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**FITTING IN: HOW TWO NEW TEACHERS PERCEIVED AND RELATED TO
THE DOMINANT NORMS AT A HIGH SCHOOL**

**A Masters Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate Program in
Communications
Ithaca College**

**In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Science**

by

Barbara Rivera

August 2007

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Abstract

New teachers are vital for maintaining the U.S. education system as teacher retirements increase; yet, they are becoming difficult to retain. In fact, a high percentage of new teachers leave their positions after only a few years. Everyone loses – school districts, students, and communities – when valuable new teachers do not stay in the teaching profession for more than a short time. In this case study, the socialization experiences of two new teachers at a public high school were explored in order to illustrate how they learned about their school's norms (as informed by and reflected in values), and how the norms they perceived might have influenced their inclinations to stay with or to leave their positions. The study results offer rich descriptions that readers may be able to relate to their own situations and experiences. It also contributes to previous research suggesting that one's perception of 'fit' with organizational norms can influence one's decision to stay with or leave the organization.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2006) reports that there are approximately 3.8 million public school teachers and, during the next ten years, a large number of them are expected to retire and will need to be replaced. This situation suggests a wonderful employment opportunity for people interested in becoming teachers. However, according to Baldacci (2006), “one-third of new teachers quit after three years and nearly half bail out after five years” (p. 8). Everyone loses – school districts, students, and communities – when valuable new teachers do not stay in the teaching profession for more than a short time. As Darling-Hammond (2003) suggests, “well prepared capable teachers have the largest impact on student learning and they need to be treasured and supported” (p. 7).

In this case study, I used face-to-face interview data from two new teachers and three existing school members to explore the socialization experiences of the two new teachers at a public high school. As suggested by Myers (2000), through small qualitative studies it is possible to “gain a more personal understanding of the phenomenon and the results can potentially contribute valuable knowledge to the community” (para. 9). My aim was to understand how the new teachers learned about their school's norms (as informed by and reflected in values), and to explore how the norms they perceived might have influenced their inclinations to stay with or to leave their new positions. Previous research has suggested that socialization processes in organizations can have significant impacts on newcomers' adjustments

(Ashforth, Saks, & Lee, 1998; Jones, 1983; Louis, 1980). The results of this case study contribute to prior research suggesting that one's perception of 'fit' with organizational norms can influence one's decision to stay with or leave the organization. Additionally, the study provides rich descriptions of participant experiences that readers might relate to their own knowledge and circumstances.

Chapter 2. Background

I am interested workplace dynamics as a result of my previous corporate management roles. I have often wondered why some people fit easily into new groups while others do not. I am also drawn to the notion that a newcomer's successful adaptation to an organization's norms and their associated values might play a role in successful group entry. Rokeach (1979) suggested that values are "the most distinctive property or defining characteristics of a social institution" (p. 51). In addition, according to O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell (1991), "congruency between an individual's values and those of an organization may be at the crux of person-culture fit" (p. 492). These interests drove my selection of a thesis topic addressing the issues of newcomers and group socialization.

In addition, I am familiar with many terms and practices used in public school settings due to the heartfelt stories that have been shared with me over the years by family members and close friends who work in public school systems. Some of those stories underscored how difficult it was becoming to retain quality teachers in public schools. Several studies suggest that 50% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years of entry (Huling-Austin, 1990; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Murnane et al., 1991). As a result, I decided to study the socialization experiences of new teachers and the potential link between socialization experiences and attrition.

While no single factor is likely to be responsible for new teacher attrition (Gold, 1996; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006), numerous studies have

identified specific factors that may influence the retention of teachers. Some have explored teacher retention rates in relation to student populations (Kelly, 2004; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). For instance, schools with higher proportions of minority, low-income, and low-performing students tend to experience higher teacher attrition rates (Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006). Other studies have explored the correlation between teachers' salaries and retention rates (Brewer, 1996; Hanushek et al., 2004; Podgursky et al., 2004). Still others have explored whether mentoring programs can influence teacher retention (Holloway, 2001; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Strong & St. John, 2001). Gold (1996) conducted an extensive survey of scholarly research regarding the challenges faced by beginning teachers and stated that "additional research regarding professional and social integration into teaching is essential to assist new teachers" (p. 554). She specifically called for the development of more case studies and stated that "future development of professional case literature could give teachers insight as they learn from one another throughout the country" (p. 585). This case study contributes to the body of literature regarding the processes associated with the integration of new teachers' into school cultures, especially those processes involving the communication of organizational norms. It offers rich descriptions and insights that readers can reflect upon and potentially relate to their own experiences and situations.

My objective for this study was to illustrate the experiences of two new teachers as they were socialized into a high school and learned about its dominant norms and associated values. As Kraimer (1997) suggests, "it is

important to examine how newcomers learn organizational goals and values” (p. 427). By exploring the experiences of *two* teachers, I felt that there would be opportunities to compare and contrast their perceptions in my illustrations.

I found this topic intriguing because knowledge about an organization’s norms that is not always easy to share. Louis (1990) wrote that because “cultural knowledge is tacit, contextual, informal, unofficial, shared, emergent...insiders cannot simply print up a sheet summarizing it” (p. 89). Instead, existing teachers and administrators have to find other ways to communicate their most important organizational norms and values to new teachers. New teachers, in turn, have to find ways to interpret and make sense of the cues and communications they receive from existing school members. The descriptions provided by the study’s participants enabled me explore the following research questions:

- How are dominant norms perceived at the school?
- How are those norms communicated to new teachers?
- How do new teachers learn about the school’s norms?
- How do new teachers’ perceptions of dominant school norms impact their perceptions of fit within the school?

Chapter 3. Literature Review

This exploration into the experiences of two new teachers and the norms of their school is based on the notion of a school as an organization. Therefore, scholarly literature about *organizational culture* was critical to this study. Additionally, the study investigated communication processes, practices, and patterns that emerged as the new teachers were socialized into the high school organization and learned about its norms. As a result, literature about *organizational socialization* also provided many useful terms and concepts for the study.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture has no single definition and is described by researchers in varying ways. For example, Allaire and Firsirotu (1984) view organizational cultures as systems of ideas. Similarly, Alvesson (2002) states that “organizational culture is best conceptualized as complex patterns of meanings, ideas and symbolism” (p. 68). Other researchers focus on organizational culture as comprised of shared meanings. For instance, according to Hess (1993) organizational culture is “the shared knowledge among members of an organization in regards to systems of knowledge, common values, ideologies, norms, and rituals” (p. 190). Still other researchers view organizational culture as a social construction. Morgan (1997) writes that organizational culture “must be understood as an active, living phenomenon through which people jointly create and recreate the worlds in which they live” (p. 141). These examples represent only a few of the many definitions of

organizational culture. For this study, the definition expressed by Bond (1999) will be used, which states that the “culture of an organization is a reflection of core values, beliefs, and shared meanings, and is the product of experience and interactions over time” (p. 331).

Within an organization’s culture, *norms* emerge. Norms are “the common standards or ideas that guide member behavior in established groups” (Bowditch & Buono, 2001). According to Hogg and Reid (2006), “norms are *shared* patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior” (p. 8) that can shape and motivate behaviors and expectations of others’ behaviors. For instance, at a meeting, the habit of raising one’s hand and being recognized by the leader before speaking is an example of a norm. This norm may be the leader’s preference, an organizational standard, or simply a commonplace practice in the larger professional community. Whatever the basis for the practice, raising one’s hand before speaking is part of what the group has come to view as “normal” behavior.

Hogg and Reid (2006) suggest that norms can be *injunctive* or *prescriptive*. One follows injunctive norms because one perceives the possibility of social sanctions by others if the norms are violated. In comparison, one follows prescriptive norms in order to adhere to one’s internal, self-identify. For example, the norm of raising one’s hand in a meeting would be injunctive for someone who feels that he or she will lose social status by speaking without first being recognized. The norm would be prescriptive for someone whose self-concept includes the importance of respecting leadership by raising one’s hand.

In fact, the norm would probably be invisible to that member because it is so closely related to his or her self-concept.

Norms act as guides in organizations. Hogg and Reid (2006) suggest that “people internalize group norms as prototypes that govern their perception, attitudes, feelings, and behavior” (p.23). For instance, if someone identifies strongly with an in-group, and acceptance within that group is important to that person, then the in-group’s norms could develop *prescriptive* potential to influence that person’s behavior. This internalization happens as the group’s norms become linked to the person’s self-concept and the norms contribute to how the person defines himself or herself. This was sometimes apparent during the study when the new teachers’ perceptions of the high school’s dominant norms appeared to influence their identities as teachers.

Organizational norms are informed by and reflect organizational *values*. Conklin, Jones, and Safrit (1992) suggest that an organizational value is “any concept or idea that is held in high esteem by the members of an organization and that shapes the organization’s philosophy, processes and goals” (p. 1). Organizational values guide the activities of an organization and communicate what it regards as most important (Hitt, 1988).

It is important to note that the values and norms that develop in a group or organization are interwoven and connected, like a cultural cloth. For instance, when considering the extent to which values determine norms, Pennings and Gresov (1986) suggest that “the best evidence of what values exist often lies in norms. But the existence of a norm is usually evidenced by regularities of

behavior and hence the whole explanation becomes tautological” (p. 323).

Therefore, due to this close interconnection, the term norm will be understood throughout the manuscript as including associated values.

Additionally, it is important to note that organizational cultures and their associated values and norms are not stable. The social interaction that creates them continually modifies and changes them. However, for newcomers entering an organization for the first time, the norms that exist at that entry point are the ones that confront them and the ones to which they must initially orient. As a result, this study will explore the norms that two new teachers encountered at a particular point in time, as well as their interpretations of those norms. It will contain retrospective accounts of the norms and values that the new teachers became aware of and expressed in their interviews.

Norms are primarily communicated and enacted in organizations through social interaction processes (Reichers, 1987), especially *discourse*. Prasad (1997) describes discourse as “the entire ensemble of ongoing enunciatory practices including writing, every day speech and conversation, media representations, and electronic text” (p. 141). Discourse is more than just language; it is an interactive process of which language is a key part. According to Holquist (1990), “discourse does not reflect a situation, it *is* a situation” (p. 90). Discourse does much to inform newcomers about the norms of an organization. For instance, certain language might suggest to newcomers whether their group or organization values maintaining the status quo or prefers to focus on

innovation. Frequent use of phrases in conversation like, “don’t rock the boat” or “stay the course,” might indicate that the status quo is valued over innovation.

Telling stories, or *narrative discourse* is an “essential resource in the struggle to bring experiences into conscious awareness” (Ochs and Capps, 1996, p. 21). According to Biber (1995), narrative discourse describes events in the past and often involves a chronological order. Vincent and Perrin (1999) suggest that discourse that does not move a story along chronologically is non-narrative and is used, for example, during the communication of emotions or in argumentation. However, narrative can also be the process of placing a configuration of events into a meaningful order that is not necessarily chronological. For example, narrative entails distinguishing characters from context, describing characters as victims or agents, providing motives as causes, drawing upon traditional plot structures such as tragedy, etc. (Langellier, 1989; Shaw, 1997). Through narratives, individuals actively construct stories that reflect their interpretations of events, situations, and persons (including themselves). According to Dyer and Keller-Cohen (2000), “through transforming knowing into telling, narrative is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful” (p. 284).

Additionally, discourse organizes relationships and identities in groups and organizations. “Discourse not only structures expectations for what kinds of messages should be performed, when, and in what context, it also structures expectations for the kinds of identities and relationships individuals should form with the organization and other organizational members” (Barge & Schlueter,

2004, p. 236). Consequently, discourse in organizations is closely tied to power relations. Mumby (1988) states that “discourse is a product of (and reproduces) the dominant power interests in organizations; it is the principle means by which the dominant ideological meaning structures in an organization perpetuate themselves” (p. 97). For instance, those in more powerful positions at the high school than the new teachers, such as veteran teachers or administrators, appeared to reinforce their positions of power and identities, either intentionally or unintentionally, by the way they communicated with the new teachers. Study participants often described discourse events in which normative power relationships were implicitly communicated.

Another area of interest that is often a component of processes within an organizational culture is *identity*. Scholarly definitions of identity and identity construction are quite varied. For example, according to Giddens (1991), identity is “an ongoing ‘story’ about the self” (p. 54). In contrast, Warin, Maddock, Pell, and Hargreaves (2006) describe identity as “a sense making device, which provides the illusion of consistency, that is of repetition of characteristics over time, and performs a vital function in governing our choices and decision-making” (p. 235). Horrocks & Callahan (2006) state that “identity is an emotional process that is understood through personal reflection and enactment with others” (p. 71). When viewed from the perspective of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), an individual’s identity construction is interactive and involves aspects of both personal identity and social identity. Personal identity involves a person’s self-view in terms of individual traits and attributes. A person’s social identity

develops from attributes acquired from one's group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In organizations, individuals regularly construct, modify, and maintain their identities through processes such as personal reflection, telling stories, and interacting with others.

In this study, the social identities of teachers as professionals, also referred to as *teacher professional identity*, was a prominent concept. Rhodes (2006) states, "The construction of a teacher's professional identity is an ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences by the individual, so that they may understand who they are now and who they want to become (Beijaard et al., 2004)" (p. 159). Teachers' professional identities are generally constructed in relation to others. Therefore, of particular interest was the notion of teachers as public performers or actors who are responsible to multiple audiences with disparate expectations, such as students, parents, administrations, communities, and governments. According to Warin et al. (2006), "it is this essentially public nature of teaching, and the diverse range of mirrors in which teachers find themselves reflected, that may render teachers' more than other professionals' identities problematic" (p. 234). Throughout the study, the new teachers shared stories that demonstrated their struggles with developing and maintaining their professional identities as they interacted with members of the high school culture. These stories were often connected to processes and practices of organizational socialization.

Organizational Socialization

When someone new enters a group or organization, that person has to gain knowledge about its norms and about his or her own role in relation to them. According to Schein (1992), one of the major activities for new members entering a group is to decipher its norms and assumptions in order to understand others' expectations for them. *Organizational socialization* is the process through which new members enter a group and "learn the values, norms, expectations, and established procedures for assuming a particular role and for becoming an accepted member of the group or organization" (Bowditch & Buono, 2001, p. 146). Put another way, "it is the process of transforming an individual from outsider to insider" (Hess, 1993, p. 194). The literature about organizational socialization encompasses a wide range of perspectives, many of which are considered in this study.

For example, because aspects of a group or an organization's identity and norms are often implicit and unwritten, Louis (1980) suggests that newcomers being socialized into an organization need help in making sense of and interpreting their new settings because they experience "disorientation, foreignness, and a kind of sensory overload" (p. 230). Consequently, newcomers, either consciously or unconsciously, try to reduce role ambiguity and uncertainty and look for interpretive schemes that enable them to "define the expectations of others and thus to orient their behavior to others" (Jones, 1983, p. 465). The *sensemaking* done by newcomers is an important aspect of organizational socialization.

Ashmos and Nathan (2002) describe sensemaking as “an interpretive process in which people assign meaning to ongoing occurrences” (p. 202). Weick (1995) suggests that, “sensemaking is about authoring as well as interpretation, creation as well as discovery” (p. 8). Louis (1980) contends that newcomers have particular sensemaking needs and that “they need help in interpreting events in the new setting, including surprises, and help in appreciating situation-specific interpretation schemes or cultural assumptions” (p. 244). As a result, newcomers often develop understandings of what events and situations mean through interactions with others. “Sense-making requires talking, interaction, conversation, argument and dialogue with others” (Ashmos & Nathan, 2002, p. 204). During the study, participants described many instances where they came to understand norms at the school through discussions with others and through sharing stories.

Utilizing past experiences is also a component of sensemaking. Jones (1983) suggests that prior learning experiences influence a person’s orientation toward a group or organization. Relying on past experience helps a newcomer make sense of the context of new situations in order to act appropriately. For instance, if a newcomer to a group were to find that sharing personal information during meetings was valued in a previous group experience, that newcomer might share some personal stories as a way to connect with the new group. However, if the new group does not value the sharing of personal information at meetings, the newcomer might find him/herself behaving inappropriately in that context because of assumptions made based on past experience.

The reflection upon past experiences also creates expectations that a newcomer brings to new situations. The extent to which these expectations are met in the new situation can impact the newcomer's feelings of uncertainty or ambiguity. *Cognitive dissonance* (Festinger, 1957) occurs when one perceives inconsistency in one's beliefs or attitudes or "when one element would not be expected to follow from another" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 77). When experiencing dissonance, individuals strive to reduce it by making changes that will return them to a more balanced state. Also, when there is dissonance, taken-for-granted social norms and practices become *visible* because there is conflict and situations are unfolding in unexpected ways.

Therefore, if an event occurs as a newcomer expects, he or she would likely feel secure and proceed without even noticing the norms or practices involved in the event. However, if an unexpected or surprising event occurs, norms and practices would become more visible to the newcomer. For example, while comparing his or her expectations with an unexpected event, a newcomer might reflect upon the norms involved in the event, consider how his or her norms relate to the event, and make adjustments to try to reduce his or her discomfort, or dissonance, with the event.

Additionally when an unexpected or surprising event occurs, emotions can become significant in sensemaking. According to Weick (1995), an interruption of what is expected "induces an emotional response, which then paves the way for emotion to influence sensemaking" (p. 45). Newcomers are bombarded with ambiguity and the unexpected when they join an organization, so emotions are

likely to be prominent in many of their sensemaking experiences. Incongruence with expectations also initiates attempts to make sense of the incongruity in order to try to make it congruent with previous experience, which is sometimes possible and sometimes not. These efforts to reduce dissonance are sometimes demonstrated when people attempt to create a coherent narrative.

In spite of the fact that emotions are an important component of organizational life, historically, rationality has been privileged in organizations (Fiebig & Kramer, 1998; Fineman, 2000; Putman & Mumby, 1993). Because of this inequity between the perceived value of emotional viewpoints and rational viewpoints, Dougherty and Drumheller (2006) suggest that workers must often “tread a treacherous path between the emotions they experience and the socialized expectations of rationality in the workplace” (p. 216). This awkward balance can cause employees to mask emotions at work. For example, during the study interviews, participants often expressed relief at being able to express their emotions and tell their stories. The accounts of participants’ sensemaking processes were full of language expressing emotions such as pride, frustration, fear, joy, and defiance.

The sensemaking associated with socialization also includes trial and error processes, as newcomers negotiate their positions and degree of alignment within the group or organization. Weick (1995) suggests that “people learn about their identities by projecting them into an environment and observing the consequences” (p. 23). For instance, the experiences shared by new teachers included stories of actions they took that were well-received by the organization

and others that were not. The outcomes of their trial and error efforts provided them with clues regarding the norms of the high school and how they might adapt in order to better align with them.

Information acquisition processes conducted through interactions with colleagues were also helpful to the new teachers in their attempts to understand the norms at the school. Comer (1991) suggests that newcomers obtain information from peers in three basic ways. One is *active explicitly*, such as asking direct questions; another is *passive explicitly*, such as observing a particular behavior and then asking questions of others about it; and finally *implicitly*, such as observing a behavior and considering it without discussing it with others. Additionally, newcomers can also acquire information on an unconscious level without realizing it.

For instance, newcomers can use *associative interpretation* processes that include receiving signs, interpreting them, and placing meaning on them at an unconscious level (Ringer, 2002) in order to acquire information. For example, someone might want to learn who the most powerful colleague is in his or her department. Unconsciously, that person might note the behaviors of several colleagues, recall powerful others who displayed those same behaviors, and decide that one particular colleague has the most power in the department. This conclusion would be based on unconscious associations between observed behaviors and memories about other powerful people. Unconscious processes are important to “human functioning because if we consciously decided the significance and meaning of every event, no matter how tiny, we would be

exhausted (Ringer, 2002, p. 121). In this study, the newcomers appeared to use both unconscious and conscious information acquisition methods in their efforts to learn about the norms of the school.

The term *organizational fit* is also connected to practices and processes that occur during organizational socialization. Chatman (1989) describes organizational fit as “the congruence between the norms and values of organizations and the values of persons” (p. 339). According to Cooper-Thomas, van Vianen, and Anderson (2004), organizational fit refers to “the match between an individual’s own values and the values of their organization” (p. 52). New employees learn about the norms and values of an organization through socialization processes (Chatman, 1989) and, during these processes, they continually assess their alignment with those norms and values. When a new employee successfully socializes into an organization “the member will ‘see’ his or her ‘reflection’ in the social mirror of the collective; the interest of the individual and the organization will overlap” (Cheney, 1983, p. 147). This assessment leads to an individual’s perception of ‘fit’ with the organization.

Research by O’Reilly, et al. (1991) indicates that person-organization fit was a significant factor in predicting turnover intentions. Additional research suggests that if someone finds that they do not fit with an organization, it is likely that they will choose to leave that organization (Schneider, 1987; Sims & Kroeck, 1994). This study explored how this notion of organizational fit might influence the turnover rates of new teachers.

Chapter 4. Theoretical Framework

Three broad theoretical perspectives provided helpful frameworks for viewing the complex and dynamic aspects of the new teachers' socialization experiences. The first perspective, *social constructionism*, "focuses on how reality (and many other concepts) result from interaction processes within social groups" (Frey & Sunwolf, 2004, p. 279). Within this perspective, communication is the primary social process through which people create realities, cultures, and identities. It shapes what is expressed and even what is thought (Grimes & Richard, 2002). Additionally, Reichers (1987) suggests that, "newcomers change aspects of their social selves and come to attach meaning to aspects of organizational life through the interpersonal exchanges they engage in with others in the setting" (p. 281). In the study, the two new teachers often learned about and made sense of the high school's dominant school norms through conversations and interactions with others. In addition, the study interviews themselves provided additional opportunities for the new teachers to reflect upon and make sense of the norms at the school.

A second perspective that builds on the framework of social constructivism is *structuration theory* (ST), which was developed by Anthony Giddens (1984). Frey and Sunwolf (2004) describe ST as an approach that explains how action within groups becomes structured through interaction. According to Poole and McPhee (2005), "the key idea in ST is that every action, every episode of interaction, has two aspects: It 'produces' the practices of which it is part...and it 'reproduces' the system and its structure, usually in a small way, as changed or

stable” (p. 175). Within this perspective, as high school staff members enacted the norms of the high school, they reinforced those norms and implicitly communicated the values that created those norms to the new teachers. Consequently, the new teachers were confronted with a ‘structure’ of norms at the high school which they attempted to reconcile with their own values and beliefs about their roles as teachers. Those new teachers who accepted dominant norms also reinforced the norms.

A third theoretical perspective reflected in this study is *standpoint theory*, which “focuses on how the circumstances of an individual’s life affect how that individual understands and constructs a social world” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005, p. 89). One’s ‘standpoint’ results from the intersection of the many identities and experiences that shape a person’s sense of self, including age, gender, cultural background, etc. The theory initially emerged from the work of feminist scholars (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Wood, 1992) to address the perspectives of women, which are marginalized by the white, male-oriented hegemonic discourses of Western society. However, by considering standpoint theory in a broader sense, it becomes possible to consider the unique standpoints of the study participants in relation to the established norms of the high school. This theory was especially helpful for viewing the new teachers in this study, who were a minority in the school and appeared to have a lower status in relation to veteran school members and administrators.

Several social-psychological concepts and theories also aligned well with this investigation. The first is *social comparison theory* (Festinger, 1954), which

suggests that a person makes comparisons with other people in order to develop his or her own self-concept. For instance, if a group holds strong linear analytical abilities in high regard, people joining that group and lacking those abilities might develop a poor self-concept. If people align well with the norm of analytical ability, they will more likely feel more positive about themselves and group members may also feel more positive about them. This notion is what Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) describe as *homophily*, “the tendency for people to be attracted to others who have similar attitudes, beliefs, and personal characteristics” (in Hinds et al., 2000, p. 228).

The *similarity-attraction paradigm*, suggested by Byrne (1971), proposes that people are attracted to those who are similar to themselves in visible traits and/or attitudes and strive for predictability. Therefore, people tend to categorize themselves and others in order to determine who is similar to them and who is not. A person engages in this categorization process, often unconsciously, in order to reduce uncertainty and to enhance self-esteem (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000).

In *self-categorization theory*, Turner (1987) suggests that while making comparisons with others, people place themselves and others into categories based on observable attributes, such as behaviors or appearances. Hogg and Reid (2006) advise that social categorization often “depersonalizes our perceptions of people – they are not viewed as unique individuals but as embodiments of the attributes of their group” and this categorization process can “generate stereotypical expectations and encourages stereotype-consistent interpretation of ambiguous behaviors” (p. 10).

Social comparison theory, homophily, the similarity-attraction paradigm, and self-categorization theory all contribute to *social identity theory* (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory proposes that once comparisons are made, people tend to categorize themselves and others into groups. *In-groups* are comprised of oneself and similar others, *out-groups* are comprised of different others, and in-group members are generally evaluated more positively than out-group members. One's *social identity* develops, in part, through the social groups and categories to which one belongs (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Tajfel (1972) defines social identity as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (p. 292). Additionally, in social identity theory, one's *self-concept* is constructed from one's social identity plus one's *personal identity*, which is made up of unique aspects of self, such as introversion or extroversion (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

When I explored how the two new teachers dealt with the dominant norms at the high school, these fundamental, interconnected theories involving social evaluations and identity development became relevant and useful. During the study, both new teachers' indicated that they continually compared their perceptions of school practices with those of other veteran school members. Based on their perceptions of similarities or differences with the views of the veterans, the new teachers often communicated their implicit constructions of in-groups and out-groups through the language they used, the stories they shared, and the feelings they expressed about themselves.

Chapter 5. Methodology

Participant Recruitment

I solicited study participants from a public school district in New York State to which I obtained access through its office of personnel. I was given the opportunity to speak at a meeting of new staff members and their mentors. After speaking about my proposed case study and inviting attendees to participate, I left consent forms and my contact information. I also provided similar information for the school's director of personnel to distribute to other teachers and staff who had not attended the meeting. Two new teachers and three veteran staff members chose to participate in the study.

I took steps to maintain participant confidentiality throughout the study as recommended by Corbin and Morse (2003), who suggest that "in the research situation, the risk of breaking confidentiality can be minimized through scrupulous attention to record handling and the concealing of identifying information" (p. 336). To maintain confidentiality, I did not reveal the names of participants to anyone, I conducted interviews at locations that were not associated with the school, and I changed participant names to pseudonyms in my report. I also took care not to report information that could link participants to particular statements or situations.

Data Collection

My investigation was qualitative in design and I primarily used confidential interviews to obtain data. I selected this approach because the sense-making processes entailed in socialization are complex, dynamic, and fluid. Ivancevich

and Gilbert (2000) offer that “the complexities of organizational life are usually not well captured using data tapes, historical records, or completed surveys” (p. 86). Therefore, in order to better understand the experiences of the new teachers, I concentrated on gathering data through stories shared in face-to-face interviews that included expressions of feelings, past experiences, and contradictory thinking. According to Horrocks and Callahan (2006), “narratives capture fragments of identity as it is communicated through representational stories, created from experiences and reflected from individual perspectives (Eisenberg, 2001; Gilbert, 2002)” (pp. 69 - 70).

Within a qualitative research design, I selected a case study approach. In case study research, “the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals” (Creswell, 2003, p.15). Case studies provide important context-dependent knowledge that emerges from real-life experiences. As Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests, “context-dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity ... it is only because of experience with cases that one can at all move from being a beginner to being an expert” (p. 222). Additionally, case studies enable objects and situations to be viewed in new ways. Ruddin (2006) cites Edward Said who offers the following insight: “Study an object in isolation and you will only be able to bring it back to itself. Seeing an object in the midst of beings who are connected with each other in many different ways...and you will discover for this object a wider scope of relationships” (p. 798). From the context-dependent knowledge resulting from this study, it was my intention to contribute to broader understandings about new

teacher socialization experiences in the educational community. I also wanted to provide readers with a humanistic understanding of two particular teachers in order to demonstrate the complexity of their experiences, which is valuable in its own right because it is “research that can inform and enhance readers’ understandings” (Myers, 2000, para. 11).

Two new teachers at a public high school were my unit of analysis. I sought to illustrate, compare, and contrast their unique experiences as they began their new positions. I was especially interested in how they learned about and dealt with the dominant norms they encountered. Additionally, I gathered contextual information from three veteran staff member participants and from a number of school documents. I intended that the case study would provide insights that could potentially be transferred to other situations by the readers through the process of *naturalistic generalization* as proposed by Robert Stake (1982). Naturalistic generalization “advocates a realignment of responsibility to generalize away from the researcher toward the reader” (Ruddin, 2006, p. 804). By illustrating my case fully through descriptions and interview excerpts, it was my hope that readers would make their own judgments about how aspects of the case study might transfer to their own professional situations. Additionally, the case study provided support for the conclusions of other research studies about organizational socialization.

I used three data collection methods for the study: audio-taped, unstructured interviews with new teachers; audio-taped, semi-structured interviews with veteran school members; and document analysis. I chose the

first method -- unstructured interviews -- because it opened up safe spaces in which participants could take time to fully describe their complex ideas, perceptions, and feelings. Corbin and Morse (2003) state that “unstructured interactive interviews are shared experiences in which researchers and interviewees come together to create a context of conversational intimacy in which participants feel comfortable telling their story” (p. 338). Mishler (1986) suggests that “telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning” (p. 67). Stories can also help people to make sense of their experiences and convey norms, values, and assumptions.

Stories shared as personal narratives enable memories to take shape through language (Shaw, 1997). Through narratives, storytellers can verbalize past experiences to help make sense of present situations. In addition, storytellers can present their views of themselves or even communicate their views of others to those who listen to their stories. According to Shaw (1997), “in everyday life, within everyday social practices, people tell each other stories as a means of constructing and negotiating social identity (Bauman, 1986; Langellier, 1989)” (p. 303). The unstructured interviews that I conducted during my study enabled participants to share stories and personal narratives.

Most of the data gathered for this study were obtained during the first few months after the two new teachers began their jobs. This time period was of particular interest for the study because “organizational socialization research has consistently shown that the first 3 to 4 months following entry are critical for newcomers’ longer term adjustment... Therefore, it is likely that much of any

value change that does occur, does so in this period" (Cooper-Thomas, van Vianen, & Anderson, 2004, p. 59). My unstructured interviews with the two new teachers took place in December 2006, after the teachers had been employed at the high school for over three months. I conducted two unstructured interview sessions with each new teacher. The combined length of each new teacher's two interviews was approximately two hours.

In addition, in order to gather contextual data, I conducted one-hour, semi-structured interviews with each of three veteran high school members during February 2007. I interviewed two teachers and one professional support staff member using specific questions based on topics that emerged from the interviews with the newcomers. My intention was to learn about their perceptions of school norms, their experiences with new teachers, and their impressions of the high school environment through a series of prepared questions. I used a semi-structured format instead of an unstructured format in order to stay focused on specific topics.

It is important to note that as the researcher/interviewer, I played a key role in both the unstructured and structured interviews because they were conversational interactions. As Holstein and Gubrium (1997) suggest, "meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter" (p. 114). I was a focused listener in the interview conversations and I encouraged participants to do most of the talking. However, I also spoke at times to establish commonalities with the participants, to probe for clarification, to

acknowledge understanding, or to encourage the participants to expand upon a topic. This influenced the data I collected. For instance, one participant and I found that we shared the value of being family-oriented so several of the stories she told during our interviews involved her family members. Had we not established this commonality, data related to her family might not have been part of the case study.

Finally, to further triangulate my data, I reviewed recruitment materials, orientation documents, and the school's Web site information. I looked for clues about the organizational context of the high school and about any values that might be implicitly communicated through these channels in order to compare and contrast them with the data from the interviews.

In order to strengthen the trustworthiness of my study, I followed several strategies for qualitative research suggested by Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002). The first was *methodological coherence*, which seeks congruence between a study's research questions and the components of the research methods. For instance, my research questions sought descriptive data and my use of face-to-face interviews was an appropriate method to gather descriptive data. Another strategy suggested by Morse et al. (2002) was *collecting and analyzing data concurrently*, which "forms a mutual interaction between what is known and what one needs to know" (p. 12). As I gathered and analyzed data concurrently through interviews, I was able to continually confirm patterns and themes or reject them when they were unsupported. As Morse et al. (2002) proposed, I was "willing to relinquish any ideas that [were] poorly

supported regardless of the excitement and the potential that they first appear[ed] to provide” (p. 11). Throughout my data gathering and analysis, I remained open to changes in my categorizations based on what was revealed, or not revealed, in the data.

Data Analysis

I conducted my data analysis in several stages within the framework of *grounded theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory enables the researcher to “derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 14). The theory has two main components. One is the constant comparison of data among emerging categories. The other is the sampling of different sources to increase the data’s similarities and differences (Creswell, 2003).

Within this framework, the first stage of my analysis involved reviewing school documents and the district’s Web site in order to gain a basic understanding of the high school and its programs. I analyzed teacher recruitment and orientation materials and made note of patterns and themes in those materials. For instance, I looked for “recurring regularities” (Guba, 1978, p. 53) and found, for example, that student diversity is often cited as a positive feature of the school. Using the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I looked for similarities and differences among the documents and Web site. As an example, I found that formal school programs, such as the International Baccalaureate program, are frequently listed in documents with descriptions about the school.

Another method of document analysis that I found helpful was offered by Bogdan and Taylor (1975), who suggest the importance of being “alert to topics that your subjects either intentionally or unintentionally avoid” (p. 82). I found that noting what appeared to be missing in documents often provided significant insights. For example, the documents I examined contained no listing of specific goals or performance expectations for new teachers. In addition, beyond descriptions of the mentor program, the documents contained no examples of how new teachers are supported by others at the school.

In the second stage of my analysis, I followed the suggestions of Ryan and Bernard (2003) and promptly transcribed the audio tapes from my interviews, looking for themes through repeating concepts, terms used in unfamiliar ways, shifts in content, metaphors, and analogies. I also analyzed the transcripts for evidence of coherence among participant stories about their past experiences, personal identities, expectations, and perceptions of the present as suggested by Agar and Hobbs (1985) and cited by Mishler (1986). I examined *global coherence* - how the speaker’s utterance related to an apparent goal; *local coherence* - how an utterance related to what was just said; and *thematic coherence* – how utterances expressed the speaker’s recurrent assumptions, beliefs, and goals. For example, when considering global coherence, I noted instances from the interviews where the participants’ narratives appeared to have goals of constructing their identities as teachers or of maintaining a positive self-image.

Then, I again used the constant comparison method suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967). I identified the interview data by similarity, organizing themes and patterns, and developed tentative categories. For instance, I sorted norms that were expressed or implied in the participant interviews and placed those that were similar into groups.

In my third stage of analysis, I compared and contrasted the themes and patterns that emerged from my three data sources – documents, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured interviews. I looked for evidence of coherence and contradictions among the data as well as for emergent insights. Using three sources of data enhanced opportunities to note similarities and differences in the data, as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and helped to support the trustworthiness of my analysis.

Finally, I considered how the patterns and insights that emerged from the data might align with related theories and assumptions in the areas of organizational culture and socialization in order to consider how the patterns and insights might support or challenge the existing literature.

Chapter 6. Study Data

The presentation of the study data will begin with information about the general context of the high school. Next, the three veteran school members and the two new teachers will be introduced and described. After that, the data will be organized according to the four research questions that frame the study. Finally, data relating to the concept of organizational fit will be presented.

Context

The high school involved in this study is located in a mid-sized city in upstate New York and serves students in grades 9 – 12. It has approximately 1700 students and 215 staff members, of which 38 were new teachers at the time of the study. The staff includes one principal, two associate principals, two assistant principals, and a dean of students. There are six guidance counselors and two school psychologists. The high school is considered by many in the area to be an ‘urban’ school because it is located in a city’s downtown area. Over 50% of students come from households that are receiving free or reduced lunch assistance, which usually indicates a significant low-income population. The ethnicity of the student body breaks down as approximately 75% White and 25% Black, Hispanic, or Asian. The high school building is large, with several floors and sections. As one veteran school member put it, “Our school is...demanding, just by mere size and socioeconomic standing.”

The school district’s Web site includes a “personnel” section with information for prospective employees, including information about job vacancies, NYS certification requirements, the local area, and nearby colleges

and universities. Other materials are also available to prospective teachers, including a CD-Rom that showcases the district, an informational brochure, and a school calendar with details about the various schools in the district, their programs, and their contact information. A number of brochures are available that focus on programs such as the district's international baccalaureate program, pre-engineering program, and special education services.

New teachers who join the high school are introduced to the school in several ways. They attend a teacher orientation program for a few weeks in the summer prior to the beginning of the school year. During this orientation, new hires participate in team-building activities. They receive a faculty handbook that contains information about discipline policies and school procedures. In addition, each new teacher is assigned a mentor. Mentoring is described as "the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in the school" (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 683). The new teacher and the mentor meet once a month throughout the school year to talk about curriculum and other teaching issues that may arise. Several mentor dinners are also offered during the school year during which new teachers and mentors can get together and socialize as a large group. During the summer following a new teacher's first school year, new teachers receive training in cognitive coaching and discipline techniques based on perceptual control theory (Powers, 1973), which stresses creating relationships with students based on techniques of internal motivation and purposeful behavior.

Descriptions of Participants

Relevant descriptive information, such as the backgrounds and viewpoints about the two new teachers and three veteran school members, is critical for understanding how the participants' unique standpoints might influence their perceptions of norms and practices at the high school. The unstructured interviews with the new teachers offered more background information than did the semi-structured interviews with veteran school members. The semi-structured interviews tended to provide more information about the veterans' professional viewpoints. For confidentiality, all of the names are pseudonyms. In order to more fully establish the school's context prior to introducing the new teachers, the viewpoints of the veteran school members are presented first.

Veteran School Members

Laura works in a professional support position at the high school. She has been with the school district for over 15 years. She often expressed her view that teachers benefit by interacting. "You definitely need comradeship with other teachers. That's so important." In addition, *Laura* said the following about a newly implemented team teaching program. "They [the teachers on the team] are just so much more excited about the kids and about learning because they team and they have each other and they support each other."

Laura also indicated that she expects new teachers to realize that their jobs involve more than just teaching.

A teacher's job is a tough, tough job because like with our district, you don't just have a student in your class, and you don't just teach.

So, I think it's the hardest thing is for them [new teachers] to figure

out. They want to go, they want to put their lesson plan down, they have some great ideas, they want to teach...And there are some days where you don't get one speck of teaching done. It's interaction, it's correcting, it's discipline. It's listening, when you have to listen... telling parents, meeting with parents, talking to other teachers. I mean it's...they're totally wrong if they think they are just going to teach students...totally...and if they're OK with that, then they do really great. But if they're intimidated by that, that's when we find that teachers have a lot of problems.

Connie has been a teacher at the high school for over 12 years. She indicated that she cares deeply about doing her best in the classroom. For example, *Connie* mentioned how helpful she found a training program that she recently completed and said, "You know, in the last couple of years I hadn't been getting the results that I was used to getting...I was starting to get depressed and disappointed. And I thought – boy, what's happening? And now I took a hold of this course and I love it. And I'm really trying to apply it."

Connie indicated that she welcomes questions from new teachers and is sometimes frustrated with colleagues who are not open to new teachers' inquiries, as evidenced by the following comment. "If the person is willing to ask a question, don't be judgmental. Answer the question and help the person out!"

She also expressed her view that classroom discipline was often the biggest challenge for new teachers. "How do you nail them in the classroom? When is enough enough and you send them out?" Overall, even after

expressing difficulties with some aspects of the school, Connie seemed to enjoy her job. “Well, basically, I like what I do. Believe it or not (laughing)...”

Michelle has been a teacher at the high school for over 5 years. She taught previously in other schools and worked in business positions for many years. Michelle often expressed her frustration with how teachers are viewed by the administration at the school. “We’re not treated the same way as in other professions.... It’s almost like a babysitting job.” She shared a story of an administrator encouraging students who wanted to be teachers to aspire toward administrative positions. “You could tell by the [administrator’s] voice. Teaching is almost like a clerical position and [it’s better] to move into a management position.” Michelle felt that administrators did not support teachers. “Give us the support we need in the classroom. When I’m calling you, *come see me*, because it may be important. Don’t ignore me saying that there’s something much more important than that.”

Michelle shared stories about how difficult it was to teach at the high school because many students were academically unprepared. She felt this was due to the district’s policy of ‘social promotion’ in lower grade levels, whereby students move to the next grade even if they do not demonstrate the necessary skills to advance. (This sentiment was also shared by Connie). “We shouldn’t be passing the kids...by sticking them in the high school, we can’t do anything. How can I teach an AP [advanced placement] class if they can’t read and write?” Michelle expressed her concern that new teachers will not stay in the profession for long because of the frustrating conditions. “I can see them saying, you know,

I'm going to do this for five years and go to another career because there's just no glory in this. I can put out this lesson so pretty, so beautiful, but I'm not reaching anybody..."

New Teachers

Sarah is in her early twenties and this her first year of teaching after graduating from college. Several members of Sarah's family are also teachers. Sarah has always had an interest in teaching and even remembers sitting in classes when she was younger and watching how her teachers conducted their classes. "I don't know if all students do that," she conceded with a laugh. Sarah said she had several memorable teachers who influenced her. One was a Spanish teacher who "was strict, really strict...but he made me learn more about myself, and that I liked." Another was a math teacher. "She was crazy. She was always jumping on desks...her neuroticness made everybody want to be there and learn. You never knew what she was going to do." Sarah seemed to admire teachers and seemed comfortable with them.

Sarah explained that she can be very shy. In fact, she said her family worried about whether or not teaching might be the right profession for her. However, she found that her student teaching experiences during college increased her confidence. "Student teaching...it showed me more about myself and about being more confident, of being able to know that I can get up in front of a class. I can get my point across." Sarah also described herself as persistent and stubborn. "When I get a thing in my head, I'm going to go for it." These qualities seemed to help her deal successfully with her shyness. For instance,

Sarah said she made efforts to explore the building and to get to know other people at the school despite her shyness. "It works slowly for me, [but] it's definitely going on the right track." Sarah demonstrated a desire to teach, even if it took a great deal of effort to work past her shy demeanor.

Additionally, throughout our interviews Sarah expressed empathy and caring for her students. For example, when describing how she deals with the personal difficulties of some of her students, she said, "I give children a lot more respect, just a lot more understanding...you know, there's something, there's a reason why they're giving you such big attitudes... and you just want to find it out so you can help them somehow." She seemed to feel that she was making a difference with her students within the context of the schools norms.

Sarah's self-concept, both personally and socially, seemed to include many of the beliefs and values that she encountered when interacting with people at the high school. She was independent, willing to do things on her own, and expected to be responsible for her own development as a teacher. Consistent with the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), Sarah appeared to view herself as being similar to many of the other teachers and felt welcomed by them. Through her self-categorization processes, she seemed to have placed herself and others at the school into an in-group. Sarah's identity as a teacher appeared to be developing in a positive way in alignment with the norms at the high school.

Jason is another new teacher at the high school. He is in his late twenties and taught at several other school districts in a variety of temporary positions

before coming to this school. From our interviews, Jason seemed very independent, confident, and comfortable with the risks associated with new experiences. For instance, at one point, he spoke about living in another country for some time without knowing the language “because I always wanted to learn it and I knew that the only way to really, really do it was to go live in the country.”

Jason’s previous teaching experiences in other schools were primarily positive and often involved collaboration. He generally described his colleagues as helpful and supportive. As an example, Jason spoke glowingly about one particular experience, saying, “The department there was really great...If I ever needed anything, people would be like, oh, do this. Or, oh, what’s the material you’re going over? OK, here’s a worksheet for that. Here’s a video for this. Here’s an activity for this. Just go make copies.” Throughout his interviews, Jason’s expressed frustration with the difference between his expectations about appropriate colleague and administrative support and the reality of his more isolated situation at the high school.

In his varied positions in the past, Jason had opportunities to develop new curricula and to work with other teachers in non-traditional settings. For example, Jason described a team-teaching experience at another school. “We actually did this experimental class...we had a class of bullies and they put them all together because these kids were on the verge of, like, going halfway in and out of jail, and they needed to get their credit to graduate.” He felt that the class worked out well because there were two teachers in the class and together they were able to deal with their troubled students more “realistically” than in previous

class situations. Jason conveyed much disappointment during his interviews that non-traditional ideas did not seem to be welcomed by the administration at the high school. He spoke of a fellow teacher who had an idea for a class for students with learning disabilities. "And I was like, that's a great idea. And so she was thinking of writing up some proposal for a class like that...But will they listen to her or not? Probably not." Jason's idea of a good teacher, one who collaborated and tried new things, was in direct conflict with what he was experiencing at the high school.

Like Sarah, Jason also expressed care and empathy for his students in his narratives about his experiences.

I have a lot of kids who never talk. They're like...they might be carrying guns. I don't know. They probably have guns. I wouldn't doubt it. They act tough, but when they get in there in front of that material, they're trying to do their worksheet...they're trying. And they can see that I actually give a shit. I'm not like, oh you're stupid, or you're this or that. I understand that some of them might have hearing problems or comprehension problems, because they ask three or four times for directions. I have to repeat it and even though the other kids are an issue -- saying, like, oh, we just heard that -- I'll repeat it again.

Jason often expressed his concerns about what happens to students after he kicks them out of class for discipline problems.

What's going to happen to them after I kick them out? They're going to be wandering around the halls. I mean, are they going to be put in study hall? Some of these kids, they're not bad on their own or when there's certain other people not instigating things. A lot of these kids, they need help, and they respond to...like, when you do an activity in class, they respond to individual instruction, or a little bit of help.

Jason's already-established teacher identity and ideas about students' needs did not align with the views of school administrators, whom he perceived as expecting him to simply "kick out" students with behavioral difficulties. His caring and desire to help students seemed to have been part of what attracted him to teaching. Yet, his experiences with people at the school devalued these qualities – qualities which had helped to define his identity, both as a person and as a teacher. Consistent with the concept of homophily, Jason did not perceive the administrators as similar to him in beliefs or attitudes and, as a result, he did not feel connected to them. Jason wanted to succeed at his job, but he did not want to self- categorize himself as part of the administrators' group. Therefore, he appeared to identify administrators as an out-group.

In summary, during their interviews, both new and veteran study participants communicated caring and concern for students as well as the belief that teaching is an important profession. The participants all appeared to sincerely want to do their jobs well and they all expressed desires for improved conditions at the school so they could be more effective. All of the participants

seemed to be personally connected to their jobs and often spoke passionately about student needs, school conditions, and the challenges of teaching. The study participants expressed several dominant school norms both explicitly and implicitly through the stories they told regarding their experiences at the high school.

How Dominant Norms were Perceived at the School

Many organizational norms were suggested in the data, such as the importance of paperwork, the expectation that teachers follow-up on attendance issues, and the assumption that student test scores reflect teacher competence. However, the following four norms relating to new teachers were the most dominant and consistent among the data.

- Teachers are individually responsible for their own successes as teachers
- New teachers are expected to seek out their own information and support
- Administrators are not responsible for assisting new teachers
- New teachers are given the more difficult classes in terms of behavior and location

1. Teachers are individually responsible for their own successes as teachers

Yes, the high school offered orientation programs and provided mentors to the new teachers; however, based on the stories shared by the study participants, new teachers seemed to be expected to become competent staff members primarily on their own. This norm is not uncommon. Teachers frequently teach in isolation from colleagues (Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson, 1990;

Sizer, 1992), and new teachers are often left on their own to succeed or fail (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Kauffman, et al., 2002).

Laura (professional support) communicated this assumption most clearly when she stated that “teachers are responsible to handle discipline and parent contacts and to be responsible for their own little classroom.” The school provides training in cognitive coaching and discipline techniques based on perceptual control theory; however, the training is provided during the summer *after* a new teacher’s first school year. This practice reinforces the notion that new teachers are expected to figure out discipline strategies on their own.

As an example, Connie (12-year veteran teacher) described with pride how she learned to manage classroom discipline issues early in her career.

I took a lot of those [difficult behavior] classes and, you know, once I found my way...And here’s another thing you have to learn as an individual, as a new teacher - where’s that line so that you can develop some kind of rapport with your class, but still retain your authority? That’s a really fine line to find. And, I don’t know, I was able to find it. It took a long time. It took a lot of write-ups (laughing). But once I found it, they [administrators] don’t really see a lot of write ups from me. Because it’s like...done...you’re done.

Connie made no mention of help or support from others as she described how she found her way. She seemed to accept the notion that she had to work out her discipline style by herself. Connie seemed to value self-sufficiency as part of both her personal identity and her professional teacher identity.

Recruitment documents and the Web site also implied that new teachers would primarily be on their own to succeed as teachers. For instance, beyond descriptions of the mentoring program, some outside training opportunities, and support for additional education for New York State teacher certification, the documents that were analyzed contained no information regarding how new teachers might be supported day-to-day by either colleagues or administrators. In addition, the opening to the personnel section on the Web site focused only the notion of new employees contributing to the school's 'team.' There was no mention of the school providing any reciprocal support to newcomers.

The organizational structure at the high school, both physically and culturally, also seemed to have significant impacts on how this school norm was communicated to the new teachers. To begin with, the high school was described as large and highly departmentalized, with those in administrative positions being centrally located on the lower floors of the school. From the accounts of the new teachers and veteran staff members, administrators did not spend much time in classroom areas. This practice gave administrators fewer opportunities to communicate with new teachers and forced the new teachers to have to intentionally seek out information from administrators because interactions did not happen naturally. As a result, new teachers tended to rely on other teachers nearby in their own departments for help and information rather than on administrators. These physical realities reinforced the isolation and fragmentation with the school.

Even when other teachers were nearby, participant accounts indicated that it was difficult for new teachers to find opportunities to talk with other teachers. Preparation periods and lunch periods did not offer much time to interact with peers. In addition, teachers were often confined to their own classrooms for much of the day dealing with students, or racing from one area of the building to another for their next class. When teachers wanted to collaborate or consult with each other, the structure of the teaching day reinforced the practice of teachers working in isolation.

Throughout their interviews, the new teachers expressed feelings of isolation and the need to intentionally seek out information from others. This finding supported previous research indicating that isolation can be problematic for new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Kardos et al., 2001; Little, 1999;). According to Smith and Ingersoll (2004), new teachers “are often left to their own devices to succeed or fail within the confines of their own classrooms – an experience likened by some to being lost at sea” (p. 682). In fact, at one point, Sarah used a similar metaphor and described working alone by saying, “I felt for the longest time like I was just swimming, you know, barely staying afloat.” Consistent with structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), the physical, organizational, and temporal structures at the high school appeared to create and reinforce the norms of teacher autonomy and isolation. The structures also reinforced power relationships. For example, since new teachers were generally not approached by administrators and veteran teachers, this practice could be viewed as implying

that new teachers had a lower value and status than these other groups at the high school.

From the perspective of a newcomer, Sarah implied that she understood that she was expected to struggle alone with discipline issues as a new teacher. The following is her account of how she is developing her classroom discipline skills:

I think it's experience in the classroom...that I can handle the class... that I can handle...just handling what they have to throw at me. At first...ugh...I was just unsure of myself and the kids see that. They can see that like no other. And just...eventually, I just kept...just dealing with them all the time so that it just got to a point - and I still need to be more confident - but, you know, it got to a point where they just throw things at the same time and I've just been like, no - sorry, I'm not taking this. I'm the teacher. And then in the class - just knowing the people, and knowing how to act when each person...how to interact with people, knowing them a little better helped a lot. It's definitely a lot easier. Not easier, but comfortable...

Sarah made no mention in this account of specific discipline strategies she learned from colleagues or administrators. Her idea of a good teacher seemed to include the practice of persevering alone. Since Sarah was adhering to the normative practice of working alone, and making progress with her discipline skills, she seemed to have compared herself favorably with others at the school.

Consistent with social identity theory, she appeared to have placed herself and others into an in-group, and viewed this group in a primarily positive way. Sarah also seemed to be constructing a positive teacher identity as a result of her agreement with the dominant norms at the school.

On the other hand, Jason described how overwhelming the expectation of handling discipline issues alone can be for a new teacher, especially when coupled with other teaching responsibilities.

I'm just trying to prepare the classes and get, like, make tests, and do all of that stuff. And they want me to, like, take my time, write up kids for being bad, which takes...I have two prep periods, which I can barely even get anything done for the next day. And they want me to, like, write kids up, call parents, you know, walk down to turn in these forms, you know, field phone calls, like, send emails. I just don't have the time.

This perspective concurs with what Gold (1996) found in her survey of educational research involving new teachers. "The greatest problems encountered by beginning teachers were overwhelming feelings of disillusionment and believing that they were unable to cope with the multitude of pressures encountered each day" (p. 556).

Jason did not align with the dominant norm of working alone as a teacher. His idea of a good teacher included collaboration. Due to his differing perspective, and in alignment with social identity theory, he appeared to categorize himself as separate from others at the school in order to support his

self-concept, as evidenced by his depersonalized references to administrators as “they” and “them.” Additionally, his emotions of frustration, anger, and disappointment often seemed strong, perhaps because he was unsuccessfully trying to make sense of the situation and questioning his identity as a teacher.

2. New teachers are expected to seek out their own information and support

This expectation is related to the previously stated norm of teachers having individual responsibility for their own success. It was communicated consistently by veteran school members throughout their interviews. For example, Laura suggested that new teachers need to “seek people out and ask for help.” Michelle observed that “most of the young teachers will go to a veteran teacher or to somebody they feel comfortable with [to ask questions].” Connie seemed to agree and said that “for the most part, they’re [the new teachers] pretty good about coming to us and asking.” However, she noted that , “if you’re not the type of individual who will walk up to somebody, maybe introduce yourself and ask questions, you might not get a lot of guidance.”

As far as the perceptions of the newcomers regarding this norm, Sarah seemed comfortable with regularly asking questions. “I usually go along with one teacher and I ask him everything he’s doing, just following along.” Additionally she offered, ““When I have issues with somebody [a student], I’ll ask a few teachers that I have gotten close to, not necessarily my mentor teacher because she’s ...she’s around, but I don’t see her that often. So, I’ll ask a teacher that’s been here. I’ll ask a girl who’s also new and see what she says, cause she’s got more...she seems like she knows a lot more of what she’s doing than I do.”

Again, Sarah accepted the norm of proactively asking questions and followed it. She seemed to feel good about adhering to it, which might have indicated that the norm had become prescriptive for her and that asking questions was important to her personal identity as well as her social identity as a teaching professional.

In contrast, Jason seemed uncomfortable with frequently asking questions of his colleagues. "They've [others in his department] all offered help, but they're all really busy with their own stuff and, you know, everyone's got a huge load of students and everyone's got the same kind of problems." Jason's discomfort was similar to the findings of Miller and Jablin (1991), who suggest that newcomers can sometimes be reluctant to ask questions of others for fear of social rejection, appearing unknowledgeable, or not wanting to bother others. The fact that veterans were not making themselves easily available for questions appeared to reinforce the norm of teacher isolation as suggested by structuration theory. The difficulty of new teachers finding colleagues to approach may have implied that new teachers had only a marginal status within the school. Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, and Liu (2001) also observed this structure in their study of new teachers and wrote of one study participant, "She was expected to function at the margins of the dominant veteran-oriented culture, and there were no useful links between her and her experienced colleagues" (p. 263).

Jason also expressed dismay that he did not have much success in seeking help from administrators, a group that had been responsive to his needs in his previous jobs. "I've worked in all these other districts where it's been pretty

straight forward, and if you ask for help, you get it...[in this district], it's like, the left hand doesn't know what the right – they don't know what they're doing." His expectation of support from administrators based on his past experiences was not met in his present situation at the high school. Jason, as a person and as a teacher, valued collaboration, but collaboration was not part of the norm of regularly seeking out his own information. Thus, his identity as a teacher was in turmoil. Again, Jason categorized the administration as an out-group by using the references "they" and "them." He also expressed much emotion because he was encountering the unexpected and was struggling to make sense of it.

3. Administrators (principals, assistant principals, deans, and department heads) are not responsible for assisting new teachers

Every veteran participant in the study commented about the lack of involvement by administrators in the day-to-day development of new teachers. For instance, when specifically asked - how do administrators assist new teachers? – Connie said, "Well, off the top of my head right now, I'd have to say they don't." She suggested that administrators had many responsibilities and said that "the administrators in our building wear too many hats." Laura's response to the question was, "I think that we could do a lot of work in that area." She cited the size of the high school building as contributing to the lack of interaction between administrators and new teachers. "Our building is so big, you know. So, it's very easy for administrators and teachers to be alienated from each other." Michelle replied to the question by saying, "Are they supportive? I don't know. Not really." She said, "I hope you understand I'm not talking against

them [administrators], they have a very tough job, but I don't think they're really assuming responsibility for what is going on...they see us not so much as teachers but as babysitters."

In fact, the past struggles of veteran participants, when they were new teachers with little help from administrators, were often communicated like initiations or badges of honor in the interviews. This view supports the perspective of Smith and Ingersoll (2004) who state that "the initiation of new teachers is akin to a 'sink or swim,' 'trial by fire,' or 'boot camp' experience" (p. 682). For example, Laura shared a story of beginning her career at the school.

When I went to work at [the school], they gave me an office and a desk. I didn't even know where to get the paperclips. I had no idea. No idea. I didn't know what my phone number was. I didn't know how to use the phone. You know, they gave me a computer, but I didn't know who to get my password from. I mean I didn't know anything. And I just kept asking people over and over ... I didn't know how to get from floor to floor, where things were, how the rooms were even numbered for at least six months to nine months.

From Laura's account, the administration failed to share the most basic information with her, but she eventually met and overcame this challenge.

Michelle echoed Laura's story of having to struggle alone as a new teacher without administrative support.

If you're brand new, it's not like they call you the week before and say this is a list of things you need. There is never anything given to you. Most of the time, they say, these are the classes you're going to teach and all of the sudden you have to find yourself the books, the paper.

Like Laura, Michelle apparently survived her initiation too, and was viewed at the school as a competent teacher within the school's culture.

Sarah and Jason seemed to learn quickly that administrators would not play significant roles in their day-to-day development as teachers. Sarah accepted the norm and simply stated, "I only met the real principal once. And theoretically I was supposed to sit down with him, he's like, oh we should sit down and talk. I never sat down and talked with him." She did not seem to have expected anything different nor was she upset about the lack of interaction with her principal. The practice of administrators being separate from the day-to-day issues of teachers seemed familiar and reasonable to Sarah. As suggested by structuration theory, by accepting the norm, Sarah also maintained the structure of teachers being separate from administrators.

Jason, however, was angry about the lack of administrative support. He utilized a conversation with a friend to confirm his impression.

Yeah, and my one friend who subs there, he was like, he had done the class before, and he goes, you know what, they [the administrators] just want, they just want someone in there to take the abuse. They don't care. They just want someone in there to be

the one body in the room and they expect you to do everything...to take the abuse.

Jason's identity, both as a person and as a teacher, seemed to be threatened by the perceived lack of support he was getting from administrators and he appeared to experience much dissonance, which generated a good deal of emotion. The lack of support also seemed to indicate that Jason held a low position as a new teacher at the school because administrators ignored his needs and reinforced his identity as a low-status individual.

As previously noted, based on social identity theory, Jason viewed the administration as an out-group. He often appeared to cast administrators as negative characters who embraced values that were very different from his own. In contrast, Jason seemed to recurrently cast himself in his narratives as the victimized good guy with the good values. For instance, he said, "they threw me in there [the classroom]" and "they just want someone to take the abuse." Jason created distance between himself and the dominant norms of the high school through his narrative accounts of his experiences. These accounts seemed to help Jason to maintain his positive identity as a teacher. In contrast, Sarah's positive teacher identity was built on stories that demonstrated alignment with the dominant norms at the high school.

4. New teachers get the more difficult classes in terms of behavior and location

Michelle described this norm in detail. "At least in the culture of the school that I'm working at, you get the worst classes. And we're not talking about the subject being worse, because the subject is the subject. We're talking about

being worse as the caliber of the kids they give you. So, they're the students that have problems, behavioral problems, and you get the younger group of students, which obviously are the ones who are less mature. And you have less choices. You're not given your own classroom. Like this is my 6th year at the school and I don't have my own classroom yet. I have to travel to four different classrooms and I have four different topics, which makes it very difficult."

This notion of new teachers having to prove themselves under difficult circumstances is not uncommon. "Schools have a pecking order. Experienced teachers often believe that they have paid their dues and that new teachers must do the same" (Renard, 2003, p. 63). New teachers have particularly demanding situations because "new teachers have two jobs – they have to teach and they have to learn to teach" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1026). The distinctive situation of new teachers is described by Manuel (2003), who states:

The teaching profession is unique in its treatment of its new members in that, from day one on the job, the beginning teacher must assume all the roles and responsibilities of the experienced practitioner with no material or other allowances made for their newness (p. 145).

Expecting new teachers to expertly handle the most difficult classes when their actual teaching experience is still limited is viewed by some as a recipe for failure. In fact, Halford (1998) suggests that teaching is sometimes described as "the profession that eats its young" (p. 33).

As with the other dominant norms, new teacher Sarah did not seem to be surprised or troubled this one. "I think as a first year teacher, you're definitely

switching classrooms. At least that's how it was in my high school. I think that's...pretty much normal. I just think it's 'cause I'm definitely the low man..." She seemed comfortable waiting her turn for better conditions and appeared to have identified with the school's norm. As Van Vugt and Hart (2004) pointed out, "once people start to identify with their group, their welfare becomes intertwined with the welfare of the group...people who identify with their group may engage in activities to help the group even if it would involve making a personal sacrifice" (p. 586). Sarah appeared to categorize herself and others at the school into an in-group in alignment with social identity theory. She seemed to be willing to endure some difficult years in order support and belong to the teacher group at the high school.

However, Jason expressed frustration with this norm. He talked about how the classes with older and more advanced students are easier for a new teacher, but unlikely to be assigned to him. "Like, you've got to work 10 years in the district just to get those classes." He suggested that some of the difficult classes should be given to more experienced teachers. "Take the seasoned pro - who's very good at managing things - and spread it out. Don't give the new guy the three toughest classes, which is what they're doing." Jason did not accept the reasoning behind assigning desirable classes as rewards based on a person's years of service at the school. He also did not seem to accept the marginal status that may have been inferred by this practice. Consistent with social identity theory, Jason appeared to create an out-group consisting of administrators by referring to the group as "them."

In summary, it appeared clear from the data that both Sarah and Jason quickly learned about the four dominant norms relating to new teachers at the high school during their first few months of interactions in their new jobs. It may have been important for them to learn appropriate practices promptly because much of their work involved teaching performances. Featherstone (1993) observes that “the new teacher is constantly on stage and urgently needs to develop a performing self with whom he or she can live comfortably” (p. 101). If a teacher displays uncertainty or unease in the classroom regarding the correct way of doing things, students pick up on it and as Sarah shared in her interview, “they can see that like no other.”

While Sarah and Jason may have promptly learned about the school’s norms, their perceptions and evaluations of them varied greatly. As Jones (1983) suggests, “even though newcomers may be processed in the same manner, they may experience that process in very different ways because of past experience, and their levels of self-efficacy or growth need strength. As a result, their subsequent orientation, attitudes, and behavior may diverge widely” (p. 467). Additionally, Sarah’s and Jason’s differing views of the dominant norms were consistent with standpoint theory (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Wood, 1992). Sarah and Jason developed their perceptions about the high school’s norms based on their differing standpoints, which were related to their ages and backgrounds. Subsequently, even though they were both new to the school, their perceptions of the norms were vastly different. An examination of the

processes used at the school to communicate its dominant norms to the new teachers follows.

How the School Communicated Norms to New Teachers

According to Feiman-Nemser (2003), “historically, schools have not been set up to support the learning of teachers, novice or veteran (Sarason, 1990). The typical organization, which Little (1999) refers to as ‘individual classrooms connected by a common parking lot’ (p. 256), keeps teachers separated from one another, reinforcing their isolation and sense of autonomy” (p. 28). Consequently, it is not easy for a new teacher to interpret the organizational culture of a new workplace, including its values and norms, without deliberate induction efforts being made by the school (Lortie, 1975). The school veterans (Laura, Connie, and Michelle) implied in their interviews that somewhat deliberate types of efforts were made by high school members to communicate its norms to new teachers; namely, orientation/mentoring, availability for questions, informal discourse, and modeling.

Orientation and Mentoring

Laura (professional support) said that new teachers learn much about the school and its practices during the teacher orientation program in the summer. She felt the team-building aspect of the summer orientation was especially important because “then you don’t feel so isolated as a teacher, and when problems crop up, you have support.” She also said that the mentor program helps new teachers. “You meet once a month with your mentor. You take a day...you actually take a day out of the classroom for team teaching and

planning time so you can get used to the schedules in your school building and [learn] some good best practices with your mentor.”

Michelle (5-year veteran) did not mention the orientation program as a vehicle for learning about the school, but she said that the mentor program was very helpful to *her* learning when she first came to the high school. She explained that her mentor “really believed in the system and in making it better... We did lesson plans together. She helped me grade papers, but she actually showed me how to grade the papers to maximize opportunities.” Based on her experience with the mentor program, Michelle said, “It’s a good program, a strong program.”

However, while Connie (12-year veteran) generally indicated that the mentor program helped new teachers to learn about school, she cautioned that not all mentoring situations work out well. “I know one of the new teachers who kind of got hooked up with somebody and the personalities just clashed and they [the new teacher] didn’t get much mentoring.” Connie did not mention the orientation program as a good way for new teachers to learn about school norms and practices. Her recollection regarding her own new teacher orientation was that “they put you through a couple of little trainings, or you know, some craziness like that, and you go to lunch.”

In general, Laura (professional support) expressed that the orientation and mentoring programs were effective ways for new teachers to learn about the high school. The veteran teachers Connie and Michelle, however, had mixed opinions about the effectiveness of the mentor program. In addition, neither

described the new teacher orientation program as a useful method for new teacher learning.

Availability for Questions

Laura noted that the school expects new teachers to seek out other teachers in their curriculum areas for information about how things are done. “Hopefully, you’ll be able to speak up and say, has anyone ever had this happen? Or does anyone have any suggestions for me?” She admitted, though, that not everyone is comfortable asking questions. “You know, some people are OK doing that, other people....(*trailing off*)” Laura seemed to realize that some new teachers may not have the personality traits that will enable them to proactively seek information from others on a regular basis.

Like Laura, Connie (12-year veteran) also stressed the importance of new teachers asking for information. “If you’re not the type of individual who will walk up to somebody, maybe introduce yourself and *ask* questions, you might not get a lot of guidance.” She added that “you have to be willing to go up to someone and say, well how do I do this or how do I do that, before you just go ahead and jump into things.” This statement implied that the norm is inductive and a new teacher might be viewed unfavorably if he or she tries something unfamiliar, or jumps into things, without asking for guidance.

It is possible to view the sentiments of both Connie and Laura as feeding the norm of placing responsibility for teaching success squarely onto the individual teacher. For instance, if a new teacher does not initiate help-seeking actions, then that teacher may be seen as having caused his or her own

problems and, therefore, the school community could feel that it is not to blame and not compelled to change its culture. In this way, consistent with structuration theory, the norm of individual responsibility for teaching success is maintained.

Informal Discourse

Another means of informing new teachers about norms is through informal discourse. Laura mentioned the importance of new teachers interacting and talking with other teachers. “It’s so important.” Michelle said that she provides information to new teachers by sharing experiences through conversations. “I think sharing your level of frustration is very important, but keeping it in a positive way. Sharing. Because sometimes as a teacher, you feel like you’re the only one in the classroom – you’re the only one that these things happen to.” Michelle did not say whether or not she actively initiated sharing-type conversations with new teachers or whether new teachers had to approach her first. In fact, none of the veteran school members indicated during their interviews that they proactively approached new teachers to communicate school norms to them. Additionally, none of the veterans mentioned gaining any valuable insights from the new teachers with whom they spoke. For instance, the veterans did not seek feedback from new teachers regarding established practices nor did they attempt to draw on newcomers’ differing experiences to enhance their own skills as teachers, which appeared to impede organizational learning at the school.

Modeling

The practice of waiting for new teachers to approach them with questions suggested that veteran school members may have consciously or unconsciously

used modeling to communicate norms to new teachers as they simply went about doing their jobs. This concurs with social learning theory as suggested by Bandura (1977) who states, "most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22). For instance, Sarah talked about spending much time asking questions of a nearby colleague and "just following along." While it was not mentioned outright, it seemed likely that modeling behavior was a communication method used at times by veteran school members.

With the exception of informal discourse, the processes used by veteran staff members to communicate the high school's norms to newcomers – mentoring/orientation, availability for questioning, and modeling – appeared to reinforce the existing high school organizational structure and culture. These processes reinforced the higher status of the veteran teachers and administrations, the isolation involved in teaching, and the need for the new teachers to watch veterans and to seek them out. None of the processes described included a vehicle for newcomer insights or ideas to be shared or considered by the organization. Therefore, the present culture appeared to remain intact.

How New Teachers Learned about Norms

Information about norms was not only communicated by veteran organizational members to newcomers. Newcomers often initiated opportunities to learn about norms. According to Comer (1991), newcomers to organizations

are often “active seekers of information who try to minimize the uncertainty and chaos of their novel environments (Feldman & Brett, 1983; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Weiss, 1984)” (p.67). During their interviews, Sarah and Jason described some of the processes they used to learn about and make sense of the dominant norms they perceived at the high school.

Sarah's Processes

Sarah's descriptions of her first few months of being a teacher indicated that she used observation and active, explicit questioning to seek out information about what she should be doing. For instance, Sarah mentioned a veteran teacher in her department to whom she often brings questions. When I asked her why she went to him she said, “He's just welcoming.” She continued, “I always ask him. I'm like, where's this stuff, and he, like, takes me around and tries to show me.” Sarah's vulnerability showed when she talked about relying on one particular person. “I guess I know I probably should just go to one person, instead of spreading that I'm incompetent to everyone else (laughing)...No...I'm just kidding.”

Sarah said that she also relies on a peer who is a long-term substitute at the school to assist her with obtaining information. “I would tell her what would happen in my class, and ask what should I do? And she'd be like, oh, I don't know, we had this situation last time and this is what we did...I bounced ideas off her that way, even like referrals, like all these other things I didn't know.”

Sarah's actions aligned with the findings of Mignerey, Rubin, and Gorden (1995), who state that "newcomers typically gain needed information from organization sources by asking questions and seeking job-related feedback" (p. 60).

When Sarah talked about administrators, she indicated that she did not interact with them a great deal. For example, she said that her department chairperson also holds another position at the school, so "she's torn between" them sometimes. However she added, "but I've gone to her if I've had problems." Additionally, Sarah indicated that her school's principal was not a source of information for her; but, she did not seem concerned or upset about not having a relationship with her principal.

Sarah also implied that the mentor program was not particularly useful to her and that, instead, she tended to approach other people for information. "I'll ask a few teachers that I've gotten close to, not necessarily my mentor teacher because she's...she's around, but I don't see her that often." This behavior was consistent with literature about socialization. According to Ostroff and Kozlowski (1993), "in the absence of a mentor, co-workers or peers may be more heavily utilized as information sources and are perceived as being very helpful during socialization (Kram, 1985; Louis et al., 1983)" (p. 174).

As for processes used for making sense of the school's norms, Sarah often compared what she was observing and learning about against the actions and practices of her teachers when she was growing up. This was consistent with Weick's (1995) theory of sensemaking which involves "the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are

doing” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). For instance, Sarah did not seem troubled about the fact that, as a newer teacher, she was forced to move among different classrooms throughout the day. She said, “I think as a first year teacher, you’re definitely switching classrooms. At least that’s how it was in my high school. I think that’s pretty much normal.” Overall, Sarah’s expectations based on her previous experiences were generally compatible with the culture she perceived at the high school so she did not experience dissonance.

Sarah also used “trial and error” processes to test things out. The notion of trial and error was proposed in the early 20th century by Edward Thorndike, who suggested that some responses come to dominate others due to rewards (Kearsley, 2007). For example, when Sarah planned to go to her department chairperson with a problem concerning one of her classes, someone in her family advised her that doing that might be perceived as a weakness. But Sarah asked for help anyway. She later found out in a formal evaluation that the chairperson perceived her questioning positively, saying that Sarah looked for new ideas and was responsive to feedback. This experience implicitly confirmed for Sarah that new teachers are expected to ask questions and that adhering to this practice was viewed positively at the high school.

In summary, Sarah often used active questioning and discourse processes to learn about school norms. She passively acquired information through observation and learned through trial and error processes. Sarah did not find her administrators or her mentor to be particularly helpful sources of information, so instead, she sought out peers and veteran school members. She

frequently made sense of the norms she perceived by comparing her present situation to expectations that developed from her past experiences as a high school student, and she seemed to find them to be congruent. Sarah did not mention that either written materials or orientation experiences were helpful to her for learning about the school's values, norms, and practices.

Jason's Processes

Jason also seemed to learn how the school operated primarily through observation and by asking questions. However, Jason did not always seem comfortable actively asking questions of his peers; he indicated that most other teachers were too overwhelmed to assist him. "They've all offered to help, but they're all really busy with their own stuff and, you know, everyone's got a huge load of students and everyone's got the same kind of problems." Going to colleagues for help seemed to be a violation of an injunctive norm. This sentiment was similar to that of a new teacher cited in a study conducted by Kardos, et al. (2001). They wrote that one study participant described how colleagues "seemed willing to help if she asked" but that "the pervasive norms of privacy and autonomy and the structure of the demanding schedule discouraged the kind of assistance she needed as a new teacher" (p. 264).

Despite his reluctance at times, Jason did interact informally with others to learn about and understand the school's norms. He said that he sometimes talked with another teacher who had been at the school for a while and had the same prep period. He also said he shared experiences with a friend who substituted at the school. (These interactions sounded like the "sharing" that

Michelle indicated was so important to new teachers). Kraimer (1997) offers that “several theoretical discussions of socialization [Ashford & Taylor, 1990; Baker, 1995; Louis, 1980; Reichers, 1987] have emphasized the importance of informal interactions between newcomers and organizational insiders” for assisting newcomers with “understanding the meaning and reality of organizational life” (p. 426).

In addition, Jason said that he found his mentor to be very helpful. He said they were able to sit down, talk about curriculum, and “make a map, get together, and make materials and all that and, you know, get on the same page.” In addition, regarding a classroom discipline problem for which Jason felt he was getting little help from administrators, he expressed relief for his mentor’s understanding. “Here’s a seasoned professional, and here I am, and she said, you walked into a terrible situation.” His mentor validated for him that he was not alone in his perceptions about the severity of his classroom problem and this reinforced his positive self-concept. In fact, as times, Jason seemed to categorize himself and his mentor into an in-group and his administrators into an out-group.

Jason often appeared to make sense of the norms of the school by implicitly comparing them to his previous teaching experiences. For example, when he expressed his frustration with administrators’ responses to his requests for help, Jason said, “Every other school I’ve ever worked at, that’s the attendance office. You put something in there and they write them up. They take care of those problems, call home, and figure out where the student is. And

in [this school], they want the teacher to do it all.” Jason’s expectations did not seem to match well with what he was encountering at the high school and this dissonance caused him much angst. Jason wanted to do a good job, but seemed to feel that he was unable to accomplish everything that was expected of him as a teacher at the high school.

Jason indicated that he did not receive much information or direction from school administrators. Regarding his department chair, he said, “It’s a woman I met one time. She’s never there. She has some office somewhere. I guess it’s in the school, I don’t know.” He also mentioned administrators’ visits to his classrooms. “They stopped by there for the first few days they threw me in there. They haven’t been back since.” In these statements, Jason indicated disgust with the lack of interaction initiated by administrators and a strongly differing view regarding the appropriateness of leaving him alone without support.

In summary, Jason frequently used discourse processes to learn about and understand the norms of the high school. He seemed to connect well with his mentor and the mentor program appeared to be very helpful to him. In addition, Jason used observation to assess how situations were being handled by others around him. His sensemaking processes often involved comparing his expectations based on past experiences to his present situation. Jason did not mention having learned about school norms from written materials or from orientation experiences.

The combined data from Sarah and Jason indicated that they both used observation, questioning, sensemaking, and discourse processes in their efforts

to learn about and make sense of the dominant norms at the high school.

Additionally, Sarah described her use of trial and error processes in her efforts to understand the norms of the school.

Organizational Fit

Through the use of a number of processes, Sarah and Jason both appeared to have learned much about the high school's dominant norms during their first few months of working there. However, each ultimately expressed different perceptions about their fit with those norms. For instance, when I suggested to Sarah in her interview that she might consider a different type of job in the future, she seemed content to remain with teaching despite all of her difficulties and uncertainties. "I'm not taking a hiatus from teaching for a little bit," she said with a smile. Sarah seemed to accept the dominant norms she encountered. She accepted that she was individually responsible for her success. Sarah did not seem concerned about her limited contact with administrators and accepted the expectation of actively seeking out information. She also seemed accepting of having to earn a better teaching situation over time. She said the following about her expectations for her second year of teaching. "I will not be the low-man person, so people will know me, which will be good, hopefully. And, it'll just be exciting because you see these people after a whole summer after, like, you don't see them for two months." From this narrative, Sarah appeared to have faith that she would eventually move on to better teaching situations at the school.

In fact, throughout her interviews, Sarah's narrative descriptions showed her to be individually persevering as a teacher and making slow and steady improvement. The narratives that Sarah constructed were consistent with the school's dominant norm of holding individual teachers responsible for their own development and appeared to reflect Sarah's positive teacher identity at the high school. Sarah seemed to look forward to her next year of teaching and implied that she felt connected to her colleagues. The teacher professional identity that she was constructing seemed to align well with the school norms she was encountering. Overall, Sarah's reaction to her situation seemed to be one of optimistic acceptance.

In contrast, Jason did not seem at all comfortable with the dominant norms at the high school. He valued collaboration with other teachers and seemed troubled by the isolation he often experienced as a teacher at the high school. He expressed dismay that "everyone kind of keeps to their own little departments" and that "it seems like everyone's kinda doing their own thing." Jason also valued support from administrators and expressed much outrage regarding the lack of support he felt he received from the administration at the high school, almost as if he'd been suckered into the situation.

Like [the administrators] they'll be like, oh yeah, that guy, that's the one that's on the front lines. Like, we gave him this shitty job, who we're not paying enough, and oh, he's taking his time to write up this girl *for the fifth time* and she's *still* in class. [I'm thinking] what

the hell? Get her out of there. And they're like, why don't you call home? And I'm like, you've got to be kidding me.

The emotional narrative that Jason constructed presented him as a victim in relation to the administration. In this view, the administration, with its bad norms and values, had disregarded Jason, the good teacher, and his noble values. Jason was left with little power or ability to make changes; whereas, in previous teaching situations, he had felt competent and empowered. By casting himself in the role of a victim in his story, Jason may have reflected his feelings of powerlessness and his efforts to maintain a positive identity, both personally and professionally.

Additionally, Jason did not seem comfortable with regularly seeking out information from others at the high school, perhaps because of his hectic schedule or perhaps because he felt that his peers were "too busy with their own stuff" and this may have implied that they did not want to help him. Finally, Jason felt that the expertise of more experienced teachers should be utilized to address the more difficult classes. He seemed aghast at the idea that new teachers were often assigned the most difficult classes at the high school. "Like if you've been there longer...it seems like the more experience you get...you know, anyone can work with juniors and seniors. That's a piece of cake. To me it seems like you start the new teachers off on those people." Then he added with frustration, "Like, here's your five [difficult] classes. We hope you really hate this job...good luck."

Jason did not seem to be able to adapt the professional teacher identity that he had developed in the past to the present circumstances, values, and norms at the high school. Consequently, Jason concluded that he would not be staying in his teaching position. "So yeah ...it's definitely been a different job than a lot of places...Like I definitely know that I don't want to do this." He later stated, "You know what, I'll go work in a bar before I go back there."

Clearly, Sarah and Jason developed very different perceptions regarding the norms of the high school. Sarah appeared to perceive a good fit between her perceptions of norms at the high school and her emerging values and identity as a teacher. The dominant norms at the high school did not seem strange or surprising to her. Adhering to them did not seem to compromise either her personal identity or her social identity as a teaching professional. Sarah did not express uncertainties about or difficulties with the dominant norms; so, consistent with the concept of sensemaking, she did not display a great deal of emotion when discussing them. As suggested by social identity theory, Sarah seemed to view herself favorably through social comparisons she made with other school members, though she indicated that she knew she still had a lot to learn. Sarah did not refer to administrators or other teachers as "they" or "them," which may have indicated that she self-categorized herself, other teachers, and administrators as an in-group, or "we." The alignment of Sarah's values and experiences with the dominant norms of the school appeared to contribute to her positive view of herself as a teaching professional, and therefore, she indicated that she intended to continue teaching at the high school.

Alternately, Jason did not seem to perceive himself as having a good fit with the dominant norms at the high school. Consistent with aspects of sensemaking, Jason's accounts of his experiences were very emotional because so much of what he encountered at the high school seemed to be unexpected and different from what he felt was normal and appropriate. Feelings of powerlessness also seemed to be reflected in stories where he portrayed himself as a victim.

The assumptions that supported the dominant norms – teacher isolation, lack of administrative support, low status of new teachers – appeared to undermine Jason's identity as a teacher. Jason did not seem to feel that the dominant norms reflected his own values as a teacher, which he indicated as including collaboration, innovation, and administrative support. Yet, he was expected by the administration and other veteran school members to adhere to the dominant norms. This conflict appeared to bring about much dissonance and unease for Jason. Therefore, in order to feel like a competent teacher, Jason unconsciously compared himself to others at the school and appeared to categorize them negatively as comprising an out-group, reflecting social identity theory. Based on the incongruence between Jason's values and identity as a teaching professional, and the values of the school (as demonstrated through its norms), Jason indicated that he did not fit in at the high school and would not stay there.

In conclusion, the study data reflected many processes related to social identity formation and sensemaking, which assisted the new teachers with

learning about the dominant norms of their organization. The data seemed to support previous research suggesting that person-organization fit in terms of value/norm congruence (Chatman, 1989) can be an important predictor of turnover intentions (O'Reilly, et al., 1991). The data seems to concur with the notion that if someone perceives himself or herself having a poor fit with an organization, it is likely that he or she will leave the organization (Schneider, 1987; Sims & Kroeck, 1994). Sarah appeared to have a good fit with the dominant norms of the school in terms of both her personal identity and her emerging professional identity. She indicated that she intended to stay. Jason appeared to have a poor fit with the school's dominant norms in terms of both his personal identity and his professional teacher identity. He said that he planned to leave. Certainly, other factors that emerged during the study's interviews may also have impacted the new teachers' perceptions of fit. Additional insights are available by examining some of the themes generated by the study data.

Chapter 7. Discussion

Several prominent conceptual themes emerged from this investigation into the perceptions and communication processes of two new teachers who were beginning their jobs at a high school. Topics involving identity construction and maintenance, emotions, and power were all prevalent in the data.

Identity Construction and Maintenance

As soon as Sarah and Jason started their jobs at the school, they began to unconsciously assess how similar or different their values were in relation to the people who already worked at the high school. They conducted these assessments without realizing it in order to develop a sense of belonging with their work group members, also known as group identification (Hogg & Hains, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Another reason Sarah and Jason assessed the values of other school members was to develop their own professional identities as teachers at the high school. O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) cite Ashforth & Mael (1989) and suggest that, "the pervasiveness and importance of values in organizational culture are fundamentally linked to the psychological process of identity formation in which individuals appear to seek a social identity that provides meaning and connectedness" (p. 492). In the case of Sarah and Jason, their professional identities as teachers seemed to be a large part of their overall social identities. However, their teacher identities were often in flux, due to the many people to whom they had to relate and adjust – students, administrators, colleagues, etc.

Sarah appeared to find herself connecting with the values of many others at the school and she seemed to reinforce those values while she developed her identity as a teacher. For Sarah, fitting with the dominant norms appeared to help her to develop a positive teacher identity. Her easy connection with the dominant school norms may have resulted from her background and familiarity with the teaching profession or it may have been because she was a new teacher.

Through interacting with others, Sarah unconsciously compared her values to those held by veteran members of the school and found that she aligned with the dominant norms (*social comparison theory*). The dominant norms also seemed similar to the expectations that she brought to her new position. For example, regarding the norm of new teachers being assigned the most difficult classes, Sarah said, "I think that's...pretty much normal." This statement appears to indicate Sarah's acceptance of this practice and its consequences.

In fact, many of Sarah's statements and stories demonstrated *thematic coherence* as suggested by Agar and Hobbs (1985) in that they recurrently reflected her belief in and acceptance of many of the school's dominant norms. For instance, in the stories she told, Sarah expressed no anger or resentment about having to work alone as a teacher or about having to frequently seek out information. Sarah's easy connection with the dominant school norms may have been impacted by her background and familiarity with the teaching profession or

it may have been because she was an inexperienced teacher and more easily influenced by more experienced staff members.

Through her assessments, Sarah appeared to unconsciously categorize herself as being similar to others at the school and she seemed to feel good about her connection with others at the school (*similarity-attraction paradigm*). “The people I work with, they’re great,” she said. “They’re very nice to me and caring towards me.” Regarding her competence as a teacher at the school, she later added, “I just feel much more sure of myself [now]...I feel I’ve come into my own a little bit.” This perceived similarity created an ‘in group,’ which consisted of Sarah and the colleagues and administrators at the school (*social identity theory*), whom she often described as “nice” and “welcoming.” Based on her evaluations, Sarah seemed to have constructed an acceptable social identity of herself as a teacher, in part, because she felt connected to the dominant high school culture.

On the other hand, Jason did not appear to align with the organizational culture of the school. He indicated that he found few people at the school who shared his values as a teacher and this may have caused him to feel uncertainty and confusion about his professional identity. Warin (2003) refers to this psychological discomfort as *identity dissonance*. It occurs when a person is “aware of disharmonious experiences of self” (Warin et al., 2006, p. 237). Jason cared deeply about helping disadvantaged students, but he did not perceive that those in charge at the school shared this value. For instance, he described the

school's view of addressing student behavior problems as "damage control" and said, "it's not about saving kids, you know, it's about sink or swim."

The phrase, "sink or swim" may have reflected what Jason thought students experienced or it may have described Jason's inability to help students in need due to a disconnection in values between him and the administration. As part of his teacher identity, Jason appeared to feel that it was important to help students having difficulties. He seemed unable to fulfill this role, and maintain his positive identity as a teacher, because of his sense of isolation and being overwhelmed with teaching responsibilities. In addition, Jason's previous teaching experiences had provided him with expectations regarding the activities of a good teacher – collaborating, innovating, and teaching. Jason's present situation did not appear to meet those expectations. He had few opportunities to work with other teachers, he felt that innovation was not supported, and with all of the student discipline problems he had in his classes, he often found himself focusing more on discipline than on teaching.

Overall, Jason did not seem to compare himself favorably with the culture of the school (*social comparison theory*). To avoid feeling bad about himself, he appeared to place himself, and people from other school districts where his values aligned, into an 'in group.' For instance, Jason described how a principal in another school district differed from the distant administrators at the high school. "He's like one of these guys that's always walking around the halls. Like he knows a lot of the kids and gives them high fives...And I think he used to teach too...Like he's there...he could walk into any class at any time. You know,

he just doesn't stay where the AP classes are." Due to this contrast, Jason seemed to unconsciously place many school members, especially administrators, into an 'outgroup,' which he viewed unfavorably (*social identity theory*) and often used the terms "they" or "them" when describing administrators.

Based on Jason's apparent evaluation that many of his values differed from those of the school organization, he appeared to struggle to feel positive about himself and about his professional identity as a teacher. He also seemed to feel uncomfortable at the school because he could not accept the dominant school norms and their impacts on his ability to be the teacher he felt he should be. These unfavorable comparisons seemed to arise through Jason's unconscious sensemaking processes and appeared to strongly influence his intention to leave his teaching position.

The stories that Jason told in his interviews often reflected identity dissonance and demonstrated *global coherence* as suggested by Agar and Hobbs (1985). In many of his stories, Jason appeared to have a consistent goal of preserving his positive identity. For example, when telling stories about his experiences at the high school, Jason often placed his administrators in negative roles. He referred to administrators as "they" and spoke about their "abuse" of him. In contrast, Jason cast himself as the good guy who cared about students, but who was being victimized by the less caring administrators. By expressing his role in his narratives this way, Jason seemed to be trying to maintain a positive view of himself, both as a person and as a teacher.

The differing outcomes of identity construction for Sarah and Jason may also have been influenced by their differing standpoints. Both Sarah and Jason came to the high school with positive outlooks toward new experiences and with desires to teach. Both had appropriate educational preparation and both displayed caring attitudes toward students, especially those with extra needs. However, Sarah and Jason confronted the norms and values of the high school from different standpoints.

For Sarah, this was her first teaching job out of college and it was a completely new experience for her. Still, as Jones (1983) suggests, Sarah's prior learning experiences influenced her orientation toward the school organization. For instance, while having little teacher experience herself, Sarah expressed some familiarity with high school culture based on her experiences with family members in the teaching profession. This familiarity made many of the high school's dominant norms seem usual and typical to her. Sarah also easily recalled her own experiences as a high school student when she described happenings associated with her new job. With her own high school status as a student being relatively low in the high school organization, Sarah may not have been troubled by her low or marginal status as a new teacher because it felt familiar. Overall, based on her standpoint as an inexperienced teacher with family members who were teachers, Sarah seemed to have a relatively low level of dissonance regarding her expectations and the actual norms and values at the high school. In fact, she did not often indicate that she recognized the dominant

norms that were operating, perhaps because her low level of dissonance seemed to make them invisible to her.

Jason, on the other hand, was a few years older than Sarah. His high school memories were not expressed often in his interviews. Instead, Jason seemed to draw his previous teaching experiences as he described various interactions that took place as part of his new teaching job. Jason's standpoint, based on previous experiences and on values related to his established teacher identity, appeared to cause him to see many of the values and norms at the high school very clearly and unfavorably because of the conflicts he experienced. For example, Jason believed that many students who displayed bad attitudes or who were discipline problems often had learning disabilities or were unprepared for his classes due to social promotions. He felt that with some extra help, these students would perform better in class. "A lot of these kids, they need help...and they respond to individual instruction or a little bit of help." However, at the high school, Jason perceived that rather than being provided with the resources to help students with problems, the school expected him to throw them out of class and forget about them. "What the administration wants [me to do is to] make a list of kids and kick them out and we'll take them and they'll be permanently out of it. And I'm thinking, well, that's not really solving it...it's a band-aid solution." From his standpoint, Jason seemed to find that his teacher identity and its associated values conflicted with the school's preferred solution of removing students from class rather than providing them with extra help in the class. Once

more, Jason's story of appropriate practice for a teacher differed from the story of actual practices at the high school.

This disconnect between Jason's identity as teacher and the norms and values of the high school appeared to result in making Jason's entry into the high school a highly emotional experience. As Nias (1996) contends, "the emotional reactions of individual teachers to their work are intimately connected to the view that they have of themselves and others" (p. 294). Jason seemed to try to maintain a positive view of his self and this resulted in a negative view of those who promoted the dominant norms of the high school, especially administrators.

Emotions

Organizational life is not made up of purely rational interactions; it also includes emotions. According to Gabriel and Griffith (2002), when emotions are viewed from a social constructivist perspective, they can be seen as guiding people as they make sense of social situations and figure out how to best behave in them (Kemper, 1978; Harre, 1986; Fineman; 1993). Emotions become more pronounced when the unexpected occurs (Weick, 1995). Fieberg and Kramer (1998) suggest that "it is unmet expectations that serve as the catalyst for emotional experiences in organizations" (p. 217). Since it appeared that Jason often found that his expectations were not met at the school, he demonstrated more emotion during his interview narratives than did Sarah.

For instance, Sarah seemed generally happy about her social identity as a teacher at the high school; though, she sometimes expressed fears of inadequacy and of being misinterpreted at the school because of her shyness.

For example, she spoke gratefully about a colleague who talked with her often in the department's office. "She'll show people that I talk. You know, like, I'm not this mute quiet girl...just the freak." In general, though, Sarah's positive feelings about her in-group status seemed to outweigh her concerns about other school members' possible perceptions of her inadequacies. She often referred to her colleagues as "helpful," "nice," or "welcoming." When Sarah described her growth as a teacher she said, "I just feel much more sure of myself...I feel I've come into my own a little bit." She later added, "it's definitely a lot easier, not easier, but comfortable." Sarah seemed optimistic about the progress she was making as a teacher and looked forward to her future at the school.

In contrast, Jason often expressed negative emotions about his teaching situation, especially disgust and frustration with the dominant norms. For example, as a result of his feelings of being overburdened with difficult classes and receiving little or no administrative support, he talked about being "suckered" and "thrown" into his teaching situation and being "abused" as a teacher. Jason's use of these terms reflected a negative evaluation of the situation and he appeared to attribute malicious intent or motives to the administrators or the system. As a result of his evaluation, Jason appeared to question his identity as a teacher at the high school. "It's definitely been a different job than a lot of places...I feel like it's really been an eye opener. Like I definitely know that I don't want to do this. I'm just like...screw this." Jason seemed to be attempting to maintain his positive self-concept by narrating his experience in this emotional way, but he also appeared to be emotionally drained.

Some of Jason's emotional fatigue at school may have been related to his high level of *emotional labor* (Hochschild, 1979), which takes place when one is feeling certain emotions but must instead display different emotions. The classroom performance aspect of teaching often forces teachers into emotional labor during much of their workday. The positive emotions that teachers, especially new teachers, are expected to display in front of students can differ significantly from the emotions that they actually feel. Ashkanasy et al. (2000) explain that "emotional labor can be particularly detrimental to the employee performing the labor, and can take its toll both psychologically and physically...employees may bottle up feelings of frustration and resentment...If not given a healthy expressive outlet, this can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Grandey, 1988; Kruml & Geddes, 2000)" (p. 322). New teachers, because they are still not fully accepted into the organization, may be expected to be especially upbeat and positive because it feeds perceptions about their performance and their ability to manage their classrooms. In addition, expressing positive emotions validates the culture of the school as well as the identities of the veteran teachers.

The burden of emotional labor seemed to be especially significant for Jason. It seemed that his negative feelings about his teaching situation may have contrasted with expectations of professional demeanor in the classroom. For example, even though Jason felt "abused" by those in charge, he still had to perform as a positive, encouraging teacher to his students. It seemed that his

professional identity and its associated standards of behavior prevented him from outwardly displaying his emotions to his students.

On the other hand, the generally positive emotions that Sarah indicated regarding her teaching position complimented her demeanor in the classroom. She seemed happy and hopeful in her work. For instance, even when she spoke of students with personal problems, she seemed amused by her students' tendencies to "tell their life stories" and seemed optimistic about her efforts to help them through patience and understanding.

Power

Power was another significant theme in the data. Normative structures at the high school appeared to maintain the existing dominant culture and the power relationships that were embedded within them, as suggested by structuration theory. First of all, the structure of personnel within the building, with most administrators being separate from teachers and with teachers being separated from each other, indicated aspects of *panoptic power* as suggested by Foucault (1977). In the metaphorical panopticon, subjects are arranged so they are unable to see each other and to interact, while the overseer maintains surveillance. This produces subjects who are "isolated, individualized, passive and pliable" (Spears & Lea, 1994, p. 438).

According to data from the interviews, teachers often work separately at the high school and were only able to interact sporadically. Administrators kept themselves separate from teachers and only periodically interacted with teachers, primarily from positions of power to assess their performances and to

provide recommendations regarding classroom issues. Under these conditions, new teachers might be reluctant to seek help from administrators because they might feel that they will be assessed as inadequate or unskilled as teachers. During her interview, Michelle expressed in frustration how separate administrators are from her everyday realities. "You never see administrators in the classroom...*I don't see administrators in the classroom!*" Therefore, individual teachers are often left alone to deal with their classroom issues, and if they do confront administrators, they must often do so alone. Generally, individual teachers do not have the same level of power as a team of teachers might have. As Michelle had observed, there is more power in numbers. "If all five of us talk to an administrator and say we have this problem... it's not one person, it's five of use doing it together." However, from the interview data, it seemed that teachers had few opportunities to interact with administrators as groups.

The participant narratives of both veteran school members and newcomers illustrated the importance of talking with others and of sharing experiences in order to learn about how to do their jobs effectively. Yet, the physical structures at the high school isolated teachers and discouraged frequent interaction. It can, therefore, become difficult to foster organizational learning and growth. For instance, Feiman-Nemser (2003) suggests that "if we leave beginning teachers to sink or swim on their own, they may become overwhelmed and leave the field. Alternately, they may stay, clinging to practices and attitudes that help them survive but do not serve the education needs of students" (p. 27).

Therefore, the quality of students' educations can suffer because the skill levels of the teachers who stay may be geared toward survival, not toward the teaching excellence that emerges from including new ideas and perspectives. Schneider (1987) reflects aspects of structuration theory by stating, "If the people who do not fit leave, then the people who remain will be similar to each other" (p. 442).

In addition, the principle of requisite variety states that "in order to remain viable, a system must have a certain minimum level of variety in its parts and/or relationships" (Rowland, 2007, p. 6). Therefore, in order for groups and organizations to thrive, they need to include a portion of the unique contributions of their new members. If not, then an organization will simply reproduce itself without improvement. For instance, since Jason intends to leave, his differing ideas and perspectives will no longer be available for consideration at the high school. Instead, the existing culture will be reinforced by the addition of Sarah, who aligns with the values at the high school. Similarity usually reinforces the status quo and replicates existing norms and power relationships.

It is notable that the physical structures impacting personnel at the high school were maintained and overseen by the school's administrators, who appeared to possess the most power and influence at the high school. As Mumby (1988) points out, "it is through the process of structuration that discourse becomes constitutive of organizational reality, and because managerial interests usually control the structuration process they thereby control what is regarded as acceptable and meaningful organizational practice" (p. 99). For instance, by not being nearby for discourses with teachers, the higher-level administrators

reinforced the expectation that teachers are responsible for their own successes. Therefore, the structure of teacher isolation was maintained at the school, as suggested by structuration theory. Additionally, in alignment with structuration theory, the lack of discourse opportunities with teachers, which administrators managed, reinforced the lower status of teachers. This situation also maintained the established hierarchy at the high school, with administrators at a high level and teachers at a lower level.

Jason indicated that he felt the effects of administrative power and control. For instance, he often expressed his perception that administrators do not adequately respond to his requests for support with student discipline problems. "I've written several kids up four or five times. Why am I writing them up *four or five times*?" As an individual teacher, and a new one at that, Jason indicated that he felt frustrated about having little power or influence over the actions of his administrators. Jason seemed to struggle to make sense of his lack of power and its conflict with his teacher identity, which valued empowerment and support from others.

In contrast, Sarah did not appear to be troubled by her level of power as a new teacher. She seemed to accept her lower status by describing herself as a "low-man" at the high school. Sarah expressed optimism that her situation would improve in the future as her discipline skills improved, saying "it will be easier with disciplinary actions." Being viewed as being able to handle class discipline issues effectively, without administrative involvement, seemed to be a means to a positive teacher identity for Sarah and to a higher status at the high school.

For example, veteran teacher Connie noted proudly, “you don’t see a lot of [discipline] write ups from me.” Therefore, consistent with the norm of teacher autonomy, rather than expecting more administrative support with discipline issues, Sarah seemed comfortable with aspiring to improve her individual classroom discipline skills. In this way, she would not need to involve administrators at all and she would unconsciously contribute to the maintenance of the existing power structure, which included individual teacher autonomy.

The physical layout among personnel in the building was not the only power structure at the high school. The school’s culture aligned with what Kardos et al. (2001) describe a *veteran-oriented culture*, in which “the concerns and habits of experienced teachers determined professional interactions” and “expert teachers saw little or no need to interact with new colleagues or discuss their work in depth” (p. 261). For example, none of the existing veteran staff members indicated that they proactively approached new teachers to assist them, or even that they gained any insights or useful information from their interactions with new teachers. This implied a perceived lack of value regarding the potential contributions of new teachers to the school. This perception also reinforced the lower status of the new teachers within the school’s culture. Consequently, at times, new teachers might feel unwelcome and more like out-group members than in-group members. As Jason’s experience demonstrated in the study, feeling disconnected from the school organization can make a teacher’s retention less likely.

Chapter 8. Limitations

This case study has a number of limitations. First of all, it was conducted during a short time frame, so it does not include additional participant insights that might have developed over a longer time period of interviewing. Also, by using unstructured interviews, the new teacher participants drove many of the issues covered in the study. It is likely that their most salient issues emerged from their narratives; however, it is also possible that other important issues were not included as part of the study because of this approach.

Additionally, many factors can influence a new teacher's decision to stay or leave a school. For instance, schools with higher numbers of minority, low-income, and low-performing students often have higher teacher attrition rates (Guarino, Sanibañez, & Daley, 2006). The high school used in this study fits this description, so this factor may have influenced participant perceptions of their jobs. However, neither Sarah nor Jason focused on the school's demographics as a consistent issue of dissatisfaction. Also, since the case study dealt primarily with values and norms, insights about other significant issues to new teachers, such as the salaries and educational preparation, were not included.

Another limitation in the study was my interpretations as a researcher. As Van Maanen (1988) asserts, "the images of others inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral" (p. 1). While I endeavored to represent the study data realistically, my background and perspectives impacted the topics I chose to highlight and the excerpts I chose to include in the report. "As a context, culture is amenable not to causal analysis but to interpretation" (Pacanowsky &

O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, p. 123). Therefore, it must be noted that the study results are influenced to a significant extent by my interpretation of the data.

These limitations can be minimized by keeping in mind that this case study was not intended to be all inclusive or to demonstrate cause-effect relationships. My goal was to describe processes involved in communicating dominant norms within an organization at a particular point in time. The study was intended to broaden understandings regarding newcomer socialization by providing real-life examples and experiences.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

This case study illustrated the experiences of two new teachers in detail as they were socialized into a high school and learned about its dominant norms. The narrative descriptions provided by the study's participants, when viewed under the umbrella of social constructivism and within the frameworks of structuration theory, standpoint theory, and social identity theory, provided rich illustrations and comparisons of the socialization experiences of two new teachers. The study demonstrated how dominant norms were perceived at the school and how the new teachers' perceptions of those norms impacted their perceptions of fit within the school. One new teacher in the study appeared to align with the school's most dominant norms; the other new teacher seemed to have much difficulty accepting the dominant norms at the school. The data concurred with previous research indicating that if someone perceives having a poor fit with an organization in terms of its norms and values, it is likely that he or she will leave the organization. Overall, the study data provided rich descriptions and insights upon which those concerned about the retention of new teachers might draw as they consider their own organizational cultures and socialization practices.

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