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Characteristics of Contemporary U.S. Progressive Middle Schools

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CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY U. S. PROGRESSIVE MIDDLE SCHOOLS

JAN WARE RUSSELL

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program

of Antioch University

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

October, 2012

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTEMPORARY U.S. PROGRESSIVE MIDDLE SCHOOLS

prepared by

Jan Ware Russell

Is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership and Change.

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Dedication

My first and foremost dedication of this work is "to praise God, because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalms 139:14). Without the talents, personality, and providential grace provided by God, I would not have come this far. I dedicate this body of work to the many wonderful teachers who encouraged me to dream big. I could not have made it to this point in life without the loving support of my parents, John V. and Joan (Carter) Ware. I pray this study will impact and inspire my children, Shane L. Ferryman and Ashley R. Ferryman, and my grandchildren, James D. Breneman Jr., Breeze A. Breneman, and Shane Michael Ferryman. I also want to dedicate this book to my favorite sister, Joy Ware Miller, and her family who have given me first-hand experience in providing education that captures the aspects of play, passion, and purpose. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to all my students that have had me in the past and those who will have me in the future. I hope that your life will be different because of our time together.

Abstract

Progressive education has a long history within the American K-12 education system dating back to the late 1800s. During this period, two very distinct ideologies represented progressive education: 1) administrative progressives supporting standardization as a means of efficiency and 2) pedagogical progressives supporting child-centered learning based upon a well-rounded education. This study looks at 82 contemporary pedagogical progressive schools to identify common characteristics. Child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making were the three overarching philosophies covered in this study. Data was collected through an online survey of school leaders. The majority of research surrounding progressive education is qualitative and focuses on the experience of teachers, students, parents, or administrators, and not the characteristics of the school. This study is a mixed methods study that uses quantitative and qualitative methods to identify qualities found in contemporary progressive schools. Findings are intended to help school leaders plan for growth and sustainability. A 6-point scale was used to gather school leaders' level of disagreement or agreement about whether particular educational practices associated with each philosophy occur within their school. Mean scores for the educational practice items for each philosophy were the independent variables in the regression analyses. A 10-point semantic differential rating scale was used to identify the school leaders' perceptions of whether their school was adhering to each philosophy. These ratings were used as the dependent variable in the regression analyses. Significant educational practice items for each philosophy include: Child-Centered Learning Practices—Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores), Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process, Small group student interaction creates

learning opportunities; Community Integration Practices—Student community service is used as a learning experience, Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations; Democratic Decision-Making Practices—Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions, Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number, Consensus is preferred to majority rule, Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders. This dissertation is accompanied by an MP4 video of the author's introduction. The electronic version of this Dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center, www.ohiolink.edu/etd.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Researcher's Focal Point

Education is the central theme of my life. I have spent over forty-five years of my life within the walls of a classroom as either a teacher or a student gaining credentials that afforded me the opportunity to help others while simultaneously holding full-time employment in either education or counseling environments. I am a life-long learner with the passion of transferring the same joy of learning to others. I am an educator by heart and by profession. I am a certified middle school teacher with over ten years of experience teaching seventh grade science in the United States and currently teaching a contained 4th and 5th grade combined class in the Bahamas.

I believe education assists individuals gain the critical thinking skills necessary to maneuver through the complex global society of today. However, over my lifetime, I have noticed not all students perform at the same rate or level of other students. The lack of student achievement is often credited to the lack of motivation or skills of the student and not to the flaws of the education system. The historical overview of the American K-12 education system rouses feelings of disappointment within me when I realize that students are often marginalized and labeled based upon standardized test scores. I believe that if offered alternative learning environments and styles, many of the marginalized and labeled students would experience academic success.

I believe education based upon a comprehensive understanding of the student is the purpose of progressive education. Education should simultaneously transmit head knowledge while also instilling responsibility and critical thinking skills. I am a proponent of progressive education and all its facets that enhance student-centered learning combined with community

integration and democratic decision-making. Much is known about educational processes and child development (physical, cognitive, social, and spiritual) and yet we as an educated society cannot formulate an educational plan that is inclusive for all children.

Politics, power, and prestige have manipulated the American K-12 education system (Horn, 2002). This manipulation has often been motivated by benevolent intentions, but at times it has been an effort to maintain the privileged status quo. It is important to have an alternative learning environment available for students. Hard core standardized educators often refer to progressive educators as left-wing socialist individuals and do not recognize the worth and quality of the education provided outside of standardized practices.

I bring to this research several assumptions about progressive schools that I will endeavor to keep in check as I survey the progressive middle school terrain. These assumptions include my belief that (1) the best type of original leadership within a progressive school is a collaborative group of parents and/or teachers; (2) curriculum expands to higher level reasoning within progressive schools; and (3) the impact of the standardized NCLB is most evident when students are transferring out of a progressive school without standardized test scores into a standardized high school or college.

As a whole systems thinker and public school educator, I believe it is important for progressive schools to be aware of their internal and external environmental connections in an effort to be proactive in navigating the ever-changing education landscape.

U. S. Education

It is very difficult to write an unbiased account of the history of U. S. Education. Many of the scholars (Cohen, 1976; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1995) that research and write about the history of education articulate the near impossibility of recording or researching history

without inserting a trace of persuasion or a hint of nostalgia in the process (Cohen, 1976; Kliebard, 1995). Therefore, a brief synopsis, without commentary, of U. S. education will provide a backdrop for the subsequent framing of progressive education.

Education between the mid 1600s up through the late 1700s within the United States was influenced by the religious beliefs of the colonial European immigrants. Education was dependent upon the classics, often in Latin, and discussion of the Bible imparting moral lessons of character and behavior (Kizer, 2004).

Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Noah Webster influenced the transition from a European style education to what is now considered American education that is less dependent upon Latin and scientific inquiry. The fledgling government of the late 1700s demonstrated the perceived importance of education by enacting the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 setting aside specific sections of land for public education (VanZant, 2004).

The mid-1800s was an era full of educational developments. The first American public kindergarten was founded in 1873 (Bredekamp, 2011). Horace Mann championed the idea of a common school that was available to all children (Mason-King, 2004). There was an increase in Catholic immigrants arriving in America. Disagreement between Protestant and Catholic supporters determining the curriculum source (Catholic Bible versus Protestant Bible) and purpose of education led to the establishment of private Catholic schools as we know them today (Drake, 1955; Tyack, 1997).

Toward the end of the 1800s, the continued increase of European immigrants arriving in the U. S., propelled individuals like Friedrich Taylor and Elwood Cubberly to initiate the movement to organize schools like the factories of the day to provide efficiency in resources. This also led to the implementation of compulsory attendance and child labor laws for school-

aged-children (Miller, 2004). The increase of student enrollment also led to the division of students by age and eventually led to our current K-12 system. The institution of public education gained attention from educators, sociologists, and politicians as radical changes occurred during the social movements to improve physical and mental health and reduce crime and poverty in the late 1800s.

The early 1900s introduced an increase of psychological research resulting in the identification of students by personality and abilities. G. Stanley Hall established the science of education psychology and Lewis Terman created the Standford-Binet Intelligence Test (Meiss, 2004). Edward Thorndike created the "Alpha and Beta tests, ancestors to today's ASVAB, a multiple choice test, administered by the United States Military Entrance Processing Command, used to determine qualification for enlistment in the United States armed forces" (Plucker, 2011, sect. 5, par. 2).

World War II brought with it a change to the adolescent landscape. "With the men off to war, teenagers—boys and girls—found employment readily available, and so they had money to spend. With fathers away and mothers at work, another new phenomenon arose—juvenile delinquency" (Goodwin, 1999). The 1950s throughout the mid to late 1970s brought with it a continued increase in school enrollment from the "Baby Boom" generation as WWII veterans returned home and started families. Increased enrollment and an emerging competitive scientific global environment fueled the continued debate about the most appropriate education format needed to keep the United States as a global leader.

During the 1980s through the early 21st Century bi-partisan government-sponsored studies were conducted in an attempt to identify the problem with U. S. education and recommend solutions. In 1982, Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman co-authored the book, *In*

Search of Excellence. The book was written to highlight the success of American corporations. During the mid-1980s the computer-driven society was beginning to emerge and become an integrated part of the business world. *In Search of Excellence* was required reading in many higher education and business venues. Another book, *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983), in the mid-1980s revealed a continuing decline in the quality of American education output as the global economy pleaded for greater output of student performances. "In 1989, an education summit involving all fifty state governors and President George H. W. Bush resulted in the adoption of national education goals for the year 2000" based upon good and positive intentions (*Standards Based Education,* 2009, sect. 4, par. 2). President George W. Bush proposed the wording and idea of a national standards-based program called "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) soon after he took presidential office in 2001 and signed the bill into law on January 8, 2002. Twenty-five years after the original *Nation at Risk* report and six years into the NCLB Act, the U.S. Government issued a follow-up report entitled *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-five Years After A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The report states, "On a strictly domestic level, our performance at the high school level is as alarming as it was at the time of *A Nation at Risk*, if not worse" (p. 10).

The current education environment is driven by the motivation of superior student achievement on standardized tests. From large school districts to individual classrooms, standardized test scores dictate the curriculum and structure established for achieving the "No Child Left Behind" standards by the year 2014.

Intermediate School Significance

Children are unique individuals and not all learn in the same way or at the same rate. Child-development theories of Jean Piaget (Cognitive Development Stages), Erik Erickson

(Psychosocial Development Stages), and Lawrence Kohlberg (Moral Development Stages) are commonly referenced in identifying the developmental paths of children. The developmental paths are never set in stone. Depending on each child's environment and resources available, he/she moves through the developmental process differently. Standardized education penalizes some students because they do not perform at or above a specified level on an identified test on a given day within their lives (Archbald, Glutting, & Xiaoyu, 2009; Borg, Plumlee, & Stranahan, 2007; Crocker, Schmitt, & Tang, 1988).

My area of educational interest and training surrounds the intermediate years of childhood development. This period of education holds a significant place in my own developmental history. The most memorable period of my education is the time spent in junior high school. My memories are not of the academic attainment, which must have occurred, but of the social interactions and the development of a personal identity. This period of life included watching various people ranging from those just slightly older, to those graduating from high school, to those within the flashy, glitzy, and glamorous entertainment industry. This period of observation created a longing and hunger for adulthood combined with confusion and a melancholy disposition of loneliness. I was involved in many organizations and activities, but I didn't feel like I belonged.

During my intermediate academic years, there were significant teachers, counselors, and mentors that encouraged me and surrounded me. My original decision to be a teacher was based upon wanting to be a positive influence to students in that same intermediate transition period as others had been for me. I've been teaching within the middle school environment for over ten years and I've observed the repeated pattern of childhood transition and the struggles that occur. I have given my best to students to later hear from them about the importance of my contact

during their transition period and the impact it had on their decisions. I believe the intermediate years of a child's education are crucial, and therefore I desire to remain professionally focused on this group of students.

I use the term *intermediate* because the literature supports that there is a transitional period between childhood and adolescence, most often termed pre-adolescence (Alexander & Williams, 1965; Brough, 1994; Buell, 1967; Caskey & Anfara, 2007). The literature also agrees on the characteristics of pre-adolescence, but there is a great divide on determining when this period occurs. Literature also documents that the successful maneuverings through the intermediate years impact high school academic success and even graduation (Bredekamp, 2011; Cataldi, KewalRamani, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2009; Greene, Winters, & Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 2006).

U. S. Progressive Education

U. S. educational reform dates back to the late 1800s with the transition from the one-room community authorized schoolhouse to the introduction of bureaucratic, compulsory, efficiently run businesses of education. Educational frameworks addressing the increased industrialization of society and greater dependence on scientific theory were considered progressive. Therein lies the difficulty of identifying modern progressive education. The evolution of the American K-12 education system used the word *progressive* for each new or renewed reform. Progressive education is most often identified with the "Progressive Era" of the early 1900s when much emphasis was directed at social, political, and moral concerns intensified by the transition within society from agrarian to industrial and homogeneous to heterogeneous. Education was one avenue recommended to address and reduce the issues of increased poverty, poor health, and a rise in crime.

Internal strain between administrative and pedagogical progressive education.

During the early 1900s, two progressive camps coexisted. David Labaree (2005) described this coexistence as a tragic marriage between individuals that identified scientific numeration methods (administrative data keepers) as progressive and individuals that focused their energy on developing child-centered (pedagogical methods) as progressive. Administrative progressive proponents included Edward L. Thorndike, David Sneeden, Ross Finney, Edward Ross, Leonard Ayres, Charles Ellwood, Ellwood P. Cubberley, W. W. Charters, and Charles Prosser (Labaree, 2005). Pedagogical progressives included John Dewey, Francis Parker, George S. Counts, Lois Meek Stolz, William Heard Kilpatrick, Eduard C. Lindeman, Jesse H. Newlon, Harry Overstreet, Sidney Hook, Harold Rugg, Goodwin Watson, James L. Hymes, Wilford M. Aikin, and Boyd Bode (Anderson, 2004; Labaree, 2005; Teeter, 2004).

Alfie Kohn (2008) addressed the current and continued conflict between standardized and progressive practices:

> There is pressure to raise standardized test scores, something that progressive education manages to do only sometimes and by accident — not only because that isn't its purpose but also because such tests measure what matters least. (The recognition of that fact explains why progressive schools would never dream of using standardized tests as part of their admissions process.) More insidiously, though, we face pressure to standardize our practices in general. Thinking is messy, and deep thinking is really messy. This reality coexists uneasily with demands for order — in schools where the curriculum is supposed to be carefully coordinated across grade levels and planned well ahead of time, or in society at large. (p. 26)

Administrative twist on progressive child education. Standardized testing, as a method of evaluating student achievement, is particularly undesirable for lower socioeconomic and minority students. This is true because standardized tests have historically been normed by a general population that consists of middle to upper-middle class European American students (Beck, 2009; Briggs, 2008; Craig, Thompson, Washington, & Potter, 2004; De Champlain, 1996;

Drasgow, 1987; Soloano-Flores & Min, 2006). While all ethnicities have been included in newer versions of the standardized tests, the minority numbers are lower, and the answers to the tests are still generated by a majority of middle to upper-middle class European American adults that may not realize or count as valid minority frames of reference within the background of minority students taking the standardized tests.

In my 2010 Critical Analysis of Methods Learning Achievement for the Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program, three main areas of concern that affected student performance on standardized tests were evident. First, student attitude directly impacts the outcome on standardized tests (Arbuthnot, 2009; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Ryan, Ryan, Arbuthnot, & Samuels, 2007; Stricker & Ward, 2004; Vaughn, 2009). Not all students have a willingness or a desire to perform on high-stake tests. Students disengage themselves in striving to perform well on the standardized assessments, and some students after a lengthy period of discouragement may drop out of school. Second, linguistics is a function of demographics, culture, and dialect and can affect standardized test performance (Beal, Adams, & Cohen, 2010; Fagundes, Haynes, Haak, & Moran, 1998; Qi, Kaiser, Milan, Yzquierdo, & Hancock, 2003; Solano-Flores & Li, 2006). Students with a different background than the majority on whom the tests are normed are penalized because their environment does not provide adequate preparation for the standardized test questions and answers. Third is test bias. The construction and analysis of tests create an unfair advantage for European American students of middle to upper-middle socioeconomic classes (Craig et al., 2004; De Champlain, 1996; Freedle, 2006; Scherbaum & Goldstein, 2008). European American students of middle to upper-middle socioeconomic backgrounds may have experienced cultural exchanges of interaction within families and community that are included within a test question that when viewed from a

different ethnic group's experience leads to a different, but correct answer for the minority student, but wrong for the pre-determined test answer. While linguistics still plays a part, it is not the fundamental focal point. Test bias may very well be a factor of vocabulary, or be a difference in the experience of completing a timed assessment format. Students very capable of answering the questions receive a poor score when they cannot complete all the listed items within the specified standardized time, thereby excluding them from scholarships or entrance into higher levels of learning experiences.

Beyond the three areas of concern surrounding standardized testing for some students, the high stakes associated with student achievement scores have generated the manipulation of numbers to inflate the success of student achievement on standardized testing and graduation rates (Hout & Elliott, 2011; Nichols & Berlinger, 2005) leading to the formation of organizations like "The National Center for Fair and Open Testing." Schools are able to manipulate the numbers by assigning students to various categories that may be excluded from the reported figures. Transient students whose tests scores are typically lower because of lower attendance rates can be excluded if their attendance exceeds a specified number of absences. Students who drop out of school before senior year graduation are not counted in the reported number of seniors, therefore inflating the graduation rate. Graduation rates do not include the number of students retained and not completing high school in a four-year period. Serious allegations of these types of fraudulent reporting methods have occurred across America (Nichols & Berlinger, 2005).

Progressive education, an alternative to standardized education methods, takes into account student developmental variances and taps into the fascination of learning to motivate students. This type of education reduces the need to manipulate data because student assessment

is not dependent upon grades (Chappuis, 2009; Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010; Wagner & Compton, 2012). Most often student achievement is demonstrated through projects or portfolios demonstrating the mastery of an integration of concepts across all subjects. Progressive education works hard not to categorize students into standardized reporting categories.

Pedagogical turn on progressive child education. The pedagogical progressive movement influenced during the early 1900s by John Dewey, Francis Parker, and others continues today. The principles of child-centered learning, integration with the community, and democratic decision-making within schools espoused by these leaders is the "progressive" framework being considered in this study.

John Dewey (1897) articulated his "Pedagogic Creed" in five distinct categories; Article One—What Education Is, Article Two—What The School Is, Article Three—The Subject-Matter of Education, Article Four—The Nature of Method, and Article Five—The School and Social Progress. Dewey's Creed scaffolds the ideology of contemporary progressive education.

Stephen Covey (2004) often writes about beginning any project with the end in mind. Educating students is no different and Dewey's Article One (What Education Is) addressed the fundamental question of the purpose of education:

> I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself….I believe that this educational process has two sides—one psychological and one sociological; and that neither can be subordinated to the other or neglected without evil results following….Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests, and habits. (p. 77)

Dewey (1897) identified the purpose of education beginning with the student and the student's interests versus the purpose of education being identified as providing a vehicle for serving the needs of society. Education is an enlightenment of each child's mind and capacity.

Dewey (1897) did not leave out the relationship between student and society. In Article Two (What The School Is), Dewey viewed the school as the receptacle that intersects student and society:

> I believe that the school is primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends….I believe that much of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed. The value of these is conceived as lying largely in the remote future; the child must do these things for the sake of something else he is to do; they are mere preparation. As a result they do not become a part of the life experience of the child and so are not truly educative….I believe that the child should be stimulated and controlled in his work through the life of the community….I believe that under existing conditions far too much of the stimulus and control proceeds from the teacher, because of neglect of the idea of the school as a form of social life. (p. 77)

Dewey described the school as the focal point of interactions that transpire between student and community.

Dewey never formulated a curriculum of learning either in Article Two (What The School Is) or Article Three (The Subject-Matter of Education). In Article Three Dewey (1897) approached the issue of content that parallels the contemporary concept of "critical thinking" that is necessary to survive in an ever-changing society:

> I believe that the social life of the child is the basis of concentration, or correlation, in all his training or growth….I believe therefore, that the true centre of correlation of the school subjects is not science, nor literature, nor history, nor geography, but the child's own social activities….I believe that there is, therefore, no succession of studies in the ideal school curriculum. If education is life, all life has, from the outset, a scientific aspect; an aspect of art and culture and an aspect of communication….I believe finally, that education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same. (pp. 78-79)

Dewey hinted at the realization that rote memorization of facts within itself does not fully qualify as education of a student.

Dewey (1897) demonstrated an understanding in Article Four (The Nature of Method) that students move through the process of education at different rates and that predetermined class assignments and academic benchmarking based upon age stifle the true learning process:

> I believe that the question of method is ultimately reducible to the question of the order of development of the child's powers and interests....I believe that only through the continual and sympathetic observation of childhood's interests can the adult enter into the child's life and see what it is ready for, and upon what material it could work most readily and fruitfully. (p. 79)

Article Five (The School and Social Progress) reiterated Articles One through Four in describing the correlation between student, school, and society. Dewey (1897) demonstrated his strong belief that education without connection to society for a student is not education at all and is devoid of benefit for society as well:

> I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform....I believe that in the ideal school we have the reconciliation of the individualistic and the institutional ideals....I believe, finally, that the teacher is engaged, not simply in the training of individuals, but in the formation of the proper social life. (p. 80)

Within Article Five Dewey elevated the teacher from the deliverer of facts to the level of facilitator of life-long ideals and skills.

Dewey's educational philosophy included the importance of education beginning with student interests and skills. Dewey determined that education flourishes when community aspects are incorporated within the learning environment. Dewey proposed that connections to society within education should demonstrate democratic principles. Dewey advocated democracy not as a governmental institution, but a democracy of people communicating a shared current existence moving forward into a mutually beneficial shared future existence (Dewey, 1966).

Preliminary Sketch of U. S. Progressive Schools

The current state of progressive education reveals that while there are adequate

definitions of progressive education, the descriptions of progressive education are a wide

assortment. Progressive education is not specific to one type of learning environment; being a

charter school, a magnet school, or even a private school does not identify progressive education.

Alfie Kohn (2008) and Dennis Littky and Samantha Grabelle (2004) depicted in their writings a

framework that encompassed progressive education devoid of limiting qualifiers. Kohn (2008)

stated, "[S]chools can be characterized according to how closely they reflect a commitment to

values such as these: attending to the whole child, community, collaboration, social justice,

intrinsic motivation, deep understanding, active learning, and taking kids seriously" (pp. 20-22).

Littky & Grabelle (2004) described what they believe all students should gain from their

education experience. They listed the items,

- Be life long learners
- Be passionate
- Be ready to take risks
- Be able to problem-solve and think critically
- Be able to look at things differently
- Be able to work independently and with others
- Be creative
- Care and want to give back to their community
- Preserver
- Have integrity and self-respect
- Have moral courage
- Be able to use the world around them well
- Speak well, write well, read well, and work well with numbers
- Truly enjoy their life and their work   (p. 1)

More often than not, the school environment described by Kohn and Littky and Grabelle

are nurtured in smaller, independent schools. A school associated with the small school

movement does not automatically label it as progressive. However, because of the intimacy

involved in the nurturing of students within the progressive education environment, smaller is

often consistent with progressive education. Deborah Meier (2002) described the need for

building trust within schools to facilitate the higher level of learning promoted through

progressive education:

> These are communities that are warily, often quarrelsomely determined to stick with each other for the sake of the kids. Within these communities, teachers are encouraged to talk to each other, debate things of importance, and use their judgment on a daily basis. Parents meet with teachers frequently and press for their own viewpoint. Sometimes they make trouble. Kids learn the art of democratic conversation – and the art of passing judgment – by watching and talking to teachers whom the larger community shows respect for and who in turn show respect for their communities. Principals are partners with their faculties and have the respect of their communities. Everywhere you look, in such schools, people are keeping company across lines of age and expertise. Innumerable casual as well as formal interactions take place between generations. And there are plenty of checks and balances to support appropriately skeptical families, citizens, and taxpayers. But the bottom line is, the school has sufficient authority to act on its collective knowledge of its children. (p. 4)

Charis Sharp (2008) summarized that "small schools as a whole are showing marked

advancements in many indicators of effective education, such as greater student achievement,

decreased dropout rates, and higher teacher morale" (p. 1). Sharp continue by identifying the

strength of small schools as the democratic leadership by teachers and students versus a strong

authoritative domination. The statements by Kohn, Littky and Grabelle, Meier, and Sharp

revealed an awareness of effective alternative methods to educate children without implementing

testing mandates.

In my 2011 Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program Individual

Learning Achievement study examining the history of progressive schools, I recognized a pattern

of school leadership of a charismatic leader building a following of parents and teachers to start a

progressive school. These original people subsequently recruit other parents, teachers, and

students into the organization. Many of these schools grow, gain national recognition, and then

lose support. The Gary Plan "had organizational and curriculum features that fostered hands-on

activities relating to occupations and daily life" (Volk, 2005, p. 39). The Gary Plan was a success in Gary, Indiana, under the enthusiastic leadership of William Wirt. Its success created a desire by other districts to replicate the same achievements. The Gary Plan was attempted in New York, but failed. Missing in the implementation was the same enthusiasm created by Wirt back in Indiana. In New York a lack of shared vision by school employees, a lack of project implementation planning, and lack of stakeholder training led to failure. The failure in New York was not blamed on poor implementation, but rather the progressive nature of the Gary Plan, leading to the defamation of the educational program in Gary and other similar offshoots.

Often after the original charismatic leader retires or moves on to another organization, the passion and direction of the progressive school cools and regresses to a less risky pedagogical curriculum. A review of progressive school histories shows that parent and/or teacher collaborative groups tend to maintain the greatest adherence to the original mission statement of progressive education. These same groups, while independent within their origin, may have outside national or international support that contributes to the resolve of mission such as Montessori, Waldorf, and the Association for Middle Level Education. There are also public schools creating alternative learning environments through charter schools, magnet schools, or academies. These schools are limited in their ability to set themselves apart from standardized schools because of their inability to separate themselves from their governing bodies set within a standardized, authoritative, bureaucratic structure.

Progressive schools have a mission statement prominently displayed on their websites. The pictures associated with the schools' websites display happy smiling children in colorful environments. However, photos and testimonials can be selected to attract prospective students

and add to positive media presence. The majority of progressive schools invite interested persons to visit and experience the enriched learning environment.

Independent, non-public schools are not required by law to report standardized test scores (if taken at all) to their respective state departments of education. Some schools do report and scores can be found in various public administrative databases. Progressive schools in general do not attempt to label children with grades, categories, or limiting titles. However, because of the American education system's history, parents as well as the community desire a recognizable report of student success and progress. This lack of a graded performance by progressive schools creates difficulty for students to transfer to colleges and other institutions requiring standardized entrance criteria. Thus, some progressive schools administer standardized tests and report scores, but the degree to which these practices compromise adherence to the progressive philosophies of child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic-decision making lies unanswered.

Three Reoccurring Features in U. S. Progressive Education

While scholars have slightly different definitions of progressive education, three themes are consistently associated with it: child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making within the school. These three philosophies have strong ties with the original purpose of education as set forth by John Dewey and other pedagogical progressives of the early 1900s as well as present-day progressive educators.

Predicament of Sustaining Progressive Education Features

The pattern of a grassroots beginning, a rise to recognition, and a decline in popularity even leading to closure is not limited to my brief analysis of selected progressive schools, such as the Gary Plan (Gary, IN), Francis W. Parker School (Chicago, IL) and Lincoln School of The

Teachers College (Columbia University, NY). James Nehring (2006) described a similar pattern

of development, a rise to prominence, and a subsequent decline of various schools from his

Massachusetts area. He described the 1834 beginning of the Temple School by Bronson Alcott,

the father of Louisa May Alcott (the author of *Little Women*). The Temple School encouraged

student-driven questions and reflective thought. Local authorities criticized the progressive style

of learning until students began to withdraw and the school eventually closed (Nehring, 2006,

p. 2).

Nehring (2006) identified, as I did, the Francis W. Parker school (this one established in

the late 1800s in Quincy, MA) that returned to a "sad normality" after Parker left the area (p. 2).

Nehring also described the Beaver Country Day School "founded by activist mothers in the

Boston suburb Chestnut Hill" in 1923 (p. 2). Nehring stated,

> The school flourished under the control of wealthy and influential Boston families, and
> by finding allies among prominent educators and within universities. But it fell on hard
> times during World War II, as anything perceived as experimental gave way to more
> conservative demands for rote learning. (p. 2)

Nehring also pointed out the school survived by moderating its approach to be less innovative.

He also recognized that this same school in contemporary times has "reasserted its original

mission" (p. 3).

Often it is the innovation of progressive education that allows it to flourish and also that

leads to its demise. As Kohn (2008) stated, "learning is messy" and it does not follow the

efficient plan of predetermined curriculum and standardized tests. When progressive education

schools flourish, opponents often criticize their success. Criticism is often directed at the lack of

curriculum, time-lines, and testing. Progressive education schools face a constant barrage from

the external environment while simultaneously dealing with normal operational pressures to

sustain their efforts in providing successful alternative education.

The Identified Void

The question, however, still remains unanswered in the literature regarding the best method for progressive education schools to passionately sustain their mission over an extended period of time.

The discussion of progressive schools and their mission is a silent hole in literature. Much is written about the process of developing a mission. There is limited literature that speaks to the ongoing demonstration of that mission in practice for an organization. Literature abounds related to wordsmithing practices for creating a mission statement and the literature that encourages the memorization of the mission statement by all stakeholders. But, after the initial work and celebration of establishing a mission statement, the literature describing the ongoing practice of actively portraying the mission statement in observable practical behaviors becomes sparse. Conceptualizing the process of sustaining the mission of a contemporary progressive education school is a valuable addition to the scholarly literature.

Research Intent and Questions

This research is designed to identify the characteristics of contemporary progressive middle schools and identify factors that enhance or inhibit adherence to the philosophies of progressive education. This is exploratory research guided by the following questions.

1. What school demographics describe contemporary progressive middle schools?

2. What educational practices associated with the three basic philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—are part of contemporary progressive middle schools?

3. How do progressive middle school leaders rate their school in terms of adherence to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making?

4. What educational practices are most strongly associated with perception of ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—in contemporary progressive middle schools?

5. What school demographic characteristics influence perceived ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making in—contemporary progressive middle schools?

Chapter Overviews

The literature review of Chapter II covers an historic overview and characteristics of progressive education. Literature reveals a pattern of progressive education schools originating through the passion of an individual or small group only to be closed or change direction after leadership succession. Chapter II identifies 1) an historic overview of the dual existence of administrative and pedagogical progressive philosophies, 2) an overview of various progressive education movements and influential people, and 3) an overview of progressive education characteristics in theory. Chapter II also identifies the lack of literature addressing what sustains progressive education philosophies.

Chapter III details the methodological process of this mixed-method quantitative study with an embedded qualitative component. This chapter includes the literature surrounding the methodological development and rationale of design, population choice, survey development, and analysis method. The choice of a quantitative study is based upon the lack of quantitative analysis within the current literature pertaining to progressive education environmental forces. The embedded qualitative portion of this study allows a fresh vocalization from progressive educators describing their current experience in maintaining their progressive mission.

Chapter IV discusses the quantitative and qualitative findings of the research, while Chapter V includes my discussion of the findings. Chapter V also includes examples of possible

future studies, leadership recommendations for progressive educators, and my personal reflection after completing this study.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Collins English Dictionary provides a definition of progressive as "denoting or relating to an educational system that allows flexibility in learning procedures, based on activities determined by the needs and capacities of the individual child, the aim of which is to integrate academic with social development" (Progressive, 2011). This definition, while concise, does not portray the vast range of variation exhibited by contemporary progressive education schools or acknowledge the embattled history surrounding the term. The American K-12 education reform movements have often included the term *progressive education* for any new or revised practice. Dating back to the early 1900s and the American Progressive Era, progressive education has been manifested through two different factions with two different agendas. The two different groups are generally identified as administrative progressives and pedagogical progressives.

The intertwined history of progressive education including both administrative and pedagogical methods parallels the growth of American society. During the late 1800s and early 1900s there was a push to formalize the structure of the American education process due to the interconnectedness between individuals and an emerging industrialized society. At the same time, there were educators that proposed methodology and pedagogy within the schools as the solution to the interconnectedness between individuals and the industrialized society.

U. S. Education

Education has played a vital role in the United States in its evolution from a British Colonial state to an independent super power. Education has functioned as the institution to transmit religious, moral, and technical knowledge from generation to generation. The intensity and priority of each knowledge base has driven the debate between scholars in determining the

purpose of education. The religious and moral components of education have steadily been stripped from the public education agenda, leaving the focus of U. S., K-12 education to equip individuals with concrete academic knowledge that can be recognized through the acquisition of a high school diploma or a marketable skill to enhance society.

The majority of U. S. schools recognize child-centered progressive methods as best practice during early childhood education. Child-centered practices include the use of manipulatives, multi-discipline integrated thematic units, and project-based activities. These activities captivate children and strengthen their interest in learning. As students get older, the guiding force in traditional school settings becomes a standardized curriculum versus the continued dependence upon student interest in progressive school environments.

However, with the current structure of the American K-12 education system, the change from an engaging, interactive learning environment to a structured and regimented learning environment comes at a time that many students need to continue in a more flexible learning style. The instructional change typically occurs as students move into "intermediate" or "middle school." Progressive educators like Lois Meek Stolz and James L. Hymes supported progressive education practices for all ages.

U. S. Progressive Education

The institution of American education has an arduous history of ups and downs interlaced with twists and turns. David Tyack (1974) described the historical backdrop leading to the transitions within U. S. education from the late 1800s to the mid 1900s:

> During these years the structures of school systems grew complex and often huge, new specializations appeared, conceptions of the nature of "intelligence" and learning shifted, and schools occupied a far larger place in the lives of youth (partly because child labor laws eliminated jobs and more and more employees required certificates and credentials). (pp. 7-8)

Many reforms have risen to prominence and then fallen away during the life of American education. Finances, politics, and social trends of the larger American society often parallel the rise and fall within the development of American education. Frontline teachers and students have been at the mercy of the ever-changing educational requirements that occur based upon the influences of non-education institutions and lobbyists. Tyack addressed the less-than successful changes in the education system. He identified the tendency to focus on personnel changes within the system rather than changes to the system itself:

> It is more important to expose and correct the injustice of the social system than to scold its agents. Indeed, one of the chief reasons for the failures of educational reforms of the past has been precisely that they called for a change of philosophy or tactics on the part of the individual school employee rather than systemic change – and concurrent transformations in the distribution of power and wealth in the society as a whole. (pp. 10-11)

Systemic change was at the heart of scholars like John Dewey who envisioned education encompassing democracy and social justice through the interests and life issues of students in an effort to facilitate systemic change.

Internal strain between administrative and pedagogical progressive education.
The differences between administrative and pedagogical progressive education philosophies widened during the 1940s and have continued to this day. The emergence of the U.S. from the depression, combined with the crumbling political isolationism policy toward totalitarian influences around the world, and the heightened evolution of technology created a faction of pedagogical progressives (romanticist) and administrative progressives (utilitarian) (Labaree, 2005, p. 281).

Pedagogical progressive proponents during this period included John Dewey, George S. Counts, Lois Meek Stolz, William Heard Kilpatrick, Eduard C. Lindeman, Jesse H. Newlon, Wilford M. Aikin, Harold Rugg, James L. Hymes, and Francis W. Parker who influenced the

development of differentiated learning based upon student abilities and interests. Table 2.1

provides a brief synopsis of the key pedagogical progressive proponents.

Table 2.1
Key Pedagogical Progressive Proponents

Name	Background	Key Contribution to Progressive Education Movement
John Dewey (1859-1952)	Dewey is recognized as the leading force of U. S. progressive education. Dewey's writings encompassed education, philosophy, and psychology. Dewey's influence was offered to others through his teaching profession at the University of Michigan, the University of Minnesota, the University of Chicago, and Teachers College, Columbia University. Dewey also was elected president of the American Psychological Association (1899) and the American Philosophical Association (1905).	Recognized as the "Father" of American Progressive Education.
George S. Counts (1889-1974)	Counts, a teacher of educational sociology that believed that schools should take a very active stance in promoting social justice and democracy. Counts taught at Delaware College, University of Washington, University of Chicago, Columbia University, University of Pittsburgh, Michigan State University, and Southern Illinois University. Count was chairman of the American Labor Party (1942-1944), president of the American Federation of Teachers, and a member of the Commission on the Social Studies of the American Historical Association. Counts was the first editor of the Progressive journal *Social Frontier*.	Believed that the structure of schools tends to support authoritarian dominance and believed that education was an opportunity to promote social justice.
Lois Meek Stolz (1891-1984)	Stolz was a student of John Dewey at Teachers College, Columbia University. The American Association of University Women recruited Stolz to serve as Education Secretary and was commissioned to develop a national	Contributed to the understanding of human development from early childhood through adulthood

Name	Background	Key Contribution to Progressive Education Movement
	program of adult education. Stolz was a leading force in the development of nursery school facilities at the Richmond, CA, Kaiser Shipyards during WWII.	based upon biological/physiological stages and needs.
William Heard Kilpatrick (1871-1965)	Kilpatrick's strong conviction to democratic values influenced his education philosophies. Kilpatrick demonstrated his child-centered and democratic education philosophy as early as 1896 as principal and seventh-grade teacher at Anderson Elementary School in Savannah, Georgia. This appointment was even prior to Kilpatrick's training and teaching with John Dewey at Teachers College, Columbia University.	Developed the project method of learning associated with progressive education.
Eduard C. Lindeman (1885-1953)	Lindeman taught at the Columbia University in the School of Social Work from 1924 until he retired in 1950. Lindeman's work often concentrated on adult education and the need for that education to start with the focus and interest generated by the student while simultaneously being committed to progressive social action.	Authored one of the first books on community development and group work.
Jesse H. Newlon (1882-1941)	Newlon understood public education from his first-hand experience as a classroom teacher, principal, and superintendent. Newlon served as Director of Education in the Lincoln School of Teachers College, Columbia University. He was president of the National Education Association (1924-1925) and a member of the executive boards of the National Progressive Education Association and American Association of Adult Education. While Superintendent of the Denver City Schools, Newlon implemented curriculum reform headed by teachers and not administrators.	Advocated the collaboration of teachers in the curriculum development process versus exclusive dependence upon superintendents and school boards dictating curriculum.
Wilford M. Aikin (1882-1965)	Aiken was the director of the Eight-Year Study (1932-1940) conducted by the Progressive Education Association.	The director of the Eight-Year

Name	Background	Key Contribution to Progressive Education Movement
	Aikin maintained a strong emphasis on progressive education ideals as he directed the multiple researchers over multiple years.	Study.
Harold Rugg (1886-1960)	Rugg taught at Teachers College, Columbia University and wrote social studies textbooks "integrating the social sciences and history in an issues-centered program focusing on understanding and social transformation" (Evans, 2008, p. 102).	Produced the first series of textbooks in the early 1940s always with an effort to write based upon how students learn.
James L. Hymes (1913-1998)	Hymes was a student of Lois Meek Stolz at Columbia University. Hymes served as manager of the Portland, OR, Kaiser Shipyards nursery schools. Hymes was Assistant Executive Secretary of the Progressive Education Association and was editor of that association's publication, *Progressive Education*.	Developed an inclusive learning environment during WWII in a preschool environment including food, play, sleep, counseling, and medical care for children and mothers.
Francis W. Parker (1837-1902)	Parker left his mark wherever he taught (New Hampshire, Illinois, Ohio, and Massachusetts). Parker served as Superintendent of Schools in Quincy, Massachusetts (1875-1880) implementing systems that did not rely on tests or grading and ranking students. Parker founded the Francis W. Parker School in Chicago, Illinois in 1901.	Developed the "Quincy Method" that eliminated harsh discipline and de-emphasized rote memorization. Rejected tests, grading and ranking systems.

(Anderson, 2004; Beyer, 1997; Bredekamp, 2011; Labaree, 2005; Sandock, 2004; Smith, 2011; Waltras, 2006)

Administrative progressive proponents during this period included Edward L. Thorndike, David Snedden, Edward Ross, Leonard Ayres, Charles Ellwood, Ellwood P. Cubberley, Charles Prosser and W. W. Charters, who influenced the development of standardization and testing within the school setting to organize students. Table 2.2 provides a brief synopsis of the key administrative progressive proponents.

Table 2.2
Key Administrative Progressive Proponents

Name	Background	Key Contribution to Progressive Education Movement
Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949)	Thorndike is best recognized for his contribution in developing measurements of intelligence for WWI, and developing an abilities and achievement correlation that "became the foundation of modern intelligence tests."	Established the stimulus-response principle of reward versus punishment to achieve experimental behavior outcomes.
David Snedden (1868-1951)	Snedden worked his way up the education career ladder, starting out as an elementary school teacher. Snedden's career path included being an elementary principal, high school principal, and a superintendent. Snedden's profession continued taking him into post-secondary education including positions at Stanford University and eventually Teachers College, Columbia University. Snedden was appointed as Commissioner of Education in the state of Massachusetts in 1909. Snedden's greatest distinction is the ideological debate between John Dewey and himself over "vocational education." Snedden supported a skill-specific vocational track, while Dewey supported vocational training that supported transferable critical thinking skill.	Supported skill specific vocational training versus broad eclectic vocational training.
Edward Ross (1866-1951)	Ross was a sociologist that articulated social control through writing and speaking. Ross held university teaching positions at Indiana, Cornell, Stanford, Nebraska, and Wisconsin. In 1908, Ross published the book *Social Psychology*. Ross championed a sociological lens to observe the components of society, including the ideals of social control and social processes.	Supported social control and advocated immigration restrictions to maintain the superiority of Anglo-Saxon people.
Leonard Ayres (1879-1946)	Ayres contribution surrounds his statistical wizardry and analysis implemented in education, economics, and military science.	Used statistics as an administrative tool within the school system.

Name	Background	Key Contribution to Progressive Education Movement
Charles Ellwood (1873-1946)	Ellwood possessed an education background in sociology, economics, and political science. Ellwood held various teaching positions, as well as leadership roles in universities across the U. S. Ellwood was the president of the American Sociological Society (1924).	Ellwood did not support the idea of a "pure" race, but provided a lecture on the positive aspects of controlling society through positive hereditary gene choices in mates.
Ellwood P. Cubberley (1868-1941)	Cubberly is credited with "applying industrial management theory to school leadership." Cubberley acquired his education at the University of Indiana and Columbia University. Throughout his career, Cubberley was a classroom teacher, college instructor, president of Vincennes University, and dean of the School of Education at Stanford University.	Used tests and measurements to track student progress and for hiring and firing personnel. He advocated the idea of administrators as the experts in education.
Charles Prosser (1871-1952)	Prosser was a student of David Sneeden at Teachers College, Columbia University and was a driving force in the Smith-Hughes Act that began federal spending for vocational education. Prosser supported the idea that education should be tailored to the aptitude of students, but that vocational training should be specific to a skill or trade rather than training for transferable vocational capacity.	Advocated programs and standards to create legislation governing vocational education.
W. W. Charters (1875-1952)	Charters contributed to the process of curriculum development. Charters' first two major publications were teacher-training textbooks: *Methods of Teaching, Developed from a Functional Standpoint* (1909) and *Teaching the Common Branches* (1913). John Dewey was Charters' dissertation advisor and influenced Charters, although Charters' practical application eventually focused more on scientific curriculum making that was contrary to the ideals of John Dewey.	Developed scientific approach to curriculum development.

(Anderson, 2004; Burgess, 1947; Hertzler, 1951; Knoll, 2002; Labaree, 2005, 2010; PBS, 2001; Rosenstock, 1984; Teeter, 2004)

The modern framework of progressive education continues to be challenged with the struggle between administrative (social efficiency) progressivism and pedagogical progressivism. Reform initiatives are often sponsored by non-education individuals and perpetuate a revolving door of reforms that are not substantially different. Sherman (2009) ruminated about recent history stating,

> Attempts to improve education during the past forty years under the banner of "educational reform" have included political initiatives generated externally by those who do not work within schools, as well as pedagogical trends and movements conceived and implemented by educators themselves. Moreover, such endeavors often gain rapid support and, subsequently, lose traction as bandwagon movements often do, reinventing themselves years later packaged somewhat differently.
> (p. 41)

James Nehring (2006) was quick to point out the difficulty of separating schools into strictly child-centered practices versus standardized practices because of the intertwined philosophical historic roots:

> Of course, schools are not simply one or the other. There are mainstream schools infused with pockets of thoughtful practice. Many teachers and school administrators labor to realize socalled progressive ideals within such places and are continually thwarted by the system. At the same time, many, if not most, socalled progressive schools are forced to contend with layers of distracting convention in the form of regulation, testing mandates, college admission requirements, and more. (p. 3)

Sherman (2009) declared, "Although many teacher education programs promote progressive educational practice, overall, progressivism does not seem to have staying power in terms of what actually takes place in classrooms on a large-scale" (p. 43). She continued, "The lack of staying power of progressive education may be due to a number of factors, including political climate" (p. 44) that pushes for an immediate show of return on investment.

Progressive education based upon student interests and skills does not lend itself to an immediate evidence of return on time or money invested per each student. Progressive education is a basis for life-long learning that can be demonstrated only by the results of the life lived by the student after "formal education." Labaree (2005) provided an in-depth description of modern progressive education as,

> basing instruction on the needs, interests and developmental stage of the child; it means teaching students the skills they need in order to learn any subject, instead of focusing on transmitting a particular subject; it means promoting discovery and self-directed learning by the student through active engagement; it means having students work on projects that express student purposes and that integrate the disciplines around socially relevant themes; and it means promoting values of community, cooperation, tolerance, justice and democratic equality. In the shorthand of educational jargon, this adds up to 'child-centered instruction', 'discovery learning' and 'learning how to learn.' (p. 277)

Administrative twist on progressive child education. The administrative "social efficiency" progressive period began with practices such as compulsory school attendance, which at the time was considered progressive in its ability to move students through school similar to employees and products within industrial manufacturing.

Ellwood Cubberley, the head of the Department of Education at Stanford University, "trained a generation of administrators in what was called the "science of school management" that mirrored the regimented structure of the industrialized factories (PBS, 2001, par. 4). David Tyack (1974) reported, "Schools reflected and shaped these changes in various ways. In the governance of education, lay community control gave way to the corporate-bureaucratic model under the guise of 'taking the schools out of politics'" (p. 6). The continued industrial progress of America during the late 1800s into the early 1900s fed the development of the American education system as "educators developed school systems whose specialized structures partly reflected the differentiation of economic roles in the larger social order. As employers and

occupational associations placed ever greater reliance on educational credentials for jobs, schooling acquired a new importance as the gateway to favored positions" (p. 6).

Pedagogical turn on progressive child education. The early twentieth century through the 1930s was a period of increased support for alternative education in opposition to the regimented administrative structure of schools. Shelley Sherman (2009) described the historical foundation of child-centered progressive practices within American education of the early 1900s stating,

> In the beginning of the twentieth century, Dewey helped lay the groundwork for the Progressive Education Movement, echoing and extending the earlier work of Rousseau, Froebel, and Pestalozzi, among others, which placed the child at the center of educational endeavors. (p. 43)

There were several significant progressive education developments that occurred during the influential years of John Dewey that represent the pedagogical framework of progressivism. An early inception of the child-centered approach included vocational training that focused on student abilities as demonstrated in the Gary Plan introduced in 1907 by Superintendent Wirt to the Gary, Indiana, school system. Kenneth Volk (2005) described the Gary Plan that received national recognition:

> The Gary plan had organizational and curriculum features that fostered hands-on activities relating to occupations and daily life. It was considered progressive in nature, with an articulated and broad program being offered from primary through secondary grades. (p. 39)

The Gary Plan was also known as the work-study plan. Students were taught the academics of reading, writing, and arithmetic and also gym, art, and shop (p. 40). This plan spread to New York because of its success in Gary. However, because of lack of planning, training, and cooperative implementation, this plan failed in New York. The failure of the Gary Plan possibly was due to its connection to the pedagogical progressive movement and generated opposition

from both the education community and public individuals including parents for no other reason

than its pedagogical progressive practices.

During the early 1920s, Harold Rugg went beyond adding vocational services for

students, but also emphasized the social and communal aspects of progressive education. Ronald

Evans (2008) described Rugg's contribution:

> It was a call to action, a call to confront the persistent issues at the heart of our social and
> economic structures that are typically left out of school. He called for students to find
> their own individual voices, "to say what I think, my way," as they wrestle with the social
> dilemmas of our times. (p. 127)

Wilford M. Aikin directed the Eight-Year Study sponsored by the Progressive

Education Association to capture the reorganization of various schools based upon the

student-centered focus of their programs. Richard Neumann (2008) described the

groundbreaking student-centered methodology discoveries of the Eight-Year Study:

> The integrated, multidisciplinary, project method of learning was the centerpiece of
> innovation identified in the Eight-Year Study, the most ambitious research effort
> concerning progressive education in the first half of the twentieth century. The study
> examined an experiment begun in 1932 to explore innovative ways to reorganize subject
> matter in high schools around students' interests and help students develop real-world
> skills. (p. 63)

The results of the study are significant and support the rationale for an alternative pedagogical

progressive framework. The inception of the Eight-Year Study was an effort to create and

document the development of a fertile learning environment that could benefit students whether

they were college bound or not. The Eight-Year Study avoided using preconceived formatted

tests and evaluations for college entrance that would push teachers to teach toward a test for

positive results. Joseph Watras (2006) described the positive student outcomes identified

through the Eight-Year Study:

> The results were favorable if not spectacular. For example, the College Follow-Up Staff
> found that the graduates from the participating schools in the study earned slightly higher

grades. They appeared more intellectually curious, objective in their thinking, and resourceful. Since these small differences appeared consistently, the College Follow-Up Staff claimed that benefits did not occur by chance. They concluded that the participating schools did a somewhat better job of preparing the students for college. The greatest differences came when the follow-up staff compared the results of the students from the most progressive schools such as the Ohio State University School with the students from less innovative participating schools, such as Milton Academy. (p. 16)

While the overall results were positive, the evaluations of the Eight-Year Study indicated that the more progressive the innovations, like those of The Ohio State University, the more positive the student outcomes. The Ohio State University School's approach to the study was a total immersion into the progressive education ideals by creating collaborative relationships between students, faculty, and parents in designing not only the curriculum substance, but also redesigning the learning environment to be more conducive to student needs. The Milton Academy, however, did not change its curriculum design and continued to focus on "mastery of academic subjects" (Waltras, 2006, p. 14). Its innovation was merely to reduce the amount of time students spent on preparing for college entrance examinations.

Preliminary Sketch of U. S. Progressive Schools

A modern advocate of progressive education is Alfie Kohn. Kohn (2008) articulated the characteristics of progressivism as attending to the whole child, community, collaboration, social justice, intrinsic motivation, deep understanding, active learning, and taking kids seriously. Dennis Littky (2011) listed ten things schools should provide as: "creat[ing] individual learning plans, involv[ing] families, focus[ing] on real-world learning, foster[ing] questions, not answers, evaluat[ing] skills, us[ing] technology wisely, support[ing] great teachers, focus[ing] on college completion, mak[ing] schools, not districts accountable, and do[ing] everything at once" (p. 1). Wagner and Compton (2012) suggested that progressive schools need to be flexible in allowing students to play to develop a passion that then fuels their purpose. Wagner and Compton

advocated this process in an effort to develop "innovative" individuals that can function in an interconnected global society. Jacobs and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2010) captured stories of individuals around the world implementing progressive education practices based upon "21st century curriculum" necessary for a changing world. Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2010) discussed the process for educators to shift their thinking and behavior to a more flexible and child-centered learning environment.

The Network of Progressive Educators in an effort to infuse progressive ideals into public education formulated principles to assist schools in determining the values that would best represent progressive education. Susan Semel and Alan Sadovnik (2008) summarized the statement of principles of the steering committee of the Network of Progressive Educators drafted on November 10, 1990.

Table 2.3
Summary of Network of Progressive Educators' Principles

Education based upon relationships
- Education is best accomplished where relationships are personal and teachers design programs which honor the linguistic and cultural diversity of the local community.   - Schools embrace the home cultures of children and their families.   - Classroom practices reflect these values and bring multiple cultural perspectives to bear.   - The school is a model of democracy and humane relationships, confronting issues of racism, classism, and sexism.
Student generated curriculum
- Curriculum balance is maintained by commitment to children's individual interests and developmental needs, as well as a commitment to community within and beyond the school's walls.   - Students are active constructors of knowledge and learn through direct experience and primary sources.

Education focused on social responsibility
- Schools actively support critical inquiry into the complexities of global issues.   - Children can thus assume the powerful responsibilities of world citizenship.
Education based upon subject integration
All disciplines—the arts, sciences, humanities, and physical development—are valued equally in an interdisciplinary curriculum.
Decision making
- Teachers, as respected professionals, are crucial sources of knowledge about teaching and learning.   - Decision-making within schools is inclusive of children, parents, and staff.

(p. 1755)

The review of literature surrounding the historic underpinnings of progressive education paints a picture of individuals with an honest desire to improve student learning. The underlying motivations and subsequent methodologies range from the very regimented mandates of standardized curriculum development and assessment to the very fluid evolution of curriculum development and authentic assessment options. The rationale for student-centered learning has ranged from vocational training to equip students with practical work skills to critical thinking skills that would prepare students for any situation. Contemporary progressive education springing from the early pioneers such as John Dewey, Francis W. Parker, and others has demonstrated a strong emphasis on adhering to child-centered education that places the needs, interests, and capabilities of students at the forefront of the curriculum development process. As well as a strong emphasis on a child-centered education, contemporary progressive education includes a palpable sense of community that permeates inside, outside, and among the school, teachers, students, parents, and community individuals. The sense of community establishes

trust that is demonstrated as stakeholders actively participate in decision-making to provide a quality education.

Three Reoccurring Features in U. S. Progressive Education

Within contemporary progressive education schools there appear to be three reoccurring features (philosophies) in some combination: education generated by the child's interests (child-centered learning), a sense of belonging (community integration), and an ability of all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, and community individuals) to contribute to the goals and outcomes of education (democratic decision-making).

Child-centered learning. Child-centered learning within contemporary progressive education goes beyond the ability to assess children and place them in appropriate differentiated groups. It actually starts with the child and identifies skill levels and interests and then develops the learning experience around the child. Aaron Manilow (2009) described child-centered education stating, "Teaching and learning are not merely an exchange of data; they are a cooperative journey in which the path is laid subtly before the student. It is the pupil's duty to recognize and follow the path by his own means" (p. 218).

It is difficult at times to distinguish between true child-centered pedagogy based upon the child's interests generated by a progressive education philosophy versus student activity from the teacher's stance driven by the standardized education philosophy. Ronald Evans (2008) described the difference between a classroom being led by student interests versus teacher-generated activity: "Learning through active participation meant that the course would involve a stream of activities rather than students simply reading a textbook, answering questions at the back of the chapter, and listening to the teacher talk" (p. 115). Stanley Ivie (2007) described the teacher's role in the child-centered environment stating, "Learning was not acquired by listening

to the words of the teacher. Meaningful learning came from acting upon the environment"

(p. 16). Ivie (2007) continued to describe Dewey's perspective of child-centered education

versus the standardized classroom environment. "The problem with the traditional school,

Dewey argued, was that it was designed for listening. Teachers talked; students listened.

Classrooms were not organized to encourage children to actively engage in problem solving"

(p. 20). Child-centered education enables students to become critical thinkers and not just rote

memory machines. Manilow (2009) stated, "Surely, any of us would admit that a problem we

figure out on our own based on our reasoning is one that we have a far better and more malleable

understanding of than one that we memorized but never truly comprehended" (pp. 215-216).

Open classrooms of the 1960s and early 1970s incorporated child-centered pedagogy

similar to the differentiated instruction of the last ten years. Open classrooms were more than

rooms without walls, but were an effort to allow students the opportunity to acquire education

through their own interests with a variety of stimuli. Shelley Sherman (2009) identified the

similarities between open classrooms, differentiation, and child-centered pedagogy:

- Students' individual interests, needs, and capacities, not prescribed curriculum, determine how and what the teacher teaches; content is relevant and meaningful to students.
- Time and space are used flexibly and creatively.
- Students are grouped flexibly.
- Instruction is engaging and personally relevant.
- Some element of student choice is present.
- Individual, rather than comparative, growth is emphasized. (p. 49)

Progressive education child-centered pedagogy moves beyond the teacher's manipulating

the curriculum to meet the child's needs and interests. The child-centered environment places an

emphasis on the student's gaining insight into his/her responsibility to be an active engaged

participant in the process. Jessica Wahman (2009) described true child-centered education as a

process of inquiry:

> To be truly a process of inquiry, the answer cannot be known in advance but instead discovered through shared investigation, and therefore the organizer, if he or she is honestly engaged, must become a part of that experience by developing an internal perspective. A concept that can suggest meaningful possibilities for change must come from those who actually live and experience the problematic conditions, and their interpretation of those conditions must be the foundation for their solution. (p. 10)

The level of student involvement in the development of the learning path is significant in the exploration of contemporary progressive education schools. Student involvement may not include the what to be learned, but includes the how of learning. Progressive education advocates such as Kohn, Littky, and the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) encouraged the integration of learning with real-life student experiences to enhance engagement beyond rote memorization of academic facts. The level of child-centered learning varies from school to school and may hold a key to the capability of adherence to progressive education philosophies within each school.

Community integration. Community, as described in various dictionary and thesaurus accounts, is described as associations, partnerships, alliances, affiliations, coalitions, and fellowships. Community embodies a shared experience between its members. Within the education arena, community is often described as a community of learners. A community of learners is a broad area of shared experience that could be characterized as shared experiences between student to student, student to teacher, teacher to parent, parent to student, and even community to student. However, in progressive education, the ideal of community goes beyond the shared learning community, and spills over into the community of living (Ramaley, 2005; Schneider & Garrison, 2008). Progressive education also embodies the concept of students learning through community service (Saha & Dworkin, 2009). Dewey's (1907) perception of community included the idea of a face-to-face encounter of individuals. McNear (1978) restated Dewey's assertions as he reflected, "He [Dewey] claims that community, which he seems to

advocate building as progress toward forming a public, is about face-to-face interactions with others" (p. 43).

The ramification of community to the development of progressive education is most dependent upon the connection of the internal learning community to the external community at large. Dewey (1907) described the role of community as "the school itself shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons" (p. 27). Community is an outward expression of trust and cooperation. Through the establishment of community, communication occurs between members to move toward an establishment of a mutually satisfying environment (Horn, 2002).

Community for each school environment is different because the lived experience of its constituents is different. Each school must develop its learning environment based upon the community characteristics of its stakeholders. Stanley Ivie (2007) reiterated Dewey's assertion that an educational system must reflect the character of the society it serves (p. 20). Dewey (1960) himself stated, "The school becomes itself a form of social life, a minute community and one in close interaction with other modes of associated experience beyond school walls" (p. 418).

Community creates a bond shared between individuals. In his description of progressive education characteristics, Kohn (2008) stated, "Children learn with and from one another in a caring community, and that's true of moral as well as academic learning" (p. 20). Community occurs beyond the classroom and transcends the time of formal education. Kohn (2008) described the life-long learning experience of students developed through progressive education:

> A sense of community and responsibility for others isn't confined to the classroom; indeed, students are helped to locate themselves in widening circles of care that extend beyond self, beyond friends, beyond their own ethnic group, and beyond their own

country. Opportunities are offered not only to learn about, but also to put into action, a commitment to diversity and to improve the lives of others. (pp. 20-21)

The learned skill of participating in community begins within the learning environment through student interaction with other stakeholders. The development of community is not a smooth and easy process. Lieberman (1994) described the community of progressive education as,

> a community that includes rather than excludes, that creates knowledge rather than assuming that it is all produced by others, that expects controversy and conflict to be a part of the educative process, and that, while accepting the boundaries of subject and the authority of knowledge, encourages a constant construction and reconstruction of these boundaries and this authority in the spirit of a democratic and humane society.
> (p. 207)

Progressive education schools construct environments that nurture community. Community is an integral part of the overall learning experience and is a key factor to student success. In the article "Haven't We Seen This Before?: Sustaining a Vision in Teacher Education for Progressive Teaching Practice," Shelly Sherman (2009) identified one of the factors necessary to include in progressive education teacher training as the ability to "cultivate understandings of the ways in which physical environments can promote a shared sense of community and reframing classroom management" (p. 54).

Progressive schools have established an environment of community in ways specific to their time, their students and their niche. The Gary Plan established in the early period of progressive education "adopted Dewey's idea of a community within the school" by combining younger and older students within the same environment to allow interchangeable learning among all students (Volk, 2005). A contemporary example of community that transcends the walls of the school is evident in the High Tech High (HTH) charter school of San Diego, California. HTH establishes community internships as an integral part of the learning process (Neumann, 2008).

Community does not occur by coincidence. Creating conducive opportunities to bring stakeholders of a school together needs to be a proactive planning process of progressive education leaders. Community integration from within and without is a vital aspect of progressive education and its future. Semel and Sadovnik (2008) adamantly charged leadership with the responsibility to create community stating, "Finally, we argue that leadership and the development of a cohesive community of administrators, teachers, and students are vital for sustaining schools" (p. 1746). It is imperative to identify the level of community integration and its impact in sustainability and success of contemporary progressive education schools.

Democracy and social justice. Progressivism incorporates not only child-centered pedagogy, but also from the historical perspective, a strong democratic and social justice emphasis. John Dewey heralded democracy in conjunction with community as fundamental to progressive education. While they are two separate entities, they are intertwined and dependent upon each other. As Stanley Ivie (2007) stated, "Democracy represents the central value around which Dewey organized his social and educational philosophy" (p. 20). Democracy and community are conjoined within Dewey's philosophy and other progressive supporters of his day. Jenlink and Jenlink (2008) described the link between democracy and community:

> Democracy, like community, Dewey explained, is based on conjoint activity, benefiting all who participate. Community, like democracy, requires a constant adjustment of individuals to each other, and of social institutions and arrangements to continuing efforts to be inclusive of the interests of all. As the community acts democratically, the power of the individuals is liberated, creating the transformative potential of a community of learners conjoined around a common purpose. (p. 313)

It was Dewey's belief that education could thrive on democratic principles and that society could benefit and improve as well from these educational practices. Ann Lieberman (1994) stated, "Learning communities defined by democratic practices are communities that include rather than

exclude, that create knowledge rather than assume that all knowledge is produced by others, and that expect controversy and conflict to be part of the educative process" (p. 207).

Advocating democracy within the classroom takes planning and preparation. David McNear (1978) described what a democratic curriculum would include by stating,

> In addition, a curriculum for democracy would include subject matters and skills aimed to develop the strengths and talents of all children. Again, this development of all humans is aimed toward the improved quality of life experiences for everyone. (pp. 36-37)

There is an important link between democracy and education that many people may not understand. Saha and Dworkin (2009) stated, "Democracy and education are integrally linked and indispensable to each other" (p. 320). They continued, "Naturally the most effective way of achieving democracy is to immerse individuals in a democratic form of social life. Democracies serve individuals as well as groups because of the interdependent and interactive relationships between selves and communities" (p. 321). Saha and Dworkin expounded,

> In short, democracy is a significant goal for schooling in its own right. In part because of Dewey's enormous influence, many contemporary educators and scholars promote similar democratic visions of education – in the canons such as human rights, empowerment, social justice, respect for diversity – with the hopes for building a more caring and humanistic school or society. (p. 321)

Saha and Dworkin expressed concern that there will need to be an organizational (systemic) change to facilitate democracy in schools stating, "Of course, democratic schooling is not possible without corresponding reforms at school and institutional levels" (p. 327).

Democracy within the learning environment advocates a voice and representation of all stakeholders in decisions not dependent upon age, power, money, or influence. Democracy incorporates social justice that involves all stakeholders to assess a common goal and determine the best method of achieving that goal in a way that does not exploit or harm any individuals in the process of goal acquisition. It is important to identify the level of democratic decision-

making within contemporary progressive schools due to the strong democratic and social justice principles of progressive education within the philosophical framework upheld by John Dewey and early progressive education advocates.

Current Progressive Schools

Deeper underlying questions fuel the controversy between standardization and progressivism: What is education? What is the purpose of education? The answers to either or both of these questions determine the choices all educators make in moving forward to educate children. Judith Ramaley (2005) spoke of the conflict,

> We will find ourselves contemplating the gulf between those who believe that the mark of an educated person is the amount of facts they know (educational traditionalists) and those who consider the goal of education to be the production of creative, responsible, productive citizens who are capable of informed decision making (educational progressives). I must admit that when I am asked which is more important, cultural literacy or critical thinking and effective citizenship, I usually say "yes." We need both. If only it were that simple! Unfortunately, the former is much easier to measure than the later. (p. 57)

Contemporary progressive education schools fit no one model because of the broad ideal of what typifies such education. Progressive education schools include public schools and private schools. Progressive education schools can be charter schools, magnet schools, religious schools, or secular schools. Progressive education schools can be focused on specific talents (music, drama, art) or focused on a broad liberal arts philosophy of integration of history, literature, science, and math.

True education is an enlightenment of the whole person. Education is not only the infilling of factual knowledge, but the developed wisdom and assumed responsibility to act for the good of all. Ramaley (2005) contended,

> Efforts to change a curriculum and to assess learning must be approached with a broader vision of the world beyond the classroom. On campus and in the schools, concepts of education must be assessed not only from the perspective of individual departments and

disciplines but also as a way to support shared responsibilities for education, scholarship, and community engagement. (p. 68)

Ramaley (2005) concluded, "Liberal education is best thought about as a way of developing the human imagination and cultivating habits of the mind and heart that lead to new understanding, rather than a specific set of arts and sciences disciplines" (p. 72). Progressive education ideals establish a foundation that allow for the broader education of students beyond memorization of facts to regurgitate on a test. However, the characteristics of progressive education range on a continuum as broad as there are organizations espousing the principles of progressive education.

The broad range of attributes associated with progressive education schools while beneficial to a broad range of learning needs, creates a difficulty for progressive education schools to establish a recognizable framework that can be sustained despite the onslaught of organizational growth over time and societal changes.

Predicament of Sustaining Progressive Education Features

Progressive schools seem to follow a pattern of development that includes a rise to prominence and a subsequent decline over a period of years. James Nehring (2006) described the historic 1834 beginning of the Temple School by Bronson Alcott. The Temple School encouraged student driven questions and reflective thought. Local authorities criticized the progressive style of learning relentlessly until students began to withdraw and the school eventually closed (p. 2).

Nehring (2006) described the Beaver Country Day School "founded by activist mothers in the Boston suburb Chestnut Hill" in 1923:

> The school flourished under the control of wealthy and influential Boston families, and by finding allies among prominent educators and within universities. But it fell on hard times during World War II, as anything perceived as experimental gave way to more conservative demands for rote learning. (p. 2)

Nehring continued revealing the school survived by moderating its approach to be less innovative.

Progressive education practices appear to remain strong while there is adequate support. While the Eight-Year Study revealed promising results of progressive education practices within schools, it also identified the tendency of schools to return to less extreme progressive practices. Waltras (2006) conceptualized the regression of progressive schools that participated in the Eight-Year Study (1932-1940) by reflecting on the findings of Fredrick L. Redefer:

> In 1950, Frederick L. Redefer, the former director of the PEA during the study, claimed that most of the experimental schools returned to conservative practices within eight years of the Eight-Year Study's end. Redefer based his conclusion on the results of a survey he conducted during a meeting he had called of the heads of the participating schools. He found that two of the participating schools had closed and several of the schools had new headmasters or principals. Although a few school leaders reported that the faculty members in their schools retained liberal educational viewpoints and sought to overcome subject matter distinctions, no school engaged in developing programs of general education as the Eight-Year Study had emphasized. Only one school reported continuing work on the core curriculum that had been popular among the participating schools. Most important, no school reported that the needs of the adolescents dominated curriculum planning as they had during the study. Most of the participating school officials told Redefer that their schools had retreated toward traditional college preparatory programs. (pp. 16-17)

Often the very change and innovation of progressive education that allows it to flourish is the very device that leads to its demise. When progressive education schools flourish, opponents often criticize their success. Criticism is often directed at the lack of curriculum, time-lines, and testing. Progressive education schools face a constant barrage from the external environment while simultaneously dealing with normal operational pressures to sustain their efforts in providing successful alternative education.

The true question is, "Can any progressive education school transcend the tendency to fall back to more administrative practices because of the educational environmental pressures of society?" The question of longevity and resolve of purpose is a question every progressive

education organization faces within the current tide of standardization and administrative rhetoric.

Intermediate School Significance

My own personal experience with intermediate school aged children is analogous to the scholarly writings identifying a transitional period labeled preadolescence that is situated between childhood and adolescence (Alexander & Williams, 1965; Brough, 1994; Buell, 1967; Caskey & Anfara, 2007). The literature agrees on the characteristics of preadolescence, but there is a great divide on determining when this period occurs.

Junior high schools were introduced at the beginning of the 1900s (Alexander & Williams, 1965, p. 217) for grades 7, 8, and 9. The formation of junior high including grades 7, 8, and 9 within the K-12 system is considered a 6-3-3 configuration; six years plus Kindergarten (K-6), three years junior high (7, 8, 9), and three years high school (10, 11, 12). Alexander and Williams (1965) stated, "There is little research evidence to support, and some reason to question, the assumption that a junior high, separate and distinct from both elementary and senior high school, is a necessity because of the unique characteristics of the age group" (p. 217).

Margaret Mead (1965) suggested that the formation of grades 7, 8, and 9 as junior high "was postulated on age, and not on size, strength, or stage of puberty" (p. 7). Mead (1965) also stated that the grade groupings of junior high students,

> have inadvertently [classified] together boys and girls when they vary most, within each sex, and between the sexes, and are least suited to a segregated social existence. Also, they have divorced them from the reassurances of association with the children like their own recent past selves and older adolescents like whom they will some day become. (p. 7)

Lois Meek Stolz working with her husband, Herbert Stolz, categorized adolescent growth and development into stages based upon biological/physiological changes (Progressive

Education Association, 1940). They propose a four-stage period that spans the time when an individual has not fully left childhood but has not fully attained adolescence characterized by puberty. The preadolescent stages identified by Stolz greatly influenced the inception of the middle school concept in the early 1960s advocating an education environment during the transitional period. Sidney Berman (1965) expressed his opinion that "during the highly volatile years of eleven through thirteen or fourteen, youngsters should have a familiar, secure background in which to operate" (p. 20). The suggestion of developing a safe and familiar environment during the transition years between childhood and adolescence parallels the beliefs of Stolz. The mission of progressive education middle schools is to create a safe and familiar environment for students within the years of transition from childhood to adolescence.

The studies of Daniel A. Prescott (Director, Institute for Child Study, University of Maryland) focused on the difference between boys and girls during this transitional period. Prescott recognized the great variation between individual students, but proposed there existed a greater probability of meeting the needs of a larger number of students "throughout their four-year period of preadolescence [within] grades five, six, seven, and eight" (Buell, 1967, p. 244). Buell (1967) pointed out, "The characteristics of the child are quite different from those of the adolescent, and the characteristics of the preadolescent who is in the transitional stage between childhood and adolescence are different from them both" (p. 244).

Don Eichhorn, a principal of a junior-senior high school in Upper St. Clair, Pennsylvania, during the early 1960s, observed great discrepancies between junior high students being grouped based upon age versus those grouped by developmental characteristics. Judith Brough (1994) reflected on Eichhorn's contribution to the formation of the middle school format: "He knew that young adolescents were at a unique stage in their development and in their approach to learning.

Don was among the first to found middle level school practices and programs on learner

characteristics" (p. 20). Brough (1994) stated, "The term [middle school] was first introduced in

his [Eichhorn's] dissertation, then defined in his book, *The Middle School*, which was first

published by the Center for Applied Research in Education in 1966" (p. 22).

Alexander and Williams (1965) listed and expounded on guidelines appropriate

for the education of students in a transition period between childhood and adolescence.

These guidelines are congruent with the philosophies of progressive education.

Table 2.4

Guidelines Appropriate for Educating Students in Transition

1. A real middle school should be designed to serve the needs of older children, preadolescents, and early adolescents.
2. A middle school organization should make a reality of the long-held ideal of individualized instruction.
3. A middle school program should give high priority to the intellectual components of the curriculum.
4. A middle school program should place primary emphasis on skills of continued learning.
5. A middle school should provide a rich program of exploratory experiences.
6. A program of health and physical education should be designed especially for boys and girls of the middle school years.
7. An emphasis on values should underline all aspects of a middle school program.
8. The organization of a middle school would facilitate most effective use of the special competencies and interests of the teaching staff.

(pp. 219-221)

Charles W. Eliot introduced the concept of junior high to American education in 1909 to

bridge the gap between childhood and adolescence ("Junior High Plan Outlined," 1929, Section

1, p. 9). However, by the 1960s, some scholars believed that junior high schools actually

mirrored the characteristics of high school that are more appropriate for the education of children

in late adolescence.

While middle school is a concept developed to be more responsive to the needs of preadolescents, there is a lack of agreement on how to separate students. Clayton Buell (1967) offered educational rationale for the middle school concept that transforms the K-12 system from a 6-3-3 to a 4-4-4 grade configuration. Buell (1967) conceded that junior high and middle school share ideology to meet the needs of students in transition from childhood to adolescence:

> Both schools are alike in that they claim to serve pupils whose characteristics are different from pupils who populate either elementary schools or high school. Both recognize that the intermediate school should serve pupils who are in a stage of development that is unique and who should therefore be given a unique school environment. (p. 242)

Buell acknowledged Alexander and Williams (1965) and their contribution to the rationale for a middle school concept versus junior high. Buell (1967) went further and introduced the advantage of middle school subject specialization:

> The middle school has an advantage over the elementary school in that there is a fast-diminishing or nonexistent supply of teachers in self-contained classrooms who can teach effectively all the complexities of modern developments in science and in mathematics, who can teach modern foreign language properly with the proper pronunciation that younger children copy so readily, and who do not have difficulty in keeping up with the modern developments in the teaching of English through the linguistics approach. (p. 242)

Caskey and Anfara (2007), in their meta-research summary for the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) described in detail this "distinct period of human growth and development situated between childhood and adolescence. During this remarkable stage of the life cycle, young adolescents (10- to 15-year-olds) experience rapid and significant developmental change" (p. 1). Caskey and Anfara (2007) continued stating, "the developmental characteristics of young adolescents include physical, intellectual, emotional/psychological, moral/ethical, and social domains, these characteristics are interrelated and overlap" (p. 1).

Successful maneuverings through the intermediate years directly impact future high school academic success and even graduation (Bredekamp, 2011; Cataldi et al., 2009; Chapman et al., 2011; Greene et al., 2006). It is also evident that children of lower socioeconomic backgrounds (often minority students) have a greater risk of academic struggles by the intermediate grades and subsequently have lower graduation rates. The standardization movement is currently not making the significant strides toward increased graduation rates of all children, particularly minorities and lower socioeconomic students.

Greene et al. (2006) calculated the U. S. public high school graduation rate for the Class of 2003 based upon the most recent data available at that time:

- The national graduation rate was 70 percent.
- The graduation rate for white students was 78 percent, compared with 72 percent for Asian students, 55 percent for African-American students, and 53 percent for Hispanic students.
- Female students graduate at a higher rate than male students. Nationally, 72 percent of female students graduate, compared with 65 percent of male students. (p. iii)

The National Center for Educational Statistics Compendium Report (Chapman et al., 2011) revealed graduation rates have ranged from a low of 72.6 percent in 2001-2002 to a high of 75.5 percent in 2008-2009 with a sporadic rise and fall of graduation rates in the subsequent years (pp. 50-53). This narrow variation between graduation rates is an additional indication that standardized testing is not making a significant improvement in education outcomes.

Middle school (intermediate) education is an important crossroads for many children. Bredekamp (2011) wrote about gaps being closed through early-childhood education and made reference that if children have not closed that gap before fourth grade, this can "subsequently predict high school graduation" (p. 26). The fact that academic disparity at fourth grade (the end of childhood and the beginning of the preadolescence) can statistically predict graduation rates is a vital imperative for offering a progressive middle school learning environment to capture the

remaining child-like inquisitiveness and energy of students. The philosophies of progressive education provide an opportunity to increase student self-motivation for learning and to extend the possibility of closing the academic gap.

The Identified Void

My historic literature overview uncovered a continuous rise and fall of successful progressive education schools. However, a clear definition or description of progressive education does not tell the lived-out experience of a progressive school. The missing gap in literature is a measurement of the progressive schools' success at maintaining the three essential progressive philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making. This study measures these three philosophies on a continuum and identifies enhancing and inhibiting factors that contribute to the schools' ability to successfully over time educate students in an alternative learning modality. Therefore, a closer look at the current identified characteristics of progressive education assisted in identifying factors that identify a plausible progressive education continuum and develop a snapshot of the current progressive education environment.

The progressive education historic literature and other literature describing progressive education characteristics begs for an additional study to identify the existence and strength of the three basic philosophies of progressive education on which the schools were founded. It is important to simultaneously provide a snapshot of the environment in which these ideals exist. This research is important because many progressive education schools are at a crossroads in their existence and need to take inventory of their purpose and direction in order to navigate a direction that ultimately will lead to their continued success or untimely demise.

Chapter III: Methodology

Purpose

The purpose of the current study is to identify the characteristics of contemporary progressive middle schools and identify factors that enhance and inhibit adherence to three basic philosophies of progressive education. This is an exploratory research guided by the following questions.

1. What school demographics describe contemporary progressive middle schools?

2. What educational practices associated with the three basic philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—are part of contemporary progressive middle schools?

3. How do progressive middle school leaders rate their school in terms of adherence to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making?

4. What educational practices are most strongly associated with perception of ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—in contemporary progressive middle schools?

5. What school demographic characteristics influence perceived ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making in—contemporary progressive middle schools?

Why this study? My conversations with parents, teachers, students, friends, and family about education often turn to the topic of how standardized education initiatives do not meet the needs of many children and often alienate children who are intelligent, but do not test well or learn well in a standardized environment.

This study is exploratory and therefore open to interpretation of the data without a preconceived notion of outcome. Fielding and Fielding (1986) discussed the advantage of combining both "objective and rigorous" and "subjective and speculative" aspects within exploratory research (p. 10). Fielding and Fielding (1986) explained that every aspect of an area

of research does not need attention in exploratory studies stating, "It is important to recognize that the procedure [exploratory research] does not require that every aspect of phenomena be assessed when comparing, but rather that all the details of the aspects which have been selected be assessed" (p.15). This study is a beginning effort to identify shared characteristics of contemporary progressive middle schools. While a complete taxonomy of characteristics is not the attempt of this study, emerging trends are expected.

This research is important because progressive education provides a necessary option that avoids labeling or categorizing students while ultimately providing a nurturing environment that fosters thinking and creativity that transcend numbers achieved on a standardized assessment. This research is necessary on a practical level to inform schools, administrators, parents, teachers, and the community about contemporary progressive education demographics in a manner that will take the discussion beyond the battle between administrative and pedagogical progressive entities that has existed for over one hundred years. Research Question 1 is designed to identify the demographics of contemporary progressive education middle schools.

This research is necessary on a professional level to allow progressive education schools to develop a description of practices related to contemporary progressive schools. There are numerous dictionary definitions and organizational philosophies that broadly describe progressive education. Even with this plethora of information, there is a lack of research identifying what these schools have in common. Research Question 2 is designed to determine whether there is a common thread of principles, activities or dynamics that become the embodiment of contemporary progressive middle schools.

This research is necessary on a personal level. I have been involved in education for over forty years and have a desire to provide alternative education to children, with a strong passion

for children within the intermediate age range. My desire to address an alternative style of

teaching during the intermediate years of education is based upon the extreme vulnerability of

students that are in their transitional years between childhood and adolescence. The achievement

gap widens as children enter middle school and if unchecked can lead to increased student

retention, dropout rates, and eventual loss of societal productivity as cited in Chapter II.

While this information targets a personal interest, it is critical information for all

progressive education schools. Business organization management requires organizations to

assess their internal health and environmental forces on a regular basis to sustain and grow.

Margaret Wheatley (1994) aptly described her perspective on organizational growth as an

organic and ever-evolving process that transcends the efficiency model of controls and

regulations that permeate the American business and education landscape by stating,

> The survival and growth of systems that range in size from large ecosystems down to tiny
> leaves are made possible by the combination of key patterns of principles that express the
> system's overall identity and great levels of autonomy for individual system members.
> (p. 11)

Wheatley (1994) continued by describing her opinion on what approach could lead to improved

organizational health:

> there is a simpler way to lead organizations, one that requires less effort and produces
> less stress than the current practices….I no longer believe that organizations are
> inherently unmanageable in our world of constant flux and unpredictability. Rather, I
> believe our present ways of understanding organizations are skewed, and that the longer
> we remain entrenched in our ways, the farther we move from those wonderful
> breakthroughs in understanding what the world of science calls "elegant." The layers of
> complexity, the sense of things being beyond our control and out of control, are but
> signals of our failure to understand a deeper reality of organizational life, and of life in
> general. (p. 3)

While schools are businesses, they would best be served if they could function as organic, living,

and learning organizations as advocated by organic system theorists, rather than stoic, static,

institutions of the by-gone Industrial Revolution. Research Question 3 allows participating

progressive education middle schools to rate themselves on how well they are achieving the three progressive education philosophies that are the focus of this study.

Both enhancing and inhibiting factors weigh upon the capacity of progressive education middle schools to adhere to these philosophies. The same question is considered in Research Questions 4 and Research Question 5, but from different perspectives with slightly different data sets. The ability to adhere to any philosophy often is a perception of those involved in the process. Research Question 4 uses school leaders' responses to Research Questions 2 and Research Question 3 to identify the relationship between the frequencies of progressive education practices used and the rating (perception) of how well the school is adhering to the three philosophies. Research Question 5 focuses on this same relationship between the education practices and the perceived ability of the school to adhere to progressive philosophies (Research Question 3), while controlling for the school demographics collected through the Demographic Fact Sheet and the School Leader Survey.

Population and Sample

This inquiry is specific to the progressive education schools within the American K-12 education system that cover the intermediate year grades. I narrowed the focus to progressive education middle schools, since this is my area of professional certification and personal interest. Middle school typically includes grades 5-9 in various combinations depending on the school. The middle school focus is also important because literature documents that if students are not going to excel in school, it becomes most obvious during middle school; and this educational window can be an advantageous time for students to experience an alternative education environment as compared to a standardized testing environment.

Progressive middle schools in eight states are the focus of this research: California, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Virginia. These states were selected because their detailed online administrative database reporting systems facilitated the collection of demographic data. These states also provide a representation of schools from various geographic areas throughout the United States.

After identifying the broad parameters of the population pool, I narrowed the parameters. Montessori and Waldorf schools are internationally recognized progressive schools that espouse the three philosophies of progressive education explored in this study. I accessed each school's organizational websites and browsed through member and associate member listings within the identified states to gather names and contact information for their respective middle (intermediate) schools. I then went to each Waldorf and Montessori school's website and read its history, mission statement, philosophy, curriculum information, leadership, and general demographic statistics. As long as the mission statement recognized all three philosophies of progressive education in any degree, the school was added to the list. Where possible, I also identified whether each school conducted standardized testing.

I needed a greater cross-section of schools that were not Montessori or Waldorf. In my literature review to identify characteristics of progressive education, the Great Schools, Coalition of Essential Schools, and the Association for Middle Level Education websites often provided reference materials describing progressive education. The Coalition of Essential Schools and the Association for Middle Level Education websites included a listing of member and associated schools. The Great Schools' website allowed individuals to query schools by various demographic criteria such as state, city, private or public, or grade level. Each of the different organizations (associations) provided profiles of listed schools. Schools that used statements

such as "meet the highest academic standards," "rigorous academic pursuits," and "place a high

value on excellent rating status" provided a quick indication of whether a school was heavily

invested into competition and standardized testing practices that are more "administrative

progressive" philosophies. Schools that mentioned "caring learning environment," "community

atmosphere of learning," and "high integration of art, music, and drama" were considered more

"pedagogically progressive" in nature. Taking the schools that I identified as being more

"pedagogically progressive," I then went to each school's website and followed the same

procedure used for screening the Montessori and Waldorf schools. At the completion of this

search process there were 529 schools.

Figure 3.1 shows the progressive middle school population that is the focus of this study.
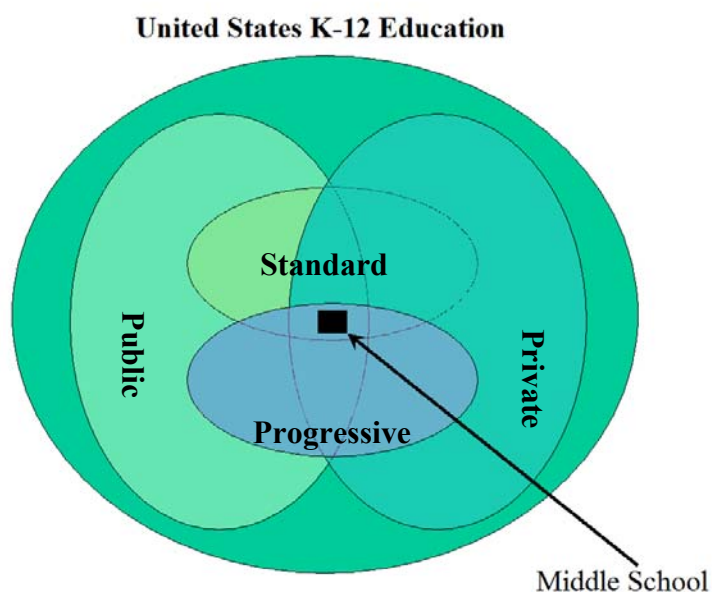
Figure 3.1
Progressive Middle Schools Within U.S. K-12 Education

Research Design and Procedures

This research is a mixed-method quantitative exploratory study with an embedded qualitative component. The choice of quantitative as the primary approach is based upon the lack of quantitative analyses within the current literature pertaining to progressive education environmental forces. The embedded qualitative portion of this study allows a fresh vocalization from progressive educators describing their current experience in maintaining their progressive mission.

The previous section discussed the process of identifying the study population. The next section focuses on the development of questions related to each progressive education philosophy, development of the questionnaire format, and the survey distribution process.

Instruments

Two data collection instruments were used, the School Demographic Fact Sheet used to collect vital statistics about each school and the School Leader Survey. The remainder of this section will describe each of the instruments.

Demographic fact sheet. The School Demographic Fact Sheet is an instrument used to record basic school information from an administrative database and school websites. The following categories were included on the School Demographic Fact Sheet. (See Appendix B for The School Demographic Fact Sheet and its list of variable definitions.)

- School Participation Code
- Organization Name
- Address
- City
- State
- Postal Code
- Work Phone
- Fax Number
- Email Address
- Student Age Range

- Student Population
- Student/Teacher Ratio
- School Category
- School Affiliation
- Years of Operation
- Standardized Testing

The original research design was to have school personnel other than the school leader confirm the demographic information through an initial phone contact. However, after contacting approximately one hundred schools to confirm the demographic information, it became apparent that I was being transferred to the school leader to answer most of the questions. Therefore, the School Leader Survey was updated prior to its release to include key school demographic questions.

School leader survey. The School Leader Survey was designed in SurveyMonkey®. Questions were organized in SurveyMonkey® to allow participants to move through questions that were pertinent and to skip questions that did not apply. SurveyMonkey® is compatible with SPSS® and streamlined transferring the data into the SPSS® analysis program. Using the online survey method was chosen to increase response rate and to reduce research expense and response time (Chaunduri & Stenger, 1991; Shounlau, Fricker, & Elliott, 2002; Yun & Tumbo, 2000).

School leader survey overview. The School Leader Survey (Appendix A) allowed each participant to respond as if they were in a conversation with the researcher. The School Leader Survey consisted of four major sections with open-ended questions throughout the survey. The survey included one section for each of the three philosophies that are the focus of this study (child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making). The fourth section included demographic questions. The School Leader Survey ended with an open-ended reflective question.

Introduction and instructions. The Introduction (Appendix C) of the School Leader

Survey covered the purpose of the research and the instructions for completing the survey. The

introduction informed the school leaders of the study's purpose. It described the study as an

effort to identify shared characteristics of contemporary progressive middle schools and to

capture the current experiences of the progressive education middle schools participating in the

study. Instructions for completing the survey encouraged the participants to think about the

normal daily occurrences and not the exceptions.

Philosophy sections. There is one section in the questionnaire for each philosophy. Each

section includes: 1) a set of statements about educational practices related to the philosophy

measured on a 6-point Likert scale; 2) a 10-point semantic differential question asking

respondents to rate on a scale of 1 (very poorly) to 10 (very well) their school's ability to adhere

to the specific philosophy covered in that section; and 3) an open-ended reflection question

covering the school leader's belief on how well their school is meeting that philosophy. Each

philosophy section is described below in detail.

Child-centered learning. Child-centered learning practices often are the most noticeable

characteristics of a progressive middle school. Measuring the frequency of occurrences of the

various child-centered learning practices is more difficult. It was important to develop a

response option that narrowed the ambiguity among respondents. A scale represented by

percentages, 0-20, 21-40, 41-60, 61-80, 81-100 was considered, but each individual scale was

too wide. Also, the ability for each leader to determine the precise percentage of frequency of

child-centered activities that occur would become tedious and time consuming without providing

research value. If the percentage scale was narrowed to smaller intervals, there was the

appearance of too much wording to be attractive to the leaders completing the survey and a loss in usefulness for data analysis.

A scale considering the frequency of occurrences of child-centered activities using daily, several times a week, once a week, a couple of times a month, once a month, once a quarter, several times a year, rarely, and never was also considered. However, it had the same limitations as the percentage intervals.

Therefore, a 6-point Likert scale was developed. The response categories chosen for the 6-point scale reflect daily language—strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree. Using the 6-point scale combats the tendency for respondents to answer with very neutral and central tendency answers. Table 3.1 lists the variable statements for the Child-Centered Learning section.

Table 3.1
Child-Centered Learning Practices Survey Statements

Items
Students are able to choose topics to study.
Students are allowed to create their own meaning from topics.
Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process.
Our curriculum is based upon topics developed from current life issues.
Students are able to set some of their own learning objectives.
Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities.
Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores).

"On a scale of 1 (very poorly) to 10 (very well), rate how well your school has been able to adhere to a child-centered learning philosophy in the middle school years" is the statement

associated with the 10-point semantic differential question. The semantic differential scale is purposefully placed after the frequency of educational practices statements. Responding to the frequency of child-centered learning practices will help respondents reflect on the topic before addressing their overall perception. The Child-Centered Learning section concludes with an open-ended reflective question asking the leader, "What, does child-centered learning look like in your school? What supports or hinders child-centered learning in your school?"

Community integration. Community integration occurs in a variety of ways and different venues. Community integration includes activities within the school and outside the school. The same procedures and thought processes used to identify questions and scales for the Child-Centered Learning section were used for this philosophy. Table 3.2 lists the variable statements.

Table 3.2
Community Integration Practices Survey Statements

Items
Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations.
Individuals from the local business community teach within school classrooms.
Learning about our community's history, resources, and/or issues is used as student learning opportunities.
Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities.
Student community service is used as a learning experience.
Planning sustainable resources for the school and community are a part of the learning experience.

"On a scale of 1 (very poorly) to 10 (very well), rate your school's ability to adhere to community involvement?" is the semantic differential statement for the Community Integration section. The Community Integration section concludes with an open-ended reflective question

asking the leader, "What does community education look like in your school? What supports or hinders community education in your school?"

Democratic decision-making. Democratic decision-making in progressive middle schools often happens without a structured format. The subtle forms of democratic decision-making activities that occur in the classroom, within the school student council, within the leadership team and various other combinations can include parents, teachers, and community individuals.

The same procedures and thought process used to determine the type of questions and scales for the Child-Centered Learning section were used for this philosophy.   Table 3.3 lists the variable statements for the Democratic Decision-Making section.

Table 3.3
Democratic Decision-Making Practices Survey Statements

Items
Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision.
Consensus is preferred to majority rule.
Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions.
Opposing ideas are welcomed in the discussion process.
Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number.
Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.

"On a scale of 1 (very poorly) to 10 (very well), rate your school's ability to adhere to democratic decision-making" is the semantic differential question for the Democratic Decision-Making section. The Democratic Decision-Making section concludes with an open-ended reflective question asking, "What does democratic decision-making look like in your school? What supports or hinders democratic decision-making in your school?"

School demographic questions. A demographic question section was included in the

School Leader Survey. Table 3.4 shows the variable matrix developed for the School Leader

Survey Demographic section. These questions are more in-depth than the earlier mentioned

demographic questions for the School Demographic Fact Sheet (See Appendix B). These

questions are procedural questions that represent the demographic processes of the school and

allow a more in-depth investigation of the progressive education middle schools.

Table 3.4

School Leader Survey Demographic Questions

Variable	Definition	Question	Variable Type	Response Option
Student grouping	The method used to group students into class units	How often does your school use the following methods to group students?	Likert Scale for each response: - Student age - Student interest - Student skill level	Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Always
Content Development	The teacher method used to develop content	About how often are the following methods used by your teachers in determining the learning content for students?	Likert Scale for each response: - state specified curriculum - organizational philosophical guidelines - student skill levels - current events	Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Always
Content Delivery	The method used to deliver content to students	How often does your school use the following content delivery methods?	Likert Scale for each response: - Direct instruction - Indirect instruction - Experiential	Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Always

Variable	Definition	Question	Variable Type	Response Option
			- Independent - Interactive	
Method of Assessment	The method used to assess student achievement	About how often do your teachers use the following methods to assess student progress?	Likert Scale for each response: - Teacher made tests - Textbook supplemental tests - Standardized state or national tests - Project presentations	Never Seldom Sometimes Regularly Always
Current leadership	The configuration of current school leadership	The current leadership of our school consists of _____.	Multiple choice (all that apply)	Founding individual or group: -Principal -Superintendent -School board -Parent advisory -Student advisory -Community advisory -State advisory -National advisory -Other—text explanation
Current leadership authority	The ability for any one person or group to have over-riding authority	Does any one individual or group have the authority to override a decision?	Dichotomous	Yes/No If yes—ext to identify individual or group and explain

Variable	Definition	Question	Variable Type	Response Option
Original leadership	The configuration of original school leadership	The original leadership of our school consisted of _____.	Multiple choice (all that apply)	Founding individual or group: -Principal -Superintendent -School board -Parent advisory -Student advisory -Community advisory -State advisory -National advisory -Other—text explanation
Original leadership authority	The ability for any one person or group to have overriding authority	Did any one individual or group have the authority to override a decision?	Dichotomous	Yes/No If yes – text to identify individual or group and explain

Final reflection. The final survey question is an open-ended reflection question asking, "If you were explaining to a person what makes your school different, what would you tell them?" This question offers each participant an opportunity to share insights or information not generated from previous survey questions. Narrative analysis was used to identify the themes that emerged from the textual reflections. The responses added to the qualitative progressive education middle school narrative analysis.

Survey Distribution

As mentioned earlier, the distribution procedure of the Demographic Fact Sheet changed during the data collection process. The process to confirm the information from school personnel other than the school leader was cumbersome and did not produce timely results. The

school leader was often required to answer the questions; therefore, the demographic questions that could not be answered from an administrative database or the school website were included on the School Leader Survey.

Confirming a middle school leader's e-mail address began the School Leader Survey distribution process. The school leader surveys were sent out through SurveyMonkey® in six batches. Each school leader's name was personalized on a cover e-mail that also included the purpose of the survey, the instructions for the survey, and the option of not participating. Each school leader was given seven days to respond before a first time reminder e-mail was sent. The timetable was shortened for the last survey batches based on response time experience for the first batches. A final e-mail was sent to all participants prior to the closing of the survey. Table 3.5 shows the School Leader Distribution Timetable.

Table 3.5
School Leader Distribution Timetable

Batch	Introduction	1st Reminder	Final Request
1	5/14/2012	5/21/2012	6/19/2012
2	5/21/3012	6/7/2012	6/19/2012
3	5/30/2012	6/7/2012	6/19/2012
4	6/11/2012	6/19/2012	6/25/2012
5	6/19/2012		6/25/2012
6	6/25/2012		6/25/2012

Ethical Considerations

The school demographics provided by each participating school are public knowledge. School leaders were informed that their responses to both closed and open-ended questions would remain confidential. All data were reported in aggregate or anonymously so that no school or leader name was identified. An IRB proposal was submitted and approved by the Antioch University PhD in Leadership and Change Institutional Review Board prior to the release of the survey questions to participants.

Data Analysis

A detailed discussion of each research question follows. Statistical significance of $p <$ .05 was used in this study based upon the documented rule of thumb by George and Mallery (2008). George and Mallery asserted, "Social Scientists have generally accepted that if the p value is less than .05, then the result is considered statistically significant" (p. 96). The data analysis tool used in this study was SPSS® and was chosen because of its compatibility with SurveyMonkey® and other database sources such as Microsoft Excel and Access.

Table 3.6 includes the five research questions, the data source, and the type of data analysis for each question.

Table 3.6
School Leader Survey Research Questions Matrix

Research Question #	Research Question	Data Source	Data Analysis
1	What school demographics describe contemporary progressive middle schools?	Administrative databases School Websites School Leader Survey	Percentage Distributions Mean Scores

Research Question #	Research Question	Data Source	Data Analysis
2	What educational practices associated with the three basic philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—are part of contemporary progressive middle schools?	School Leader Survey	Percentage Distributions Mean Scores
3	How do progressive middle school leaders rate their school in terms of adherence to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making?	School Leader Survey	Percentage Distributions Mean Scores
4	What educational practices are most strongly associated with perception of ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—in contemporary progressive middle schools?	School Leader Survey	Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and measures of skewness and kurtosis) Bivariate Correlations 3 Regression analyses – one for each dependent variable – the perceived ability to adhere to the three philosophies (results of Research Questions 2 and 3)
5	What school demographic characteristics influence perceived ability to adhere to the three	School Leader Survey	Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and measures of skewness and kurtosis)

Research Question #	Research Question	Data Source	Data Analysis
	philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—in contemporary progressive middle schools?		Bivariate Correlations 3 Regression analyses – one for each dependent variable – the perceived ability to adhere to the three philosophies (results of Research Questions 1 and 3)

Research Question 1—What school demographics describe contemporary progressive middle schools? The Demographic Fact Sheet was used to record information retrieved from administrative databases and school websites. Democratic data were also collected in the School Leader Survey. SPSS® was used to run descriptive statistics, including percentage distributions and mean scores. The demographic items used as the independent variables in the regression analysis of Research Question 5 were Student/Teacher Ratio, Student Grade Level Configuration, Current Leadership Overriding Veto Power, Administration of Standardized Tests, Years of Operation, and Type of School.

Research Question 2—What educational practices associated with the three basic philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—are part of contemporary middle schools? The data for this question were collected through the School Leader Survey using a 6-point Likert scale asking the school leader to strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree whether each of the educational practices was used within their school. SPSS® was used to run descriptive statistics, including percentage distributions and mean scores. A percentage distribution table for each set of educational practices is presented and discussed in Chapter IV. The mean score for each education practice item for each separate philosophy also were the

independent variables in the regression analyses for Research Question 4 and Research Question 5.

Research Question 3—How do progressive middle school leaders rate their school in terms of adherence to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making? The data for this question were collected through a 10-point semantic differential scale for each philosophy section of the School Leader Survey ranging from 1 (very poorly) to 10 (very well). SPSS® was used to run descriptive statistics, including percentage distributions and mean scores. Mean scores were used as the dependent variables in the regression analyses for Research Question 4 and Research Question 5.

Research Question 4—What educational practices are most strongly associated with perception of ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—in contemporary progressive middle schools? Research Question 4 addressed the relationship between the perceived ability to adhere to progressive education philosophies (Research Question 3) and the actual experience (Research Question 2) with progressive educational practices. The independent variables were the scores for each of the education practice items for each of three philosophies. The school leader perceived adherence to each philosophy score collected for Research Question 3 was the dependent variable. For each philosophy, the independent variables were entered into a regression model using the stepwise method. The stepwise method enters each independent variable into the regression analysis one at a time and drops variables from the equation when other variables are added and the significance level drops below the determined p value. The regression model identified the relationship of educational practices to the overall school leaders' perceived ability of the school to adhere to the same progressive education philosophy. A two-

tailed level of significance was used in all the regression analyses. George and Mallery (2008)

provided the general consensus in choosing between a one-tailed and two-tailed correlation

asserting,

> To determine which to use, the rule of thumb generally followed is to use two-tailed
> significance when you compute a table of correlations in which you have little idea as to
> the direction of the correlations. If, however, you have prior expectations about the
> direction of correlations (positive or negative), then the statistic for one-tailed
> significance is generally used. (p. 126)

Table 3.7 includes the name, source, and the data type of each variable within the regression

analysis of Research Question 4.

Table 3.7
Research Question 4 Regression Table

REGRESSION	Independent Variables	Dependent Variable
1	Child-Centered Learning Practices	School Leader's Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to Child-Centered Learning.
2	Community Integration Practices	School Leader's Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to Community Integration.
3	Democratic Decision-Making Practices	School Leader's Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to Democratic Decision-Making.

Research Question 5—What school demographic characteristics influence perceived

ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community

integration, and democratic decision-making—in contemporary progressive middle

schools? Research Question 5 addressed the type of relationship that exists between the school

leaders' perceived ability to adhere to progressive education philosophies (Research Question 3)

and certain demographic characteristics (Demographic Fact Sheet and School Leader Survey) of

progressive educational practices.   Selected demographic characteristics of student/teacher ratio,

student grade level configuration, current leadership overriding veto power, administering of standardized tests, years of operation, and type of school were chosen as the independent variables based upon the perception I gained from researching the history of progressive education schools. The perceptions included the possibility that smaller class size (individualized attention) and absence of standardized testing (reduced stress) enhance student success.

The demographic variables were converted into dummy variables for the purpose of the regression analyses and served as the control variables. The progressive educational philosophy item scores used in Research Question 4 remained the same and were used in the in the three regression analyses. The school leaders' perceived adherence score of each philosophy collected from Research Question 3 functioned as the dependent variable. The demographic variables were used as the control variables within Block 1; with the philosophy practices item scores entered into Block 2. The stepwise method for regression was used just as in Research Question 4. Table 3.8 includes the name, source, and the data type of each variable within the regression analysis of Research Question 5.

Table 3.8
Research Question 5 Regression Table

REGRESSION	Demographic Control Variables	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
4	• Student/Teacher Ratio • Student Grade Level Configuration • Current Leadership Overriding Veto Power • Administration of Standardized Tests • Years of Operation • Type of School	Child-Centered Learning Practices	School Leaders' Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to the Child-Centered Learning Philosophy

| 5 | • Student/Teacher Ratio
• Student Grade Level Configuration
• Current Leadership Overriding Veto Power
• Administration of Standardized Tests
• Years of Operation
• Type of School | Community Integration Practices | School Leaders' Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to the Community Integration Philosophy |
| 6 | • Student/Teacher Ratio
• Student Grade Level Configuration
• Current Leadership Overriding Veto Power
• Administration of Standardized Tests
• Years of Operation
• Type of School | Democratic Decision-Making Practices | School Leaders' Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to the Democratic Decision-Making Philosophy |

Narrative responses from all open-ended questions were the source of the qualitative data. Narrative analysis followed an emergent process. SurveyMonkey® textual analysis was used to group school leader responses.

Summary – Chapter III

This research is an exploratory mixed-method quantitative study with an embedded qualitative component. This study is a beginning effort to identify shared characteristics of contemporary progressive middle schools. It is designed to add scholarly insight to the literature beyond the typical progressive education rhetoric depicting the differences between "administrative (standardized)" advocates and "pedagogical (child-centered)" advocates. This study focuses on the pedagogical progressive education and identifies contemporary progressive education schools as including three primary philosophies: child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making.

This study focuses on progressive education middle schools because of the identified learning gaps of middle (intermediate) school students that are predictors of future educational

difficulties not limited to but including manipulated retention by administrators and frustrated students dropping out of school. The ability to survive and grow in a predominantly standardized society guided by the No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB) is the difficulty faced by contemporary progressive middle schools.

Literature indicates that progressive education schools often flourish during the early period of their existence and over time become less progressive in their practices or even cease to exist. This study is an effort to identify characteristics of contemporary progressive education. It is hoped, that once these characteristics are identified, progressive education leaders will use this knowledge in a proactive manner as they evaluate their current ability to adhere to their mission statement and plan for future sustainability and growth.

To accomplish the goal of identifying the characteristics of contemporary progressive education middle schools, three types of questions were asked: 1) What do we look like demographically as a school? 2) How frequently do we exhibit progressive education practices within our school? 3) What is our perception of how well we achieve progressive education philosophies within our school? These three questions asked in a variety of formats allowed leaders to reflect on their current practices and share their stories through both numbers (quantitative) and words (qualitative) of their experiences. Chapter IV (Findings of the Study) and Chapter V (Conclusions and Discussion) hinge upon the achievement of data gathering as presented in this chapter.

Chapter IV: Analysis

Introduction

This chapter describes the results of the study of the characteristics and environment of

contemporary progressive education middle schools. Included in this chapter are statistics and

narrative analyses that address the five research questions:

1. What school demographics describe contemporary progressive middle schools?

2. What educational practices associated with the three basic philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—are part of contemporary progressive middle schools?

3. How do progressive middle school leaders rate their school in terms of adherence to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making?

4. What educational practices are most strongly associated with perception of ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—in contemporary progressive middle schools?

5. What school demographic characteristics influence perceived ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making in—contemporary progressive middle schools?

Participant Recruitment

The participant pool was developed using membership lists from the following: Coalition

of Essential Schools (CES), American Montessori Society (AMS), Association of Waldorf

Schools of North America (AWSNA), National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS),

Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE), and Great Schools. Five hundred and twenty-

nine schools met the research criteria following the recruitment procedures as described in

Chapter III. Required e-mail contact information for school leaders was available for 463

schools. SurveyMonkey® delivered 445 surveys after controlling for previously opted-out

participants and undeliverable e-mail addresses.

Table 4.1
Development of Participant Pool

	Process Information	
Total Possible Contacts	529	Membership Lists: CES, AMS, AWSNA, NAIS, NMSA, Great Schools
Total Valid Contact Info	463	Leader e-mail contact information available.
Total Surveys Sent	445	Survey Monkey deleted any e-mails previously opted out or undeliverable.

Eighty-nine surveys out of the 445 sent were returned through SurveyMonkey®, establishing a 20% return rate. While this number is small, Holbrook et al. (2008) and Visser et al. (1996) provided research findings comparing response rates and the validity of smaller response rates. Larger response rates have often been associated with an assurance of validity. Holbrook et al.'s research centered on telephone surveys and Visser et al.'s observations focused on mail surveys. These two topics were relevant to this study. Holbrook et al. proposed that a lower response rate is not an indication of response error. Actual findings from their study did indicate some differences on 14 of 91 variables. The differences on the 14 variables, however, were "small in magnitude" (p. 508). Holbrook et al. continued to compare other response rate studies and "found comparably small effects of response rates" (p. 508) as well.

Visser et al. discussed the shift in using mail surveys versus telephone surveys, a shift that is very similar to the continued change in technology and the rise of electronically distributed surveys. Respondents are able to answer at a time that is most convenient to them and that gives them a sense of privacy to allow an assurance of confidential responses. Visser et al. stated, "…these results demonstrate that surveys with low response rates are not necessarily low in validity" (p. 182), a statement that mirrors the words of Holbrook et al.   I feel confident

that a 20% response rate by the school leaders is a good representation of the larger population pool because of the similar descriptive statistics and distribution patterns between the population and respondent groups.

Data Cleaning

The cleaning of the survey data included checking that the core questions surrounding the three philosophies of progressive education—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—were answered. These questions had to be answered in order to run regression analysis. Other questions within the survey that did not receive responses from all the participants could be considered as adding to the qualitative portion of the research.

Sixteen of the 89 surveys had missing answers and gaps. Five surveys were submitted with only the first four to six questions answered. These six surveys were automatically deleted because they lacked the data surrounding the core philosophies needed to conduct regression analysis. One additional survey was deleted from the study because of large segments of missing information based upon the participant's hit-and-miss answering of questions throughout the entire survey.

The remaining nine surveys were completed by using information from the Demographic Fact Sheet and revisiting each school's website. This led to a total of 82 complete, usable surveys, establishing a 92% completion rate of the surveys returned.

Table 4.2
Participant Response Rate

Total Surveys Returned	89
Percent Returned	20%
Total Completed Surveys	82
Percent Completed	92%

Analysis: Research Question 1

Percentage distributions and mean scores of participant school demographics were used to address the question of "What school demographics describe contemporary progressive middle schools?" It was important to compare the possible population pool (529) to the actual analyzed surveys (82) to determine the representativeness of the respondent group to the population pool. The variables to compare the respondent group to the population pool identified through the Internet included the following: State, Type of School, Years of Operation, Student/Teacher Ratio, Student Grade Level Configuration, and Administration of Standardized Tests.

The percentage distribution for the State variable shows that the population pool and respondent group have similar state representation. The percentage varies six percentage points or less between the population pool and the respondent group for any state.

Table 4.3
State for Population Pool, Contact List, and Respondent Group

	Population List (N = 529)			Population List with Good Contact Information (N = 445)			Respondent Group (N = 82)	
STATE	Frequency	%		Frequency	%		Frequency	%
CA	126	24		109	24		15	18
OH	35	7		32	7		10	12
TX	66	12		48	11		5	6
FL	43	8		33	7		6	7
VA	38	7		34	8		5	6
MA	80	15		71	16		17	21
IL	39	7		30	7		10	12
NY	102	19		88	20		14	17
TOTAL		99			100			99

The Type of School variable in the respondent group also closely followed the population pool distribution, with private schools as the largest group of progressive education middle schools.

Table 4.4
Type of School for Population Pool, Contact List, and Respondent Group

	Population List (N = 529)			Population List with Good Contact Information (N = 445)			Respondent Group (N = 82)	
TYPE	Frequency	%		Frequency	%		Frequency	%
PRIVATE	442	84		378	85		68	83
OTHER	87	16		67	15		14	17
TOTAL		100			100			100

The actual survey categories for the Student Grade Level Configuration variable contained twelve subcategories that covered various combinations of 4th through 9th grade as pre-determined by the literature review that identified this as the transition period from childhood to

adolescence (Alexander & Williams, 1965; Brough, 1994; Buell, 1967; Caskey & Anfara, 2007). This variable was recoded into two categories: schools that included younger students (4th and 5th graders) and schools that did not include younger students. The most frequent Student Grade Level Configuration was 6th to 9th grade (older students) for both the population pool and the respondent group.

Table 4.5
Student Grade Level Configuration for Population Pool, Contact List, and Respondent Group

	Population List (N = 529)		Population List with Good Contact Information (N = 445)		Respondent Group (N = 82)
CONFIGURATION	%		%		%
Includes Younger (4th – 5th Grade)	29		29		30
Does Not Include Younger Grades	71		71		70

The Years of Operation percentage distribution for the population pool and respondent group shows that the majority of years of operation for both groups was between 1 to 60 years. However, the respondent group under-represents the longest operating schools and over-represents the schools in the early stages of operation. The population pool included a school that had been in existence for 283 years, while the longest running school in the respondent group had been in operation for 170 years. Future studies should attempt to target the schools that have been in existence longer to determine if there are any differences in their progressive educational practices versus those schools that have not been in existence as long that have strongly been represented in this study.

Table 4.6
Years of Operation for Population Pool, Contact List, and Respondent Group

	Population List (N = 529)		Population List with Good Contact Information (N = 445)		Respondent Group (N = 82)
YEARS	%		%		%
1 – 30	29		26		41
31 – 60	37		36		34
61 – 90	14		15		12
91 – 120+	20		22		12

The percentage distribution for the Student/Teacher Ratio variable shows that the majority of schools in both the respondent group and the population pool have a student/teacher ratio lower than 18 students to 1 teacher. The respondent group slightly under-represents the smaller class sizes with a student/teacher ratio of fewer than 8 students to 1 teacher, while showing a slight over-representation of the student/teacher ratio of 9 to 18 students per teacher. The comparison between the population pool and the respondent group in all categories except the 1 to 8 students per teacher is no more than 3 percentage points different.

Table 4.7
Student/Teacher Ratio for Population Pool, Contact List, and Respondent Group

	Population List (N = 529)		Population List with Good Contact Information (N = 445)		Respondent Group (N = 82)
RATIO	%		%		%
1 – 8	48		49		37
9 – 18	45		42		49
19 – 28	8		8		11
29 +	1		1		4

A surprisingly high percentage of schools reported administering standardized tests. With almost a 10-percentage point difference between the populations, the respondent pool somewhat over-represents schools that do not administer standardized tests.

Table 4.8

Standardized Test Administration for Population Pool, Contact List, and Respondent Group

	Population List (N = 529)		Population List with Good Contact Information (N = 445)		Respondent Group (N = 82)
TESTING	%		%		%
YES	90		90		81
NO	10		10		20

The relatively similar percentage distributions for the population pool and the respondent group in the variables reinforces the assertion that the respondent group is a good representation of the larger population pool.

In addition to the school demographic information posted on Internet sites, descriptive information was collected through the School Leader Survey. A five-point Likert scale was used with the following categories: 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = regularly, and 5 = always.

Respondents identified no one method of grouping students for instruction. The item responses for grouping of students showed that 93% of the school leaders reported their schools use student age sometimes (12%), regularly (58%), or always (22%). More than four-fifths of the school leaders reported that student interest groups were sometimes (40%), regularly (41%) or always (1%) used. Student skill level was also used for grouping in more than four-fifths of

the schools. School leaders indicated they used this method sometimes (28%), regularly (48%), or always (7%).

A few school leaders responded that their schools never or seldom used age, interest, or skill level to group students. While this represents a small number of schools in the respondent group, it does raise a question about what type of grouping these schools use. One school leader who reported never using student age to group students was from a charter school characterized as a "Science Academy" providing education to students in grades 6 to 8. This school leader did not provide additional comments to clarify the school's grouping of students other than to indicate that the school regularly grouped students by skill level, which would easily fit into a science-oriented discovery-learning environment.

The three school leaders who reported never using student interest to group students were from two private schools and one public school. One of the private school leaders reported that while not using student interest as a grouping method, the school regularly used age and skill level. The second private school leader stated the school regularly used age and always used skill level to group its students. The public school leader reported that the school never used interest or skill level, but always used age as a method to group students.

Table 4.9
Grouping of Students (N = 80)

	Mean	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Student Age	3.94	1.2% (1)	6.2% (5)	12.3% (10)	58.0% (47)	22.2% (18)
Student Interest	3.23	3.8% (3)	13.8% (11)	40.0% (32)	41.3% (33)	1.3% (1)
Student Skill Level	3.43	3.7% (3)	12.3% (10)	28.4% (23)	48.1% (39)	7.4% (6)

Sixty-two percent of the school leaders reported that standardized testing never (22%) or seldom (40%) influenced the learning experience of their students when responding to Influence of Standardized Tests. Seventy-three percent of the school leaders reported they never (40%) or seldom (33%) had difficulty related to students transferring into their school, while 80% reported never (46%) or seldom (34%) having difficulty with students transferring out of their school. Further explanation is given in the narrative comments that these difficulties relate to outside expectations of parents and other educational institutions.

Table 4.10
Influence of Standardized Tests and Difficulty of Transfer Related to Standardized Testing

	Mean	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Influence of Standardized Tests (N = 82)						
How often des the standardized testing environment of the U.S. influence your students' learning experience?	2.32	22.0% (18)	40.2% (33)	24.4% (20)	11.0% (9)	2.4% (2)
Difficulty of Transfer Related to Standardized Testing (N = 77)						
Student ability to transfer into your school.	1.95	40.3% (31)	32.5% (25)	19.5% (15)	7.8% (6)	0.0% (0)
Student ability to transfer out of your school.	1.78	45.6% (36)	34.2% (27)	16.5% (13)	3.8% (3)	0.0$ (0)

School leaders' responses showed that to determine content, "student skill levels" and "organizational philosophical guidelines" were most commonly used. Student skill levels were reportedly used regularly (60%) or always (21%), and organizational philosophical guidelines were used regularly (62%) or always (28%). School leader responses showed a greater range of use of state specified curriculum benchmarks and current events. Respondents indicated the least used method of determining content as "state specified curriculum benchmarks"—never (13%)

or seldom (35%). School leaders' responses indicated "current events" were generally used sometimes (53%) or regularly (39%) to determine content.

The top three regularly or always used methods of content delivery reported by school leaders were indirect instruction (78%), interactive (80%), and experiential (71%). These three categories are similar and support the concept of child-centered learning practices that focus on student interaction and responsibility versus teacher instruction.

Project presentations (93%) and teacher made tests (77%) represented the two most regularly or always used methods of assessment. Twenty-one percent of the respondents indicated that state and national standardized tests were never used within their schools.

Table 4.11
Methods Used for Determining Content, Content Delivery, and Assessment

	Mean	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Methods Used for Determining Content (N = 78)						
State specified curriculum benchmarks.	2.78	12.8% (10)	34.6% (27)	25.6% (20)	15.4% (12)	11.5% (9)
Organizational philosophical guidelines.	4.18	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	10.3% (8)	61.5% (48)	28.2% (22)
Student skill levels.	3.99	0.0% (0)	2.6% (2)	16.7% (13)	60.3% (47)	20.5% (16)
Current events.	3.36	1.3% (1)	5.1% (4)	52.6% (41)	38.5% (30)	2.6% (2)
Methods Used for Content Delivery (N = 79)	Mean	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Direct Instruction – highly teacher directed	3.33	1.3% (1)	12.7% (10)	40.5% (32)	43.0% (34)	2.5% (2)
Indirect Instruction – highly student focused with teacher as facilitator, supporter, and resource	3.80	0.0% (0)	3.8% (3)	17.7% (14)	73.4% (58)	5.1% (4)
Experiential – learner centered with the emphasis in experiential learning through process	3.75	1.3% (1)	2.5% (2)	25.3% (20)	62.0% (49)	8.9% (7)

	Mean	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Independent – student study generated by student interest and depends on student initiative and self-motivation	3.33	1.3% (1)	15.2% (12)	39.2% (31)	38.0% (30)	6.3% (5)
Interactive – relies heavily on discussion and sharing among students in small groups	3.94	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	20.3% (16)	65.8% (52)	13.9% (11)
Methods of Assessments (N = 81)	Mean	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Teacher Made Tests	3.84	0.0% (0)	4.9% (4)	18.3% (15)	65.9% (54)	11.0% (9)
Textbook Supplemental Tests	4.71	16.0% (13)	38.3% (31)	22.2% (18)	21.0% (17)	2.5% (2)
Standardized State or National Tests	4.35	21.0% (17)	34.6% (28)	23.5% (19)	12.3% (10)	8.6% (7)
Project Presentations	4.13	0.0% (0)	1.2% (1)	6.2% (5)	65.4% (53)	27.2% (22)

Summary: Research Questions 1

Almost three-fourths of the respondent group identified the 6th to 9th grade (70%) as the student grade level configuration being served at their school. This student grade level configuration seemed to be an "official" structure that within the school is not often used because of the multi-age grouping of students internally. Examples included combining both 7th and 8th graders for most classes as a usual practice for one public school. A private school incorporates mixed age groups throughout its curriculum except for Math, Latin, and Advisory Groups. Often the traditional structure and expectation of schools necessitate fitting students into a recognizable category.

Eighty-three percent of the respondent group was in the private school category. Private included Independent, Charter, Montessori, or Waldorf. Private schools have the ability to function outside the scrutiny of federal guidelines such as in administering or reporting standardized test results.

An unexpected response was the percent of schools that administer some type of standardized test (81%). At the same time, 62% of the schools indicate that standardized tests never or seldom influence the learning environment of their schools. Even with 24% of the school leaders indicating that their school learning environment was sometimes influenced by standardized testing, this discrepancy fuels the question, "How can schools report not being influenced by standardized state or national tests and still have such a large percentage administering those tests?" This discrepancy is addressed in the school leaders' narrative comments associated with Research Question 2.

School leaders reported that the most frequently used content delivery methods in their schools were indirect instruction (78%), interactive small groups (80%), and experiential learning (71%). The top two assessment methods of project presentations (93%) and teacher made tests (77%) reported by the school leaders complement the methods of content delivery.

While the demographic characteristics of private, low student/teacher ratio, project presentations and assessments are not exclusive to contemporary progressive education middle schools; these demographic characteristics do represent the majority of the respondents in this study. A closer investigation of the progressive middle schools through the lens of each succeeding research question will provide an opportunity to identify characteristics embodied by these schools.

Analysis: Research Question 2

Percentage distributions and mean scores were used to address the question of "What educational practices associated with the three basic philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—are part of contemporary progressive middle schools?" A six-point Likert scale was used with the following categories: 1 = strongly

disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly

agree.

      Child-centered learning practices. Table 4.12 shows the distribution of responses for

the Child-Centered Learning section items. Table 4.13 shows the mean, standard deviation, and

measures of skewness, and kurtosis for these items. The overall mean score ($M = 4.52$) across all

items in the Child-Centered Learning section indicates that the average response was between

somewhat agree and agree (See Table 4.12). Between 70% and 98% of responses to the items in

this section were at one of the "agree" levels. Over 90% of school leaders agree at some level

that "Students are allowed to create their own meaning from topics" and "Small group student

interaction creates learning opportunities." While some level of agreement was the norm,

school leaders were least likely to strongly agree with the statements of "Student learning is

based upon discovery through an independent learning process" (15%), "Students are able to

choose topics to study" (11%), and "Our curriculum is based upon topics developed from current

life issues" (8%). Respondent narrative statements do not provide specific reasoning why some

leaders did not strongly agree that these practices represented their school's educational

practices. The school leaders who responded that they strongly disagree, disagree, or somewhat

disagree that a certain educational practice characterized their school indicated they did agree or

strongly agree that other child-centered learning practices were used at their schools.

Table 4.12
Mean Scores and Percentage Distributions for Child-Centered Learning Practices Items
(N = 82)

	Mean	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students are able to choose topics to study.	3.84	8.5% (7)	11.% (9)	11% (9)	37.8% (31)	20.7% (17)	11% (9)
Students are allowed to create their own meaning from topics.	4.71	1.2% (1)	3.7% (3)	3.7% (3)	31.7% (26)	34.1% (28)	25.6% (21)
Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process.	4.35	2.4% (2)	1.2% (1)	12.2% (10)	41.5% (34)	28.0% (23)	14.6% (12)
Our curriculum is based upon topics developed from current life issues.	4.13	3.7% (3)	2.4% (2)	12.2% (10)	48.8% (40)	24.4% (20)	8.5% (7)
Students are able to set some of their own learning objectives.	4.52	1.2% (1)	3.7% (3)	9.8% (8)	37.8% (31)	22.0% (18)	25.6% (21)
Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities.	5.49	0.0% (0)	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	7.3% (6)	28.0% (23)	62.2% (51)
Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores).	4.57	1.2% (1)	7.3% (6)	4.9% (4)	34.1% (28)	24.4% (20)	28.9% (23)

The somewhat high measures of skewness and kurtosis for the statement "Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities" reflect the extremely high percent of agree (28%) and strongly agree (62%) responses. Skewness and kurtosis measures for all the statements other than the previously mentioned statement fall within the generally accepted range of $\pm$ 3.0.

Table 4.13
Descriptive Statistics for Child-Centered Learning Practices Items (N = 82)

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Students are able to choose topics to study.	3.84	1.40	-.484	-.385
Students are allowed to create their own meaning from topics.	4.71	1.08	-.883	1.149
Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process.	4.35	1.07	-.568	1.043

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Our curriculum is based upon topics developed from current life issues.	4.13	1.06	-.717	1.505
Students are able to set some of their own learning objectives.	4.52	1.16	-.453	.016
Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities.	5.49	.79	-1.888	4.431
Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores).	4.57	1.23	-.686	.103
1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree				

Child-centered learning practices narrative analysis. Narrative responses to the open-ended question related to child-centered learning covered four topic areas: 1) learning processes, 2) student classroom environment (configuration), 3) assessment, and 4) hindrances. Figure 4.1 shows the SurveyMonkey® graphic representation of the narrative responses.
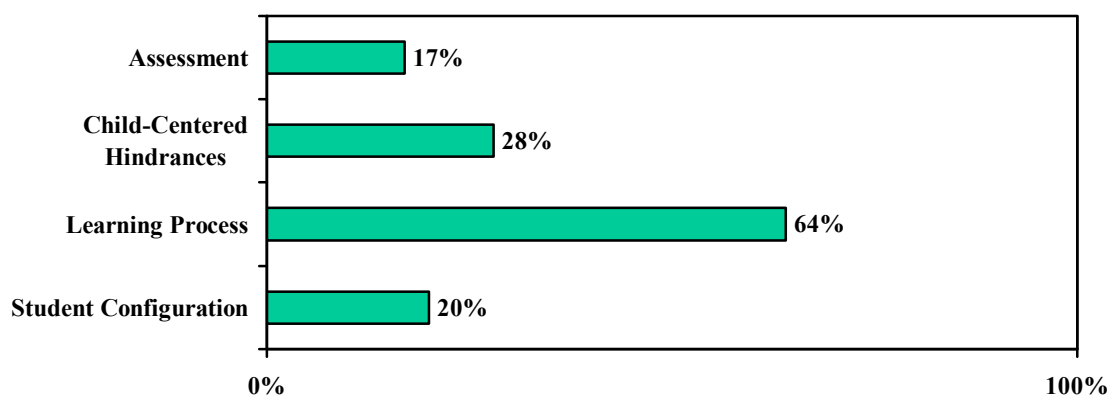
Figure 4.1
Percentage Bar Graph of Child-Centered Learning Narrative Responses

Learning processes. Sixty-four percent of the school leader narrative responses described the learning process as contributing to their school's child-centered learning practices. Three predominant learning processes described in the narratives included students taking responsibility for their own learning, cyclical learning ending with mastery, and teacher-created

parameters with internal student choice. One school leader's comments about students taking responsibility for learning included student reflection as part of "an on-going dialogue between the adults and students about areas of strengths, [and] areas in need of improvement. Students set goals at the beginning of the year with an implementation plan, and they regularly (each week and after a cycle of work) evaluate how they are doing." Student responsibility also includes student-led parent conferences and the maintenance of their own educational portfolio. A private school leader stated, "Students not only attend, but also lead their parent-teacher conferences, and are responsible for communicating their perceptions regarding personal progress on those goals."

Cyclical mastery learning allows students to repeat learning concepts and to practice at their own pace versus moving steadily ahead to accumulate an abundance of memorized knowledge. Respondents from several private schools described four to six week cycles of learning, culminating with a student-led presentation demonstrating mastery. The learning process incorporated project based and authentic learning that is heavily dependent upon multi-disciplined approaches and an authentic assessment process. A private school leader stated, "Students have individualized goals set for some areas of the curriculum and students can progress through the materials at their own pace." Another private school leader stressed the significance of being private and the freedom from standardized testing by sharing, "We are different from the local public school options since we are not held to a national standardized test and give our students a more in-depth study into topics."

Many schools develop the container of learning and allow students to choose the 'what' and 'how' of learning the concepts as described by a private school leader: "Our Middle School has designed thematic units and within these high interest portals, all the necessary skills and

concepts are taught." A challenge is to keep the project-based learning student centered and avoid creating a standardized format as indicated by a public school statement: "We make our curriculum relevant and authentic, we purposefully vary ways of showing mastery and building competencies, and honor all learning styles." A private school interjects a view of a more structured environment with the student freedom developed in the learning pace and assessment: "Even when all students get the same assignment—typical of our MS [middle school]—teachers understand that students' work will reflect their current level of understanding, and encourage their students accordingly. Even when there is a single assignment, it is often open-ended enough so that students adapt it to their own level of achievement."

  Student classroom environment. Smaller class size impacting student classroom environment is associated with many of the progressive education middle schools. This fact alone may not reflect the true underlying component of establishing a teacher/student relationship through one-on-one contacts, remediation, and immediacy of attention afforded to all students in a smaller class as compared to students in a larger class setting. A private school leader emphasized this point by stating, "Each child has a one-to-one tutorial every day. These tutorials are based upon the learning needs of each student. All of our classes have a small student/teacher ratio, another feature that supports child-centered learning. Although the curriculum is determined by faculty, the pace at which any class goes is heavily determined upon how well the students are learning and responding to the material."

  An encouraging atmosphere of excitement is described as being part of the small class size. Students and teachers build a relationship that fosters safety for exploration. A charter school leader describes their environment as a place where, "Teachers are able to spend one on one time with students as necessary to individualize instruction." Comments from school leaders

describing the relationship aspect of a small student/teacher ratio that promotes child-centered learning practices included:

- Our classes are small and warm, offering students a safe community in which to learn.

- [We] focus on relationship in that we learn from the people we love and the best learning happens in the context of relationship.

- [The] degree to which faculty really know the students and how well the students know themselves as learners when leaving 8th grade….

A private school leader provided an encompassing statement reflecting the development of teacher/student relationship:

> My students love to come to school. They are treated as intelligent beings who have the capacity to learn, create, and grow. They know they are valued as individuals. We laugh together. We solve problems together. They know that each one of them is an integral part of our community and we discuss the effects of our actions upon one another. We can be irreverent or serious (rarely). We are flexible. I always ask, "When was the last time you heard a middle school student say they loved to come to school?" 'Nuff said.

Assessment. The discrepancy identified through the leaders' school demographic responses reporting never (22%) or seldom (40%) having standardized tests to influence their learning environment versus the 81% of respondents that did administer standardized tests shows that while the majority of schools administer standardized tests, they do not let this testing influence the learning environment of their school. Some school leaders indicated that they administer standardized tests to prepare students, through practice to take standardized tests in the future, as well as to meet the more stringent transfer requirements to more traditional schools. Respondent statements describing the administration of standardized test for transfer include:

- Summative assessments are critical for our 9th graders transferring into a 10th grade boarding school.

- Standardized testing is not part of our program except for brief preparation for high school entrance exams.

Some respondents described the use of standardized testing for internal evaluation versus external reporting as demonstrated in the following statements:

- We use standardized testing all the time to monitor and assess student progress in language and math remediation. Not state standardized testing, however.

- Standardized tests (only administered once in middle school years) are utilized to assess curriculum, not individual students.

Child-centered learning hindrances. Hindrances to child-centered learning practices include references to future school requirements and parent/community expectations. A private school leader stated, "The community and public school mentality are the two biggest hindrances. It is hard to convince others to stop thinking traditionally and to start thinking progressively. How do children learn? We must foster each individual—not use a "factory" model." Another private school leader lists hindrances experienced in their school related to parent expectations:

- Parent fears about any change.

- Parent fears about an approach that deviates from their educational experience.

- [Having a] perception that [our] approach lacks rigor, especially reports with no grades.

- Belief that kids don't work as hard without grades.

One private school leader expressed the effort put forth in their school to overcome these outside expectations revealing, "Child-centered learning is supported by a committed faculty and administration that is constantly reflecting to make sure we are not losing our focus and becoming too influenced by prevailing, outside (societal and parental), academic pressures."

Child-centered learning practices are only one part of the contemporary progressive middle school practices that also include researched best practices such as differentiation, multiple intelligence, and hands-on learning.

Community integration practices. Community integration is the next philosophy of progressive education considered in identifying characteristics embodied by contemporary progressive middle schools. Table 4.14 describes the distribution of responses to the Community Integration section items. Table 4.15 describes the mean, standard deviation, and measures of skewness and kurtosis for the Community Integration items. The overall mean score ($M = 4.22$) across all items in the Community Integration section indicates that the average response was between somewhat agree and agree (See Table 4.14). Over three-fourths of school leader responses to the Community Integration items were in the agree categories for four of the six activities. (See Table 4.14) The four activities are "Learning about our community's history, resources, and/or issues is used as student learning opportunities," "Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities," "Student community service is used as a learning experience," and "Planning sustainable resources for the school and community are a part of the learning experience." The other two activities—"Individuals from the local business community teach within school classrooms," and "Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations"—had lower levels of agreement, 41% and 61% respectively.

"Individuals from the local business community teach within school classrooms" had the highest percent (17%) of respondents indicating that they strongly disagreed their school practiced this activity. These responses may indicate community integration involving outside organizations is more difficult to coordinate. Some school leader narrative comments for those who disagreed that these items related to their schools' adherence to community integration included the following:

- We are not as connected with local businesses as we could be. We have so much that we are doing, that this just tends to come last.

- Because we are a private school, few students actually live in this community. We are a suburb close to Chicago, and have students from 41 surrounding towns.

- Not sure what community education is—not a goal we talk about.

- Very little institutional prioritization hinders community education we are looking to use service as learning more in the future.

Table 4.14
Mean Scores and Percentage Distributions for Community Integration Practices Items
(N = 82)

	Mean	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations.	3.65	6.1% (5)	14.6% (12)	18.3% (15)	34.1% (28)	23.2% (19)	3.7% (3)
Individuals from the local business community teach within school classrooms.	2.95	17.1% (14)	20.7% (17)	20.7% (17)	34.1% (28)	6.1% (5)	1.2% (1)
Learning about our community's history, resources, and/or issues is used as student learning opportunities.	4.01	8.5% (7)	3.7% (3)	11.0% (9)	40.2% (33)	28.0% (23)	8.5% (7)
Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities.	5.06	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	3.7% (3)	15.9% (13)	40.2% (33)	37.8% (31)
Student community service is used as a learning experience.	5.12	1.2% (1)	2.4% (2)	2.4% (2)	15.9% (13)	32.9% (27)	45.1% (37)
Planning sustainable resources for the school and community are a part of the learning experience.	4.51	2.4% (2)	7.3% (6)	9.8% (8)	25.6% (21)	26.8% (22)	28.0% (23)

Skewness and kurtosis measures for all the items were below $\pm$ 3.0. The "Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities" and "Student community service is used as a learning experience" items had the highest measures of skewness and kurtosis, reflecting the high percentage of responses within somewhat agree (16% for both) and strongly agree (38% and 45%, respectively).

Table 4.15
Descriptive Statistics for Community Integration Practices Items (N = 82)

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations.	3.65	1.26	-.396	-.524
Individuals from the local business community teach within school classrooms.	2.95	1.27	-.094	-.913
Learning about our community's history, resources, and/or issues is used as student learning opportunities.	4.01	1.29	-.870	.553
Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities.	5.06	1.00	-1.423	2.973
Student community service is used as a learning experience.	5.12	1.06	-1.529	2.832
Planning sustainable resources for the school and community are a part of the learning experience.	4.51	1.33	-.727	-.105

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree

Community integration practices narrative analysis. Narrative responses to the open-ended question related to community integration covered four topic areas: 1) community service, 2) partnerships, 3) internal school community, and 4) community integration hindrances. Figure 4.2 shows the SurveyMonkey® graphic representation of the narrative responses.
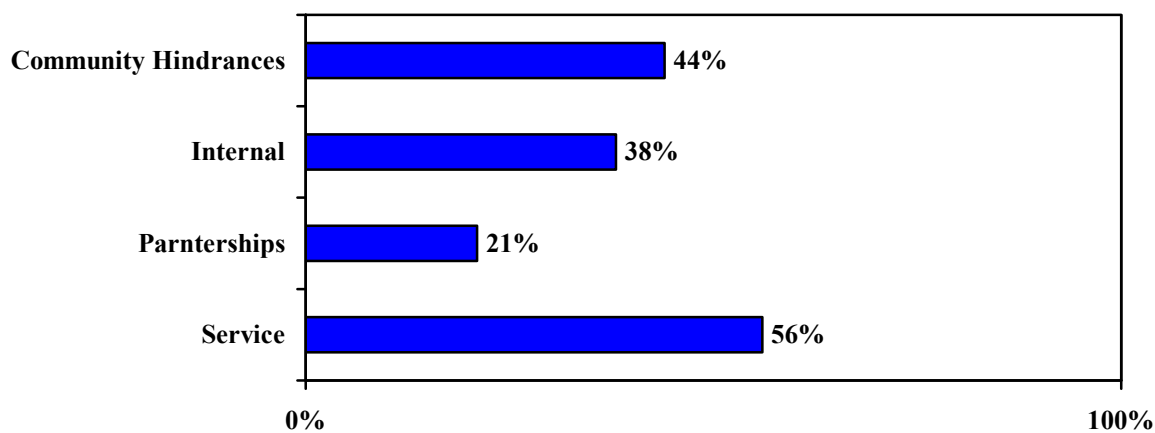
Figure 4.2
Percentage Bar Graph of Community Integration Narrative Responses

Community service. Community service was the largest category of responses (56%) by school leaders related to community integration. These services were provided through activities that include events at senior centers, food pantries, and shelters. The activities include gardening, cleaning, singing, and other social interactions. For example, respondents share the following:

- We have weekly community service, in which our students volunteer at a local facility. Every week some of our students spend an hour at a local residential facility for elderly people, spending time with the residents. Other students spend an hour a week beautifying the local Rail Trail, picking up litter and removing intrusive branches.

- We are connected to a senior centre and participate regularly there, we also participate in reading programs in local schools. We donate to our community's food pantry.

Each school varies in the degree of community integration. Comments from several school leaders from more active schools include the following:

- We have a strong relationship to our local national park. Our students serve meals at the local soup kitchen. They also work in the kitchen's garden. 4th graders have elder buddies at a local retirement home. We clean city parks and beaches. Ecological principles are taught in middle school and applied on field trips and in the classroom. We visit and work on local farms while studying food production.

- Community education at our school includes partnerships with local universities, receiving grants for civic engagement and ecologically based school policies, community involvement with local nursing homes, annual "trash-a-thon" to collect (and make students aware of) litter in our neighborhood.

Partnerships. Partnerships, as described by school leaders, included schools partnering with corporations, universities, national parks, and local business. The partnerships created a dual learning environment for both sides. Often the corporate partners gained research information while providing staffing and services to the schools, thereby expanding the learning environment for each student. A more unique experience described by leaders of two private schools about their partnerships with local businesses included the following:

- Students participate in extensive community service efforts. In addition, this year alone, they recorded a CD at the local Music Resource Center, and took a film-making workshop at Lighthouse Studios, a teen film-making organization. They also completed a week of service related to issues of hunger and homelessness

- [Our students are] working with local restaurants in foreign language study and language arts (writing and publishing restaurant reviews). [We] link with [a] local bookstore selecting and reviewing children's and young adult literature. Community service with local nonprofits and home for the aged and taking charge of school recycling efforts are evident in our school.

The ability for schools to acquire resources through partnerships is vital as reflected in the story of a private school: "We are also a beta site for [Telecom Corporation] and all our teachers have been trained so we have an individual lap top program and evaluate assistive tech needs of all students and train them and hold [them] accountable to use."

Internal school community. The internal school community integration is juxtaposed to the nurturing environment associated with small student/teacher ratio. Creating an internal school community includes having students collaborate in small group learning activities and arranging a buddy system of older students working with younger students. Examples include the following:

- Students partner with students in the lower grades, they publish a literary journal, they work in a greenhouse and gardens on the roof.

- Learning to get along well with people different from oneself is a valuable life skill. A small school, such as ours, affords our students the opportunity to do so. We camp, we canoe, we spend 4 days in Florida at a marine science camp. The middle school students have "buddies" in our Lower Elementary (grades 1-3) with whom we read, create, celebrate, etc. We read with students in our pre-primary classrooms (ages 3-6).

Community integration hindrances. Hindrances to community integration include the lack of time and finances. Fitting all the social activities into the academic framework creates both time and financial hurdles as stated by one private school leader: "Time is the killer in using community resources, as is a dense and rich curriculum." Another private school leader made a

similar comment: "The major hindrance to increased community education is our budget for transportation, which limits us to very local activities."

Progressive education middle schools exhibit practices of community service, partnerships, and internal community development. This situation raises the question, "Does the freedom and flexibility that progressive middle schools have in adjusting curriculum, time, and resources toward community integration enhance their school's adherence to progressive education philosophies, even though time and money are limited?"

Democratic decision-making practices. Democratic decision-making is the third philosophy considered in identifying characteristics embodied by contemporary progressive middle schools. Table 4.16 describes the distribution of responses to these items and Table 4.17 describes the mean, standard deviation, and measures of skewness and kurtosis for these items. The overall mean score ($M = 4.79$) across all Democratic Decision-Making items indicates that the average response was between somewhat agree and strongly agree. Almost all of the responses to the Democratic Decision-Making section items were in the agree categories (See Table 4.16). "Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions" is the only practice where the majority of respondents disagreed.

Table 4.16
Mean Scores and Percentage Distributions for Democratic Decision-Making Practices Items (N = 82)

	Mean	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision.	4.95	0.0% (0)	4.9% (4)	2.4% (2)	22.0% (18)	34.1% (28)	36.6% (30)
Consensus is preferred to majority rule.	4.68	0.0% (0)	4.9% (4)	6.1% (5)	31.7% (26)	30.5% (25)	26.8% (22)
Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions.	3.89	4.9% (4)	7.3% (6)	24.4% (20)	30.5% (25)	23.2% (19)	9.8% (8)
Opposing ideas are welcomed in the discussion process.	5.29	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.4% (2)	13.4% (11)	36.6% (30)	47.6% (39)

	Mean	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number.	4.87	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	3.7% (3)	28.0% (23)	35.4% (29)	30.5% (25)
Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.	5.05	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	20.7% (17)	39.0% (32)	36.6% (30)

Skewness and kurtosis measures of all the items were below $\pm$ 3.0. The "Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders" item had the highest measures of skewness and kurtosis matching the high percentage of somewhat agree (21%), agree (39%) and strongly agree (37%) responses.

Table 4.17

Descriptive Statistics for Democratic Decision-Making Practices Items (N = 82)

Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision.	4.95	1.06	-1.034	.854
Consensus is preferred to majority rule.	4.68	1.09	-.574	-.075
Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions.	3.89	1.27	-.312	-.247
Opposing ideas are welcomed in the discussion process.	5.29	.79	-.882	.107
Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number.	4.87	1.02	-.957	1.655
Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.	5.05	.97	-1.357	3.229
1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree				

Democratic decision-making practices narrative analysis. Narrative responses to the open-ended question related to democratic decision-making covered five topic areas: 1) hindrances, 2) trust, 3) consensus, 4) student led activities, and 5) social justice. Respondents shared most about student led activities (62%) and hindrances (54%). The high level of responses related to hindrances to democratic decision-making indicates that this aspect of progressive middle school education appears to be the most difficult to execute. Therefore, the

hindrances will be discussed first. Figure 4.3 shows the SurveyMonkey® graphic representation of the narrative responses.
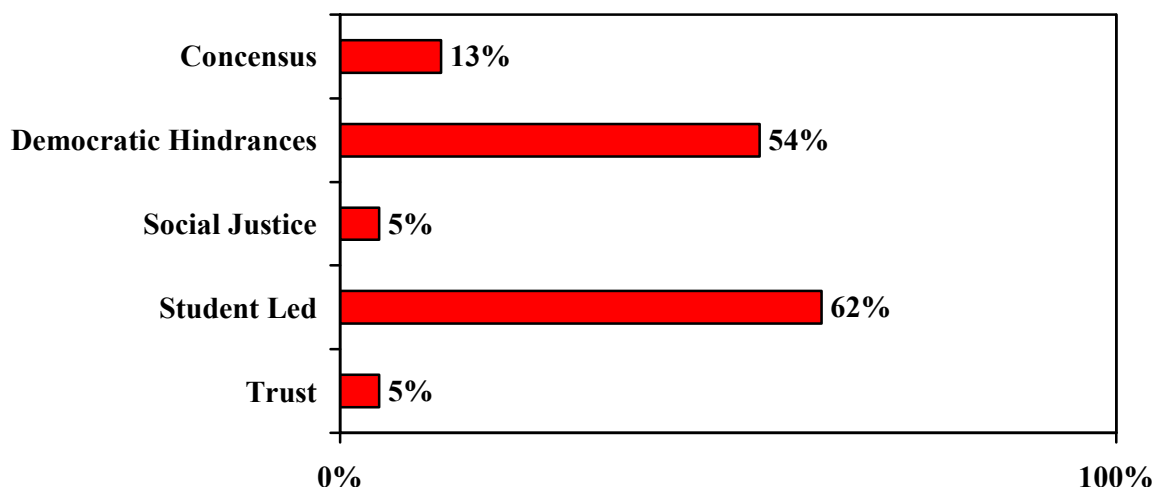
Figure 4.3
Percentage Bar Graph of Democratic Decision-Making Narrative Responses

Democratic decision-making hindrances. The respondent narratives continually expressed the fact that students have a voice and input into the decision-making process. However, often because of time or external factors, teachers or administrators made the final decisions as expressed in, "Students are always welcome to voice their opinions, but faculty ultimately make most decisions." Similar school leader comments included the following:

- Focus is put on the professionalism of our teachers—they are the chief decision makers. Always trying to make decisions that best serve our students.

- We involve our middle school students in decision making whenever it is appropriate. Even when the adults make a decision without student input, we encourage respectful feedback from the students.

- Students and faculty feel empowered to come to the Head's office to express an opinion or make a suggestion. All constituencies talk and interact with mutual respect, however in the end many decisions rest with the Board and the Head of School.

- However it is abundantly clear that the final decision is always the headmaster's.... and he (me) is very careful not to throw positional weight around (a rarity).

The intense loyalty to child-centered learning practices permeates the responses to indicate that the decisions made by adults within the progressive middle schools align with the mission/vision statements of the schools.

Trust. The ability to allow a few to make decisions is based upon the development of trust within contemporary progressive middle schools. Trust is built upon and enhanced by the sense of community experienced within the school. Trust, as mentioned earlier, impacts the establishment and delivery of child-centered learning practices. Trust also impacts aspects of democratic decision-making such as consensus and student led activities.

Consensus. One private school leader's description of the consensus process matched the responses of other schools indicating a high degree of consensus contributes to their schools' democratic decision-making when they wrote, "In all our democratic decision making, the seeking of and respect for truth is actively encouraged. Through mindful contemplation, careful listening and intentional questioning, decision making skills are developed and students come to consensus on issues." This same school leader stated, "Consensus, however, can be a slow process which can be a hindrance at times." Several other respondents expressed similar views. It was evident that the adult educators within the schools modeled the democratic decision-making and consensus process to assist in training students to take responsibility of their own student led activities. A private school leader stated, "Kids need to understand that systems exist to support them and they need to know how to be self analytical as well as organizationally savvy. They do a great job once they are trained and facilitated in the process." This same school leader identified "direct communication skills, conflict resolution, and the decision making process" as the building blocks toward student led decision-making.

Student led activities. Student led decision making took on many different forms, but usually included the gathering of students daily at a minimum and up to several times weekly within morning or community meetings as part of student government or advisory groups. Various descriptions of student led democratic decision-making included these statements:

- Students run most clubs: student government, team captains, Honor Code.

- There are community meetings twice a week when students meet to discuss issues and acknowledge each other.

- In our middle school the class is run as a democracy where all student ideas/opinions are heard. We have weekly problem solving sessions were the class community would focus on any issue that has arisen in the previous week.

- One of the main venues is our weekly community meeting. Issues that arise in the classroom are recorded in a book and discussed by the class on Fridays. The students lead their own meeting, and guide their classmates in the process of making decision to solve the issues that arose. They also are free to object to teacher decisions, etc., and except in situations where it would be inappropriate, their feedback on these matters is taken into consideration and considered as an equal vote.

- I conduct Campus Forum every Wednesday, which is dealing with campus wide issues.

The most elaborate and developed example of student led activities came from a private school leader:

> Students are actively involved in a variety of decisions. They develop ground rules for the classroom, the dress code, the technology contract; they determine our project for the annual benefit; when there are interpersonal problems, they are encouraged to resolve them independently with mentor support; we further use Council for students to get together and figure out how to solve a problem, which can include negative behavior, how to improve their business (to raise money for trips). For our Washington, D.C. trip, they did the research and decided upon the itinerary with given parameters. They can even choose dates for a final test.

Social justice. The ability to actively engage in social justice is difficult because of the dedicated time and attention needed. One private school leader described the daily commitment and inclusion of social justice that many schools cannot afford:

My classroom is always welcome to share multiple opinions. We hold brainstorming sessions, peace councils, and discussion groups daily in order to make decisions regarding what is best for the school and classroom environment. The students know what to do when there is a disagreement. We do not have violence and behavioral issues because of this. Our goal is PEACE always. This is true of the staff members as well. Our meetings run smoothly because everyone has an equal voice.

Another private school leader described how curriculum specifically focused toward development of student social justice skills was implemented within their school:

Part of our curriculum includes a communications lab that focuses on grace and courtesy, listening skills, note-taking, active participation in group discussions by articulating ideas, and making formal presentations. Students learn a variety of communication skills such as acknowledging others, using "I" messages, active listening, goal setting, and group decision making. Students also participate in activities developed from Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens and The Heroic Journey. Each year the class develops a mission statement and right/responsibilities document. Students are able to practice communication skills daily by working in community meetings, class committees, small group cooperative projects, and peer and cross-age teaching activities. Community meetings follow the Roberts Rules of Order format and includes a section called "problem solving" where students can bring issues to the group for discussion and (hopefully) solving.

Summary: Research Questions 2

Research Question 2 identified practices and activities associated with progressive education philosophies. Within each philosophy's grouping of items, there were several items on which ninety percent or more of the school leaders somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that the particular item characterized their school. These items included the following:

Child-Centered Learning Practices

- Students are allowed to create their own meaning from topics. (91%)

- Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities. (98%)

Community Integration Practices

- Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities. (94%)

- Student community service is used as a learning experience. (94%)

Democratic Decision-Making Practices

- Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision. (93%)

- Opposing ideas are welcomed in the discussion process. (98%)

- Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number. (94%)

- Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders. (96%)

Narrative responses indicated progressive schools have a strong sense of community and trust as well as flexibility and collaboration. Time or the lack thereof tends to be the greatest hindrance identified by schools in achieving community integration and democratic decision-making. Summative grade expectations by others outside the progressive school tend to be the greatest hindrance associated with child-centered learning practices. The understanding of progressive education middle schools is still incomplete. To gain an even greater perspective of the characteristics and environment of progressive education middle schools, I believe it is important to continue looking at how school leaders perceive their school's ability to adhere to the practices they identified in Research Question 2.

Analysis: Research Question 3.

Rating scales were used to address the question of "How do progressive middle school leaders rate their school in terms of adherence to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making?" Leaders rated their school's ability to adhere to each of the three philosophies on a scale of 1 (very poorly) to 10 (very well).

School leader perception of their school's adherence to the child-centered learning philosophy. Table 4.18 shows the percentage distribution of responses for the leaders' perception of their school's adherence to the child-centered learning philosophy. The mean

score ($M = 7.48$) indicates that the majority of respondents had a positive perception of their school's adherence to this philosophy. The skewness and kurtosis measures for the child-centered learning philosophy rating scale was within ± 3, reflecting a close to normal distribution.

While the majority of leaders gave positive responses about their perception of their schools' adherence to the child-centered learning philosophy, some school leaders gave their schools negative ratings. Thirteen of the total respondents (16%) gave their school a more negative rating of < 6. Three of the thirteen leaders indicated in Research Question 2 they somewhat disagreed their school used the independent learning process and current events in the development of learning content. Of those three, two leaders gave comments to enhance the understanding of their perception of their schools' possible inability to adhere to the child-centered learning philosophy. One private school leader who rated their school's adherence as a 3 stated, "A lack of understanding amongst faculty of using formative assessment to determine next steps in education hinders child-centered learning. So, in essence, a lack of institutional "push" [hinders]." A second private school leader with a rating of 5 described the testing environment as influencing their perception of their school's adherence to child-centered learning stating, "We do modify and try to meet children's interests and concerns. Students take a very rigorous standardized test for a highly competitive NYC independent school placement as they leave in sixth grade."

Other comments included:

- Private school leader with a rating of 5 stated: less creative teachers or those who want to lecture hinder it.

- Private school leader with a rating of 2 stated: My answer reflects a low score of wishing to adhere to such a philosophy. Places where child-centered learning appear in middle school is choosing a biography in a history block, after the teacher has

presented significant ones in a historical period, or choosing an 8th grade project topic, which is approved.

One private school leader rated their school's adherence to the child-centered learning philosophy as 5. However, this leader's previous responses to the items in the Child-Centered Learning practices section from Research Question 2 and their narrative responses, may be an indication of a lower self-report due to greater expectations and future goals. Based upon the child-centered learning items from Research Question 2, this school leader's responses to a 6- point Likert scale were primarily positive, ranging from somewhat agree to strongly agree. This school leader's narrative response describes in detail the child-centered learning practices of discovery, integration of community learning, and hands-on experiences.

Table 4.18
Percentage Distributions for Leader Perception of Their School's Adherence to the Child-Centered Learning Philosophy
(N = 82)

	1 Very Poorly	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Very Well
Our school achieves adherence to child-centered learning.	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	2.4% (2)	1.2% (1)	9.8% (8)	8.5% (7)	17.1% (14)	29.3% (24)	14.6% (12)	14.6% (12)

School leader perception of their school's adherence to child-centered learning narrative analysis. The narrative responses to the open-ended question related to the school leaders' perception of their school's adherence to the child-centered learning philosophy identified small class size and the learning process as supporting the ability to adhere to this philosophy. Hindrances included the expectations of others outside the school. Lack of teacher understanding of child development and limited options for teaching to the individual needs of students were also mentioned by school leaders as a hindrance.

Respondents noted that student responsibility and ownership of their learning created through the one-on-one relationship with teachers fosters fun in learning. For example, some of the comments were:

- Decisions are always made based on the child's needs. Instruction is designed to engage students in the learning through factors such as novelty, choice, and projects. We seek to create an environment where risk-taking is encouraged and safe.

- Child center learning in our school is about identifying individual learning styles and creating opportunities for the child to thrive in the classroom.

- As a result of the individual attention and the variety of experiences in middle school, students become confident communicators who take on increasing independence and responsibility for their learning. They understand that actions have consequences, and learn to make good choices. They develop the skills and the mindset that will facilitate future learning, and they are caring individuals.

- Recent discoveries about the nature of human intelligence have indicated that we have the ability to enhance and amplify our intelligences, and that intelligence is a multiple reality that occurs in different parts of the brain/mind system. Students will take a survey of where they are on the continuum of each of the eight intelligences as identified by Howard Gardner in his book, Frames of Mind.

- All decisions about student learning are based on the following question: What is best for THIS child, at THIS time? Completion of a 35-hour course on neurodevelopment and the science of learning has been a condition of employment for faculty and administration since 2001.

School leader perception of their school's adherence to the community integration philosophy. Table 4.19 shows the percentage distribution of responses for the leaders' perception of their school's adherence to the community integration philosophy. The mean score ($M = 6.40$) indicates that the majority of school leaders had a moderate perception of their school's adherence to this philosophy. The skewness and kurtosis measures for the community integration philosophy rating fell within $\pm$ 3, reflecting a close to normal distribution.

While the majority of leaders gave ratings within the middle of the scale, seventeen of the total leaders (21%) assigned their school's adherence to the philosophy of community integration

as poor with ratings from 1 to 4 on a 10-point scale, with one as very poor. Public school leaders

comprised three of the seventeen disagree responses. The public school leaders did not provide

additional comments to clarify their perception of adherence ratings. Transportation, funding,

and lack of internal school support were included in the private school narrative responses as

hindrances to their schools' ability to adhere to community integration. A few of the comments

to clarify leader perceptions included the following:

- Private school leader with a rating of 4 stated: Transportation hinders our involvement in the community. When we were smaller, we did this more often and more organically. Now, we need to plan and be more structured.

- Private school leader with a rating of 3 stated: We have looked for bigger experiences but are hindered by agencies not willing to have students of their age range [6th to 8th Grade] participate and or transportation issues.

- Private school leader with a rating of 1 stated: We teach about our local community in some ways, but do not integrate with it. We have science teachers who do a lot, but other than that there is not much interaction, in part because our students come from so many different communities, and in part because of inertia and lack of awareness of the importance of this on the part of teachers.

Table 4.19
Percentage Distributions for Leader Perception of Their School's Adherence to the Community Integration Philosophy
(N = 82)

	1 Very Poorly	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Very Well
Our school achieves adherence to community education.	2.4% (2)	2.4% (2)	6.1% (5)	9.8% (8)	19.5% (16)	3.7% (3)	15.9% (3)	22.0% (18)	13.4% (11)	4.9% (4)

School leader perception of their school's adherence to community integration

narrative analysis. The narrative responses to the open-ended question related to the school

leaders' perception of their school's adherence to the community integration philosophy

identified partnerships with larger entities such as universities, corporations, and national parks

as supporting the ability to adhere to this philosophy. Internal adherence to community

integration included cross-age activities. External community integration most often was associated with senior centers or homeless shelters. Time and money were the most frequently reported hindrances to community integration. Some examples of comments addressing community integration included:

- Time is the killer in using community resources, as is a dense and rich curriculum.

- Transportation can be difficult.

- Rural area and transportation concerns. Also delivery of expected curriculum means that students can't be out of the classroom too much.

- Our school is in somewhat of a small town and we are able to walk to a couple of community places that integrate well into our curriculum, but real meaningful service learning opportunities that have our students interacting with people in need are farther away and the logistics of transporting students is always a hindrance.

One private school leader with similar comments listed earlier, added additional insight about how their school is able to adhere to community integration by stating, "Our staff includes a service learning coordinator, which helps us maintain our commitment to community education." Overall leader responses indicated that outside specific science or social studies special projects, the local environment is not used to the greatest potential other than for gardening or clean-up projects. These same schools provided comments that indicate they understand the potential of improved community integrated learning and believe this is an area of future growth they would like to pursue.

School leader perception of their school's adherence to the democratic decision-making philosophy. Table 4.20 shows the percentage distribution of responses for the leaders' perception of their school's adherence to the democratic decision-making philosophy. The mean score ($M = 7.24$) indicates that the majority of respondents had a positive perception of their

school's adherence to this philosophy. The skewness and kurtosis measures for the democratic

decision-making rating scale fell within $\pm$ 3, reflecting a close to normal distribution.

While the majority of leaders gave positive responses about their perception of their

school's adherence to the philosophy of democratic decision-making, fourteen of them (17%)

rated their school's adherence to the philosophy with ratings from 1 to 5 on a 10-point scale, with

one representing "very poor." Four of the fourteen school leaders that gave low ratings were

public school leaders. Three of the fourteen school leaders reported their school adhered to

democratic decision-making with ratings from 1 to 3 on the 10-point scale. Two of these three

school leaders shared information about their school to clarify their responses. One private

school leader who rated their school's ability to adhere as 1 stated, "Within student council we

will use democratic decision making. While students are given opportunities to vote on things,

they are not given choices about what to learn." The second school leader, also from a private

school, with a rating of 3 said, "Students are always welcome to voice their opinions, but faculty

ultimately make most decisions."

Table 4.20
Percentage Distributions for Leader Perception of Their School's Adherence to the Democratic Decision-Making Philosophy
(N = 82)

	1 Very Poorly	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Very Well
Our school achieves adherence to democratic decision-making.	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	3.7% (3)	9.8% (8)	12.2% (10)	18.3% (15)	28.0% (23)	15.9% (13)	8.5% (7)

School leader perception of their school's adherence to democratic decision-making

narrative analysis. The narrative responses to the open-ended question related to the school

leaders' perception of their school's adherence to the democratic decision-making philosophy

identified an internal modeling structure as supporting their school's ability to adhere to this

philosophy. Teachers and administrators typically modeled the process of working toward

collaboration and social justice. Time was the greatest hindrance to democratic decision-making

as mentioned in earlier sections. A private school leader's comments gave an authentic

representation of other schools' abilities to adhere to democratic decision-making when this

leader stated, "All voices [are] heard. Most decisions [are] reached through consensus.

Challenges: can be a slow, even if inclusive, process."

It is important to include some of the negative comments reported by leaders that made

adhering to democratic decision-making difficult within progressive education middle schools.

Some of the negative comments follow:

- The meeting after the meeting [is] when more feelings are shared [and] underminds the decisions made during the actual meeting.

- Consensus can be a way to stay with the most conservative choice.

- What most hinders democratic decision-making is the classroom teacher's commitment and faith in allowing this process to determine outcomes, rather than make decisions unilaterally.

Summary: Research Question 3

Trust is a strong reoccurring thread within the analysis of Research Question 3. Trust

appears to influence the quality of child-centered learning, and the levels of community

integration, and democratic decision-making within a school. Time constraints impact both

community integration and democratic decision-making. Lack of financial resources tends to

affect the intensity and the depth of the community integration within a school.

A majority of respondents held a positive perception of their school's ability to adhere to

the progressive educational learning philosophies. However, a minority of school leaders gave

their schools lower ratings, implying they that their schools were not very successful at adhering

to one or more of these philosophies. Five school leaders indicated they disagreed that their

school was adhering to all three of the progressive educational learning philosophies. Three of the five school leaders rated their perception of adherence as a 5 on the 10-point scale, with one representing "very poor." Two of the five school leaders rated their schools with a 1 or a 2. Neither of these private school leaders provided in-depth narratives that would explain more about their school's inability to adhere to all three of the progressive educational philosophies.

So far, the analysis has used descriptive statistics and narrative text to create a picture of contemporary progressive education middle schools. The design of this study is an effort to go beyond only words or numbers that are so often found in the progressive literature. The next two research questions place variables from Research Question 1, Research Question 2, and Research Question 3 into regression models to determine what, if any, influence educational practice variables have on leader perception of adherence to each of the three progressive education philosophies of child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making.

Analysis: Research Question 4

Multiple regression analysis was used to examine "What educational practices are most strongly associated with perception of ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—in contemporary progressive middle schools?" A separate regression was run for each of the progressive education philosophies using the school leader perception of their school's adherence associated with that philosophy as the dependent variable. Likert scale responses to the educational practices items describing each philosophy were used as the independent variables.

Table 4.21

Regression Plan for Influence of Educational Practices on Perception of Adherence to Philosophy

REGRESSION	Independent Variables	Dependent Variable
1	Child-Centered Learning Practices	School Leader's Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to Child-Centered Learning Philosophy.
2	Community Integration Practices	School Leader's Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to Community Integration Philosophy.
3	Democratic Decision-Making Practices	School Leader's Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to Democratic Decision-Making Philosophy.

Each of the regressions used the stepwise method with the level of entry into the regression at .05 and removed at .10. A bivariate correlation was completed for each set of educational practices prior to running the regressions to identify any possible issues related to multi-collinearity. Independent variables that are too highly correlated ($\geq$ .80) may indicate multi-collinearity and should not be included in the same regression.

Child-centered learning items correlations. The correlations for the child-centered learning items show all items have a moderate to strong correlation (.332 to .663) at $p \leq$ .01 and that there is no threat of multi-collinearity. The strongest correlation (.663) exists between "Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process" and "Our curriculum is based upon topics developed from current life issues." The significance level and the moderate to strong correlations between the items in the Child-Centered Learning section indicate these are appropriate to use within the regression analysis.

4.22
Pearson Correlation Matrix of Child-Centered Learning Practice Items

ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Students are able to choose topics to study.	1						
2. Students are allowed to create their own meaning from topics.	.539**	1					
3. Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process.	.532**	.495**	1				
4. Our curriculum is based upon topics developed from current life issues.	.520**	.431**	.663**	1			
5. Students are able to set some of their own learning objectives.	.509**	.400**	.487**	.454**	1		
6. Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities.	.517**	.443**	.539**	.495**	.541**	1	
7. Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores).	.219*	.406**	.342**	.271*	.403**	.332**	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Child-centered learning regression. The first regression examined the relationship between the practice items in the Child-Centered Learning section and the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to the child-centered learning philosophy. A statistically significant model resulted from the regression, with $F_{(2, 79)} = 34.406$, $p = .000$ (See Table 4.23). R^2 equal to .466 shows 47% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by two items: "Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities" and "Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process."

Table 4.23
Child-Centered Learning Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Model

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R^2 Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig. F Change
1	.615	.378	.370	1.533	.378	48.620	1	80	.000
2	.682	.466	.452	1.430	.088	12.937	1	79	.001

Model 1—Predictors: (Constant), Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities.
Model 2—Predictors: (Constant), Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities. Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process.

The standardized beta, ß, as shown in Table 4.24 indicates the positive relative influence of the practice items on the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to the child-centered learning philosophy. "Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities" has the greatest influence at .426 and "Student learning through an independent learning process" has an almost equally strong influence at .351. The collinearity statistic of tolerance is less than 1 and is consistent with the bivariate correlation statistics confirming that multi-collinearity is not an issue.

Table 4.24
Child-Centered Learning Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Coefficients

VARIABLE	B	SE B	ß	Tolerance
Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities.	1.042	.239	.426	.710
Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process.	.634	.176	.351	.710

Child-centered learning regression analysis narrative review. The two significant practice items identified in the regression analysis for child-centered learning fit within the categories identified in Research Question 2 of "student classroom environment" and "learning

processes." A few of the narrative responses related to "Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities" included the following:

- Students work in small groups often and have various ways to display their knowledge.

- Small group lessons with a lot of materials.

- Small class sizes [provide] individual attention with the teacher, [making the teacher] readily available [for] extra help.

- You can see children working in groups, sharing meaning, creating projects.

Many of the respondents' comments about "Student learning is based upon discovery through independent learning process" are very similar to the following few examples:

- Through projects and independent research, students are able to create and grow based on their unique learning style. In some cases students may choose a variety of ways to show what they can do because of what they know.

- Lots of experiential opportunities including fieldtrips and outdoor education [with a] strong emphasis on collaborative learning, self-selected topics within classes, and multiple ways chosen by kids to prove understanding.

A more detailed description from a leader of an all girls' private school told the school's story of how students are involved in various independent learning processes including " a two week-long immersion experience in which girls learn how to be archaeologists and dig at a site of a reenactment of a Whittlesey site. The girls dig up artifacts, charred stone and corn, pieces of a hearth, flint, and determine after 8 days of digging what story the remains tell of the people." Another example from the same leader described how the students work with their local government in an effort not only to learn facts, but also to contribute to the community's enrichment. "The girls have redesigned buildings and given them a new purpose. They have also

met with people in city government—the mayor, councilwomen, a leading economist—to figure

out how they can contribute to the city."

Community integration items correlations. The correlations for the community

integration practice items show all items except one have a moderate to strong correlation (.331

to .616) at $p \leq .01$ and that there is no threat of multi-collinearity. The weakest correlation (.198)

is between "Individuals from the local business community teach within school classrooms" and

"Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities." The

strongest correlation (.616) exists between "Education occurs within the local community at

various businesses and/or organizations" and "Individuals from the local business community

teach within school classrooms." The significance level and the moderate to strong correlations

between the practice items in the Community Integration section indicate the inclusion of these

items are appropriate to use within the regression analysis.

Table 4.25
Pearson Correlation Matrix of Community Integration Practice Items

ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organization.	1					
2. Individuals from the local business community teach within school classrooms.	.616**	1				
3. Learning about our community's history, resources, and/or issues is used as student learning opportunities.	.412**	.416**	1			
4. Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities.	.410**	.198	.402**	1		
5. Student community service is used as a learning experience.	.486**	.401**	.198	.437**	1	

ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Planning sustainable resources for the school and community are a part of the learning experience.	.471**	.331**	.364**	.470**	.439**	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Community integration regression. The second regression examined the relationship between the practice items in the Community Integration section and the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to the community integration philosophy. A statistically significant model resulted from the regression, with $F_{(2, 79)} = 47.874$, $p = .000$ (See Table 4.26). R^2 equal to .548 indicates 55% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by two items: "Student community service is used as a learning experience" and "Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations."

Table 4.26
Community Integration Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Model

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R^2 Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig. F Change
1	.674	.454	.477	1.672	.454	66.573	1	80	.000
2	.740	.548	.536	1.531	.094	16.378	1	79	.000

Model 1 Predictors—(Constant), Student community service is used as a learning experience.
Model 2 Predictors—(Constant), Student community service is used as a learning experience. Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations.

The standardized beta, ß, as shown in Table 4.27 indicates the positive relative influence of the practice items on the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to the community integration philosophy. "Student community service is used as a learning experience" has the greatest influence at .504 and "Education occurs within the local community

at various businesses and/or organization" has a somewhat smaller influence of .350. The collinearity statistic of tolerance is less than 1 and is consistent with the bivariate correlation statistics confirming that multi-collinearity is not an issue.

Table 4.27

Community Integration Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Coefficients

VARIABLE	B	SE B	ß	Tolerance
Student community service is used as a learning experience.	1.070	.184	.504	.764
Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations.	.625	.154	.350	.764

Community integration regression analysis narrative review. The two significant practice items identified in the regression analysis for community integration fit within the categories identified in Research Question 2 of "community service" and "partnerships." A few of the school leader narrative responses to "Student community service is used as a learning experience" included the following:

- Within our school, students engage in community service, assisting formally and informally with other programs. Seventh year students are expected to participate in community service for 50 hours outside of school during the school year; eighth year students are expected to develop a community service project.

- We have a strong focus on community service and it is woven throughout our curriculum. We have an active sustainability committee and there is much action and education around these issues.

- Each grade level of our middle school "adopts" a community organization and raises funds through out the year to support that organization.

Maintaining the community integration philosophy does not occur spontaneously. A private school leader described the circumstances surrounding their school's community services stating, "This is an area for growth in terms of supervision and expanded opportunities for student…. Developing community service requires supervision, and that is one area for which

we can benefit from support. We can explore how our parents can become more involved and supportive."

Comments related to "Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations" included the following:

- We draw some elective teachers from our parents and the greater community. Our students are deeply involved in environmental sustainability and work with local foundations on projects including oyster gardening. We are at present seeking a grant to establish a community partnership with a home for the elderly based on growing vegetables.

- We partner with a school in the Cleveland Municipal School District. Our students go to their school to share what they are learning in the arts. We invited them here to participate in a fund-raiser to support another school in great need of PE equipment.

- We partner with local businesses for field trips and events. We support many nature preserves and habitats in our community. In my classroom, students seek business internships each year with local businesses in order to gain work and "real life" experiences.

Democratic decision-making items correlations. The correlations for the democratic decision-making items show all items have a moderate to strong correlation (.343 to .722) at $p \leq$ .01 and that there is no threat of multi-collinearity. The strongest correlation (.722) exists between "Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision" and "Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders." Two other items highly correlated with "Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision" are "Consensus is preferred to majority rule" and "Opposing ideas are welcomed in the discussion process" at .680 and .602, respectively. The significance level and the moderate to strong correlations between the items in the Democratic Decision-Making section indicate these items are appropriate to use within the regression analysis.

Table 4.28

Pearson Correlation Matrix of Democratic Decision-Making Practice Items

ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision.	1					
2. Consensus is preferred to majority rule.	.680**	1				
3. Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions.	.527**	.378**	1			
4. Opposing ideas are welcomed in the discussion process.	.602**	.481**	.401**	1		
5. Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number.	.462**	.352**	.343**	.371**	1	
6. Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.	.722**	.567**	.448**	.432**	.509**	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Democratic decision-making regression. The third regression examined the relationship between the practice items in the Democratic Decision-Making section and the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to the democratic decision-making philosophy. A statistically significant model resulted from the regression, with $F_{(4, 77)} = 55.467$, $p = .000$ (See Table 4.29). R^2 equal to .742 indicates 74% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by four items: Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision," "Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions," "Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number," and "Consensus is preferred to majority rule."

Table 4.29
Democratic Decision-Making Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Model

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R^2 Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig. F Change
1	.712	.507	.501	1.312	.507	82.255	1	80	.000
2	.783	.613	.603	1.169	.106	21.655	1	79	.000
3	.822	.676	.663	1.077	.063	15.070	1	78	.000
4	.853	.728	.714	.993	.052	14.764	1	77	.000
5	.863	.745	.729	.967	.018	5.228	1	76	.025
6	.862	.742	.729	.966	-.003	.900	1	76	.346

Model 1 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision.
Model 2 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision. Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions.
Model 3 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision. Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions. Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number.
Model 4 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision. Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions. Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number. Consensus is preferred to majority rule.
Model 5 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision. Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions. Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number., Consensus is preferred to majority rule. Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.
Model 6 Predictors—(Constant), Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions. Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number. Consensus is preferred to majority rule. Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.

The standardized beta, ß, as shown in Table 4.30 indicates the positive relative influence

of the items on the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to the democratic

decision-making philosophy. The Beta scores of each item are relatively close, with the

"Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions" item having the greatest influence at .343.

The collinearity statistic of tolerance is less than 1 and is consistent with the bivariate correlation

statistics confirming that multi-collinearity is not an issue.

Table 4.30

Democratic Decision-Making Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Coefficients

VARIABLE	B	SE B	ß	Tolerance
Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions.	.502	.097	.343	.762
Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number.	.428	.125	.234	.721
Consensus is preferred to majority rule.	.548	.122	.321	.657
Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.	.460	.151	.240	.538

Democratic decision-making regression analysis narrative review. The four

significant items identified in the regression analysis for democratic decision-making fit within

the categories identified in Research Question 2 of "trust," "consensus," and "social justice."

These categories are intertwined and difficult to separate. A few of the narrative responses

related to each of the significant items included these:

- We emphasize collaboration and partnership in meeting the needs of the child, taking initiative to consult with other colleagues, professionals, parents to increase understanding of what might work best for an individual.

- We seek the input and support of all stake-holders in decision-making when

  appropriate.

- Sense of community including diversity and inclusivity.

- Significant efforts to build consensus before a decision is made.

- [T]he classroom is managed in the middle school with students, though social inclusion and deliberation and discussion around human interaction is a part of the middle school experience.
- Throughout the school, students are encouraged by word and example to respect and celebrate the talents and varying perspectives of others.

- Social justice interwoven throughout curriculum.

A private school leader shared the practices used in their school based upon the school's strong emphasis regarding social justice by stating, "We have a strong emphasis on social justice. We have standards for social justice. We have a social justice coordinator."

Summary: Research Question 4

The regression analysis within this section identified practices associated with the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to each philosophy that characterizes progressive education middle schools. Practices associated with the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to child-centered learning include 'Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities' and 'Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process." Activities associated with the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to community integration include "Student community service is used as a learning experience" and "Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations." Practices associated with the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to democratic decision-making include "Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions," "Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number," "Consensus is preferred to majority rule," and "Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders."

The next section looks at the influence of demographic variables on the school leaders' perception of adherence to each of the philosophies of progressive education.

Analysis: Research Question 5

Multiple regression analysis was used to examine "What school demographic characteristics influence perceived ability to adhere to the three philosophies—child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making—in contemporary progressive

middle schools?" A separate regression was run for each of the progressive education

philosophies using the practices associated with that philosophy while controlling for the school

demographic variables. The school leader's perception of adherence associated with that

philosophy is used as the dependent variable.

Student/Teacher Ratio, Current Leadership Overriding Power, Administering of

Standardized Tests, Years of Operation, Student Grade Level Configuration, and Type of School

variables were used as the independent variables within Block 1, serving as the control variables

in each of the three regressions. These variables were converted to dummy variables prior to

correlation and regression analysis. The items representing educational practices for each

philosophy were entered into Block 2 of the regression. Each of the regressions used the

stepwise method with the level of entry into the regression at .05 and removed at .10.

Table 4.31

Regression Plan for Demographic Control Variables, Practices, and Adherence to Philosophy

REGRESSION	Demographic Control Variables	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
4	• Student/Teacher Ratio • Student Grade Level Configuration • Current Leadership Overriding Veto Power • Administration of Standardized Tests • Years of Operation • Type of School	Child-Centered Learning Practices	School Leaders' Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to the Child-Centered Learning Philosophy
5	• Student/Teacher Ratio • Student Grade Level Configuration • Current Leadership Overriding Veto Power • Administration of Standardized Tests • Years of Operation • Type of School	Community Integration Practices	School Leaders' Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to the Community Integration Philosophy

6	• Student/Teacher Ratio • Student Grade Level Configuration • Current Leadership Overriding Veto Power • Administration of Standardized Tests • Years of Operation • Type of School	Democratic Decision-Making Practices	School Leaders' Perception of Their School's Ability to Adhere to the Democratic Decision-Making Philosophy

Demographic variable correlations. Bivariate correlations were run for the dummy variables for the school demographic variables prior to running the regressions to identify any possible issues related to multi-collinearity. The demographic variables correlation shows the variables have a moderately strong negative to moderately strong positive correlation (-.515 to .443) with two variable pairs indicating significance at $p \leq .01$ and no threat of multi-collinearity. The strongest correlation (-.515) is negative and exists between Standardized Test Influence and Type of School variables. The second strongest correlation (.443) is positive and exists between Type of School and Student/Teacher Ratio variables. These variables are appropriate to use within the regression analysis based upon the significance and the strength of the moderate correlations between the school demographic variables.

Table 4.32
Pearson Correlation Matrix of Demographic Characteristic Variables

ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Current Leadership Veto Power	1					
2. Years of Operation	.210	1				
3. Student/Teacher Ratio	.119	.178	1			
4. Standardized Test Influence	.020	-.161	-.258*	1		
5. Student Grade Configuration/Grouping	.016	.062	-.052	.001	1	
6. Type of School	.053	.210	.443**	-.515**	.067	1
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)						

Child-centered learning regression controlling for school demographics. The first

regression for Research Question 5 examined the relationship between the child-centered

learning practice items and the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to the

child-centered learning philosophy while controlling for school demographic variables. No

school demographic variable significantly influenced the school leader's perception of their

school's adherence to child-centered learning. A statistically significant model resulted from the

regression, with an F-value of $F_{(2, 76)} = 36.547$, $p = .000$ (See Table 4.33). R^2 equal to .490

shows that 49% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by two items: "Student

learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative

assessments (grade or percentage scores)" and "Student learning is based upon discovery through

an independent learning process." "Student learning is based upon discovery through an

independent learning process" was also a significant item in Research Question 4's regression

analysis for child-centered learning. Controlling for school demographics shifted the focus from

"Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities" to "Student learning is assessed

through formative assessments versus summative assessments."   This is an interesting result that

can be a focus of a future study.

Table 4.33
*Child-Centered Learning Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Model Controlling
for School Demographics*

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R^2 Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig. F Change
1	.644	.414	.407	1.495	.414	54.504	1	77	.000
2	.700	.490	.477	1.404	.076	11.300	1	76	.001

Model 1 Predictors—(Constant), Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with
feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores).

Model 2 Predictors—(Constant), Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores) and Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process.

The standardized beta, ß, as shown in Table 4.34 indicates the positive relative influence of the items on the school leader's perception of adherence to the child-centered learning philosophy. "Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores)" has the greatest influence at .464 and "Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process" has a somewhat smaller influence at .329. The collinearity statistic of tolerance is less than 1 and is consistent with the bivariate correlation statistics confirming that multi-collinearity is not an issue.

Table 4.34
Child-Centered Learning Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Coefficients Controlling for School Demographics

VARIABLE	B	SE B	ß	Tolerance
Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores).	1.151	.243	.464	.701
Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process.	.586	.174	.329	.701

Community integration regression controlling for school demographics. The second regression for Research Question 5 examined the relationship between the community integration practice items and the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to the community integration philosophy while controlling for school demographic variables. No school demographic variable significantly influenced the school leader's perception of their

school's ability to adhere to community integration. A statistically significant model resulted

from the regression, with $F_{(2, 76)} = 44.651$, $p = .000$ (See Table 4.35). R^2 equal to .540 shows that

two items explain 54% of the variance in the dependent variable: "Student community service is

used as a learning experience" and "Education occurs within the local community at various

businesses and/or organizations." These are the same items that had a significant influence in

Research Question 4's regression analysis for community integration where there was no control

for school demographics.

Table 4.35
Community Integration Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Model Controlling for School Demographics

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R^2 Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig. F Change
1	.668	.446	.439	1.696	.446	62.005	1	77	.000
2	.735	.540	.528	1.555	.094	15.567	1	76	.000

Model 1 Predictors—(Constant), Student community service is used as a learning experience.
Model 2 Predictors—(Constant), Student community service is used as a learning experience and Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations.

The standardized beta, ß, as shown in Table 4.36 indicates the positive relative influence

of the practice items on the school leader's perception of adherence to the community integration

philosophy with "Student community service is used as a learning experience" having the

greatest influence at .506 and "Education occurs within the local community at various

businesses and/or organizations" at .347. The collinearity statistic of tolerance is less than 1 and

is consistent with the bivariate correlation statistics confirming that multi-collinearity is not an

issue.

Table 4.36

Community Integration Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Coefficients
Controlling for School Demographics

VARIABLE	B	SE B	ß	Tolerance
Student community service is used as a learning experience.	1.076	.187	.506	.781
Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations.	.627	.159	.347	.781

Democratic decision-making regression controlling for school demographics. The

third regression for Research Question 5 examined the relationship between the democratic

decision-making practice items and the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to

the democratic decision-making philosophy while controlling for school demographic variables.

No school demographic item significantly influenced the school leader's perception of their

school's adherence to community integration. A statistically significant model resulted from the

regression, with $F_{(4, 74)}$ = 52.844, p = .000 (See Table 4.37). R^2 equal to .742 shows 74% of the

variance in the dependent variable is explained by the four independent variables: "Stakeholders

have equal voting power in decisions," "Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the

greatest number," "Consensus is preferred to majority rule," and "Decisions are made that create

inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders." These are the same items returned as significant in

Research Question 4's regression analysis for democratic decision-making where there was no

control for school demographics.

Table 4.37
Democratic Decision-Making Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Model
Controlling for School Demographics

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R^2 Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig. F Change
1	.712	.507	.501	1.312	.507	82.255	1	80	.000
2	.783	.613	.603	1.169	.106	21.655	1	79	.000
3	.822	.676	.663	1.077	.063	15.070	1	78	.000
4	.853	.728	.714	.993	.052	14.764	1	77	.000
5	.863	.745	.729	.967	.018	5.228	1	76	.025
6	.862	.742	.729	.966	-.003	.900	1	76	.346

Model 1 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision.
Model 2 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision. Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions.
Model 3 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision. Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions. Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number.
Model 4 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision. Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions. Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number. Consensus is preferred to majority rule.
Model 5 Predictors—(Constant), Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision. Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions. Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number. Consensus is preferred to majority rule. Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.
Model 6 Predictors—(Constant), Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions. Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number. Consensus is preferred to majority rule. Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.

The standardized beta, ß, as shown in Table 4.41 indicates the positive relative influence

of the items on the school leader's perception of their school's adherence to the democratic

decision-making philosophy. The collinearity statistic of tolerance is less than 1 and is

consistent with the bivariate correlation statistics confirming that multi-collinearity is not an

issue.

Table 4.38
Democratic Decision-Making Practices and Adherence to Philosophy Regression Coefficients Controlling for School Demographics

VARIABLE	B	SE B	ß	Tolerance
Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions.	.453	.104	.303	.727
Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number.	.422	.124	.235	.732
Consensus is preferred to majority rule.	.551	.121	.330	.663
Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.	.495	.155	.260	.532

Summary: Research Question 5

The regression analyses conducted using the school leaders' perception to each of the three progressive education philosophies and the practices associated with each philosophy, while controlling for the school demographic variables did not show that school demographic variables provide a statistically significant influence on school leaders' perceptions. This finding suggests that school demographics are not a strong influence in the ability to adhere to progressive educational practices. This inference is supported by two of Research Question 5 regression analyses returning identical variables with marginally different coefficient statistics as the Research Question 4 regressions for the community integration and democratic decision-making philosophies. Research Question 5 and Research Question 4 regression analyses for the child-centered learning philosophy returned the same item of "Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process." However, Research Question 4's second variable with the greatest influence (43%) on the dependent variable was "Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities," while Research Question 5's second item with the greatest influence (46%) was "Student learning is assessed through formative assessments

(progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores)." This difference is interesting and raises the question of what factor influenced the difference since no demographic item returned as significantly influencing the dependent variable.

Summary: Chapter IV

What have the numbers and narratives revealed about contemporary progressive education middle school practices based upon school leader responses? It is evident that there is no one demographic characteristic that identifies contemporary progressive middle schools. The strong Pearson Correlation of items associated with each philosophy upholds the historic definition as described in the literature review of Chapter II.

Contemporary progressive education middle schools include public, private, charter, and independent schools. Some are newly formed and others have been in existence for over 170 years.

The majority of school leaders identified a student grade level configuration of older students between grades 6 to 9. Project presentations and assessments are used by almost all of the respondent group regularly or always. A surprising discrepancy was that 81% of the schools administer standardized tests, although 62% of the respondents indicated standardized tests never or seldom influence the learning environment of their schools. This discrepancy was clarified by school leader narrative responses indicating that the standardized tests are used for student practice in preparation for future external requirements and internal school evaluations, and not as a summative tool.

There were some practices that had a statistically significant influence related to the school leaders' perception of their school's ability to adhere to each of the educational philosophies. Almost all of the school leaders agree or strongly agree that "small group

interaction" characterized their school. The majority of school leaders also somewhat agree or agree that "Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process." Respondents that supported the statistical findings of the bivariate correlations and regression analysis categorized child-centered learning narrative responses into topic areas of learning processes, student classroom environment, assessment, and hindrances.

There were also some activities that had a statistically significant influence related to the school leaders' perception of their school's adherence to the community integration philosophy. The majority of school leaders agree or strongly agree that "Student community service is used as a learning experience." The majority of school leaders somewhat agree or agree that "Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations." Community service occurred in various ways as reflected in school leader comments. There was community service among grade levels and age groups and service to others in need as well as partnerships with larger organizations within the respondent schools. Hindrances to community integration noted by many school leaders included lack of time and money.

Almost all of the school leaders had some level of positive agreement with most of the Democratic Decision-Making section items. The one exception was that they did not agree that "Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions."

Four items influenced school leader perception of democratic-decision making. These items included "Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions," "Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number," "Consensus is preferred to majority rule," and "Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders." The school leader comments related to democratic decision-making were divided into five topic areas: democratic decision-making hindrances, trust, consensus, student led activities, and social justice.

The school leader narrative responses show progressive education middle schools develop a sense of community that incorporates trust, camaraderie, flexibility, collaboration, enjoyment, and social justice that builds a safe environment where both students and teachers take risks without worry of the label of "failure" implied by standardized (summative) tests. There is a pattern of students being mentored to become critical thinkers able to collaborate with others. The aspects of trust, camaraderie, flexibility, collaboration, enjoyment, and social justice in my opinion may contribute to a central thread that characterizes contemporary progressive education middle schools.

Chapter V: Discussion

Introduction: Overview of the Study

Reflection is paramount in the Antioch Leadership and Change Ph.D. program. Reflection is a quality that empowers not only the candidate on the journey to a degree, but also those individuals who have participated in the journey along the way or those who have yet to join the journey through reading or being affected by the study. This study of "Characteristics of Contemporary Progressive Education Middle Schools" offers the opportunity of reflection and engagement to all who encounter this topic along the way.

The rationale for this study was based on my recognition that standardized testing and the *No Child Left Behind* policy did not meet the needs of many students. Students who have difficulty in a standardized test environment whether because of culture, socio-economic status, or learning challenges often fall behind in a standardized environment (Borg et al., 2007; Greene et al., 2006; Vaughn, 2009). These same students often become frustrated with school at times leading to the ultimate disengagement of dropping out (Bredekamp, 2011; Cataldi et al., 2009). Just as alarming is the fact that many students may meet the standards for graduation, but still lack the life skills of critical thinking and application beyond a list of memorized facts (Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010; Lattimore, 2001; Wagner & Compton, 2012). Parents are also frustrated with the high-stakes environment of standardized testing that places great stress on their child and diminishes the joy and excitement of going to school (Coppess, 2011; Culmer, 2012; Kugelmass, 2012).

Teachers within the standardized environment echo this frustration ("Testing…Testing…1-2-3*,"* 2007; "Testing the Joy Out of Education*,"* 2008). Teachers are required to meet standards and timelines imposed by test deadlines. Because of test deadlines

many teachers are unable to provide individual attention to student differences or needs that might improve student learning.

The educational literature includes numerous reports by students, parents, and teachers of improved student achievement fostered by small class size, teacher one-on-one with students, and alternative methods of learning and assessment as enhancing the educational experience (Beck, 2009; Doherty & Hilberg, 2007; Doherty& Hilberg, 2008). Educational literature and historical archival records identified the previously mentioned aspects as rooted in the "Progressive Era" of the late 1800s and early 1900s (Cremin, 1961; Semel & Sadovnik, 2008; Volk, 2005).

Historical perspective. The history of progressive education is replete with a collection of notable names such as John Dewey, George Counts, Lois Meek Stolz, Edward Thorndike, David Snedden, and Edward Ross, to name a few (Anderson, 2004; Burgess, 1947; Hertzler, 1951; Knoll, 2002; Labaree, 2005, 2010; PBS, 2001; Rosenstock, 1984; Teeter, 2004).

Contemporary education and the split between standardized testing and progressive practices have their roots within the "Progressive Era" (Cohen, 1976; Ramaley, 2005;Tyack, 1974, 1997). At the turn of the 20th century, progressive ideals included the move toward standardization that mirrored the transition from an agrarian society to an industrialized society. One group of progressives included Edward Thorndike, David Snedden, Edward Ross, and others advocating the use of standardized tests to enhance efficiency of resources. This group, known as administrative progressives, also believed testing should be used to place students into the correct level of education that matched their aptitude. A second group of progressives included John Dewey, George Counts, Lois Meek Stolz and others who believed that standardization limited the learning potential of students and advocated experiential learning.

This group, the pedagogical progressives, advocated learning based upon immersion within one's community in an effort to build responsible citizens.

 Purpose. The purpose of this study was not to continue the long debate surrounding the administrative versus pedagogical progressive proponents. The purpose of this study was not to evaluate the successful outcomes of contemporary progressive education against the report cards of standardized testing initiatives. What was missing in the literature was a fresh look at progressive education. Alfie Kohn (2008) discussed the fact that "progressive education doesn't lend itself to a single fixed definition…[but] there are enough elements on which most of us agree so that a common core of progressive education emerges, however hazily" (pp. 19-20). The purpose of this study was to reduce the haziness by identifying characteristics and the environment of contemporary progressive education middle schools.

 The middle school (intermediate) age range of students was identified as the target audience within the contemporary progressive education framework. Middle school is identified in the literature as a pivotal time in a student's learning (Alexander & Williams, 1965; Brough, 1994; Buell, 1967; Caskey & Anfara, 2007). If a student experiences gaps that are not closed by this juncture in the child's education, the gaps are more difficult to close later. Due to the intensity of remediation necessary to close the gaps, many students become frustrated and disengage from the active learning process.

 The focus of this study materialized as I read the historic literature to identify characteristics of progressive education schools (Cohen, 1976; Labaree, 2005; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The literature told many stories and gave various versions on the theme of progressive education congruent with the *Collins English Dictionary* (2011) definition of progressive as "denoting or relating to an educational system that allows flexibility in learning procedures,

based on activities determined by the needs and capacities of the individual child, the aim of which is to integrate academic with social development." This definition best reflects the pedagogical progressive stance advocated by John Dewey and others during the "Progressive Era" at the turn of the 20th century and embodies the philosophies of contemporary progressive education within this study.

A pattern of an enthusiastic school beginning initiated by founding individuals followed by a rise in popularity and support, then followed by a slow decline and possible closure was identified in the literature (Cremin, 1961; Labaree, 2005; Sherman, 2009; Zimiles, 2008). Conversations with various contemporary progressive school leaders confirmed that a critical point exists when the foundational principles of their mission begin to contribute to their decline. A voice that embodies this struggle was found during the search for possible schools to participate in the study. James McDaniel, the Headmaster of Linden Hill School, wrote a closing letter to the parents and community. The full letter was posted on the school's website as of June 2012 and reflected the burden of contemporary progressive schools to maintain their resolve to deliver quality education to students that need an alternative education environment. Following are brief excerpts that reflect the struggle faced by Linden Hill School:

> We came to the understanding that our need for fundraising each year was growing at a rate that would exceed our small community's ability to respond. We were, in short, rapidly approaching an inevitable closing of the school for lack of funds.

> Thus in the fall of this 2011-2012 school year, we embarked on what we felt was a necessary effort to stem the tide of decreasing enrollment and enhanced pressure on our school's donor base. Despite this effort and given the extreme pressure on the fundraising efforts and donors themselves over the past several years, it became increasingly evident that we have exhausted the ability of our constituents to rescue the school from the ravages of a depressed economy and our significant enrollment declines. Recognizing this, the Board of Trustees determined that the current and projected expense of keeping Linden Hill School open is more than our community could bear or risk. Thus, the Board has voted to close Linden Hill after the end of this school year, June 8, 2012.

We are deeply saddened that we must make this decision regarding a school that has helped so many fine young men and their families. Our tradition has been a proud one as the oldest junior boarding school in America for boys with learning differences. We hope that through each of us who has been affiliated with our school, its legacy will live on.

I want to thank each of you who contributed to our community over the course of its proud history. Our sadness cannot be quantified.

Peace be with all of you as you carry forth the legacy of Linden Hill School.

<div align="center">Retrieved from http://www.lindenhs.org/ on June 9, 2012</div>

Not only is there an observed cycle of birth, growth, and decline for some progressive education schools, but through this research it became evident that some schools do not identify themselves as progressive. This lack of identity was evident when a couple of the first school leader respondents e-mailed comments similar to the following statements:

- I have just completed the survey. I don't see us as a "progressive" school as this moniker differs somewhat from Montessori education, so some questions I left blank. Middle School Program Director

- To be honest, I do NOT FEEL we are a progressive middle school—in fact, I think we are the opposite—the middle school is currently a focus for updating—if you are categorizing Waldorf schools as being progressive—I think we might be described as that by some, but I also question this. Lower School Chair

The purpose of this study is to identify contemporary progressive education school characteristics and the environment in which they exist. The expectation of this study is to assist contemporary progressive education schools like Linden Hill and other schools that may not identify themselves as progressive to recognize essential characteristics they can leverage to maintain a progressive focus within the broader national standardized education environment. A mixed-method exploratory study was chosen to fill the gap that exists in the current literature providing both quantitative and qualitative data to support the findings.

Findings and Implications

Three philosophies were identified during the progressive education literature review that guided this study: child-centered learning, community integration, and democratic decision-making (Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010; Kohn, 2008; Littky, 2011; Semel & Sadovnik, 2008; Wagner & Compton, 2012). The three philosophies were shown to be related to progressive educational learning practices. On a scale of 1 (very poorly) to 10 (very well), the majority of school leaders indicated their school's ability to maintain each of the three philosophies with a rating score of 7, 8, or 9. The overall mean rating ($M = 7.48$) for the items in the Child-Centered Learning section indicated that school leaders perceived their schools were better at adhering to this philosophy. School leader perceptions of adherence as related to the other philosophy sections were ($M = 7.24$) Democratic Decision Making and ($M = 6.40$) Community Integration.

The starting point for any future studies related to contemporary progressive education should include these three philosophies.

School demographic characteristics. No one demographic variable identified a school as a progressive education middle school. This finding opens the door for a wide range of schools to have the capability of developing or maintaining progressive education philosophies. The majority of respondent schools were private schools (83%); 17% were public schools. The private school category included Independent, Charter, Montessori, and Waldorf schools. The Great Schools' website advises parents that private schools have the ability to function outside the scrutiny of federal guidelines:

> The potential benefits of private schools accrue from their independence. Private schools do not receive tax revenues, so they do not have to follow the same sorts of regulations and bureaucratic processes that govern (and sometimes hinder) public schools. This allows many private schools to be highly specialized,

offering differentiated learning, advanced curriculum, or programs geared toward specific religious beliefs. There are exceptions to such generalizations — charter and magnet schools are increasingly common public schools that often have a special educational focus or theme. (GreatSchools.Org, 2012, par. 9)

The fact that private schools are not required to report or administer standardized tests heightened the surprising contradiction of 81% of the respondent group reporting their school administer standardized tests, while 62% of the respondent group reported that standardized tests seldom or never influenced the learning environment of their schools. School leaders' narratives explain the apparent contradiction is based upon the use of standardized tests for internal evaluation and student preparation for future school requirements. Since the majority of the school leaders report using project presentations as assessment methods regularly (65%) or always (27%) in their school, would these same schools administer standardized tests if there were no outside requirements and pressures? Kohn (2008) referred to this discrepancy reminding individuals that even a school that advocates progressive education straddles a society that is heavily influenced by standardized guidelines.

Student grade level configuration as reported by school leaders is a formal stated grouping often to satisfy the expectations of others, but it is often not significant within the school environment itself when students are grouped based upon other criteria. The ability not to emphasize student grade level configuration may be related to the small class size of eight students or fewer (37%) and the necessity to group students together for learning experiences within an overall small school population as a best use of resources. School leaders reported that this flexibility in grouping contributes to the building of internal community cross-grade buddy activities ranging from academic peer tutoring to community service modeling. This flexible grouping empowers students to learn not only academic content, but also collaboration and

communication skills at an early age. The school leaders' narrative comments reflect that 90% of them agree that "Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities."

Child-centered learning. Progressive education middle schools' flexibility in facilitating the learning process allows students time and experiences to accomplish mastery of a concept. Wagner and Compton (2012) described how important flexibility is within the learning process. Wagner labeled students as innovators and declared the supporting adults within a child's life are responsible for providing children conditions favorable for discovery. He proposed that the flexibility in the learning process allows students an opportunity to experience play and pleasure leading to a passion that ignites an intrinsic motivation. Wagner and Compton (2012) stated,

> I discovered a consistent link and developmental arc in their progression from play to passion to purpose. These young people played a great deal – but their play was frequently far less structured than most children's, and they had opportunities to explore, experiment, and discover through trial and error – to take risks and to fall down. Through this kind of more creative play as children, these young innovators discovered a passion – often as young adolescents. (p. 30)

This study's results showed that many contemporary progressive middle school leaders establish the learning parameters and students then are given the opportunity to determine their learning path and pace based upon personal interests and learning styles. Many of the schools use cycles of mastery that assist students in moving forward and not becoming stuck on one concept. Cycles of mastery allow students to return and see content in a new perspective after additional learning experiences. Many schools described their efforts to provide skills to students to assist them to take responsibility for their learning rather than having teachers take this responsibility.

Flowing out of the learning process are the assessment tools used to identify the mastery of concepts. Authentic, project-based learning incorporating multiple disciplines characterizing

progressive middle schools was proposed as early as 1896 by William Heard Kilpatrick (Beyer, 1997). Niguidula in *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World* (Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010) and Chappuis in *Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning* (2009) advocated student portfolios as methods of assessment versus standardized testing. Use of portfolio assessments allows students to demonstrate their skills of mastery in unique ways that also exhibit their individual creativity.

The ability to consistently implement child-centered learning strategies may have a greater probability of implementation within a progressive school because progressive schools tend to be private and free of the testing mandates. Examples of schools implementing progressive educational philosophies outside the standardized testing environment include the Progressive Education Association's commissioned Eight-Year Study that showed the more progressive the innovations, the more positive the student outcomes (Bullough, 2007; Denver Public Schools,1941; Waltras, 2006). Contemporary examples of progressive education schools providing child-centered learning practices outside the structured classroom environment include descriptive stories told by Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2010), Kohn (2008), Littky and Grabelle (2004), and Wagner and Compton (2012).

Hindrances to child-centered learning identified through this study's school leader narratives include meeting future school entrance requirements, current school/system structure, and heightened parent expectations based upon report card progress. Kohn (2008) shared from his experience that parents have not shifted their understanding of progressive educational processes that will better serve their children. Kohn (2008) stated, "[T]here are parents who have never been invited to reconsider their assumptions about education. As a result, they may

be impressed by the wrong things, reassured by signs of traditionalism – letter grades, spelling

quizzes, heavy textbooks, a teacher in firm control of the classroom" (p. 26).

Nehring (2006), Semel and Sadovnik (2008), and Sherman (2009) described the ongoing

struggle between schools that focus on developing the whole child through student interests and

passion versus schools that depend on standardized practices and measurable outcomes. They all

discussed how societal perspectives often determine the level of acceptance of progressive

educational philosophies. Nehring's (2006) comments are an excellent summary of all their

discussions:

> The schools we call progressive are nothing new. They have appeared again and again in the history of American schooling. What is ironic is that each time they emerge, they are termed (sometimes, and unfortunately, by their advocates) as innovative, experimental, break-the-mold, or, well, progressive – and are frequently dismissed on those grounds….So why do we persist in calling schools that have a long tradition "progressive"? Partly, it's because Americans love the idea of innovation. But it is due, also, to the fact that anything experimental or innovative is by definition not mainstream, and thus is doomed to occupy the fringe of society. Perennially labeling such schools experimental is the dominant culture's way of marginalizing the tradition of thoughtful education. (pp. 1, 3-4)

Community integration. Community integration narrative responses indicate

that progressive schools recognize community in three distinct aspects: internal

community, community service, and partnerships. Internal community includes the

immediate classroom and the other classrooms within the school. Student-led meetings

and cross-grade buddy activities characterize internal community. Community service is

a natural outreach from the school's internal community to others in an effort to serve.

Community service includes local clean-up drives, food drives, and community

gardening. Often the community service builds a partnership between local businesses

such as food banks, senior centers, and shelters. Larger community partnerships often

include local colleges, parks and recreation services, and corporate entities that benefit

from the partnership as well as the schools. Eduard Lindeman (1921) in the early twentieth century advocated the interconnectedness between education and community and the ultimate development of partnerships.

While 94% of school leaders indicated that they somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree with the statement, "Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities", hindrances identified through the narrative responses include the reoccurring theme of not enough time to fit all the community activities (whether internal, service, or partnership) into an already full academic calendar. The location of a school can increase the difficulty of using the community as a learning environment because of distance to travel and the cost of transportation. Wagner and Compton (2012) and Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2010) described alternate methods of connecting with others using electronic social networking that can reduce the negative impact of the hindrances identified. Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2010) described how a school in the U.S. partnered with a school in China through open networks similar to Skype. These students experienced reciprocal practice of authentic language acquisition. Not only did they have the opportunity to polish their language skills, but they developed relationships that shared cultural experiences and enlightened understanding of history, economics, art as well as and a host of other topics.

Democratic decision-making. School leader narrative responses to democratic decision-making indicate that many schools allow student-generated topics to be voted on by students. Students are given a voice in all aspects of the student life from personal learning objectives, to school dances, to community projects. Often within reason students are also given an equal voice within contemporary progressive middle schools for broader issues as well. The narratives

describe consensus, trust, and social justice as democratic practices that characterize

contemporary progressive education middle schools. Dewey (1907, 1916), Jenlink and Jenlink

(2008) and Wenger and Snyder (2000) discussed in detail these same democratic ideals as

important components of progressive education.

The narrative responses indicate modeling of democratic behaviors by adults as critical to

conveying the expected practices to students. The democratic practice involving an equal vote

for all stakeholders still has room to improve as indicated by almost one-fourth of the school

leaders signifying they somewhat disagree that this practice is adhered to in their school. Jenlink

and Jenlink pointed out that the effort to increase democratic decision-making practices within

schools requires an identified "space and time" for discussion to identify "shared values and

beliefs" (2008, p. 315). Time was an identified hindrance described by the school leaders'

narratives in their school's ability to adhere to democratic decision-making.

Interconnectedness of philosophies. The majority of school leaders indicated their

schools were at least moderately successful at maintaining all three of the progressive education

philosophies. I believe, along with a respectable number of other scholars, that it is the

combination of the three philosophies that gives progressive education middle schools their true

character (Dewey, 1897; Kohn, 2008; Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum

Development, 2010); Littky & Grabelle, 2004). That character influences the internal and

external school environment. Wheatley (1994) used examples from science to explain

organizational structures when she stated, "Each structure has a unique identity, a clear

boundary, yet it is merged with its environment" (p. 18). While there may not be a definitive

definition or description of progressive education schools, progressive education clearly includes

the three philosophies used in this study. As demonstrated in this research and the Eight-Year

Study (1930-1942) conducted by the Progressive Education Association (PEA), the greater the progressive educational practices implemented within a school, the greater the school leaders' perception of their ability to adhere to those practices.

Results from the regression analyses from Research Questions 4 and 5 and the school leader narratives showed low student/teacher ratio, formative assessment versus summative assessment, and student learning based upon discovery through an independent process support efforts to adhere to child-centered progressive educational practices. School leader narrative responses indicated progressive education middle schools have an ability to be flexible regarding students' scheduling and the overall teaching calendar. School leaders also shared in their narrative comments that teachers receive continued education (sometimes dependent upon employment) to understand child development, multiple intelligences, differentiation, and other research-based best practices. The leaders within their narrative responses also discussed how the transfer of responsibility of learning from the teacher to the student enhances the learning environment. The narratives continued to reflect that learning was safe and fun within the walls of progressive education middle schools.

Community integration and democratic decision-making practices joined together to enhance the ability to build trust. Trust established through community and democratic activities then spills back into the child-centered learning practices. Establishment of trust between students and teachers enhances the learning process. As identified in the narrative responses, the progressive education middle school is a safe, enjoyable, engaging place for students and teachers to work together to grow as life-long learners. Trust in my opinion becomes a vital entity within progressive education that enhances child-centered learning strategies, community integration, and democratic decision-making.

Hindrances reported through narrative comments were standards-based expectations by future schools and parents. However, these hindrances are an indication of education remaining entrenched in the long-standing educational structures that date back to the end of the nineteenth century. Learning in a project-based, authentic assessment environment does not produce grades that outsiders are able to see and use as a gauge of learning. Scholars are writing about the change in our society as it moves from an industrial society to a service society that is becoming more dependent upon social technology innovations and the necessary changes needed in education to prepare students for the world of tomorrow (Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2010; Wagner & Compton, 2012). Students of today are heavily immersed in electronic gadgets and at times are more educated and capable than their teachers at creating projects within their "friends" group on Facebook and Twitter. Students experience authentic assessment with immediate feedback of success or failure in these networks and, thus, have the capacity to repeat the success or to try something different. These are the skills students are acquiring outside the formal classroom, and are the skills that they will need as they take jobs in the modern global community.

As progressive education schools grow in both size and age, new teachers are hired. If the training of future teachers does not change its methods of teaching to reflect the interconnectedness of progressive educational practices, new teachers and administrators will tend to teach as they were taught and may experience discontent or burnout. This discontent was mentioned in some of the school leader narratives and is represented in some of these comments:

- It [child-centered learning] is hindered by reluctance or resistance to changing teaching methods on the part of the more experienced teachers.

- Challenges are teachers new to the environment often are inexperienced in working according to progressive principles.

- What hinders is a traditional college prep upper school that does not have a developmental approach.

- Impediments [to our community philosophy] are lack of administrative and planning support to our program.

- Please note that all the ratings provided in this survey are for the middle school program, but are slightly skewed due to the inconsistency in the school itself (one division could hardly be described as progressive).

Stories of teachers who are making an effort to teach adhering to the progressive educational philosophies in a standardized environment reflected the same discontent from a teacher's perspective as well. Wagner and Compton (2012) shared in their book stories about several different teachers implementing innovative progressive educational practices within their classroom and their feelings of alienation from the other teachers and administrators within their school. This same disconnection of teacher support can happen in schools attempting to make the switch from a strong standardized learning environment to a more progressive learning environment. Long-standing staff not schooled in the methods of progressive education can contribute to difficulties of adhering to child-centered learning practices. It will be important for progressive education leaders to provide on-going training and encouragement to their teachers. Just as important as creating an engaging learning environment for students, teachers equally need an atmosphere of enthusiasm in which to work ("Testing…Testing…1-2-3," 2007; "Testing the Joy Out of Education," 2008). A graphic representation of the integration of this study is provided in Figure 5.1. The figure contains the items found to be significant through regressions in Research Questions 4 and 5 and the narrative responses per each philosophy. This figure represents the QUANTITATIVE/qualitative framework of this study.

Figure 5.1
Representation of Progressive Education as Determined by This Study
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Limitations

Authenticity of this study is the ability to capture the real experience of contemporary

progressive education middle schools. The findings of this study can be viewed only as

exploratory because the responses were from a limited number of states and less than 100%.

However, while the respondent group for this study adequately represented the larger population

pool as related to school demographics, a larger group would have provided greater strength to

the findings.

An ability to conduct follow-up interviews or focus groups with school leaders to clarify frequency of practices, rating of perception, and narrative responses would have enhanced this study because there is always the ability to interpret questions differently.

Future Research

The current study needs to be conducted on a much larger population than 82 schools. The current study could be the foundation for a larger expanded study used to confirm or refute the findings. The research should include progressive education schools from each of the 50 states. The administrative databases used for this study still have an extensive number of schools that with additional time could be identified as progressive in their educational practices. This study should also include procedures to secure a more even distribution of schools across the variable Years of Operation, to reduce if possible, the under-representation within this study of schools with a longer existence.

A future research study using the significant items from this study's regression analyses, as the primary focus, would allow a more in-depth understanding of these specific items. The research would ask school leaders to clarify the process used to adhere to the identified practices. This study could also clarify the impact of standardized testing on the learning environment of progressive education middle schools and delve deeper into the schools that had leaders indicate that standardized testing regularly (11%) or always (2%) influenced their learning environment. The study would identify themes that were not included in the list of child-centered, community integration, and democratic decision making practices that are significantly related to the adherence to the progressive principles. The identification of reoccurring practices could further assist progressive education middle schools in maintaining and growing their learning community with the least amount of adversity possible.

Conducting an in-depth case study of several schools using video and audio recordings to capture students, teachers, and other stakeholders in the everyday progressive educational learning experiences for a specified period of time (at least 30 days, up to 6 months) could be used to document a phenomenological perspective to a progressive education school environment. A longer observation period will allow the participants to forget about the video recordings of their behaviors so they will function normally. The video and audio observations combined with personal interviews of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community partners will provide a more in-depth understanding of the real-life ability to adhere to the progressive education philosophies.

It would also be helpful to conduct a study comparing the schools whose leaders strongly perceive a positive ability to adhere to progressive educational learning practices versus schools whose leaders strongly perceive a negative ability to adhere. This new study should be a quasi-experimental design. There should be a control group and three experimental groups within each of the two identified populations (positive perception of adherence versus negative perception of adherence). Each control group would function with no changes in practices. The experimental groups would develop a learning experience based upon the three progressive educational learning philosophies used within this study. There should be an effort to develop a range of intensity of progressive principles from low to medium to high integration of practices. The study would focus on the differences between the control group, low-level intensity group, moderate-level intensity group, and high-level intensity group focusing on the progressive practices. The study would identify the difference of student outcomes (attitude, critical thinking skills, collaboration skills, and authentic learning application) between each group. The research of the Eight-Year Study would establish the hypothesis that the greater the progressive

educational philosophies are adhered to, the greater student outcomes will be based upon the skills necessary for the future (Bullough, 2007; Doherty & Hilberg, 2007, 2008; Denver City Schools, 1941; Waltras, 2006).

Another future research option is a case study of schools identified by school leaders as never or seldom using progressive educational learning practices or schools rated by their leaders as not adhering to these philosophies very well. Unfortunately, the narrative responses of these leaders did not address why their schools were not able to follow the principles of progressive education.

Another research option would be to try to identify any regional or sub-group differences that might affect the ability to adhere to progressive educational learning philosophies. The methodology would be to conduct the study with schools of a specific state or region and to include all types of schools, whether they identify as progressive or not. Prior to administering the survey, the researcher could use pre-coded survey links to identify schools that appear to be progressive in their educational practices and those that tend to not be progressive based upon the same criteria that identified the 529 schools of the population pool for this study. This would be a comparative study to determine the ability to adhere to progressive education philosophies regardless of the "label" of type of school. As mentioned by Kohn (2008) and others, it is often hard to distinguish where progressive educational philosophies begin and end throughout the American K-12 education environment because of the widespread effort to implement researched best practices that tend to be child-centered learning strategies.

Implications for Leadership and Change

Based upon this study, what are the implications for leadership and change? My first thoughts are to realize my statements and ideas not only are being made to satisfy my Ph. D.

requirements, but also are being made because there is a real crisis within the American K-12 education system. Students are being marginalized by the outcome of a test they take on one day in their life. Teachers are being evaluated on their effectiveness based upon the student scores on these tests. Often teachers, students, parents, and administrators have anxiety about the tests. What are these tests providing? They provide a report of those students that can and cannot perform well on tests.

There needs to be a shift in the thinking about the American K-12 education system. However, a repeat of the implementation of *No Child Left Behind* is not the answer. Teachers and frontline stakeholders were not involved in the development of the plan. A strong bureaucratic, top-down, authoritarian leadership style was used. Bureaucratic, top-down, authoritarian leadership will continue to be a problem if the American K-12 education system functions as it has always functioned. One right method of educating students is continually sought after in an effort to mandate guidelines to be used as a cure-all solution.

Is it possible that schools could be given independence from a central authority and still be capable of providing quality education that inspires students to identify and solve problems creatively? I think so. But, how can this happen? It will have to happen one teacher at a time, one classroom at a time, one school at a time. Many will say this will take too long. However, if through a process teachers were given the opportunity to understand the true nature of progressive educational learning philosophies and given the freedom to work together with their colleagues to determine what that looks like for their school, could they not formulate a plan of implementation that would fit their school, their community, their environment? Wheatley (2002) described the art of communication inspiring hope and imagination when she wrote,

> Change doesn't happen from a leader announcing the plan. Change begins from deep
> inside a system, when a few people notice something they will no longer tolerate, or

respond to a dream of what's possible. We just have to find a few others who care about the same thing. Together we will figure out what our first step is, then the next, then the next. Gradually, we become large and powerful. We don't have to start with power, only with passion. (p. 25)

I believe that this study has uncovered valuable information that supports the practices and activities of progressive education schools, particularly the middle schools. I believe that a school leader, if given the guidance to become a servant-leader who demonstrates good policymaking and provides others with support to follow progressive educational philosophies, transformation within their school can occur (Burns, 2003; Goldstein, 2008; Greenleaf, Beazley, Beggs, & Spears, 2003; Hickman, 1998). Another term being used to describe this style of leadership is "Leadership in Place" (Meehan, Castañeda & Salvesen, 2011; Wergin, 2004). Wergin (2004) described the leadership style I believe is necessary to guide the change in the American K-12 education system:

> It's a form of leadership that deliberately avoids any trappings of hierarchy and privilege, indeed any sort of formal authority at all. Instead it's a type of lateral leadership that promotes collaboration and joint exploration of issues, with decisions that are built on solid, evidence-based deliberation. (p. 2)

I believe the first action of the school leader is to create an opportunity for teachers, parents, and community individuals to read and discuss the books by Tony Wagner and Robert Compton (2012) on innovation and by Heidi Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2010) on the curriculum of the 21st century, among other contemporary progressive education scholars. The school leader becomes a facilitator and not a dictator. The open forum of discussion is using community deliberation to establish "synergy between diverse viewpoints" (Hartz-Karp, 2007, p. 1). As found in this study, parents' and outside organizations' inability to understand the flexible time schedules, formative assessment methods, project based learning, and non-graded portfolio methods of progressive education are

a hindrance to the school leader's perception of the ability to adhere to progressive educational philosophies.

The deliberation between stakeholders then transitions from discussing the literature and examples of progressive educational schools to identifying the primary aspects that need to be evident within their school environment to provide a progressive education for their student population. The process should not be rushed. Stakeholders need to be advised in the beginning that forward progress will be made, but the establishment of community through democratic practices is critical, even if it slows the process.

The school leader must continue to monitor the group discussion and dynamics and avoid, as one school leader wrote, in this study about the undermining that occurs in the "meeting after the meeting" syndrome. Once the group has been able to formulate consensus about the primary aspects that will be implemented within their school—teachers, parents, and community individuals should be trained in the methods surrounding those principles. Stakeholders should research and find other progressive education schools that resemble the pattern they would like to emulate and schedule visits and partnering sessions with those schools.

This preliminary work is only the beginning. Next, the school leaders' responsibilities are to continue functioning as facilitators, modeling the child-centered learning practices, community integration practices, and democratic decision-making practices at every turn within their school whether it be with teachers, parents, community members or students. The leaders need to avoid falling into the trap of making executive decisions and not following the process of democratic decision-making due to the urgency of time, even though they are decisions "based upon the greatest good for the greatest number" and "inclusion versus exclusion." It will take practice, mentoring, and encouragement on the part of the school leader to be a servant-leader.

A great help to the profession of teaching would be a shift in the teacher training programs. If teachers and administrators were trained to integrate these progressive educational learning philosophies within their schools, the previously described effort might not be so cumbersome.

Is this a pie-in-the-sky dream? Is this ideal of leadership too simple? Or are the real questions—Have we not dreamed big enough? Have we tried to make this too complicated? This study identified that the majority of progressive education middle school leaders perceive they are at least moderately adhering to the progressive educational learning philosophies. The real leadership issue is to focus on providing the minority of other school leaders with options and hope that their school, if they so choose, can improve its adherence to progressive educational principles. I do believe in the Pareto Principle and the ability to focus on the 20% of hindrances. I believe that if a small part of the 20% of hindrances can be addressed and thereby shift some individual's perspectives ever so slightly to the positive side, this can tip the already 80% of positive energy and motion to create change (Cohen, 2003; Craft & Leake, 2002). That is what Wheately (1994) termed "dissipative structures" (p. 19). Wheatley explained that for a system to change, it must let go of its state of equilibrium by some form of disruption creating as Wheatley described a source of,

> provok[ing] the system into a response. New information enters the system as a small fluctuation that varies from the norm. If the system pays attention to this fluctuation, the information grows in strength as it interacts with the system and is fed back on itself (a process of autocatalysis). Finally, the information grows to such a level of disturbance that the system can no longer ignore it. At this point, jarred by so much internal disturbance and far from equilibrium, the system in its current form falls apart. (1994, p. 19)

Wheately (1994) continued to advise that this falling apart is not a disaster but an opportunity for a new beginning as she stated:

> Dissipative structures demonstrate that disorder can be a source of order, and that growth is found in disequilibrium, not in balance. The things we fear most in organizations—fluctuations, disturbances, imbalances—need not be signs of an impending disorder that will destroy us. Instead, fluctuations are the primary source of creativity. (p. 20)

Wagner and Compton (2012) discussed the need for educational system flexibility as a necessity if the American K-12 education system is going to produce globally competitive individuals. The education system will need to experience dissipative structures as a norm and move away from the constant desire to establish equilibrium. Wheatley (1994) reminded her readers that if we were discussing the natural environment such as a pond, we would be concerned if there were no diversity or change. Over time the pond could not sustain life. The organizations of the future need to become learning and living organizations, full of diversity and change. The leaders of these organizations will possess different skill sets than were needed in the past. These leaders will need to be able to collaborate, think quickly on their feet, make adjustments to plans, and communicate effectively and quickly with a multitude of people. Oh, would those be the same skills that are proposed as outcomes of students educated within a progressive educational learning environment? I think so!

Personal Reflection

I am a strong proponent of contemporary progressive education and visualize the day when I will be able to establish a progressive education middle school. Results from this study will guide me in the development process as well as the continual improvement process that all organizations must follow. I believe that an alternative form of education needs to be available for any child who cannot show progress in the standardized format of the current education environment.

Reflection will continue to be an integral part of my life. I see myself as an "innovator" as described by Tony Wagner with play, passion, and purpose. I read his descriptions and

examples and I know that I am a different "breed" of thinker and doer. However, I also know that I am responsible for the next generation of thinkers through my profession, passion, and purpose. I want to instill in children a love of learning. I want to spawn self-confidence within children to pursue their passion with excellence. I want to nurture children not to be afraid of "failure" and the unknown. I want to model for children the practice of persistence. I must constantly think how can I facilitate progressive educational learning philosophies within a standardized system? Through my Ph.D. journey, I conducted a Change Project, *Transfer of Learning Responsibility (Leadership) from Teacher to Student.* I am in a new work environment, but the process has not changed. I have determined based upon this research that I need to provide a capsule for the learning experience, but allow students to choose their options and the methods of how they achieve the overall goal, whether that goal be understanding fractions and decimals or the correct use of subject/verb agreement. I am excited and believe my excitement will be contagious. This contagious excitement I hope, like Wagner and Compton, creates the "innovative" concept of "play" that is so apparent within the school leader responses within this study.

However, children are not the only persons of need. So often teachers teach as they have been taught. The current educational system is still entrenched in the methods that have prevailed since the turn of the 20th century. I want to be a model in the servant-leader fashion as described by Greenleaf et al. (2003) to the professionals within the K-12 American education environment. Jacobs & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (2010) described the necessary skills in *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World* to educate students for the world of tomorrow and I'm inspired. However, there are many teachers

who have not had the opportunity to see these principles in practice. I would like to establish a school that functions as a learning lab for teachers in training or re-training.

I believe research will continue to be a strong focus in my profession. I have always loved searching for new options and answers. Early in my Ph. D. journey, Jon Wergin, my advisor, asked me, "You may have lots of success, but do you know why?" This question helped me to investigate the why of my success and not only the completed accomplishment. I know the why of success can change with each student, each teacher, and each experience. However, with the use of the research tools I've learned in my Ph.D. journey, I will be able to track any changes and determine if they are statistically significant or only a random act of chance. With that knowledge, I then can implement the learning organizational change model as described by Margaret Wheatley (1994) that allows the system to function within its designed parameters based upon its purpose and provisions.

APPENDIX

Appendix A
Survey Monkey® Online School Leader Survey

Progressive Education School Environment

Introduction

Progressive Education Schools provide a rich learning environment for students. At times, in the face of pressures from the broader society, progressive schools may struggle to adhere to key philosophies. This study seeks to describe progressive middle schools and understand the factors that influence their ability to focus on progressive education philosophies.

In completing the survey you will have the opportunity to reflect on your school's philosophies and practices. It is my hope you will use the findings to further your understanding of the broader progressive middle school environment, and use that information to facilitate your school's continued commitment to quality education.

The survey will take about 25 minutes to complete. Your responses will help shape the story of progressive middle schools. All responses will be confidential and anonymous. A summary of results will be e-mailed to you.

This study is a partial fulfillment of my PhD of Leadership and Change dissertation through Antioch University. If you have any questions contact:

Jan Ware Russell
jrussell2@antioch.edu

Thank you for participating in this study.

Progressive Education School Environment

Child-Centered Learning Experiences

Child-centered learning is based upon using a child's interests and skill level to determine the level of learning and content of learning. Some schools find that adherence to this principle is not always possible or desirable for middle school age children.

1. Thinking about your school's usual practice for middle school age children, how strongly do you disagree or agree that your school uses each of the following educational practices?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students are able to choose topics to study.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Students are allowed to create their own meaning from topics.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Student learning is based upon discovery through an independent learning process.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Our curriculum is based upon topics developed from current life issues.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Students are able to set some of their own learning objectives.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Small group student interaction creates learning opportunities.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Student learning is assessed through formative assessments (progress with feedback) versus summative assessments (grade or percentage scores).	○	○	○	○	○	○

2. Schools may experience a variety of internal and external challenges in following a child-centered learning philosophy during the middle school years. On a scale of 1 (Very Poorly) to 10 (Very Well), please rate how well your school has been able to adhere to a child-centered learning philosophy in the middle school years.

	1 Very Poorly	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Very Well
Our school achieves adherence to child-centered learning.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

3. What does child-centered learning look like in your school? What supports or hinders child-centered learning in your school?

Progressive Education School Environment

Community Education Experiences

Community education includes all activities that demonstrate cooperation between the community and the students of the school. Some schools find that adherence to this principle is not always possible or desirable for middle school age children.

4. Thinking about your school's usual practice for middle school age children, how strongly do you disagree or agree that your school uses each of the following practices?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Education occurs within the local community at various businesses and/or organizations.	O	O	O	O	O	O
Individuals from the local business community teach within school classrooms.	O	O	O	O	O	O
Learning about our community's history, resources, and/or issues is used as student learning opportunities.	O	O	O	O	O	O
Our natural ecological environment is used as a source of learning opportunities.	O	O	O	O	O	O
Student community service is used as a learning experience.	O	O	O	O	O	O
Planning sustainable resources for the school and community are a part of the learning experience.	O	O	O	O	O	O

5. Schools may experience a variety of internal and external challenges in practicing community education during the middle school years. On a scale of 1 (Very Poorly) to 10 (Very Well), rate your school's ability to adhere to community involvement.

	1 Very Poorly	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Very Well
Our school achieves adherence to community education.	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

6. What does community education look like in your school? What supports or hinders community education in your school?

Progressive Education School Environment

Democratic Decision-Making Experiences

Representation of all participants (stakeholders) in the decision-making process is considered democratic. Some schools find that adherence to this principle is not always possible or desirable for middle school age children.

7. Thinking about your school's usual practice for middle school age children, how strongly do you disagree or agree that your school uses each of the following practices?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Deliberation and discussion are used to work toward a decision.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Consensus is preferred to majority rule.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Stakeholders have equal voting power in decisions.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opposing ideas are welcomed in the discussion process.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Decisions are made based upon the greatest good for the greatest number.	○	○	○	○	○	○
Decisions are made that create inclusion versus exclusion of stakeholders.	○	○	○	○	○	○

8. Schools may experience a variety of internal and external challenges in practicing democratic decision-making principles during the middle school years. On a scale of 1 (Very Poorly) to 10 (Very Well), rate your school's ability to adhere to democratic decision-making.

	1 Very Poorly	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Very Well
Our school achieves adherence to democratic decision-making.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

9. What does democratic decision-making look like in your school? What supports or hinders democratic decision-making in your school?

Progressive Education School Environment

Current Leadership Authority

This section asks you to think about demographics of your school that only the principal or head of school can answer.

10. The current leadership of our school consists of _____ .

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Founding individual or group
- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Superintendent
- ☐ School Board
- ☐ Parent Advisory

- ☐ Student Advisory
- ☐ Community Advisory
- ☐ State Advisory
- ☐ National Advisory

Other (please specify)

_____

11. Does any individual or group have the authority to over-ride a decision?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Progressive Education School Environment

Current Leadership Authority

12. Which current leadership group has the authority to over-ride a decision.

○ Founding individual or group

○ Principal

○ Superintendent

○ School Board

○ Parent Advisory

○ Student Advisory

○ Community Advisory

○ State Advisory

○ National Advisory

Other (please specify)

Progressive Education School Environment

Original Leadership Authority

13. The original leadership of our school consisted of _____ .

Check all that apply.

☐ Founding individual or group   ☐ Student Advisory

☐ Principal   ☐ Community Advisory

☐ Superintendent   ☐ State Advisory

☐ School Board   ☐ National Advisory

☐ Parent Advisory

Other (please specify)

_____

14. Did any individual or group have the authority to over-ride a decision?

○ Yes

○ No

Progressive Education School Environment

Original Leadership Authority

15. Which original leadership group had the authority to over-ride a decision.

- ○ Founding individual or group
- ○ Principal
- ○ Superintendent
- ○ School Board
- ○ Parent Advisory

- ○ Student Advisory
- ○ Community Advisory
- ○ State Advisory
- ○ National Advisory

Other (please specify)

Progressive Education School Environment

Grouping and Assessment Practices

16. Progressive education philosophies often allow schools to group students in various combinations. How often does your school use the following methods to group students?

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Student Age	○	○	○	○	○
Student Interest	○	○	○	○	○
Student Skill Level	○	○	○	○	○

17. Teachers use various methods to assess student progress. About how often do your teachers use the following methods to assess student progress?

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Teacher made tests	○	○	○	○	○
Textbook supplemental tests	○	○	○	○	○
Standardized state or national tests	○	○	○	○	○
Project presentations	○	○	○	○	○

18. How would you describe the influence of standardized tests on your school's ability to adhere to progressive education philosophies?

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
How often does the standardized testing environment of the U.S. influence your students' learning experience?	○	○	○	○	○

Progressive Education School Environment

Content Development Practices

19. Teachers use various methods to determine the learning content for students. About how often are the following methods used by your teachers in determining the learning content for students?

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
State specified curriculum benchmarks	○	○	○	○	○
Organizational philosophical guidelines	○	○	○	○	○
Student skill levels	○	○	○	○	○
Current events	○	○	○	○	○

20. Progressive education philosophies often allow schools to use a wider variety of content delivery methods. How often does your school use the following content delivery methods ?

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Direct instruction - highly teacher-directed	○	○	○	○	○
Indirect instruction - highly student focused with teacher as facilitator, supporter, and resource	○	○	○	○	○
Experiential - learner centered with the emphasis in experiential learning through process	○	○	○	○	○
Independent - student study generated by student interest and depends on student initiative and self-motivation	○	○	○	○	○
Interactive - relies heavily on discussion and sharing among students in small groups	○	○	○	○	○

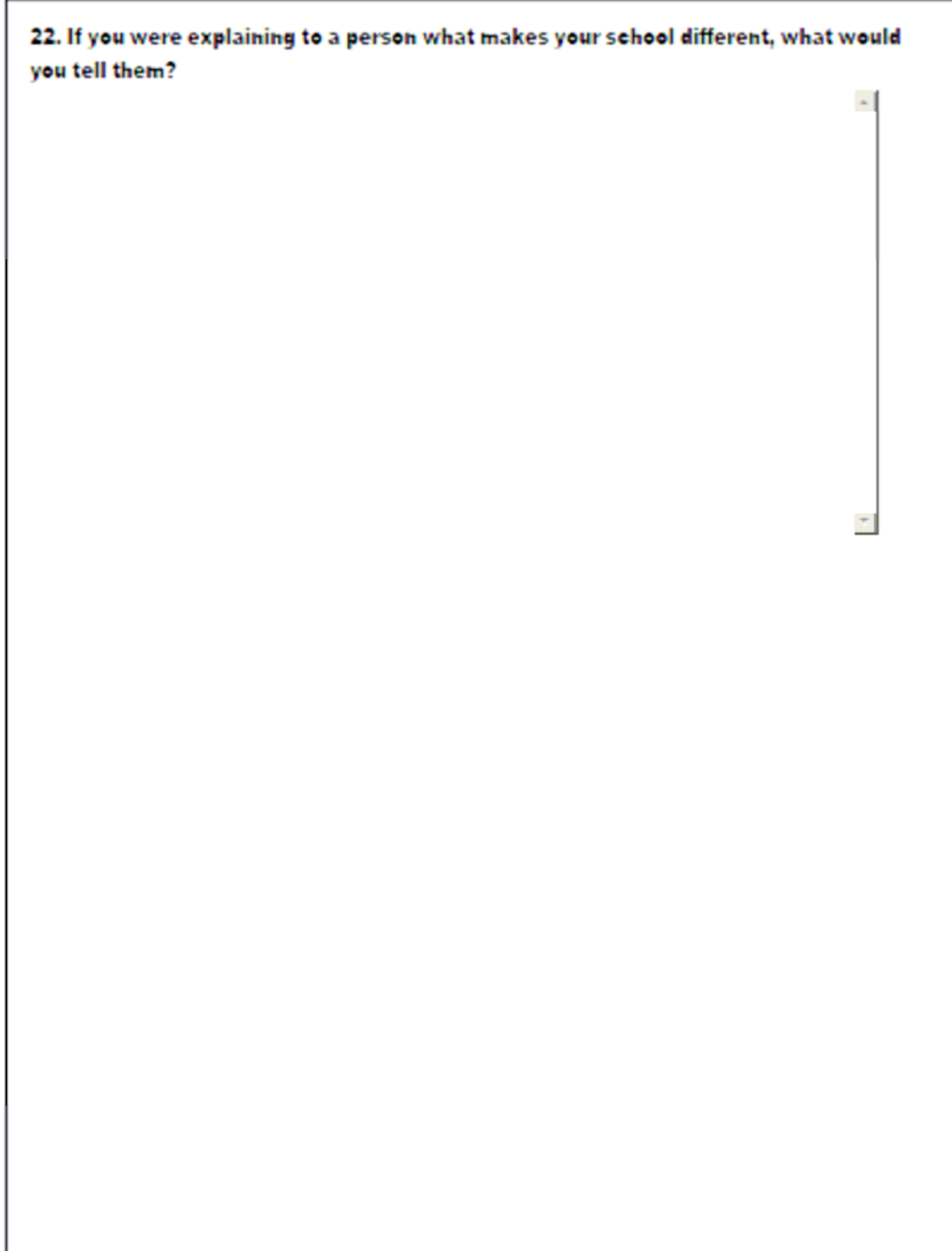## Progressive Education School Environment

Student Enrollment Issues

21. How often have you experienced difficulty with students transferring into or out of your school because of other institution's standardized test requirements?

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Student ability to transfer into your school.	○	○	○	○	○
Student ability to transfer out of your school	○	○	○	○	○

Progressive Education School Environment

School Uniqueness

22. If you were explaining to a person what makes your school different, what would you tell them?

For additional pages including school demographic questions asked of the school leaders, contact me at jrussell2@antioch.edu.

Appendix B
Demographic Fact Sheet Variable Table

Variable	Definition	Variable Type	Response Option
Demographic			
Student age range	The age range of students served	Text	Number range
Student population	The number of students served	Numeric	Number
Student/Teacher ratio	The ratio of students per teacher	Numeric	Fraction
School category	The type of category under which the school functions	Multiple choice (all that apply)	Public Private Charter Magnet Other – text explanation
School affiliation	The national or international parent organization	Multiple choice (all that apply)	Montessori Waldorf National Middle School Other – text explanation
Years of operation	The number of years the school has been in operation	Numeric	Number
Standardized tests	The administration of state or national standardized tests as prescribed by NCLB	Dichotomous	Yes/No

Appendix C
School Leader Survey Introduction and Instructions

Progressive Education Schools provide a rich learning environment for students. At times, in the face of pressures from the broader society, progressive schools may struggle to adhere to key philosophies. This study seeks to describe progressive middle schools and understand the factors that influence their ability to focus on progressive education philosophies.

Many schools may not consider themselves Progressive based upon the historic definition and struggles. My research is exploring contemporary characteristics of progressive middle schools based upon 1) child-centered learning strategies, 2) integration of the community into student learning, and 3) the aspects of democratic decision-making within the school.

Your school has been chosen through my various studies based upon your school's vision/mission statement and profile obtained through various public documents. This is an exploratory study to identify 1) any common characteristics (if they exist) and 2) identify any trends Progressive middle schools encounter within the larger education environment that assists or hinders their ability to deliver quality education as set forth in the vision/mission statement of the school.

In completing the survey you will have the opportunity to reflect on your school's philosophies and practices. It is my hope you will use the findings to further your understanding of the broader progressive middle school environment, and use that information to facilitate your school's continued commitment to quality education.

The survey will take about 25 minutes to complete. Your responses will help shape the story of progressive middle schools. All responses will be confidential and anonymous. A summary of results will be e-mailed to you.

This study is a partial fulfillment of my Ph.D. of Leadership and Change dissertation through Antioch University. If you have any questions contact:

Jan Ware Russell
jrussell2@antioch.edu

Thank you for participating in this study.

Appendix D
Tagxedo License for Figure 5.1

January 28, 2013
To Whom It May Concern,

This letter certifies that Jan Ware Russell, has obtained a full Artwork License to use one Tagxedo artwork, as specified in Exhibit A (or variations or derivatives thereof), for publication uses, without further need of any attribution border/logo. I am the owner and operator of Tagxedo http://www.tagxedo.com from which these images were generated, and has full right to grant such license to him. Please let me know if you have any question.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely Yours,

Hardy K. S. Leung Owner of
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