ranting and raving about how this school is not going [to close]. 'You're not going to shut this school down. This is the only [high] school of choice in the region.' (Jones, pers. comm.)

Members of a group called Fair Share Coalition[22] led by John Pollard from Lansing, Michigan, began to attend board meetings and make demands regarding the school. In effect, the WFA board and local community were arguing for increased authority and control of the school. At this point TLG was not as strong a player, their authority having been diminished as the working board with the support of CMU had gained authority. Now, however, the WFA board and its allies were pushing against CMU. Ross became irritated after several board meetings in a row when the board gave what Ross felt was too much public comment time to vocal non-board members.

Ross said that he stepped into the hallway one evening prior to a board meeting and found one of the people from Fair Share Coalition telling a board member what the board would do at this meeting, and subsequently the board member made motions verbatim based on this talk outside the meeting room. According to Ross, CMU as the authorizer has the sole authority both to appoint charter school board members and to remove board members without cause. Ross said:

> I thought to myself, 'This is all I need on top of close to eight years of nothing but problems.' That was, I can tell you, the final death knell. (Ross, pers. comm.)

The end of WFA was not due to money or test scores or a lack of "consumers" to fill its classrooms. Though there was plenty of ready documentation after eight years of chaos, Ross put it quite simply: "You know, after awhile, I just said, 'No, they're going down. All of my concentration and my energy is going into one thing: The burial" (Ross, pers. comm.)

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[22] See http://www.mibulletin.org/vol10i019/p12special/special.shtml for information about the Lansing, Michigan, based Fair Share Coalition and its president at that time, John Pollard.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical Influences and Problematics: To Be a New Cultural Historian

> 'Look,' says the poet …'the sun obeys my syntax.'
> 'Look,' says the historian, 'the past obeys my interpretation.'[23]

When someone says, "So, fill me in on the history here," they are asking for details that offer an explanation of a past event or of a trajectory that offers information as to the present, for there is somehow a connection. The words, descriptions and narrative that follow do not equal the past; they only recount it by way of the narrator. This history is wholly incomplete, in that multiple facets of the past are left out, either by mistaken omission or conscious decision. The narration tends to have a beginning, middle and an end that serve to frame the account and make it tidy in some way.

When the police detective is the one asking to be filled in, s/he knows that those who are interviewed likely will offer different details, some which are accurate and some which are less so. S/he knows that the answers received are contingent on the questions asked, and that eye-witnesses are notoriously unreliable sources of data. Events directly witnessed or documents produced can be interpreted in multiple more or less 'truthful' ways. A detective knows that clarity can bend the truth, and that what seems natural and logical to assume must nevertheless not be assumed.

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[23] This quote is from Keith Jenkins (1991), *Rethinking History,* 12. The first sentence is from G. Steiner's (1975), *After Babel* (234). The second sentence is Jenkins' addition.

However, when history is placed in its context as a domain of knowledge and as an academic discipline, there is more than a hint of trouble. This domain and its product, historiography, has been and is a highly contested terrain. While traditional historians generally accept that the past and history are two very different things, from that place of agreement, the lines have been drawn and debates ensued. The past as a site for investigation, analysis and description is a territory occupied by historians who work from varying ideological, epistemological and methodological positions (Jenkins 1991). Yet some historians would say that to write history well is to work in a manner that is ideologically neutral, objective and unbiased. While disagreement often enlivens a field, according to some historians, current critiques challenge history's claims to relevance and more dramatically, its claims to truth and to objectivity. Thus, the language of crisis has emerged and with it critique, even going so far as to announce the death of history.[24]

In the sections that follow I briefly survey major directions in history for the problematics that are inherent within this field, and to projects that have influenced new directions in historiography. My reasons are various. I want to make sense of the past and current debates in order to join the conversation while at the same time acknowledging the new cultural history as a player in the fray. Too, I argue alongside others that the language we use is historically constructed and connected to the past. Thus, to analyze the field offers a way to understand more dimensions in the history of our historical conceptualizations and their expressions. Borrowing from Bakhtin (1981), Popkewitz (2001) asserts that our speech is "over-populated with the

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[24] Mark Poster (1997) takes up the idea of the end of history as a discipline as animated by Fukuyama's (1989) essay "The End of History." In Norman Wilson's (1999) *History in Crisis? Recent Directions in Historiography*, Wilson also takes up this theme as the title suggests.

intentions of others," such that "it may not be 'us' speaking" (Popkewitz,166). Cohen describes

this as intertextuality in which "history is already informed by a rich (or, as the case may be,

impoverished) network of texts and traditions of discourse" (Cohen1999, 35). In speaking of the

history of education, Cohen asserts that existing work and the authority of its authors, along with

inherited debates weave their way into this network, even if it is not acknowledged. Finally, I

undertake a "crooked reading" of inherited orthodoxies (Cohen 1999) in an effort to be more

self-reflective about my approach to writing history. Hegel asserts, "Reflective historiography is

history written from a self-consciously critical point of view and in full awareness of the

temporal distance between the historian and the events about which he [sic] writes" (quoted in

White1978, 76).

I also intersperse trends in the history of education within my survey, asserting common

influences, though historians within the academy have often viewed their colleagues within the

education school with more than a passing disregard. Cohen (1999) quipped that it has been said

that "120th street is the widest street in the world"[25] (280) because it separates Columbia

University from Teachers College. After all, history is a long-standing domain of inquiry in

comparison to the upstart history of education that is little more than 100 years old in the United

States. In addition, history departments within the Humanities have complained that early

histories of education were written by people in teachers colleges whose interest in history was

secondary at best. According to Cohen, historians from "liberal arts faculties viewed the

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[25] Cohen was speaking in reference to historian of education Lawrence Cremin whom he said
narrowed the road to a corridor, if only briefly.

curricula of teachers colleges and departments or schools of education as devoid of scholarship—method without content, technical skills at best" (10).

I begin by acknowledging the challenges historians face within the discipline as new understandings and methods confront traditional or dominant ones. Then I offer the work of several individuals who have influenced cultural history or new cultural history as it is more recently called. I am somewhat cautious about making categories, as I am aware of the problems that come with assigning names and thus essentializing spaces. The name serves in Cohen's words as a "flag of convenience" used to encompass a broad spectrum of interest. Popkewitz, Pereyra and Franklin (2001) also caution against the "expression of a new totalizing project" (33), since there are multiple approaches taken within the rubric of cultural history. With this proviso in mind, I highlight its influences, its main arguments and point out its critiques. Since ideas push against one another, I also attend to social history and social revisionist history in education, and to intellectual history, then and now. In juggling all of this terrain, I point to the problems that accompany the discourse about the past. Finally, I suggest the risks that one faces within the academy as a new cultural historian.

History in Conflict

In the late 1960s social history began to carve a significant place for itself within both history and history of education departments. Poster (1997) characterizes the progression toward the acceptance of social history as a "ragged course characterized by stages of denial, resistance, debate, approval, and, finally, hegemony" (3). By the 1970s it had achieved its 'victory' over intellectual history. This dominance continues today, though just as intellectual history was

forced to make room for social history, so is social history now making space for cultural history that began to emerge in the 1980s. New ideas push against established ones and they do not give way easily. Though cultural history is not in its infancy, it is far from displacing the others. Some historians have reacted vehemently against the verbiage that stands out prominently in reference to new cultural historians that all history is but fiction. Others, however, leave the analysis of the interiority of the domain of history to philosophers and carry on with their work.[26] There are also voices of calm that suggest there is space for all. Cohen, as an example, sees new cultural history neither as a rupture with social or intellectual history nor as a challenge to either. Rather it is an approach that embraces both and brings intellectual history back into the picture. "Ideas and language are themselves social events and forms of social action… And, vice versa, every social action possesses an essential linguistic or symbolic dimension" (Cohen 1999, x). Cultural history thus offers expanded areas and methods for study by opening the analysis of language as "social act" and "social event." As such, he examines cultural history as a sphere of inquiry that he feels has been neglected and thus, underdeveloped in the fields of history and education.

Mark Poster (1997) proposes not to displace either social or intellectual history, but rather to challenge them, thus "animating the discipline" by multiplying the possible projects for research and analysis. Poster argues that the shift from intellectual history to social history brought a

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[26] Peter Novick's statement sheds light on the philosophy/history divide. "In Europe, and even more in the United States, one of the earliest tasks professionalizing historians set for themselves was the emancipation of 'history proper' from nefarious speculative philosophy of history" (Novick 1988, 600).

move from narratives about social and intellectual elites to what is called "history from below"[27] of the working class, ethnic minorities and women, to name a few. The shift also brought with it a number of methodological innovations; for example, the move from narrative explanation to analysis of quantitative data. He argues, however, that the fundamental relation of the historian to the past was maintained. The historian's quest to find what is true and real led to analyses of speeches and political documents or data about student drop out rates in urban schools, all of which were viewed as "transparent mediations between the past and the present" (5). These records and the historian's textual analysis of them were accepted for the most part as neutral media that assisted in capturing what is real. For Poster the cultural approach both challenges historians and affords them the opportunity to examine the internal structure of documents and consider the ways they rhetorically shape their reading. It asks historians to see text as anything but a neutral space between the past and their histories, but rather as a site for analysis.

New Cultural History and its Influences

Rather than defining it, a way to understand new cultural history is by tracing some of its influences. At the height of social history's dominance in the 1970's, work was published that was to anticipate and influence the new cultural history. In this section I highlight the contributions of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the historian Hayden White, and Thomas Kuhn, the physicist and philosopher of science.

Clifford Geertz

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[27] Poster credits E. P. Thompson with this expression. E.P. Thompson, "History from Below," *Times Literary Supplement* (April 7, 1966), 279-80.

Clifford Geertz is cited all over the history and social science worlds. A quick check of indexes and reference pages will attest to his influence across multiple genres.[28] There are several important ways that he has influenced new cultural history. First, Geertz, as the "amphibian" anthropologist traveling between the land and sea of science and humanities, makes permeable the borders between them. His essay, "Blurred Genres," developed from a talk he was invited to give on the topic of the relation between humanities and social sciences. While challenging the distinction between the two, he pointed out the rubrics that construct the natural and social sciences and humanities and sort scholars into cliques that he later describes as small peasant societies. Geertz seeks to blur genres when these rubrics are "taken to be a borders-and territories map of modern intellectual life…that block from view what is really going on out there where men and women are thinking about things and writing down what they think" (Geertz2000, 8). He argues for what he calls "an intellectual poaching license" among traditional genres, a move that destabilizes traditional spaces for the production of knowledge. This destabilization serves to open spaces for the cultural historian. Popkewitz, Pereyra and Franklin (2001) describe cultural history as inquiry "where fragmentation, recombination, and hybridization of disciplinary fields have intersected during the past few decades, creating and legitimizing 'new' fields and specializations" (31) and multiplying the possible research agendas.[29] The interaction is systematic and brings history into play with philosophy, literary studies, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, among others.

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[28] Geertz is listed in the indexes of nearly all the references in this document.

[29] See Cohen's (1999) *Challenging Orthodoxies* on new cultural history of education. Also see Wilson (1999), Chapter 3, "Cross Pollination." Poster (1997) sees the multiplication of possible "research agendas as salubrious for the discipline of history" (10).

Second, employing what he termed "thick description," Geertz suggests a methodology that reads and interprets with depth and detail the signs and symbols within a culture. These signs are not only discursive, but also performative. To Geertz, culture is symbolic action. What is there to know about culture based on the details of life within a human community? What "truths" lie in things like memos, ads, gestures of greeting, or in the case of Walter French Academy, a move by a board member into an office in the school with a private phone line? Viewed this way, each context is complex and singular, calling for detailed interpretation that accepts the problem of truth as a game that can not be won. Geertz is not apologetic about this, asserting he has never "gotten anywhere near to the bottom of anything I have written about …. Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is…. To commit oneself to a semiotic concept of culture and interpretive approach to the study of it is to commit oneself to a view of ethnographic assertion as, to borrow W.B. Gallie's by now famous phrase, 'essentially contestable' (Geertz, quoted in Hunt 1989, 79).

Geertz broadens the understanding of culture in part by dissolving the difference between high and low culture. Texts are taken as cultural phenomena encompassing that which is recorded as well as that which is performed. Cultural history "dissolves the divides of knowledge between what people say (discourse) and what people *actually* do" (Popkewitz, Pereyra and Franklin 2001, emphasis in original, 33).The work is interpretive, and therefore cultural historians along with Geertz accept the idea that history writing is contingent upon specific time and place as well as upon the lens through which the historian looks. Multiple lenses are possible, thus the contestable nature of all historiography. Geertz deals with the charges of relativism humorously, suggesting that his position is "anti-anti-relativism." He mocks those who defend objectivity in

historical and or anthropological production as being "afraid reality is going to go away unless we believe very hard in it." His analysis is therefore not an "experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz, quoted in Novick1988, 552). Likewise, new cultural historians' work is not animated by a Whiggish explanation that places human events in epochs and human action in accordance with natural laws.

Hayden White

The work of Hayden White was not well received among historians at the publication of either *Metahistory* in 1973 or *Tropics of Discourse* in 1978. Poster (1997) says that White was "virtually ejected from the guild" when he suggested that historians' discourse was anything but neutral and transparent. Too, White has not been taken up in particular by English speaking historians of education, since from 1979 to 1998 there were only sixteen articles published in the field that cited White's work (Popkewitz, Franklin and Pereyra, eds. 2001). Historians either rejected or ignored (or both) the dust White kicked up and went about their business. However, in the wake of what is broadly called "the linguistic turn" with which White is associated, and the subsequent uptake of postmodern projects that prominently feature discourse analysis, White's influence has become more apparent across genres.

He writes in *Tropics of Discourse:*

> Every discipline, I suppose, is, as Nietzsche saw most clearly, constituted by what it *forbids* its practitioners to do. Every discipline is made up of a set of restrictions on thought and imagination, and none is more hedged about with taboos than professional historiography—so much so that the so-called 'historical method' consists of little more than the injunction to 'get the story straight' (without any notion of what the relation of 'story' to 'fact' might be)….

Yet, the price paid is a considerable one. It has resulted in the repression of the *conceptual apparatus* (without which atomic facts cannot be aggregated into complex macrostructures and constituted as objects of discursive representation in a historical narrative) and the remission of the *poetic moment* in historical writing to the interior of the discourse (where it functions as an unacknowledged—and therefore uncriticizable—*content* of the historical narrative). (Hayden White 1978, 126)

White challenged historians to attend to the "conceptual apparatus" that functions within the structure of historical writing and that often goes unnoticed. White's starting point is that historical writing assumes the form of narrative prose, which is not unlike the prose found in literature. A historian's job is to sort through a plethora of facts to construct a story. The facts are derived from multiple sources and formed into an account with beginning, middle and end that are shaped by time and space. To make history comprehensible, some data are left out. Since historians can only recover fragments, according to Jenkins (1992), "History is less than the past" (13). It might also be said conversely that history is more than the past, in that at times it exaggerates, overstates, and enlarges events, shaping them into pivotal moments in the course of human events.

White argues that discourse analysis and literary theory are crucial to both the writing and reading of historical texts, as they help illuminate the rhetorical structures, plots, literary devices and tropes that are put to use. In this way, White blurs the lines between literature and history, a hard notion to swallow for those following traditions in a search for objectivity. Yet to White, all representations of history are bent and shaped by the discursive structures in which they are constructed. Historians don't find patterns in the past, but rather construct and/or impose them. The historian's choice of rhetorical device, the tone of the language, and the tropes deployed are

ideological and philosophical. Under these terms, objectivity and neutrality are problematic, as the historian's voice intervenes between event and history.

Central to White's work is his concept of "emplotment," in which narrative types encode histories based on four types of plot structures: romance, comedy, satire, and tragedy, all of which may be mixed or combined. Cohen (1999), whose work is influenced by that of Hayden White, offers three standard explanatory models of change chosen by historians of education:

> 1. Romance; there is conflict, but democratic forces overcome and change is cumulative and progressive.
> 2. Tragedy; there is conflict, but in the end the forces of reaction are victorious and change is a fall or decline—things go from good to bad or bad to worse.
> 3. Satire or irony; there may or may not be conflict, but change is an 'illusion,' a 'myth'. (88)

Though he lists these four, White also asserts that other discursive types could be produced; that these types are "coterminous with the number of generic story types available in a historian's own culture" (White, quoted in Cohen1999, 68). The choice of these depends upon the historians' context and intentions, whether they are implicitly or explicitly related. As such, histories act out particular political, ideological, and epistemological positions. It is not hard to recognize the romance of manifest destiny and western expansion found today in United States history texts. It is the romance of progress.

To make sense of the new cultural history is to understand the linguistic turn. The term acts as an umbrella that describes multiple developments highlighting the importance of language in the production of knowledge. Discourse is viewed as more than a neutral tool for the transmission of ideas, but as a site for analysis. Language and language systems allow what we can see and

know. Likewise it hides form view. White's work therefore makes visible the problematic that historiography presents "a mythical view of reality" (White 1987, 9), rather than a true correspondence of the story of real lives. Foucault's question, "Whom does discourse serve and what are its effects?" resonates here. The implications are many for both those who write and those who read history, since the story told (and by whom) is the story that dominates a people's belief systems and influences and therefore restricts their choices of action.

Thomas S. Kuhn

Much has been written that attempts to historicize the context in which Kuhn's most influential book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* was published in 1962. Appleby, Hunt and Jacob (1994), for example, describe Kuhn as the new historian of science who inadvertently brought the "Trojan horse concealing irreverent critics" (163) into the scientific arena. They argue that Kuhn did not intend to fog the essentially objectivist mirror in science with his theories about paradigms and paradigm shifts and the social nature of normal science production. According to Novick (1988), Kuhn's work was not carried out with interest in debunking or devaluing the field. However, the reaction was swift and strong as the cries of relativism rang out from those "for whom science was meaningful only insofar as it was teleological, approaching closer and closer to 'the objective truth'" (532). With these cries also came the beginnings of skepticism regarding science's claim to being value free and progressive. Kuhn asserts:

> We are all deeply accustomed to seeing science as the one enterprise that draws constantly nearer to some goal set by nature in advance. But need there be any such goal? Can we not account for both science's existence and its success in terms of evolution from the community's state of knowledge at any given time? Does it really help to imagine that there is some one full, objective, true account of nature and that the proper measure of scientific achievement is the extent to which it brings us closer to that ultimate goal? (Kuhn, quoted in Novick 1988, 532)

Briefly, Kuhn's position is that what he calls normal science is carried on within a paradigm or

particular worldview. It is "puzzle solving within the framework of the paradigm" (Novick, 528).

Thus, most of the work carried out within a paradigm is to confirm its tenets, since the paradigm

defines what problems can be taken on and what constitutes appropriate solutions. Progress is

defined as solving problems that make the current paradigm an ever closer fit, while

discouraging the pursuit of problems that do not (Novick 1988). White's reference to Nietzsche

above is useful, as scientists according to Kuhn are indoctrinated to a particular view of the

world that is hard to overthrow or at least to see past.

In Kuhn's view, science is not ahistorical and objective, but rather historically contingent and

subjective, advancing by way of ruptures and breaks instead of by steady increments.

So, how does this type of change take place? In the traditional understanding, if a theory was

contradicted by enough facts, it was replaced by a new one that handled everything the former

one did, besides accounting for the anomalies. The new theory thus moved the scientific

community closer to the "truth." According to Kuhn, science does not work this way. Paradigms

do not shift because of anomalies where results don't fit the theory. "If any and every failure to

fit were ground for theory rejection, all theories ought to be rejected at all times" (Kuhn, quoted

in Novick 1988, 529). The anomalies in fact set the puzzle solving agenda. A crisis develops

when anomalies accumulate that cannot be pushed aside as less relevant or as still ripe for

solution. This is the space in which revolution or paradigm shift takes place. However, the new

does not encompass the old, for often the new paradigm could not explain some things the old

did. Too, the language systems within each paradigm are often so different as to be

incommensurate, a point which Kuhn addresses when speaking of scientists as living in different worlds.

Historians are interested in change and their work exemplifies different ways of understanding how change takes place. To social, economic and/or political factors, the new cultural historian adds discourse as a factor in change. Within Kuhn's paradigms are systems of meaning that construct the scientist's worldview, and change occurs when the systems of meaning are disrupted. Similarly, language has meaning within the context of a particular discursive system. Change takes place when one language system is displaced by another. Regarding the history of education, Cohen (1999) argues, as an example, that the language of progressive education that had at first been marginal had displaced the dominant and incommensurate moral-intellectual language system within what he describes as the total discursive field of education. Thus, he asserts that around 1950 progressive education had become normalized to the extent that its discourse was (and perhaps is still today) considered conventional wisdom. He describes this displacement as a "rupture, a revolution in the language of educational discourse" that "marks a radical discontinuity, a Foucauldian epistemic break in the history of American education" (95). Like paradigm shifts in science, discursive shifts in history are more revolution than evolution.

Problems in Historiography

In this section I first examine presentist and historicist ways of constructing the past and the problems associated with each, after which I explain a way to work positively with presentism. Then I turn to the issue of objectivity in historiography by analyzing the bias and non-bias

dichotomy and recognize this as a construction that assumes non-bias as a possibility. Finally, I

engage with the problem of relativity and the postmodern challenge to history production.

Historicism and Presentism in the Writing of History

Earlier in this study, I argued along with others that the past and history are very distinct and

different. The past has occurred and is long gone. History is constructed by means of very

different media (Jenkins 1991). Therein lies history's major problem, that of trying to make

sense of the past discursively. Jenkins (1991) acknowledges that for him the problem is

theoretical, making history part of a philosophical discourse that is epistemological,

methodological and ideological. Historicism and presentism are commonly used to describe

different understandings of and approaches to the problems of writing of history. Each brings its

own strengths and complications.

Broadly speaking, to historicize is to recognize that the past is very different from the present

and that the only way to make sense of the past is on its own terms. Historians thus "assume the

otherness of the past in order to avoid imputing modern values into the historical account"

(Wilson 1999, 29). There are problems with the historicist approach. Wilson (1999) argues that

the "search for otherness" emphasizes difference and therefore marginalizes similarities. Too, the

history constructed is based on current knowledge of the end of the story that the historical actors

could not know. Given only fragments of the past on which to write history, and the

understanding that historians are products of their own time, it would seem likely that the past is

in part determined by the present. Presentism in which "the past doesn't change but our

understanding of it changes" (Wilson 1999, 25) is generally understood as an unavoidable

situation for historians. Historical accounts are presentistic too in that over time our

understandings of past events change due to current events. Terrorism, for example, is

understood in very particular ways nowadays that would most likely construct erroneous

meanings if used to describe events in the distant past. Though indeed terrible, terrifying things

happen in all ages, terrorism conceptually carries with it meanings that are undoubtedly different

in the late 20th and early 21st centuries than in times long ago when communication,

transportation and weaponry were entirely different.

The Historiographical Problems of Objectivity and Relativism

When Kuhn argues that science, the bastion of rationalism and objectivity, is subjective and

historically contingent, the effects are felt across disciplines, especially within those that have

attempted to model their efforts on the rigors of scientific research. Traditional historians hold a

commitment to a reality of the past, to history as correspondence to that reality, and to distinct

separation between knower and known (Novick1988). According to Novick, an objective

historian is traditionally thought of as "a neutral or disinterested judge" who finds patterns in

history rather than making them (2). Novick, who took the objectivity question as the subject of

his book *The Noble Dream,* asserts that the strength of the commitment to objectivity, though

still dominant, has been tempered by the work of Kuhn and others. There is, according to

Novick, "somewhat less talk… of approaching the past 'without preconceptions' and 'letting the

facts speak for themselves'; increased tolerance for hypotheses, and a greater emphasis on

interpretations being tested by facts, instead of derived from them" (2). Instead of a straight line

to 'truth,' historians journey on a collective sailing voyage to 'truth' by tacking back and forth,

making collective contributions to historical knowledge. Even so, the quest for objectivity

endures. Novick describes the "objectivist creed [as] an ideal to be pursued by individuals [and] policed by the collectivity"(Novick 1988, 3). To think in terms regarding objectivity as an ideal, a mythic goal that cannot be reached but which must be pursued with rigor is understandable. All research and its reports aim for a kind of validity that cannot be attained. "Policing by the collectivity" is problematic since often the "collective" is a group of like-minded historians who represent the dominant position as to what counts for history. Those who argue against objectivity as a possible outcome of historical work or even as a valorous goal take their positions on the margins. The lines of the history community are drawn and there insiders and outsiders.

The stakes are high in the ongoing debates regarding historical production, since objectivity has been central to the work of professional historians. I found a brief footnote in Novick's work suggestive of changing historical debates. He said that "objectivism" and "objectivist" were not terms much used by historians until recently (1988). It would seem that objectivity was previously a normalized standard for quality in historical projects that was assumed to be part of every historian's effort and therefore not an object for analysis or debate.

Relativism as a term is most often used by traditional historians in order to critique those who argue that the past is infinitely redescribable and that no interpretation of the past is written from a center position that is neutral and free of ideology. To these historians described as relativists the concept of *bias* and its counterpoint *unbiased* are not useful since there can be no history that does not reflect a particular position, making all history biased. For those who search for objective truth, the question becomes one of what can anyone count as true if all representation

of history is contingent and relative to context and dependent on discursive construction?

Hayden White (1999) has been the target of much criticism regarding the problem of relativity, to which he responded, "Actually, I do hold that there is an inexpungeable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena. The relativity of the representation is a function of the language used to describe and thereby constitute past events as possible objects of explanation and understanding" (27).

To Be a Historian in the 21st Century

White does not despair (nor do I) and throw up his hands shouting, "History is dead!" There are for him more as well as less acceptable modes of historical emplotment and analysis. "Competing narratives can be assessed, criticized, and ranked on the basis of their fidelity to the factual record, their comprehensiveness, and the coherence of whatever arguments they may contain" (White 1999, 28).

Fendler (2008) also offers a type of analysis that for me is hopeful. She argues not only that presentism is inevitable in historical writing, but also that there is an "upside" to this problem. She describes presentism as strategic when the presentistic "vantage point" is used to critically examine our current condition by "seeking multiple and unfamiliar perspectives on issues" (678). In this way, it may be possible to make sense of our current condition of engagement in the world. Strategic presentism does not necessarily solve current problems in education, for example. It does, however, make it possible to ask questions regarding current assumptions in education. For example, much is being written about "teacher leadership" that assumes it is a positive and these days even a required aspect of teaching life. Questions that might be asked in

order to open space for and problematize thinking about teacher roles are, "Under what conditions has this construction of the teacher been put in play?" "How has 'teacher leadership' developed into a concept to be studied, taught, marketed, and/or employed as a way to evaluate teachers?"

To a new cultural historian the past does not obey her or his interpretation. Put more precisely, perhaps, the past does not obey the historian for long. There is no last word. The very critique often cited regarding the uselessness of a history that can be forged by way of a multiplicity of interpretive lenses is a freedom to be embraced by those historians who no longer have to "get it right." Certainties are thus disposed of and "those who have benefited from them are capable of being exposed" (Jenkins 1991, 25). It is in this spirit that I write the history of Walter French Academy.

The radical revisionists of the late 1960's and 1970's offer an example of the satirical or tragic emplotment of historical narrative and too, of the interpretive nature of history. In particular, Katz's (1968) book *The Irony of Early School Reform* sent shock waves through the then traditional history of education camps. The style was in-your-face and the challenge was over whose voice counted in historical interpretation (Cohen1999). This book offered a completely different view, and certainly not a romantic one, of the purposes for urban education and school reform. Instead of Cremin's more romanticized view, Katz argued vehemently that urban education was about social control of urban workers. My purpose in mentioning this is not to delve into the layers of controversy during these times. It is also not to choose one mode of literary emplotment over another. It is to point out the nature of such emplotment that presents

and may disguise particular ideological positions, and to suggest again that the way history is framed controls what we are able to see and to know. It is also to offer an example of the way history is open to continual change through re-interpretation. The very relationships among systems of knowledge and their production thus are opened for analysis under the banner of new cultural history.

Cultural historians view history as constructed and provisional and open for critique and reinterpretation. Written history cannot therefore be seen as solid or certain or able with certitude to offer lessons for the present. Cohen suggests that history can still function in this ambiguous space by asking new questions and conversing with the past in new ways. In this way it may be possible to "raise questions about solutions in education [and to provide] historical contexts for critical thinking about the present moment in education" (Cohen, 28). New cultural history is a history of the present.

About My Approach to History

There are a number of ways to investigate the trajectory of this school, its creation and demise, and the many internal and external conflicts that impacted it. However, for the purposes of this project I choose to narrow my investigation and analysis to a particular construction of a "consensus community" that reflected the stakeholders'[30] original vision for the school. I also implicate the language of jurisdiction in the struggle I highlight among overlays of governance

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[30] I use the term stakeholders to mean adults who either worked at the school on a daily basis or those whose work supported the functions of the school. Though the school theme during Walter French's first year was "Constructing a community," and the discourse around community building was apparent within classrooms, I choose to limit my study to the project of community among adults at the school.

and blurred jurisdictional lines that developed as for-profit company (.com) met institution of higher education (.edu) and interacted with Michigan's Department of Education and the federal government. This is a history of a school that operated only during an eight-year period that began in 1996 and ended in 2004. This study begins with the school's tumultuous start, and implicates the school's messy end.

To make sense of both the construction and later destruction of Walter French Academy, I drew from three different types of sources in order to view the community from different perspectives. First, using a semi-structured interview approach, I interviewed multiple members of the staff at Walter French Academy, including teachers and administrators. My decisions were based in part on those people who were available or could be found. Though I traveled to Flint, Ann Arbor and Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, I found most interviewees in the Lansing area. When asked, no one chose not to participate in this study, though several prospective respondents did not return calls or respond to emails.

The second source is the review of documents that shed light on the school's history. Newspaper articles, internal memos, reports and letters assisted me in my analysis. Finally, the third source is my own connection as a former teacher at WFA. Thus, I wind my insider knowledge of the world and people of WFA throughout the essay. Those in support of an insider position argue that this is an important way to know and speak of the world. Merton (1972) sheds light on the complexities regarding insider and outsider lenses. "Only through continued socialization in the life of a group can one become fully aware of its symbolisms and socially shared realities; only so can one understand the fine-grained meanings of behavior, feelings, and values; only so can

one decipher the unwritten grammar of conduct and the nuances of cultural idiom" (Merton 1972, 15). Conversely, those arguing for a more detached, outsider research lens hold that to be an outsider is to be more open to knowledge about particular groups and not prejudiced by membership within them. I argue alongside Merton who asserts that no matter the lens, the researcher is drawn to certain questions and peculiarities and not to others. This is a dilemma not to be solved but rather to be acknowledged and managed with care.

I do not place myself solely in either the insider or outsider camp. While Walter French was in operation, I served as part of the original staff that met for several months prior to the opening of the school in September 1996. I taught at the elementary, middle and high school levels at different times until my departure in late fall 2002. Under two different administrators I served as lead teacher for the middle school. I was part of the administrative team from 2000 to 2002, and participated on the school improvement team from 1999 until 2002. With such a wide variety of placements and responsibilities, I had the opportunity to know and work with much of the staff, including teachers, administrators, school board members and representatives of both The Leona Group (TLG), and Central Michigan University. Thus, I am researcher and part of that which I research. In the years since leaving WFA, my research on issues such as school choice, charter schools, professional community, governance and professionalization of teaching, to name a few, has served to shift my gaze, and in many ways to depersonalize my work on this project. Time, distance, and the varied lenses through which I view this study make my relationship to the project multi-faceted and complex.

In this work, I position myself within the tradition of new cultural historians who recognize the constructed nature of history. This is not to deny the reality of the past, but to say that histories are representations of the past, written by an author who uses rhetorical structures and tropes in the production of historical knowledge. Given this understanding, discourse moves from neutral medium to site for analysis. Constructed with a beginning, middle and end, historiography is structured in ways that are similar to literature. The historian, thus, is a storyteller of sorts. Good stories reopen events for new questioning. I therefore approach this case study as a story to be told. Toni Morrison, in her 1993 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, reminds us that narrative is not just for entertainment, but is also one of the most powerful ways for us to know. Bruner (1996) asserts the power of narrative to arrange a sequence of events with an implied evaluation of them. In the details of this story, I attempt to problematize the concepts of school community and the overlays of governance and school jurisdiction while particularizing the troubled history of Walter French. To Bruner:

> Trouble is the engine of narrative and the justification for going public with a story. It is the whiff of trouble that leads us to search out the relevant or responsible constituents in the narrative, in order to convert the raw Trouble into a manageable Problem….(99)

I know the walls and staircases and hideaways. I know and have worked alongside most of the adults who hoped to build a solid school and a positive, welcoming community. With their help I offer a cautionary tale.

CHAPTER FOUR

Walter French Academy and the Construction of Community: The Consensus Community

The giant and now mostly empty hulk of a 1920s three-story brick school building that housed WFA is like a neighborhood community in itself. From original construction to hefty additions, the old Walter French Junior High School held over 1500 students in its day. The building features at least eight separate staircases with many of its marble composite stairs gouged by years of foot traffic. Besides these more normal passageways, there are a plethora of lesser known ones that lead to back doors or basement hideaways, to the boiler room or to what become secret attic spaces. The back of the building is girded by a series of fire escapes, rusting black metal staircases against brick that remind me of the scene from "West Side Story" where Tony serenades Maria. To say that the building is huge and imposing does little justice to the way Walter French overpowers the corner of Mt. Hope and Cedar in Lansing, Michigan. It is a landmark of the city and testament to Lansing's history as a "GM town" that in its day drew thousands of workers to its assembly lines. There is elegance in its generous lines, and like several other schools built in Lansing within a similar timeframe, it stands as a reminder of Lansing's pride in its growing community and commitment to educating its children. The school was thus aptly named for Walter French, an educator at Michigan State University dedicated to teacher training. A large two-by-five foot portrait of Walter French was still hanging in its grand oak-trimmed glass showcase on my last visit to the building in the fall of 2004, four months after its doors closed to students for the last time.

I first visited the building in 1996, by way of what now seem a serendipitous series of events leading eventually to my teaching in it for just under seven years. The building was sold by the Lansing School District around 1980 to the Eyde Company that specializes in commercial real estate leasing and development. However, in the fall of 1996, a new charter school first named Walter French Academy of Business and Technology, but later renamed Walter French Academy (WFA) opened its doors. Attempting to rehabilitate the old, dusty and relatively unused symbol of community, a reform-minded group of educators set about the task of creating a new school community, and with it, a unique identity. However, its opening was chaotic, and in many ways foreshadowed its eight stormy, difficult years that culminated in its closing by June of 2004.

New cultural historians argue that linguistic structures serve not as neutral media but as sites for historical investigation and analysis (See for example Cohen 1999; Wilson 1999; Popkewitz, Franklin and Pereyra 2001). My project by way of this story is to analyze the multiple ways that the language of community and community building and assumptions about it were appropriated by the staff at Walter French Academy during its years of operation. Specifically, I unpack the recollections of a group of individuals who attempted to construct a community identity for WFA while developing a democratic process for decision making within the community. In so doing, I illustrate the workings of governance in play. I also offer a history of the first of several versions of community building that were tried at WFA, the consensus community. To analyze the concept of 'community', I shed light on these and other questions: Why did community building seem attractive to WFA staff and leadership? How was "consensus community"

understood at WFA? How does "community" operate as both product and process? What were

the tensions as well as unexpected consequences of this type of governance?

Why Community Building?

Noddings wrote in 1996 (the year WFA opened), "the call for community is heard everywhere

today" (245). Likewise, Franklin who has written considerably about community and its relation

to schooling and school reform, notes that the "question of community has spurred a virtual

growth industry of research and commentary on this subject" (Franklin2010, 2). Both suggest the

historical nature of community as a social good in their analysis of its current popularity.

Noddings argues that the pendulum that swings both politically and culturally between emphasis

on the individual and emphasis on community currently favors a focus on community.

Suggesting the loss of a sense of community in contemporary life as a factor, she cites Nisbet:

> Surely the outstanding characteristic of contemporary thought on man and society is the
> preoccupation with personal alienation and cultural disintegration….The widening
> concern with insecurity and disintegration is accompanied by a profound regard for the
> values of status, membership, and community. (Nisbet, quoted in Noddings 1996, 245)

Noddings notes the obvious enthusiasm she sees in education writing regarding themes of

community in which community is seen as a "redemptive solution" (246). Classroom

community, teacher professional community, school community, and school and community

partnerships are all touted as positive moves in the "reform" of education. At the school level,

professional development programs are awash with the language of community. Too, the federal

and state sponsored Comprehensive School Reform (CSR)[31] competitive grant program, part of

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[31] Comer School Development Program is an example of a CSR model that emphasizes
community development and involvement of all community members in children's education.
Integrated Thematic Instruction (ITI) is a model that features classroom community

Title 1 since 2002, requires schools to choose and follow a particular reform model, many of which have community building as a strong element of their programs.

In his most recent project, Franklin (2010) analyzes the current interest in smaller school communities of scale, noting the way discourses about school reform circulate over time, producing a variety of meanings and reflecting a variety of purposes. He asserts:

> There is actually no distinct point of origin for the development of the idea of community. There are rather numerous discontinuous pathways, sometimes parallel and sometimes overlapping, that follow different lines of descent that constitute the multiple meanings that we give to a notion of community in the present (21).

When Dewey wrote about community, he looked to find ways to bring together a growing, disparate, urban populous as a way to construct a distinctly American, democratic citizenry. Nowadays, however, instead of building a unified national community, charter schools, for instance, exemplify a move that favors a shift in locus from national identity to local identity and community building therein.[32]

Analyzing the shift socially and politically, a number of factors explain the interest in community. One is the reaction to globalization and its subsequent dissolving of "the local." Another relates to a change in the state's authority from direct control to indirect control by way of civil society (Franklin 2009). Community discourse also plays a part in arguments made by those advocating a more egalitarian society. Those who argue for recognition in terms of social

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development. Both programs are models accepted by the federal and state governments for adoption by schools that apply for the CSR grant.

[32] All names in this chapter are pseudonyms. See Appendix for list of staff members cited, their positions and a timeline indicating their years of service.

justice have lost faith in the state's "assimilationist" concept of equity or the ability of the state to make schools fairer through large programs of assistance. Fuller (2000), considers these factors and locates the charter school debate as a question of where public authority for schooling should be located, whether at the federal or state or local school board level, or at the "radically decentralized alternative: the village's charter school" (15). The response he found among those advocating the "small public square" was that they were searching for a way for civil society to construct small, caring communities in which more teachers, students and their families were known and who actively participated in the workings of the school.

Why Community at Walter French Academy?

There are several reasons that WFA personnel might find community building within a consensus community attractive. Charter schools are not circumscribed by geography or by traditions maintained over generations of service to a particular neighborhood. There is no school history. There is no entrenched staff or bureaucracy to further fix borders. Too, in the early days of charter school development in Michigan, oversight mechanisms were not solidly in place. Thus, in effect, the charter school movement in Michigan could be described early on as the "wild west" of education. With few borders in place, community building appears as a natural and logical strategy for staking out a territory within this new educational landscape. Castells' description of communities as "cultural communes" (Castells, quoted in Lopez, Wells and Holme 2002, 131) offers a way to think about charter school communities. First, they "appear as reactions to prevailing social trends; second, they are defensive identities that function as a refuge and solidarity to a hostile, outside world; and third they are culturally constituted" (Lopez,

Wells and Holme 2002, 131), organized around particular values. Taken together, according to

Castells, they create a "community of believers."

Given the particular historical times in which WFA began, and considering its reform mission as

part of the charter school movement, it is not surprising that the founders and initial staff were

attracted to the idea of democratic community building. American schools frequently operate

within a bureaucracy in which those at the top of hierarchies make decisions about policies and

curriculum and pass them down to classroom teachers who often work in isolation. Therefore,

constructing a more democratic model of organization and decision making would seem a

powerful and exciting reform possibility. Several teachers spoke enthusiastically about the

prospect of such participation.

Dan Meadows, part of the original staff, described this model as a "dream" that the teachers

regarded as intensely powerful and like no other school operation he had ever experienced.

> When we were digging the trenches and putting this thing together we were convinced and led to believe that this was going to be run from the bottom up. They had hired experienced teachers for the most part. There weren't very many newbies back then. I think all of us, you know, were convinced that this thing was going to be run (and maybe bottom up is not the right way to describe it) more as one for all and all for all rather than this hierarchical pressure down from the top to conform and be what has always been which has never worked. (Meadows, pers. comm.)

Kelly Sampson who was also part of the original teaching staff described participation in the

WFA community in positive terms:

> I liked this idea that I would be so involved in creating a school that I thought worthwhile. It's powerful for a teacher to be able to craft the rules of the school [and] to figure out which textbooks to use. What we were offered was a lot of power to create a school that we knew would be the ideal. (Sampson, pers. comm.)

Liz Talbot spoke of trying to construct a "true community" school at WFA that worked both for

staff and students. In her conception:

> No matter who you were or what grade level or position [you held], you felt like you
> were a part of a group of people working toward the same idea, and the idea was to be
> proud of your school; that you made a safe place. Everybody wanted to help everybody
> else….This idea in my head [was] of the staff working as one and very early on I felt like
> we had that….I remember getting to know so many people and really feeling like I was a
> part of their lives in a way. When you have that sort of feeling with people, being a
> group naturally forms itself. (Talbot, pers. comm.)

Each speaks with optimism about the positive aspects of participating in the construction of a

school community. The interests and interpretations they bring to the notion of community

building are slightly different, however. Dan is energized by the shift in governance pattern from

top down to bottom up. He speaks of a freedom from what he considers ineffective governance

that requires conformity to directives from above. Kelly feels empowered to contribute to the

creation of the school. Hers is more a freedom to than a freedom from, and she expresses an

interest in taking part in all aspects of structural design. Liz looks not so much at issues of

governance or school structure, but more in terms of relationships and a sense of belonging to a

group. Though they each spoke with enthusiasm about community and community building, they

have brought their individual meanings to the project. As such the term community is a word

with multiple meanings whose discourses nevertheless served to connect a potentially disparate

group to the project of starting a school from the ground up.

Two Tensions in Community Construction at WFA

Gail Furman (2004) understands community both as product and process, but argues that

generally the term community connotes a thing or a product, something that occupies space and

is bounded as territories are. Furman draws on Beck (1999) who found in her review of literature

on community that "ontological images of community as entity abounded: Community was likened to a family, a circus… or a neighborhood" (Furman2004, 221), or a refuge from enemies. By contrast, Furman analyzed community building in schools and found that such efforts were more a matter of process than product. In a community people build trust through the practice of civil communication as they develop goals and set about accomplishing them. In this understanding, community is performative and the work of community ongoing. Commitment to the processes of community develops what Furman describes as the ethic of community.

Furman's work sheds light on the first of two tensions I see that charter schools like WFA must face regarding its community development. In order to create a new school, the first steps seem to be product oriented. A foundation of sorts must be created where there was none before, and that foundation and scaffolding need somehow to look like 'school' so that teachers, staff, families and students can see in the new school something that is attractively familiar. At the same time, a charter school is usually represented as a model of reform where something different happens or will happen, or where something looks pleasingly different. Therefore, while attempting to design a structure with a strong foundation, the stakeholders must proceed toward constructing something different from what is known and at first, expected. I argue that this is a tall order for any school, but particularly for a new charter school like Walter French Academy that struggled to find an identity while attempting to reformulate what Tyack and Cuban (1995) describe as the grammar of schooling, the organizational forms that structure our naturalized understanding regarding schooling. Walter French Academy struggled with many outside problems from finance to state compliance, all of which played a part in its closing.

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However, I argue that the challenge from within of producing something both familiar and new turned out to be too tall an order and contributed greatly to the school's failure.

Marta Spaulding who was hired to serve as lead science teacher at WFA, spoke to the product/process tension that eventually caused her to resign her position just prior to the school's opening. She stated:

> It was all enormously exciting and thought provoking and like a wish come true that there would be the ability to develop a school based on consensus. But from the moment that I interviewed and took my first tour of the school, there was always the feeling of, 'but how can this happen when there's not some really fundamental, key pieces in place.' There was no outer skin apart from literally the walls of the building. That was the only skin there was and so everything had to be developed. So there was always that tension. (Spaulding, pers. comm.)

Though Spaulding was excited by the process of building consensus among staff in a school setting, she saw that there was too little of the basic structure or what I would call the product of community in place, close to the opening of school. For her there had to be more of what was known and expected as part of that which constitutes "school." She continues:

> I think that for me that was the piece more than anything that had me sever that tie. I knew that I couldn't, for whatever reason at that point in my life, I was simply too unable, too vulnerable, too something to manage that complete lack of structure, to negotiate that. (Spaulding, pers. comm.)

Fendler (2006) presents a critical review of the current U.S. literature on community and helps point to a second tension that I develop regarding WFA. The discourse of community serves to both include and exclude and ironically, to control by means of self-government. Fendler highlights three discursive strands in the literature that appeal in a positive way to notions of community, while at the same time perpetuating assumptions about community that deflect the possibility of drawing a more balanced portrait. Though Fendler illustrates these three strands by

employing examples from the literature, I use them as a way to structure my analysis of the constructions of the consensus community at WFA.

The first strand is community's appeal to Third Way thinking as theorized by Anthony Giddens as an alternative and midway position between two divergent approaches.[33] The second strand is the discourse around solidarity that positions communities as empowering and thus able to effect change. The third strand refers to affective appeals that focus on the ways community creates a sense of safety, care, and belonging. I will refer to these strands as I review the way community discourse was deployed at Walter French.

I argue that the project of community at Walter French developed in ways that served both to empower and to control (perhaps two sides of the same coin), to build solidarity and to discipline, to find common ground, and yet, to deploy techniques of surveillance in order to limit non-compliance. Too, I argue that community by its very nature creates boundaries that serve both to include as well as to exclude. Issues of surveillance, control and exclusion developed into disruptive forces that, in light of WFA's idealized goal for inclusion and voice, eventually led many to leave the project. Time and again both the product and process of community building were begun anew, until the energy and resources for both were no longer able to be sustained.

The Consensus Community

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[33]Fendler's use of the term broadens the concept of Third Way beyond its more traditional deployment as a space between that of state control and free-market individualism. I argue that in this way Third Way thinking has evolved to include midway positions between two divergent or even opposite approaches and is useful under these circumstances in a discussion about community, as it helps among other things to point out ironies or perhaps paradoxes that exist side by side and are somewhat shielded from view.

In July of 1996, the original staff at Walter French Academy assembled for the first time in the newly decorated school cafeteria. Without windows, the scent of fresh paint was unavoidable in the two-toned purple room with purple tweed carpeting. It was hot too, and voices had to carry over the big industrial fan whirring and sputtering in the background. Barry Kosner, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, chaired the meeting. By July, no principal had been hired. Thus, Barry took the lead in the staff meetings that took place on a regular basis. According to Barry, Walter French Academy's staff was to develop as a consensus community, crafted with the intention that each member of the community would have a voice in the creation of the school, while at the same time, assuming ownership of and responsibility for its progress and problems. Responsibility for governance was to circulate throughout the membership rather than from the top down. What follows is a portion of an interview with Kosner and his response when asked to explain what he meant by a consensus community:

> A consensus community is a working school community where everyone is a learner and where everyone participates…. If teachers are truly heard and know that they will be heard, they will take ownership for the building. (Kosner, pers. comm.)

The following replicates a handout from the meeting Barry used to explain his community vision and that of the original founders of the school.

Consensus means:
1. All group members have an opportunity to contribute.
2. Everyone's opinions are heard and encouraged.
3. Differences are viewed as helpful.
4. All members agree to take responsibility for implementing the final decision.
5. All staff members agree to live with a decision, not block it.

Consensus does not mean:
1. A unanimous vote.
2. The result is everyone's first choice.
3. Everyone agrees.
4. Conflict or resistance will be overcome immediately.

Mike Shervan, a member of the original staff and present at the meeting, offered his

understanding of the consensus community in somewhat different terms:

> It was kind of messy like a true democracy is, in that it slows things down. You know, it requires a lot more meetings of your community, and decisions can't be made lickety-split because there's not someone sitting behind the desk…with a sign that says the buck stops here. The down side is that it slows things down. The upside is that everybody has power. Everybody is buying into the vision and working together as a community and you end up less fractured than in a normal school community…. (Shervan, pers. comm.)

Allen Richards, Director of Student Services, described the work of the consensus community at

WFA early on:

> The entire staff regardless of position would participate in lively, frank, open discussion and have equal voice in whatever...was decided. The idea of compromise was embraced [knowing] that under this arrangement I could stop or hold up or filibuster any decision or movement. The staff felt so strongly about participating in the consensus community that rarely if ever initially [did] that happen. That isn't to say there wasn't disagreement, there wasn't discourse [that was] frank, honest and at times very heated, but we always came because of this commitment to the consensus community to a consensus agreement. There was, 'Okay but with reservation.' And I believe with my heart and soul that at that time... everyone worked very hard to help whatever the decision was to be successful. (Richards, pers. comm.)

Kelly Sampson explained the consensus community in these terms, while noting the irony of

Barry's "directive":

> Well the fact that he [Barry Kosner, Curriculum Director] had to announce that that's what we were going to do really kind of flies in the face of it. I guess my thinking and understanding of a consensus community is one where all party holders, stakeholders have a say in the decision and the outcome of whatever it is being addressed….Whether [you] all agree, that's not necessarily it, but [it's] that you are able to let your piece be on the table….Then everyone has to come to a mutual understanding. I may not agree with a lot of the things, but at least I [am] able to see other people's thinking and why we are doing this. If I thought, 'hmm, this is not what I do, but [I will since] it's the greater community. So we'd all end up at the same place but maybe not through the same avenues. (Sampson, pers. comm.)

Liz Talbot viewed the consensus building in terms of democracy via the vote:

> I remember those words, that term. Everybody [gets] a vote [and] we all are working toward the same thing. We all had a say in how things were done and how things were run and that it was done by majority rule. (Talbot, pers. comm.)

I argue that the consensus community they describe contains elements of all three of Fendler's discursive strands: Third Way, solidarity, and caring. First, consensus building represents a middle position between "commonality (which does not allow for diversity) and individualism (which does not allow for unity)" (Fendler, 2), and as such is an example of Third Way thinking. According to the handout and several respondents, members are not required to agree with one another or with a particular line of reasoning. Difference is expected and embraced. However, once a decision has been hammered out, all must agree to implement the plan and not impede its potential to succeed. Thus, individuality is maintained (or so the plan goes) while members move forward as a united group.

Second, the language of solidarity resonates through each description where community members all "buy in" to the vision for the school and even to the "parameters for behavior" such that "there's no question about it." Mike recognizes that this system affords everyone power to effect change by working together, even though as an example of participatory democracy, it is "messy" and "time consuming." Kelly is willing to listen because "it is for the community".

Dan Meadows offers a metaphor which he agreed was a little overstated regarding the solidarity he experienced as part of the original staff. His description hints at the chaos and difficulty encountered by the group around the school's opening:

When Walter French got started it was definitely a whole school, everybody marching together. I've always held in my mind for some reason the image of Gandhi marching down the road with all those people lined up behind him knowing they're going to get clubbed as they tried to walk through the gate, and that's kind of the way you felt at Walter French. You weren't sure who was going to do the clubbing and where it was going to come from, but we were all in this thing together come bloody blows, we were in this thing together. That small group of us met together all the time for long, hot, stinky hours with a deadline looming to try to get this thing up and running. Although we had our disagreement at times, there was camaraderie there like nothing I probably have ever experienced before or since. (Meadows, pers. comm.)

Finally, Kosner invokes affective discourse when he talks about the consensus community as a family. Here he continues his description of his understanding of the workings within a consensus community:

The professionalism that is lacking so often in our public schools would not become part of the picture because you don't do that to family….If you could have that family then all of our problems would be dealt with by everyone instead of two or three or five. If you could get people to buy in…for example, if you set down parameters for behavior whether it be professional behavior for your staff or behavior for your students, and everybody says 'Ok, yes, we'll do that,' then there's no question about it. It just takes people with strength to be able to walk up to [someone] and say, 'You know, you agreed with us that we were going to do this and this and this and now I see you doing this instead. Can you help me understand why you're choosing that direction?' And then it can be taken care of non-confrontationally, for the most part. If truly somebody doesn't belong there then everybody in the system ought to be able to step up to the plate and say, 'Hey, we either need to see these behaviors from you or you need to consider another position.'(Kosner, pers. comm.)

Under such conditions, professionalism becomes a matter of honor akin to family loyalty and respect. Too, both of their understandings imply a sense of belonging through a commitment to shared norms of behavior and goals. Rose describes community as "a space of emotional relationships through which individual identities are constructed through their bonds to microcultures of values and meanings" (Rose2000, 1401). The vision of consensus community not only serves to construct individual identities, but also to construct a particular Walter French identity. In carving out a specific territory for itself, boundaries are also created between "us"

and "others." Indeed, a charter school, by its very nature, sets itself apart as an educational community. Barry compares the professionalism that he envisions within his community next to the lack he sees in the public schools. Mike sees the "normal school community" as "fractured" by comparison to the consensus community. These are mild examples of the way community defines its territory by recognizing what it is not or by constructing "Others" as the enemy (Fendler 2003). Even so, we see the terms of exclusion deployed in order to determine the terms for inclusion.

In referring to staff work prior to the opening of the school, Dan Meadows' comments add force to the community versus others divide:

> There were times when individuals were brought in from the outside. [A woman] came in and tried to give direction to the planning process that we had been working on for so long and…in my mind she was extremely disruptive. She came in and as I remember tried to apply all this theory to…what we were doing…and it just went cross grain to all of the hard work we had put in to try to get to where we were going. (Meadows, pers. comm.)

In order to remain safe (meaning accepted and acceptable) within this consensus community, certain behavioral norms were expected of each member, and non-compliance may have resulted in expulsion from the community. By invoking the emotionally charged language of family, professionalism (a muddy term on its own) was conflated with behavior expectations within a family. Ironically, families are not usually thought of as consensus communities, but more often as hierarchical ones since they typically are composed of asymmetrical power relations. When Kosner said, "You don't do that to family," he was referring to unprofessional behavior in moral terms that sound a lot like the way a parent might admonish a child.

The discourse around consensus was also interpreted in sometimes dramatically different ways by staff members. Ted Wilson described it in a manner that spoke of anything but democratic processes. While his response was not typical, it suggests that underlying the appearance of unity, there was concern about being accepted and a particular understanding of what it took to remain safe.

> [Consensus is] to believe the same thing, believe from leadership on down. [To] have consensus [means] if you don't like it, or if you don't like the direction, leave. [You reach consensus by having] everybody agree with you...." While he added that he thought his use of the term 'dictatorship' was extreme, he saw the similarities. He added, "I didn't feel you could have your say. It was like this is the way we're going to do it. If you don't like it, there's the door. A lot of people took the door. (Wilson, pers. comm.)

Based on Kosner's comments, not only were staff members required to follow set parameters for their own professional conduct, but they were required to place under surveillance all other members of the community. However, members were further required to take on disciplinary roles regarding the behavior of their colleagues, by confronting anyone who was not doing right according to the given guidelines and by threatening the perpetrator with loss of employment. I would have to disagree with Kosner when he described this process as an act of strength but not of confrontation. Faced with losing one's job, it would seem that the potential exists for many voices to go silent. And too, under these circumstances, much of the staff's evaluative discourse that *was* voiced might be reduced to discussion about the state of the community. Questions such as, "Are we on the same page or not? Have we found a way to agree or at least accept the decision? Is that teacher a team player and will s/he fit in here?" may trump other discussions regarding the curriculum and the quality of learning taking place.

The intention is not to critique fellow educators who desire to find ways to make schools positive places for adults and students. I place myself beside them as one who found the chance to participate in a consensus community very exciting. Prior to my experience at Walter French Academy, I worked in a school district where I never saw the superintendent in my school or the principal in my classroom. Most of the time I felt like an independent contractor charged with managing business in Room 211. As a result, the chance to talk about all-school issues and then implement changes was powerful indeed. It is my intention, however, to unpack normalizing assumptions about community in order to better understand its potential as a technology for regulation of behavior, for surveillance, and for closing avenues for debate and disagreement while appearing to open them. They represent what I argue are possible unintended consequences of such a construction.

Problems with Product

A former teacher and her son formed Innovative Learning Solutions (ILS), a company that initially sold their own reading software and eventually founded what was to be called Walter French Academy of Business and Technology. Together with two other local people they envisioned a very different type of school that embraced project learning primarily through the use of technology. There would be few books, but rather a variety of live and print interfaces by way of the Internet. There would be CAD engineering design and a state of the art robotics lab. Instead of traditional school furniture, they ordered high end business furniture that was set up to accommodate multiple computer stations in each classroom. Projects would be determined as a product of consensus type collaboration among staff. Thus, the community as product would look different and the decision making process would be democratic. Marta Spaulding's interest

in community stemmed from her desire to collaborate with teachers, crossing traditional subject area boundaries:

> While we were developing the structure, I remember talking about the first potential project that we would base the curriculum around, [and] how that could work. I think the greatest piece for me was the idea of collaborating. My position was a lead science teacher and the excitement was to collaborate with all of the other disciplines to create a project based learning environment, to do something with those seemingly unconnected pieces. You just come to school for the day, and within the course of the day everything is going to happen. Language is going to happen; mathematics is going to happen…. It's all going to happen based on a series of real life projects that were going to occur. And that was phenomenally exciting….It was just like going into a toy store. It was just amazing in terms of what was promised. (Spaulding, pers. comm.)

While Spaulding was concerned with curriculum construction, the immediate work that the staff addressed was more basic. Sampson describes this work:

> In the very early parts when we spent the summer in that horrible cafeteria that [had] no windows, down [in what] felt like the basement, we spent hours and hours crafting the minute laws and rules and operations. Which side of the hallway are they going to walk on; which stairway is up and which stairway is down?....It would take us a lot longer than, maybe someone saying, this is your up hallway and this is your down stairwell. But we all had a say in why we thought it was or should be or where these classes should be and what the lunch period is [should] look like. (Sampson, pers. comm.)

The contrast in these two descriptions of the collaborative work carried on by the staff points out once again the first of two tensions that accompanied the project of community and community building at Walter French Academy. At the same time that the staff was trying to construct a curriculum that was innovative and would fit many a model of reform, they were also trying to construct something familiar and recognizable based on the implicitly understood paradigm of school. Thus, in meetings the weeks and days before WFA opened its doors, the staff worked on ideas for all school projects, while at the same time hammering out the minutiae involved in the daily operation of the school. Everything from dress codes to class hours to parking spaces was discussed. Taken together, this is the work required to create an entity and a particular identity

for this school. It represents the product side of community. The enormity and complexity of the task proved to be too much for a number of those originally hired to teach at Walter French. Marta Spaulding remembered her feelings prior to her resignation:

> I remember feeling emotionally tapped. I couldn't remember ever feeling that stressed out. I remember talking to people. It was like starting a school year feeling like you did at the end of the school year. (Spaulding, pers. comm.)

Problems with Process

Immediately prior to Walter French's opening in September, 1996, ILS was fired by Walter French's board of directors. Ironically this is the group that ILS had just put in place according to charter school law and CMU regulations. There were a number of problems cited by the board, but by far the biggest was that ILS could not secure the funds needed to open the school. They were a small organization with little business management or finance experience. They had signed contracts with various companies to purchase equipment, services and supplies and were unable to make payment deadlines. Thus, at what seemed like the eleventh hour, ILS was replaced by the formerly non-profit Michigan Partnership for a New Education that shortly thereafter became The Leona Group (TLG), a for-profit management company.[34] TLG, led by its president and founder, William Coates, PhD, was able to bring considerable funds to the table based on his association with A. Alfred Taubman[35] who underwrote loans needed to open the school.

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[34]The Leona Group (TLG) is the for-profit corporation founded in 1996 as a charter school management company. The school board at Walter French Academy hired TLG in 1996 just prior to the opening of the school. Central Michigan University was the chartering organization that granted WFA its charter in 1996.

[35]Al Taubman served on the Board of Directors of the Partnership for a New Education. At the time he also served as chairman of Sotheby's auction house.

On the Friday before WFA opened, TLG introduced Marian Oliver to the staff for the first time. She became the first principal or director as she preferred. At this point, the four members of ILS and two of four of the lead teachers were gone. Their vision of a consensus community was left to Barry Kosner and the remaining staff that was also undergoing change. Of the thirty teachers pictured in the 1996-1997 yearbook, only twenty were part of the original group that began the project. Dan Meadows talks about the turnover of personnel in reference to its impact on the original vision for WFA:

> We had as big a turnover in faculty as we did of kids. It got to the point that those of us who had not only been in the trenches but had dug the trenches…were few and far between. There weren't too many of us any more who could sing the old fight song…. (Meadows, pers. comm.)

From Barry Kosner's perspective, problems regarding the consensus community developed almost immediately. He described himself as deeply invested in hiring a staff interested in practicing democratic decision making, taking care to choose people who "were not only willing to team but had the personality that would enable them to team; not just say they were on a team, but to team" (Kosner, pers. comm.). Once TLG took over school management, Kosner was left out of the hiring loop and the vision he had fostered was no longer communicated to new staff. By December of 1996, barely three months into the first school year, Kosner was asked to resign, purportedly on the basis that he did not fit in.

Allen Richards maintained his position as Director of Student Services and therefore met often with Marian Oliver. From his perspective Oliver championed the consensus community at the very beginning, but eventually confided to him that:

She no longer supported the concept…and even expressed to me that [she] knew it wouldn't work…. [To her] any organization needs a leader that's going to drive it and push it and pull it to where it needs to go, and you can't have everyone wishy-washy, sitting around talking…all the time.(Richards, pers. comm.)

Mike Shervan considers TLG's hiring of Marian Oliver as the first major blow to what he felt was the strong, democratic community that had developed in the two months before school started:

I remember her first address to the staff….The tone changed the second she was hired. [TLG] brought in an administrator who was clearly more interested in being *the* voice of the school as opposed to helping a staff that [had] already built a community, as opposed to saying, 'All right you guys already have this community; let me help you work better.' It was more a situation where the administrator came in and said, 'All right, now I'm here. This is how we're going to do it. We can get started now.' This is what our school is going to look like, instead of asking what our school is going to look like…. (Shervan, pers. comm.)

During the first semester in 1996, Oliver tapped four teachers to become what she called dean and assistant dean of the upper school, dean of the middle school and academic dean. There were no staff meetings to discuss this arrangement or to nominate individuals who might serve in these capacities well. Richards noted:

In discussions and meetings the individuals that she chose were pretty much surrogates. If they did not embrace the identical philosophy and direction that [Marian] was advocating, they at least mimicked it well enough and carried out the orders well enough to satisfy her. (Richards, pers. comm.)

With the departure and arrival of new staff and the appointments establishing a hierarchy of school leadership, the community of the whole splintered and the solidarity that characterized the first months was replaced by uncertainty and factionalism. Surveillance tactics developed by way of asymmetrical power relations, from the principal to the deans to the teaching staff. The discourse of community remained, though it was strategically deployed for use in a hierarchical

power structure as opposed to an egalitarian one. Citing Rosa Burgos, Barry Franklin considers

the term community an example of what is called a "floating or empty signifier…a word without

a single or specific referent" (Franklin 1999, 7). Thus, ironically, it was used by leaders with two

different visions for the school as a way to invoke civic responsibility and loyalty to the school,

to include as well as exclude. In Kosner's vision of a consensus community, those who were not

on the same page would be asked to leave. In Oliver's hierarchical vision of community, those

who agreed were rewarded and those who did not were marginalized and removed. According to

Allen Richards, Barry Kosner was the "first notable casualty," though not the last. These

developments highlight the second tension I have suggested regarding community discourse as

creating a space that is both inclusive and exclusive.

Nell Noddings (1996) offers factionalism as one of the dangers accompanying

communitarianism, a danger that is particularly salient as it regards the developments at Walter

French Academy. She quotes Etzioni:

> Without a firm sense of one supra community, there is considerable danger that the
> constituent communities will turn on one another. Indeed, the more one favors
> strengthening communities, which is the core of the Communitarian agenda, the more
> one must concern oneself with ensuring that they see themselves as parts of a more
> encompassing whole, rather than fully independent and antagonistic. (Etzioni, quoted in
> Noddings, 260)

In fact, by the end of the second school year, strong factions had developed. A group that was

part of the original staff and by several accounts still felt empowered by and responsible to the

original vision of a consensus community, began to challenge the authoritarian style of the first

principal. By the end of the second school year, Marian Oliver was fired and four of the five

deans she had appointed resigned.

The Conclusion of Community

There seemed to be good reasons to construct a community based on a shared vision of decision making through collaboration and consensus building. In WFA's early years, explicit hierarchical structures were not in place. TLG was in its first months of operation and CMU was only in the early stages of developing oversight procedures for the multiple schools they had chartered. Without a history or a neighborhood to help maintain solid footings on which to build, the stakeholders at WFA needed to create a foundation and a space with borders.

The discourse of community has pierced the imagination of those who work with disparate groups of people, including those within school settings. What now seems natural in discussions, trainings, and planning sessions among educators, was not always so. The influences are multiple and take place over time. Communitarian logic appeals as an antidote to individual isolation. It serves also as a counter to the distance and coldness of bureaucracy. Nikolas Rose (1999), referring to the language of community, asserts, "Within a rather short period, what began as a language of resistance and critique was transformed, no doubt for the best of motives, into an expert discourse and a professional vocation…." (175). The discourse of community and community building therefore has become normalized as it makes its way via experts into the likes of teacher training, professional development programs, and leadership training. According to Rose (1999), once "community" becomes technical as a result of its uptake by experts, it also becomes governmental. WFA's consensus community is a good example of what Rose (1999) describes as the "double movement of autonomization and responsibilization" (174). Teachers were offered the opportunity for self-government in the creation and management of the school.

It was a heady, exciting possibility to most of the original staff as has been shown. However, the staff was also to be made responsible for an ethics of behavior that required, among other things, surveillance and critique of others. This is the space for control with its demands for conformity to a particular vision with particular obligations. Hence, community discourse may be deployed to include and yet to marginalize, to empower and yet to control. This is community, the double-edged sword.

The first year at WFA, the staff decided to embrace a year long, all school theme with students, "Constructing a Community." Each classroom was to create a symbolic representation of this concept. The sixth grade students decided to cut out the letters and place them on a large bulletin board. They also drew and cut out a bulldozer and a crane. The bulldozer was pushing the letter C for "constructing" into place. The crane lowered the letter C for "community" into position. This was their conceptualization of the process of community building and the work that needed to be done at Walter French Academy. Unfortunately, after eight years, the goals symbolized by this display and those represented in other classrooms remained unmet. Many students and staff, excited by the original vision of such a place, left disillusioned, thus adding urgency and a continuing call for community. What began as an exciting and energizing project became hollow and meaningless except perhaps as a caution to others who would follow the call for community construction.

CHAPTER FIVE

Tying Walter French Academy's History to Policy Literature: Questions of Governance in Charter Schools

Though many factors intersect historically that influence school choice debates, it is often suggested that the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education report, *A Nation at Risk,* heightened the urgency, quantity and very nature of choice rhetoric. My interest among the myriad school reform efforts is the school choice movement, and in particular charter schools. It is impossible to take up this subject without highlighting in some way the pro or con nature of much of the literature. Though my project is not to study charter schools by way of this dichotomy, to analyze the literature requires me to explain the sides and thus expose them both analytically and discursively. While traditional lines have been drawn on the basis of deeply rooted political and philosophical differences, Bruce Fuller notes that "elite decentralists on the political Right are finding common cause with progressive bedfellows on the Left" as they support various choice schemes that will "electrify reform more powerfully than the state's clumsy hand" (Fuller2003,15). Thus, the lines of advocacy are blurred in complex ways as influential voices from very different camps converge. The questions they continue to prompt are, "Whose schools are these and how should they be governed?" Does the hand of the State recede or is it just less visible?

School Choice Options: Magnet Schools, Charter Schools, and Vouchers

School choice involves myriad plans that are governed in multiple ways dependent upon particular state laws and local interpretation by various stakeholders. Parental choice regarding

schooling has always existed in the form of private secular or parochial schools. Generally,

however, more recent choice options fit four basic categories (See for example, Brighouse 2000;

Weiss 1996; Plank and Sykes 2000; Witte 1990). First are the within-district plans such as

magnet schools that draw students to particular themes such as the arts, technology or language

immersion. Magnet schools developed starting in the early 1970's, often as a voluntary move to

desegregate schools, thereby heading off court ordered busing (Brighouse 2000; Fuller2000) and

serving as an incentive for parents to stay in the public school system. If enough students, both

black and white, enrolled in magnet schools within their local school district but outside their

own neighborhood, sufficient school desegregation could be achieved without further court

intervention (Blank, Levine and Steel 1996). More recently, magnet schools have served as a

way to compete with charter schools for students by offering potentially innovative programs

that rival those offered at charter schools.

Next are inter-district choice options that allow students to enroll in schools outside their district

boundaries. In the state of Michigan, districts may choose whether to accept students from other

districts, but they may not prevent their residents from enrolling elsewhere (Plank and Sykes

2000). In this way, districts with falling enrollments, whatever the cause, may compete for

students in order to garnish the per pupil funding from the State that accompanies each child.

The third group includes charter schools that operate as stand-alone schools that have been

authorized by school districts, intermediate school districts, community colleges or public

universities.[36] These schools are publicly funded and not constrained by geographic boundaries. According to statistics kept by the Center for Education Reform (CER), apro-choice think tank in Washington D. C., currently forty states and the District of Columbia have passed laws that authorize charter schools. As of 2010 there were about 5,000 charter schools nationwide that have enrolled approximately 1,500,000 students.[37]

The fourth category of school choice plans allows parents to use public or private grants called vouchers to send their children to private secular or private religious schools. Thus far in Michigan, all ballot attempts to include vouchers have failed. However, now well-known programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland began modestly and have increased their participation since their introduction. Voucher plans are the most controversial of all choice schemes, since they involve, among other things, the government funding of religious-based education, a concept that for many conflicts with separation of church and state documented in the U.S. Constitution by the religious disestablishment clause. Vouchers also draw both political and ideological criticism from those who argue against the use of public funds for private interests (Mintrom 2002). Some plans call for vouchers for all students, while others designate vouchers for students based on parental income or attendance at a failing school. Florida's voucher plan initiated by then Governor Jeb Bush allows all parents of students whose schools have failed

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[36] Michigan's charter school law is considered liberal in that all four of these types of authorizers are allowed. Some states only allow charter schools to be authorized by school districts. Great battles have ensued in these states where, as one pro-charter spokesperson said that it's like being a Burger King trying to get franchise okayed by McDonalds. See *New York Times* article from July 17, 2011, at: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/17/education/17charters.html

[37] See CER website, www.edreform.com/_upload/CER_charter_numbers.pdf for state by state data.

standardized tests two out of four years to opt for vouchers to the school of their choice, whether

private, parochial or secular. The voucher amount consists of the lesser between the per-pupil

funding of the failing school or the private school tuition (Gutmann 2003). Though the political

and philosophical agendas driving school choice plans contrast starkly with one another, all the

programs and plans have one thing in common; that is, they offer parents the potential to choose

a school that in their opinion best serves the needs of their children, or in some cases, their

family.

Organization

My analysis of this literature has resulted in a three-part classification. The first category

includes studies that view choice options as market impulses. Next is literature that looks at

school choice as a moral issue of equity and justice. The third category is literature that delves

into school choice as it relates to issues of governance and the shifting roles of the State. I further

expand on each category by making references to the study of the history of Walter French

Academy. Within each section, I therefore analyze the literature in relation to the history of

WFA that I constructed using interviews, documentary evidence, and my personal recollections

as a member of the staff.

This three-part classification allows me to make sense of the competing discourses around school

reform and governance. It is an attempt to organize and synthesize the literature on school

choice. It looks at theoretical as well as empirical studies in order to highlight the multiple

conversations that proceed from incommensurate assumptions about the value and purpose of

school choice. I choose to historicize in particular the charter school movement, though the issue

of school choice in general must be considered as I unpack the reform at both the micro and macro level, thus attempting to make sense of the complex web of connection between the self-governing subject and the State. Thus, I move back and forth between a wider lens that examines issues of freedom, justice, equity, democratic principles and markets and the role of government and the narrower lens that relates these principles to the rhetorical moves deployed by both advocates for and against the school choice movement. This necessarily requires me to pay attention to concepts as discursive constructs that present interesting ironies along the way. For example, choice implies freedom of action as well as freedom from constraint. Yet, choice as a freedom can be viewed alternately as a technology for control (Rose 1999). Thus, while choice is deployed in discourse about consumerism and free markets, such choice is influenced and constrained by the rationalized ways such choices are presented. With this in mind, I recognize that the three categories that I highlight are not meant nor are they able to stand comfortably apart as carefully marked territories.

While my interest centers mainly on the developments in the choice movements in the United States, David Plank and Gary Sykes (2003) highlight the global nature of school choice plans. "The emergence of a world education system means that policy innovations adopted and approved in one part of the system diffuse quickly" (Plank and Sykes2003, xiii). On the theoretical level, their work contributes to the body of evidence regarding globalization and its impacts on major institutions such as education. Too, the situated studies they include parallel the studies conducted in the United States that explore the benefits and problems that accompany market impulses in education. Walter French Academy is a Michigan-based case of a charter school that exemplifies the parallels Plank and Sykes draw from a global perspective.

School Choice and Market Impulses

Both those who oppose and advocate school choice plans deploy market discourse. To some, markets serve as the metaphor for selfish private interest. Therefore any connection between markets and school reform implies private goods at the expense of the public good and even forecasts the demise of the common school. For others, markets allow for competition that in the area of school reform makes possible the success of quality programs and the demise of ineffectual ones, thus replacing sluggish, top-heavy school bureaucracies with efficient, human scale organizations. Too, competition is hailed as a force to drive improvements in traditional public schools. These are the sides in most black and white terms as they are presented in school choice debates today. To explore these sides, I will first consider the work of Milton Friedman who is credited with the earliest academic work that challenged the traditional "government" school.

Milton Friedman and the Case for Vouchers

In his chapter "The Role of Government in Education," Friedman (1962) asserts the importance of literacy and some form of governmental control of education in a democracy. A "stable and democratic society is impossible without a minimum degree of literacy and knowledge on the part of most citizens and without widespread acceptance of some common set of values" (Friedman, 86). He also argues that the education of one family's child contributes to the common good shared by all, a result he calls "the neighborhood effect." Given these beliefs, Friedman argued that government should indeed remain involved in education, setting up the rules that impose a minimum level of educational attainment. Too, the government should in

some cases, but not all, finance education. However, he could not justify the government's involvement in running school operations, a step that he described as the "nationalization, as it were, of the bulk of the education industry" (89). Thus, he argued that the closely connected governmental roles of school finance and school operation should be "analytically and practically distinct" (Brighouse2000, 25).

Under Friedman's plan, the government would provide a voucher for parents to spend each school year on an approved private or public school of their choice. Competition for students would improve the supply of schooling options, and he envisioned a veritable cornucopia of schools run by non-profit, for-profit, and local governments alike. Less money would be wasted on steep bureaucracies and special interest groups and more money would flow toward the meeting of student needs. Ultimately, his theory is based on the idea that the government run system of delivery is inefficient and a form of voucher system would serve both the private and public good more effectively.

With the assumptions about schooling so deeply ingrained in American thought, few but libertarian scholars and free market devotees pushed the debate toward new options in schooling at the time of his writing. As Henig (1996) notes, the momentum for new choices in schools did not come about based on theoretical economic abstractions, but rather was shaped by the political and legal currents that came about in the wake of the Brown vs. Board of Education decision. As previously stated, many of the first choice plans developed in the form of magnet schools and were created to satisfy federal school integration laws. Therefore, choice was linked not to free market visions, but to issues of redistribution and justice in which the federal

government imposed its authority on what is traditionally local control of schools in order to enforce integration laws. It was also a way to avoid court ordered integration or across town busing and thus protect traditional school boundaries and the educational privilege that accompanied them.

Henig (1996) argues that it was not until the 1980's during the Reagan and Bush administrations that school choice became coupled more explicitly with market theory. Reagan's privatization themes of the New Federalism influenced this movement. Strategically, Reagan removed private and parochial schools from the choice debate. Also, of utmost importance was "the unhinging of school choice from its historical association with controversial racial issues" (Henig 1996, 96), instead recasting the debate along the lines of school quality and improvement. The attraction of the language of individual freedom and choice and the publication of *A Nation at Risk* added force to this position.

The work of John Chubb and Terry Moe in 1990 moved the issue of governance and choice based on market principles into the mainstream (Brighouse 2000; Viteritti 2003). Their book *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* has been widely cited by both the left and right side of the political aisle as the debate began and continues to have legs. Chubb and Moe noted that previous reform efforts had mainly focused on the teacher workers at the bottom of the education hierarchy who were to work smarter and harder to improve "the one best system," rather than paying attention to the workings of the system itself. The basis of their argument is that democratic control of schools contributes to a one size fits all approach that is layered with bureaucracy, rules and restrictions. The argument follows something like this: In a democracy,

public authority is to be gained and kept through maintenance of a hierarchy of bureaucracy that reduces or eliminates autonomy and discretion on the part of the bulk of educators who serve on the front lines of education. This is so because those on top cannot assume that the mass of workers will do their bidding, so they create rules and structure to force compliance. Also, political uncertainty in a democracy leads the group currently holding public authority to insulate their decisions from change that might be brought about by the next group in power. Thus, rules and bureaucracy are enhanced, and decision-making takes place far from the real action, the school.

In place of the current system, Chubb and Moe argue for a market-based approach to governance, thus supporting the development of a wide variety of schools that would remain in business as long as they met the needs of consumers. The ties to bureaucracy would be severed and school management would be decentralized. With their theoretical argument in place, Chubb and Moe used data from a large quantitative study to drive their rhetoric and add validity if they could to their assertion that students at schools free from bureaucratic constraints achieve at higher levels. Though the validity of the inferences drawn from the data has been debated, what seems clear is that Chubb and Moe have made strategic use of quantitative research methods at a time when there is considerable support for the development of an education science. Their project therefore has commanded a great deal of attention among policymakers at all levels of government as well as among educators.

Marketization and its Unintended Consequences

The market metaphor organizes school choice by way of decidedly economic terms of supply and demand. On the demand side are families who make decisions about their children's education and are able to exit the neighborhood school if they feel other options would serve their children better. On the supply side are schools and their response to the wants and needs of consumers. Choice advocates argue that consumer demand will stimulate innovation and ultimately help improve education for all. They argue that such a system rewards effective schools and causes ineffective ones to close.

Chris Lubienski (2005) analyzed the impact of market strategies on schooling and discovered what he considers to be some of the unintended consequences associated with such schemes. He notes several problems. First, the very market forces that drive competition among schools and school districts, have led a number of districts, especially ones that can least afford it, to spend precious dollars in marketing and advertising rather than in the classroom. He includes 2002 data from districts involved in choice plans from around the state of Michigan. Detroit Public Schools, hit very hard by competition with charter schools and inter-district choice plans, spent a reported $1,500,000 in marketing during 2002. Yet their overall loss from choice was 3,727 students and their choice gain was zero students. Districts that ring the Detroit area can spend much less (and in some cases, nothing) on marketing and still make gains in choice transfers. Royal Oak, a suburban Detroit area district spent $100,000, but gained overall 836 students. Take that gain and multiply it by state per pupil funding, and Royal Oak's advertising investment seems to make great sense in terms of their return. Lubienski describes this as subverting or short-circuiting the original purposes for competition, that of innovation and improvement of educational outcomes for students. He also concludes that thus far, empirical research into

charter schools suggests that they look pretty much the same on the inside as any public school. Instructional innovation is not in evidence (see also Arsen, Plank, and Sykes 1999; Wells 2002), and some schools show evidence of reverting to even more traditional instruction methods.

Lubienski points to another kind of problem. Studies of previous attempts at school reform show that "classroom practices are remarkably resilient, even in the face of sustained and comprehensive campaigns to change instructional strategies" (Lubienski 2005, 478). This notion has been well documented by researchers that looked at change through a variety of lenses (See for example: Cohen 1988; Cuban 1984; Fink 2000; Fuller 2000). Under these circumstances, Lubienski associates considerable risk and expense with undertaking substantial innovation. Risk and the uncertainty that accompanies it may in fact serve as a disincentive to innovation. Schools may choose instead to "adopt a safer strategy to establish stable footing in the local education market (Lubienski 2005, 479). Therefore, marketing to sell a school's image and symbolic vision would seem a more risk-free way to increase a charter school or district's market share. This is where "Horace Mann meets Madison Avenue" (Lubienski, 480) in school reform.

Walter French Academy and the Marketization of School Governance

The move nationally to privatize what have previously been publicly run institutions directly impacted the start and the trajectory of Walter French Academy. When the Michigan Partnership for a New Education, a non-profit organization became The Leona Group, a for-profit corporation, they did so in order to directly manage WFA's operation. WFA was a school with an approved charter by Central Michigan University, a leased school site, a 672 student body ready to start the school year in 1996, and a nearly complete staff under contract and working at

the school. When the founders of WFA (Innovative Learning Solutions, ILS) were fired by their

board of directors, MPNE/TLG brought what ILS could not bring, sufficient financial backing to

underwrite the initial start up costs before per pupil state funding was dispersed. The firing of

ILS and subsequent hiring of MPNE became the serendipitous impetus for MPNE to become

TLG, a charter school management company. Walter French Academy, though risky, was an

entrepreneur's dream, since 10% of 672 students' funding from the state, along with 10% of all

federal Title 1 and special needs dollars could get the new for-profit company off to a strong

start. I argue that William Coats, CEO of The Leona Group (the company was named for his

mother) is an education entrepreneur who jumped into the education marketplace fully intending

in rapid succession to open as many schools as possible in as many states as possible.[38] More

schools equal more profit.

When I asked TLG's first chief operating officer (J. Smith)[39] about their five to ten year plan,

his response had everything to do with building a corporation and little if anything to do with

meeting the needs of students and families. Smith said that at first, TLG was concerned with

generating enough income to support the company, to make ends meet. With the financial

backing of Alfred Taubman, a wealthy businessman who was interested in education, TLG was

able to buy time to construct a business plan. The plan in his words was to add clients as quickly

as possible and big schools like WFA were desirable. Smith said:

> We knew we had some time to develop a viable business and the nature of that business
> was clearly to add clients as quickly as we could…and what was going to drive our
> financial viability was contract fees. It wasn't quite so much a matter of number of

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[38] Currently according to TLG's website, http://www.leonagroup.com/ , they manage 58 schools in five states and serve over 15,000 students.

[39] This is a pseudonym.

charter schools but rather…the size of the contract in any given school, and usually the size of the contract in any given school is going to be determined by the size of the school. (Smith, pers. comm.)

By 1998, after two years in operation, Smith said that TLG was solicited to start schools in Arizona. He describes this as an unexpected event and one that they pursued, though at first they were not certain that there was enough revenue to be garnered in Arizona. Smith continued, "On the surface, Arizona wasn't terribly attractive because it had a relatively low per pupil funding, but the more we explored, the more it made sense and we grew into Arizona with a commitment…to have authorizations for a number of schools to start up in the Phoenix area" (Smith, pers. comm.).

To me it is telling that this respondent did not choose to speak about school quality or ways to assist schools like Walter French Academy that they had previously taken on and that were struggling mightily. While it is true that TLG, CMU as authorizer, and WFA were all operating in a sense while they were still under construction and that TLG was working to put people and support structures in place, their main thrust still seemed to be in the area of maximum expansion for maximum profit. By throwing many darts (schools) at the dart board (TLG) and seeing which ones stick, a company can develop a particular plan for growth and for profit which may have little to do with implementing a strong school program and staying with a school until it meets program goals.

This approach negatively impacted Walter French Academy, which had gotten off to a very chaotic start, and by 1998 was still struggling. Yet TLG's goals seemed to be diverted to the projects Smith outlined. Too, where WFA was concerned, TLG's goal was directed to a large

degree in marketing the school to keep a steady stream of students coming to the school. This goes along with one of Lubienski's (2005) critiques regarding the impact of market strategies on schooling. TLG employed a full time marketing director and staff to plan advertising campaigns. The costs of these programs were assessed to the charter school, and paid with money that came from per pupil state funds.

Since TLG was responsible for hiring school principals, they were able to create incentives for increasing student enrollment. Susan James[40], the second of four principals at Walter French Academy, said that her contract included a $5,000 raise in salary if WFA's enrollment reached 500 in fall 1998. That year the enrollment went to 650 and according to James, she earned in addition a $16,000 bonus. She said, "So, you bring in the kids, you bring in your bonus" (James, pers. comm.). These are the possible consequences of privatization where profit is indeed the bottom line and money is spent on marketing a school rather than on innovation.

Another way to look at competitive educational markets is to understand the role of the consumer in education. One of the arguments for parents (consumers) making choices among schools (products) is that it would stimulate competition and force schools and districts to build better programs, since good programs would prosper and bad ones would fail (Arson, Plank and Sykes 2002). Though at WFA a lottery was only needed prior to opening in 1996, there was always a fairly steady stream of students enrolling throughout the school year. These were often disaffected students and families who had been disciplined or held back a year by their former schools. I remember, for example, an eighth grade male student who came to WFA because as

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[40] This is a pseudonym.

his parent said his son was *only* allowed to attend a program after school for two hours each day. This family was choosing a school based primarily on the need for a place for their son to *be* each day. Many chose Walter French Academy for reasons that had little to do with the quality of teaching and learning that would take place.

Market based choice models require wise consumers with some knowledge of the "product" they are considering. Many parents do not have experience or confidence regarding evaluation of school programs, especially given the tradition of local schools where parents send their children to the school where they live. While parents may navigate within the local system, evaluating the total school program is a relatively new challenge for parents and a daunting one for many.[41]

Dave Hinds[42] from the charter school office at CMU added his position on parents as consumers in the education marketplace:

> The education is a marketplace viewpoint has at its basis, which I totally disagree with, that parents always make the best decisions for their children…. It has nothing to do with poor people. It has nothing to do with education level…. Sometimes a child is being well-served by a school and the parent, for whatever reason, isn't satisfied or it's more convenient to change to another school. (Hinds, pers. comm.).

Since Walter French Academy was shut down after eight years, supporters of market claims regarding charter schools might say that the system worked and that a bad school (product) could not compete and therefore could not remain open. However, the year WFA closed, the enrollment was fairly steady and the standardized MEAP scores had actually improved. The

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[41] Amy Stuart Wells' (1997) book, *Stepping Over the Color Line: African-American Students in White Suburban Schools,* offers an important look at parental choice. She interviewed multiple parents about their choice of schools for their children when given the opportunity to transfer their students from poorly funded city center schools to more affluent, dominantly white, suburban schools.
[42] This is a pseudonym.

school was finally closed according to Harry Ross from CMU's charter office when he felt he no longer could put up with the personalities on WFA's board of directors and their supporters from the community. Ross was able to assert his considerable authority and along with CMU walk away from WFA, knowing that CMU could charter another school in its place.

School Choice as a Moral Issue of Equity and Justice: Redistribution, Recognition and Strange Bedfellows

Both proponents and opponents of school choice and those representing very different political and ideological positions deploy discourse regarding justice and equity as they argue their position. For those favoring school choice plans, the intent is to equalize the opportunities for all students to receive a high quality education, opportunities that are denied to students assigned to the poor performing schools in their neighborhoods. They argue that choice of schools has always been available to more affluent, primarily white families who are able to purchase homes in desirable suburban neighborhoods that feature quality schools. These same families may also choose among an array of private school options, any of which they feel will continue to advantage their children. Howard Fuller (2000) describes this situation as the double standard that "contaminates the public debate about parent school choice" (3), when it is described as a new policy. He further asserts, "The power to make educational choices is widespread, long-standing, and highly valued—by those who have it" (H. Fuller 2000, 3)). Howard Fuller argues for the choice plan in place in Milwaukee that provides vouchers for low-income families to attend private secular or religious schools. However, his is not the language of the market or democracy or the common good, but in his words, the language of power, and ultimately, of

justice. For Fuller, the debate is about "who should have the primary power to determine where low income, mostly African American children attend school" (4).

 H. Fuller's stance is an example of a theory of justice based on redistribution that is usually identified with the modern liberal state (Viteritti 2003). Redistribution as a means for remedying injustice involves some sort of economic supports (Fraser and Honneth 2003), in this case, offering students tuition vouchers to private schools on the basis of need. I would argue that Fuller's stance also fits Fraser's understanding of recognition, whereby the solution for injustice is "cultural or symbolic change" that could mean "upwardly revaluing disrespected identities" (Fraser and Honneth 2003,12). While Fraser notes that recognition and redistribution are most frequently portrayed as mutually exclusive, she finds this way of thinking unsatisfactory, as either position on its own may obscure dimensions of injustice. Howard Fuller is interested in redistributive justice that may in part be secured by publicly funded vouchers for private schools. However, he also passionately argues that poor people of color can and do indeed make wise choices on behalf of their children's education. He is indignant that tax-supported choice be burdened with extra rules in order to assure accountability. He further argues, "The singular importance of *accountability to parents,* so valued by more affluent families, is condescendingly dismissed when it comes to low-income African American parents" (emphasis in original, 4). To me, this is an argument for recognition.

I find it interesting and indeed ironic that voucher plans that have their roots with intellectuals and community based action groups on the left have been deployed by the conservative and religious right. The former calls for a kind of justice that redistributes resources and recognizes

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disenfranchised "others" in order to shore up long standing inequality in education opportunity. Indeed, Abowitz (2001) draws on Fraser's theory of justice to provide a rationale for choice schemes, and in particular, charter schooling. Fraser, who problematizes the "post-capitalist democratic public sphere" (Abowitz2001,1), contends that the aims of equality are "better achieved by a multiplicity of publics than by a single public" (Fraser, quoted in Abowitz, 1). Thus, "subaltern counterpublics" are groups traditionally marginalized in part by mainstream institutions that "invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interest, and needs" (Fraser, quoted in Abowitz, 1).

The latter employ themes of justice as they argue that in choosing and paying for private schools, they are being unfairly double taxed. While both argue on separate accounts for equal public support for educating their children, I argue that one wants social/economic change to enhance "equality of life chances" (Wilson1987) for the poor and underclass, and the other hopes to maintain the social/economic status quo. This is another example of the way school choice plan advocates make strange bedfellows.

Equity Problematized

It is impossible to argue against the quest for equity and justice per se. They are what Ian Hacking describes as "elevator" words that appear as truths that therefore need no definition (Hacking 1999, quoted in Franklin, Bloch, and Popkewitz 2003,12). Part of Franklin et al's project, therefore is to problematize the concept of equity, a term that is used in "neoliberal and Third Way policies to express a concern with social inclusion and exclusion" (12) and the

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institutionalized structures created to support "greater social mobility, access, and the social representation of groups" (13). They offer as examples of the equity problematic the inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups in school governance and enhanced parental choice regarding the schools their children attend. Those who argue against or at least question school choice on the basis of equity therefore, do so not based on the right to choose or on the act of choosing itself, but rather on the effects of such choice on individuals and groups the policies are to serve. In the following section, I highlight findings that engage with the equity problematic.

Fuller and Elmore (1996) in their book, *Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions, and the Unequal Effects of School Choice,* attempt to address the issue of equity relatively early in the school choice, and in particular, charter school debate. Their strategy is to assemble empirical evidence that might shed light on the effects of school choice. One of the conclusions they propose is that "increasing educational choice is likely to increase separation of students by race, social class, and cultural background" (Elmore and Fuller 1996, 189). This echoes the work of Lee, Croninger, and Smith (1996) who studied survey data of over a thousand households in three Detroit area counties in order to make inferences about the impact choice plans might have in those settings. They argue that those most likely to opt out of Detroit schools may benefit, but those who remain in Detroit Public Schools lose out as the district faces substantial financial loss due to student exit. Detroit schools become the district of last resort, and as such are segregated more completely on the basis of class and race. Since charter school law does not include transportation, those who choose are constrained by their ability to get to and from school, and by the range of choices permitted within a small geographic area.

Research on charter school enrollments by Wells (2002) also confirms the notion that they are less diverse racially or socioeconomically than the public schools. Her analysis of U.S. Department of Education data from 1997-98 suggests that the more diverse a state's K-12 population, the more likely a charter school is to enroll White and non-poor students. Conversely, the less diverse the population, the more likely it is to enroll low-income students of color. Thus, the choices families make seem to either maintain or enhance segregation of students based on race and class.

In Lubienski's (2005) work on the unexpected consequences of school marketing practices, he offers what he considers his biggest concern regarding equity. It runs along the same lines as Wells and Fuller, but with an interesting twist. "The predilection for marketing in general to direct symbols and images toward specific audiences raises possibilities that marketing opportunities will contribute to increased student selection, sorting, and segregation" (Lubienski 2005, 480). If that is the case, then it may be possible, according to Lubienski, to raise test scores ironically by marketing a school to the interests of high-achieving students and their families rather than by improving educational services. This research suggests the down side to the traditional notion of 'choosing up sides.' In so doing, those already privileged may keep their privilege and the hope for diversity within schools may be dashed.

The Case of Walter French Academy

Given that charter schools like WFA tend to cluster in urban areas, one could argue that working class or lower class families that reside in cities have many choices for their children when it comes to schooling. Does choice in this way help to level the playing field or does choice for

lower class families mean choosing among poorly funded charter schools that set up shop in shabby buildings school districts have abandoned? The former board president at Walter French Academy criticized The Leona Group for starting schools "simply run on a shoestring in old buildings in old neighborhoods [with] kind of, no real change… in curriculum or building or administration from any other school" (Wakeman, pers. comm.). He continued in reference to TLG, "As long as the population is there, they're there to sell it…. [It's a] slash and burn operation, where you make your money and you disappear (Wakeman, pers. comm.). He described TLG's approach to charter school management as "opportunistic" rather than serving as a true reform approach.

Under these circumstances, it would seem that choice is constrained and does not disturb the societal or financial position of wealthy suburban schools in a way that would make for more equitable distribution of education resources and thus equality of life chances. This relates to the redistribution argument put forward by Fraser and Honneth (2003) in their debates about justice and equity.

The recognition side of the argument about justice as related above suggests that one of the ways of lessening injustice is by "revaluing disrespected identities." I argue that in a number of ways WFA made it possible for many different students and their families to be "known." Students who otherwise would have walked anonymously (and sometimes notoriously) in the larger area high schools had opportunities to lead, to create, and to be acknowledged for their talents and interests. As a small school, the competition for positions of classroom and school leadership was lessened. Sports teams provided spaces for those who would not have participated at a large

school. Each year WFA held a talent show where students displayed great talent and also only average talent. Everybody was included and each year the auditorium was full. I once took a group of nearly sixty eighth grade students to a large student conference with many schools in attendance. I had no idea in advance that one of my students had volunteered to sing the Star Spangled Banner. He took the microphone and with no accompaniment sang an outstanding version that had the whole of the auditorium on its feet by the end. Prior to this event, this student was not known as a singer. In fact, he had come to WFA after being tormented by fellow students at his former school. This opportunity changed the direction of his school life.

By exercising the right to choose, parents and families also assert their wish and their right to be known. This has both positive and negative consequences. It is powerful to be heard as a parent and to assert authority in decision making about one's children. On the down side, parents sometimes exercised their right to choose by moving their children from school to school…shopping more or less for a situation that they liked. One parent wanted her two students placed in the same self-contained classroom. When asked why, she said that it would make things easier for her. Her request was not honored, and within five months she removed her children to a different charter school in the area, perhaps one that would better serve her wants.

Governance and the Shifting Role of the State

The political boundaries forged as part of the modern nation seem quite permeable in the early years of the twenty-first century. With the fall of state socialism, many predicted that the principles of laissez-faire markets and weak state democracy would dominate political thought. Yet, the concept of the modern nation with its centralized government and explicit power to

make all binding laws and to authorize any other authorities is now contested based on themes of

globalization and localization (Rose1999. See also, Franklin, Bloch, and Popkewitz, eds., 2003,

Popkewitz, ed., 2000). Rose offers examples of the challenges posed to the nation state:

> The globalization of flows of money, communications, products, persons, ideas and cultures, and the localization of local economic regions, world cities, regional identities, lifestyle sectors and so forth…disrupt the images of spatialization and communication that underpinned conventional notions of nation states, their territorial unity and governability: the mechanical image of the steam engine or the internal combustion engine, with their associated roads and railways; the semiotic image of a national language and a national currency; the electrical image of the fixed lines relaying signals between fixed points through a single protocol; the organic image of a single national economy, a system of relations amongst discrete economic actors; the sovereignty image of a single source of law, right and authority in a given domain. (Rose1999, 2)

Rose's examples shed light on his particular way of analyzing the shifts taking place that I find

useful as they regard the proliferation of school choice options over the last two decades. The

development of the chip and launching of communication satellites made possible all manner of

wireless connectivity worldwide while fixed lines still relay signals from home to home. In the

United States, English is still touted as the national language, but at the local grocery store, you

can go through the self-serve checkout lane in Spanish. For better or worse, the charter school

draws children from the same neighborhood as the traditional public school. Rose's approach

does not analyze these shifts as "epochal" (Rose 1999, 173) but as occurring in a complex set of

relations that help identify "something new taking shape within and alongside the old

arrangements, something different threatening or promising to be born. Its birth is slow,

complex; it is conceived out of the intersection of heterogeneous social, political, discursive and

technological shifts, often in apparently unconnected fields" (Rose 1999, 173).

Thus the boundaries created in the construction of the nation state have become permeable and fragmented. New spaces are constructed that identify particular politics that serve to redefine the modern relationship between citizen and government. These shifts and new spaces present problems of governance to the State, since, to continue along Rose's lines of thinking, "to govern is to act upon action" which necessitates understanding what mobilizes the individuals or groups to be governed. "To govern, one must act upon these forces, [then] instrumentalize them in order to shape actions, processes and outcomes in desired directions" (Rose 1999, 4). This is the essence of Foucault's work on "governmentality" in which he asserts that power circulates between the governed and the government, and that to govern is to acknowledge humans' capacity to act, thereby shaping it through technologies of self-government. Bloch and Blessing (2000) refer to governmentality as the "blurring of boundaries between the state and all quarters of civil society and blurring the boundaries between the self and the society" (61).

Centralized, Decentralized, Cha Cha Cha

Schools thus lie at the intersection where "programs for the administration of others intersect with techniques for the administration of ourselves" (Rose 1999, 5). In this way of thinking, the State now appears according to Rose as just "one element—whose function is historically specific and contextually variable—in multiple circuits of power, connecting a diversity of authorities and forces, within a whole variety of complex assemblages" (Rose 1999, 5). This line of thinking makes what appear to be the paradoxes of school governance on the part of the State more understandable. On one hand, the government seems to be promoting autonomy at the school level in the form of school choice options. Localized partnerships among business, community organizations, universities, school personnel and parents redefine the types of

schooling available to their children (Franklin, Bloch and Popkewitz, eds., 2003). All these

different actors are constructed as stakeholder participants with the responsibility for

participating in and sustaining school programs. The hand of the State seems to recede.

However, with strict new accountability measures such as the No Child Left Behind legislation,

the State reasserts its control as well as a claim to moral authority in the education of our nation's

children. This is the double movement (Rose 1999; Popkewitz 2003; Fendler 2003) that links

governance by the State with civil society and the actions of individuals.

Bruce Fuller's chapter entitled, "The public square, big or small?" (2000) highlights the tension

that he and others see regarding the oversight of education. Where does the locus of decision-

making regarding education policy reside? What kinds of shifting of this locus of control do

charter schools and other school choice plans represent? Many in research and policy circles

locate their arguments regarding the pros and cons of school choice plans based on the issue of

centralization versus decentralization in school governance. Some like David Cohen (1990) point

out the traditional currency of any schemes that promote individual choice over government

control. He notes the "especially hostile attacks on government" and its immensity, as well as the

beliefs among many that expensive State led reforms have proven to be ineffectual.

Amy Stuart Wells moves the dichotomy in a slightly different direction, though she also

recognizes the call for decentralization as an attack on government. She sees ways this theme

links the school choice movement to social movements that represent "very localized activity

around issues of recognition, identity, difference, voice, and empowerment" (Wells 2002, 7). In

so doing, she differentiates between two seemingly similar phrases that stand for quite different

forms of 'small square' control. Too, they are deployed by people from different social, economic and political positions in order "to accomplish very different—and sometimes contradictory—goals" (Wells 2002, 7). *Local control* refers to the efforts of those who are traditionally able to exercise power and who thus reject government intervention that may reduce their control. By contrast, *community control* refers to the efforts to gain control by people or groups who have historically been marginalized and who argue that schools do not serve the needs of their children. Fuller also takes up this position as he marvels at the wildly varied groups who are challenging the ways the state organizes common schooling. "Yes, the neoliberals are successfully advancing global faith in the rights of individuals and property owners, the alleged 'autonomy' of persons and corporations. But in the school reform arena it's the rise of ethnic, class-bound, and religious organizations that powers novel pressures on the state…" (B. Fuller 2003,16). This is the non-assimilationist pluralist policy culture that has drawn educational progressives, community organizations and families to charter schools.

Fendler (2003) repositions the analysis of centralization and decentralization in a different way. Charter schools, voucher plans and site-based management[43] are examples of what she describes as "decentralizing or centrifugal movements," while standards based accountability and state mandated testing are "centralizing or centripetal" forces. Instead of regarding the two in opposition, Fendler sees them as complementary and characterizes these impulses as dances in a "political pas de deux that expresses a specific construction of social individuals in the United States" (189). She argues that when different reform movements are contextualized alongside

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[43] Bruce Fuller (2000) offers useful analyses of this concept in the book he edited, *Inside Charter Schools: The Paradox of Radical Decentralization.* He engages with this subject again in his essay "Education Policy under Cultural Pluralism" (2003).

analyses of governing patterns, it is hard to draw sharp distinctions between centralizing and decentralizing forces. Continuing Fendler's dance analogy, imagine two partners in a waltz, tango or foxtrot with one stepping forward at the same time that one steps back. To the extent that one moves, so does the other. Charter schools have been envisioned as places where there is great procedural autonomy, freed from top-heavy hierarchical bureaucracies. However, charter schools, as a type of public school, are regulated on the basis of student outcomes determined by high stakes testing and as a result, by ever-narrowing learning objectives that determine outputs. The very bureaucracies from whom they seek release also finance charter schools. Bruce Fuller terms this the "uncertain interplay between political levels, where central agencies play a pivotal role in advancing particular communities on the ground" (B. Fuller 2003, 19).

Plank and Sykes (2003) assert the dialectical nature of the shift between markets and the state and quote Lindblom who views this dialectic as a three-act play:

> In the theater of efficient social coordination, Act I belongs to the state, in which, half-blindly and not efficiently, it makes the prior determinations that set the course for the next act. Act II belongs to the transactions of the market system. A long act with much audience participation, it moves not to but in the direction of an efficient ending. It cannot achieve that ending because it is limited to playing out the consequences of the first act. Act III again belongs to the state, which tries in its often blundering way to bring everyone the rest of the way to an efficient ending, largely through the redistributions of the welfare state…. (Lindblom, quoted in Plank and Sykes 2003, xvi.)

Plank and Sykes see not an either or situation regarding market and state, but rather a current move toward markets that is accompanied or at least followed soon after by demands on the State to ameliorate the impact of market dynamics as they pertain to schooling.

Popkewitz (2003) also argues that "centralization and decentralization are not separate practices," but that "they embody patterns of governing that relate collective rationalities and the self-governing of the acting subject" (28-29). The terms he uses to describe this relationship are "the pact" and "the partnership" that together construct a form and a field of governance. The pact refers to the State's responsibility for promoting the common good, a collection of narratives that inscribe norms for action. Partnerships construct the community and individual as agents who participate in self-governing activities as an obligation of citizenship. "There is no state without a civil society; and there is no self-governing without the conditions of the state that produce the calculus of governing action and participation" (Popkewitz 2003, 28). Perhaps then, a better statement might be 'the public square, big AND small.'

The Case of Walter French Academy

Walter French Academy, as a charter school in Michigan came into being at the crossroads of multiple seemingly disconnected events: The election of John Engler, a republican with ties to powerful business and lawmakers, as governor of the State of Michigan; Al Taubman's[44] interest in giving financial support toward systemic school reform; dissatisfaction among homeowners regarding high property taxes in Michigan; calls for fairer distribution of education resources in the funding of schools statewide. WFA opened at a time when the discourse of school reform was high in the wake of the publication of "A Nation at Risk," a document arguing that U.S. economic therefore political supremacy was at stake if U.S. education did not produce better student achievement to compete in a global economy. Along with the discourse of reform

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[44] Al Taubman served on the Michigan Partnership for a New Education. He also backed The Leona Group financially and signed a note that provided funds for Walter French Academy's start.

and globalization, came the language of choice, of partnerships, and of community control. With changing discourse, significant new arrangements for the governing of individuals come into play. The birth is complex as Rose (1999) suggested.

New arrangements blur the boundaries between centralization and decentralization, between government control and self-government. WFA is a great example of these blurred boundaries. The state government in Michigan passed charter school legislation allowing for stand-alone schools like WFA that were to be relatively autonomous and accountable primarily for student outcomes. As such the hand of the State seems to recede. The founders and original staff at WFA envisioned a unique school that would be run democratically. Following Fendler's (2003) analogy, the first move on the dance floor was a government (centralized) step back, allowing a decentralized step forward. Moves produce countermoves and so on as the music plays. Central Michigan was able to authorize many schools but didn't have a staff to oversee them. Education entrepreneurs like The Leona Group proliferated. WFA opened, but with trouble and chaos and with media attention within sight of the capitol, the State rejoined the dance. The State of Michigan required CMU to put solid oversight structures in place, and CMU constructed firm rules of engagement with WFA. John Dorlin[45], the third principal at WFA from 2000-2002, asserted that there was more oversight at WFA than he'd experienced in traditional schools. When asked about the different roles of stakeholders at WFA, he responded:

> The people who say charter schools are not monitored, they're monitored, I think, more than the mainline public schools by a long shot…. because of the authorizing university and the management company…and the board, all demanding reports and accountability. So to say charter academies…are not held accountable; I will argue that to my last breath. (Dorlin, pers. comm.)

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[45] This is a pseudonym.

Some Final Thoughts

Most agree that school choice in some form is here to stay. Some are more optimistic than others. Wells (2002) speculates that charter school reform is but a "late-20th-century, laissez-faire reform that will die of its own weight some time early in the 21st century" (Wells 2002, 2). A few charters will dot the landscape, she thinks, in about the same way that a few alternative schools from the 60's and 70's do today. Others like Arsen, Sykes and Plank advise policymakers to learn the lessons from early efforts and make rules that seem fairer. Howard Fuller is passionate about leveling school playing fields through vouchers based on need. Bruce Fuller's stance against charter schools seems to have mellowed somewhat since he spent periods of time in charter schools run by progressive-minded reformers determined to make a caring space for children. Fendler, Popkewitz and Rose pay attention to the terms of governance and the relationship between the hand of the State and the actions of individuals as they act out their freedom through self-governance. Charter schools seem to be a fine example of the Third Way as parents are constructed as wise consumers and advocates for their children based on the choices they make. The State partners with parents and corporations and local organizations to provide education. Paradoxically (or not, depending on how you look at it), the State offers autonomy through decentralization, but then sets up stricter rules and standards for student achievement. What is striking at every turn are the strange bedfellows from the left and the right who have joined forces in support of charter schools. Some want to maintain their freedoms and I suppose the advantages they have always enjoyed. Others want equality and a more level playing field. Can the "dizzying pastiche of cultural communities" (B. Fuller 2003, 22) serve both of these masters?

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

> That is why historians surprise me.... They see history like a
> peep show with two-dimensional figures
> against a distant background.[46]

These days the reading and writing of history continues to be a risky, contentious business. The idea that history can be undertaken in a scientific manner has been undermined by a variety of challenges along with science itself as a way to objective truth. The admonishment by some historians just to get it right is threatened by the idea that all history is constructed rather than found, that objectivity is impossible. According to some, (see for example Appleby, Hunt and Jacob 1994; Evans 1999; Popkewitz, Franklin and Pereyra 2001; Cohen 1997; Wilson 1999; Jenkins 1991), historians have either faced what many describe as the postmodern challenge and become more reflective about the nature of their historical projects or they have continued to do what they have always done, thus eschewing any epistemological crisis. Jenkins (1991) asserts:

> Theoretical discussions are still on the whole skirted by robustly practical practicing historians, and certainly the occasional text on theory does not exert the same kind of heavy pressure that the many texts on, say, literary theory, exert on the study of literature (3).

On the other hand, Appleby, Hunt and Jacob (1994), for example, argue for reflexivity, stating that "it is time historians took responsibility for explaining what we do, how we do it, and why it is worth doing" (9). Jenkins (1991) calls for historians to deliberately point out their particular processes of production. He argues:

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[46] These are the words spoken by the fictional Inspector Alan Grant of Scotland Yard in Josephine Tey's historical mystery *The Daughter of Time,* 1951, 151.

To work in this way is to adopt a method which deconstructs and historicises all those interpretations that have certaintist pretensions and which fail to call into question the conditions of their own making; which forget to indicate their subservience to unrevealed interests, which mis-recognise their own historical moment, and which mask those epistemological, methodological and ideological pre-suppositions that…everywhere and everytime mediate the past into history. (69).

In my project, I have argued alongside Cohen as a new cultural historian. Cohen offers a way of reading and writing history that like Jenkins and others challenges orthodox views of historiography by viewing history as constructed and contingent and able to be emplotted in a multitude of ways. Following White, Cohen recognizes the literary and rhetorical elements in historical works. Cohen does not intend to devalue history and historiography. Rather, he recognizes the importance of language, rhetoric and literary conventions to historiography, and values a critical reading of it that uncovers the "ideological preconceptions that we do not recognize as such but honor as the only correct representations of reality" (Cohen1997, 80). I position my history of Walter French Academy with the recognition that the story I have told could have been told in multiple ways and that this one should not be read as the last word. I have added many voices to my own through interviews of staff and other stakeholders at Walter French Academy, yet I recognize that their ideas are influenced by my choice of questions. Too, their remembrances of their times at WFA are also constructed by the way that memory works to tidy experience and give order to it. As Jenkins (1997) asserts: "…the straightness of any story is a rhetorical invention, i.e., the straightness and coherence of any historical story lies not in the 'events' of the past but in an aesthetic, narrative form" (119). Remembrances thus take the form of narratives with beginning, middle and end.

Time itself has also influenced respondents' recollections as well as my own. Asked the same questions in 2004 at the time the school closed, respondents likely would have spoken differently about their experiences at WFA. Given these understandings, mine has not been a quest for truth per se. Assemblages of facts and documents do not represent truth in my view. What seems factual and clear can be refracted like objects in water, thus distorting and bending those facts to a particular purpose. My purpose is to attempt to make visible that which is disregarded and taken for granted by way of discourse that normalizes concepts or shapes and reshapes meaning. It is to offer a history of Walter French Academy as a particular case of school governance during the early years of the charter school movement in Michigan. As a charter school that operated for only eight years from its inception to its close, I also hypothesize the reasons for its failure. Finally, my purpose is to give voice to those who came together to construct a charter school at a particular time and place when the rhetoric for school reform was high. My effort was always to be respectful of respondents as I represented their ideas. I include interviews with people who represented the chartering and management organizations, the school board, and staff who held different positions while working at WFA. I also have read and represented multiple documents from TLG, CMU, and staff members in order to offer divergent perspectives on Walter French Academy and the events from 1996-2004.

The history of WFA is in part a story of pioneering by a group of educators who hoped to build a democratic school community within a newly founded charter school. In retrospect it would seem that a romantic, idealized vision of schooling dominated the thinking and planning of the founders and original staff whose hope was to create a school that better served the needs of students and their families, as well as teachers and staff. By the time WFA closed its doors in

June 2004, little of the original vision remained, as there was little trace of the founders or the original staff and students. Following Hayden White's understanding of literary tropes in historical writing, I have emplotted the history of Walter French Academy as a tragedy that includes both redeeming and romantic elements, as do most tragedies. It is thus, a narrativized account of real events. Part of the project of the New Cultural History is to problematize the myth that history and literature are strictly separated (Cohen 1996) and to read history for its literary qualities and rhetorical tropes in order to open spaces for new thought and analysis. The threat that some historians see regarding the literariness of historical writing is based in part on the binary set up that separates truth from fiction. Poster (1997) argues that it is necessary to "get beyond this binary set in place by the boundary between history and literature" (101) so that it is possible to open additional sites for investigation. This project aims at history that serves as a "lever" to challenge assumptions rather than as a "mirror" that further instantiates them (Simon and Depaepe 1996).

While the "linguistic turn" has compelled readers and writers of history to recognize the relationship between language, narrative structures and rhetoric found in historical accounts, there remains today the positivist impulse in historiography to get to the truth (Cohen 1996). To these historians, history must remain more science than art or literature. White (1987) asserts:

> In any event, the dual conviction that truth must be represented in literal statements of fact and explanation must conform to the scientific model or its commonsensical counterpart has led most analysts to ignore the specifically literary aspect of historical narrative and therewith whatever truth it may convey in figurative terms. (48)

For the New Cultural Historian, there is no "neutral or transparent [language that serves as] container that transmits the content" (Cohen1996, 70). Language is performative and ideological

and makes possible what can be seen and known. It constructs meaning. Thus, language is a proper site for the critical analysis of knowledge, power and change. Throughout this work, I have analyzed particular language deployed by various stakeholders throughout the history of Walter French Academy in order to better understand the ways that power circulated among them, making possible certain actions and foreclosing others. I have used the analysis of language to open spaces for understanding the various ways meaning is constructed and how these constructions "constitute social practices through which individuals 'reason' about their participation and identity" (Popkewitz, Franklin, and Pereyra 2001, x).

Through this lens I have examined multiple questions in order to think about Walter French Academy as it relates to larger questions of governance and control. "Whose school is this?" "Who takes ownership of this school?" "How does 'ownership' of a charter school look or operate in comparison to that of a traditional public school? "Who determines the trajectory of the school?" "Who speaks for the school?" "Who defends it or fights for its right to continue to operate?" These questions have afforded a way of looking at stakeholders and governance organizations as they sought to claim Walter French Academy as their own.

Foucault argued, "Reforms do not come about in empty space, independently of those who make them. One cannot avoid considering those who will have to administer this transformation."[47] Foucault responded in this way to the often-heard reproach that criticism does not lead to action. He added wryly that in fact thousands of people have worked toward "the emergence of a certain

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[47] M. Foucault, in an interview with Didier Erihon, appearing May 30-31, 1981, in *Liberation.* Reprinted by permission in P. Rabinow and N. Rose, editors, *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984.*

number of problems that are now actually before us today" (Foucault2003, 171). Foucault's work is useful as it shows a way to approach current issues by seeking out the conditions and power relations that make particular practices possible. Thus, I implicate Foucault's critical approach as I have attempted to make sense of those who were to administer and hence govern Walter French Academy (WFA) during its eight years as a charter school in Lansing, Michigan. To understand the external and internal pressures that impacted its ultimate failure, I attended to various stakeholders who had an impact on the school and helped develop the problems that became insurmountable over time. I have argued that the emergence of competing claims and claimants as well as their departure affected the trajectory of the school in critical ways and eventually resulted in its failure and closure in 2004 after eight years of operation.

First, I review particular discursive constructions that I highlighted in earlier sections, namely *community* and *consensus* as examples of normalized thought within school environments. Then I examine the title *board liaison officer* and the construction of the board of directors at Walter French Academy as a *working board* in order to show how naming can both reinscribe epistemological understanding and make possible space for re-direction and reinvention in unpredictable ways. Next, in answer to the question, "Who killed Walter French?" I offer findings in three categories: Multiple roles and impacts of bureaucracy; Economic self-interest; Public schools, Charter schools and Privatization as an ideological shift in public schooling. Last, I offer final thoughts, some of which are autobiographical.

Discourse and the Circulation of Power: Community and Consensus

Rose (1999) argues that history of the present "encourages an attention to the humble, the mundane, the little shifts in our ways of thinking and understanding, the small and contingent struggles, tensions and negotiations that give rise to something new and unexpected" (11). Given this conceptualization, I attended to the shifting meanings of *community* and *consensus* at Walter French Academy. *Community* is a term that serves many masters. At WFA community language served both to empower and to control, to help build solidarity and to discipline. Techniques of surveillance were to be instituted in order to coerce staff members to act in accordance with a particular, accepted set of norms. Community and consensus discourse thus became a technology for the control of staff members reshaped as Rose argues, "upon the ground of freedom" (Rose 1999, 11). Staff believed that they would have great freedom and authority to decide how WFA would look and run as a school, yet as a condition of that freedom they would monitor each other's behavior and intervene if it did not fit the prescribed norm. Freedom under these circumstances comes at a great cost.

Community as a "floating and empty signifier" (Burgos 2003, 55) is able to be translated in multiple ways and therefore impact the circulation of power. As Cohen (1999) argues, "Language is crucially involved in change and the redistribution of power…"(xvi). The first principal was hired the Friday before WFA opened, September 23, 1996. In the months after her arrival, the language of community was still prevalent, but it more often connoted *family, loyalty* and *duty*. These terms construct a set of power relations that is top down rather than democratic. Governance under these conditions became autocratic, and loyalty meant following directives without complaint rather than engaging in discussions where honest disagreements are accepted

as a way of solving problems and moving forward. Democratic decision making by consensus

slowly became obedience to a single person's vision for WFA.

The Board Liaison Officer and Working Board

Once again Rose (1999) asserts:

> Things happen through the lines of force that form when a multitude of small shifts, often contingent and independent from one another, get connected up: hence it is these configurations of the minor that seem to me to form the most appropriate object for the work of a historian of the present. (11)

At Walter French Academy the changes in language from *board liaison* to *board liaison officer*

and from *board* to *working board* were indeed small, but by analyzing these changes, I attempted

to locate the shifting relations of authority and control at WFA. This analysis was intended to

exemplify the ways that language constructs meaning and makes possible multiple translations

that may result in unintended consequences. The analysis was to show how naming can both

reinscribe epistemological understanding and make possible space for re-direction and

reinvention in unpredictable ways. It is, as Hacking (2002) states, a "conceptual analysis

conceived of as the analysis of words in their sites" (24). I argue that *board liaison officer* and

working board, as discursive constructions, impacted the circulation of power and stakeholders'

courses of action as they interpreted their roles. These courses of action in turn affected the

governance at WFA and are implicated in the school's failure.

The board liaison position was created by Dr. Harry Ross from the charter school's office at

Central Michigan University in Michigan. It was a part time position. The board liaison was, in

his words, "the handmaiden" to the board, a term that suggests a person who does not wield

much authority, but tends to answering mail and taking notes at board meetings and writing minutes. The second person to hold this position, described herself as the "board liaison officer," a term which suggests a person who is part of the high command of an organization. This signified a change in the position and with it changes in governance at WFA. The board liaison officer was able to expand the job into a full time position with a salary commensurate to that of the principal. She set up a separate office in the school building, attended all meetings, and inserted herself in the daily administration of the school. Eventually, she held private meetings in the principal's office that excluded the principal. The board liaison officer dictated policy to the school administration, controlled the board checkbook and board finances, and served as the "watchdog" (her descriptor) against The Leona Group. Here a small change in language was implicated in a large shift in power and control. In a handout from a meeting held in 2002 that compared job descriptions between the school leader (principal) and the board liaison officer, I found it telling that the school leader's responsibilities included seven bullets, but the board liaison officer's responsibilities included sixteen bullets.

As I've argued earlier, Ross from CMU urged the school board at WFA to take on more responsibilities, and so become not just a *board* but rather a *working board*. The irony of the language notwithstanding, Ross wanted the board to involve itself more in the everyday workings of the school, thus limiting the authority of The Leona Group. According to Hinds (formerly from the charter schools office at CMU), Ross actively encouraged the board president and liaison officer to become more and more deeply involved in school decision making. He remembers that many at CMU believed WFA's school board should not renew The Leona Group as the management company at the expiration of their five year contract in 2001 due to their poor

performance. However, instead of directly communicating this both to Leona and the board through a formalized assessment, in his words CMU "did this circuitous route by having this board liaison, and over and over, behind the scenes, [tried] to influence events" (Hinds, pers. comm.).

The board took the responsibility for managing finances from The Leona Group. They wrote checks and negotiated contracts for such things as building leasing arrangements and repair. While also encroaching on school administration and creating multiple conflicts with school principals and staff, the board liaison officer and other board members did limit and lessen the authority of TLG. For a time, this seemed to work well from CMU's perspective, since the school board shifted authority away from TLG, and CMU could assert authority over the board. It is a small shift from *board* to *working board,* but these shifts among others signified changes in identity and construction of roles of those serving on the school board at WFA. The last working board at WFA tried to steer its own course away from both CMU and TLG. They decided not to renew TLG's contract, but were unwilling to hire the group that CMU brought to the table to take TLG's place. At meeting after meeting in the spring of 2004, however, they haggled over how they would move the school forward. Ultimately, the school board in place in 2004 was not strong enough or capable enough to overcome all the challenges that WFA presented. The multiple board meetings they presided over eventually attracted the attention of a few outspoken community members who were able to take control of board meetings. This was the tipping point for Harry Ross from CMU's charter school office. He vowed to himself to drop the school as he walked out of one of these board meetings.

Who Killed Walter French?

In reference to his study of Central High School, David Labaree (1988) wrote, "The aim of a case study…is not to pick a typical subject but to choose one that is exemplary" (2).[48] Walter French Academy fits this description. It opened in 1996 in chaos and closed as a spectacular failure. Those who argue against charter schools use the likes of WFA as an example of how public funds are misused or wasted. Those who favor charter schools argue that the market worked in this case and that a bad school went down. I argue that the case of Walter French Academy is important as it opened at a time when issues of school reform, school finance and school governance were at a crossroads in Michigan. Thus, while this study focuses on people who made up this institution, it also focuses on larger issues of governance and the control of schools as public institutions that serve both public and private interests. In this project, each chapter has presented a different way of looking at governance and its complications and implications throughout the eight-year history of Walter French Academy. This research offers a fine-grained view of the inner workings of the school and its staff, The Leona Group as its for-profit management company, the school board at WFA, and Central Michigan University as its authorizer. The voices of many are combined with mine to present multiple experiences and insights that together offer a particular way to understand charter schools as a part of the school reform landscape.

They serve to answer the question, "Whose school is it?" This question is germane as one ponders the reasons for WFA's eventual failure and closing. I would argue that the answers to these questions also speak to broader issues of governance, ownership, community and

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[48] Labaree refers here to the argument put forward by Harold Silver (1983) in his book *Education as History.*

technologies for control of the self and others as they refer to schooling in general and charter schools in particular. Here I will offer three categories of findings regarding WFA that also are important in the larger picture of school reform schemes and school governance: Multiple roles and impacts of bureaucracy; Economic self-interest; Privatization as an ideological shift in public schooling.

Multiple Roles of Bureaucracy

First, bureaucracy is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has been argued that with too much bureaucracy involved in the operation of schools, it is difficult to make changes, or to consider or implement innovative reforms. This was the main argument that Chubb and Moe (1990) deployed in order to advocate for a market based system of schooling. Their position was that schools could actually be run more democratically and more effectively with thick layers of bureaucracy removed from school governance and operation. WFA serves as an example of a school that began without layers of bureaucracy. As the third principal at WFA pointed out, in such a situation it was possible to make big changes in procedures, curriculum and scheduling over the weekend if it was deemed necessary. Sometimes quick changes resolved problems and were beneficial to students. Given the discretion to act, wise educators whose interest is the well-being of the students they serve, can make creative adjustments to scheduling, curriculum, or materials used to support curricular decision. This happened at Walter French Academy with some regularity.

On the other hand, the downside of quick decision-making was also apparent at WFA. As an example, with a modicum of planning and meager resources available, a separate alternative high

school was begun at WFA in fall 2001. This school was instituted in addition to the pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade already in operation at the school. One director and one teacher were in charge of approximately forty students. They were housed in an isolated section of the building and were not allowed into other parts of the school except during their lunch when they marched past the Montessori four to six year olds, often to the dismay of visiting parents. While an alternative education program could have served a real need in the Lansing, Michigan, area, the program was not well thought out and ended in chaos and failure.

I would also argue that with too little bureaucracy, there may be less stability within a school, which sets the stage for trouble. In such a situation it is possible for one or more individuals to gain authority through means other than credentials or expertise or experience. At WFA there was a great struggle for control of the school among a variety of stakeholders. The last principal at WFA started as a member of the original school board, and then became the board liaison officer. She built authority by helping people she knew become school board members, and by working with the charter school staff at CMU who wanted the board to assert itself over The Leona Group. Eventually, she created a formal office within the Walter French building. In 2002, she became the fourth and final principal at WFA. While every organization can probably tell a story of power struggles and coups, in a school where there is little bureaucracy and few lines of authority in place, it would seem all the more probable that an individual could take the school in disastrous directions. This was indeed the case at WFA. The final principal at WFA was implicated in the firing of two principals. She gave promotions to people with few credentials and marginalized those she considered to be enemies in order to secure her authority.

Finally, regarding bureaucracy or structures for the management and oversight of organizations like schools, the history of Walter French Academy appears to be a case of "nature abhors a vacuum" and that consensus communities are defenseless against authoritarian takeovers. Charter schools were to be spaces with less bureaucracy, allowing more room for innovation. They were to be held accountable primarily for their student outcomes rather than inputs. I argue, however, that the empty spaces where traditional structures for control and oversight reside were little by little filled with parallel ones. Here I will offer two effects of this phenomenon. First, educational reform is notoriously difficult. Using Lortie's (1975) concept of "apprenticeship of observation," it is understandable that those involved with WFA would begin to see themselves in terms similar to their own experiences. Since the structures were only parallel and not quite the same as in traditional public schools, conflicts over control arose, as I have shown throughout this project.

Second, bureaucracies operate, as Chubb and Moe (1991) have argued, in order to secure and maintain particular positions of authority and control. As I have stated, CMU began as a chartering machine, accepting applications and rapidly becoming the biggest authorizer in Michigan. In the early 1990's there was little time or staff for oversight. In order to protect their position, CMU enlarged its staff and developed more and more compliance structures that for some seemed more like policing than assistance. J. Smith of The Leona Group argued that "Central [CMU] took the position as authorizer that their primary job was to be a policing force as opposed to being a nurturing force," a position that was different from many other authorizers with whom he has worked (Smith, pers. comm.). CMU created enhanced structures for

governance and documentation that both served to protect CMU's position as an authorizer and in the case of WFA, to build a documented case against WFA.

Economic Self-Interest

Both The Leona Group and Central Michigan University are in the business of education. Each has profited from its relationship with Walter French Academy as well as other charter schools. There is frankly, a great deal of money to be made in the charter school industry. It is imperative that organizations that stand to profit protect their reputations as well as the reputation of charter schools as a reform project in education.

The Leona Group takes as their management fee ten per cent of *all* revenues. This includes per pupil funding but also Federal entitlement program funds such as special needs and at risk funds. TLG has a grant-writing department and any monies awarded are also subject to their management fee. The plan is to both cover corporate expenses that include salaries and to make a profit.

Walter French Academy was attractive to TLG as a new entity because it was a big school with a large student population already assembled. Big schools have more potential for profit, so it was important to market the school to the community in order to attract high numbers. The second principal at WFA noted that she received bonuses in addition to her salary based on the number of students that were recruited. Also, rapidly adding as many schools as possible made sense in terms of income and profit. By 2000 TLG began its expansion into Arizona. According to Allen Richards, administrator at WFA in charge of student services, TLG's interest in WFA began to

change as TLG ventured into new markets. Where initially TLG seemed interested in providing

educational services to disadvantaged children, their interest turned to the repayment of the costs

they had incurred by taking on WFA's initial debt load. Their goal according to Richards was to

recoup their losses, staying on with WFA as long as it took to do so.

Dave Hinds from the charter school office at CMU offers a different perspective on the loans

they arranged on behalf of WFA and other charters:

> Leona started working with the school [WFA] the way Leona started working with lots of
> schools, and that is that these schools…found themselves in financial difficulty. Leona
> had deep pockets because it was backed by Al Taubman and they would come in and bail
> them out financially. Walter French Academy had, rounded off, a million dollar
> deficit…. That never got paid down completely and that was the case with…a number of
> Leona schools…. Because they bailed them out, provided them funding, [schools] were
> on the hook with the company. And it's almost in their interest to continue to profit as
> much as possible, pay down the debt to some extent, but never quite extinguish it,
> because doing so…would mean the termination of their contract…. So the eight years
> they [TLG] were under contract, they would have divorced many times over. (Hinds,
> pers. comm.)

CMU earns three per cent of all per pupil revenues from all the schools they have authorized. It

is in their interest to protect this source of revenue by protecting their reputation. It is also in

their interest to authorize as many schools as they can. The admonishment by CMU's board of

directors early on "to get in and get in big" reflects such a goal. J. Smith, former TLG executive

argued that CMU's agenda was twofold:

> First there was a political agenda. They were doing a major favor for the governor and
> they got big time rewarded for that through state funding to help support the initiative.
> The second part of their agenda certainly was the fact that authorizing schools is revenue
> generating. (Smith, pers. comm.)

Smith disputed the idea that CMU was against management companies. In fact, according to

Smith, CMU has gotten into the management business as an additional source of revenue. He

asserted:

> I think Central [CMU] became enamored with the prospects of managing [charter schools] themselves and were in a position as an authorizer to steer boards into a circumstance where, if the board would separate from the management company, through a separate arm, Central Michigan would step in and provide the services that the [former] management company was no longer providing…. So, I would describe to you that Central's position was influenced as much by business opportunity and revenue generation as it was any kind of philosophy or set of judgments. (Smith, pers. comm.)

Madeline Jones, the former board liaison officer and fourth and final principal at WFA, offered

information that may corroborate Smith's assertion. In the months before the final decision was

made about reauthorizing Walter French, she said that CMU brought a group from Mt. Pleasant

that they wanted WFA to contract with for consulting services in place of The Leona Group.

When she read the contract, she was amazed that these services would cost more than TLG's and

this group would do less. WFA's board would not agree to this plan, believing they could not

afford such an arrangement. In Jones' opinion, the charter school office at CMU was angered

and their anger may have impacted their decision not to reauthorize.

Public schools, Charter Schools and Privatization as an Ideological Shift

The history of Walter French Academy as a charter school or public school academy serves as a

particular case of school governance and ownership. It exemplifies the problematic as to what it

means to be a "public" school. By asking the question, "What makes a public school public?

Higgins and Abowitz (2011) denaturalize the terms public and public school. They offer a

distinction between what they call *formalist* definitions of public schools and *functionalist*

definitions. A formalist conception of a public school requires public funding and governance

based on elected community representatives. However, a functionalist would place importance

on the quality with which a school achieves its public mission. This distinction breaks down the

public/private dichotomy as it relates to schooling and opens spaces for different ways of

conceptualizing the common school. As the distinction is blurred, it also represents an

ideological shift that is redefining the public school. Higgins and Abowitz (2011) argue:

> For better or worse, the very project of the common school is being vigorously contested and radically redefined. Consider the advent of voucher plans; the dramatic rise of home schooling; the corporate takeover of districts and schools…the new rhetoric of, but narrow metric for, public accountability; increased federalization and standardization of schools. (367)

Indeed charter schools like Walter French Academy are part of this changing landscape and

changing understanding regarding the connections between private interests and public funding

of schools. In regard to WFA, by asking the question, "Whose school is it?" my intention is to

trouble the reconceptualization between the public and private spheres in a different way. This

question is answered more easily by those involved in traditional public schools. Those schools

belong to the community large or small in which they are found. Districts are named after their

cities, towns and villages and often the name is followed by "community schools" as a way of

saying that the schools are by and for and with the approval of those people who live within their

well-defined, geographical school district boundaries.[49] Citizens pay taxes and vote on millages

to pay for their schools, elect school board members who oversee their schools, and they send

their children to their schools. The schools serve as reflections of community values and interests

which make it all the easier for community members to say that these are *our* schools. In a

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[49] However, with schools of choice plans, students more than ever before are able to reside within one district and go to school within another.

traditional public school, the question suggests ownership in perpetuity.[50] Ownership is not

contingent since, as problems develop, they must be addressed and solved, at least to the

satisfaction of a majority of the community.

Charter schools like WFA in Michigan can draw students from any part of the state. The effect is

that there are no specific geographical districts constructed and students who enroll in charter

schools take their per pupil dollars from the district in which they live to attend them. When

charter school legislation was enacted in Michigan, new entities came into being to manage and

oversee charter school operations. Authorizing entities, primarily in the form of public

universities like CMU, shifted from granting charters to developing ways to oversee them.

Charter school management companies like The Leona Group could guarantee enough start up

funding for new schools to help them open for business. These moves opened new spaces for

governance and oversight relations among schools and their boards, management companies, the

State and authorizing agencies. With boundaries blurred, the question "Whose school is it?" is

more complex.

I assert that at a charter school, the question implies not ownership but rather control. It is, I

would argue, contingent ownership, whereby claimants with distinctly private interests can walk

away from a school when it is in their best interest to do so. A claimant's private interest may

have little to do with the best interest of the students or communities they serve. Too, claimants

can be forced away by a competing claimant who has competed for control and superseded the

former entity. This begs other questions, such as: What are the purposes for asserting control in

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[50] This is changing in the case of low performing schools where States can intervene, and in some cases, impose new leadership.

the first place? When and why is control or interest in the school relinquished? In the case of Walter French, I argue that the purpose for asserting control was two-fold: The first was idealistic in that the staff planned to create a school community built on the concept of democratic decision making. The second purpose was to protect financial interests and/or enhance them. CMU walked away from Walter French Academy to protect its considerable financial interests in charter schooling and their status as a charter school authorizer. The Leona Group opened multiple schools between 1996 and 2004, making it possible to profit while closing or walking away from schools that did not succeed.

WFA, as a charter school that operated in Lansing, Michigan, from 1996-2004, serves as a site for examining these sets of questions and for considering jurisdictional lines that have little to do with geography and much to do with relations of power and privatized interest in profit. WFA is an example of a charter school that failed, in that Central Michigan University (CMU), its chartering agency, declined to reauthorize it after eight years. The Leona Group (TLG), its for-profit management company was not re-hired at the end of its eight years under contract with the school board. Finally, the board of directors was unable to agree on plans that might have saved the school. I argue that each group struggled for, and at some point along the school's trajectory, claimed control of WFA and is implicated in its failure.

Final Thoughts

I had been in education for a number of years prior to teaching at Walter French Academy. My adventure at Walter French Academy began prior to its opening in 1996 and continued until November 2002. During that time, I taught with some of the most dedicated, most competent

people I have ever had the privilege to work with, a point I cannot overstate. I feel a great sense

of gratitude toward many with whom and from whom I learned the art of teaching. I am also

thankful for the opportunity to have thought together with intelligent, caring people who

attempted to start a school that served students who needed a different school. While the school's

closing is tragic, there were numbers of incredible success stories. A mother told me once that

Walter French Academy saved her daughter's life. Several students went through Microsoft's

training program while at WFA and have gone on to successful careers in computer technology.

One year alone, I had two students who earned full four year scholarships, one at Eastern

Michigan University, and one at the University of Michigan. My criticism is not aimed at any of

these individuals.

The tragedy of Walter French Academy is that the desire for control and for profit, the greed of

individuals and organizations superseded all the good that was accomplished on behalf of

deserving students and families. This desire remained front and center in place of what was in

the best interest of the children who walked the halls at WFA. The tension between education as

a public good as compared to a private good is usually argued in relation to the communities and

students schools serve. In this case the private interests of those competing for control of the

school took precedence over interest in the community or in its children. The Leona Group was

interested in the control that would create profit. CMU's interest in the end was in protecting its

reputation and its income stream. The private interests of board and some staff members was in

securing a salary and building a resume that would take them to their next position. All of these

private interests are implicated in WFA's failure. In the end, there was no one to fight for the

school, as those who fought for control each stepped away. The history of Walter French

Academy is indeed a cautionary tale.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

National Charter School Implementation by State

Table 1

State	Year Law Passed	# of Charter Schools	# of Students Enrolled
Alaska	1995	25	5, 207
Arizona	1994	454	90,773
Arkansas	1995	27	3,863
California	1992	733	280,854
Colorado	1993	150	61,889
Connecticut	1996	23	4,696
Delaware	1995	18	25,724
District of Columbia	1995	97	8,626
Florida	1996	396	116,983
Georgia	1993	109	53,994
Hawaii	1994	27	5,812
Idaho	1998	31	11,959
Illinois	2009	95	30,795
Indiana	2001	49	15,611
Iowa	2002	6	922
Kansas	1994	34	4,305
Louisiana	1995	90	40,000
Maryland	2003	34	8,836
Massachusetts	1993	61	26,384
Michigan	1993	265	100,996
Minnesota	1991	180	32,776
Mississippi	1997	1	371
Missouri	1998	41	17,136
Nevada	1997	30	9,813
New Hampshire	1995	12	585
New Jersey	1996	66	19,726

Table 1 cont'd

New Mexico	**1993**	**67**	**11,634**
New York	**1998**	**134**	**33,581**
North Carolina	**1996**	**99**	**36,007**
Ohio	**1997**	**330**	**88,449**
Oklahoma	**1999**	**16**	**5,418**
Oregon	**1999**	**87**	**13,617**
Pennsylvania	**1997**	**132**	**70,567**
Puerto Rico	**NA**	**NA**	**NA**
Rhode Island	**1995**	**11**	**3,134**
South Carolina	**1996**	**34**	**8,465**
Tennessee	**2002**	**16**	**3,656**
Texas	**1995**	**416**	**101,681**
Utah	**1998**	**67**	**27,369**
Virginia	**1998**	**4**	**250**
Wisconsin	**1993**	**221**	**37,277**
Wyoming	**1995**	**3**	**255**
Total		**4,691**	**1,419,996**

State by State #'s

This information is self-reported from state departments of education, state associations and/or resource centers. These figures are updated periodically as changes are reported.

This table is recreated from data retrieved July 2011 and is available at: http://www.uscharterschools.org/

Walter French Academy Staff and Stakeholders with Time of Service

Principals' timeline, 1996-2004.

September 1996- June 1998: Marian Oliver
September 1998- October 2000: Susan James
October 2000-July 2002: John Dorlin
August 2002-June 2004: Madeline Jones (Jones first served as school board vice president, 1996-1997; then as board liaison officer, 1998-2002)

Staff and Stakeholders at WFA (time of service at WFA in parentheses):

Barry Kosner, (Spring 1996-December 1996) Director of Curriculum and Instruction.
Sarah March, (1997-2002) High School English teacher. High School Lead teacher, 2002.
Dan Meadows (1996-2002) Middle school English teacher; Special Needs teacher.
Allen Richards (1996-October 2002) First title and role, Director of Student Services.
Kelly Sampson (1996-2000) Middle school English teacher; 4th grade teacher; Special Needs teacher.
Mike Shervan, (1996-2000) High School English and Spanish teacher. Assistant basketball coach.
Marta Spaulding (July 1996-August 1996) Hired as high school science, Lead teacher.
Liz Talbot (1996-2003) Science, Art, Elementary Teacher, Lead teacher Elementary School, 2001-2003.
Ted Wilson (1996-2000) Teacher, Science and computer technology.
Dave Hinds (1998-2002) Worked in Charter Schools Office, Central Michigan University.
John Smith (1996-2004) Executive with The Leona Group who worked closely with Walter French Academy staff and school board.
Dr. Harry Ross, (1993-present) Associate Director of the Charter Schools Office, Central Michigan University.
Dr. William Coats, (1996-present) Chief Executive Officer, The Leona Group, Lansing, Michigan.
Judy Haught, (1995-1996) Founder of Walter French Academy, Innovative Learning Solutions, Lansing, Michigan.
Brian Haught, (1995-1996) Innovative Learning Solutions, part of founders team, Walter French Academy.
Steve Bollier, (1999-present) Regional Vice President, The Leona Group. Territory included Walter French Academy, (1999-2004).
Dorothy Delaney, (1996-2004) Administrative Assistant at Walter French Academy.

APPENDIX C

1996 Informational Summary: Student and Teacher Recruitment Meetings

Walter French Academy of Business and Technology

Informational Summary[51]

<u>Introduction</u>

The Walter French Academy of Business and Technology was conceived and developed by a group of citizens from the greater Lansing area, made up of parents, educators, business people, human service professionals and others. We come from different races, communities, income levels, educational levels, religions and political parties. But we all have one thing in common: the desire to improve education for children and adults. We decided to open a charter school out of concern for problems such as:

- High dropout rates in local school systems;
- Low literacy and math skills among dropouts and many graduates;
- Lack of adequate academic and technical skills for employment or further education among both dropouts and many graduates;
- Insufficient or ineffective programs for both gifted students and students with academic problems, including at-risk students, learning disabled, dyslexic, ADHD, ESL and non-readers.

We believe that a charter school provides the opportunity to offer effective and innovative teaching methods, curriculums, and technologies that are not in widespread or consistent use by local school systems. In addition, our group possesses the necessary expertise, experience and dedication required to combine these elements into a successful educational program which will yield superior results. Accordingly, Walter French Academy of Business and Technology has adopted the following mission and goals:

Our mission is to create an innovative and caring learning environment that promote academic excellence, meets individual needs, incorporates modern technologies, develops career paths and entrepreneurial skills which are relevant to the marketplace, encourages independent and critical thinking, and prepares students to be productive, compassionate world citizens who are adaptable, life-long learners.

<u>Goals</u>:

1. Improve pupil achievement for all pupils, including, but not limited to, educationally disadvantaged pupils, by improving the learning environment (from PartB, Section511 of Senate bill 1103).

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[51] This is the information handed out at both parent and teacher recruitment meetings held in May, 1996.

2. Promote student progress toward meaningful careers allied with their interests, abilities and talents.
3. Promote student competency in a variety of technology skills.
4. Promote student learning and application of entrepreneurial and business management skills.
5. Provide individualized education for a diverse student population.
6. Conduct outreach to middle and high school dropouts and at risk students.
7. Advance the field of education by developing and disseminating innovative instructional methods and materials.
8. Provide educational services in the realms of community education, reading remediation, parenting education, etc., to those outside our middle and high school student population.
9. Develop partnerships with businesses, human service organizations and other educational institutions which provide increased educational and vocational opportunities, and financial support.
10. Involve staff and students in community service projects that improve the overall quality of life in the surrounding neighborhood area.

Answers to Commonly-Asked Questions
What is Walter French Academy of Business and Technology?
Walter French Academy is a new public school academy, a "charter school', which will open on September 3, 1996 serving 576 students in grades 6-12. It will be located at the Walter French Building, 1900 S. Cedar (corner of Cedar and Mt. Hope), in Lansing.

Does the Academy charge tuition?
No. Walter French Academy is a free public school supported by state funding; there is no tuition.

How are students selected?
Walter French Academy is open to any student in grades 6-12 who is a Michigan resident. You are encouraged to submit applications as soon as possible, as the enrollment period will be limited, ending during the month of June. (We are awaiting some documentation from the state which will determine our exact date for close of enrollment.) Application forms are available at the informational presentations (see above) or can be obtained by calling Lynne or Jim Warren. If at the end of the enrollment period there are more applicants than available space, Michigan law requires that students be chosen by random selection (lottery), with preference given to brothers and sisters of enrolled students.

When and where are informational meetings being held?
Presentations for the public will be held at the school auditorium (second floor) on Friday, May 31 at 7:30 p.m; Saturday, June 1 at 10:00 a.m.; Friday, June 7 at 7:30 p.m. Parents are invited to bring their children. Additional presentations will be scheduled as needed. Also, off-site presentations are available for organizations or families in outlying neighborhoods. Please call for more information on these. A teacher recruitment meeting will be held Saturday, June 1 at 1:00 p.m.

What is the Academy's overall educational design?
The Academy will offer a curriculum that focuses upon career development, business and entrepreneurship, technology education and training, and community service, and will include ongoing aptitude, occupational and interest assessment. Our curriculum will integrate the latest research on learning and teaching with current technologies, to provide an individualized education that enables the student to plan and pursue a career path which matches his or her interests, abilities and talents. State-recommended core curriculum (math, science, social studies and language arts), music, art, drama, physical education and instruction in independent living skills will be infused into all curricular areas and also taught as separate subjects where appropriate. The curriculum will meet and exceed state educational standards and provide a foundation for successful performance at institutions of higher learning. Emphasis will be placed on providing appropriate instruction for a diverse student population, including gifted students and those who are at risk, ESL, learning disabled, ADD, dyslexic, non-readers, etc. (A detailed description of the educational program is contained later in this summary.)

What is the school year schedule?
The school year for 1996-97 shall start on Tuesday, September 3, 1996 and end on Friday, June20, 1997. The Academy will be closed for the following holidays:
    Thanksgiving, November 28 and 29, 1996
    Winter break, December 23, 1996 to January 6, 1997
    Martin Luther King Day, January 20, 1997
    President's Day, February 17, 1997
    Spring Break, March 31 to April 7, 1997
    Memorial Day, May 26, 1997

What is the school day schedule?

    8:00 a.m. School begins
    8:00-11:00 a.m. Academics (all subjects according to schedules)
    11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Staggered ½ - hour lunches
    12:30 - 3:30 p.m. Academics (all subjects according to schedules)
    3:30 p.m. School Day Ends

What is the student-teacher ratio?
For the most part, there will be 24 students to a classroom, with a teacher, a teacher's assistant and a volunteer in each classroom. The only exceptions would be for cases in which a larger number of students is a benefit to learning, as in classes such as music or physical education.

Who will teach Academy classes?
Classes will be taught by accredited teachers and qualified experts from various professions.

Is there opportunity for parent involvement?
The Academy will encourage active engagement by parents/care-givers in their children's education through a variety of opportunities for involvement:
- as members on the Academy Board of Directors;
- in developing individual educational plans for their children;
- as instructional aides, expert instructors, or mentors;

- as classroom volunteers;
- as members of the Parent-Teacher-Student Association
- as fund-raisers, chaperones, or in other roles as parent interest and ability allow.

The Academy will provide space for workshops that teach parenting, anger control, mediation and conflict resolution. The Academy will seek parent assistance in developing and implementing other projects such as a parent network, ride-sharing network, etc.

Will the Academy offer lunch?
Lunch will be available at a reasonable fee. We will also have a free and reduced lunch program for qualified students.

Will the Academy provide transportation to school?
Initially, parents or care-givers will be expected to provide transportation to and from the Academy. The Academy will help to develop a ride-sharing network. When enrollment is complete, we'll review the transportation issue based on student needs and available funding.

What kind of sports/physical education will the Academy offer?
The Academy has contracted with Aim High Basketball Camp to offer an elite basketball program which will include competition with the best prep school basketball teams in the nation. Our physical education program will include opportunities for students to receive gymnastics instruction from Great Lakes Gymnastics Academy, well known for their Olympic-level professional training.

Will the Academy provide a safe environment?
Safety is of primary importance of learning. We have aligned our program with the recommendations of the Ingham County/City of Lansing Youth Violence Prevention Coalition, and are taking specific steps to ensure that students are protected from physical *and* mental abuse at our school.

Current Details of Walter French Academy's Design and Programs
Educational Design

Individualized education within integrated thematic instruction:
Each student will participate with his or her parents/care-givers and school staff in designing an individualized educational plan ("IEP") in which the curriculum is adapted to accommodate individual learning styles, abilities, talents and interests. The IEP will produce a higher rate of educational success for at-risk populations, and a higher level of education for average and exceptional students.

The overall structure of curriculum and teaching methods will be based on the model of integrated thematic instruction, which teams teachers and subject matters on worthwhile common projects, problems or themes, and utilizes multiple intelligences strategies (see below) and other innovative teaching techniques.
Innovative instructional techniques:

In accordance with Howard Gardner's research on multiple intelligences and Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of learning, the Academy will employ a variety of instructional techniques designed to engage the students in multiple modes of learning, and to address individual learning styles, learning differences and diverse student populations. [According to multiple intelligences theory, these modes are defined as verbal, visual, rhythmic, logical, kinesthetic, intra-personal and interpersonal.] Such techniques will include:

- Incorporation of music, art, dance and other movement activities into all subject areas

- Patterned learning for subject mastery, such as the Neurological Impress Reading Method

- Computer-assisted learning

- Cooperative learning

- Expert and peer mentoring

- Apprenticeships

- Instruction by experts in the field

- On-site investigations

- Hands-on instruction in multiple technologies

- Experience-based learning

- Interactive video

All Academy students will participate in some form of the Future Problem Solving Program developed by the University of Michigan. This program teaches students how to work together to research problems, brainstorm possible solutions, and evaluate their solutions by developing weighted criteria. These techniques will be invaluable across the curriculum.

Our reading curriculum will include a specialized program which utilizes a combination of computer assisted instruction, Neurological Impress Reading and other multisensory methods. Over seven years of research has shown that this program has consistently produced higher gains in comprehension, word knowledge and other skills than the phonics-based programs traditionally used in many school systems. Results of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test have consistently reported a gain of approximately one year, eight months for special education/at-risk students enrolled in her program for one school year, compared to a four month gain for special education students not enrolled in the program. General education students have gained an average of three year, six months in one school year as compared to the ten month expected gain for this population. In addition, MAT test scores for general education at-risk students enrolled in this program have indicated a gain from two percentile points to over 22 percentile points on the Total Reading portion.

Curriculum
Career development

A Business Advisory Board will assist in developing our "real life" curriculum that will include ongoing aptitude, occupational and interest assessment, and will prepare our students for the world of work, as well as for higher educational pursuits.

Students will perform career research and development through a variety of techniques, including assessment and exploration software, job shadowing, internships, mentoring and apprenticeships.

Individualized education plans will be coordinated with student career paths.

Business
Through a variety of strategies including required student projects, Academy students will learn the basic functions of successful business entrepreneurship and management: product research and development, development of a simple business plan which includes financing and market research, production, marketing implementation, quality assurance, quality control, record-keeping, assessment of business performance, and employee-peer and employee- management relations. Appropriate courseware will be provided for instruction.

Each year, all students will be required to participate in selection, planning, implementation and marketing of individual and/or group business/entrepreneurial projects geared to their individual interests and abilities. These projects will include training in the specific endeavors chosen and in the accompanying business practices required, from the perspectives of entrepreneur, employer and employee.

School business projects will integrate all curricular areas. Possible projects include: production of laser-inscribed items produced by students through the ESHED Robotec computer-integrated manufacturing system; development of software games which teach core subject matter; production and distribution of a school mail-order catalogue and/or a virtual mail catalog through the internet.

Complimentary business projects between student groups, (such as manufacturer/retailer) will be encouraged. In addition, the Academy will seek partnerships with appropriate businesses for possible joint ventures and expert instruction.

It will be the intent of student projects to produce revenue. A portion of revenue generated will be returned to the school as seed money for further projects, for scholarships, and other appropriate uses. The Business Advisory Board will assist in developing an appropriate plan for distributing remaining revenues to students who produced or acted as support personnel for the project.

Technology:
The Academy will install a school-wide computer network which will include a minimum of one computer for every two students. Each classroom containing computers will also include with color ink jet printers and a laser printer.

The Academy will strive to offer the widest possible access to and training in modern technologies. Computer literacy will be incorporated throughout the curriculum. Students will receive continual instruction and practice in use of common computer software such as word-processing, spreadsheet, and database applications. Advanced training in specialized applications

and in computer programming will be provided as appropriate for the student's individual educational program.

The Academy will utilize computer-assisted instruction, which has been proven to be very effective for students of all levels. In combination with assistive technology, it is particularly effective for at-risk students, including poor readers, non-readers, ESL and special education students. The Academy will provide reading and math software which reflects the knowledge and skills required for specific occupations, and can be customized to fit the requirements of specific employers. In addition to core curriculum, software modules will address typing, employability skills, consumer skills, personal and life skills, test taking & test preparation, and English as a second language.

The Academy will subscribe to Educational Management Group's digital educational satellite network. EMG is owned by Paramount/Viacom and Simon &Schuster, and utilizes the considerable resources of these companies in providing a multitude of educational services, including:

- Custom curriculum designed to fit specific school needs and state requirements, and based upon the most current information and developments in the field. This curriculum can provide the basis of subject instruction or augment an existing program, and comes in the form of interactive "on-line" textbooks, live instruction and interaction around the world via satellite, and short video presentations. This will in many cases replace the purchase of hard cover textbooks which are out of date when they are printed and often contain serious inaccuracies or omissions, particularly in the science and social studies areas.

- Access by teachers and students through the internet and live via satellite to experts around the world, such as archeologist Kevin Weeks.

- Access by teachers to the entire Simon &Schuster library, including the ability to download and print books or portions of books for class instruction.

- Instruction and credit from major universities for Associate Degrees, teacher recertification and Masters Degrees.

- Satellite hookups to the homes of students or teachers for supplementary instruction and adult education.

Our curriculum will feature synergistic-style technology learning modules at exploratory, intermediate and advanced levels. Modules will provide hands-on, teamed instruction in a wide variety of current technologies such as robotics, flight technology, satellite communications, structural technology and meteorology. The most advanced level will articulate with two and four year colleges, and include architectural design &engineering, industrial design & engineering, electronic media &communications, and bioengineering. At this level, students will work in multi- disciplinary teams of 6, to 8 students; emulating industry research and developing work cells. All technology modules coordinate with core academic subjects, especially science, math and language arts, and provide extensive career exploration.

The Academy technology training program will also include the ESHED Robotec Advanced Manufacturing Technology Laboratory, a two-year course in computer-integrated manufacturing which includes laser, robotics, pneumatics and control technologies. Containing 780 hours of instruction, it is designed to articulate with two and four-year college programs. Academy students who successfully complete this program will be in a very good position to qualify for advanced placement at technical schools or colleges, including Michigan State University, which recently installed this same system in their engineering lab. Students will also be able to manufacture items for student business projects.

The Academy will house a CD-ROM resource library updated monthly, which will be provided

for both school and community use. It includes:

- Selected articles from over 500 domestic newspapers and wire services
- 60+ periodicals cover to cover
- 170+ science journals
- Government and United Nations documents
- 200+ international news wires, newspapers, broad casts and speeches
- Original historical documents
- Spanish language news wires
- Statistical database (over 200 sources)
- Business and career database
- USA Today, Christian Science Monitor and Detroit News cover to cover
- Professional teaching journals

Core academics:
Core academic subjects will be infused into all curricular areas and also taught as separate subjects where appropriate. Much of our reading and math software will be customized to incorporate the knowledge and skill requirements of specific occupations and businesses.

Community service:
All students will be required to incorporate some form of community service into their business projects as part of public relations skill building. This will also help to foster civic responsibility, self-esteem and compassion for others.

Partnerships:
The Academy is developing partnerships with business, other educational institutions and human services organizations to enhance curriculum and services offered.

Teacher training and evaluation

Teachers will be provided with professional development activities in collaboration with educational institutions and local ISD. Teachers will be required to abide by a code of conduct, and will be evaluated through a variety of measurements, including student performance, self-assessment, peer evaluation and student evaluation.

School Environment

Classroom design and environment:
The Academy will create a pleasant physical learning environment which fosters order, creativity and peaceful interaction. The Academy facility will incorporate environment enhancements such as non-traditional classroom designs (use of carpeting and modular furniture, for example), and psychologically beneficial use and choice of color in decor. Students will have opportunities to contribute design elements such as art work. This environment will encourage autonomous, self-directed learning.

Class size and student-teacher ratio:
Each class will be taught by a certified teacher or a professional expert. Class sizes shall usually be limited to 24 students, with a minimum of one teacher and one instructional aide for each class. When possible, parent volunteers will provide additional assistance. Aides and volunteers will be specifically trained to assist teachers and students.

"Small school" strategies:
To bring a sense of small school intimacy within the greater student population, students will be grouped into classroom "homes" within "family" units containing no more than six to eight classrooms. Class homes, families and the associated core teacher teams will stay together through consecutive years. Most instruction for each family unit will take place within a single wing.

Grade Compatible Grouping:
Because the Academy will house grades six through twelve in one building, a variety of strategies will be incorporated into the curriculum and scheduling design which will manage the interaction between younger and older students so that each age group can participate in activities appropriate for their maturity and interest levels, and still provide opportunities for positive modeling, mentoring, cross-age tutoring and cooperative learning situations.

Counseling and tutoring:
The Academy will employ a "teacher as counselor/tutor "system in which each teacher will have a "case load" of approximately 20 students, and time set aside each day for meeting with students as needed.

Intelligent inclusion:
The environmental design of our classrooms and the individualized curriculum will permit students to participate at different levels within the same classroom. This will allow gifted and talented students to proceed without hindrance, and provide opportunities for peer mentoring and tutoring. It will also allow inclusion of students with special needs without setting them up for failure. This type of inclusion, in which students of varying capabilities experience success in the same classroom, promotes the ability to communicate across cultural, social and intellectual barriers.

Violence prevention strategies:
The Academy subscribes to the goals and objectives of the Ingham County/City of Lansing Youth Violence Prevention Coalition and will work together with the Coalition task forces on

"School/Community Violence Prevention Programming" and "Educational Success for Youth at Risk." All school personnel and students will receive instruction in conflict resolution and mediation techniques. The Academy will consult with violence prevention experts in selecting appropriate curriculum and setting up a peer mediation program. Other prevention strategies will include student courts, violence prevention workshops for parents, and partnerships with appropriate organizations to provide mental health services. For students who have repeated behavioral problems, the Academy will implement a "wrap around" program with a host of support services for students and their families and establish behavioral contracts.

Student Personal Development

Expanded definition of gifted and talented: Our Academy will help students assess and develop their interests, abilities and talents through an expanded definition of "gifted and talented," as based on the research of Dr. John F. Feldhusen of Purdue University. This research identifies talents under the following categories: Academic- Intellectual, Artistic, Vocational-Technical, and Interpersonal-Social. Dr. Feldhusen's research states in part, "As children reach middle school and high school their talents become more specific and are more and more career oriented. Their talents are in physical science, home economics, creative writing, agriculture, foreign language learning, business subjects, drama, trade or industrial subjects, etc." He further states, "Increasingly children should take responsibility for their own educational progress and talent development...Those who go on to high level creative achievement become autonomous learners, independent and self-directory. "Through ongoing aptitude, occupational and interest assessment, we expect to find gifted and talented students among populations such as the at-risk, ESL, dyslexic and learning disabled students, whose gifts often go unrecognized due to lack of cultivation or inherent learning differences which have not been properly addressed. In addition, our educational curriculum design and classroom environment will encourage the development of autonomous, self-directed learning.

Academic Performance:
Students will be expected to master the subject matter in their classes (not simply just "get by") and to complete all assigned work. Problems in these areas will be identified early and remedial steps taken to correct them.

Student Empowerment:
The Academy will provide opportunities for student decision-making and involvement at multiple levels. Students will take part in developing policy and standards for student behavior through such activities as student government, student court, peer mediation and conflict resolution, mentoring, classroom and office student assistant opportunities, and other strategies. Student Council and other appropriate student groups will be invited to develop programs that will increase cooperative attitudes and discourage violent behavior. This may include 1) development or expansion of supervised recreation programs and after school activities; 2) creation of carpools for students who do not have access to rides; 3) networking and coordinating programs with youth groups from area churches, scouts and 4-H clubs. Students will serve as members of the Parent-Teacher-Student Association.

Transition assistance:

Our specialized curriculums and instructional techniques for students with learning differences will help to ease the transition of those qualifying for entrance into federal or state vocational rehabilitation programs. The Academy will also provide appropriate social and recognition activities at all grade levels to provide benchmarks of student progress. Transition assistance for work or further education after high school will be provided throughout students' schooling at the Academy. This will include counseling, mentoring, apprenticeships, on-site work experiences, opportunities for graduates to return as paid classroom assistants, assistance in finding suitable trade schools or colleges, help with identifying and applying for scholarships and other funding sources, and support in preparing for college entrance exams. Throughout their attendance at the Academy, all students will be taught to design, update and produce portfolios that are suitable for use in seeking higher education and/or employment. Portfolios will contain information on significant achievements, activities and goals.

Other Academy Activities

Model center:
The Academy envisions becoming a model educational center for teaching, testing and dissemination of innovative teaching methods and materials, as well as a model for exceptional teacher training, methods and materials.
Programs during non-school hours:
The Academy will offer after-school programs for its own students, family members, as well as for other schools and for the general public. Such programs may include reading remediation, parent training, adult education and extra-curricular activities.

Walter French Academy of Business and Technology Project Planning Group

APPENDIX D

Walter French Academy Newspaper Advertisement, 1996

Figure 1

This is the half-page advertisement announcing informational and teacher recruitment meetings for Walter French Academy of Business and Technology that appeared in *The State Journal* on May 22, 1996.

Brief Chronology of Events Relevant to Walter French Academy

Table 2

Year	Legal Actions	School Governance	School Organization	Principal
1994	Michigan's charter school laws passed, enabling authorization and opening of charter schools (public school academies).			
1996	Central Michigan University (CMU) grants 5 year charter to open Walter French Academy (WFA)	WFA's school board: • Fired Innovative Learning Solutions • Hired The Leona Group	Grades 6-12	Marion Oliver
1998			Grades 4-5 added	Susan James
1999			Montessori, Grades 1-3 added	
2000				John Dorlin
2001	CMU re-authorizes WFA charter for 3 years			
2002				Madeline Jones
2004	CMU does not re-authorize WFA charter	Board is unable to secure new authorizer. WFA closes.		

APPENDIX F

A Statement Regarding My Historiographical Interpretations

The lens or framework for interpretation I chose was primarily to personalize and humanize the people and events that I was recounting. My choice was to write about an institution but to put a very human face on it.

I chose transcript examples for their evocative and vibrant language. Therefore, I made decisions about what to include or exclude on this basis. For example, I made choices among several examples of similar content based on what I determined was interesting language. I chose the responses of Dan Meadows because of the vibrancy of his description and his colorful use of metaphor as he made sense of his understandings and his experiences at WFA. His descriptions have a literary quality that some historians would disregard. However, I do not, because I argue that his descriptions personalize the events that he experienced and relate to the reader the strength of his emotional involvement to the school and community in its early stages of construction. I chose Meadows' words rather than Doris Delaney's words because they said basically the same thing but Meadows spoke more eloquently.

I also included many direct quotes from my interview with Harry Ross. He spoke in such a way that not only his words but the tone of his speech helped construct meaning in powerful ways. Therefore in several instances I chose his words over those of Dave Hinds who spoke similarly but more dispassionately.

In one section of his interview, the tone of Ernest Wakeman, the first board president at WFA, suggests his incredulity at getting a phone call in which he feels he is left to make the decision as to whether or not WFA is to open in 1996. Both Madeline Jones as board vice-president and John Smith of The Leona Group recount this time approximately the same. I chose to include Wakeman's description because it expresses more powerfully the drama of Walter French Academy's beginning.

I chose not to include responses for several reasons. Broadly speaking, interviews often covered a great deal of territory and included discussions, for example, about the future of charter schools from an interviewee's position. At the end of interviews, I asked what interviewees thought of charter schooling as a result of being part of WFA and in the time since their involvement with the school. These discussions were interesting, but I chose not to analyze this information as part of this project.

Over the course of my project, my skill developed as an interviewer. At first, I stayed with my chosen list of prompts and missed the chance to probe questions more deeply. With experience and practice, I began to make better use of the opportunities that presented themselves during the course of an interview. Thus, some interview material was less rich and I was less likely to choose it as part of my analysis.

I decided close to the finish of my analysis to leave out a chapter that I had planned to include in the dissertation. The purpose of this chapter was to analyze a particular set of discursive moves that

exemplified the ways that language constructs meaning, specifically by examining the title *Board Liaison Officer* and the construction of the Board of Directors at WFA as a *working board.* While I made reference to this language in other chapters, I made the decision to exclude some of interviews and therefore several segments of transcripts.

So the first part of my "interpretation" consisted of the selections I made about which excerpts of quotations to include as part of the chapters. Then, when I "explained" those quotations, I kept three principles in the forefront: fairness, multiple dimensions, and humanization. By fairness, I mean that I made every effort never to contradict or omit any facet of information. I did not censor any factors just because they did not fit into my preconceptions about how I should tell the story.

By "multiple dimensions," I mean I was committed to relating a many-faceted and incoherent account. For example, in the discussion about community, I wanted to include both the administration's perspective and the teachers'. I also included both the perspectives of The Leona Group, Central Michigan University and the school board at WFA when I considered the overlays of governance and struggle for authority at the school.

By "humanization," I mean that I always remembered that these were real people involved. My interpretations were always guided by a commitment to respect them as people with dignity. I tried never to demonize or vilify any of the participants, and I earnestly sought to understand their perspectives regarding both the events that took place at WFA and their experience of them.

In the preceding sections I have attempted to make explicit some of the ways I made decisions regarding my interviews and interpretations. It should be noted that these principles and patterns were identified after the fact. That is, I did not determine the principles of selection or interpretation before the writing. Rather, the writing process itself was a discovery process in which I came gradually to understand— reflexively—how I work as an historian.

I must also say that some decisions were made on the basis of chance. Did I push my questioning one step further to allow for more interrogation of a respondent's thinking, or did I stop a line of questioning and move on to another? It is always possible. When I read and re-read the transcriptions did I catch something that was potentially provocative and germane or did I miss it completely? Maybe. Each reading brought something new to mind, but more readings would undoubtedly produce other material for interpretation.

Throughout this project, I wrote about what I knew, but mostly what I wanted to know more about. The challenge was always to balance these two, the known and the unknown, in some way that made for an effective history with coherent arguments made ethically. I was at all times accountable to the data but not determined by it. As such, I have made choices and offered interpretations that do not run counter to the record, but I hope enhance and extend in some way conventional understandings and assumptions about it.

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