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**Emerging Democracy in an Urban Elementary School:  
A Habermasian Framework for Examining School Governance  
Reculturing in Response to Systemic Reform**

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**Emerging Democracy in an Urban Elementary School:  
A Habermasian Framework for Examining School Governance  
Reculturing in Response to Systemic Reform**

**Brendan David Maxcy, B. S.; M. Ed.**

**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

To my parents, David H. and Janet Griffin Maxcy

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The purpose of this study was to examine the micropolitical dynamics manifested in the re-culturing of campus governance in response to systemic reform imperatives? The study examined: 1) the recent intensification of standards and stakes associated with the Texas performance accountability system, 2) managerial responses to these pressures by the central administration of a large urban school district, and 3) the renegotiation of work and leadership in



response performance pressures and the district policies by the faculty at a high-poverty, majority Hispanic elementary school.

The study combined document analysis and various ethnographic methods to understand the interplay between reform pressures, district policies, and campus micropolitics. The analysis of the state performance accountability system used state reports, press releases, and print media related to the development and intensification of the system. The district level analysis combined press releases, print media, public comments by administrators and participant observation to study the administrative response to accountability pressures. The campus-level analysis employed formal and informal interviews of teachers with observations of faculty and committee planning meetings to understand decision-making dynamics and planning processes as carried out by the faculty of one campus.

The major findings of the study are three-fold. First, the state-level analysis suggests that the Texas performance monitoring system, a response to a state legitimacy crisis, appears to be informed by a narrow technical logic and therefore seems likely to intensify an existing administrative emphasis on efficiency at the expense of other valued outcomes, most notably equity. Second, responses to accountability pressures in the district studied reflect an intensification of a traditional management discourse evidenced in a series of

reforms that dramatically extend administrative control over staffing decisions, campus planning, curriculum development, and instructional delivery. Third, the current district policies contrast with recent reforms at the campus studied that engaged teachers and administrators in more deliberative governance activities focused on collective and strategic planning. Conflict between the communicative rationality of the campus-level reforms and the technical rationality informing the district's management discourse are resulting in ongoing renegotiation of work and leadership norms at the campus.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the study, opening with a re-examination of three “waves” animating school reform over the past twenty years. Invoking Habermas’s theory of legitimation crisis (Habermas, 1975) it is argued that “top-down” intensification through the standards and assessment movement and “bottom up” restructuring models through the devolution of decision-making authority are not conceptually distinct and successive reforms as generally portrayed in the literature. Instead, these are complementary reform strands of a “conservative modernization” (Apple, 2001b) effectively separating the state’s administrative and legitimating functions. By redefining task responsibilities, the state evades the conflicting demands for activism in mitigating social inequality and restraint from interfering with self-determination. The resultant performance accountability systems stave off the state legitimation crisis, but, problematically, relocate the crisis to local education authorities at district and campus levels.

Arguing that a “re-culturing” (Fullan, 2001) of schools will result from some combination of acceptance and contestation of encroaching systemic control brought to bear through these systems, a study of the micropolitics of a school negotiating and navigating these reform pressures is proposed. The study is



outlined briefly introducing the methodology, the campus of interest and the on-going school-university collaboration from which the study emanates. Next, delimitations, perceived limitations, possible implications and significance of the study are discussed. The chapter concludes with an overview of the organization of the study.

#### **BACKGROUND: RESPONDING TO PRESSURE TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE**

Twenty years ago, *A Nation at Risk*, a report commissioned by the Reagan administration, called on public schools to account for the “rising tide of mediocrity” threatening the nation (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report warned of America’s weakened position vis-à-vis her global economic competitors resulting from an erosion of standards in its public school system. Emphasizing “twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling”, the report demanded, “all, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost” (p. 1). Reflective of a growing emphasis on accountability as a core political value in American culture (Cibulka, 1997), the report received a great deal of attention and reflected a growing discontent among certain segments of the public with the state of public school. Its release is

often used to mark the onset of the first of several “waves” of reform aimed at strengthening accountability.

### **Tightening loosely-coupled systems**

Researchers suggest the reform initiatives of the past two decades represent an attempt to reestablish legitimacy by tightening the formerly loose organizational structure within schools as well as among schools and state and local education authorities (Boyd & Crowson, 2002; Fusarelli, 2002). This refers explicitly of course to Weick’s (1976) contrast between “loosely coupled systems” (notably schools) and traditional Weberian bureaucracies understood as “tightly coupled” through standard operating procedures and clear lines of authority. In Weick’s conception, loose coupling is a functional structure adopted by organizations like schools facing multiple, conflicting and indeterminate goals, uncertain technical processes, and relatively weak worker attachment to the organization. In addition to providing flexibility and adaptability, loose-coupling allows for a de-coupling of the management hierarchy from the instructional core, allowing administrators to manage the public interface (parents, community and central administration) while teachers retain substantial authority with the campus exercised primarily through student management (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Tye, 2000).

Loose coupling helps explain many of the aspects of teacher sociology noted in micro-level accounts of schools such as individualism, conservatism, egalitarian norms, and teacher-administrator pacts of non-interference (Ball, 1987; Lortie, 1975). However, in the “imperialistic discourse” of management theory, loosely coupled systems such as schools are “locked into irrational chaos... [and need] to be brought into its [management’s] redeeming order” (Ball, 1990b, p. 157). While contributing to the stability of the institution, many of the features associated with loose coupling inhibit the responsiveness often sought by administrators and, from a rational-technical perspective, are dysfunctional in terms of the pursuit of administratively defined (or re-defined) goals.

As discussed below, the integrated performance accountability systems emerging out of multiple “waves” of reform were a common response to a mounting crisis in legitimacy of public administration generally and educational administration in particular. Through a heavy emphasis on high-stakes student performance testing and public comparisons of school performance (Elmore, Abelman, & Fuhrman, 1996), these systems are designed to more effectively direct “the flow of fiscal, human and material resources” (Fuller & Johnson, 2001, p. 280) toward state defined performance goals. By the mid-1990s, performance accountability was already the dominant model among states (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998; Elmore et al., 1996).

### **Intensification and restructuring: The initial “waves” of reform**

The first wave of reforms reflected a “neo-conservative” response (Apple, 2000). Neo-conservatives, notably Reagan and Bush appointees William Bennett, Chester Finn, Dianne Ravitch, argued that schools, over-burdened with accumulating demands from special interests, are largely failing to instill traditional social and cultural norms that serve as the basis for a common civic culture. The proposed remedy was an explicitly defined curriculum rooted in Western culture and associated standardized testing to ensure compliance by educators. Leaving in tact the basic institutional design, these reforms essentially intensified the existing system through top-down mandates, increasing graduation requirements, extending the instructional day and year, and standardizing delivery and assessment of a basic skills curriculum (Desimone, 2002; Smith & O'Day, 1991; Vinovskis, 1996).

The second wave of reforms initiated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, referred to collectively as “restructuring”, promoted more fundamental changes school organization and governance (Elmore & associates, 1990; Mohrman & Wohlstetter, 1994; Murphy, 1991). Proponents of devolved decision-making authority in education argued for restructuring on the grounds that “decentralized units, increase knowledge about, access to, and participation in governance; make organizations easier to change; and prevent undue consolidation of power at

geographically distant locations and hierarchically remote organizational levels” (Murphy, 1991, p. 2). Calls for restructuring came from a variety of sources and represented diverse views of schooling appealing to, among others, free-market advocates and Jeffersonian democrats, but for very different reasons.

### **Performance accountability: Devolving authority and increasing control**

These two reform initiatives, systemic intensification and governance restructuring, are often referred to as separate, successive waves in the literature (Desimone, 2002; Elmore & associates, 1990; Lunenburg, 1992; Mohrman & Wohlstetter, 1994; Murphy & Beck, 1995). Moreover, the “waves” are often characterized as contrasting and even conflicting approaches, the former as “top-down” and the latter as “bottom up” (Elmore & associates, 1990; Lunenburg, 1992; Murphy, 1991). However, the two “waves” might also be understood as complementary and reinforcing strands of a systemic response of “conservative modernization” (Apple, 2001b), which separates state administrative and legitimating functions to stave off a developing crisis in public confidence regarding the state’s ability to meet contradictory obligations (Apple, 2000).

For instance, although the devolution of authority through school-based management (SBM) was prominent theme in restructuring, the dominant models of “systemic reform” emphasized the importance of coherent and aligned state

policy to encourage and direct local level reform (Vinovskis, 1996). Raising questions about the nature and extent of the devolved authority, Malen and Ogawa (1992), note that SBM policies, “tend to shift task responsibility but not delegate decision-making authority” (p. 190). Apple states it this way,

We are witnessing a process in which the state shifts the blame for inequalities in access and outcome, which it has promised to reduce, from itself onto individual schools, parents, and children...The state is...faced with a very real crisis in legitimacy. Given this, we should not be at all surprised that the state will then seek to export this crisis outside itself (Apple, 2000, paragraph 37).

Apple’s terms suggest a longer look at the work of Jurgen Habermas may be helpful in putting apparently contradictory reforms into perspective and in projecting potential consequences of these reforms.

#### **A HABERMASIAN INTERPRETATION OF PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY**

Habermas’s theoretical work in *Legitimation Crisis* (Habermas, 1975) and *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, (Habermas, 1979) foreshadowed both the current crisis and the nature of the state response. Moreover, as articulated in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1984, 1987) his more general system-lifeworld framework aimed at elucidating the state-society interface(s), provides some insight into a predictable but problematic reliance on

system- rather than social-integrative processes in late-capitalism. The following section examines current integrated performance accountability system through this framework and suggests that this response to the legitimacy crisis has not resolved the underlying contradictions. Instead it has simply relocated the problem of legitimation to the local level, and, more problematically, interfered with local communicative processes needed to legitimize the educational process.

### **Legitimation crisis: The achievement ideology and societal support**

Although the rhetoric was exceptionally bellicose, the demand for reform reflected in *A Nation at Risk* might be cast as another in a series of a century and a half of reforms documented extensively by educational scholars and historians (Callahan, 1962; Katz, 1971; Ravitch, 2000; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). However, some scholars suggested the growing public frustration with schools in the 1980s signaled a deeper crisis of confidence the educational system generally (Shapiro, 1984) and in educational administration in particular (Cibulka, 1992, 1997; Foster, 1980).

Perhaps a crisis was inevitable. Public schools are positioned at the nexus of America's competing market and democratic ideologies. While schools must "transmit an ideology based in the values of the market place, they must also, in certain respects, attempt to represent a field of democratic and classless values

that are the antithesis of this ideology" (Shapiro, 1984, p. 34). Growing public awareness of the state's inability to reconcile, let alone satisfy, these contradictory imperatives creates a crisis in confidence in administrative capacity, eroding authority over public concerns and causing, in Habermas's (1975) terms, a "legitimation crisis".

Habermas (1975, p. 21) suggests that as traditional authority gave way to liberal-capitalist principles in the eighteenth century, "economic exchange [became] the dominant steering medium...[as] interest-guided action [replaced] value-orientated action". The result was a dramatic scaling back of modern state power with responsibilities limited to: 1) maintaining a pro-growth business policy, 2) encouraging production aligned with collective needs, and 3) mitigating social inequality (Habermas, 1979). The modern state faces a dilemma in exerting its power to curb social inequality when doing so violates norms protecting personal autonomy and private property, which also contribute to the state's legitimacy (Habermas, 1979). Dependence on the economic sector for tax-derived resources, further limits the state, which is precluded from capitalist enterprise in its own right. Thus, unlike traditional state authority that was largely unfettered, state power in liberal-capitalist society is circumscribed by its perceived legitimacy to intervene in private affairs (economic or otherwise), and state restraint is enforced through constraints on its ability secure the requisite



resources to do so. Ultimately, state power is legitimated by its perceived ability to act (or appear to act) in concert with the force(s) of public opinion and market forces (Habermas, 1974).

Habermas (1975) observes that the “fundamental contradictions” inherent in the forced system integration of class societies, necessitate the maintenance of “ideological justifications to conceal the asymmetrical distribution” of life opportunities (p. 27). Due to its role in occupational and professional mobility, formal schooling became increasingly important to these ideological justifications, especially as the market lost credibility as a fair arbiter of life opportunities. Schools play a key integrative role in modern society by maintaining an “achievement ideology” premised on the belief that individual achievement should determine the allocation of social and economic rewards and presupposing equal opportunity to participate. Central to this ideology is “a common educational fallacy that opportunities can be *made* by education, that upward mobility is basically a matter of individual push, that qualifications make their own openings” (Willis, 1981, p. 127). For much of its history belief in US public education was relatively strong. Tyack and Cuban (1995, p. 3) assert, “faith in the power of education [to promote individual and societal progress]...has helped to persuade citizens to create the most comprehensive system of public schooling in the world”. As a result, American education is

deeply embedded within a western civilizational framework, which creates conflicting demands that it simultaneously provide a mechanism for equal opportunity and for social mobility (Foster, 1980). To the degree that the school-based achievement ideology is vital in staving off social crisis, the state as a whole, and the educational establishment in particular, have a substantial interest in nurturing this faith.

Arguably, the authority of educational administrators to direct employees and to procure funding rests maintenance of this belief system. Habermas (1979, p. 179) asserts, "only political orders can have and lose legitimacy; only they need legitimation." Neo-institutional theorists suggest that for organizations with complex objectives and uncertain technologies, legitimacy becomes a driving force in organizational development (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Given the pressure to maintain or regain the legitimacy from which its power emanates, state initiated reform efforts are as likely to be animated by political exigencies as by technical and conceptual coherence (Cibulka, 1997). Habermas (1986) suggests that in a legitimation crisis, the state is in danger of losing its base societal support. He states:

In such a situation the social welfare state comes into danger of having its societal base slip away. The upwardly mobile voter groups, who have directly reaped the greatest benefits of the formation of the social welfare state, are capable in times of crisis of developing a mentality concerned

with protecting their standard of living. They may also join with those classes oriented towards productivity, into a defensive block against underprivileged or excluded groups. Such a regrouping of the electoral base threatens, first of all, the political parties that for decades have been able to rely on a steady clientele in the welfare state (p. 8).

For this reason, public school administrators sensitive to public perceptions of their legitimate authority, face a dilemma when schools are simultaneously called upon to redress historical inequities and to maintain the social order to which the institution is wedded.

The state in capitalist societies, for Habermas, provides the political steering mechanism complemented by the non-political steering of market exchange. Applying Habermas's framework to the impending legitimation crisis in US education, Foster (1980) predicted a state response of increasing technical and rational control of education through expanded teacher evaluation and the imposition of planned curricula as "the traditional legitimacy of the teacher becomes secondary to the means of administration" (p. 501). At approximately the same time, Apple (1981) noted that progressive "deskilling" and "re-skilling" was undermining the professional nature of teaching and effectively "proletariatizing" teachers. These concerns with technical control and shifting (and diminishing) professional responsibilities seem to anticipate the spread of performance accountability systems among states during the 1990s and expansion

of federal control of education enacted through the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) in this decade.

### **Performance accountability: A state legitimacy project**

As a result of the crisis in legitimacy, governance accountability is acquiring the status of core value in public administration (Cibulka, 1997). The intensification of technical control through standards and assessment and redefinition of professional responsibilities, reflect a response to the legitimacy crisis by more tightly coupling schools and school systems through “integrated, outcome-based accountability systems” (Boyd & Crowson, 2002; Fusarelli, 2002). The resulting performance accountability systems are powerful administrative tools to facilitate steering toward specified (but still contradictory) goals by more effectively integrating the components of the educational system, and, perhaps more importantly, (re-)institutionalizing the authority to do so.

From this point of view the first wave of reforms was not a failed or limited attempt to simply intensify the existing system as sometimes argued (Desimone, 2002; Elmore & associates, 1990; Lunenburg, 1992; Murphy & Beck, 1995). Rather it was an initial step in a broader trend to expand technical administrative control by: 1) establishing and publicizing increasingly rigorous and narrowly defined curricular standards, 2) monitoring compliance through

standardized assessments, 3) attaching and localizing the stakes associated with student performance<sup>1</sup>, and 4) stepping up competition among schools and districts through public performance comparisons<sup>2</sup>. This form of public relations reconfigures the role performed by the state, turning the “gaze” (Foucault, 1977) away from the state and back toward the individual student, classroom, campus or district. Without actually subjecting state affairs to public view, public reason and public debate, this form of public accounting “wins public prestige for people or affairs, thus making them worthy of acclamation in a climate of non-public opinion” (Habermas, 1974, p. 55). This odd form of transparency is reinforced in the second “wave”, or complementary stream of reforms, characterized as restructuring.

The imposition of performance standards and publication of tested performance associated with systemic intensification extends state control, but also raises expectations. This interferes with a state interest in maintaining a level of obscurity regarding its responsibilities “in order that there accrue to it from its planning functions no responsibilities that it cannot honor without overdrawing its

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<sup>1</sup>Test scores are the most commonly used measure of educational quality in state accountability systems (Goertz, Duffy, & LeFloch, 2001), with graduation rates, student attendance, and even post-secondary outcomes incorporated in various ways in state systems (Fuhrman, 1999). A common element of earlier state systems was to tie student graduation to passing an exit examination. With NCLB grade promotion in the primary grades will also be linked to test performance.

<sup>2</sup> With regard to stakes for schools, performance accountability models implicitly or explicitly assume that individuals and systems will be motivated by performance comparisons, and will work to earn rewards or to avoid sanctions (Fuhrman, 1999; Linn, 2001; Texas Education Agency, 1996).

accounts” (Habermas, 1975, p. 68). As a result, Habermas’ predicts that the scope of government activity will actually contract at the same point it apparently needs to expand. This is accomplished in part by separating administrative and legitimating systems.

While the second wave purported to restructure governance by devolving decision-making authority, as enacted, it appears to be a redefinition of task responsibilities with little devolution of substantive decision-making authority (Malen & Ogawa, 1992). This “horse trade” of “policy centralization and delivery decentralization” (Hoyle, 1999) meant that local educators were provided greater discretion in selecting the means to attain more explicitly specified goals associated with higher stakes.

It seems reasonable to argue that the shift in emphasis from process to performance of the new accountability systems (Elmore et al., 1996) reflects the decoupling of the legitimating and administrative systems theorized by Habermas (1975). This occurs through failure of a neo-liberal logic informing performance accountability systems to account for the structured and structuring nature of so-called “rational choices” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This allows a convenient ahistoricism<sup>3</sup>, allowing the state to retain authority to establish

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<sup>3</sup>“The actor, as it [rational choice theory] construes him or her, is nothing other than the imaginary projection of the knowing subject (sujet connaissant) into the acting subject (sujet agissant)...This narrow, economic conception, of the "rationality" of practices ignores the collective *history* of agents through which the structures of preference that inhabit them are constituted in a complex

performance and equity goals and the responsibility for monitoring goal attainment, but shifts responsibility for achieving the goals and re-norming the institutional framework to local education authorities.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, Habermas's work on legitimation crises helps explain the impetus for the state adoption of performance accountability systems to facilitate system steering in an effort to improve productivity (attainment of goals) and efficiency (effective use of resources). As legitimacy projects, performance accountability systems help reestablish state legitimacy and authority by appearing to tighten system couplings through intensification, and redefining responsibilities. However, while system integration is used to re-establish legitimacy for the state, the crisis is simply relocated to the local level without resolving the underlying problem: the achievement ideology demands equality of opportunity, but schools as historically constituted in a capitalist society are almost invariably uneven playing fields. Moreover, local school administrators face similarly contradictory

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temporal dialectic with the objective structures that produces them and which they tend to reproduce." (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 123). Bourdieu finds, "it is amusing to see them (rational choice theorists) go back and forth, sometimes from one page to the next, between a mechanism that explains by the direct efficacy of causes (such as market constraints) and a finalism which, in its pure form, wants to see nothing but the choices of a pure mind commanding a perfect will or which, in its more temperate forms, makes room for choices under constraints--as with 'bounded rationality,' 'irrational irrationality,' 'weaknesses of the will,' etc., the variations are endless." p. 126

<sup>4</sup> Ball (1990b) argues that the effective schools research of the seventies and eighties laid the groundwork for this redefinition of responsibilities, "Effectiveness studies and school-difference studies have recentred the school as the focus of causation in explanations of pupil performance and variations in levels of achievement" (p. 162).

demands: actively mitigate social inequality and exercise restraint in interfering in self-determination.

Although the consequences at the school level are uncertain, this may have come at a tremendous cost. Habermas (1975) argues that despite their increasing sophistication, technical systems cannot create or reestablish traditional norms needed to restore the eroding belief in the system. Speaking specifically about curriculum planning, he notes the irony, “administrative planning [of curriculum] produces a universal pressure for legitimation in a sphere that was once distinguished precisely for its power of self-legitimation.” (p. 71). More than simply taxing limited resources, the instrumentalization of everyday communicative practices by administrative systems undermines socially and culturally integrative processes, processes that must then be assumed by the state.

### **Relocating rather than resolving the legitimation crisis**

The inherent limitation of system integrative processes is the central problematic of Habermas’s *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1984, 1987). Habermas posits two types of learning processes driving socio-cultural evolution: technical or instrumental knowledge used to pursue material interests and moral-practical insight serving social integration. These learning processes are the defining features of his two-component, “system-lifeworld” model of



society. Instrumental rationality is central to so-called “system” processes related to material production, while moral-practical insight rooted in inter-subjective communication animates “lifeworld” processes of cultural development and identity formation. Of concern in late capitalism is the interference in the creation of shared cultural meanings resulting in alienation and anomie resulting from systemic encroachment on the lifeworld. Ultimately, “colonization of the lifeworld by system imperatives...drive moral-practical elements out of private and political-public spheres of life...[leading to] deformation of everyday practice, [in which] symptoms of rigidification combine with symptoms of desolation” (Habermas, 1987, p. 325-7).

Arguably, system imperatives of delivering a predefined curriculum enforced through high-stakes assessments inhibit socially integrative inter-subjective processes of engaging students and educators in dialogues about the means and ends of schooling within the classroom and campus “lifeworld”. Thus, colonization interferes with the ability of students, teachers, and administrators to meet “praxis needs” to become, maintain, and develop a self through self-expression (Carspecken, 2002). “Teachers are increasingly subject to systems of administrative rationality that exclude them from an effective say in the kind of substantive decision-making that could equally well be determined collectively” (Ball, 1990b, p. 153). As a result, teacher work is continuously intensified and

de-professionalized contributing to teacher alienation and burnout (Apple, 2000) and at the same time enforcing a non-dialogic, and alienating “banking” model of education (Freire, 2000) for students. In addition, the intensified competition introduced by the “market-like” environment central to performance accountability systems (Texas Education Agency, 1996) is likely to further undermine socially integrative processes within and among schools.

### **Control and resistance: The struggle against the colonization of the lifeworld**

While the encroachment and legitimation of system imperatives are both subtle and persistent (Anderson, 1990), they should not be portrayed as irresistible. In fact, Habermas’s re-conceptualization of the reification of oppressive social structures as a “colonization of the lifeworld” by economic and administrative system imperatives is an attempt to establish the connection between structure and agency by integrating the system and lifeworld paradigms (McCarthy, 1991). Like the working class “lads” in Willis’s *Learning to Labor* (1981), Carspecken (2002, p. 66), suggests that individuals will inevitably find ways to fulfill praxis needs in spite of systemic encroachment<sup>5</sup>,

When goal directed tasks are controlled by others, are menial, fragmented, and do not facilitate self-expression, then people will develop cultures that

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<sup>5</sup> Carspecken’s work on critical ethnography in education .(Carspecken, 1996, 2002) draws heavily from a Habermasian communicative model.

try to maximize what few opportunities for self-expression do exist in the tasks themselves...and simultaneously meet praxis needs by resisting cultural forms associated with the authority figures of the setting: teachers, foremen, employers.

Accounts of institutions such as schools must avoid a “pessimistic functionalism”, excluding the possibility of resistance, and recognize that although structural relations within them are durable, they are not eternal (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Schools and schooling as institutions should be approached "in historical and contemporary terms, as social sites in which human actors are both constrained and mobilized" (Giroux, 1983, p. 62). This echoes Bates (1982, p. 9) emphasis on the cultural aspects of schooling in his critical approach to educational administration.

Organizations are cultures rather than structures and it is the maintenance and contestation of what is to constitute the culture of organisational life that provides the dynamic of rationality, legitimation and motivation in organisations. This dynamic is the praxis of administration.

From a Habermasian perspective, one might argue that central to this dynamic is a contest between moral-practical and instrumental logic occurring within the lifeworld of the campus (or classroom). This accepts McCarthy’s contention that formal organizations are both systemically and socially integrated, rather than

accepting Habermas's hard line that "social-integrative mechanisms are put out of play in formal organizations" (McCarthy, 1991, p. 129). Traditional educational research informed by positivism characterizes schools "merely as instructional sites. That they are also cultural and political sites is ignored, as is the notion that they represent arenas of contestation and struggle among differently empowered cultural and economic groups" (Giroux, 1983, p. 3). To understand the manner in which systemic reform plays out at the campus level, requires an examination of the interaction of system- and social-integrative processes within the campus "lifeworld",

The transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements (Habermas, 1987, p. 126).

As noted above, scholars have employed Habermasian theories to predict both a legitimation crisis and the subsequent administratively driven reforms for public schools (Foster, 1980; Shapiro, 1984). More recently, researchers have employed Habermas's normative model of an "ideal speech situation" to examine intra-campus decision-making (Johnson & Pajares, 1996). The study proposed below

attempts to connect the two by tracing the impact of the system encroachment resulting from the reforms into the campus lifeworld.

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

As discussed above, reforms such as the standards and assessment movement, school restructuring, and performance accountability systems can be characterized as a comprehensive systemic integration intended to effectively “re-culture” schools by transforming their loosely coupled structure to a tightly coupled one. Without invoking a “fantasy of conspiracy” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), the Habermasian framework articulated above offers a plausible account for the state’s increasing rationalization of the public education system in response to a mounting legitimacy crisis. Further, it suggests that the effort to re-establish state legitimacy by redefining task responsibilities relocates rather than resolves the legitimacy crisis.

This manner of resolving the legitimacy crisis results in several problematic consequences for local schools. First, it intensifies pressures on schools to achieve specific state defined goals without redressing well known historical inequities or necessarily removing demands to serve other ends required of schools due to local needs, expectations or traditions. Next, the apparent gain in flexibility derived from the shift in emphasis from process to outcome increases

uncertainty in how a school might meet the ends. Finally, the attempts to replace loose with tight couplings within schools and districts by more explicit forms of accountability with higher stakes, interfere with the institutional mechanisms for coping with multiple goals and uncertain technologies, mainly reliance on the flexibility and resilience of loosely coupled systems.<sup>6</sup>

With its profile raised as an issue in the 2000 presidential campaign and as the model for No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Texas performance accountability system is one of the more scrutinized models in the nation. As noted by Skrla, Scheurich and Johnson (2001, p. 227), “accountability systems and their equity effects...are dynamic (over time), highly complex, [and] varied.” Thus, it is not surprising that a variety of studies of the system came to different conclusions. A number of reports praised accountability-driven reform in Texas citing more rapid reduction of performance gaps than other states (Grissmer & Flanagan, 2001; Jerald, 2001). Some contended that the accountability system was instrumental in promoting educational equity by focusing district leadership and public attention on performance disparities and holding schools and districts accountable for the performance of all students (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Other reports were skeptical, contending that the state-reported results of quick gains were

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<sup>6</sup> Although it is tempting to argue that reforms “tighten” the systems, Orton and Weick (1990) employ a dialectic rather than continuous conception of coupling. That is, loose and tight coupling represent different forms of organization that function differently, and creating tight couplings fundamentally changes the organization.

misleading (Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey, & Stecher, 2000). Some were highly critical, arguing that the high failure rates visited on poor and minority students were discriminatory (Bernal & Valencia, 2000; Haney, 2000; Natriello & Pallas, 1998), and that by obscuring issues of historical inequities, the system would ultimately harm the students and schools it purports to help (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000; Valencia, 2000; Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan, & Foley, 2001).

Like Habermas's theories on legitimation and lifeworld colonization, the research noted above is suggestive of the consequences of increased rationalization, but is far from definitive about how this rationalization will play out at the local level. Control is inevitably in tension with resistance (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Foucault, 1977; Giroux, 1983; Thomas, 1993) and, although intensified with new technical tools, pressures to re-culture schools in particular ways will inevitably be resisted, contested, and redirected. Moreover, despite a great deal of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), schools are historically constituted and idiosyncratic. As a result, re-culturing driven by generalized reform pressure will unfold differently across schools. As a result, regardless of the rational approach to managing reform, "educational change is inherently, endemically, and ineluctably nonlinear. This means that the most systemically sophisticated plan imaginable will unfold in a nonlinear, broken-front, back-and-forth manner. It will be fragmented" (Fullan, 1996).

Too little is known about the internal struggles of schools, as cultural and political sites, as they navigate, negotiate, contest, and at times subvert converging reform initiatives. More “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) is needed regarding the ways teachers, administrators, parents and students at the local level, under pressures to “re-culture” (Fullan, 2001), renegotiate power relationships and reconfigure school governance. Advocating micro-level analysis, Stephen Ball (1987, p. 3) asserts, “an understanding of the way that schools change (or stay the same) and therefore of the practical limits and possibilities of educational development, must take account of intra-organizational processes”.

This micro-level approach falls squarely into the area of study known as micropolitics, which refers to “those strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts seek to use their resources of power and influence to further their interests” (Hoyle, 1982, p. 88). Unfortunately, reformers have in large part failed to recognize the micropolitical challenges generated by systemic reforms, in part, due to the ad hoc nature of micropolitical accounts and the resulting use of disparate perspectives (Mawhinney, 1999). According to Mawhinney, micropolitical would be more informative to policymakers if analysts “lay out the model of organizations and the associated assumptions



which frame their research...[and substantively address] the organizational dilemmas posed by restructuring proposals and efforts” (p. 164).

To better understand the struggle against the “colonization of the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1987), micro-level accounts of the convergence of reforms at the campus level must move beyond description by anchoring the analysis within an explicitly critical perspective (Anderson, 1990). Apple (2000, paragraph 8) suggests,

It is crucial to document the processes and effects of the various and sometimes contradictory elements of [current reforms] and of the ways in which they are mediated, compromised with, accepted, used in different ways by different groups for their own purposes, or struggled over in the policies and practices of people's daily educational lives.

The study attempts to provide a critical account of, and to participate in, one such reculturing process in an urban elementary school in central Texas.

#### **PURPOSES OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to examine, and ultimately to contribute to, one campus’s ongoing efforts to renegotiate power relationships and reconfigure the governance structure of the school in ways that are more just and more democratic. The study will attempt to shed light on campus level politics

manifested in navigating, negotiating, and contesting systemic reforms animated by performance monitoring pressures and informed by a traditional, but problematic management discourse. The study seeks to understand the reasons and the ways in which teachers and administrators at a single school faced with a highly charged reform environment re-negotiated the campus governance structure in a “struggle for betterment” (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000).

In addition to documenting these processes and effects, the study is intended to contribute in a practical way to the efforts of the participants to mediate these pressures by articulating and enacting governance structures and processes that are (more) democratic and (more) just. “The oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable...[rather than] mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 263). Engaging participants in reflective dialogue about shortcomings in, and strategies to increase, the inclusive and democratic nature of campus governance, will contribute to this effort.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

The study broadly addresses the following question: What are the micropolitical dynamics manifested in the re-culturing of campus governance in response to systemic reform imperatives?

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED STUDY**

### **Research design**

The proposed study is a qualitative case study of the micropolitical dynamics of reform within a single elementary campus. As the purpose is not only to investigate, but to participate with and engage participants in shaping the organizational culture of the school, the study will employ the method of participatory action research (PAR) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; McTaggart, 1997; Reason, 1998).

*Site and participant selection:* The site for the study was selected for three reasons: 1) an ongoing research relationship with the university over an eight-year period, 2) the presence of myriad and often conflicting campus and district initiated reform efforts, and 3) the recent promotion and replacement of a long time principal resulting in new struggles for control over work between teachers, campus and district administrators. Ten faculty members were selected for individual interviews. Seven of these faculty members will be selected from a

core group of teachers involved in a voluntary, but highly active core group of teachers on the campus. These and other individuals were interviewed informally as questions and opportunities arose.

*Data collection and analysis:* Data collection employed standard ethnographic techniques of document review, interviews and participant observation (Carspecken, 1996; Thomas, 1993). As is typical in critical approaches, data analysis employed grounded theory techniques of constant comparative analysis to reveal subjective and normative patterns, which although often accepted as natural by participants, are socially and historically constituted (Thomas, 1993). While the discovery of grounded theory as discussed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) occurs inductively through systematic gathering and analysis of data, the use of a critically theoretic orientation to inform theory development is explicitly acknowledged in this study (Carspecken, 1996).

*Transformative activity:* Genuine critical projects must move beyond abstract critique and provide some means of altering alienating and exploitive conditions (Robinson, 1994; Young, 1990). Thus, consistent with Freire's (2000) concept of *conscientizacao*, data collection and analysis occur through on-going, reflective dialogues with participation about the ongoing transformation. Throughout the study, dialogues with the teachers attempted to: 1) gain insight into the participant's understanding, 2) develop strategies with the participants,

both organizational and cognitive, to challenge unjust and undemocratic conditions in the school, and 3) raise critical questions about possible exclusion or suppression of alternate voices, especially with regard to student and parental involvement in campus governance.

### **Description of the site and the ongoing school-university collaboration**

Chavez Elementary School<sup>7</sup> is a high-poverty and predominately non-white campus in a large urban central Texas school district. Of the enrolled student body of approximately 400 students, more than 95% are non-white, 85% are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs, and approximately 40% are English language learners. From the 1993-4 to 1999-2000 academic years, the campus maintained a minimally “Acceptable” level of performance according to the state rating system<sup>8</sup>. During this period, frustration with the lack of progress despite a myriad of initiatives was resulting in growing animosity between the long-time principal and the teaching faculty. Given substantial disagreement about the appropriate goals for the campus and criteria for success, the campus was unable to collectively agree on and sustain a course of action.

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<sup>7</sup> Chavez Elementary School is a pseudonym designating the campus in a prior study of parent involvement conducted by Michelle Young (see Young, 1999). The name will be retained allowing this study to build off findings of the earlier study. In a later study of the initial stages of the reform process by High (2002), the campus was referred to as Central Elementary School.

<sup>8</sup> All public schools in Texas are rated on a four-point scale, Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable and Low Performing.

Beginning in the 1999-2000 academic year the campus partnered with the Educational Productivity Council (EPC) a non-profit research and service group centered in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Texas Austin. The partnership focused on increasing student achievement by enhancing faculty-involvement in campus decision-making. During the course of the partnership, the campus' accountability rating climbed from "Acceptable" in 2000 to the state's highest rating of "Exemplary" in 2002. Chavez joined only one other high-poverty campus in the district to receive that rating.

Project activities engaged teachers and administrators in more deliberative governance activities focused on collective and strategic planning. As a result of these dialogues, a quasi-accusatory demand for "knowledgeable and effective leadership" directed at the principal by teachers led to more distributed, relational leadership within the campus (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Over a relatively brief period of time, the activism of the teachers appeared to change dramatically. Chavez showed some signs of progressing toward the idealized, but seldom realized democratic leadership described by Blasé and Anderson (1995).

The effort appeared to promote achievement gains that had eluded the school previously. Strikingly, the changes in the organizational culture and student achievement occurred without any substantial turnover of the faculty or the long-time principal. Moreover, the activism and resolve of the teachers

appeared to strengthen rather than wane when the district promoted principal after the school achieved the top rating. With the promotion of the long-time principal within the district, the faculty forcefully asserted itself in the hiring process, seeking a principal that would maintain the flattened leadership structure. The struggle for betterment at the school continues as the school contends with an intensified management discourse and associated reform initiatives from the district administration.

### **Implications and significance**

Three comments were the direct catalysts for the proposed study and hint at possible implications of the study. First, a visiting professor consulting on the ongoing collaboration expressed strong skepticism about the possibility of generating similar collective efforts in other schools. He remarked, "it runs counter to the entire sociology of teaching, going back to Lortie!" As Foster (1986, p. 68) suggests,

As intellectuals study administration...they develop theories of administrative behavior that attempt to reflect actual practices within schools; however, the practices themselves begin to conform to their theoretical analysis because the theoreticians have status and power...In this fashion intellectuals help to create certain social structures out of the universe of alternatives.

Despite a great deal of research and rhetoric about the benefits of teacher leadership, traditional conceptions of hierarchical leadership are heavily institutionalized and continually reproduced as “common sense”, informing school administration and administrator training (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). These notions are reinforced in a number of ways within schools and within the academy, through an untroubled acceptance of a variety of power-laden expert-novice relationships including: administrator-teacher, professor-student, university-school, and perhaps most notably, theory-practice (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). The encroachment of administrative and market logics into schools corresponding to the current accountability pressures raises serious questions about schools as either democratic workplaces or Deweyan laboratories of democracy (Apple, 2000; Ball, 1990b; Engel, 2000; Giroux, 1992).

The apparent changes in the both the organizational performance and culture at Chavez suggest that it may reveal something about the creation of conditions fostering effective school-based management. This study may help elucidate why Chavez proceeded down the peculiar path toward collective and increasingly high-stakes political activism on the part of the teachers. While the path is necessarily unique to the Chavez’s context, the study may point to those features of the state policy structure, district organization and campus context, which may promote a shift from individualism to broader-based activism, from



collective frustration to collective effort. In doing so, this study can help close that gap in the literature noted by Fullan and Watson (2000) by identifying features of the campus context and the nature of teacher activism promoting the shift from a traditional, individualist, hierarchical organizational culture to one characterized by more distributed leadership and collectivist and activist approaches on the part of teachers. Moreover, engaging the teachers discussions about the transformation and participating with the teachers in sustaining and expanding the effort, contributes to the articulation of different and hopefully more democratic administrative models out of the universe of alternatives for the school.

Second, in a panel discussion about the ongoing project, teachers from Chavez expressed concern that the role of teacher involvement and leadership in the campus' success was not fully appreciated throughout the district. A central office administrator told one of the teachers directly, that she was skeptical about the attribution of the campus improvement to the faculty leadership as discussed by High (2002). The teachers felt this skepticism contributed to the lack of consideration of the faculty in the assignment of an interim principal and the subsequent loss of momentum of the faculty efforts to broaden campus leadership.

Nothing suggests decisions at the central office were intended to hamper efforts at the school, but the limited effort by district administrators to initiate

dialog with the faculty (and parents) appeared problematic. At a time when the collective effort of teachers could have been directed toward continuing to improve instruction and school function, much of their energy was diverted into again justifying the benefits derived from, if not their right to, substantive involvement in school decision-making. The study may contribute to the campus's effort to, and the knowledge base regarding similar efforts to, maintain inter-subjective and deliberative processes in the face of systemic encroachment in the increasingly intense accountability climate.

The final comment related to the ongoing struggle for betterment at the school. With the promotion of the long-time principal within the district, the faculty forcefully asserted itself in the hiring process, seeking a principal open to more shared leadership. Although successful, this power struggle with district leadership both raised faculty concerns of retribution by district leaders and galvanized the faculty around the new principal. At a planning meeting at the end of the year to establish a governance structure, one teacher asked the group,

The district will be focusing on us this year...waiting for us to fall apart.  
We need to share the leadership. We need to be very careful about being accountable to our children and ourselves? How will we do that?

Thus, and perhaps most importantly, the study may contribute in a practical way to the efforts of teachers at the study site to develop and articulate planning and

decision-making structures and processes that are (more) democratic and (more) just. To this end, the study attempted “non-impositional intervention” (Robinson, 1992) to engage the core group teachers in reflective dialogue regarding the renegotiation of control over work at the school and collective strategies to increase communication, deepen the commitment and broaden the base of support by becoming increasingly inclusive and democratic.

In addition to the practical benefits noted above, the study may contribute to theory development in school reform and school leadership by bringing in a very limited way a number Habermasian concepts to elucidate the genesis of, and responses to, performance accountability pressures. Others have incorporated Habermasian frameworks to examine education (Shapiro, 1984; Young, 1990), educational administration generally (Foster, 1980) and shared decision-making specifically (Johnson & Pajares, 1996). This study extends these efforts, linking Habermas’ conceptions of legitimation crises, system-lifeworld analysis, and critical hermeneutics to gain insight into the assumption and use of political power by teachers at the campus level in response to intensified managerial control by state and district administration.

## **Limitations and delimitations**

*Limitations:* The use of qualitative methods, and specifically critical ethnography will limit the generalizability of the study. The study draws on the views of the ten unique participants involved in the complex negotiation of multiple reforms within the dynamics of a working school campus. The study is therefore necessarily subjective and specific to that particular context. Furthermore, my role as a researcher and as a critical friend in the process is informed both by my perspective as a former teacher in that district and my ongoing work with the district in general and this project and this campus in particular. That is, much of the interaction within the interviews and the participant observations are dependent on trust established within an ongoing relationship with the participants and a working knowledge of individual and group dynamics. The subtleties these relationships is substantially obscured by the truncated nature of the data gathering in the formal study. To the degree possible, I attempt to enter into the analysis information that may shed light on the interactions. Although idiosyncratic, detailed descriptions of the methods and protocols used in the study will be provided, allowing other researchers to attempt to repeat or adapt the investigation.

*Delimitations:* The study examines the faculty discourse and activities regarding the negotiation of converging reforms at a single campus from over a

relatively short period of time. A retrospective analysis of governance changes from 1999 to 2002 is drawn from teacher perceptions. A “real-time” analysis based on observations and ongoing interactions looks at the current re-negotiation of work and leadership norms. The study contrasts this discourse with an alternate “management discourse” drawn from district documents and practices, but no attempt was made to interview central office administrators about this discourse or about perceptions of the reforms. Neither is the faculty discourse or interpretation of the reforms contrasted with parental perspectives.

The study attends to the participation of faculty members within organizational planning and decision-making. In particular, the activity and influence of an emergent group of teacher leaders taking on a legitimating role akin to a “critical public sphere” (Habermas, 1989b) is explored. Of interest is the impact of this participation on faculty perceptions of the nature of their roles and their power within the organization. The study does not attempt to ascertain the impact of these activities on classroom instruction, student performance, parental participation or district-level decision making, although each of these areas merits further study.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION**

As discussed below, the dissertation includes seven chapters, the following two reviewing the literature and methodology, the next three offering state, district and campus-level analyses, and the concluding chapter providing an executive summary and implications. Chapter Two provides an examination of the literature focusing on three areas. The first focuses on studies of three “waves” animating the reform agenda of the past twenty years: intensification, restructuring and adoption of comprehensive school reform packages. The second area is the study of micropolitics initiated by Iannaccone in the 1970s, and advanced by Ball, Blasé, Hoyle and others in the 1980s and 1990s. This work provides a theoretical lens to view the strategic efforts by individuals and groups to negotiate and contest reforms. The third area draws from the work by critical theorist Jurgen Habermas on system-lifeworld analysis. This work, complemented by that of Freire, Bourdieu and others, is used to situate recent reform efforts within a broader critique of late capitalism.

Chapter three contains a detailed account of the qualitative methods used for the study of a single case. The specific critical ethnographic method of participatory action research is introduced, followed by a review of site and participant selection, data collection and analysis, and issues of validity and trustworthiness.

Analysis of the data occurs in chapters four, five and six. Chapter Four addresses the policy environment associated with the Texas accountability system, with specific attention on the recent intensification system corresponding to a more rigorous assessment and provisions for tying grade promotion to test performance. The analysis draws primarily from an array of research reports and performance data available to the public through the Texas Education Agency.

Chapter Five situates Chavez within its state-district policy environment addressing three interrelated issues including: 1) intensified pressures on the district to address historical inequities in services to poor and non-white students, 2) the intensification of a traditional but problematic “management discourse”, and 3) an alternate teacher discourse emerging in response to the encroachment of administration control over work life in the campus and classroom “lifeworlds”. This chapter draws from district level documents and press releases regarding a series of initiatives to improve student achievement and reduce achievement gaps by increasing administrative control over curriculum and instructional practices. These data are completed by participant observations of and teacher interviews about the initiatives as practiced at Chavez.

The sixth chapter begins with an account of the governance changes at Chavez from 1999 to 2002. Drawing primarily on interviews with ten teachers involved in the reform effort, these data are complemented by comments by

administrators and teachers provided in panel sessions with the associated university class and historical documents from the partnership. Habermas's critical hermeneutic framework is used to gain insight into the nature of these changes and the practical use of partnership activities in creating a communicative space and possibly catalyzing broader dialog among the faculty.

Chapter seven concludes the study with an executive summary of the findings, identification of implications for theory and practice, and suggesting areas of future study.

## **SUMMARY**

As discussed above, systemic intensification and restructuring reforms might best be characterized as complementary strands of a state effort to separate administrative and legitimating functions in an effort to stave off a legitimation crisis. Presupposing that "re-culturing" of schools is likely to occur due to intensification pressures and restructuring possibilities, renegotiating of work and leadership norms of some form is inevitable. It is argued that an administrative emphasis on system integration as opposed to social integration process may increase alienation and anomie among teachers. A study of the micropolitics of a school negotiating multiple reforms is proposed. The campus of interest, the current reform context, and an ongoing university collaboration with the campus



were introduced. Following an explication of the purposes and potential contributions of the study, the research methodology, participatory action research, and the perceived limitations of the study are discussed. The following chapter examines the related literature.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter examines three areas of the literature pertinent to the study. The opening section focuses on studies of the “waves” animating the reform agenda of the past twenty years: intensification, restructuring and adoption of comprehensive school reform packages. The second area is the study of micropolitics initiated by Iannaccone in the 1970s, and advanced by Ball, Blasé, Hoyle and others in the 1980s and 1990s. This work provides a theoretical lens to view the strategic efforts by individuals and groups to negotiate and contest reforms. The third area draws from the substantial body of work on political sociology by critical theorist Jurgen Habermas. This work, complemented by the work of other critical theorists, is used to situate recent reform efforts within a broader critique of late capitalism.

A brief overview of educational reform delineates two strongly normative streams of thought animating past educational reforms: outside-in and inside-out approaches to governance. The following section, examines the literature on reforms precipitated by the Nation of Risk report in 1983. Specifically, literature is used to sketch the fundamental nature of three reform “waves”. Shifting to an alternative metaphor of “confluence”, the literature on micropolitics is introduced as a potential theoretical framework to make sense of issues encountered by local schools forced to navigate various reform streams. Noting shortcomings in current micropolitical theory, a number of epistemological perspectives with potential to improve extant micropolitical models

are reviewed. Ultimately, it is argued that critical models of inquiry show the greatest promise. Key elements and critiques associated the critical frame to be used to orient the micropolitical analysis are introduced.

## **A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE REFORM CONTEXT**

### **Competing objectives for education: The means or ends of social mobility?**

Dewey argued early in the last century (1997, p. 20) the “special environment” of schools could and should “balance the various elements in the social environment, and...see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born”. This section examines a long-standing struggle by educational reformers to realize Dewey’s educational vision within the reality of American society. Of particular interest are competing notions of the best reform approach to achieve this end: from the outside in or from the inside out.

Nearly fifty years ago, Chief Justice Warren writing for the majority offered the following in the 1954 Brown decision,

[Education] is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today, it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment ("Brown v. Board of Education," 1954, p. 493).

The statement is suggestive of the status American education achieved as a cornerstone of our civic and economic culture just one hundred years after Horace Mann’s common school movement. Arguably, the cornerstone has been laid across a fissure. In modern

societies functioning within an “achievement ideology”, schools provide the primary means of social mobility (Habermas, 1975). At the same time, schools figure prominently as an end of social mobility, providing a means to secure the future of one’s children. As Justice Powell noted in 1973:

The history of education since the industrial revolution shows a continual struggle between two forces: the desire by members of society to have educational opportunity for all children and the desire of each family to provide the best education it can afford for its own children (“San Antonio ISD v. Rodriguez,” 1973)

In a review of the long history of educational reform, historians David Tyack and Larry Cuban suggest, “faith in the power of education...has helped to persuade [American] citizens to create the most comprehensive system of public schooling in the world” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 3). However, given disparities in wealth and income within our society, it is hardly surprising as they note, “Americans from all walks of life may have shared a common faith in individual and societal progress through education, but they hardly shared equally in its benefits” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 22). Thus, reforming of the system of schooling, began almost as soon as school systems had formed, resulting in an almost fetish-like “tinkering” toward a utopian vision of public education.

### **Competing approaches to education reform: Integrative versus aggregative**

Numerous authors offer varying accounts of educational reform efforts (Callahan, 1962; Cronin, 1973; Cuban, 1990; Finn, 1990; Katz, 1971; Paris, 1995; Ravitch, 2000; Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995; Sarason, 1991; Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The

history of school reform is complex and assessments of success or failure, progress or regress often reflect ideological differences (Paris, 1995; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Such assessments are political constructs providing “coherence and force to educational reform, though each [impose] blinders on policy makers” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 38). Some scholars suggest competing visions of integrative and aggregative governance have strongly influenced on the selection and function of governmental institutions in general (March & Olsen, 1989), and educational institutions in particular (Cibulka, 1996; Timar, 1997). Although it is problematic to lump together very complex arguments, these different visions seem to inform opposing critiques of reform generally associated with the “left” and “right” ends of the political spectrum.

Critiques from the left suggest the “integrative” governance approach epitomized in the progressive reform ideology (Cibulka, 1996) “originated from impulses that were conservative, racist, and bureaucratic” (Katz, 1971, p. 3). Central to this critique is the recognition that despite the “education-for-the-masses” rhetoric, educational opportunities for large segments of the population including women, Native Americans, Africans Americans and immigrants have been limited or denied outright throughout the history of U.S. public education (Spring, 1997). Researchers from this school of thought argue the public education system has long served “common” interests defined by white, male policy elites and the system effectively reproduces class and racial and/or ethnic stratification by allocating access to educational opportunities, and thus career opportunities (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Darling-Hammond & Aness, 1996; Kozol, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1997; Oakes, 1985; Tyack, 1974). Thirty years ago, Michael Katz (1971, p. 1) offered a rather scathing assessment of the prior century

of reforms, "America's educational past seems more depressing than uplifting. For much of it is an unpleasant record of insensitivity and bias, or a dreary tale of innovations that did not reach their goals."

Other scholars suggest that reforms have largely failed due to an “institutional incapacity” resulting from the insertion of “aggregative” politics beginning with the Brown decision, within the historically “integrative” public school institution (Cibulka, 1996). Critiques from this general position, argue that with the accumulating demands by various groups for equality of opportunity, schools lost focus on student achievement and became highly inefficient and ineffective (Chubb & Moe, 1988; Coleman, 1992). Thirty years after Katz, and from a decidedly different perspective, Diane Ravitch (2000) suggests that attempts to solve social problems through public schools have eroded educational quality and led to an incoherent mission.

As schools tried to comply with decisions by distant officials and policy makers, as they absorbed new federal and state programs for targeted groups of students, as bureaucratic red tape grew more tangled, as they employed more specialists, it became ever more difficult for them to maintain their focus on teaching and learning or even to perceive teaching and learning as being their primary responsibilities (p. 457).

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) brought national attention to education reform, and is generally used to mark the onset of the first of several waves of school reform. Although it would be difficult to characterize the myriad of reforms that have followed in the twenty years since the report, so-called integrative and aggregative streams run through, and often appear to conflict within, these

reform initiatives. These streams are often characterized as contrasting means to reach reform goals: top-down, centralizing versus bottom-up, decentralizing approaches. However, considering the complementary nature of centralizing neo-conservative approaches to standards and testing and decentralizing neo-liberal market, and quasi-market reforms, “top-down” and “bottom up” is a problematic characterization. As discussed below, a better dialectic, is that of “outside-in” versus “inside-out” offered by Sloan (2002).

### **Reforms following *A Nation at Risk*: Integrative and Aggregative**

*A Nation at Risk* warned of America’s weakened position vis-à-vis her global economic competitors due to an erosion of standards in its public school system. Emphasizing “twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling”, the report demanded, “All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost” (p. 1). Given the high profile of the critique, as well as its tenor and breadth, it is not surprising that the years that followed witnessed numerous, ambitious efforts to stem the rising “tide of mediocrity” decried in the report.

Although *A Nation at Risk* received a great deal of attention, the release of the report coincided with a number of other reports by Boyer (1983), Goodlad (1984), and Sizer (1984) advocating major reforms to the educational system. These reports emphasizing “bottom-up” approaches of empowering teachers, differed from *A Nation at Risk*, favoring a “top-down” approach of raising standards and accountability (Lunenburg, 1992). Although either can be defended as a legitimate means to the same

end of reforming schools to serve all students, top-down and bottom-up approaches function from distinctly different loci of control, external and internal respectively, and thus function very differently.

Jepperson and Meyer (1991) cite external forces generating “cultural isomorphism” through competition and diffusion of innovation as a source of institutional change. "Isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions," (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 68). The inducement of "coercive isomorphism" through policy changes legislated in "systemic reforms" is intended to bring coherence in the public school mission (Vinovskis, 1996). Mawhinney (1996) argues that the standards and assessment movement offers one example of this type of integrating force, seeking to change school from the “top-down” by establishing and monitoring progress toward common goals and controlling incentives and sanctions for attainment or lack thereof.

Neo-liberals favoring free market approaches are adamantly opposed to centralized, social intervention (Friedman & Friedman, 1982; Hayek, 1994), and thus would ostensibly oppose top-down, neo-conservative reforms. However, as discussed in the introduction, these apparently opposed approaches to reform can be understood as complementary aspects of a “conservative modernization” (Apple, 2001b). Both approaches reflect a common approach to reform schools from the “outside-in” (Sloan, 2002). Appeals for school choice stem from a belief in market forces to provide the external impetus to align schools to public expectations (Chubb & Moe, 1988; Coleman, 1992; Friedman & Friedman, 1982).



In contrast to top-down and/or outside-in approaches, Mawhinney notes, “the professional imperative in current reform initiatives directs policy makers to adopt *bottom-up* strategies that focus on classroom and school-level changes that enhance professionalization of teaching” (1996, p. 31: italics added). Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Weick (1976) have emphasized the importance of legitimating myths as integrating forces in otherwise “loosely coupled” systems. Given the loose coupling of schools, Moorman and Ergemeier (1992) posit the generation of an “integrative myth” to provide coherence and direction needed for successful reform. Broadening the “in group” to include parents and community members, school-based management models draw on a similar logic of generating the collective drive for reform from the “inside-out” through more collaborative and deliberative decision-making (Elmore & associates, 1990; Murphy, 1991).

Arguably, effective reform “packages” might strike some complementary balance between these contrasting drivers of institutional change. However, as discussed later in the chapter, “critical” perspectives drawing from the work of Jurgen Habermas suggest otherwise. That is, these contrasting “inside-out” and “outside-in” drivers of reform are not reconcilable in some simple way. Moreover, from this viewpoint many of the very issues of inequity and injustice generating the need for reform stem from the encroachment of outward-in directives at the expense of inside-out initiative(s). In Habermasian terms, instrumentally derived system imperatives “colonize the lifeworld” interrupting the creation of more humane cultural norms through the moral-practical insight inherent in communicative action (Habermas, 1987). Habermas’s system-lifeworld framework is discussed in greater detail in a later section of the chapter.

The next section examines three “waves” of reform visited upon schools in the twenty years since the release of *A Nation at Risk*. Reflecting an “outside-in” perspective, these reforms are often grouped in the literature as three “waves”. However, as discussed in the following section, the wave metaphor reflects an incomplete and arguably distorted outsider’s view. Thus, it is argued, this macro-level view must be complemented with one from within providing a micro-level account of how stakeholders negotiate and navigate the reform “streams”, new and old, converging at the campus level.

### **Reexamining reforms following *A Nation at Risk* from the outside-in**

Reforms following the Nation at Risk report are often delineated as successive “waves” (Desimone, 2002; Elmore, 1990; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Smith & O’Day, 1991; Vinovskis, 1996). The first wave is characterized as an intensification of the existing system by increasing standards for students and teachers. A second wave, beginning in the mid 1980s, focused on restructuring schools through more fundamental changes in student expectations, teacher practice, school organization and governance (Elmore, 1990). Desimone (2002) posits the widespread adoption of Comprehensive Schoolwide Reform (CSR) models as a third wave of reforms initiated in the late 1990s. As discussed below, the wave metaphor is problematic in that it suggests a surge and passing away of reforms that, in fact, remain long after the zeal for them has died out. Prior to reframing reform as confluence rather than waves, the literature is reviewed to sketch the characteristics and reported impact of three reform “waves”.

### *Wave 1 reforms: Intensification*

A central critique of the Nation at Risk report concerned the erosion of academic standards. Thus, the initial wave of reforms focused primarily on intensification of the existing system. Reflective of integrative governance, states dramatically increased activism vis-à-vis local education authorities during this period (Elmore, 1997; Fuhrman, 1989; Timar, 1997). Leaving in tact the existing institutional design, the initial reforms functioned from the outside-in to reinforce and repair the existing bureaucratic infrastructure by increasing graduation requirements, extending the instructional day and year, and standardizing delivery and assessment of a basic skills curriculum (Elmore, 1990; Smith & O'Day, 1991; Vinovskis, 1996).

Critics charged that the initial round of reforms was insufficient on several counts, some emphasizing stronger outside-in approaches (improved coherence in state reform policies) and others inside-out approaches (increasing direct involvement of teachers in the process) (Smith & O'Day, 1991). In addition to dissatisfaction with the initial reforms, Murphy (1991) identified a number of factors underlying the call for a second wave of reforms: pressure to align the educational system with the rapidly changing post-industrial economy, a growing population of “at-risk” students poorly served by traditional schools, a graying teaching force and high turnover of young teachers due to working conditions, dissatisfaction with the educational bureaucracy, and borrowing from corporate and “effective schools” models. These criticisms were the impetus for a second wave of “systemic” reforms.

### ***Wave 2 reforms: Systemic reform***

Given the dissatisfaction with the initial reforms, a second wave emerged in the mid 1980s aimed at a “fundamental rethinking and restructuring of the process of schooling, not a mere bolstering of the existing one. Decentralization, professionalization, and bottom up change are the key concepts, as reformers focus on the change process and those closest to instruction” (Smith & O’Day, 1991, p. 234). Despite the apparent “inside-out” theme, Vinovskis (1996) notes that the dominant model of “systemic reform” as articulated and advocated by Smith and O’Day, was simultaneously “outside-in” emphasizing the importance of coherent and aligned state policy to encourage and direct local level reform. Thus, Smith and O’Day appear to reflect the middle ground between those favoring more decentralized models focused on devolving authority to local districts (Clune, 1993) and those favoring more centralized models focused on creating higher curricular standards and enforced through testing (Finn, 1990). The “loose coupling” (Vinovskis, 1996) of these alternate streams of thought in the second wave of so-called systemic reforms create dilemmas for those implementing reforms featuring the opposing outside-in and inside-out schools of thought noted above.

### **Devolving authority: Promoting change from the inside out.**

*Overview:* During the 1980s, a relatively small but potent network of reformers spearheaded by the Carnegie Corporation was promoting school-based management (SBM) reforms (Mazzoni, 1995). This type of reform concerned “restructuring” schools in ways that “encouraged the redistribution of decision-making authority to the local

school” (Stevenson & Schiller, 1999). Proponents of this type of devolution of authority contend “decentralized units, increase knowledge about, access to, and participation in governance; make organizations easier to change; and prevent undue consolidation of power at geographically distant locations and hierarchically remote organizational levels” (Murphy, 1991, p. 2). With regard to substantive involvement, Sarason (1991, p. 51) argued that in failing to include teachers, “the educational decision making process ignored the creativity and experience of people with an obvious stake in improving our schools. On a psychological level, Ogawa and Bossert (1995) suggest the symbolic aspect of the participation in governance may lead to indirect benefits of increased motivation and ownership by stakeholders.

By the mid 1990s, federal legislation was also promoting devolution of authority to local schools. The Improving America’s Schools Act (“Improving America's Schools Act of 1994,” 1994) states, “decentralized decisionmaking [sic] is a key ingredient of systemic reform. Schools need the resources, flexibility, and authority to design and implement effective strategies for bringing their children to high levels of performance.” Similarly, Title III of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (“Goals 2000: Educate America Act Pathways,” 1994) suggests “parents, teachers, and other local educators, and business, community, and tribal leaders must be involved in developing systemwide [sic] improvement strategies that reflect the needs of their individual communities”.

*Related research:* Despite hopes for dramatic improvements, early evidence of the effectiveness of devolution of authority in terms of altering curriculum and instruction and subsequently improving student appeared limited. In a study of shared decision-

making (SDM)<sup>9</sup> in twelve schools across eleven states, Weiss (1993) found limited impact on curriculum and instruction and suggested the hopes for “unleashing teacher creativity” through restructuring were “overly optimistic” (p. 73). In contrast, Wagstaff (1995) found evidence that SBM impacted curriculum and instruction. However, her observation that the impact on curriculum and instruction occurred under “strong district-wide guidance and other forms of control” (p. 70) suggests that schools acted within a limited grant of autonomy. In a review of the literature, Fullan (1993) found that SBM led to greater involvement of teachers in school-wide decisions, but had limited impact on teaching behaviors. In a review two years later, Murphy and Beck (1995) also found that the link between SBM and student learning outcomes was weak although they caution that variation policy design and implementation preclude general assessments of effectiveness of SBM as a single reform.

Sarason (1991) cautioned that the adoption of site-based decision-making should not be justified on instrumental grounds such as rapidly improved test scores, reduced dropout rates, etc. Instead he suggests that the justification is moral-political, resting “on the value that those who are vitally affected by decisions should stand in some meaningful relation to the decision making process,” (p. 63). Looking beyond direct impact on instruction and student achievement, SBM appears to provide indirect benefits in terms of climate and involvement. For example, Weiss (1993) found that the shared decision-making had beneficial effects on teacher morale by providing more space for teacher dialogue and discussion regarding new initiatives. In a later single school case

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<sup>9</sup>Although not identical, shared decision making (SDM) and school- or site-based management (SBM) refer to similar phenomena of devolving authority to local decision-makers.

study consistent with Weiss' findings, Beck and Murphy (1998) found that site-based management increased and energized the involvement of teachers and parents and acted as an enabling, but not causal, factor in school effectiveness.

Weiss (1993) suggests that SDM was a relatively fragile phenomena in the schools studied. "In several cases a unilateral action by the principal seemed to undermine the grant of authority to teachers and caused them to become suspicious of the 'reality' of SDM" (p. 74). The perceived tentativeness of a "grant of authority" is consistent with Smylie's (1992) findings regarding teacher willingness to participate in SDM. His study of 116 teachers in one restructuring district, found willingness to participate was limited to particular types of decisions (curriculum and instruction, not personnel) and was heavily related to perceptions of the principal's openness to sharing.

Evaluation is complicated by the fact that SBM outcomes are "entangled" with those from a variety of local, state and federal reform approaches implemented concurrently (Ogawa & White, 1994). The devolution of authority in the second wave of reflected a trade "providing greater decisionmaking [sic] authority and flexibility to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance" ("Improving America's Schools Act of 1994," 1994). Therefore, in assessing the robustness of SBM/SDM and the willingness to participate, it is particularly important to recognize the roles of related accountability reforms. Weiss (1993, p. 82), suggests how the "loose coupling" (Vinovskis, 1996) of decentralized decision-making with centralized policy, complicates and perhaps precludes substantive evaluation of decentralized decision-making:

[Teachers] are often so hedged about with state regulations, district rules, and principals' preferences that they see little latitude for change. They are used to following the rules, and their refuge from uncongenial requirements is to close the door and protect the one space, that classroom.

So, an evaluation of devolved authority must be contextualized with an account of the wider policy environment in which it is situated. Such a contextualization requires an examination of the strongly normative, outside-in effects of the performance accountability systems instituted in the second wave of reforms.

**Reforms increasing accountability: Promoting change from the outside in.**

*Overview:* Although definitions of “accountability” differ, in educational policy the term generally refers to an expectation of educational providers to report (weaker version) or justify (stronger version) the adequacy of performance to some external authority (Robinson & Timperley, 2000). The term accountability was attached to reforms in the nineties that increasingly shifted the focus from changes in input, governance and process to improved student performance outcomes with a strong emphasis on standardized testing. The result was the evolution of a new model of state and local school governance characterized by three components: 1) accountability rooted in student performance, 2) the attachment of consequences to student and school performance, and 3) the development of complex systems to compare student performance by school and by district (Elmore et al., 1996). By the late 1990s this type of performance accountability system to evaluate school and district performance was the dominant model of statewide school reform (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998). By 1995, forty-



five states adopted some form of school accountability system (National Education Goals Panel, 1996), and in 1999, nineteen states, including Texas, required students to pass some form of exit exam to graduate from high school (Gutloff, 1999).

The logic of performance accountability rests on several assumptions. First, performance accountability systems assume that student outcomes are the appropriate measure of performance (Elmore et al., 1996). Next, it is assumed that performance information will be useful to parents, teachers and students (Linn, 2001). Most important, performance accountability implicitly or explicitly assumes that individuals and systems will be motivated by performance comparisons, and will work to earn rewards or to avoid sanctions (Fuhrman, 1999; Linn, 2001). Thus, while performance accountability appears to provide space for local decision-making, this space is substantially circumscribed by the curriculum framework, testing and associated rewards and sanctions. According to Clune (1993, p. 241)

It may not be immediately obvious, but high-stakes student examinations are a key component, perhaps the cornerstone, of the centralized version of systemic educational policy. Without some incentive for performance, the top-down qualities of systemic policy become an extreme liability...But, with such powerful consequences as grade promotion, graduation, college entrance, and employment, the evidence is quite clear that teachers will teach to the test and students will be motivated.

So, standards and high stakes are effective tools in focusing attention, but raise questions about the nature of self-determination within the restructured schools.

*Related research:* As with SBM, “[performance] accountability systems ...are dynamic (over time), highly complex, [and] varied.” (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2001, p. 227) thus, evaluation of the effectiveness of this type of reform is difficult. Much like the findings on SBM, test-based accountability is popular, but evidence of the impact on improving student performance and the quality of education is quite limited (Mehrens, 1998). In one of a very few national studies of performance accountability systems, a Rand Corporation study attempted to measure changes in student achievement related to state reform efforts unrelated to changes in educational expenditures (Grissmer & Flanagan, 2001). Although the study could not distinguish contributing effects of multifaceted reforms (e.g. performance accountability, school-based management, resource redistribution, etc.) two states with notably strong performance accountability systems, Texas and North Carolina demonstrated significantly stronger gains than other states in terms of student achievement on the National Assessment of Academic Progress (NAEP).

As the model for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Bush, 2001), the Texas public school accountability system has probably received more attention in educational policy debates than any other state systems over the past five years. A number of reports praised accountability-driven reform in Texas citing more rapid reduction of performance gaps than other states (Grissmer & Flanagan, 2001; Jerald, 2001). Some contend that the performance accountability system was instrumental in promoting educational equity by focusing district leadership and public attention on performance disparities and holding schools and districts accountable for the performance of all students (Fuller & Johnson, 2001; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Other reports were skeptical, contending that the state-reported results of quick gains were misleading (Klein et al., 2000). Some were highly

critical, arguing that the high failure rates visited on poor and minority students were discriminatory (Bernal & Valencia, 2000; Haney, 2000; Natriello & Pallas, 1998), and that by obscuring issues of historical inequities and promoting vacuous or narrowly defined equity goals the system would ultimately harm the students and schools it purports to help (Black & Valenzuela, 2004; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000; McNeil, 2000; Valencia, 2000; Valencia et al., 2001; Valenzuela, 2002).

### ***Wave 3: Comprehensive School Reform***

*Overview:* Despite the limited evidence of direct impact on student achievement, SBM was a popular reform strategy (Ogawa & White, 1994). Fullan (1995) and Elmore (1995) argue that fundamental restructuring of governance and decision-making is necessary, but not sufficient to alter the core technology of schools, curriculum and instruction. Fullan argues (1995, p. 233) schools must focus on “reculturing” defined as “developing collaborative work cultures that focus in a sustained way on the continuous preparation and professional development of teachers in relation to creating and assessing learning conditions.” Toward this end, Sykes (1999) notes growing interest by the mid 1990s in the contextual variables associated with effective “professional learning communities” (Beck & Murphy, 1998; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999). By the late 1990s, scholars were researching the implementation of such communities (Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999).

With this shift toward “whole school restructuring”, is a trend toward adopting comprehensive school reform (CSR) models. Desimone (2002) credits facilitative federal legislation as driving this “third wave”. Title III of the Goals 2000: Educate

America Act ("Goals 2000: Educate America Act Pathways," 1994), finds "the reforms in education from 1977 through 1992 have achieved some good results, but such reform efforts often have been limited to a few schools or to a single part of the educational system." Calling for more substantial "restructuring" of the educational system, the act goes on to say, "strategies must be developed by communities and States to support the revitalization of all local public schools by fundamentally changing the entire system of public education through comprehensive, coherent, and coordinated improvement in order to increase student learning".

To this end, three federal initiatives promote comprehensive school: *Title I Schoolwide* created in the 1994 reauthorization of Title I, *Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration* program (CSR) created in 1998, and the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) passed in 2001. This legislation provided hundreds of millions of dollars in financial incentives to encourage schools to develop comprehensive school reforms aimed at increasing student achievement based on reliable research and effective practices.

As with the earlier reform efforts, the persistent outside-in and inside-out tension is again revealed in the CSR wave and the associated legislation. The decentralizing push to locate decision-making at the school level is juxtaposed with the normative and centralizing pressure to adopt "proven" models encouraged by financial incentives and the threat of sanction through performance accountability systems. Although CSR is relatively new and research is ongoing, this tension appears to be manifested in the adoption, implementation, and performance of these models, as noted below.

*Related research:* In a 22 school case study, Datnow (2000) finds the impetus for adoption at the district and/or campus administrative level. Moreover, she notes that the hierarchical nature of the adoption process, “thwarted” buy-in and implementation of the models. As discussed below, her use of a micropolitical lens helped illuminate the cluttered landscape and contestation reforms face at the campus level. Desimone (2002) provides a comprehensive review of the literature regarding CSR implementation noting wide variation related to issues of specificity, consistency, authority, power and stability.

As the third wave began in the late 1990s, research on the effectiveness of these reforms is ongoing. A recent Rand study examined implementation of one of the earliest comprehensive models, New American Schools (NAS) program noting wide variation in implementation and levels of success (Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002). The study concluded that schools did not readily adopt externally developed “break the mold” CSR models like NAS. However, by addressing capacity, leadership and facilitating policy at the district level these reforms could take hold. In a comparative case study of three schools implementing the School Improvement Process (SIP) model, Scribner et al (1999) noted progress in developing a professional community, but had difficulty attributing the progress to the model as opposed to antecedent conditions.

### **Reflecting on the waves of reform**

This section outlined the essential tenets of three “waves” of reform impinging on schools in the wake of the Nation at Risk report in 1983. In addition, at least two strong ideological streams were noted, one reflecting outside-in pressures to constrain and direct and the other inside out drives to generate and direct the reforms. Although in tension,

these streams are not new and, given their persistence in past reforms, are not likely to disappear. While common and to some degree useful, the wave metaphor reflects an incomplete and arguably distorted “system” level view of reform. This limited view must be complemented with a view from the “lifeworld”, that can provide a micropolitical account of how students, teachers and administrators negotiate and navigate the new and old “streams” of reforms converging at the campus level.

The following section explores the literature on “micropolitics” in developing a theoretical framework to understand the impact of these successive waves of reform at the campus level. In shifting the view from the macro level to the micro level, the metaphor of “confluence” rather than “wave” is introduced to help to conceptualize the way local actors navigate ongoing reform.

#### **MICROPOLITICS: EXAMINING THE CONFLUENCE OF REFORMS FROM THE INSIDE OUT**

The wave metaphor for the recent reform efforts promotes an ahistoricism, which is more than a little misleading. A wave is characterized by an intensification, cresting and falling away of each successive reform. While the zeal for each reform may follow this pattern, policy associated with reform often remains in place, interacting with and perhaps obstructing incoming waves. Moreover, changes in practice promoted, either intentionally or unintentionally, by the reform policy often continue well after the wave has passed and new policy arrives. Practice at the campus and classroom will thus reflect a “mélange” of old and new, simultaneously informing and being reformed by incoming reform streams (Cohen, 1991).

From a perspective outside and above, the wave metaphor is helpful in grouping some distinguishing features of successive reform approaches. However, as Tyack and Cuban (1995) note, schools change reforms as much or more than reforms change schools. Unfortunately, the wave metaphor obscures the experience of those in schools experiencing the wave. From this more micro perspective, life is both more complex and continuous than is apparent from the outside. At the micro level, confluence of reform streams seems a more appropriate metaphor than wave. The issue is not how reforms change schools, but how individuals resist, divert, and/or navigate these streams.

Stephen Ball (1987, p. 3), argues “an understanding of the way that schools change (or stay the same) and therefore of the practical limits and possibilities of educational development, must take account of intra-organizational processes”. Although the work on micropolitics by Ball and others, might yield great insight into the dynamics of decision-making resulting from “inevitable” disagreements over the direction systemic reform takes, Mawhinney (1999, p. 160) feels reformers have not “explicitly recognized the micropolitical conundrums posed by systemic change efforts.” The following section is an initial effort in addressing this blind spot.

### **Micropolitical models: Control, natural, political systems and interpretivist**

Laurence Iannaccone is generally credited with coining the term and advocating micropolitical studies, noting in 1975, these “interrelationships are the least systematically studied in the politics of education to date and may be the area in which the most important next contributions to the field’s knowledge will come” (Iannaccone, 1975, p. 43). According to Hoyle (1982, p. 88), micropolitics refers to “those strategies

by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts seek to use their resources of power and influence to further their interests.” Interest in the area grew in the 1980s and 1990s advancing the theory through numerous books and articles by scholars such as Hoyle (1982; 1986), Ball (1987), Blasé (1989; 1991a; 1991b), Marshall and Scribner (1991), Lindle (1994), and Blasé and Anderson (1995).

Mawhinney (1999) notes four dominant micropolitical models used by theorists: control systems, natural systems, political systems or interpretive systems. After briefly exploring each, I argue that a new model drawing on critical perspectives is needed to make sense of, and transform, reform policies in ways that promote more democratic and just schools for all participants.

*Control system models:* Control models derive from organizational theory emphasizing authority rather than power, portraying schools as “rational tools for achieving maximum predictability of actions and outcomes” (Mawhinney, 1999, p. 161). For example, Iannaccone’s early work on micropolitics (1975, p. 43) focused on internal subsystems, “the interaction and political ideologies of social systems of teachers, administrators and pupils within school buildings”, and external subsystems, “the interaction between professional and lay sub-systems at the building level.” His outline of the field is essentially pluralistic focusing on efforts by formal and informal groups at the school level to control turf and boundaries. Of particular interest is an ideological imperative of teachers to maintain autonomy vis-à-vis administrators and parents, and of educators to maintain the professional boundary vis-à-vis the lay public.

*Natural system models:* Still drawing from organizational theory, natural systems models conceive of organizations as organic rather than mechanistic, responsive rather



than rational, and survival rather than goal oriented (Scott, 1998). Weick's (1976) re-conceptualization of schools countered prevailing understandings of schools as rational, bureaucratic systems. Instead, he argued schools were "loosely-coupled". Moreover, he suggested that coupling was functional allowing the school, among other things, to decouple the schools public front from its core technology of instruction. Noblit, Berry and Dempsey (1991) provide one example of the micropolitics in an open system, illustrating how teachers appropriated power from the reform environment to deflect district efforts to centralize control.

*Political system models:* "Scholars...have long recognized that schools are mini political systems...[which] face difficult, divisive allocative choices" (Malen, 1995). A shortcoming of control and natural systems approaches is a tendency "to ignore values, ideologies, choices, goals, interests, expertise, history and motivation of individuals in organizations" (Mawhinney, 1999, p. 162). Responding to these shortcomings, a number of scholars offered a third micropolitical model using a political systems approach (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Burns, 1961). Political systems models are often associated with David Easton (1957; 1965). The political system is affixed to other social systems, so that,

stress in other subsystems of the social environment generates inputs or demands on and supports of the political system. The political system then reduces or converts these inputs into public decisions or outputs, which in turn feed back allocated values into the society whence the process began (Wirt & Kirst, 1982).

Political system approaches are concerned with the persistence of a particular political system as much as in the interplay among the mechanisms of the system. Although political systems models provide a useful heuristic, they present problems in that the focus is on inputs and outputs, while decisions occurring “in the box” remain obscured. In addition, systems models accept that political decisions represent “the authoritative allocation of values” (Easton, 1965), but consistent with their positivist roots, 1) treat the values as exogenous to the system, and 2) hold no position as to the proper ordering of the values.

*Interpretivist models:* Reflecting the post-positivistic shift in educational research, scholars in the late 1980s and 1990s cracked the lid on the “black box”, offering more interpretivist micropolitical accounts of schools. According to Ball (1987, p. 16),

A pragmatic and critical organizational analysis of schools must begin by being rooted in and developed upon the experiences, views and interpretations of the individual actors who constitute 'the organization' and their real and practical concerns and interests.

Ball (1987) suggested that schools were better understood as “arenas of struggle” in which conflict rather than consensus was the norm. Diverging from pluralistic political systems approaches, Ball’s work attended more closely to the individual and to conflict emanating from substantial goal and ideological diversity, noting “conflict is not necessarily totally ignored in [systems theoretic work] but is regarded, within the logic of the paradigm, as aberrant and pathological” (p. 4), but “once the loose-coupled or

anarchic character of schools and their ideological diversity are recognized then the ever-present potential for conflict must also be accepted" (p. 15).

Demonstrating similar interest in the individual and attention to conflict, Blasé (1991b, pp. 1-2) understands micropolitics this way,

Micropolitics is about power and how people use it to influence and to protect themselves. It is about conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they want. It is about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends.

To gather the insider's view, Ball (1987) employed case study analyses involving direct observation, commentaries, and interviews of various stakeholders to understand the politics of change, leadership, and the like. Eschewing simplistic portrayals of the principal as an absolute authority in the school, Ball notes the informal power available to teachers: "While they were denied access to the formal positions of power under the new regime, the 'old' teachers could exert considerable pressure through their opposition to and non-cooperation with the headteacher's new ideas" (p. 45). He spends a good deal of time identifying the strategies employed by teachers to resist or subvert imposed change from above: "Apathy or lack of interest were very effective delaying tactics, and as a result discussions would get nowhere, action would not be taken, decisions would be referred to other meetings" (p. 51). Ball's explicit rejection of a pejorative characterization of "teacher resistance" is in stark contrast to the rational systems models discussed above.

In a similar vein, Blasé (1991a, p. 363) documents teacher strategies for dealing with “closed” or authoritarian principals, “There was little interest on the teachers' part in exercising influence; they used avoidance to create and maintain physical, psychological, and social distance between themselves and closed school principals.” Connecting micropolitics to leadership, Blasé and Anderson (1995) examine the political interactions among a variety of individuals and groups: among teachers, teachers and parents, teachers and administrators, teachers and students, etc. Turning attention to administrator induction, Marshall and Mitchell (1991) investigate the importance of the “assumptive worlds” of assistant principals, to document strategies used to get along, get ahead and stay out of trouble.

### **Reconsidering micropolitical models**

The introduction of the preceding micropolitical models was deliberately ordered, with those offering more penetrating and critical analyses coming later. Although providing revealing accounts of conflict and power often hidden beneath an apolitical shroud draped over schools, the latter interpretivist accounts continue to fall short on at least two fronts. First, while Ball (1987), Blasé (1991a) and Blasé and Anderson (1995) document and problematize the use of coercive power by administrators vis-à-vis teachers, they stop short of interrogating the ways teachers are complicit in perpetuating oppressive practices within schools. Institutional myths sanctioning the concentration of power within the educational hierarchy may be at teachers' expense, but often serve their interests as well. Second, while teachers are portrayed as political actors in these accounts, they often appear to be simply reactionary, limited to working against or in

concert with administrators. This arguably stems from the treatment of interests and preference formation as exogenous rather than endogenous to the institution (Wildavsky, 1987). In either case, their agency remains tethered to power concentrated within public school hierarchies, and serving the interests of some over others. Micropolitical accounts need to: 1) move past limiting binaries (teacher-administrator, teacher-student, etc.), 2) treat as problematic the (re-)formation of interests and preferences, and 3) explore alternate points of leverage for teacher (and administrator) activism and agency that are productive rather than simply oppositional.

Acknowledging insight into organizational dynamics provided by micropolitical studies, Mawhinney (1999) suggests the findings fail to generate theoretical insight or to inform policy related to systemic reform given the ad hoc nature and hodge podge accumulation of individual cases studies from disparate perspectives. In her estimation, “micropolitical analysts must...lay out the model of organizations and the associated assumptions which frame their research...[and substantively address] the organizational dilemmas posed by restructuring proposals and efforts” (p. 164). In the following section, the literature on critical theory is drawn on to suggest an approach to micropolitics which is: 1) explicit with regard to the orienting assumptions, 2) penetrating with regard to taken for granted assumptions which obscure dilemmas posed by the outside-in and inside-out tensions of systemic reform, and 3) deliberate in efforts to resolve those tensions in equitable and just ways.

## **Focusing the micropolitical lens**

In the concluding chapter of *The micropolitics of educational leadership: From control to empowerment*, Blase and Anderson (1995) argue that, while an improvement over authoritarian and adversarial modes, facilitative leadership does not genuinely empower, but shifts control to less direct forms of meaning management. Facilitative leadership continues to be essentially traditional, as “its limited conception of democracy and empowerment tends to leave existing power relations intact” (p. 132-133). This assessment coincides with an observation by Weiss (1993) regarding wariness of teachers to participate in shared decision-making. Quoting her at length,

It is hard to avoid the sense that in most of the SDM schools we studied, teachers are being co-opted. They are given a limited role in decision-making, and the extent of their authority is ambiguous. Whatever authority they have can be withdrawn. Most of them say that, for all the SDM machinery, the principal is in charge--and a large number say that the principal ought to be in charge because he or she is accountable for the school. Because of their awareness that their preferences can be overridden if in conflict with those of the principal or district administrators, they self-censor what they propose. Canny administrators, therefore, can manipulate the SDM process with small cues about where the zone of acceptability ends. Should teachers actually propose an action that meets administrative resistance, everybody knows who will win (p. 87).

The goal of restructuring, a genuine re-norming of the institutional framework of schools, is undermined when schools are situated in an accountability environment emphasizing traditional hierarchical administrative structures.

### *A closer look at systemic reforms*

Weiss's observation suggests that a deeper and more critical examination of systemic reforms might reveal tensions between manifest and latent goals in the pairing of devolution of authority and increased accountability. A number of critical researchers express similar concerns regarding the degree to which new management techniques such as SBM and SDM symbolically call for greater participation in decisions which are effectively predetermined or severely circumscribed (Apple, 2000; Bates, 1995; Engel, 2000; Gee & Lankshear, 1995). Engel (2000) argues that "restructuring [through SBM] is in every sense a top-down reform, despite its bottom-up rhetoric" (p. 126)... and the corporate model from which it derives "particularly objectionable because it adopts the style and rhetoric of democratic decision-making but not the actuality, and the former conceals the latter." (p. 133) Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996, p. xvii) suggest the adoption of corporate styled management strategies reflects "a growing alignment between school reformers and reforms and the desires and needs of the new [or alternately fast-] capitalism, both in theory and practice". Bates (1995, p. 11) notes, "Central to [so-called 'fast capitalism'] management strategies...is the construction and communication of 'vision', which persuades and provokes 'commitment' to 'shared' organizational goals".

Thus, while the apparent inside-out themes in restructuring policies such as SBM and SDM seem on the surface to devolve authority and empower those at the site, there is at least a hint of manipulation lurking beneath the surface. "Paradoxically though [workers in the new capitalism] are meant to think for themselves and even leverage critical capacities to redesign their work practices, they are not supposed to challenge the

basic values and ideologies of their workplaces or of the new capitalist society itself" (Gee, 1999, p. 3). According to Michael Apple (2000; see also Engel, 2000; Gee et al., 1996; Giroux, 1993), "rightist" reform policies inscribe education into an "eloquent fiction" valorizing the free market, demonizing government intervention in social concerns, reinforcing an achievement ideology, 'disciplining culture and the body', and popularizing Social Darwinism. He argues,

The seemingly contradictory discourse of competition, markets, and choice on the one hand and accountability, performance objectives, standards, national testing, and national curriculum on the other...actually oddly reinforce each other and help cement conservative educational positions into our daily lives (paragraph 7).

Without suggesting some sort of malevolent conspiracy, it is import to consider the possible interests served by reform agendas and origin of the "common sense" that undergirds the reforms (Anderson, 2004).

The dilemmas of devolving of authority within a policy environment circumscribed by performance accountability systems are likely to remain obscured by research grounded in traditional administrative theory. Attending to instrumental rationality (identifying the appropriate means to a given end), traditional positivistic epistemologies offer no insight into formal or substantive rationality (seeking appropriate and valued ends) (Forester, 1993).

Schools, in these [traditional research] perspectives, are seen merely as instructional sites. That they are also cultural and political sites is ignored, as is the notion that they represent arenas of contestation and struggle among differently empowered cultural and economic groups (Giroux, 1983, p. 3).



A brief examination of post-positivistic epistemologies may be helpful in selecting research lenses sensitive to the political and cultural dimensions of organizations.

*A closer look at alternative epistemologies*

Foster (1986, p. 56) noted twenty years ago, "most research done in educational administration and organizational theory can be labeled functionalist in character. It is particularly acritical in nature; it treats organizations as concrete realities outside the individual lives of those persons within them and it takes a fairly optimistic view of theory's ability to restructure organization." A decade later, Scheurich (1997c, p. 30) suggested little had changed, "most social science research, including that in education, continues to take place within the general parameters derived from positivism, though largely without the almost fanatical logical purity sought by positivists." As a result, the resulting knowledge base and epistemologies in educational administration carry strong race, gender and class bias (Scheurich, 1995; Scheurich & Young, 1997).

Challenges to the positivistic tradition began in earnest almost thirty years ago. Examining the positivistic "quest for a scientific knowledge base" Culbertson (1988) identified challenges by Greenfield (1975), Foster (1980), and Bates (1982) as introducing post-positivistic alternatives within the study of educational administration. According to Donmoyer (1999, p. 26): "the net effect of the Greenfield and Bates critiques, when seen in tandem, is essentially to call into question the legitimacy and appropriateness of the previous century's quest for a scientific knowledge base and the professional status such a knowledge base confers." By the mid to late 1990s, several paradigms had, to use Donmoyer's (1999) metaphor, found their way under the "big tent"

of educational administration. The diversity of the field precludes in depth treatment of each, but several themes should be introduced briefly, including post-positivistic science, interpretivism, postmodernism, and critical theory. Given its central place in this study, critical theory is then explored more thoroughly.

*Post-positivistic science:* Attempting to correct a number of the shortcomings of positivism without losing the perceived benefits of scientific approaches, some scholars advocate post-positivistic science. Willower argues for an “ethical” and “naturalistic” perspective on inquiry, which retains scientific methods emphasizing openness and self-correction while downplaying positivistic emphasis on “verifiable knowledge”. While maintaining positivism’s fact-value distinction, Willower suggests science “can abet the resolution of moral problems.” Like Willower, Evers and Lakomski (1996, p. 381) promote a post-positivistic science using a “coherence theory of justification” employing “supra-empirical” categories such as "consistency, simplicity, comprehensiveness, fecundity, and explanatory unity" to judge theoretical merit.

*Interpretivism/Constructivism:* Often credited with precipitating much of the clamor for alternatives to positivism in educational administration, Thomas Greenfield advocated interpretivist or phenomenological approaches, which explicitly acknowledge the value-ladenness of theories and thus facts in social scientific inquiry. He argues with Ribbins, (1993, p. 10)

While the cultural scientist may not discover ultimate social reality, he can interpret what people see as social reality and indeed, he must do so according to a consistent, logical, and rigorous methodology. It is such a discipline for

interpreting human experience, which provides the science in the cultural scientist's work, not his ability to discover ultimate truths about social structure.

Following Greenfield, numerous scholars in educational administration have offered interpretivist or constructivist accounts of school life. As noted above, the work by Ball (1987), Blasé (1991a), Blasé and Anderson (1995), Marshall and Mitchell (1991) and Noblit et al (1991) all feature essentially interpretive accounts of school micropolitics.

*Postmodernism:* A number of scholars have advocated use of postmodern methods in educational administration (Anderson, 1998; Maxcy, 1994b; Scheurich, 1997b). Noting the failure of traditional rational and technical methods to solve current social problems in and around schools, Maxcy (1994a, p. 10) advocates postmodern approaches to educational administration “draw[ing] on new philosophy, literary theory, qualitative research methods, and other nontraditional intellectual backings.” Within a postmodern vein, Scheurich advocates the use of “policy archeology” borrowing strongly from Foucault’s work “to investigate the intersection or, better, the constitutive grid of conditions, assumptions, forces which make the emergence of a social problem, and its strands and traces, possible--to investigate how a social problem becomes visible as a social problem” (p. 98). Bushnell (2003) draws on Foucault’s study of disciplining techniques, to examine the effects of current accountability-styled reforms on teacher practice and professionalism.

*Critical approaches:* Following the lead of Foster and Bates, a number of scholars have promoted value-oriented critical inquiry in educational administration (Anderson, 1989, 1990; L?ez, 2003; Lugg, 2003; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999;

Robinson, 1994; Young, 1999). Anderson (1990) noted the preponderance of functionalist research in educational administration reinforced a management and control perspective, and argued for critical approaches to reveal the subtle ways meaning mobilization and management reproduce dominant social arrangements. Arguing nearly a decade later that “most educational policy studies take place within a traditional rationalist frame,” Young (1999, p. 677) suggests, “the findings ...do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the problems being researched, and thus, should not be used as the sole basis for making educational policy.” She goes on to posit that a failure to consider non-traditional policy perspectives, “lead to ignorance of issues... that have the potential not only to strengthen the policy process but also to better address the concerns held by members of nonmajority populations” (p. 679). Young advocates the use of multi-focal analysis in which critical interpretations are juxtaposed against traditional accounts to reveal these obscured issues.

### *A closer look at critical theory*

Critical theory is a style of analysis elucidating the sources of domination and authority in society that constrain human freedom. Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer, social theorists at The Institute for Social Research commonly referred to as “The Frankfurt School”, are generally credited with initiating this work in Germany in the years between the first and second world wars. Drawing heavily from the Marxist tradition, critical theory deviates Marxism’s heavy materialist emphasis shifting attention to, among other things, the importance of mass communication and media in shaping culture and ideology (Horkheimer, 1972b; Horkheimer & Adorno,

1972; Marcuse, 1991). Although his work has critiqued and revised that of his predecessors, Jurgen Habermas is the leading representative of the Frankfurt School.

In the eighty years since its inception, “critical theory” has spawned innumerable offshoots with different theoretical underpinnings and emancipatory agendas. Despite the apparent divisions within this area, perspectives grouped under critical theory are generally distinguished from positivism and other post-positivistic schools by an explicit commitment to combining an emancipatory orientation with active transformative practice (Scheurich, 1995). “Inquiry that aspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere within the society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label “political” and unafraid to consummate a relationship with an emancipatory consciousness.” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 264)

Beginning with William Foster (1986) and Richard Bates (1980; 1982) in the early 1980s, a number of scholars in educational administration have called for increased use of critical inquiry in educational administration (Anderson, 1989, 1990; L?ez, 2003; Lugg, 2003; Parker et al., 1999; Robinson, 1994; Young, 1999). Over the past twenty years the use of “critical” inquiry as defined by Kincheloe and McLaren above has grown substantially. Although differing in focus and holding or emphasizing different assumptions, the “critical” theories share the axiological framework noted above. The growth in this area is suggestive of the appeal and acceptance of critical epistemologies. A brief list of critical approaches includes a variety of feminist theories, critical race theory, queer theory, cultural studies, and critical pedagogy.

As argued at the conclusion of the previous section, micropolitical accounts often offer limiting teacher versus administrator binaries at the expense of more penetrating critique which might identify alternate points of leverage for teacher (and administrator) activism and agency that are productive rather than simply oppositional. Although any of the alternative perspectives noted might enhance micropolitical inquiries into dilemmas created by the confluence of contradictory reforms streams, as argued below, a critical examination of the micropolitics of reform appears to hold the greatest potential due to: 1) an explicit value framework, and 2) an emphasis on reflexivity and self-critique, and 3) a commitment to transformative practice.

### **Situating micropolitics within a critical perspective**

Mawhinney (1999) asserts, “micropolitical analysts must...lay out the model of organizations and the associated assumptions which frame their research...[and substantively address] the organizational dilemmas posed by restructuring proposals and efforts” (p. 164). Reframing micropolitical inquiry within a critical perspective is one means to address these concerns.

With regard to the first concern, the orientational and epistemological assumptions of critical research are both explicit and consistent (Carspecken, 1996). In the post-positivistic era, recognition of the value-ladenness of any epistemology appears to leave all criteria of theoretical justification open to charges of subjectivism (Evers & Lakomski, 1996; Scheurich, 1994, 1997c). Critical inquiry is neither neutral nor objective, but is decidedly partisan in its attempt to reveal and transform exploitive relations between persons through reflexive action on the part of those in unjust and

inequitable situations (Aronowitz, 1972; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). However, while the unapologetic value-orientation flies in the face of traditional research, critical epistemologies are anchored to intersubjective validity to avoid the relativism of constructivists and so-called ludic postmodernists (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998).

The explicit axiological stance of critical approaches also provides leverage to address the dilemmas alluded to in the second concern. A critical approach to micropolitics would pay particular attention to the dilemmas posed by systemic reforms, dilemmas obscured by the avowed agnosticism of positivism and the relativism and potential nihilism of some postmodern epistemologies. In viewing schools as mere “instructional sites” traditional research generally ignores their role as cultural and political sites (Giroux, 1983). The characterization of schools as sites of human capital development exemplified in *A Nation at Risk*, often accepted uncritically by reformers and researchers, allows a dramatic narrowing of an equity-focused or emancipatory reform agenda (Anderson, 2001; Apple, 2001b). For instance, using reduced achievement gaps on minimum competency tests in “core” curriculum areas as proxies for progress on equity may help deflect more difficult questions about service and opportunity gaps structured into schools and society more generally, which contribute to achievement gaps more broadly defined. In addition, characterizing schools as human capital sites reframes of claims for genuine democratic participation by students, parents and teachers from an end in and of itself, to simply a means to an end (Engel, 2000). From this point of view, limited evidence of a positive impact on student test scores (Murphy & Beck, 1995; Ogawa & White, 1994) dramatically undermines efforts to

increase workplace democracy through SBM and encourages greater administrative control.

Far from simply accepting this utilitarian and apolitical portrayal, critical theories view both the means and ends of schooling and school reform as contestable. By adopting critical perspectives “workers can use qualitative research to uncover the way power operates to construct their everyday commonsense knowledge and undermine their autonomy as professionals” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). For instance, a critical approach might interrogate the ways quasi-markets created with public performance comparison combine with assessment-driven standards movements to concentrate power in administrative hierarchies and intensify rather than professionalize teachers’ work (Apple, 2000, 2001a; Bushnell, 2003). Similarly, teachers can interrogate the way utilitarian rhetoric is used to undermine their claims to legitimate and substantive participation in determining the ends as well as the means of their work (Anderson, 1990).

The following section attempts to situate micropolitical study within a critical, Habermasian frame. In addition to providing an orienting frame of reference for intra-organizational politics, this also helps connect Habermas’s more abstract analysis of the creep of technical rationality in society, to the lived experience of “governmentality” to use Foucault’s term. That is, it is an effort to extend Habermas’s notions of critical hermeneutics into the (re-)negotiation of work in formal organizations, which he felt



## **A HABERMASIAN FRAMEWORK FOR MICROPOLITICS**

The prior section was an attempt to argue that a better understanding of the impact of and the means of navigating the “waves” of reform discussed above, requires critical inquiry into the confluence of reform policies at the campus level, placing “issues of concentration [of power] and hierarchy into perspective” (Foster, 1986, p. 69). The proposed study will examine the organization and administration of a single school in the process of negotiating new structures and culture, attempting to elucidate those taken for granted features, which underlie and perpetuate dominant relations and which also become central to the contestation for power. “What is needed is a theoretical model in which schools as institutions are viewed and evaluated, both in historical and contemporary terms, as social sites in which human actors are both constrained and mobilized” (Giroux, 1983, p. 162). To accomplish this, the study will incorporate a critical theoretical framework drawing primarily from three areas of work by critical theorist Jurgen Habermas: legitimation crises, internal colonization, and communicative action.

### **An overview of Habermas’s critical theory**

Habermas’s early work published first in the 1960s (Habermas, 1974, 1989b) centered on an historical analysis of societal evolution leading to the modern capitalist state. According to Habermas, the modern period coincides with the point when authority became legitimated from below (reflected in new reliance of fair exchange in the market and demands for popular rule) replaced legitimation from above (rooted in tradition, divine right, military might, etc) (Habermas, 1970). Liberal capitalism

developing in Western Europe reflected this shift in legitimation, and resulted in dramatic changes in the institutional framework. The economic system or “base” became the primary steering system for social production as markets developed where workers exchanged labor for material needs. Capitalists skimmed off the profit provided by excess labor. State power was scaled back dramatically and focused on maintaining a stable institutional framework enforced through a legal system, encouraging production aligned to general needs, and mitigating social inequality. Habermas suggests the basic problem of modern civilization centered on the question of how to *inequitably* but *legitimately* distribute the excess social product.

This dilemma animated reconfiguration of Western European society and government, notably in Britain and France, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the emergence of two key differentiations: state from market and private from public (Habermas, 1987). The central element of the first is noted above. Traditional authority gave way to a growing preference for markets to “freely” and “fairly” exchange labor and goods according to the interests and preferences of the involved individuals. The economy thus began to take on a prominent role in “steering” social production and distributing the social product. The state role was much reduced and subject to sanction “from below”. This split is largely consistent with the Marx’s base-superstructure dichotomy.

As state activity took on a complementary rather than dominant role over the market, the private entrepreneur, previously excluded from state decision-making, took an increasing interest in state affairs. According to Habermas, from a “structural transformation” of bourgeois society emerged a “critical public sphere”, which mediated

between the state, the market and the private lifeworld of the citizens constituting it (Habermas, 1989b). This critical public sphere assumed a legitimating authority vis-à-vis the state, and maintained this authority through public dialogue about state activity in the press and informal public spaces such as salons and coffee houses. Within these spaces, private (read white and male) citizens deliberated the nature of the social contract between state and citizen. Through this critical public sphere and the potential spark of an intrinsic emancipatory intent, Habermas appears to view the state steering system (the superstructure) as potentially responsive and offers the individual an to temper the alienation subservience to the economic steering system (the base). Thus, he offers a less deterministic account than Marx.

While sympathetic to the general thrust of his critique, Habermas notes that Marx's commentary corresponded to early or "liberal" capitalism characterized by relatively small, independent firms, competitive markets, and a small state. He notes (Habermas, 1970) this critique preceded both large trust capitalism and the growth in state intervention and regulation in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century. With regard to the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marx didn't anticipate: a) the state influence on production through the support of research and development, or b) the growth of social-welfare state to stabilize society by mitigating material inequality and subsequently encroaching on public/private spheres. With regard to the latter, the welfare state treatment of citizens as clients submerges but does not eliminate class antagonism,

and precipitates an increasing reliance on ideology maintenance through distorted communication to maintain social stability.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the obvious shortcomings of the critique, Habermas maintains Marx's early mission to subject the institutional framework to critique and thus deliberate "practical" action. In his analysis, Habermas diverged from earlier critical theorists by suggesting that many of the sociopathologies resulting from rationalization did not result from modernization per se, but from the "peculiar nature of capitalist modernization" (McCarthy, 1991). Habermas locates the most pernicious problems of late capitalism in demise of key features of earlier capitalism, particularly the erosion of the critical capacities of the "public sphere" (Habermas, 1989b). Thus, Habermas does not view capitalism as inherently problematic, but out of balance and in some sense "treatable".

Habermas conceptualizes the primary problem of late capitalism as a "one-sided rationality", an over-reliance on "purposive-rational" action to the exclusion of "moral-practical" or communicative action (Habermas, 1973, 1987). In this lop-sided view the modern problem of fairly distributing the social product is essentially a "technical" problem that may be resolved by improved control systems. The primary thrust of his critique of late capitalist society the technical solutions informed by utilitarian rationality and operating through administrative and economic steering systems, undermine socially integrative character of communicative rationality rooted in practical speech and action in the lifeworld. In addition to being direct alienating effects, this encroachment contributes

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<sup>10</sup> This management of culture is the prime target for early critiques by the Frankfurt school, arguing that the erosion of critical capacities by a citizenry entrapped by the "culture industry" has sapped the revolutionary potential of the working class.

to the erosion of the critical capacity of the public sphere as citizens are relegated to roles of client and consumer by the state and market respectively (Habermas, 1987, 1989b).

Habermas, like Marx, views this problem of creating a more just institutional framework as essentially normative not technical, and thus amenable to moral-practical action rather than purposive-rational action. Eschewing traditional Marxism, Habermas does not anticipate nor call for a utopian “post-capitalist” society. Instead, he envisions a dynamic balance among market forces, state administrative power, and the power of the citizenry emanating from the private and public spheres of the lifeworld. That is, the deliberate reconstruction of the institutional framework must draw on rationality rooted in communicative action, arguing about and attempting to reach consensus around normative claims. To this end, he advocates reclamation of communicative rationality and reinvigoration of the critical public sphere by enhancing communicative competence among citizens by attending to conditions for “ideal speech situation” in which reason prevails over power (Habermas, 1979).

### **Invoking Habermas to understand school reform**

While Habermas’s work focuses on societal-level change stemming from the interactions of major steering systems (market and state) with the generalized private and public “lifeworlds” of the citizenry, his insights into the nature of legitimating authority through communication action offers insight into both macro- and micropolitical issues in the current school reform environment. Rather than review Habermas’s work here, the following section briefly introduces the application of a number of Habermasian concepts to the current study. Three aspects of Habermas’s vast body of work are incorporated in

the chapters that follow to gain some insight into a state's development of, a school district's response to, and a school's contention with performance monitoring systems in Texas public education. Each concept will receive more elaborate treatment in the subsequent analyses.

*Legitimation crisis:* Chapter four applies Habermas's earlier theoretical work on social evolution and legitimacy crises in *Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Sphere* (1989b, originally published in 1962), *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), and *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979) to account for the rise of performance monitoring systems in response to eroding public confidence in schools. This account is explicitly contrasted with a rational-technical account informed by public or rational choice theories. Characterizing performance monitoring as a legitimacy project premised on this narrower technical rationality, this analysis of accountability policy development lays the groundwork for the subsequent examination of district responses to accountability pressures. The chapter concludes with an examination of an inherent efficiency bias in the "decisionism" characteristic in traditional administration, a bias embedded in and intensified by the performance monitoring system that will likely undermine equity efforts.

*Internal colonization:* Chapter five focuses on the intensification of a "management discourse" (Apple, 2001c; Ball, 1990b; Gee et al., 1996) by a district responding to pressures emanating from the performance monitoring system. Habermas's (1987) conceptualization of "internal colonization" emanating from his system-lifeworld analysis is employed to understand the increased administrative control of work at the campus and classroom level. This colonization, legitimated by the

rational-technical logics noted above, is evidenced in a series of administrative initiatives centralizing control and marginalizing teachers, parents and community members in decision-making.<sup>11</sup>

While acknowledging administrative systems as characteristic of modern society, Habermas expresses concern that the “anomie” of modern life noted by Durkheim (1984) cannot be overcome by an administrative ordering of society. Ultimately, “colonization of the lifeworld by system imperatives...drive moral-practical elements out of private and political-public spheres of life” (Habermas, 1987, p. 325) leading to “deformation of everyday practice, [in which] symptoms of rigidification combine with symptoms of desolation” (p. 327). Chapter five concludes with a presentation of teacher perceptions of and feelings about the central administrative encroachment into the campus and classroom.

*Communicative Action:* In many ways chapters four and five depict an increasingly stifling work environment for local educators. As Ball (1987) notes, the boundaries of control are continually changing and differ among and within schools. Carspecken (2002) notes that workers will inevitably find ways to resist and deflect the alienating effects of managerial control. To better understand how this occurs, it is worth invoking Habermas in an area that he appeared to believe the system was nearly totalizing: the formal organization. McCarthy (1991) finds Habermas’s distinction

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<sup>11</sup> The intensification of the management discourse in response to an impending legitimation crises was presciently outlined by the late William Foster using a Habermasian framework nearly three years before the Nation at Risk report and two decades before the No Child Left Behind Act (Foster, 1980).

between system and lifeworld is too stark, and suggests that system processes may rely to varying degrees on socially integrative communicative action. He notes,

He [Habermas] insists that social-integrative mechanisms are put out of play in formal organizations...And yet it seems obvious that there are also situations...in which they [organizational superiors] know they cannot achieve their goals without collegiality, cooperation, mutual understanding. The ratio of power to agreement in the actual operation of administrations seems, in short, to be a thoroughly empirical question which allows of no general answer (p. 129)

While Habermas's approach has much to offer in terms of orienting a micropolitical approach, this critique points to apparent oversimplification that might compromise an investigation of systemic reform. Again, from McCarthy (1991)

In short, there is no general answer to the question of where and when and how participatory planning may be more effective than non-participatory planning. It can only be answered by testing and learning in different and changing circumstances (p. 133).

Thus, an investigation of micropolitics might avoid assuming a strict dichotomy between systemically and socially integrated processes and instead seek empirical answers to the questions of balance and interaction.

In chapter six the analysis shifts to the organizational level, the campus, and attention turns to a third element of Habermas's work, his communicative action theory (Habermas, 1979, 1987). In re-crafting his critical theory, Habermas employs a communicative foundation which "conceptualizes knowledge and social practice not in terms of a duality between subject and object...but through a reconceptualization of *the*



*subject as inherently intersubjective*” (Agger, 1998, p. 94, italics in original). For Habermas, language and communication are the central features of the human lifeworld. In conjunction with self-reflection, language and communication hold potential to resist the systemic imperatives of money and power and to recast society in humane ways.

The central assumption of Habermas’s critical hermeneutic approach is that truth claims can be resolved in the lifeworld through reasoned discussion resulting in consensus. In this case, the encroachment of the system (central office administration) on the lifeworld (campus and classroom) noted in chapter five, is contrasted with communicative action emerging within the campus in the period of achievement growth. In recounting and analyzing this story, Habermas’s critical hermeneutic approach is used to understand the micropolitical renegotiation of work and leadership norms at the campus through the partnership activities with the university. Employing these opportunities to raise and discursively redeem “truth claims” about the organization as a normative model, the intensified management discourse of the previous chapter is reconsidered.

Through the three chapters, the interplay of legitimation pressures, colonization efforts, and communicative action are drawn out and the influence of state and district macro-politics on campus-level micropolitics elucidated. By situating the micropolitical examination of the renegotiation of work and leadership norms within Habermas’s more societal level analysis a broader range of influential actors and factors come into view that might otherwise be obscured. Further, importance of and the possibilities for local level activism become more apparent: elucidating structures points to the spaces and fissures where and against which agency can take shape.

## **Addressing caveats and critiques of Habermas**

While Habermas's work has enjoyed a good deal of praise, it has not surprisingly also garnered a good deal of criticism. Space does not permit any thorough analysis of this discourse. Still addressing a small number of critiques germane to this study seems appropriate. One of these occurred in the preceding section: A critique of Habermas by Thomas McCarthy was introduced along with a discussion of how the critique informs the application of Habermasian thought at the organizational level. Two others concerning an apparently utopian model of communication and an overly abstract treatment of the lifeworld are addressed below.

### *Addressing the utopian model of the ideal speech space*

While Habermas's idealized conceptualization of deliberation and debate within a liberalized public sphere is a useful construct, it has some noted shortcomings related to under-appreciation of historical power disparities (Brenkman, 1995; Fraser, 1985; Jacobs, 2000). Brenkman (p. 8) notes that treatments of the public sphere by Habermas and others, "tend to subordinate the empirically rich question of the formation of publics and communicative forms to some generalized overriding model of an ideal public sphere, or alternatively, of a hegemonic public sphere." In conceptualizing campus decision-making, Habermas's "ideal speech situation" (1975), where reason rather than power prevails, must contend with power differentials among various actors or groups related to the formal administrative hierarchy as well as a variety of insider-outsider scenarios.

In practice, some participants, notably administrators and more veteran teachers, are likely to possess more informal knowledge and skill, enhancing their habitus

(Bourdieu, 1990), enabling them to decode and use site council processes to their own benefit. Confidence in one's ability to know and work "the system" creates a subtle form of capital and results in hidden power asymmetries in negotiations. Although often accepted as natural, these asymmetries deform the ideal speech situation, providing those with power advantage and increasing the likelihood that the "collective" deliberations will result in decisions that reinforce the hierarchy and the status quo.

Traditional patterns of unequal distribution of various forms of capital, economic, human, social, and symbolic, along class, gender and racial lines are likely to be manifested in campus decision-making process. Whitty, Power, and Halpin (1998) suggest that "masculinist" management models imported from the corporate world may intensify the historically gendered nature of school administration. Thus, despite the apparent devolution of authority in SBM, traditional power asymmetries between teachers and administrators in decision-making may be reinforced, regardless of the gender of the participants. Similarly, differential information availability contributes to power asymmetries, with administrators served well by the conventional emphasis on top-down flow, from administrators to teachers (Ogawa & White, 1994).

Noting that Habermas's ideal speech situation is often interpreted as action "conditions" in which distortions created by power imbalances are eliminated, Carspecken (2002) suggests instead the situation can be approached if parties actively attempt to equalize power rather than put it out of play. Here the evocative or normative aspect of the ideal situation is important as it alerts all parties with a "will to power", that is seeking agency, to potential distortions. To the degree that parties are legitimately seeking understanding (presupposed in the critical hermeneutic approach), foregrounding

these distortions as they become evident dampens their effect. That is, the normative nature of the ideal speech situation can be employed to promote and maintain some intersubjective reflexivity, which all parties have some interest in maintaining en route to understanding and action. Thus, while Habermas does not speak to issues of race-ethnicity, gender, homophobia, or even for that matter to class in concrete terms (Hanks, 2002) his framework appears to provide conceptual tools to address these issues.

### *Addressing Habermas's partial account of the lifeworld*

Hanks (2002, p. 97) notes a “descriptive failure” in Habermas owing to the “lack of ‘deep’ or ‘thick’ account of the lifeworld”. Hanks suggests Habermas’s abstract accounts are not “untrue”, but only partial. This critique of a lack of materiality and thus a limited practical value is not uncommon for critical theory in education (Robinson, 1994). In some way, this study may help to “meat of the bones” so to speak, both using Habermasian concepts to gain insight into the societal pressures animating micropolitical activity and at the same time providing “thick” descriptions of the materialization of legitimation pressures, internal colonization and communicative action as played out at the district and campus levels.

### **SUMMARY**

This chapter reviewed the literature related to three aspects of the proposed study. The chapter opened with a brief overview of educational reform identifying integrative and aggregative streams of thought running through past reform efforts, and creating tensions within systemic reforms in the years following the release of *A Nation of Risk* in

1983. After reviewing three “waves” of reform since 1983, an alternative metaphor of “confluence” was offered and the micropolitics literature was considered as a potential theoretical framework to make sense of intra-organizational issues in navigating various reform streams. Given shortcomings of past micropolitical approaches, alternate perspectives with potential to augment micropolitical theory were discussed. A case was offered to orient a micropolitical inquiry with critical theory. Finally, a number of key themes and critiques were offered associated with the work of critical theorist Jurgen Habermas, which will provide a critical frame for the micropolitical analysis of this study.

In the following chapter, I will introduce the methodology for the study. Consistent with the use of critical modes of inquiry, the methodology will draw from critical ethnographic methods associated with participatory action research.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the study methodology. After reviewing the problem, purpose and research question, the qualitative research design and ethnographic method of participatory action research are introduced with a rationale for their use. This is followed by a discussion of the selection of site and participants, data collection and analysis procedures. The following section addresses techniques to strengthen the study by attending to issues of validity and trustworthiness. The final section outlines the analyses to following in chapters four, five and six.

#### **REVIEW OF THE PROBLEM, RESEARCH QUESTION, AND PURPOSES IF THE STUDY**

Reforms of the past two decades are often described in the literature as successive “waves”. Using Habermas’s theory of legitimation crisis (Habermas, 1975) the “waves” animating school reform, can be reframed as complementary reform strands. Thus, the “top-down” intensification through the standards and assessment movement and “bottom up” restructuring models through the devolution of decision-making authority are not conflicting reforms. Instead these are complementary aspects of “performance accountability” allowing an effective separation of administrative and legitimating functions of the state.

Leaving in tact the contradictory goals of providing for social mobility and equity in opportunity, the effort to re-establish state legitimacy by redefining task

responsibilities relocates rather than resolves the legitimacy crisis. This shift in task responsibilities has several problematic consequences for local schools. First, it intensifies pressures on schools to achieve specific state defined goals without necessarily removing demands to serve other ends required of schools related to local needs, expectations or traditions. Next, the apparent gain in flexibility derived from the shift in emphasis from process to outcome increases uncertainty in how a school might meet the ends. Given the increased stakes from performance, the resulting anxiety can produce perverse and unproductive consequences such as curriculum narrowing, organizational cheating, etc. Finally, the attempts to tighten couplings within schools and districts by more explicit and higher stakes forms of accountability, interferes with the institutional mechanisms for coping with multiple goals and uncertain technologies, through the flexibility and resilience of loosely coupled systems.

School cultures will inevitably change as a result of the shift in task responsibility and the associated intensification of accountability pressures. The nature of this re-culturing depends on the differing pressures and demands on different schools, the existing school cultures and associated structures and the approaches to the re-culturing taken by the stakeholders. Borrowing Habermas's distinction between system and lifeworld integration, the operating assumption in this study that the re-culturing will reflect some combination of compliance, negotiation and resistance to encroaching systemic control by these stakeholders as they attempt to maintain or re-establish the lifeworld within these new parameters. Diverging from Habermas, it is argued that, in parallel with integrative mechanisms in the broader society, social and systemic integrative processes are similarly manifested in formal organizations (McCarthy, 1991).

This re-negotiation of the school culture, occurring through inter-subjective, communicative action in the campus “lifeworld”, reflects attempts by stakeholders to meet “praxis needs” (Carspecken, 2002) within the new policy environment. The “will to power” represented in these individual and collective attempts to meet these needs, coincides approximately with that area of study referred to as micropolitics. Blasé (1991b, pp. 1-2) characterizes micropolitics this way,

Micropolitics is about power and how people use it to influence and to protect themselves. It is about conflict and how people compete with each other to get what they want. It is about cooperation and how people build support among themselves to achieve their ends.

Unfortunately, policy makers might, but too often do not, consider micropolitics of negotiating converging systemic reforms at the campus level (Mawhinney, 1999). This study situates micropolitics within the critical theoretic framework of Jurgen Habermas in an effort to connect the broader state and societal demands for reform with the lived reality of that reform at the campus level.

### **The research question**

A study of the micropolitics of a school negotiating multiple reform streams is proposed to address the following question: What are the micropolitical dynamics manifested in the re-culturing of campus governance in response to imperatives related to the Texas performance accountability system?



## **The purposes of the proposed study**

The study seeks to understand the “struggle for betterment” (Oakes et al., 2000) by teachers and administrators at a school faced with a highly charged reform environment. The study sheds light on campus level politics manifested in negotiating, navigating and contesting accountability-related reforms. The purpose of the study is to examine and ultimately to contribute to the campus’s ongoing efforts to renegotiate power relationships and reconfigure the governance structure of the school in ways that are more just and more democratic.

Given the intent to contribute in a practical way to the efforts of the participants to articulate and enact governance structures and processes that are (more) democratic and (more) just, the study will engage participants in reflective dialogue about shortcomings in, and strategies to increase, the inclusive and democratic nature of campus governance. Toward this end the methodology of participatory action research (PAR) was selected. The choice, nature and application of this method are discussed below.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD**

### **Overview**

The past two decades have witnessed a surge in the popularity of qualitative research methods in the field of education generally, and educational administration more specifically (Donmoyer, 1999). Qualitative research however is not new but has an extensive history in social research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). However, an outgrowth of the increased use, related efforts to justify the merits of qualitative methods, and the

“reflexive turn” among qualitative researchers (Altheide & Johnson, 1998), is a growing sophistication in data collection, analysis and validation techniques available to researchers.

This study is a qualitative case study of the micropolitical dynamics of reform within a single elementary campus. Carspecken (1996) suggests all social research, quantitative and qualitative, focuses on social action (and its patterns), subjective experiences, and conditions influencing action and experience. However, he notes, where quantitative methods study phenomena indirectly through some combination of existing proxies, qualitative methods approach the phenomena of interest more directly and in doing so, generally, make explicit the ontological assumptions left obscured in traditional quantitative studies. Thus, the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) resulting from qualitative studies is appropriate given an interest in revealing the subtleties of micropolitics at the campus level.

### **Critical qualitative research**

Qualitative research is an umbrella term covering a variety of methodologies used to investigate and interpret routine and problematic social situations (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). In this case, so-called critical research methods will be used to interrogate the way experience, consciousness and cultural context are implicated in maintaining asymmetrical power relations exercised through apparently neutral administrative techniques to control subordinates (Bates, 1982; Foster, 1980; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998).

Critical research is generally associated with three characteristic emphases: an “emancipatory interest”, explicit critique of ideology, and transformative action. “Inquiry that aspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or sphere within the society” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 264). Without exception then, critical research expresses an “emancipatory interest” (Habermas, 1972) aimed at eradicating repressive relationships and power asymmetries which constrain thought and action by obscuring alternatives (Aronowitz, 1972; Carspecken, 1996; Foster, 1986).

Next, critical researchers move beyond representing participant experience and perspective and attempt to reveal systematic distortions contained in common assumptions and taken for granted accounts of the world (Carspecken, 1996; Foster, 1986; Giroux, 1983; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Thomas, 1993). To address the ideological constraints implicated in reproducing subordination, critical qualitative research engages participants in a “reflective process of choosing between conceptual alternatives and making value-laden judgments of meaning and method to challenge research, policy, and other forms of human activity” (Thomas, 1993, p. 4). That is, the research must in some way problematize the common sense, taken-for-granted aspects of the world around us in ways that make the actionable quality of these features apparent.

Finally, rather than speaking about, or for, participants, critical researchers typically participate in social action aimed at transforming the problematic condition (Brydon-Miller, 2001; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). The nature of this social action may take a variety of forms including altering cognition,

entering influential interactions with others, networking, infusing curriculum, and/or engaging in political activism (Thomas, 1993).

### **Critiques of critical research**

A number of critiques have been offered for critical approaches to research. Not surprisingly, given the development of critical theory in opposition to positivism (Horkheimer, 1972a), a number of critiques involve conflicts with the basic tenets of positivism, notably objectivity, generalizability, validity and reliability. Critical research eschews the sort of objectivity idealized in positivism in favor of a particular and explicit value orientation. Aronowitz states it this way,

Critical theory proceeds from the theorist's awareness of his own partiality. Thus theory is neither neutral nor objective. Its partisanship consists in its goals: the reconstruction of society based on nonexploitive relations between persons; and the restoration of man to center place in the evolution of human society as a self-conscious, self-managing subject of social reality.

The emphasis is on the awareness rather than the partiality, as critical researchers suggest that researchers naïve about the inherent status quo bias of traditional research are no less partisan (Horkheimer, 1972a). “Critical researchers enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 265). Thus, for critical researchers the methods of inquiry as much as the data are “in play” in a study of educational and organizational politics.

The response to the “lack of objectivity” critique by some post-positivist schools, has been acknowledgement and near valorization of relativism. A number of constructivists and so-called “ludic” postmodernists (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998) argue that the “value-determined nature of inquiry” (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) preclude the possibility of investigating a single reality. According to this critique, inherent relativism resulting from the positionality of the researcher reduces epistemological choice to little more than highly political “truth games” (Scheurich, 1997c) and any particular critical study offers one of any number of possible “constructions” of reality. Acknowledging the contributions to reflexivity by these critiques (Carspecken, 2002; Foley, 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998), critical theorists take great pains to avoid relativism (Carspecken, 1996). This critique and the critical hermeneutic response are taken up substantively in the section on validity at the end of the chapter.

Another area of critique of critical research is leveled at its practicality. Noting the gap between the promise and realized impact of critical research in educational administration, Robinson (1994) suggests that critical research is often hindered by tendencies to remain utopian and highly abstract. Both tendencies, she argues reduce the motivational and inspirational qualities necessary to sustain transformative practice within complex environments like schools.

As discussed in the following section, given the specific objectives of the study to investigate issues of control, alienation, and resistance, a particular critical approach, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was used. In addition to sharing the general features of critical research methods, the practical focus of PAR addresses the concerns raised by

Robinson. The choice also brings into play and/or exacerbates issues related to combining research, activism and advocacy. These issues and efforts to address them are discussed in the following section.

### **The method: Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

One objective of this study is to reveal the ways that individuals at the campus level comply and contend with instrumental, systemic imperatives which encroach on the campus lifeworld and are enacted through and reinforcing taken-for-granted, hierarchical concentrations of power. A second objective is to contribute to the efforts of the participants to respond to these pressures by articulating and enacting governance structures and processes that are (more) democratic and (more) just. As the purpose in this case is not only to investigate, but to participate with and engage participants in shaping the organizational culture of the school, the study will employ the method of participatory action research (PAR) (Brydon-Miller, 2001; McTaggart, 1997; Reason, 1998).

PAR is a process in which people explore the ways in which their practices are shaped and constrained by wider social (cultural, economic, and political) structures and consider whether they can intervene to release themselves from these constraints-or, if they can't, how best to work within and around them to minimize the extent to which they contribute to irrationality, lack of productivity (inefficiency), injustice, and dissatisfaction (alienation) among people whose work and lives contribute to the structuring of a shared social life (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 597-8).

### **The suitability of PAR for the purposes of the study**

The selection of PAR for this case study has a two-fold purpose. Reason (1998, p. 269) notes the double objective characteristic of critical research generally and of PAR specifically:

One aim is to produce knowledge and action directly useful to a group of people—through research, adult education, and sociopolitical action. The second aim is to empower people at a second and deeper level through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge: They "see through" the ways in which the establishment monopolizes the production and use of knowledge for the benefit of its members.

The current study focuses on the micropolitical behavior of teachers contending with converging, and often conflicting, reforms imposed through federal, state, district and campus mandates. Although the loosely-coupled nature and ideological diversity of schools makes micropolitical conflict within school inevitable (Ball, 1987), these conflicts are not settled on a level playing field. Within schools, power is by no means distributed equally among administrators, teachers, parents, and students. As Ball (p. 8) notes, "schools occupy an uneasy middle ground between hierarchical work-organizations and member-controlled organizations." Power asymmetries often lurk within the conventions and standard operating procedures of public school bureaucracies.

Unfortunately, the traditional binaries of traditional education studies (researcher-subject, teacher-student, administrator-teacher, teacher-parent, etc.) generally fail to problematize "the existing hierarchical arrangement of the workplace...[and the associated] assumptions upon which the cult of the expert and scientific management are

based” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 284). An orienting assumption of critical research is that the unjust privileging of one group at the expense of another that characterizes contemporary societies, is facilitated when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). The thrust of critical research such as PAR is to interrupt these ideologies and “open to scrutiny hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain” (Thomas, 1993, p. 2-3). In this study, this will be done through an on-going dialogue with teachers regarding courses of action that will best serve the campus and its students.

Critical research possesses a second feature adding to its appeal in a study of workplace micropolitics: the potential to transform power asymmetries. The reflexive study of practice with practitioners is inherently political and can spur changes in practice (Brydon-Miller, 2001; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). “Power is at bottom logically tied to agency when agency is understood as inclusive of a need for self-production” (Carspecken, 2002, p. 67). The activities associated with reconfiguring the campus structure and culture of governance require that the teachers involved re-examine traditional governance and extant policy for leverage points or spaces that create untapped opportunities for agency.

Interestingly, among critical researchers, PAR has been criticized for perpetuating systems of control by mediating between the more and less powerful (Thomas, 1993). That is, the more pragmatic approach addressing Robinson’s concern is thought to actually dampen the critical thrust. Lather’s (1991) concept of “catalytic validity” discussed below appears to be an attempt to address this concern. According to this



concept, a study is more or less valid to the degree to which it captures the attention of, and motivates the participants to take action to transform the unjust and unsatisfying conditions they face. The critique is also deflated if PAR is employed as an ongoing strategy to critique and flatten the hierarchy, rather than a one shot attempt to secure power in the organization.

### **SELECTION OF THE SITE AND PARTICIPANTS**

The proposed case study will focus on the micropolitics within a single elementary campus contending with systemic reform. While reform policy is often developed at the macro, the concern here are the internal dynamics of a campus as a “functioning specific” with a discernable boundary and observable behavior patterns (Stake, 1998). The campus selected merits interest due to the extended prior relationship, the convergence of multiple reform initiatives, and a highly charged micropolitical environment resulting from intensified accountability pressure, a declining resource base, and a contentious process of appointing a new principal. While the ongoing relationship and specifics of the context are unique, many of the issues faced by the campus are typical for campuses in the district and across the state. As discussed below, the selected campus holds both instrumental and intrinsic value.

#### **The site**

In selecting a case, Stake (1998) suggests a balance between the instrumental value of a typical case and the intrinsic value and opportunity to learn from an atypical case. Although no fine line separates intrinsic and instrumental cases, an instrumental

case study “is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory. The case is of secondary interest” (Stake, 1998, p. 88). Although unique in many ways, Chavez can yield insight in reform related micropolitics more generally as well and thus serves also as an instrumental case study. Operating within an urban central Texas school district with over fifty elementary schools, the school faces the same increasingly intense accountability-driven reform environment as schools within the district and the state. To a large degree, the staffing and financing of the campus are also similar to other Texas elementary schools. Although the percentage of low-income students (85%) and non-white students (95%) are high, many schools in the district and hundreds across the state serve similar populations.

An intrinsic case study “is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest” (p. 88). As a site, Chavez holds intrinsic value for three reasons. First, the campus has been the focus of an ongoing research relationship with the university over an eight-year period. In 1995, the campus was selected as a site for a study of parental involvement (see Young, 1999). In 1999, the campus began a multi-year partnership with the Educational Productivity Council (EPC), leading to an examination of the beginning stages of a “faculty led” reform effort (see High, 2002). In many ways, this partnership has been the model for several others initiated with five additional campuses over the past two years. During that period, the relationship and involvement with the campus has continually deepened. This history of involvement with the campus provides a good deal of contextual information for the current micropolitical investigation.

A second point of interest in the campus is the recent adoption of an externally developed reform model. In addition to the more faculty-led reform effort noted above, the campus is subject to a variety of district imposed reform initiatives. These initiatives are intended to enhance student achievement by aligning and sequencing curriculum and instruction across the district. The initiatives include a detailed curriculum, associated interim assessments (weekly in some cases), and routine classroom observations by district administrators.

A third point of interest concerns interesting micropolitical dynamics related to internal and external changes for the campus. The recent promotion and replacement of a long time principal resulted in substantial conflict between the teachers at Chavez and the central office. Despite its recent performance improvements, the high-stakes accountability context within which the campus operates intensified substantially during the past year, resulting in tremendous pressure on the students, the faculty, the new administration, and the district to sustain the higher test scores. At the same time, budget shortfalls have substantially reduced the resources available to the school for staffing, professional development, and instructional resources. While none of these issues are unique to Chavez, the school is nonetheless contending tremendous change after an extended period of relative calm associated with having the same principal for over 20 years, a stable state assessment system for ten years, and a comparatively large resource base prior to the loss of an additional district funding stream for high poverty schools.

## **The participants**

A purposive sampling technique was used in selecting participants for the study. Purposive sampling focuses on identifying “information rich” cases and participants who can provide insight into issues central to the study (Patton, 1990). The purpose of this study was to examine the campus micropolitics of negotiating and navigating reform streams. The selection of participants focused on identifying those members of the campus who could provide insight into the dynamics of the decision-making and planning process. Ten faculty members were selected for individual interviews. Seven of these faculty members were associated with a core group of teachers involved in a voluntary, but highly active planning committee on the campus. This group, whose membership changes across and within years, was particularly active in the “faculty-led” reform effort noted above.

To provide perspective from outside the core group, three faculty members were selected who do not work actively with the group. These individuals were selected based on recommendation of the core group, the principal, observations of the faculty meetings, and informal interviews with faculty members. “Information richness” regarding awareness of, interest in, and involvement with campus decision-making and planning was the underlying criteria. Information on the participants is provided in chapter six.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

A primary objective of the study is to contribute in a practical way to the campus efforts to re-configure campus governance in (more) just and (more) democratic ways. A primary challenge in doing this lies in positioning myself as a researcher so that I might:

1) observe some aspects of governance, 2) legitimately raise questions about the governance discourse, and 3) remain “off-center”, but present in both these activities. To this end, data collection employed standard ethnographic techniques of document review, interview and participant observation (Carspecken, 1996; Thomas, 1993). Notes from and dialogue among a small team of graduate students working with the campus and enrolled in an associated course<sup>12</sup> were used to augment and complement my personal observations of the campus meetings. Substantial performance, finance and staffing data were available through the state’s Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

## **Documents**

A wide array of documents was used to map the district-state policy environment, to position the campus in this environment, and to outline the school-university collaboration. The documentation was drawn from interviews and documentation associated with the ongoing partnership, relevant campus, district and state policies regarding organizational decision-making and planning, state and district press releases and print media stories, as well as research reports and performance data available to the public through the Texas Education Agency.

## **Observations**

The primary record of the study emphasized “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of:

1) the general faculty meetings held on the first and third Thursday each month, and 2)

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<sup>12</sup> A team of five graduate students and two EPC staff members work with the campus to: 1) collaborate with the faculty on on-going reform efforts, and 2) observe and learn about policy as lived at the campus-level. The frequency of interaction and level of involvement of the students will vary. In general, I will be on campus whenever the team meets with the faculty.

the planning meetings of the core group of teachers on the prior Wednesday. During the initial weeks of the fall semester, core group meetings met weekly to: 1) plan facilitating activities for the campus improvement planning process, and 2) to establish and adjust the governance process. This data was collected through participant observation of meetings of the core group and regular faculty meetings. In addition to these larger group meetings, I also met in an ad hoc fashion in individual or small group sessions with teachers and/or the principal to discuss the agenda for upcoming meetings and/or debrief regarding the prior meetings. A colleague often attended these meetings with me.

My role on the participant observer continuum (Glesne, 1999) differed substantially at the meetings. At the faculty meetings, I acted as a passive observer attempting to document verbal and nonverbal communication and context information (Carspecken, 1996). Given the concern with micropolitics and the influence of hidden or taken for granted power asymmetries, Wolcott's (1981) strategies of searching for paradoxes and problems facing the group helped guide the observation. Of interest within these faculty-wide meetings were power asymmetries related to agenda control, participation and the nature and use of different types of power and authority. The nature of the communication (e.g. didactic vs. dialogic), between teachers and administrators and among the faculty members, was an object of focus. Given the complexity of a faculty meeting, the method of "priority observation" (Carspecken, 1996) helped to maintain thick description and sample the variety of interactions within the meeting by routinely shifting focus among participants.

Within the core group meetings, my role shifted toward active participant. In particular, I used issues raised or noted in prior core group and faculty meetings to pose

questions regarding reform related decision-making and planning. Again, I attempted to document verbal and nonverbal communication and context information. Of interest within the core group meetings was the identification of barriers to action, opportunities for agency, and plans for strategic action. A second focal point was the nature of the communication (e.g. didactic vs. dialogic) among the core group members and attention to the communication between the core group and other constituencies within the campus (teachers, administration, parents, students).

All observations were systematically recorded in a field journal. Analytic side notes were distinguished from descriptive notes (Glesne, 1999) and direct quotes were clearly identified with quotations. To limit evaluative interpretation of activities and comments, “low inference” language was used as much as possible (Carspecken, 1996). Reflections and questions stemming from observations were distinguished from the field notes.

As the semester progressed, I developed a routine with the group of summarizing the meeting verbally with the group and returning a written summary to the contact person the following day for corrections. Questions stemming from the general faculty and core group meetings were provided to the core group to: 1) help maintain a record of the ongoing planning dialogue, 2) provide an opportunity for member checking, and 3) initiate conversations regarding alternative and/or unexamined interpretations or courses of action.

## **Interviews**

Qualitative interviews are a means to access the perspectives of participants not readily discernable through observation (Patton, 1990). One focus of PAR is to reveal “hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain” (Thomas, 1993, p. 2-3). Toward this end, interviews are essential to gather data regarding participants’ knowledge regarding, feelings about, interpretations of, and motives for micropolitical behaviors related to negotiating and navigating reforms at the campus level. Three types of interviews were used in this study, guided interviews, informal conversational, and focus group. To assure accuracy and formal interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. All records of interviews will be maintained in a secure place with the anonymity of the participants protected.

*Individual interviews:* Six of the participants in the process (five of the core group members) participated in two guided interviews to inquire about perspectives on the campus reform process. Four participants were interviewed once. The intent of these semi-structured interviews was to gather data regarding common questions about micropolitics of the reform process, while allowing space to probe topics emerging during the interview (Patton, 1990). Although a protocol was used for the initial interviews, the interviews were only semi-structured to allow flexibility based on responses. The protocol for the second interview contained a number of common questions and a number of participant specific questions, emerging through the course of the study. Each interview lasted from 45 to 90 minutes. All were scheduled at the convenience of the participant, and all but one were conducted at the campus.



*Informal interviews:* Throughout the study informal conversational interviews were conducted with the participants before and after meetings, or when questions arose. The duration of these interviews varied from a few minutes to nearly an hour. Although not systematic, informal interviews allowed for more responsive and contextually relevant questioning related to concrete and immediate concerns (Patton, 1990). Such interviews also provided opportunities to build rapport and trust with participants by engaging participants in meaningful discussions in a less formal context (Glesne, 1999). Informal interviews provided an additional source of data through which to “triangulate” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) observational and interview data and were a source of questions for the guided interviews. Data gathered in informal interviews was maintained in the primary field journal.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Although oriented to particular types of problems and working from particular epistemological assumptions about the relationship between “truth” and power, critical methodologies do not attempt to impose particular findings on the data (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). Nor do critical methodologies test theories arrived at deductively. Rather, the critical methods use grounded theory methods to reveal subjective and normative patterns, which although often accepted as natural by participants, are socially and historically constituted (Thomas, 1993). As opposed to theory deduced from a priori assumptions, the discovery of grounded theory occurs through systematic gathering and analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

As the study progressed, data analysis advance through description, analysis, and finally, interpretation (Wolcott, 1994), but it is important to note that as in qualitative studies, data collection and analysis often overlapped and informed one another (Huberman & Miles, 1998). Although analysis began within the data collection phase, descriptive and analytic activities were distinct. For instance, the separate analytic field log noted above provided a place to capture analytic thoughts and memos as they occurred throughout the study (Glesne, 1999). Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used “to ‘make sense’ of the data in ways that ...facilitate the unfolding of the inquiry, and...lead to a maximal understanding...of the phenomenon” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.224-5).

After constructing a primary record through data collection, the initial stage of data reduction and analysis began descriptively with the coding of themes, regularities and patterns. In this “open coding” stage (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) data are broken down, examined, and categorized. “The objective to tease out and articulate normative and subjective patterns consistently displayed at the site (Carspecken, 1996). Thomas (Thomas, 1993, p. 35) suggests this process involves “defamiliarization” with our taken for granted understandings,

The task is to illuminate how it [a problematic situation] occurs and is managed in a given culture. The trick is to find ways into the problem and reduce an infinite range of possible issues to a few manageable ones.

A more systematic analysis, approximating “axial coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to label and categorize key phenomena and dimensionalize categorical properties by

comparing notes to refine coding schemes. Axial coding, going on concurrently with open coding, revealed conceptual linkages between categories and their subcategories. In the final stage of the analysis, “selective coding” refined, reassembled and integrated these categories into a larger theoretical scheme. The intent of axial and selective coding is to interpret essential features and relationships among phenomena. As themes emerge from the data,

The researcher decodes the ways that symbols of culture create asymmetrical power relations, constraining ideology, beliefs, norms, and other forces that unequally distribute social rewards, keep some people disadvantaged to the advantage of others, and block fuller participation in or understanding of our social environs (Thomas, 1993, p. 43).

It is important to note that the axial and selective coding noted above only approximated the purely inductive approach to grounded theory idealized by Strauss and Corbin (1990). As the study and analysis progressed, the interplay between the literature and the data resulted in an ongoing refinement of themes and complication of theory in a manner that was by turns deductive and inductive. As discussed later in the chapter, while literature based themes were invoked, efforts were made both to ground these in the data and to maintain a high level of reflexivity to avoid simply fitting the data to the theory.

#### **ANALYTIC CONSIDERATIONS IN CRITICAL RESEARCH**

Post-positivist analyses challenge traditional positivistic notions of objective interpretation of data. While similarly eschewing positivism’s reliance on objective perception as a “truth” criterion, critical researchers take issue with the sort of radical

subjectivity implied by constructivists, and some “ludic” postmodernists (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). “Critical methodologists are not ‘relativists’...We acknowledge the mediation of culture in all truth claims, but we point out that all human beings, wittingly or not, assume a common reality whenever any attempt is made to reach understandings” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 57-8).

Critical researchers should assume a cautionary stance toward ludic postmodernism critique because...As a mode of critique, it rests its case on interrogating specific and local enunciations of oppression, but often fails to analyze such enunciations in relation to larger dominating structures of oppression (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 271-2).

To be certain, "critical researchers enter into an investigation with their assumptions on the table, so no one is confused concerning the epistemological and political baggage they bring with them to the research site" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 265). Central to analysis in critical ethnography is distinguishing the value-based assumptions orienting the research, from the epistemological assumptions which lead to revealing, but rigorous analysis (Carspecken, 1996). Still, regardless of my intent to document the “case’s own story”, I as the researcher exercise substantial discretion about, among other concerns, the questions pursued, the issues highlighted, the voices included, and the contradictions revealed (Stake, 1998).

Carspecken (1996) suggests that critical research is served well by clearly distinguishing the assumptions associated with the value orientation of critical researchers from assumptions of critical epistemology. That is to say, that although facts

are value-laden and an explicit value framework orients critical researchers, it does not necessarily follow that critical research results in a biased reading of the facts from a particular perspective. Thus, where constructivists suggest that the researcher is always the ultimate arbiter of the “story”, critical researchers place great emphasis on employing techniques to assure that the story is valid, credible, and truthful to those who participated in constructing the reality on which the story is based. A number of these techniques and their use in this study are discussed below.

### **Validity and trustworthiness**

The use of multiple sources of data provides for “triangulation” increasing the research validity or trustworthiness of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Derrida’s undermining of "the metaphysics of presence" bolstered post-positivistic research approaches such as critical ethnology, constructivism, postmodernism and post structuralism. Derrida’s critique focuses on three problematic features of language, difference, deferral and ambiguity, which preclude the simultaneity of awareness and perception that provide the basis of truth in positivism (Agger, 1998). “For Derrida, the meaning of a word is constantly deferred because it can have meaning only in relation to its difference from other words within a given system of language” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 264). As a result, traditional conceptions of validity, reliability, and data interpretation were called into question (Carspecken, 1996). This does not mean that issues of truth and validity are unimportant in critical research. Rather it means that these issues must be reconceptualized using different foundations.

Given the problematic nature of the traditional notions of internal and external validity, some critical researchers have opted for “trustworthiness” based different assumption about the purposes of research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Lather, 1998). For example, rather than internal validity, trustworthiness is established when portrayals of particular realities “are plausible to those who constructed them and even then there may be disagreement, for the researcher may see the effects of oppression in the constructs of those researched—effects that those researched may not see” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 285-6). External validity providing for uncomplicated generalization is eschewed in favor of a trustworthiness criterion of “anticipatory accommodation” allowing limited generalization based “knowledge of a variety of comparable contexts, [through which] researchers begin to learn their similarities and differences” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 285-6).

Using the more traditional term validity, Carspecken (1996), drawing strongly from Habermas’ work, identifies three “communicative validity claims” associated with three ontological categories: objective claims, subjective claims, and normative/evaluative claims. The nature of, and methods to strengthen each claim is discussed below, briefly. An additional claim, “catalytic validity” proposed by Lather (Lather, 1991) and associated with the transformative intent of the study is also discussed.

*Objective validity claims:* Objective validity claims refer to statements that may be judged as true or false through multiple access by others through their senses. Objective claims are issues of description not inference, or evaluation. The use of multiple data sources, or *triangulation* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to enhance

objective validity claims. Specifically, this included cross checking of alternate accounts of observations and recollections, member checks of interview transcripts and meeting notes, and referencing claims to policy documents, prior studies, and available quantitative data. In addition to triangulation, objective claims could be re-visited through an extended interaction with the school and a number of the participants over a multi-year period. This *prolonged engagement* contributed to the trustworthiness of the findings allowing greater understanding of the culture, testing of misinformation, and trust-building could occur (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

*Subjective validity claims:* Subjective validity claims concern emotions, desire, intent, and are not directly accessible by others. Because validating such claims requires disclosure on the part of the participant, *member checks* “whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are checked with [participants, are]...the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). This will be done in part by allowing participants to review and correct interview transcripts. In addition, informal questioning regarding interpretations of and feelings about salient issues and incidents will be employed. In this case, the prolonged engagement noted above provides the greater access and opportunities for trust building enhancing member checks.

*Normative/evaluative claims:* Normative/evaluative validity claims are claims about what is proper, appropriate and conventional. Although contestable, these claims are grounded in a belief that others should conform to a convention. Assessing the validity of normative/evaluative claims is not a matter of agreeing with or contesting the claim, but rather revealing that such claims exist and are understood, at least implicitly by

participants. Again, *prolonged engagement* is a primary means to understand the accepted practices and understandings from which norms can be inferred. The use of multiple data sources, or *triangulation* is crucial to enhancing the credibility of the inferred normative/evaluative validity claims. Specifically, this will be done by cross-checking interview transcripts, meeting minutes, observed behaviors, claims in prior studies, official policy documents and public reports. In addition, member checks in the form of questions can be raised about perceived normative/evaluative claims within the planning meetings, follow-up interviews (individual and focus group) and informal interviews.

In addition to prolonged engagement, triangulation and member checking, *peer debriefing* contributes tremendously to the trustworthiness of the study. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), discussions of the data and the analysis were held with a group of disinterested peers, a research and writing group of fellow graduate students. This group provided opportunities to articulate and consider emergent hypotheses and offered feedback and rival interpretations that problematized initial and “thin” interpretations. In addition to this group, very substantive debriefing occurred routinely with a fellow researcher associated with the university partnership. In addition to enriching the theoretical development through an on-going dialogue, the different role in, sensibility about, and approach to the project helped promote a greater degree of reflexivity about the study and my positions vis-à-vis the participants and the topic.

Finally, peer debriefing occurred within the weekly staff meetings concerning the partnership activities. Coordinating the activities with three different schools and a university class during the period of the study provided a tremendous opportunity to



“compare notes” and check our working hypotheses regarding school reform against the realities of the campus and district context. These one to two-hour debriefing, discussion and planning sessions developed as a routine over the four-year partnership with Chavez and the wider project for the past two years.

*Catalytic validity:* Genuine critical projects must move beyond abstract critique and provide some means of altering alienating and exploitive conditions (Robinson, 1994; Young, 1990). Given the transformational intent of critical research, Lather (1991) argues for an additional validity criterion, “catalytic validity” emphasizing inspirational or motivating force of the research for the participants of the research. Consistent with Freire’s (2000) concept of *conscientizacao*, the data collection and analysis discussed above occurred through on-going, reflective dialogues with stakeholders about the ongoing transformation of school governance. Throughout the study, dialogues with the teachers focused on: 1) gaining insight into the participant’s understanding, 2) developing strategies with the participants, both organizational and cognitive, to challenge unjust and undemocratic conditions in the school, and 3) raising critical questions about the ways participants become complicit in maintaining asymmetrical power relations, especially with regard to student and parental involvement in campus governance. To a large degree, the catalytic validity of the study is reflected in: 1) the degree to which the participants find these dialogues helpful in reconfiguring the governance in more democratic and just ways, and 2) increased activism on the part of stakeholders in the governance and in expanding the participation in governance.

The foregoing discussion focused on establishing credibility or trustworthiness of the data. Trustworthiness stems from efforts by the researcher to ensure that s/he has

“gotten it right”; that, even if not in agreement, accounts from alternate perspective converge to some extent. Arguably, increasing trustworthiness through techniques such as those discussed above is akin to an after the fact “cleaning up” the data collected to establish some intersubjective objectivity. As the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection in qualitative research, some effort to maintain the cleanliness of this “instrument” is all in order. As discussed in the following section, a priori awareness of the need for, possible erosions of, and in process adjustments to improve trustworthiness necessitate “reflexivity” on the part on the researcher.

### **Reflexivity**

In *Leçon sur Leçon* (1982) Bourdieu referred to reflexivity as the exploration of the “unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought” (as cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 40). Reflexivity might be understood as the effort “to explore the self-other relationships of field work critically...to produce more discriminating defensible interpretations” (Foley, 2002, p. 144). Attending to reflexivity is central to this study, as the methodology of choice, PAR, deliberately seeks to strengthen reflexivity on the part of participations and demands reflexivity on my part as the researcher (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Reason, 1998). Some even suggest that in failing to be adequately reflexive, researchers engaged in emancipatory efforts can paradoxically re-create repressive myths and impose dominance relationships with participants (Ellsworth, 1989). Using the three major commonly used by ethnographers as identified by Foley (2002), confessional, inter-textual, and theoretical, I will briefly suggest how reflexivity will be introduced into the

proposed study, and emphasized more or less in the three chapters of the analysis noted above.

Foley associates confessional reflexivity with a “self-critical awareness of our limits as interpreters” as discussed by Babcock (1980). To a large degree, confessional reflexivity will be critical to interpretation of the interviews with, and observations of, and participant with the participants. As an aid to the reader, and in an effort to sharpen my analysis, I will offer an account of my position and approach to the interactions at the campus in Chapter Six. Although necessarily incomplete, this account will address my development as a teacher, my former employment within the district where the study is conducted, and my role in the design and enactment of the school university partnership central to the study.

A second aspect of reflexivity, inter-textual, concerns the effort to interrogate the manner disciplinary discourses and practices strongly, but often unconsciously inform the research (Foley, 2002). While of concern throughout, inter-textual reflexivity is addressed most explicitly in the fourth and fifth chapters. The fourth chapter contrasts a two conceptual frames for performance accountability, the first a rational frame that has traditionally informed the field of educational administration (Ball, 1987; Foster, 1986; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Scheurich, 1995) and the second a critical theoretic frame. The two offer very different perspectives on the state role in schooling, the pressing problems of schools, and possible solutions. In doing so, the fourth chapter provides insight into the logics informing the development of Texas’s accountability model and the pressures on local education authorities by this system.

The fifth chapter deals explicitly with the district mediation of those accountability pressures. In an attempt to tease out the conceptual, and often constraining assumptions informing educational reform, administration, and accountability the chapter examines a dominant “management discourse” common in traditional administrative practice and reinforced in administrative training (Ball, 1987, 1990b; Bowles, 1997; Gee et al., 1996). By situating this discourse within Habermas’s system-lifeworld frame, some of the theoretical underpinnings of educational administration are revealed, which help to explain the expansion of control of curriculum and instruction and the emerging problems associated with this encroachment into the campus and classroom.

Enhancing theoretical reflexivity is a central concern of the project’s praxis and is crucial to the entire analysis. Theoretical reflexivity, or “epistemic reflexivity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), concerns the constant tack “back and forth between scientific metalanguages and the learned dispositions (habitus) of everyday actors in their constraining historical/cultural contexts (fields)” (Foley, 2002, p. 147). Of particular concern are the ways that I over-simplify and/or distort the complex practice at the campus level in imposing theories to explain it. A related concern lies in the inherent inability to account for subtle, but important changes in communication resulting from project activities that persist and evolve during the overwhelming amount of time that I, and others from the research team, are not and cannot observe.

Theoretical reflexivity emerged through ongoing work with a number of schools associated with the partnership. Idiosyncratic responses of different campuses to similar approaches continue to provide the research group weekly opportunities to “check” theory against practice, opportunities that were illuminating and humbling. The efforts to

improve trustworthiness through member checking and triangulation also provide opportunities to problematize theories of practice. In addition to interactions in the field, fresh insight into the theory-practice dialectic were provided by colleagues outside the project but associated with the university and/or the district in various capacities, and sought out throughout the study.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE ANALYSES**

One objective of the study is to understand the micropolitics of navigating, negotiating, and contesting systemic reform imperatives at the campus level. In an effort to conceptually connect the “system” with the “lifeworld”, the analysis of data will take place three chapters each with differing but related foci. While the analysis techniques identified above will be employed, an overview of the scope of these different analyses may be helpful to orient the reader.

### **Chapter Four: A Multi-focal Policy Analysis of Texas-style Performance Accountability**

Chapter Four addresses the policy environment associated with the state accountability system, with specific attention on the recent intensification system corresponding to a more rigorous assessment and provisions for tying grade promotion to test performance. Adapting Graham Allison’s multi-focal approach to the Cuban missile crisis, this chapter attempts to provide insight into the state accountability system by contrasting alternate theoretical perspectives through which the Texas accountability system might be interpreted. Rather than offering a definitive evaluation of the system,

the chapter attempts to understand the manner in which different evaluations emanate from differences in conceptual lenses as much as from differences in evidence.

To that end, two conceptual lenses are contrasted: a rational-technical perspective emphasizing a recent trend toward neo-liberal thought and a critical perspective based on the work of Jurgen Habermas. After laying out foundational assumptions of each lens, common questions are addressed with regard to the nature of schooling, perceived problems, and implications for the state in addressing the problems. Each lens is trained on the performance accountability system to identify both confirmatory and confounding evidence of these implications. The analysis uses a wide array of research reports and performance data available to the public through the Texas Education Agency. Except where noted, all data incorporated in this chapter is drawn from the state Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

### **Chapter Five: District Mediation of Performance Monitoring**

Chapter five will attempt to situate Chavez within a local policy environment. First, the chapter re-examines a “management discourse” posited by a number of critical scholars (Apple, 2001c; Ball, 1990b; Gee et al., 1996) as a script for “internal colonization” (Habermas, 1987) of the campus “lifeworld” by district imperatives. An intensification of the management discourse appears to derive from the legitimation pressures brought to bear by the performance monitoring system discussed in chapter four.

The chapter then introduces wider district context including: 1) a history of inequitable service for communities of color and poverty reflective of the state as a

whole, 2) recent political pressure brought to bear by traditionally underserved communities and associated administrative responses, 3) and a recent budget crisis related to a change in status in the state's wealth recapture school finance plan and slowed growth in property values. The nature and intensification of a management discourse is evidenced in a number of district initiatives unrolled over the past three years. These initiatives seek to improve student achievement and reduce achievement gaps by increasing coherence through greater technical control over schooling. These initiatives appear also to be legitimizing efforts to placate public pressures.

Finally, the chapter will situate Chavez Elementary, a school serving a high poverty, Latina/o community, within this state-district policy environment, examining the perception of teachers to the extended control over work and governance. These perceptions suggest, among other things that the management discourse is at least partially contested by those at the campus and classroom level. That this discourse has recently moved within the "horizon of the lifeworld" and is no longer "always, already understood" suggests that the initiatives will be navigated, negotiated and contested at the campus level.

This convergence is examined through the window provided by the aforementioned school-university partnership. This partnership engaged the Chavez faculty in policy praxis as they navigated this complex state-district policy environment.

## **Chapter Six: Emergence, Maintenance and Development of Collective Voice**

According to Robinson (1992, p. 351), “the initial tasks of a critical social science project<sup>13</sup> involve the analysis of the problems of the subjects, including how their own understandings may be implicated in the problems they experience.” Chavez is located at the convergence of longstanding intra-district inequity, traditional, hierarchical management concepts and practices, mounting pressure stemming from state assessments and associated public performance comparisons, and growing community frustration with the district. Chapter six focuses on the perspectives of individuals within the campus as they contend with traditional management discourses, voiced initially by a long-time administrator and later through the district central administration in the initiatives discussed in chapter five. The chapter first examines the emergence of a collective voice among the wider faculty coinciding with the partnership activities and the improvement in students achievement and campus ratings. Habermas’s (1987) communicative action theory and associated critical hermeneutics are used to account for the renegotiation of work and leadership norms at the campus level. The district initiatives identified in chapter five and the ways the campus is finding to navigate, negotiate and contest system imperatives from district policy are reconsidered in light of this demonstrated communicative activity.

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<sup>13</sup> Robinson uses the term “critical social science” to distinguish her more generalized critical research drawing on critical theory, from a particular neo-Marxist theory of advanced capitalism often associated with the term critical theory.



## **SUMMARY**

This chapter introduced the methodology of the study. The research design was described and justified with regard to the purposes of the study. The selections of the site and the participants were outlined, followed by a discussion of data collection through participant-observation, interviewing and document analysis. The next section discussed issues of validity in critical qualitative research and identified several techniques to strengthen the study by attending to a number of validity claims and incorporating reflexivity in the analysis. The final section briefly delineated the three part analysis articulated in chapters four, five and six, and provided a timeline for completion of the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **A MULTI-FOCAL POLICY ANALYSIS OF TEXAS-STYLE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past five years, the Texas public school accountability system has received a great deal of attention in educational policy debates. As states begin to grapple with the policy implications of the Texas-styled No Child Left Behind legislation, it is important to understand how a variety of established scholars could come to very different opinions with regard to the impact of the Texas accountability system in closing performance gaps.

Adopting Graham Allison's multi-focal approach to the Cuban missile crisis, this chapter represents an effort to gain insight into a complex and particularly contentious policy issue: the impact of performance accountability systems on equity. Rather than offering a definitive evaluation of the Texas performance accountability system, this chapter is an attempt to understand the manner in which different evaluations stem from differences in conceptual lenses as much as from differences in evidence. To that end, I outline and apply two conceptual lenses to the Texas accountability system: a traditional administrative perspective rooted in rational-technical logics and a critical perspective based on the work of Jurgen Habermas drawing on a more inclusive communicative rationality.

The lenses provide contrasting accounts for the recent intensification of the accountability system mandated by Senate Bill 103 in the 76<sup>th</sup> legislative session and

enacted in the 2002-3 academic year. The account provided by the traditional administrative perspective suggests the intensification reflects necessary adjustments in system goals to spur progress and to improve the quality of information available to the public and employers. In contrast, the critical analysis characterizes the accountability system as a state legitimacy project and the intensification as a predictable feature of a system designed to reconcile equity demands with the maintenance of an achievement ideology. The concluding section discusses issues related to the administrative application of Texas style performance accountability that, if unaddressed, will ultimately undermine equity goals. By outlining some of the logics animating the changes in the current operating environment of the state's public education system, this discussion offers a prelude to the subsequent chapters focusing on district and campus efforts to navigate, negotiate, and resist pressures for change.

#### **CONFLICTING REVIEWS OF PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY IN TEXAS**

Over the past five years, the Texas public school performance accountability system has received a great deal of attention in educational policy debates. Placed on the national stage with the candidacy of then governor and current president George W. Bush, the system was the subject of several apparently conflicting reports regarding its role in raising academic achievement in general and in reducing the performance disparity of historically underserved populations. As states begin to grapple with the policy implications of the Texas-styled reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the No Child Left Behind legislation (see Bush, 2001), it is important to understand how a variety of established scholars could come to very different opinions

with regard to the impact of the Texas accountability system in closing achievement gaps among various student groups.

As noted by Skrla, Scheurich and Johnson (2001, p. 227), “accountability systems and their equity effects...are dynamic (over time), highly complex, [and] varied.” It is not surprising, then, that studies come to different conclusions. A number of reports praised accountability-driven reform in Texas citing more rapid reduction of performance gaps than other states (Grissmer & Flanagan, 2001; Jerald, 2001). Some contended that the performance accountability system was instrumental in promoting educational equity by focusing district leadership and public attention on performance disparities and holding schools and districts accountable for the performance of all students (Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Other reports were skeptical, contending that the state-reported results of quick gains were misleading (Klein et al., 2000). Some were highly critical, arguing that the high failure rates visited on poor and minority students were discriminatory (Bernal & Valencia, 2000; Haney, 2000; Natriello & Pallas, 1998), and that by obscuring historical inequities, the system would ultimately harm the students and schools it purports to aid (McNeil & Valenzuela, 2000; McNeil, 2000; Valencia, 2000).

Commenting on the contradictory findings on the state of Texas education, Gary Anderson (2001, p. 321) suggests that "arcane statistical minutiae" fail to provide insight into "problems which are largely conceptual." Is it possible to make sense of these decidedly different evaluations of the merits of the Texas system with regard to the single issue reducing inequity in the public school system? That is, if these conceptual lenses trained on a complex, variable and dynamic system and its effects, to use Kuhn's (1970)

term, are “incommensurable”, will analysis reach an impasse in which scholars simply talk past one another?

### **MULTI-FOCAL POLICY ANALYSIS**

Growing interest in the influence of conceptual underpinnings on policy analyses has led a number of educational researchers to advocate “multi-focal” approaches, which place in dialog multiple perspectives on single issues (Donmoyer, 1999; Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2002; Young, 1999). Multi-focal approaches to policy research are certainly not new. Although not the earliest, one to the most noted and influential was Graham Allison’s application of multiple conceptual models of the Cuban missile crisis (Allison, 1969). Allison notes,

This study proceeds from the premise that marked improvement in our understanding of such event depends critically on more self-consciousness about what observers bring to the analysis. What each analyst sees and judges to be important is a function not only of the evidence about what happened but also of the 'conceptual lenses' through which he looks at the evidence (p. 689)

Beginning with an identical premise, this chapter represents a similar effort to gain insight into a particularly contentious policy issue: the impact of performance accountability systems on equity. Rather than offering a definitive evaluation of the Texas accountability system, this chapter attempts to understand the manner in which different evaluations stem from differences in conceptual lenses as much as from differences in evidence. By tracing the often-polemical arguments to foundational paradigmatic assumptions, the attempt is to demonstrate that arguments over performance

accountability represent a much deeper and potentially irresolvable debate regarding, among other things, the nature of society, the objectives of schooling, and the role of the state in education. Although irresolvable, greater sensitivity to the underpinnings of the debate will serve policymakers well, especially in light of the arguments by critical theorists such as Bourdieu , Habermas, and Freire among others, that societal inequality is perpetuated through “commonsense” ideas which are in fact historically contingent social constructs.

I begin with a brief introduction to the bi-focal approach used here. Following a short history of performance accountability in Texas and the nature of its impending intensification, I briefly analyze the intensification through two contrasting perspectives or conceptual lenses, one rational-technical and the other critical<sup>14</sup>. The chapter closes with a discussion of issues related to the application of Texas-style performance accountability and its interplay in school finance legislation, which if unaddressed may undermine equity goals by promoting administrative efficiency over all other outcomes. The policy analysis offers a prelude to the following chapter which examine the intensification of an efficiency oriented management discourse manifested in district policy and campus level efforts to retain agency by balancing efficiency-oriented system imperatives with communicative action in campus governance.

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<sup>14</sup> As the terms are used below, briefly: Rational-technical perspectives are essentially utilitarian, concerned with finding the most efficient means to achieve given ends. Critical perspectives attempt to illuminate with critique the structural relations in capitalist societies submerged in utilitarian ideologies that perpetuate class, race and/or gender domination.

## **A multi-focal approach to policy analysis**

As noted in the introduction, an increasing number of researchers in education and within the social sciences are calling for the use of multi-focal approaches to the study of policy issues for reasons noted by Graham Allison over three decades ago,

Formulation of alternative frames of reference and demonstration that different analysts, relying predominately on different models, produce quite different explanations should encourage the analyst's self-consciousness about the nets he employs. The effect of these different 'spectacles' in sensitizing him to particular aspects of what is going on...must be recognized and explored (Allison, 1969, p. 715)

Young (1999, p. 677) argues that a multi-focal approach, “reveals not only a fuller portrait but also the narrowness and constrictedness of each perspective when used alone.” Hargreaves, Earl and Schmidt (2002, p. 71) find that using “different conceptual lenses or perspectives...is a way of arresting our own ardor...so we can step back and reflect on it critically and carefully.” According to Lichbach and Zuckerman (1997, p. 9) multiple perspectives are invaluable because, “a field advances through explicit dialogue about the relative strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures of the research traditions of which it is composed. Theory is a collective but contentions exercise.”

Arguing that “most educational policy studies take place within a traditional rationalist frame,” Young (1999, p. 677) suggests, “the findings...do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the problems being researched, and thus, should not be used as the sole basis for making educational policy.” She goes on to argue that failure to consider non-traditional policy perspectives, “lead to ignorance of issues... that have the

potential not only to strengthen the policy process but also to better address the concerns held by members of nonmajority populations.” (p. 679). Given the rational-technical underpinnings of the Texas performance accountability system discussed below, and its stated intent of improving equity, I find this rationale for multi-focal analysis particularly compelling.

### **Using exemplars to create focal points for the dialogue**

Explanations produced by particular analysts display quite regular, predictable features...[that] reflect an analyst's assumptions about the character of puzzles, the categories in which problems should be considered, the types of evidence that are relevant, and the determinants of occurrences (Allison, 1969, p. 689).

In an attempt to shed light on the analytic assumptions in the perspectives below, I draw on Lichbach's scheme of allowing scholarly exemplars to represent each research tradition. Explaining the benefits of juxtaposing ideal type comparative theorists, Lichbach (1997, p. 241) notes, “while each recognizes the value of synthesis and cross-fertilization, each is principally concerned with advancing a particular intellectual tradition and theoretical agenda that transcend comparative politics.” The choice of exemplars did not come a priori, but stemmed from my investigation of a number of different conceptual lenses. I acknowledge that other might have selected differently, but I stand by these for the following reasons. First, each of the selected exemplars is renowned for commentary on the modern social condition. Next, each critiques the current state of affairs from a distinct intellectual tradition and theoretical agenda. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, each has commented extensively on the role



education in modern society, and critically on the problematic nature of modern schooling.

The first perspective, rational-technical, focuses on a decided neo-liberal shift toward more market-like conceptualizations of the public school field. The comments of economist Milton Friedman, a zealous advocate for unfettered free market capitalism, are used principally to articulate the perspective. This rational-technical perspective contrasts with more critical perspectives emphasizing societal evolution and crisis tendencies inherent in capitalist systems, articulated here through the work of Frankfurt School critical theorist Jurgen Habermas.

Following a brief history of the Texas accountability system with emphasis on its impending intensification, the conceptual lenses and exemplars are introduced. The introduction to each conceptual lens identifies the foundational assumptions orienting the perspective. Direct quotes from the exemplars outline the general angle of approach of each perspective and distinguish the perspective. In an effort to polish the conceptual lens, clarifying assertions from complementary theorists are invoked in places. In an effort to interrupt some of the linearity of presenting each lens in succession, I have made use of the footnotes to establish a dialogue among the perspectives. After laying out the basic assumptions, I will address common questions with regard to the nature of schooling, perceived problems, and implications for the state in addressing the problems. Finally, I apply each lens to examine performance accountability in Texas to identify both confirmatory and confounding evidence of these implications. To do this I take advantage of a wide array of research reports and performance data available to the public through the Texas Education Agency. Except where noted, all performance data

incorporated in this study was gathered from the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) available on-line.

### **Limitations of the approach**

It is important to acknowledge several limitations in this approach. First, much has been written about performance accountability in the US and elsewhere. While I believe the conceptual lenses selected offer distinctly different perspectives, I recognize that the list is not inclusive. I also appreciate the fact that others might disagree with the conceptual groupings employed or with the associated exemplars. Finally, I am aware that a great deal of sophisticated internal critique exists within each of the intellectual traditions from which I draw. Some of this internal dialogue will be used to clarify the major intellectual thrust of each perspective. While sensitive to the value of this internal critique, given the space available the chapter will focus on distinguishing among the perspectives rather than illuminating the debates within.

## **THE CASE: PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY IN TEXAS<sup>15</sup>**

### **Origin of the system**

With regard to education, Texas, along with a number of other southern states, was a notorious underachiever in terms of academic achievement and equity of opportunity relative to other states for much of its history (Shirley, 1997; Valencia,

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<sup>15</sup>Given the space available and the substantial documentation of the Texas system elsewhere, I will provide an extremely abbreviated history. For those interested in the evolution of the system, I recommend documents provided by TEA (1996; 2000a; 2000b), as well as books and reports by McNeil (2000), Jerald (2001), Skrla et al (2001) and Haney (2000) among others.

2000). In response to public pressure to improve the system, the Texas legislature brought into law an increasingly comprehensive educational accountability system administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) between 1979 and 1999<sup>16</sup>. Consistent with national trends, the system reflected a heavy emphasis on high-stakes student performance testing and public comparisons of school performance (Elmore et al., 1996). Notably, Texas was one of the first states to address equity through a campus and district rating system based on the performance of a number of racial/ethnic and socio-economic student groups.

Between 1979 and 1999, the state progressed through three testing systems: the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS) from 1980-84, the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) from 1985-92, and the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) beginning in 1990. Each new test reflected an increase in the rigor of the examination and each was accompanied by increased failure rates in the early administrations. As graduation requirements, the latter two also reflected an increase in the stakes for students.

### **Impending intensification of the system**

In 1999, the 76<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 103 mandating the most substantial changes to the state educational assessment system since 1990. The bill provided for an expansion and intensification of the current state public education

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<sup>16</sup> The introduction of accountability systems in Texas coincided with legal and political battles by a number of groups including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) to rectify one of the most inequitable school finance systems in the nation. As discussed in the final section of the paper, finance and performance accountability are intimately tied together. Timelines for development of the accountability and the school finance system are provided in Appendices A and B.

assessment program in the 2002-03 academic year. In creating a new assessment system, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) the bill impacted student testing at all grade levels<sup>17</sup>. A primary focus was to increase the rigor and breadth of the current exit examinations<sup>18</sup>. The TAKS exit-level requirements represent a substantial increase in rigor over the TAAS standards for students slated to graduate in the 2004-5 school year. Moving from the tenth to the eleventh-grade year, the new exit-examinations substantially increase the breadth and rigor of the existing tests and require additional tests in social studies and science.

As noted above, a stated intent of the Texas accountability system was to promote equity in public education. There is concern that the increase in rigor is projected to disproportionately impact students of poverty and students of color undermining this goal<sup>19</sup>. Field test data from the TAKS exit exam in mathematics collected in the spring of 2002 suggests sharp declines in passing rates<sup>20</sup>. To soften the impact, the State Board of Education adopted a three-year phase-in period for the standard in November 2002, (Texas Education Agency, 2002b). Under this plan the standard would begin at two standard errors of measure (SEM) below the recommended standard and be raised one SEM each of the following two years. Despite the phase-in and the potential increase of

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<sup>17</sup> In a related bill, the 76<sup>th</sup> Legislature passed the Student Success Initiative (SSI) mandating grade advancement testing requirements as part of the TAKS assessment program. The requirements will be phased in with a reading test at Grade 3 beginning in 2002-2003, reading and mathematics tests at Grade 5 beginning in 2004-2005, and reading and mathematics tests at Grade 8 beginning in 2007-2008.

<sup>18</sup> In the spring 2002 administration of the TAAS exit exam, 87.4% of low-income 95.0% of non-low income 10<sup>th</sup> grade students passed the mathematics subtest (AEIS, 2002). Passing rates for African American, Hispanic and White students were 85.6%, 88.0% and 96.5% respectively.

<sup>19</sup> Currently, African American, Hispanic, and low-income students account for 14.4%, 41.7%, and 50.5% of the Texas public school enrollment respectively (Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Based on the passing standard recommended by a 350-member advisory committee of citizens and educators, the estimated passing rates for the exit examination are 25% for low-income and 46% for non-low income students. The estimated passing rates for African American, Hispanic and White students are 20%, 27% and 47% respectively (Texas Education Agency, 2002c).

scores in the “live” administration<sup>21</sup>, TEA projections clearly indicted that the exit-exam failure rates would increase dramatically for all students and for low-income and non-white students in particular<sup>22</sup>.

Prior to the first administration of the new assessments, a number of groups raised questions about the impact on students and on the educational system.<sup>23</sup> The field test projections generated concerns that the proposed changes were overly ambitious and would disproportionately punish student groups that have only recently begun to pass the exit tests at acceptable levels. There was also concern that sudden increases in failure rates would undermine recent claims of progress and weaken public support for the educational system as a whole. The latter concern was given an added political dimension when the Texas accountability system became the model for reforms to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, reauthorized in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The intensification of the Texas performance accountability system raises a number of interesting questions. First, in pursuing long-term equity goals, the system routinely reestablishes shorter-term increases in performance gaps. Which is the dominant feature, gradual long-term reduction or the routine reestablishment of the gaps? Similarly, can a goal promoting equity over the long term be achieved in a decidedly non-Rawlsian

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<sup>21</sup> According to the Texas Education Agency, the scores in the initial “live” administration of the TAAS test in 1990, were 10 points above the field test projections (TEA, 2002b).

<sup>22</sup> For students slated to graduate in 2005, the estimated passing rates are 46% for low income and 65% for non-low income students. The estimated passing rates for African American, Hispanic and White students are 40%, 48% and 58% respectively.

<sup>23</sup> With each intensification of the assessment system, opposition also intensified. The TAAS test was the subject of a federal lawsuit *GI Forum v. Texas Education Agency* filed by the MALDEF in 1997 and settled in favor of the state in 2000. A new round of legal challenges are anticipated when results of the new assessment are released.

approach of bringing to bear a disproportionately negative impact on groups that have been least advantaged historically? Finally, are efforts to create psychometrically fair assessments compromised by political processes to establish passing standards? I argue below that answers to these questions depend largely on the perspective one adopts with regard the nature of schooling, the nature of the problems facing public schooling, and the appropriate role of the state in public schooling.

#### **A RATIONAL-TECHNICAL PERSPECTIVE: ACCOUNTABILITY AS A NEO-LIBERAL SHIFT**

In general, rational-technical perspectives operate from a means-ends conceptual model of the world composed of goal-directed individuals or firms (students, parents, schools, etc) seeking information and employing instrumental logic to efficiently pursue interests (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Suggesting rational-technical thought informed the design of a state educational system is hardly surprising. Attempts to rationalize US public education have a long history, perhaps most notably the efforts by progressive elites in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to rescue urban schools from ward politics (see Tyack, 1974). Under pressure from business elites and informed by Tayloristic principles of scientific management (Callahan, 1962), so-called “administrative progressives” reformed urban school systems into professionally managed, hierarchical, and (ideally, if not realized) apolitical bureaucracies. The trend toward centralized control to increase efficiency and curb democratic traditions in school governance continued into the 1980s (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1995).

While rationalization is in no way new to the field of education, the rise of performance accountability in the 1980s reflects a decided shift toward a more “neo-

liberal”<sup>24</sup> conceptualization of a rationalized educational system (Apple, 2000). Beginning in the 1970s, the focus on the U.S. public education system shifted from an interest in system inputs and processes to a concern for system outputs (Elmore, Abelman, and Fuhrman, 1996). State policymakers and departments of education shifted the emphasis from compliance to rules and regulations to rewards and sanctions for demonstrated performance of the quality of the students they “produce”.<sup>25</sup>

The trend toward these newer neo-liberal administrative logics in education roughly coincides with the development of rational or public choice scholarship in a number of social science fields. Originating in the field of economics, these models, emphasizing the intentional pursuit of interests by individual actors, have been extended to political science (see Elster, 1986) and to sociology (see Becker, 1976; or, more recently, Coleman, 1990), but have been less central in the study of educational politics (Boyd, Crowson, & van Geel, 1995).

### **Conceptual assumptions**

Although the interpretation of each vary to some degree, rational choice models rest on four basic assumptions (see Becker, 1976). First, these models apply to a world conceptualized as an aggregation of individuals.<sup>26</sup> Second, these individuals engage in

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<sup>24</sup> As with the application of “neo” to any term, neo-liberal is vague and probably over-used. For the purposes of this paper the term refers generally to the school of thought associated with Milton Friedman and others that advocates limited government and free markets as a means to greater individual liberty.

<sup>25</sup> Test scores are the most commonly used measure of educational quality in state accountability systems (Goertz et al., 2001), with graduation rates, student attendance, and even post-secondary outcomes incorporated in various ways in state systems (Fuhrman, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> In pure form, rational choice models rest on the individual as the fundamental unit of analysis. Eschewing holistic approaches, Coleman (1990, p. 13) argues the case for methodological individualism as “the theory of action used implicitly by most social theorists and by most people in the commonsense

behavior directed toward maximizing self-interest. Next, the interests pursued follow from ordered, stable, and exogenously determined preferences that are relatively consistent within and across cultures. Finally, it is assumed that markets coordinate, with varying degrees of efficiency, the actions of individuals, firms and nations<sup>27</sup>.

The concept of a market is central to rational choice theory and to the neo-liberal approaches to educational reform discussed below. More than simply a means of efficient exchange, markets allow choice among liberated individuals rather than coercion by central authority to coordinate social behavior. In a free market, according to Adam Smith (1937, p. 423), an individual intentionally pursuing “his own gain [is] led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention...By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.” For neo-liberals, the vast majority of ventures, including the education of the public, are best coordinated through market-based competition where Smith (1937, p. 717) argued “rivalship and emulation render excellency.”

Over time, rational choice theorists have incorporated a number of secondary features to stretch choice models to more complex situations. For example, to account for inefficiencies in markets or other apparently “non-rational” behavior (i.e. behavior that does not appear to maximize preferences), the availability or costliness of information is often posited (Becker, 1976). This device allows researchers to extend the

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psychology that underlies their interpretation of their own and others actions”. In adapting rational choice theories to more complex social behavior, however Coleman (1990) argues that goal-oriented groups can be treated as individuals, or “corporate actors”, but that ultimately this group behavior can be reduced to the individual-level as well.

<sup>27</sup> While adherence to an objective, value-free and scientific investigation of the world is a point of pride for proponents, opponents, including Habermas as discussed below, would argue that the “common-sense” model adopted by rational choice scholars is a heavily value-laden social construction.



approach to the non-material exchanges (e.g. time, learning, etc.) through “shadow prices” and to account for the apparent “stickiness” of markets failing to reach equilibrium. Similarly, the presence and influence of institutions reflecting “congealed preferences” (Riker, 1980) or “rules of the game” (North, 1990) are used to explain apparent constraints which shape actor’s choices and which may or may not be recognized.

### **The nature of schooling, its problems and the role of the state**

Arguably, economist Milton Friedman’s advocacy of a voucher system provides one of the clearest expressions of neo-liberal thought regarding education and schooling. Drawing from his recent testimony before the Texas public education committee and from his more philosophical texts written with his wife Rose, Free to Choose (1980) and Freedom and Capitalism (1982), I will attempt to outline the possibilities and problems of schooling from this perspective.

Like Adam Smith, Friedman identifies two primary benefits of education: one civic, providing for a stable democracy by instilling a common value system among the citizenry, the other economic, increasing the labor value of the individual through the embedding of knowledge and skills. With regard to the economic benefits, Friedman views investment in education, especially vocational and professional education, no different than investment in physical capital.<sup>28</sup> “It is a form of investment in human

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<sup>28</sup> Friedman’s dissertation at Columbia focused on human capital investment. This area of study is generally associated with Gary Becker, a student and colleague of Friedman at the University of Chicago. Becker’s colleague and collaborator, James Coleman, is known, among other things, for extending the concept of capital investment to include social capital as part of an effort to extend rational choice into sociology. Coleman, also famous for the “Coleman report” challenging conventional wisdom about the

capital precisely analogous to investment in machinery, buildings, or other forms of non-human capital. Its function is to raise the economic productivity [and future earnings] of the human being" (Friedman & Friedman, 1982, pp. 100-1). Friedman argues that because the benefits accrue to the individual, the choice and cost of investment should likewise remain with the individual. Thus, in a meritocratic educational system, the combination of aspiration and talent will ideally determine the upward mobility of the individual. Given the relatively high rate of return relative to physical capital investment, he attributes the under-investment in human capital to a "flaw in the capital market" caused by a lack of security on loans for human capital investment.<sup>29</sup> The flaw is best corrected with minimal government interference through educational loan programs, allowing individual interests and talents to determine the level of investment and through provisions for better information to reduce risk.

With regard to civic benefits, Friedman (1982) acknowledges a legitimate governmental interest in the development of an educated citizenry, but contends that, as with central planning generally, governmental interference in education results in undesirable "neighborhood effects". In particular, over-specification on where and how a child is to be educated interferes with the efficiency and quality enhancements resulting from competition for pupils among education providers. Friedman therefore views free-

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efficacy of public school inputs in mitigating the effects of poverty on student achievement, is also a strong advocate of voucher programs as a means to reform schools.

<sup>29</sup>In examining race and gender discrimination in the human capital market, Gary Becker (1993) notes that in addition to lack of security, discriminatory beliefs and attitudes may also play a role in under-investment. An analysis of statistical discrimination suggests that "the *beliefs* of employers, teachers, and other influential groups that minority members are less productive *can* be self-fulfilling, for these beliefs may cause minorities to under invest in education, training, and work skills such as punctuality. The underinvestment does make them less productive" (p. 388). Thus, underinvestment in education and historic pay differentials stem from mutually supporting choices at the individual level.

market approaches to organizing education as superior to, and diametrically opposed to, the centralized, collectivist, “socialist” uses of political power informing the progressive movement in education discussed above. For Friedman, public schools have stagnated due to increasing centralization and bureaucratization beginning after the Second World War and intensifying with teacher labor movements in the 1960s.

For Friedman, and for those advocating neo-liberal approaches generally, accountability is ideally achieved through direct market pressure on the schools as local education providers, applied by the parents as private consumers. To stimulate competition, Friedman advocates voucher systems allowing parents to send children to schools of their choice. Testifying in favor of a voucher program in Texas, he states, "The most important thing we can do is find some means to give parents control. It's *their* children. It's *their* problem, and the question is how can we arrange to give them control," (*Public hearing on HB 2465, 2003*).<sup>30</sup>

Given a concern with the implications of the Texas accountability system for equity, it is important to note that the neo-liberal philosophy espoused by Friedman and through which many analysts and citizens interpret performance accountability, favors a particular view of equality. Arguing that the neo-liberal philosophy reflects classic, 18<sup>th</sup> century emphasis on individual liberty, Friedman (1982, p. 195) argues, "The [classic] liberal will...distinguish sharply between equality of rights on the one hand, and material equality or equality of outcome on the other. One cannot be both an egalitarian, in this sense [i.e. favoring redistributive policies], and a liberal". Thus, while Friedman

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<sup>30</sup> While agreeing with this general point, Habermas would certainly disagree that the market is the best means to achieve this control, contending that this monetary rather than political version of “proportional representation” (see Friedman & Friedman, 1982, p. 23) is inherently undemocratic, favoring the have over the have nots.

contends that low-income students suffer most from “government” schooling<sup>31</sup>, and therefore have the most to gain from privatizing schools, vouchers offer only an opportunity that may or may not be realized. Arguing the benefits of attending to aspirations rather than material conditions, rational choice sociologist and Friedman colleague James Coleman (1992, p. 261) asserts,

It is a misplaced emphasis on equality in education that is responsible for policies in American education that have led to students' poor performance. The emphasis on equality means that the focus in education is on the bottom of the performance distribution. My general conjecture is this: Policies that focus on high levels of achievement and rewards for high levels reverberate downward through the system, providing an incentive for students at lower levels to improve.

### **Texas performance accountability as a neo-liberal shift**

Viewed through a rational-technical lens, the development of the Texas accountability system can be interpreted as a growing incorporation of neo-liberal thought in administering public education. Evidence of this shift is found in a number of features of the system consistent with the logic expressed, including: 1) a pronounced emphasis on interest pursuing individuals, 2) advocacy of market mechanisms to improve organization through competition, and 3) efforts to reduce market imperfections through improvement in information flows and a reduction in government interference. Statements from the Texas Education Agency documentation (TEA, 1996; 2000a; 2002a)

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<sup>31</sup> In his testimony, Friedman expressed a preference for the term “government” schools, rather than public schools, as the term public in the context of schooling has become “misshapen.”

regarding the state performance monitoring system discussed below offer evidence of each, although it can be argued that in some cases that state actions have introduced “neighborhood effects” that compromise the market shift.

### ***Interest-pursuing individual***

Whether single students or “corporate” actors, the accountability system presupposes a universe of individuals directed toward the goal, ostensibly, of meeting the state learning standards. According to TEA (1996), “Accountability was first applied to the individual students [with required exit tests]...By 1993, however, aggregate data were being used to hold entire campuses and districts accountable for student learning.” (p. 11). A primary objective of the performance monitoring system with regard to these individuals is to, “promote action within and across all sectors of the system that is directed to the tangible outcomes established by the indicators” (TEA 1996, p. 8). Accordingly, each actor, individual or corporate, has a specific set of goal-aligned rewards and sanctions. Student rewards include graduation and, more recently, grade-level promotion<sup>32</sup>. Campuses and districts receive monetary<sup>33</sup> and non-monetary awards for high performance and performance gains under the Texas Successful Schools Award System (TSSAS). The funding of a principal incentive program represented “a critical contrast to the TSSAS program...[with] awards given to the *individuals* [principals] for

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<sup>32</sup> In 1999, provisions for individual student stakes shifted to the elementary grades. With the state’s Student Success Initiative, third, fifth and eighth students must pass the state tests to be promoted to the next grade.

<sup>33</sup> Monetary rewards to campuses and districts from the state were reduced and phased out over time, with a maximum of \$20 million in 1992-3. A proposal by Governor Perry announced in January 2004, would direct \$500 million to monetary incentives with schools receive funds according to the number of students passing all tests, with premiums paid for low-income students and students with limited English proficiency (Stutz, 2004).

their school's results as opposed to being given to the schools" (TEA 1996, p. 21, italics in original). Creation of and, adjustment to, system incentives system are viewed by TEA as an effective means to spur progress. Quoting a report by Deere and Strayer of Texas A & M, TEA (2002a) asserts,

Across Texas, student progress on the TAAS tests has been remarkable...What is clear is that schools in Texas have responded, and dramatically, to the incentives of the state accountability rating system.

### ***Increased information***

The control and dissemination of performance information was a driving factor behind the performance monitoring system in Texas,

Because it had become obvious that the public cared about the quality of its schools and would use any available information to monitor school performance, the calls for accountability throughout the 1980s could be interpreted as implicit calls for more and better information about the educational status of schools and the children they serve. (TEA, 1996, p. 7)

In an effort to "[provide] parents...better information about how their children's schools compare to other schools [so that] they will pressure weak schools to improve" (p. 8), the state created the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). Available on-line (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/>), AEIS provides campus, district, region and state level report cards on a variety of indicators related to academic performance, staffing, and finance. Further, Chapter 35 of the Texas Education Code requires that campuses and districts: 1) disseminate the performance results through a variety of local

media, and 2) provide campus report cards to the parents of each student. TEA notes a high degree of customer satisfaction, especially among superintendents, principals and business managers, with regard to the information they provide through the report cards and the website (TEA, 2002a).

The assessment component of the accountability system also enhances information for employers about the relative quality and quantity human capital investment by potential employees. This could encourage potential employers to expand or relocate operations to tap a more highly skilled labor-market, and subsequently encouraging greater human capital investment. As discussed by Betts and Costrell (2001), cut scores designating the passing standard are the fulcrum of any standards based system, and adjustment of these scores have important but subtle implications for students near the cut off point.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the adjustment of the performance bar for students and schools reflected in the three intensifications of the assessment system since 1984 is necessary to maintain the amount and quality of information available to the public and to employers.

### ***Reduced neighborhood effects with educed regulation***

Consistent with the emphasis on performance outcomes rather than procedural compliance, the state specifies “local flexibility” and “local responsibility” as general principles for the accountability system (TEA ,1996). Clearly, the state circumscribed local autonomy with the specification of an explicit curriculum, the Texas Essential

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, a publication of increased standards raises the status of *all* students, passing and not. According to the authors, *ceteris paribus*, the status of the failing group increases, because it is composed of higher performing students by including those that would have passed under the previous standard.

Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and associated assessment systems and passing standards. However, beginning with SB 417 in 1990, an “on-going shift toward decentralization” has steadily increased district autonomy with provisions for waivers from specific laws and regulations and generally curtailed the powers of TEA, the state board of education, and the regional service centers (TEA 2000a, p. 7-8).

### ***Market reforms***

Of the three issues noted, the shift toward market mechanisms is the most explicitly stated, but perhaps the least tenable. Market competition is the driving force in neo-liberal models, as noted by Friedman, "You can count on competition. It keeps on going year after year, and it enlists the interests of the people who have the most at stake: the parents" (*Public hearing on HB 2465*, 2003). Invoking similar logic, TEA (1996, p. 8), states,

The fundamental assumption of performance monitoring is that organizations in the public sector will become more efficient if they are forced to function in an environment similar to that of a marketplace.

Beginning in 1995, the legislature expanded school choice with provisions for a limited number of open enrollment charter schools, a number increased in later legislative sessions. In general, however, school choice in Texas is the exception not the rule. Charter options and limited intra-district transfer policies aside, most families in Texas are effectively required to send their children to schools in a specified attendance zone if they are unable to afford private school tuition. Moreover, government intervention in



school finance through an equity-focused wealth recapture program, dubbed “Robin Hood”, specified in Chapters 41-43 of the Texas Education Code further interferes with the ability of education consumers to directly target their tax dollars in schools of choice by relocating to particular districts or attendance zones.

Thus, while local schools and districts enjoy greater programmatic freedom (albeit within the limits of officially sanctioned and monitored curriculum), and the public is provided better information to monitor their performance, individual consumers are restricted from freely purchasing education on the market. As discussed by Coleman (1992) this “captured market” problem interferes with the “natural” market incentives by removing the ability of the consumer to effectively reward or punish the education providers by withdrawing support. Finally, politically determined campus and district incentives related to “outcome equality” reflect “socialist” tinkering opposed by Friedman (1980) and would appear to continue the misplaced emphasis on equality rather than merit noted by Coleman above.

### **Summary of the rational-technical perspective**

By placing Friedman’s free market plan in relief, I have attempted to show that the Texas accountability system can be viewed as moderate step to leverage the power of market forces, while maintaining a role for the state in monitoring the equality of educational outcomes (at least within the tested areas of the curriculum) and invoking public pressure to help regulate equitable delivery. According to TEA, these moderate steps aimed at reducing government intervention in favor the “market-like” mechanisms have resulted in a more productive and more equitable system. Still, as currently

composed, the Texas accountability system might be considered “market-light”, falling short of the free-market prescription advocated by Friedman and others, appearing to be instead a hybrid featuring centralization of policy and decentralization of delivery (Hoyle, 1999).

In the following section, I offer an alternative account of performance accountability from a critical perspective. This perspective may help to shed light on the state’s invocation of “market-like” language and the state’s reluctance to transfer schooling into a market environment wholesale.

#### **A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE: ACCOUNTABILITY AS A LEGITIMATION PROJECT**

A number of radical critiques of American education and schooling began to appear in the late 1960s and continue to the present. Radical approaches drawing on orthodox and neo-Marxist thought focused attention on homologous structural features of the wider society evident in schools and on the role of schooling in perpetuating class relations and issues of domination (Giroux, 1983)<sup>35</sup>. These radical critiques were in marked contrast to those discussed in the previous section in: 1) offering holistic rather than individualistic social analyses, 2) debunking rather than appealing to a meritocratic ideal of schooling, and 3) criticizing rather than valorizing the effects of market capitalism on schooling.

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<sup>35</sup>Notable among these were Illich’s *Deschooling Society* (1971), Bowles and Gintis’ *Schooling in capitalist America* (1976), Carnoy and Levin’s *The limits of educational reform* (1976), Apple’s *Ideology and Curriculum* (1979), Anyon’s “Social Class and the hidden curriculum of work” (1980), Giroux’s *Theory and resistance in education* (Giroux, 1983), and Oakes’ *Keeping Track* (Oakes, 1985)

As with the neo-liberal account above, the nature of the challenges to traditional schooling are important to understanding a critical account of the impetus for the Texas accountability system arising in the early 1980s. In discussing this account below, I focus attention on the effort by the state to re-legitimize an achievement ideology central to the public school project as a means to reconcile or at least paper over irreconcilable demands on the state to serve contradictory economic and political ends. To provide a conceptual framework for this discussion I will draw from the work on social evolution and crises tendencies outlined by critical theorist Jurgen Habermas in the late 1970s and 1980s. While Habermas' body of work is vast, my primary concern in this chapter is with his theories on legitimation and motivation crises articulated in *Legitimation Crisis* (1975), *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979), and to a lesser degree the *Theory of Communicative Action* (1987).<sup>36</sup>

### **Conceptual Assumptions**

Leading the second generation of the Frankfurt School critical theorists, Habermas' critique of modern capitalist society is an extension and re-interpretation of theorists such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. Central to his work is the concept of social evolution punctuated by crises, termed "steering problems" resulting from contradictions inherent in all social systems. For Habermas, modernity reflects a growing differentiation and de-coupling of the economic and political "steering systems" and the

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<sup>36</sup> In the early eighties, a number of educational theorists used Habermas' work on legitimation issues to comment on the impending crisis in public education (Bates, 1982; Foster, 1980; Shapiro, 1984). Although prescient in anticipating a trend toward technocratic administrative solutions offered to redirect an apparently faltering system, much of this theoretical work predated the actual development of performance accountability systems. By examining that development through this critical lens, I hope to assess the degree to which these projections are evidenced two decades later.

private and public “lifeworlds” of citizens (Habermas, 1984). The primary thrust of his critique of modern capitalist society is that the utilitarian rationality of administrative and economic systems, encroach upon the “lifeworld” of the citizenry undermining socially integrative character of communicative rationality rooted in practical speech and action. Eschewing traditional Marxism, Habermas neither anticipates nor calls for a utopian “post-capitalist” society. Instead, he envisions a dynamic balance among market forces, state administrative power, and the power of the people emanating from the private and public spheres of the lifeworld (McCarthy, 1991).

Habermas (1975, p. 21) suggests, as traditional authority gave way to liberal-capitalist principles in the eighteenth century, “economic exchange [became] the dominant steering medium...[as] interest-guided action [replaced] value-orientated action”. Thus, in the modern era, the state and the economy play complementary but decoupled roles in steering society<sup>37</sup>. To the degree that the market is separated from the state, the economic steering capacity is (apparently) de-politicized and legitimated as free exchange among individuals<sup>38</sup>. Thus, modernity allowed a dramatic scaling back of state power with government responsibilities limited to: “shaping a business policy that ensures growth, influencing the structure of production in a manner oriented to collective needs, and correcting the pattern of social inequality” (Habermas, 1979, p. 194).

Unlike traditional state authority that was largely unfettered, state power to intervene in liberal-capitalist society rests in its perceived legitimacy and in its ability to

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<sup>37</sup> Although this differentiation is largely consistent with the neo-liberal conceptualization discussed above, the nature and value of each component are very different. Unlike the narrow non-reflective man and weak state posited by neo-liberals, Habermas envisions a substantive, semi-autonomous state and a critical public sphere as important counter-veiling forces reining in market excesses.

<sup>38</sup> While Friedman (1982) advocates a system of “proportional representation”, he prefers this in free-enterprise dollar to vote terms, rather than in political, democratic person to vote terms.

secure the requisite resources to do so. The modern state faces a dilemma in exerting its power to curb social inequality and promote economic growth, when doing so violates norms of protecting private autonomy and property, which also contribute to the state's legitimacy (Habermas, 1979). Additionally, reliance on the economic sector for tax-derived resources, further limits the state, which is precluded from capitalist enterprise in its own right. Thus, state power emanates from its ability to act (or appear to act) in concert with both the force(s) of public opinion and market forces (Habermas, 1989a).

Unfortunately, finding or orchestrating interest convergence is problematic in societies characterized by class and/or racial-ethnic cleavages, and state legitimacy is therefore often contested and always tenuous (Weaver & Rockman, 1993). Habermas' contends, "In liberal-capitalist societies...crises become endemic because temporarily unresolved steering problems, which the process of economic growth produces at more or less regular intervals... endanger social integration" (1975, p. 25). These economic crises reveal the market's pretense to be free of power, and as social crises surface class antagonism becomes evident<sup>39</sup>. The "fundamental contradictions" inherent in the forced system integration of class societies, necessitate the maintenance of "ideological justifications to conceal the asymmetrical distribution" of life opportunities (p. 27). This ideological maintenance results in a weakening of the critical functions and a "refeudalization" of the political public sphere, as the state resorts to public relations to obscure the particular interests served by public policy and to engineer public opinion

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<sup>39</sup> Thus, Habermas is clearly at odds with the neo-liberal assertion that system integration via the market is free of political coercion as stated by Friedman.

(Habermas, 1989a)<sup>40</sup>. I argue below that the concept of ideological maintenance offers insight into the development of performance accountability in Texas.

### **The nature of schooling, its problems, and the role of the state**

A primary means of the steering systems to ensure social integration is the maintenance of an "achievement ideology" premised on the belief that individual achievement should determine the allocation of social rewards, and presupposing equal opportunity to participate. Due to its role in occupational and professional mobility, formal schooling became increasingly important to the achievement ideology, as the market lost credibility as a fair arbiter of life opportunities (Habermas, 1975). Tyack and Cuban (1995, p. 3) suggest an achievement ideology was central to the expansion of the American public school system:

Faith in the power of education [to promote individual and societal progress]...has helped to persuade [American] citizens to create the most comprehensive system of public schooling in the world.

For Habermas, education, or at least the achievement ideology, possesses an integrative value to society beyond the sum of the benefits accrued to individuals<sup>41</sup>. To the degree that the school-based achievement ideology is vital in staving off a social crisis, the state

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<sup>40</sup> From the standpoint of image management, the rationale for a "controlled" release of performance data appears consistent with the statement by the TEA (1996, p. 7, italics added), "it had become obvious that the public...would use *any available information* to monitor school performance."

<sup>41</sup> For neo-liberals, education is viewed primarily in utilitarian terms, as a means to accrue human capital. For Habermas, while useful in system integration, education and communicative action more generally are valuable in and of themselves by engendering meaning for the individual and the group.

has a substantial interest in nurturing this faith. This is not an easy task, as Justice Powell noted in 1973 in *Rodriguez v. San Antonio Independent School District*:

The history of education since the industrial revolution shows a continual struggle between two forces: the desire by members of society to have educational opportunity for all children and the desire of each family to provide the best education it can afford for its own children.

Tyack and Cuban (1995, p. 22) note, “Americans from all walks of life may have shared a common faith in education, but they hardly shared equally in its benefits.” Beginning in earnest with civil rights challenges in the 1950s and 1960s, school finance cases in the 1970s, and the critiques from the left noted above, challenges to the achievement ideology began to mount.

A critique from the right offered in *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), arguably the rallying cry for the accountability movement (Ravitch, 2000), differed in content if not in zeal from the radical critiques from the left. The report warned of America’s weakened position vis-à-vis her global economic competitors due to a “rising tide of mediocrity” in its public school system<sup>42</sup>. Emphasizing “twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling”, the report demanded, “All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost” (p. 1).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Although the research findings on which it is founded are debatable (see Berliner & Biddle, 1995), this report is an exemplar of neo-liberal, utilitarian logic applied to public schooling, focusing primarily on its economic and defensive benefits and locate its main problems in misguided efforts in “social engineering”.

<sup>43</sup> Despite an apparent convergence of interest with the radical critiques regarding equity, arguments in the report reflect the neo-liberal emphasis on “equality of opportunity”, downplaying the importance of structural inequality. The report argues in the introduction that the national commitment to education was

The growing public awareness of the inability of schools to reconcile egalitarian and democratic values with the hierarchical demands of the marked an intensification of a “legitimation crisis” for public education schools in the eighties (Cibulka, 1997; Foster, 1980; Shapiro, 1984). Within the American federal system of government, the primary responsibility for creating and maintaining public education systems of schools falls to the state. In discharging this responsibility, states have traditionally deferred much of the governance to local education authorities. However, beginning with the Brown decision in 1954, there has been a growing presence of state governments in educational policy-making and monitoring in response to public pressure for states to address longstanding inequity in the public school system (Cibulka, 1996). In the two decades since the Nation at Risk report, states have dramatically increased activism vis-à-vis local education authorities (Elmore, 1997; Fuhrman, 1989; Timar, 1997).

### **Texas performance accountability as a legitimacy project**

Viewed through Habermas’ critical lens, the development of the Texas accountability system might be interpreted as a “legitimacy project”, an attempt by the state to re-establish legitimacy with the public by employing administrative systems to resuscitate and nurture a faltering achievement ideology. Evidence of this shift is found in a number of features of the system consistent with the logic expressed above, including: 1) publication and enforcement of an explicit and increasingly rigorous curriculum, 2) redefinition of state and local responsibilities reflecting a separation of administration

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compromised by “the multitude of often conflicting demands...to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve.”



from legitimation, and 3) public relations efforts to reduce tension within class and race cleavages by simultaneously drawing attention to, and obscuring the persistence of, performance gaps.

### ***Formalization of curriculum***

Attempting more “systemic reform” states have assumed greater authority over curriculum and enforced this authority with comprehensive systems to monitor, reward and sanction school performance (Vinovskis, 1996). In Texas, this took the form of an evolving set of learning standards, beginning with the Essential Elements adopted by the State Board of Education in 1984 and later replaced by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills adopted in 1997. Consistent with, if not leading, the trend to develop policy systems designed to hold individual schools and school districts accountable to public demands for equity, efficiency, quality and choice (Loveless, 1998), Texas has instituted an array of assessments and associated rewards and sanctions for students, campuses, and districts to enforce the curriculum standards as discussed above. Ironically, Habermas (1975, p. 71) notes “administrative planning [of curriculum] produces a universal pressure for legitimation in a sphere that was once distinguished precisely for its power of self-legitimation”,

### ***Separating administrative and legitimating systems***

More than simply taxing its limited resources, the “instrumentalization” of everyday communicative practices by administrative systems undermines socially and

culturally integrative processes<sup>44</sup>, processes that must then be assumed by the state (Habermas, 1984). In politically imposing a curriculum the state must carefully limit its administrative responsibilities “in order that there accrue to it from its planning functions no responsibilities that it cannot honor without overdrawing its accounts” (Habermas, 1975, p. 68). Thus, Habermas’ predicts that the scope of government activity will contract at the same point it apparently needs to expand. This is accomplished in part by “making the administrative system, as far as possible, independent of the legitimating system” (p. 69).

Although this appears to contradict this the apparent expansion of state control, Hoyle (1999, p. 217) notes just this trend in current reform strategies that often entail “centralisation of policy and decentralisation of delivery...by establishing self-managing schools...within structures of accountability”. This is clearly evident in the Texas system where apparent autonomy provided in site-based management is severely circumscribed by state curricular mandates and funding limitations. Thus, it seems reasonable to argue that the shift in emphasis from process to performance of the new accountability systems (Elmore et al., 1996) reflects the decoupling of the legitimating and administrative systems theorized by Habermas<sup>45</sup>. Accordingly, in this case, the state redistributed responsibility, retaining for TEA the task of monitoring and sanctioning and leaving to

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<sup>44</sup> Neo-liberals would tend to agree on the problem, but where Habermas argues for maintaining space for communicative action in the private/public sphere of the student-parent-teacher relationship, neo-liberals would transfer this activity to the market.

<sup>45</sup> This explanation suggesting a repositioning of the state vis-à-vis the market and the public sphere, differs from the neo-liberal push for government devolution in favor of market processes.

local education authorities responsibility for ensuring the outcomes.<sup>46</sup> Apple (2000, paragraph 25) suggests competition inspired by performance comparison results in “a subtle, but crucial shift in emphasis...from student needs to student performance and from what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school.”

### *The public relations of performance gaps*

Perhaps most interesting in the Habermasian scheme, is the ambiguity performance gaps pose for the state. As noted above, the state derives its political legitimacy and power in part from the need to curb the tendency of the economic system to generate intolerable social inequality, if left unchecked. At the same time, the state must nurture an achievement ideology, which relies on a public perception of a fair system of *merit*-based stratification. Given these imperatives, it seems reasonable to predict some cycling of performance gaps rather than either long-term closure or persistently wide gaps.<sup>47</sup>

Attention to performance disparities for historically underserved students is a very interesting and somewhat unique feature of the Texas accountability system<sup>48</sup>. As discussed earlier, TEA addresses equity concerns by publicizing and sanctioning schools and districts failing to attain minimum performance levels for each of a number of racial,

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<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting that the redistribution of responsibility followed the implementation of a heavily redistributive educational finance system that was developed under court order following *Edgewood v. Meno* in 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Here the interpretation diverges substantially from that of the neo-liberals. Where one sees cyclical gaps arising from necessary incremental incentive adjustments to maintain motivation and improve information quality, the other sees the maintenance of tolerable performance gaps to obscure the underlying reality of class relations and to maintain the motivation ideology.

<sup>48</sup> Beginning in 1992-3, district and campus results on the newly instituted Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test were disaggregated by race/ethnicity categories and socioeconomic status and publicized through the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS).

ethnic and socioeconomic student subgroups, (Texas Education Agency, 2000c). Some equity advocates laud this new openness by the state to reveal longstanding inequity,

The point that accountability and standardized testing can reveal the deep inequity structured within traditional models and methods of schooling and force educators to make improvements is one we...strongly support (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2001).

In shedding light on the performance gap, the state also establishes a legitimate role of monitoring, if not ensuring, equity at the local level. However, the state maintains legitimacy only to the degree that it can demonstrate an ability to reduce gaps associated with “accidents of birth” rather than individual effort. Not surprisingly, the TEA strategic plan for 2001-05 (2000a, p. 15-16) notes progress and room for improvement,

Student performance on the statewide assessment has outpaced expectations... [with] remarkable growth over the past seven years. Minority students and economically disadvantaged students have made especially impressive gains... Despite improvements, disparities in student performance remain. The agency must prioritize its efforts to help schools and districts close the achievement gap.

It is clear that a number of state reported statistics suggest rapid gains for minority and poor students. There has been a good deal of debate about the substantive improvement underlying the impressive statistical gains in Texas test scores (Fuller & Johnson, 2001; Grissmer & Flanagan, 2001; Haney, 2000; Jerald, 2001; Judson, 1997; Klein et al., 2000).

A number of indicators suggest large and persistent gaps in area such as advanced course enrollment<sup>49</sup>, college readiness, and post-secondary participation.<sup>50</sup>

One issue raised is a lack of parallel improvement in passing rates and college readiness as measured by the state exit exam (Parker, 2001). The Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) is a college readiness test administered by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board required of all persons entering Texas public institutions of higher education for the first time. Students unable to pass the TASP test prior to admission to entering higher education are required to enroll in remedial classes. TAAS/TASP equivalence measure indicates the percent of graduates receiving a score on the exit-level TAAS to have a 75% likelihood of passing the Texas Academic Skills Program (TASP) test. Unlike the TAAS passing rates, there was effectively no closure between 1994 and 2000 of the 25-point performance gap between low-income students and their peers in terms of TAAS/TASP equivalency scores. Similar gaps occur between white and non-white student groups.

The difference between the TAAS passing rates and TAAS/TASP equivalence appears to be an artifact of the arbitrary placement of the cut score<sup>51</sup>, which might explain

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<sup>49</sup> From 1994 to 2000 enrollment in advanced coursework increased for both low income and non-low income students, but the gap between groups increased from approximately six to nine percentage points.

<sup>50</sup> A national study of postsecondary education, Measuring Up 2000 scored states higher education systems with regard to preparation, affordability, participation, completion and benefits. Texas received an overall score of 72 (average = 78) and ranked 41 among the 50 states (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2001). Although figures regarding non-white students are not included, Texas lags top states in measures related to preparation and strategies for financial support of low-income students.

<sup>51</sup> Because the majority of low-income students fell below the 1994 cut score (passing rate = 37.3%) and the majority of non-low income students fell above the cutoff (passing rate = 60.0%), a marginal score improvement results in a much larger proportion of low-income students moving into the passing range than that of their peers. In addition, as more students in the non-low income group begin to reach the performance ceiling imposed by the TAAS, the gap appears to close even more rapidly as the test fails to reflect “real” performance gains. An identical argument can be made for the gains for African American

both the modest gains in TASP equivalence noted above and the modest gains on the National Educational Assessment of Progress (NAEP) noted by other researchers (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000; Klein et al., 2000). Habermas' theory helps to explain the choice by the state to emphasize TAAS passing rates on the state developed test<sup>52</sup>. Foster (1980, p. 502) notes

In order to function effectively, Habermas claims, administrative solutions must be implemented quickly and accepted simply by the public. The identification of new “problems” can pose a threat to administrative authority and legitimacy by allowing public debate about a variety of solutions.

While unable to resolve the basic contradictions of the system, in tending to its “legitimizing myth” (Cibulka, 1997) by establishing and reaching impressive appearing, if somewhat vacuous goals, the state staves off an impending legitimacy crisis<sup>53</sup>. However, the solution is necessarily temporary for two reasons. First, as arbiter of equity and guardian of the achievement ideology, there is an institutional interest in maintaining some level of inequity. Perhaps more importantly, the state must avoid a potential motivation crisis stemming from “over-correcting” the economic steering system,

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and Hispanic students as well. Haney (2000) discusses the arbitrary process of establishing the cut score and its disparate impact different student groups.

<sup>52</sup> While the state reports a wide array of statistics, it has been suggested that these fall into a “hierarchy of public-ness” with TAAS scores being much more public due to their disproportionate influence on the school ratings (Valenzuela & Maxcy, forthcoming).

<sup>53</sup> A similar argument can be made with regard to the choice of dropout statistics. Texas elects to calculate the dropout rate in a way that differs markedly from commonly accepted methods such as the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) definition. The rate reported by Texas consistently underestimates the rates relative to the NCES measure. In 1994-5 NCES reported a dropout rate for Texas of 2.7 percent as opposed to 1.8 reported by the state (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

In such a situation ...upwardly mobile voter groups, who have directly reaped the greatest benefits of the formation of the social welfare state...developing a mentality concerned with protecting their standard of living...may...join with those classes oriented towards productivity, into a defensive block against underprivileged or excluded groups. Such a regrouping...threatens...the political parties that for decades have been able to rely on a steady clientele in the welfare state, (Habermas, 1986, p. 8).

As noted above, the TEA strategic plans articulate a need to close performance gaps. With passing rates for all students rising above 90%, it becomes increasingly difficult to demonstrate quick improvements, defend charges of a lack of rigor, and maintain a sense of urgency. By instituting a broader and more rigorous testing system, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, the state achieves all three. Unfortunately, as new performance gaps are re-instituted (see figures in the introduction) the apparent gains for poor and minority students disappear. Moreover, the appeal of the system is likely to erode as “the method of ensuring egalitarian standards through ever-subtler forms of regulation and surveillance conflict with the goal of providing opportunity for self-fulfillment and spontaneity” (Habermas, 1986, p. 9)<sup>54</sup>. Thus, the achievement ideology becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

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<sup>54</sup> Habermas is concerned with suffocating imposition of formal rationality in every aspect of life. Like the vocal opponents of neo-liberalism in Critical Legal Studies and Critical Race Theory movements, he appears skeptical about the feasibility of formal legal or administrative structures to balance market pressures given the intertwining of state and market interests. Unlike these scholars, he holds out hope for democratic solutions emanating from the private and public spheres of the lifeworld.

## DISCUSSION

The objective of this chapter is to shed some light on the state level performance accountability system as a means to promote greater equity in public education, and in particular, to examine the recent expansion and intensification of the assessments and stakes associated with the system. By juxtaposing a traditional administrative perspective with one oriented through the critical theory of Habermas, I have attempted to provide insight into the logic(s) informing the system. Where the former recognizes the performance accountability system as a means to more effectively manage effort within the system toward excellence and equity in student achievement, the latter suggests the system operates to manage public opinion as means to reestablish legitimacy of the system of public education with the public.

Either account appears plausible. As Kuhn's sociological account of the hard sciences brought to the fore nearly forty years ago, theories constructed on different paradigmatic premises can offer different, but internally consistent accounts of the available evidence. Thus, he argues, theory choice is paradigm dependent and the reasons are left to philosophy, not logical or mathematical proof. The social sciences, from which educational administration borrows is no different, and in the post-positivist era, awareness of the links between paradigm selection and value orientations are more readily acknowledged (Donmoyer, 1999; Scheurich, 1995).

Kuhn leaves us with the problem of what to do with internally consistent but mutually incommensurable theories, which we appear to have here: "proponents of incommensurable theories cannot communicate with each other at all; as a result, in a debate over theory-choice there can be no recourse to *good* reasons; instead theory must



be chosen for reasons that are ultimately personal and subjective” (Kuhn, 1970, p. 199). Does this leave us at an impasse? Not necessarily. He suggests that the potential communication breakdown may be addressed, though not necessarily resolved through efforts to translate across paradigms,

What the participants in a communication breakdown can do is recognize each other as members of different language communities and then become translators. Taking the differences between their own intra- and inter-group discourse as itself a subject for study, they can first attempt to discover the terms and locution that, used unproblematically within each community, are nevertheless foci of trouble for inter-group discussions (p. 202).

The following section attempts to identify some implications from the juxtaposition of the rational and critical perspectives.

### **Contrasting traditional and critical accounts: What is revealed?**

Juxtaposing perspectives, brings to the fore some of the assumptions underlying the orienting paradigms. In this case, presuppositions concerning the role of schooling, the role of the state and the nature of the problems of public education map out some meta-theoretical plane and suggest to the reader an arbitrary aspect in the selection of an orienting paradigm. In tracing the origins of paradigmatic choice, the historical and subjective quality of the assumptions is revealed. For example, the assertion that “public entities function best in a market-like environment” presupposes the effectiveness of markets as a distributive mechanism. Even if the reader prefers the assumptions underlying the market shift over others, bringing into view the arbitrary quality of the

assumptions may be arbitrary forces some recognition that his/her presuppositions are subject to debate. Thus, while a market may be a preferred distributive system, it is one of any number of possible systems, and as discussed below one with a particular value bias.

The previous examination of performance accountability through the alternate perspectives revealed some distinct contrasts. The first perspective viewed performance accountability as a means to improve the performance of public education by recasting the system in a “market-like” competitive environment. Ostensibly “performance” could be measured along a number of bottom lines reflecting different constellations of values including, but not limited to, those characteristic of educational decision-making: efficiency, equity, excellence and choice (Garms, Guthrie, & Pierce, 1978; Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989; Stout, Tallerico, & Scribner, 1995). To be certain, excellence as measured by test performance is one bottom line. Similarly, equity as measured through the reduction of performance gaps among student groups and reflected in campus and district ratings is a second performance measure for the system. Some equity advocates suggest that the provisions for the latter performance measures in performance accountability systems create leverage for social justice issues (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson et al., 2001).

The second perspective portrays performance accountability as a means to reestablish the legitimacy of the state’s administration of public education with the wider public. While this particular legitimacy project trades upon a public belief in market systems, the performance of the system is measured somewhat differently. As discussed by Cibulka (1997), an additional value of “accountability” has ascended as one of the

preeminent values by which the educational system might be assessed. Thus, the performance of performance accountability as a legitimacy project must be assessed by the degree to which it nurtures a belief among the public that state officials are satisfactorily serving the public interest. This can certainly lead to goal displacement characteristic of bureaucracies as discussed by Weber and others<sup>55</sup>. From Habermas's perspective, this reflects the "refeudalization" of society as: 1) the state develops its capacity to obscure its activity through public relations and 2) the critical public sphere is captured by private interests through the consolidation of ownership of the free press and the shift to private financing of much of the work of public universities intellectuals.

I have attempted to provide reasonable alternatives to explain the function and performance of performance accountability systems, neither of which invokes a "fantasy of conspiracy" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Success must be judged according to the degree that either perspective offers a plausible account of the empirical evidence. If the reader believes one case is "made better" than the other, this may reveal: 1) bias on my part that I was unable to attenuate and that placed limits on my ability to adequately articulate the case, or 2) bias on the reader's part regarding the merits of my selection of the data.<sup>56</sup> The important point to be made is that the intense and ongoing debate about performance accountability is not a matter of an inability of one group to "spell it out" or

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<sup>55</sup> Ironically, as Linda McNeil (2000) notes, the use of public comparisons characteristic of performance accountability simply intensifies the goal displacement that it is purportedly seeking to mitigate as administrators become deeply invested in keeping up appearances.

<sup>56</sup> It is important to note that there is no requirement that the perspectives make the case using the same evidence as the relative importance of various types of data is paradigm dependent (Allison, 1969; Kuhn, 1970; Scheurich & Young, 1997)

another to “get it”, but rather the difficulty reconciling fundamentally different conceptual starting points.

To be certain, the second perspective offers a much more cynical portrayal of origins of performance accountability. Still, the intent is neither to disparage public administrators and state officials, nor to sway the reader regarding performance accountability.<sup>57</sup> Rather, the intent was to use the commonalities of the two perspectives noted to suggest a broader point about performance accountability: *the effort to improve the performance of public education is informed by an administrative bias toward technical control privileging efficiency over other valued outcomes*. In the conclusion of this chapter I will attempt to draw out the implications of a “lopsided” rationality characteristic of traditional administrative theory and practice and address the question of the effect of performance accountability on equity. This discussion foreshadows the subsequent chapters which examine district- and campus-level administrative practice in response to performance accountability.

### **Equity through performance accountability: Idiosyncratic responses and pervasive bias**

Considering performance accountability through the perspectives noted, the use of this type of system as a means to equity raises some substantive issues. Immediately, we must address a contradiction between a laudable goal, reducing disparities in access and quality of educational opportunities, and questionable approach, intensified control by

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<sup>57</sup> To be sure, I have opinions regarding performance accountability as constructed in Texas and I am not so naïve to believe that the reader is unaware that I work from a definite position. Still I am confident that the reader has “read through” this and my accounts have had marginal influence in solidifying or unsettling the reader’s position.

improving monitoring and invoking competition. This contradiction is introduced below, briefly. Manifestations of control intensification mediated by district policy are the central topic of the following chapter.

Even if one accepts that ends may justify the means on the grounds that disparities developed in the absence of effective administration, we must examine if the means will indeed lead to the desired ends. The review of empirical evidence above suggests that, at a minimum, multiple cycles of intensification are likely before the achievement gaps are appreciably reduced. As discussed below, performance accountability as composed in Texas, informed by and operating within a traditional administrative framework, carries with it an underlying value bias toward efficiency. Rather than an effective means to equity, a “lever for social justice”, performance accountability as it operates in Texas might be better characterized as a “curricular sieve”, undermining equity claims on the school finance system in the courts.

Both accounts outlined in the previous section portray performance accountability as a means to an end, whether that end is to improve the performance of the system or to reestablish the legitimacy of the system’s trustees. In *Theory and Practice*, Habermas (1973) traces a change in the “constellation of dogmatism, reason, and decision” since the Enlightenment period characterized by a divorce of theory (orientation to right action) from praxis (emancipatory pursuit). Through progressive scientification, advanced industrial societies attend to survival and reproduction through expanded technical control of nature and a refined administration of human beings. “Socially effective theory is no longer directed to the consciousness of human beings who live together and

discuss matters with each other, but to the behavior of human beings to manipulate” (p. 255).

A fundamental ethical issue must be considered in improving the control of the system, as the “system” is in fact composed of several million school children and thousands of educators who have become subject to the instrumental logic of system administration. While the promise of equitable instructional delivery and greater parity in results is appealing, to the degree that social justice connotes an “emancipatory intent” the refinement of control through a more effective performance monitoring system seems dubious. “Emancipation by means of enlightenment is replaced by instruction in control over objective or objectified processes” (Habermas, 1973, pp. 254-5). Freire would appear to be similarly troubled by the expansion of technical control as a vehicle to a more just system: “Manipulation, sloganizing, ‘depositing’ [of knowledge], regimentation, and prescription cannot be components of revolutionary praxis, precisely because they are components of the praxis of domination” (Freire, 2000, p. 126).

A number of researchers have commented on the interests served when administrators ground “apolitical” decisions within technical expertise or when decisions are shifted from explicitly political bodies to “non-political” markets (Apple, 2000; Engel, 2000; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998; Spring, 1992). While a one-sided administrative rationality may be confined to the technical question of means, the complementary moral-practical rationality must grapple with the questions of “To what end?”, “Who decides?” and “How will it be decided?” Space does not permit a lengthy discussion of this issue here, but clearly the establishment of the curriculum, the tests,

and the rating system at the state-level was highly political and those with political clout and/or technical expertise no doubt held sway over the proceedings.

While the control of the development of the system raises important questions, performance accountability is enacted and mediated largely through the work of educators and administrators at the local level. The materialization of performance accountability policy at the district and campus level is the topic of the next two chapters. Chapter five examines the responses of one Texas school district to the intensification of the performance accountability system. The account reveals an expansion of technical control manifested in an intensified “management discourse”. Chapter six examines the responses of teachers within one campus to that discourse.

While the particular district and campus responses discussed are no doubt idiosyncratic owing to their unique histories and social contexts, the following section examines an administrative bias permeating the operating environment they share with over 1000 districts and 7000 schools in the state. As discussed by Habermas, underlying “decisionism” in which he locates instrumental and strategic choice models is an implicit efficiency bias. The technical rationality of traditional administration rooted in positivism (Scheurich, 1995), trades upon the separation of fact from value, theory from practice, but in fact subordinates “all other interests of the praxis of life...for the benefit of the sole interest in efficiency and economy in the utilization of means”(Habermas, 1973, p. 271). In the final section, I attempt to illustrate how this efficiency bias mitigates against equity by examining the use of the performance accountability system in undermining equity claims on the school finance system.

### **Reconsidering performance accountability: Efficiency at the expense of equity**

To ensure statewide consistency in the instructional program, state law (TEC 28.001) requires districts offer a “foundation” and an “enrichment” curriculum. The content of the foundation curriculum (English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies) is specified by the state board and assessed through the state’s assessment system. Guidelines are offered for the enrichment curriculum (Fine arts, music, health, economics, career and technology education) though no statewide assessment is used to monitor performance in these areas.

According to the Texas Education Agency (1996, pp. 8-9), the performance monitoring system, of which state assessments are an integral part, is intended to create a “market-like” environment to: 1) "Promote action...directed to the tangible outcomes established by the indicators" 2) "[Provide] parents...better information about how their children's schools compare to other schools [so that] they will pressure weak schools to improve" and 3) "Create conditions that facilitate indicators' use in planning and decision making so that the data have a direct, rather than indirect, influence on policy".

Thus, beyond simply distinguishing the curricula by name, the monitoring of the foundation and not the enrichment curriculum must be read as an explicit prioritizing of outcomes by the state. In light of a concurrent shift by state Supreme Court regarding “adequate” support for the “general diffusion of knowledge” by the public education system, the privileging of efficiency over all other values becomes clear. An examination of the court’s shift from equity to adequacy requirements for the finance system in the latter two Edgewood decisions follows.



### *The adequate financing of education*

Although ultimately overturned on grounds that education finance fell under state not federal jurisdiction, arguments by the plaintiffs in *San Antonio ISD v. Rodriguez* revealed tremendous inequities in the state's school finance system. From 1975 to 1984, the Texas legislature attempted to amend the finance system to stave off impending state court challenges (Walker & Casey, 1996). Despite reforms that partially leveled the playing field, advocates on behalf of a number property poor districts challenged the system in the state courts in 1984 in *Edgewood v. Kirby*. The Texas State Supreme Court found the system unconstitutional in 1989 due to violations of the equal protection and efficient system clauses of the state constitution. Following the decision, the legislature rewrote the educational code to meet the court demands for an equitable and efficient school finance system. Although several initial attempts failed to pass muster, Senate Bill 7, providing for tax-base recapture was passed by the 73<sup>rd</sup> legislature in 1993 and deemed satisfactory by the court in 1995.

Of interest here is a notable change in the court's argument between the second and third decisions. In the *Edgewood I* opinion written by Justice Mauzy, the court did not provide specific guidelines as to how an efficient finance system might be achieved, but held

Districts must have substantially equal access to similar revenues per pupil at similar levels of tax effort. Children who live in poor districts and children who live in rich districts must be afforded a substantially equal opportunity to have access to educational funds. Certainly, this much is required if the state is to

educate its populace efficiently and provide for a general diffusion of knowledge statewide ("Edgewood I," 1990).

In this opinion, the central problem is the efficiency of the distributive mechanisms of the finance system, that is similar tax rates should result in similar revenue generation. The remedy focuses on equalizing access to revenues.

Three years later, the Edgewood III decision on Senate Bill 351 in June 1993 found the state system still out of compliance. However, in a concurring and dissenting opinion, then state justice and current U.S. Senator John Cornyn (R-Texas) added for the first time the argument that a constitutionally viable finance system must link the outcomes of education with the inputs. Two years later, writing the majority opinion in 1995 for the Edgewood IV decision upholding the wealth recapture system specified by Senate Bill 7, Cornyn wrote ("Edgewood IV," 1995):

In addition to reforming the financing system, Senate Bill 7 makes significant educational reforms in...the Texas Education Code, entitled "Public School System Accountability."...[T]he Legislature defines the contours of its constitutional duty to provide a "general diffusion of knowledge" by articulating seven public education goals [which] emphasize academic achievement. Most notably, the Legislature envisions that all students will have access to a high quality education and that the achievement gap between property-rich and property-poor districts will be closed. To ensure that all districts are able to meet these goals, the Legislature has established a system of student assessment and school district accreditation...and districts that chronically fail to maintain accreditation standards are subject to penalties...

Speaking for the majority, he continues,

While we considered the financial component of efficiency to be implicit in the Constitution's mandate, the qualitative component is explicit: [quoting the educational clause of the state constitution] “A general diffusion of knowledge being essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people, it shall be the duty of the Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools.

Thus, the court finds, “The accountability regime set forth...we conclude, meets the Legislature's constitutional obligation to provide suitably for a general diffusion of knowledge statewide.”<sup>58</sup> Then, pointing to the plaintiff’s charge:

The property-poor districts point out that the \$600 advantage enjoyed by the wealthiest districts...is an inherent, permanent part of the system established by Senate Bill 7...The property-poor districts argue that this gap will leave them with a permanent educational disadvantage.

He counters:

However, the property-poor districts' complaint that the \$600 gap renders Senate Bill 7 inefficient is premised on an erroneous view of the meaning of efficiency. The State's duty to provide districts with substantially equal access to revenue applies only to the provision of funding necessary for a general diffusion of knowledge. Although the Legislature has chosen to equalize funding up to a tax rate of \$1.50, the evidence established that, currently, all districts can attain the funding for a general diffusion of knowledge at a lower tax rate. Thus, our

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<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, under TEC 39.031 the costs of the assessments that form the centerpiece of the accountability come from compensatory education funds. Ironically, TEC 42.152 on the compensatory education allotment states, “funds allocated under this section shall be used only to fund supplemental programs and services designed to eliminate any disparity in performance on assessment instruments administered under Subchapter B, Chapter 39”. Since the introduction of statewide testing in HB 72 in 1984, the rationale for using compensatory funds is that the tests constitute needs assessments.

constitutional inquiry must focus on that disparity, rather than on the \$600 gap that occurs at a \$1.50 tax rate...[With the “dramatic reduction” in tax rate disparities with the wealth recapture plan, a]ll districts are able to provide for a general diffusion of knowledge, but property-poor districts must tax at a slightly higher rate than property-rich districts to do so.

In correcting this “erroneous view of the meaning of efficiency”, the court’s new opinion creates a legally binding change in meaning. Where the earlier interpretation focused solely on an efficient distributive mechanism resulting in equal access to revenues (output) for equal tax effort (input), Cornyn’s interpretation ties the system to a second stage of outputs, defined by the standards and testing system. This alternate interpretation has substantial equity implications. In the immediate situation, it allows the court to dismiss the equity claim based on the finding at revenues below the \$1.50 cap schools have provided for a “general diffusion of knowledge” as specified by the state. That is, districts have demonstrated “satisfactory” outcomes, both in terms of overall performance and the performance of various student groups, at tax rates below the \$1.50 cap<sup>59</sup>. Thus, the lower rate provides a suitable or “adequate” level of support to meet state requirements specified in the assessment system. Variations in efficiency and taxpayer willingness to support higher rates (up to the \$1.50 cap) may allow districts to offer some modest level of local enrichment beyond the required “diffusion of knowledge”.

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<sup>59</sup>It is unclear to what evidence he refers. It seems reasonable to suggest that the very limited number of districts defined as “low performing” by the state and thus maintaining accreditation might constitute the evidence. Here the difference between the standard setting for districts and for students has substantial implications, for “adequate” was defined in 1995 as 30% of each student group passing each test.

### *An efficiency-oriented foundation plan*

In combination then, the finance and monitoring systems create a modified efficiency oriented foundation program. Where traditional foundation programs provided a minimum level of support allowing local enrichment depending on tastes for education and tax rates, this efficiency oriented foundation program tightly specifies both the level of support and the level of performance. Clearly the efficiency requirements are intimately tied to the political concerns of the state regarding legitimacy (e.g. What will the public deem acceptable in terms of educational content and performance?) and regarding redistribution (e.g. What level of expenditure will local taxpayers tolerate?).

Like traditional foundation programs, this efficiency-oriented program is unlikely to maintain equity given avenues for local enrichment. According to the express logic of the system, given scarce resources action should to be directed toward the “system indicators”. Thus, while the state suggests public school offerings extend beyond the “foundation”, the lower priority of “enrichments” is reflected in the exclusion of this part of the curriculum from the testing and rating system. Assuming equalized per pupil<sup>60</sup> revenues under Edgewood IV, achievement equity will follow from administrative efficiency as with the adoption of strategies to maximize achievement (as measured by the system indicators).

The assumption of equalized funding is suspect. Local enrichment may occur in areas falling outside equalized operating expenditures. Investments in facilities, for

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<sup>60</sup> Under the wealth recapture plan, an annual revenue gap of up to \$600 per pupil remained to allow some local discretion in educational funding.

example, fall outside the scope of the wealth-recapture plan. Alternately, it may occur through privatizing funding of “enrichment” curricula. A growing trend in the state is the formation of tax-exempt educational foundations. One such foundation in Eanes Independent School District, a property-wealthy suburb of Austin articulates the following vision on the district homepage:

The Eanes Education Foundation exists to support the Eanes Independent School District (EISD) in becoming the premier school district in the United States. To achieve this goal, we will provide the financial resources to ensure that: EISD students have access to cutting-edge curricula and technology, as well as outstanding cultural, arts, and athletics programs; EISD students develop the academic strength, leadership skills, and understanding of diverse opinions and cultures to succeed at the university level and as productive citizens; and EISD can recruit and retain educators and administrators of the highest quality.

In its “Keep Eanes Exemplary” campaign, the Eanes Education Foundation (EEF) raised nearly \$300,000 to support its 7,100 students. Highland Park ISD, one of the state’s wealthiest districts raised \$2 million from private sources to support its 6,500 students in the 2002-3 school year (Hart, 2004). The district also instituted a \$500 fee for athletic participation. The district’s education foundation, created in 1984, is currently engaged in a campaign to create a \$10 million endowment through private donations. According to the foundation’s executive director, the endowment is a means for the district to pursue excellence by raising private funds outside the equalized public funding channels<sup>61</sup>,

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<sup>61</sup> Under the state’s wealth recapture plan, the Highland Park sent \$65 million to other districts in 2003-4.

The long-term benefit of an endowment is not only to provide dependable funding to help meet the immediate, critical financial needs of the district, but also to offer a solid, reliable financial base that will allow HPISD to maintain its position of excellence in education (Holland, 2004).

The co-chair of the endowment campaign views this type of private funding stream as a necessary strategy, “Just as our public universities have discovered, a public/private partnership is the only means of assuring the quality education that we want for our children.” What this fails to acknowledge is that sources for these private funds which are “off the books” in terms of the equalized funding formulae are not equally distributed among districts. Regardless of tastes for education, school districts will vary widely in the capacity to privately augment district budgets.<sup>62</sup>

The “adequate” level of public dollars provided through the school finance system is now explicitly tied to the state’s specification of minimally acceptable academic performance in the foundation curriculum monitored through the performance accountability system. As noted above, the performance accountability system is explicitly designed to direct “action” and thus time and resources toward the outcomes associated with the indicators (and away from other outcomes)<sup>63</sup>. The intended outcome of “efficient” resource administration means that public dollars devoted to the enrichment activities, art, music, health and physical education, and career education, will be

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<sup>62</sup> In 2000, the median income in Highland Park was just under \$150,000 and the median cost of a home was \$685,000. Both are approximately six times the state average allowing planners for the Highland Park endowment campaign anticipated substantial donations. Donations in excess of \$25,000 are recognized with dedicated plaques, and larger donations be honored with the re-naming of a district building or facility (Holland, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Arguably, variation in local preferences for the “foundation/enrichment” mix would allow administrators to vary the emphasis. As these are question of ends, determination of this variation by administrators, however, would require raising practical questions with the community, a move into communicative action.

progressively limited. These additional educational activities might be pursued privately by those with means, but under the logic of the system will be pushed to the margins of the public system. In essence, the performance accountability system provides the policy “sieve”: 1) reduce the scope of “equity” to a more limited segment of specified and measured curricular outcomes, and 2) transform the pursuit of equity to an administrative search for efficient means to those narrowed ends.

### *Texas-style performance accountability in a different light*

It seems that through the adequacy shift in the court’s argument, a potentially troublesome equity claim on the state was reconstituted as an efficiency problem. In doing so, the state shortens its reach (narrowing educational outcomes to a “foundation” and arbitrarily defining “adequate” passing standards), redefines its role as performance monitor and creates pressure on local actors to find efficient means. In the short term, this shift had an apparently miraculous effect and contributed greatly to re-legitimizing the state’s administration of public education. Over the longer term, the new pressures created issues for local districts.

At the state level, this issue is coming to a head and is to be taken up in special legislative session this spring. According to the governor, current funding levels are adequate and efficiency of the local districts must improve<sup>64</sup> before he would consider changes to the finance system that would expand the resources made available for public education (Fikac, 2004). In light of the recent intensification of the assessment system

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<sup>64</sup> A recent proposal by the governor would reward schools for improved efficiency with financial incentives tied to the number of students achieving high test scores, remaining in school to graduation and completing the recommended graduation plan (Stutz, 2004). Premiums paid for those passing from low-income homes or with limited English proficiency.



under SB 103 and the Student Success Initiative, local education authorities face new pressures to squeeze every penny to meet the new “minimum standards” for student performance with fixed or declining budgets. The filing of suits by property wealthy districts and the reconsideration of the recapture provisions of the finance plan by the legislature, suggest the political will regarding adequate achievement, acceptable levels of taxation, and appeal of redistributive policies will be tested.

At the local level, the heavy emphasis on addressing technical questions of control, whether of costs or instruction, erode possibilities for deliberations concerning the ends of schooling and means of achieving those. The following two chapters attempt to document how these efficiency considerations play out in the allocative and instructional decisions in the district and campus in this study.

## **CONCLUSION**

The focus of this chapter is the state level performance accountability system as a means to promote greater equity in public education. In particular, the chapter examined the recent expansion and intensification of the assessments and stakes associated with the system through SB 103 and the Student Success Initiative. Research, policy and planning documents published by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and student performance data released by the state agency through its Academic Excellence Indicator System were used to evidence the logics informing the development of the system. By juxtaposing a traditional administrative perspective with one oriented through the critical theory of Habermas, the chapter provided alternate accounts for the development of the system. Where the former recognizes the performance accountability system as a means

to more effectively manage effort within the system toward excellence and equity in student achievement, the latter suggests the system operates to manage public opinion as means to reestablish legitimacy with the public.

Either logic is plausible in the abstract. Performance accountability must be contextualized in terms of its place in the broader state context and in terms of how the effects of the system materialize at the local level. The former is dealt with, in part, in the concluding section of the chapter, by examining the coupling of performance accountability to the school finance system which explicitly and powerfully orients educators and educational administrators in Texas. The intensification of efficiency concerns stemming from this change appears to undermine the potential use of the system to leverage equity for the state's historically underserved student groups. As discussed in chapters five and six, this intensification has substantial impact on local level responses to performance accountability.

## **Conclusion**

State performance accountability systems were introduced widely in the eighties and nineties to improve the performance and increase the responsiveness of public education systems. Over the past five years, the Texas public school accountability system has received a great deal of attention in educational policy debates. This chapter employed alternate perspectives to explain the development and periodic intensification of the Texas performance accountability system to address equity concerns. A rational-technical account focused on the benefits of improved management systems and tighter

coupling in public education. The second critical account emphasized improved impression management to reestablish the legitimacy of the system with the public.

In the abstract, the impacts of the system on equity in a complex educational system are difficult to assess and conclusions seem paradigmatically bound. That is, either explanation appears to be borne out empirically and “the truth” is to some degree “in the eye of the beholder”. Alternate accounts raise important questions about the common sense underlying the system. In this case, certain assumptions regarding the identification of ends and the selection of means often obscured in traditional administrative approaches were revealed. Improved management of the educational system in the interests of those it has historically underserved is laudable. Definition of those interests and establishment of systems promoting efficiency in serving those interests by elites for the underserved are more dubious. The contradictions of using control systems for emancipatory ends, often obscured by technical rationality typical of traditional administrative theory, must be problematized.

Situating the system in the wider state reform context can provide some orientation. For example, the coupling of performance accountability to the school finance system through the latter Edgewood decisions had important implications for how the system might animate reform activity. As discussed in the final section, channeled through traditional administrative practice focused on improved technical control, performance accountability system will promote efficiency over other valued outcomes such as equity. The following chapter examines the ways accountability pressures on Texas Independent School District administrators combine with this

administrative efficiency bias to intensify a particular management discourse with problematic consequences for the Chavez ES.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISTRICT MEDIATION OF PERFORMANCE MONITORING**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

State performance accountability systems were introduced widely in the eighties and nineties to improve the performance and increase the responsiveness of public education systems. The previous chapter employed alternate perspectives to account for the development and periodic intensification of the Texas performance accountability system to address equity concerns. One explanation focused on the benefits of improved management systems and tighter coupling in public education. The second emphasized improved impression management to reestablish the legitimacy of the system with the public. In the abstract, the impacts of the system on equity in a complex educational system are difficult to assess and conclusions seem paradigmatically bound. That is, either explanation appears to be borne out empirically and “the truth” is to some degree “in the eye of the beholder”. Situating the system in the wider state reform context can be instructive. For example, the coupling of performance accountability to the school finance system through the latter Edgewood decisions had important implications for how the system might animate reform activity. As discussed in the final section of the previous chapter, performance accountability channeled through traditional administrative practice emphasizing improved technical control is likely to promote efficiency over other valued outcomes such as equity.

Still, despite an inherent efficiency bias, the local level effects of these policies are unpredictable. Over 7000 campuses operate in the Texas public school system.

Without doubt, the invocation of market pressures will materialize differently in different campuses in different locales with different social, cultural and educational traditions and differing access to resources. Complicating matters, these campuses operate within the administrative structures of over 1000 independent school districts across the state whose elected board members are accountable to the state agency and to the voting public. The pressures brought to bear by the state level system on local campuses will be mediated by district level policies, which however uniform in application and normalizing in intent, will play out differently given any level of variation among the campuses.

This chapter focuses on the nature of that district-level mediation in one urban school district in central Texas, Texas Independent School District (ISD). The initial section seeks to connect the legitimacy pressures discussed in the previous chapter to a “management discourse” identified by a number of critical scholars (Apple, 2001c; Ball, 1990b; Gee et al., 1996) informing traditional administrative practice and intensified within current performance accountability operating environments. Following a brief overview of the district, an apparent intensification of this management discourse in response to the recent intensification of Texas’ performance accountability system is evidenced. The chapter examines a series of “power claims” (Habermas, 1987) reflected in district initiatives that shift decision-making toward the central office and away from campus leaders, teachers, parents and community members. The nature and intensification of the management discourse is evidenced in the “announcements” and “imperatives” expressed in district documents and press releases, the print and broadcast media and the comments of district-level administrators.

The previous chapter suggested that a key component of the new performance accountability system in Texas was the separation of the legitimation and administrative systems. Arguably, the announcements and imperatives articulated within the management discourses might be empty political gestures seeking to simultaneously legitimize the district administration and buffer the campuses from external interference. Alternately, if the management discourse was uncontested among administrators, employees, parents and community members, the initiatives might simply be understood as a rational and coherent plan of action. In fact, in the case of Texas ISD, district administrators do seek to “tightly couple” pronouncement to practice and the management discourse is contested. The latter section of the chapter examines efforts by district administrators in this district to ensure campus-level compliance with the imperatives and to close the gap between announcements and action by stepping up surveillance and enforcement. The focus is on the problematic nature of enforcing compliance through increased oversight and surveillance and the preclusion of opportunities to, in Habermas’s terms, “discursively redeem” the power claims embedded in the policies. The difficulties of substituting socially with systemically integrative practices noted by Durkheim (1984) and expanded by Habermas (1987) are used to understand frustration and contestation emerging at the campus level in response to this managerial approach to reform. These alienating effects are evidenced through the perceptions the teachers at one local campus and personal observations of administrative activities associated with the policies. This discussion foreshadows the discussion of “productive resistance” at Chavez ES in the following chapter, which stands contrast to “anomie” posited by Durkheim

## PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND MANAGEMENT DISCOURSE

Beginning in the late 1970s, many states, including Texas, began to develop comprehensive performance monitoring systems to make the educational system more responsive to public demands. Texas, along with a number of its southern neighbors, was a notorious underachiever in terms of academic achievement and equity of opportunity relative to other states for much of its history (Shirley, 1997; Valencia, 2000). As discussed in the previous chapter, the Texas legislature brought into law an increasingly comprehensive educational accountability system administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) between 1979 and 1999. Consistent with national trends, the system reflected a heavy emphasis on high-stakes student assessments<sup>65</sup> and public comparisons of school performance (Elmore et al., 1996).

A prominent feature of Texas-style accountability is its performance monitoring system that seeks to improve responsiveness by focusing public pressure with performance comparisons of districts and schools through the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA),

The fundamental assumption of performance monitoring is that organizations in the public sector will become more efficient if they are forced to function in an environment similar to that of a marketplace (TEA 1996, p. 8).

Thus, through market-like pressures the state seeks to “rationalize” the system in the narrow sense of imposing a technical rationality which “refers to the extent to which a

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<sup>65</sup>For students, graduation and grade level promotion are linked to meeting minimum standards. For campuses and districts, the stakes include negative (or positive) public opinion, financial rewards and possible state oversight and takeover.



series of actions is organized ...to lead to predetermined goals with maximum efficiency” (Scott, 1998). As suggested in the previous chapter, the state role within the performance accountability context relates to specifying goals and monitoring performance. Apple regards the trend to a smaller, regulative state reflected in performance monitoring systems of this kind as a cynical redefinition of roles and responsibilities by state policy-makers to fend off the legitimacy crisis.

A process in which the state shifts the blame for inequalities in access and outcome, which it has promised to reduce, from itself onto individual schools, parents, and children...The state is...faced with a very real crisis in legitimacy. Given this, we should not be at all surprised that the state will then seek to export this crisis outside itself (Apple, 2000, paragraph 37).

This redefinition of roles and responsibilities has intensified pressure on local actors, districts and campuses, to better manage fiscal and human resources to increase achievement and redress longstanding inequities. Although bringing pressure on local education authorities by making the longstanding achievement gaps more public, the performance monitoring system does little to alter the longstanding structural inequities that underlie the gaps. As argued below, the pressures brought to bear through monitoring may in some cases reinforce and intensify certain management logics that might maintain the status quo, if not exacerbate the gaps.

### **Performance monitoring reflecting and reinforcing the management discourse**

Over the past decade, scholars in educational administration have made considerable use of Foucault’s work (Anderson, 1998; Anderson & Grinberg, 1998; Ball,

1990a; Bushnell, 2003; McKenzie, 2002; Scheurich, 1997a). Although the applications vary widely, each is strongly informed by a central concept in Foucault's work: discourse as a system of representation. For Foucault, discourse "defines and produces the objects of our knowledge...[and] influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others" (Hall, 1997, p. 44). Foucault posited "discursive practices" and "discursive formation" as key elements in the analysis of how particular institutions establish "regimes of truth" defining the "reality" accepted by a given society. Historically developed, the resulting "discursive formations" are hierarchically arranged with dominant discourses reinforcing previously established racial, sexual, and economic, identities among others.

As Stuart Hall notes, Foucault's later work focused on the use of "discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others" (Hall, 1997, p. 47). Techniques of power operating through institutionalized systems such as law, education, and the media carry and enforce dominant discourses. For Foucault these techniques provide the bridge between power and knowledge. He argued "the apparatus [through which power operated] consists in: strategies of relations of forces supporting and supported by types of knowledge" (Foucault, 1980, p.196).

A number of critical scholars in education characterize performance monitoring systems in education like Texas's as powerful technologies operating within and reinforcing "management discourses". Ball (1990a) describes management discourse as a "moral technology", "an all-embracing conception of organizational control" (Ball, 1990a, p. 156). Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) suggest management discourses reflected in late capitalism are "profoundly imperialistic, seeking to take over practices

and social identities that are (or were) the terrain of other Discourses connected to churches, communities, universities, and governments (Gee et al., 1996, p. 26).

According to Apple (2001c), management discourses function in powerful ways in education to deskill and re-skill teachers, empower and constrain administrators, and further limit the public's role in public schooling. In a reform environment informed by this discourse, "teachers are increasingly subject to systems of administrative rationality that exclude them from an effective say in the kind of substantive decision-making that could equally well be determined collectively" (Ball, 1990a, p. 153). The narrowing of decision-making occurs within the campus and the classroom. Misgeld (1985) characterized the instructional objectives movement of the late seventies as a "cultural invasion" of the classroom which effectively neutralized the emancipatory potential of education. Reducing teaching to "the systematically monitored delivery of instructional units to a client target group" (p. 89) with the material comprising the instructional units deemed appropriate by administrative decision, not dialogue with the student.

According to Habermas, these discourses develop through attempts by the late capitalist state to resolve the legitimation crises through increased technical control. Although skeptical about the postmodern project in general (see Habermas, 1981), Habermas invokes Foucault in reference to an emergent management discourse in welfare state administration. Quoting him at length,

The legal and administrative means for the implementation of social welfare state programmes do not represent a passive medium, devoid of its own peculiar properties. Rather, they are bound up with a practice that isolates and considers separately the legal facts of the matter that normalizes and places under

surveillance. It is this reifying and subjectivating power that Foucault has traced into even the thinnest capillary branchings of everyday communication. The distortions within such a regulated, analyzed, controlled, and watched-over life-world are certainly more subtle than the obvious forms of material exploitation and impoverishment; but these conflicts, shifted into the domains of the psychological and the bodily, internalized are no less destructive (Habermas, 1986, p. 9).

As discussed below, the encroachment of administrative control into the campus and classroom lifeworlds through standardized and heavily monitored curriculum within the public education system is largely consistent with the “reifying and subjectivating power” Habermas identifies.

### **Management discourse as colonization of the lifeworld**

The distorted communication represented by management discourses in schooling might be thought of as a “colonization of the lifeworld” by management systems, a central concept in Habermas’s communicative action theory (Habermas, 1987). Central to this work is the distinction between *purposive-rational* or *instrumental action* aimed at technical control and *moral-practical* or *communicative action* aimed at establishing and validating norms through consensus (Habermas, 1970). Within this scheme, the management discourse can be understood as the manifestation of a “one-sided rationality” characteristic of late capitalism, an over-reliance on instrumental action to the exclusion of communicative action. Relying on the former, problems of social inequality are understood as “technical” problems to be treated and resolved through the design

application of improved control systems<sup>66</sup>. Habermas argues that such problems are essentially normative not technical, and thus amenable to moral-practical, communicative action rather than purposive-rational, instrumental action (Habermas, 1970). The deliberate reconstruction of a more equitable institutional framework for education must draw on the rationality rooted in communicative action to foment deliberation about and attempts to reach consensus regarding objective, subjective and normative claims of truth. Improved systems of technical control cannot fundamentally alter inequitable institutions, such as the public education system.

In Habermasian terms, educational reform driven through performance monitoring seeks to bring the system under tighter technical control, rather than employing communicative action to reshape public education through critique, consciousness-raising and public deliberation. According to his normative communicative action theory, this approach is wrong-headed. From his perspective, the penetration of these administrative rationalities into elementary education, an area (at least ideally) “specialized in cultural transmission, social integration, and child rearing”, is problematic as these activities “remain dependent on mutual understanding as a mechanism for coordinating action” (Habermas, 1987, p. 330). That is, the social integration of the child facilitated through interactions with the teacher cannot be replaced by a systemic transmission of beliefs, attitudes and norms, a so-called “banking model” of education (Freire, 2000).

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<sup>66</sup> In fact, as discussed in the previous chapter, defining the problem as a technical problem to be redressed with improved administrative control will bias corrective action toward efficiency, regardless of the desired outcome. The management discourse to large degree offers a built in rationale for defining all problems as control problems, and thus, ironically perpetuating problems stemming from the lop-sided rationality informing the discourse.

Ironically, the spread of organizational rationality associated with the management discourse actually undermines traditional norms increasing the need for legitimations sought through the introduction of performance monitoring systems. “‘Rationalization’ [of the narrower, technical type] destroys the unquestionable character of validity claims that were previously taken for granted...and thus it furthers the politicization of areas of life previously assigned to the private sphere” (McCarthy, 1978). With regard to curriculum planning specifically, Habermas (1975, p. 72) notes,

At every level, administrative planning produces unintended, unsettling and publicizing effects. These effects weaken the justification potential of traditions that have been flushed out of their nature-like course of development.

Thus, where administrators once relied on teacher discretion to manage the uncertainty of instruction by negotiating the curriculum in a “loosely coupled system” (Weick, 1976), the extension of administrative authority demands new justification both for the planned instruction and the usurpation of that planning. In a highly uncertain activity such as classroom teaching, demands to justify each aspect of a lesson can quickly outstrip the ability to provide that justification.

For Habermas, the active and deliberate reshaping of the institutional framework of public education requires the moral-practical rationality of communicative action rather than increased technical control. Mutual understanding, coordinating action, and socialization according to Habermas must occur through communicative action whereby “participants carry out their plans cooperatively in an action situation defined in common” (Habermas, 1987, p. 127). “Public, unrestricted discussion, free from

domination...at all levels of political and repoliticized decision-making processes is the only medium in which anything like ‘rationalization’ [of the broader type] is possible” (Habermas, 1970, p. 118-9). As discussed in the previous chapter, traditional administration often acts out an inherent efficiency bias. It seems likely that administrators would typically then be averse to the sort of open-ended, time-consuming, and uncertain discourse necessary for communicative action. As discussed below, the “market-like” pressures designed to improve the efficiency of the public education system (Texas Education Agency, 1996) appear in the district studied to be promoting technically oriented rationality at the expense of more robust deliberations and the means and ends of public education in that district.

### **Examining the management discourse in accountability related reform**

The central concern of this study is gaining insight into the micropolitical dynamics manifested in the re-culturing of campus governance in response to systemic reform imperatives. In what ways do individuals and groups at the campus level negotiate reforms imposed and monitored by central office administrators in response to pressure brought to bear through the state’s performance monitoring system? In what ways do individuals at the campus level reconcile demands for communicative action within the mounting administrative strictures of an increasingly (technically) rationalized organizational environment?

An examination of a series of district reform initiatives offers a starting point to begin to investigate these questions. As discussed below, the concept of management discourse is helpful to understand the “colonizing” nature of this district’s responses to

the pressures brought on by the state's performance monitoring system. Further, the campus-level perceptions of this administrative "invasion" are helpful to understand the nature of the micropolitical activity that forms to central topic of the following chapter.

### **EVIDENCING THE MANAGEMENT DISCOURSE IN ONE TEXAS DISTRICT**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the performance monitoring system seeks to focus public pressure with performance comparisons of districts and schools through the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). The pressure is intended to force schools and districts to align instruction with an explicit curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) monitored with a high-stakes assessment system Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Schools and districts are rated annually as: *Low-performing*, *Acceptable*, *Recognized* and *Exemplary* based almost exclusively on test scores<sup>67</sup>. Periodic updates and intensifications have occurred for the curriculum (from the Essential Elements to TEKS), the testing (from the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), to the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS), to the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), and to TAKS) and the stakes (from a diagnostic test, to a graduation requirement, to a grade level promotion requirement).

This study seeks in part to understand ways in which the pressures invoked by performance monitoring manifest themselves at the campus level. These pressures are mediated by district policy. Following a brief overview of the Texas Independent School District, three district reform initiatives developed ostensibly in response to the state's

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<sup>67</sup> Although attendance and dropout rates are additional factors, very rarely are either of these a sole determining factor in a campus rating drop.



performance monitoring system are introduced: *A Blueprint to Leave No Child Behind*, *Instructional Planning Guides*, and *Benchmark Testing*. Documents, press releases, and public comments by the superintendent and district administrators are used to connect the pressures created by performance monitoring and to draw out the managerial rationale underlying the policies. The three initiatives are examined as “announcements” and “imperatives” invoking and reinforcing the district’s traditional management discourse, followed by a discussion of the nature of these “power claims” that cannot be “discursively redeemed” through communicative action. Specifically, the analysis looks to the ways the district’s central administration justifies increased centralization of its decision-making authority to the exclusion of subordinates and those outside the system.

The analysis then turns to the exercise of this authority over subordinates. A fourth initiative, the LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup> is examined as a means of penetrating the campus and classroom resulting in internal or lifeworld colonization to use Habermas’s terms. This discussion draws on the perceptions the teachers at one local campus and personal observations of administrative activities associated with the policies. The inclusion of teacher perceptions in this discussion helps illustrate the contested nature of the management discourse, foreshadowing the discussion of “productive resistance” and governance reculturing in the following chapter.

### **The district**

Texas Independent School District is a large urban district serving approximately 80,000 students in over 100 campuses. The student community is diverse: 52 percent of the students are Hispanic, 31 percent are Anglo, 14 percent are African American, and 3

percent are Asian. More than half the students are served by free and reduced-cost lunch programs, and approximately 20 percent begin school as English-language learners.

The district has a relatively long history of disparities in services for, and achievement of, student of color and students of poverty. Residents generally acknowledge a major interstate highway as the dividing line between the district's haves and have-nots (Martinez, 2002) and perceptions of marked disparities in services for communities within the city persist (Policy Research Project on Ethnic and Race Relations, 2001). Although court-mandated busing ended in the late 1980s, figures from AEIS suggest the district remains heavily segregated. Marked performance differences are also apparent, with disproportionate numbers of schools rated "Low-performing" to the east of the highway and disproportionate numbers rated "Recognized" and "Exemplary" to the west.

Given this physical and performance divide, the district faces intense pressure from a number of parents, community members, advocacy groups and city leaders to improve services to the east-side schools (Martinez, 2001; Reston, 2001). The pressure on, and scrutiny of, the district intensified in 1998 when the district was indicted by the state for manipulating test scores in an effort to improve the ratings of three elementary schools (Jayson, 1999)<sup>68</sup>. The move to the new TAKS assessment system in 2003, featuring more rigorous tests in new areas for graduates and new stakes for elementary school students due to grade promotion requirements, ratcheted up the pressures.

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<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, the scandal resulted from the deliberate exclusion of a small number of student scores (16 in a district of over 50,000 students) from the accountability subset, which raised the performance ratings for three schools. In economic terms, the adjustments occurred "at the margin" to scores for kids "from the margin", a predictable but problematic outcome of creating a "market-like" performance environment.

In addition to higher standards and increased scrutiny, the district encountered new restrictions on generating revenues in the late 1990s. Deemed a property-wealthy district in 1999 under the state's wealth sharing school finance system, the district has shared \$250 million in revenues with property-poor districts over the past three years. Unlike most of the state's property-wealthy districts, typically suburban and affluent, more than half the students in this district come from low-income families. Faced with declining property values and a \$1.50 cap on the maintenance and operations tax rate the district must address increasing performance standards and equity demands with declining resources.

### **Intensification of the management discourse**

A new superintendent was hired in 1999 to "right the ship". In the wake of the district's cheating scandal and under the cloud an indictment by the state's attorney for the cheating scandal, the superintendent's first charge was improving the district's data systems and reestablishing the district's integrity by improving its information management systems. Facing the intensified assessment system, longstanding achievement gaps and a budget crunch, attention then turned to improving and streamlining curriculum and instruction. Reflecting on his efforts to enhance teacher quality at a national conference in 2003, the superintendent<sup>69</sup> characterized the district as "caught in the vortex of what may come together as a perfect storm,"

We face rising standards and accountability measures at the state and federal levels but receive diminishing revenues to meet them. We have all the social ills

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<sup>69</sup> The citation of the presented paper is withheld to maintain the anonymity of the district and campus.

created by poverty, mental illness, addiction and violence arriving at our doorstep without community social agencies to address them adequately. We have the safety concerns endemic to most urban and suburban districts. We have strapped taxpayers, rising costs for utilities and maintenance, and a dire need for continuing professional development to carry our teachers from the novice level to mastery.

To navigate this “perfect storm” the new superintendent has attempted to run a “tighter ship”, by increasing central control over a number of district concerns.

Arguing that the district suffered from “too much pluribus, and not enough unum”, the superintendent initiated a number of reforms to strengthen central control of the district and create “a system-wide structure to guide teaching and learning”. Initiatives such as *A Blueprint to Leave No Child Behind*, *Instructional Planning Guides (IPG)*, *Benchmark Testing*, and *The Principles of Learning (POL)* were central components of the effort. As discussed below, each initiative reflects a response to the pressures created by the performance monitoring system. While merit can be found each initiative, it should be noted that each effectively extends managerial control over staffing decisions, campus planning, curriculum development, and instructional delivery. Moreover, in combination the three initiatives dramatically tighten linkages in the system through technical controls, arguably choking off communicative action.

### ***A Blueprint to Leave No Child Behind***

In 1999, a coalition of 600 parents, community members, religious leaders, advocacy groups and educators formed to protest alleged police brutality in the

historically underserved neighborhoods of the city. Over time the group expanded its scope to address perceived inequities in the city's educational system. In October 2000, the group led by a prominent local minister demanded the district enact "an aggressive timeline" to take action on a list of twenty equity related demands focused on the underachievement of the district's African American students (Smith, 2001). Although concerns about district inequities were not new, the concerns listed were easily corroborated by data available through the public performance reporting system. Not surprisingly, the coalition's demands coincided with state established performance indicators and referenced achievement disparities revealed publicly through AEIS. The district acknowledged the groups concerns, noted ongoing efforts to address the concerns, and articulated a strategy to improve<sup>70</sup>.

In December 2001, noting little progress after a year of dialogue with district officials regarding the demands, the coalition encouraged a for-profit school management company to submit a proposal to assume management of 15 schools. At that time, the district was reviewing an October 2001 proposal to establish a district charter school in AISD to be operated by an independent charter corporation. A district advisory board reviewed both proposals based on three criteria: proven student achievement, cost and accountability. In a press release in late February 2002, the superintendent announced a decision not to pursue a partnership with the for-profit management company. With regard to the charter school, although the possibility was left open, none has been established to date.

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<sup>70</sup> The superintendent's response in explored further in the discussion below.

The challenge caught the district's attentions. Acknowledging the community's concerns, the superintendent noted "an urgent need to do much better, much faster" and announced the district's intent to develop a plan of action for a group of under-achieving schools. Eight weeks later, a press release revealed the details of the plan for six under-performing campuses. The campuses were selected due to low achievement or low achievement growth on the state assessments. The proposed plan: 1) created a new position for a master principal to oversee the school and implement the plan, 2) reconstituted the staff of six campuses including the reassignment of five principals and large numbers of teachers, 3) required remaining and incoming teachers to deliver a prescribed curriculum and submit to "close monitoring", 4) devoted additional resources for professional development activities, and 5) committed to filling vacancies with experienced and certified teachers.

In a two-year review in March of 2004, the superintendent regarded the plan a success. A plan to develop a secondary school Blueprint model grouping two traditionally low performing high schools with the existing Blueprint middle schools was announced.

### ***Instructional Planning Guides***

In the fall of 2002, the district unveiled a detailed curriculum guide for all grades, pre-kindergarten to 12. Referring to the impending TAKS assessments in a press release on August 16, 2002, the superintendent stated

The new tests will be more rigorous than the TAAS tests of the past, will test students' knowledge in more subjects, and be given to students in more grades. We

welcome the TAKS challenge because it sets higher expectations for student mastery of the state standards...and the first step in meeting that challenge is teaching the TEKS in every classroom.

According to the press release, the Instructional Planning Guide (IPG) provides a “uniform curriculum that mirrors state standards and that ensures consistent, quality instruction in every grade, every subject, and every school.” According to the front matter, the IPGs include: “instructional guidance regarding pacing of instruction, research-based best practices including the Principles of Learning, methodologies, instructional resources, assessment strategies, descriptions of student work, and discipline/course specific teacher notes.”

Design of the IPGs was completed during the previous summer by teams of teachers from the district, in collaboration with consultants from the Just for the Kids Foundation (<http://www.just4kids.org/>). The curriculum was aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for the four core subject areas, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. According to the press release, “these guides detail every skill that teachers should teach and students should learn from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade.”<sup>71</sup> The superintendent notes, “This consistency is vital, considering the high mobility rate among families within the [district’s metropolitan].” Thus, the IPGs shift instructional planning from the classroom to the central office to improve alignment to the state curriculum and consistency of delivery.

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<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that the curriculum appears to be available for only the tested areas, language arts (reading and writing), mathematics, science, and social studies.

One central office administrator speaking to a class at the university regarded the IPGs as a necessary district response to the intensified assessments. The administrator felt the district was “way behind” in preparing for the new battery of tests. Noting the writing test specifically, this administrator felt “writing is going to blow people away because there is such a shift”. In her opinion, the IPGs and associated benchmark testing were needed to bridge problematic gaps between the TEKS (curriculum) and TAKS (the assessments) with a coherent and consistent set of district defined local objectives.

***Interim assessments: Benchmark, 9-weeks, and weekly testing***

To monitor student progress in the core curriculum during the year and assess readiness for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, the district instituted a number of interim assessments in 2002. In a July 2002 press release, the district curriculum director argued, “continuous assessment throughout the school year, especially benchmarking that can be evaluated across the whole city, is crucial to improving student achievement in all of our schools – for all of our students.”

“Benchmark” tests were developed for grades 2-10 for 2002-3, with tests for grades K-1 and 11-12 slated for 2003. According to the manager of the benchmark testing program, the beginning-, middle-, and end-of-year (BOY, MOY and EOY) Benchmark tests are directly aligned to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and thus indirectly aligned to Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)<sup>72</sup>. The stated intent of benchmark testing to help teachers target instruction to

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<sup>72</sup> Although the district spokesperson was very clear that the alignment to the TAKS was indirect, according to the district website, a private company received a \$1.6 million contract for “development and implementation of a TAKS-aligned Benchmark Testing program”.



un-mastered skills associated with delivery of the core curriculum (as specified in the IPGs). To help assess progress, benchmark tests have “a year’s worth of material” on each test. The manager noted that the tests should not be interpreted as predictive of performance on TAKS, which he noted was “a moving target”, but helpful to sense how a student might perform.

In addition to the Benchmarks, the district selectively administers two other interim assessments: 9-weeks tests and weekly assessments. A series of “9-weeks tests” aligned to the core curriculum as articulated in the IPGs. Voluntary otherwise, these tests are mandatory for Blueprint schools and a number of others on a “focus” list. Unlike the benchmark tests, which may include content from the entire year, these tests focus on material from the prior nine weeks of instruction as specified in the IPGs. Recently, the district provided weekly instructional programs culminating in a weekly assessment for the tested content areas of math, reading, writing, science and social studies. Like the nine-week tests, these weekly assessments are mandatory for focus schools<sup>73</sup>.

The district curriculum specialists develop the Benchmark and nine-week tests, which are then reviewed by lead teachers. Due to time constraints and costs, assessments are not field-tested. The manager noted that the district contracts with experts at the local university to review test content for the benchmark tests. According to the manager of the benchmark program, because the tests are simply used to inform instruction less rigor is required in terms of validity and reliability, relative to the state level TAKS tests.

The assessment program, specifically the Benchmark tests, are facilitated with assessment technology developed by a private company awarded a three-year \$1.6

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<sup>73</sup> A district testing schedule adapted from district documents is included in Appendix E.

million contract in 2002. Information provided in a July press release notes that the contractor, “provides curriculum-based educational software and Internet products and services that increase student achievement and enhance teacher professional development”. The assessment program and associated technology are intended to provide district administrators “real-time, online multi-year reports” of critical student data across years and across various student groups.

### **BLUEPRINT, IPGs, AND BENCHMARK TESTS: POWER CLAIMS IN THE MANAGEMENT DISCOURSE**

The impositions of the Blueprint, the IPGs and the associated assessments represent substantial extensions of managerial control over the campus and the classroom consistent with “colonization” of the campus and classroom lifeworlds. This section examines two types of “power claims” (Habermas, 1987), *administrative announcements* and *system imperatives*, that invoke and reinforce the management discourse to bolster the legitimacy and hence authority of the district administration vis-à-vis the public and the public school employees. For Habermas, administrative announcements and imperatives reflect efforts to exert influence. Within the “imperialistic” management discourse (Ball, 1990), such claims are not subject to criticism and do not need to be defended, apparently because they are legitimated within the prevailing discourse.<sup>74</sup> The

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<sup>74</sup> In a recent proposal to revise the hiring process for campus principals, the superintendent argued that if the board were to hold him accountable, he needed greater control over the selection of principals. The current process allows a panel of teachers and parents to put forward a list of preferred candidates from a pool identified by the district. A central complaint regarding the current process was that it was too participatory and limited administrative control by making the proceedings subject to public view and involvement. Concurring with the superintendent and apparently suggesting that pro forma participation was more desirable, one board member note the process was the “worst of both worlds” in that “you get parent and teacher involvement, but if you don’t choose their top candidate they get angry”.

exclusion of the public and/or public school employees from the planning process is reflective of a management discourse where legitimate authority is presumed rather than solicited “from below”.

### **Administrative announcements: Managing the boundaries of control**

As noted above, a coalition led by a prominent local minister demanded the district take action on twenty equity related demands related to the underachievement of the district’s African American students in October of 2000 (Smith, 2001). In March of 2001, the superintendent announced the district strategy to address the coalition’s concerns with the lagging achievement of African American students.

#### ***Announcing the strategy***

*Calling attention to the formal structure:* In the opening lines of the two-page introduction, the superintendent acknowledged the import of the coalition’s demands. In these lines he also indicates a clear insider (administration)-outsider (public) division. This division is characteristic of an administrative understanding of the organization, in this case the district, as a functional, goal-directed system serving the needs of its clients, the public.

It's important to recognize that the [coalition] has done this school district a service by focusing public conversations about education on the performance of African American students in our school system. Many of these conversations have been taking place internally for the past several years. These conversations have generated a number of major initiatives in this district, some of them growing out of recommendations by our District Dropout Task Force.

His comments seem intended to make explicit the formal structure of the system and to denote the boundary between insiders and outsiders. In doing so he invokes and reinforces a characterization of the system as both closed and rational (in a narrow, technical sense) which helps explain the functioning of the system and reduces “status battles” by calling on prestructured and differentiated roles (Scott, 1998). By suggesting the coalition is a step behind the district, he also appears to re-establish the authority of the district stemming from professional knowledge and expertise. That is, those “in the know” at the district have already noted and acted on the concerns expressed by the lay outsiders.

Following brief descriptions of three district initiatives, he states “As you see in the proposals generated by AISD staff working with representatives of the DAC [District Advisory Council], some of these initiatives already in place are central to some of these proposals [from a District Dropout Task Force].” While the comments signify the insider-outsider distinction, the response suggests that the superintendent feels pressed to maintain and reinforce the boundary.

Within a strictly rational-technical understanding of administration such a boundary is presumed. Neo-institutionalists (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995) in contrast would argue the defensive posture suggests an active effort to “buffer” the technical core of the organization by reaffirming the legitimating myth of its formal structure and pointing to its ability to proactively respond to client needs. If this legitimacy were unassailable, there would be no need to “announce” what was already known and what had already been done. This response to the pressure brought by the coalition deflected the demand for greater responsiveness sought through the market

mechanism of choice<sup>75</sup>. The intent of the announcement, then appears to be to deflect if not repel the encroachment by the public on the public system by invoking the management discourse.

Arguably, the information provided by the Academic Excellence Indicator system might have shifted the balance of power between the insiders and outsiders, allowing the coalition to call into question the efficacy of the existing hierarchical structure. That is, the publication of disaggregated performance results provided the coalition with a “policy lever for social justice” (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson et al., 2001) to challenge the historical structure of the district by evidencing the persistent achievement gaps. In fact, not only did the district not alter this formal structure, it reinforced the hierarchy and tightened the couplings within it. While this rigidification increased the district’s ability to transmit pressures from the public to the campus and classroom, paradoxically it might have made the district less responsive to public demands for engagement. The announced strategy seems to be an aggressive to put the coalition, and the public, in its place, by hunkering down and invoking the authority of management. This becomes clearer with the superintendent’s proposed communication strategy.

*Communicating to rather than with the public:* Outlining the district strategy to address the coalition’s list of concerns, the superintendent emphasized “the need to communicate effectively with parents and the community” and a “need to work closely with families as partners in the education of our students.” The description of

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<sup>75</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, markets and administrative hierarchies are both steering systems. Unlike non-political market steering where legitimacy rests on perceptions of fair exchange, the power of administrative steering rests on the perception of legitimacy of the political order (Habermas, 1975), in this case the district administration. The non-political nature of markets should be distinguished here from the political act of challenging existing administrative orders with replacement by market systems.

communication that follows has a clear direction, flowing from the district to the parents.<sup>76</sup>

We are putting on a *full-court press* to talk to parents about the TEKS standards. But every school needs to examine its procedures to make sure students and their families have the tools they need to plan for the future, including information about opportunities to supplement their education, to enroll in honors classes or to prepare for college entrance exams. (italics added)

While coaching metaphors are not uncommon in school leadership, the use here is revealing with regard to the district's management discourse. In basketball parlance, a "full court press" is an aggressive defensive posture in which one team extends the defense over the entire court and sets "traps" to keep the opponent from advancing the ball, reaching its goal, and scoring points. A press is most successful when it keeps the opponent from getting "in bounds".

Working as "partners" appears to suggest dialogue and power sharing among "teammates". Nothing in the paragraph above, nor in the strategy statement generally, indicates the parents or community members are to be engaged in deliberations nor included in the decision-making process. In fact, the parents and community members appear in the superintendent's characterization to be the "opponents". While the coaching metaphor might have been an unfortunate choice of words, the subsequent actions were largely consistent with the subtext of the announcement.

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<sup>76</sup> Referring to anti-dialogic "communication" or communiqués, Freire (2000, p. 131) notes: "The dominant elites...can--and do--think without the people--although they do not permit themselves the luxury of failing to think *about* the people in order to know them better and thus dominate them more efficiently. Consequently, any apparent dialogue or communication between the elites and the masses is really the depositing of "communiqués," whose contents are intended to exercise a domesticating influences".

### *Announcing the Blueprint*

The strategy materialized a year later when the Blueprint plan was announced in April. Despite the avowed “need to work with parents as partners”, the parents of students were provided opportunities to respond to the plan in a series of meetings *the following week*. In a press release announcing the meetings *after* the plan was announced, the superintendent stated,

Parent involvement will be crucial at these Schools for Excellence. We want to discuss with parents how teaching and learning will be improved at their campus and why their support is vital to the program’s success.

Extending the basketball metaphor, the parents are here viewed as “fans” or perhaps “boosters” who support the team from the sidelines, but are neither teammates nor part of the coaching staff.

Athletic supporter jokes notwithstanding, the district effectively excluded the “partners”, parents and community members, from the planning process, unveiling the “Blueprint” to the public as a finished product. Similarly, the affected employees were closed out of the planning discussions. Many, including several of the principals, were alerted to the plan when it was leaked to the media several days before the public announcement.<sup>77</sup> When questioned by parents and teachers at one elementary school about their exclusion from such an important decision at a public briefing about the Blueprint, the superintendent explained that expedience precluded wider involvement.

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<sup>77</sup> Ironically, the district was notified shortly after announcing the removal of the principal, that one of the six campuses reconstituted by the district just two years before, achieved a Recognized rating from the state for strong test performance.

He again invoked a coaching metaphor to point to the impracticality of the coach asking the players what to do during the game. He appears to appeal to a common sense of administrative efficiency which precludes more deliberative processes and the benefits derived (Fearon, 1998).

***Announcements: The best defense is a good offense***

The announced strategy to address the coalition's concerns and the resulting Blueprint reflects the invocation and maintenance of the management discourse with regard to the public interface with the district. Within this discourse, external challenges to the effectiveness of the organization are addressed by assurances that the basic machinery is in order and loose parts are being tightened. The internal retooling of a few schools by reinforcing the hierarchy and providing a highly prescriptive instructional program should quell concerns, but need not involve outsiders who belatedly recognized and raised the concerns. Parents and community members act as "silent partners", receiving information about the standards and offering support.

The premise of performance accountability is that new pressures must be brought to bear on schools due to a failure of earlier reforms, notably restructuring reforms, to fundamentally change the nature of instruction. The coalition's concerns were no doubt bolstered by the availability of corroborating performance data. The administrative announcement above appeared to buffer the technical core of the school, which is concerned with instruction. However, a buffering claim is hard to maintain in light of the announcement that the "reconstitution of these schools aligned perfectly with the intent of No Child Left Behind" (Superintendent, 2003), the superintendent promoted the plan as a



prototype for the district to respond to the new federal education mandates modeled on the Texas system. Still, the resulting response seemed less about inviting the public into a broader dialogue about education and schooling, than to transform the concerns into a number of imperatives intensifying the management discourse within the technical core.

### **Administrative announcements: Steering the system**

Announcements also speak to the ability of administrators to direct or steer the organization. For example the August 2002 press release introducing the IPGs and Benchmark testing, announced “New Austin Curriculum is ‘TEKS-Based’ & ‘TAKS-Ready’ —‘Curriculum Alignment’ Ensures Consistency in Every Grade, Every Subject, and Every School”. As with the insider-outside claim there is a reciprocal quality of this performance. Administrators “take charge” and make important decisions to put the district “back on track” and demonstrate their legitimacy in the power and knowledge to do so. Unlike the power claim above, which invoked-reinforced an insider-outsider distinction, the announcement of the IPGs and associated testing is legitimized by explicit connections to authoritative outsiders. The press release makes explicit reference to alignment with the state-defined standards to specify content, a national center to develop the curriculum guides, and an outside firm to provide assessment technology.

With regard to the latter, the district’s Executive Director of Curriculum noted the need for improved within district alignment in a press release in July 2002,

Continuous assessment throughout the school year, especially benchmarking that can be evaluated across the whole city, is crucial to improving student achievement in all of our schools – for all of our students.

To strengthen the claim of alignment with a proper outside authority, she then invokes the company's proven track record to announce the steps the district has taken to ensure the proper alignment, "We evaluated many companies and chose Lightspan because of their proven experience helping school districts tailor online assessments to be aligned with specific statewide tests." According to the press release, "More than 900 independent studies prove Lightspan products enhance student achievement, improve teacher effectiveness and help build stronger connections with families."<sup>78</sup>

Interestingly, while the clear intent is to announce the district initiative to align the curriculum to the state standards and to improve student achievement with a \$1.6 million investment in its testing infrastructure, the press release concludes with a "safe harbor statement" from the company. This statement falls under the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995 and is a caution to investors about the risks of "forward-looking statements".

This release contains forward looking statements, including statements related to performance by the Company and third parties under contracts...that are subject to risks and uncertainties, including, but not limited to, actual performance of third parties and the Company...The Company cautions readers not to place undue reliance on any forward-looking statements.

The statement would appear to undermine the claims of "proof" made by the company, or at the very least suggest the claims reflect a "marketing discourse" that should invite a degree of skepticism. More to the point, the "safe harbor statement" in effect buffers the

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<sup>78</sup> Claims of proof in educational studies must always meet with some skepticism. Science as a way of knowing typically avoids the strong language of proof, focusing on more indirect claims of falsification of alternate hypotheses (see, for example, Lakatos, 1970).

Company from legal claims by clearly stating that the parties in the environment in which the Company operates are “loosely coupled” and outcomes are therefore unpredictable. Ironically, the product they are providing will purportedly tighten the couplings in an organization around which the concept of loose coupling was developed, schools (see Weick, 1976).

For Weick (1976), the cohesion and directedness of a loosely coupled organization lay common values and shared visions among the semi-autonomous individuals composing the organization. In this case, the progress of students toward the standards might be improved through the application of the assessment technology to monitor progress and adjust instruction in the schools accordingly. That is, by tightening the couplings. Alternately, the system might function as if it were tighter if the semi-autonomous individuals within the system share a belief that the system is appropriately directed allowing them to act in concert to move the system to a perceived goal or standard. That is, the couplings might be more robust depending on the “common sense” underlying these shared goals and standards. Given the equivocation regarding the forward-looking statements, it seems reasonable to suggest that the power of the announcement lies as much in the belief of the stakeholders (of the Company or of the district) as in the technology itself.

Material gains associated with the management discourse are revealed in the mutual benefit derived from the announcement (the press release appeared simultaneously on the company’s website). Absent the authority the management discourse accords the curriculum director, her product endorsement is useless (as distinct from the \$1.6 million contract). Within the management discourse, her administrative

announcement is a power claim, legitimate because of her role in directing instruction and legitimated by her reference to the “proven” technology she will employ to accomplish the alignment (the Company’s cautions about forward looking statements notwithstanding). The announcement draws on and contributes to the administrative belief system rooted in the management discourse. The Company trades on this in soliciting investors in their management tools.

#### System imperatives: Assuming control

Like administrative announcements, system imperative reflect power claims. However, where the announcements above (re-)legitimize administrative authority to the public, imperatives discussed below invoke and reinforce the management discourse to control the work of those within the organization. The announcements above might be understood as administrative “buffering”, allowing the core classroom activities to continue without interference from outside pressures. However, the imperatives outlined below suggest the administration has translated and transmitted those pressures in an effort to more tightly couple the instructional activities within the district. As with the announcements above, the nature of the communication characteristic of the system imperatives is non-dialogic.

#### ***Valorizing the hierarchy***

In a two-year review of the Blueprint to Leave No Child Behind in March of 2004, the program’s director noted that “implementing consistent systems and procedures” was crucial to the success of the Blueprint model in improving test scores

and that reconstituting the staffs of the schools was “one of the major reasons for that success”. Reiterating the lessons learned from the Blueprint the superintendent stated:

If you can have a master principal build a team of experienced leaders on our most challenging campuses and get them to bond together with a cohesive plan of action. And if each of them could build a team of staff on those campuses as an effective team, and vertically and horizontally align, there is power in that design.

Noteworthy with regard to the management discourse is his clear emphasis on a hierarchical and tightly coupled system. From the perspective of management theory, schools as “loosely coupled systems” (see Weick, 1976) are “locked into irrational chaos...[and need] to be brought into its [management’s] redeeming order” (Ball, 1990b, p. 157). Within the management discourse, teachers are transformed into “technicians” delivering the curriculum and principals “as managers” (Ball, 1990b). Ball cautions, that in such situations “teachers are likely to emerge more clearly than ever as alienated workers with little control over their own work situation (p. 155). Apple (1981) suggests that this type of deskilling reflects a “proletariatization” of teachers.

### ***Extending control***

In the latter two initiatives, mandating a pre-planned curriculum through the Instructional Planning Guides (IPGs), the penetration of “system imperatives” into the previously “private” world of the classroom comes into view. This “invasion” is reinforced through the monitoring provided by routine testing for all students. The first line of the explanation of the IPGs states the imperative quite clearly,

It is the expectation of the District that learning will be enhanced by adherence to an aligned, articulated curriculum that promotes continuity and cumulative acquisition of Essential Knowledge and Skills from classroom to classroom, grade to grade and school to school.

The August 2002 press release gives a sense of the scope of the imperative, noting the IPGs, “detail every skill that teachers should teach and students should learn from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade”. Quoting the IPG explanation, the guides provide,

Instructional guidance regarding pacing of instruction, research-based best practices including the Principles of Learning, methodologies, instructional resources, assessment strategies, descriptions of student work, and discipline/course specific teacher notes.

Further, the mandated curriculum explicitly includes the district Benchmark testing and directions for administering the tests. A central office administrator commenting on the IPGs and Benchmark testing in September of 2002 felt that in the past, site-based management in the district had been “taken to the max”. The IPGs and associated testing were thought to provide commonality and thus a corrective to this loose coupling. According to this administrator, the objective was to provide consistency classroom-to-classroom and school-to-school and to *not* leave the TEKS to teacher interpretation.

More than simply a guide for instruction, the IPGs also provide an outline for teacher development. Speaking with the class, the administrator asserted that the uniform curriculum and routine assessments would enhance staff development, as results from the Benchmark tests would allow the district to target professional development sessions to specific teachers. This is echoed by the superintendent in the August press release, “Staff

development is a key component of this initiative...Teachers who are knowledgeable about the TEKS can provide quality, TEKS-based instruction consistently across the District”. Thus, within these system imperatives, the reduction of teacher discretion is evident in the loss of control over their work within the classroom, and over the direction of their own professional development.<sup>79</sup>

Like the administrative announcements discussed above, system imperatives expressing administrative intent appear to be power claims resting on a presupposition that justification to those affected is unnecessary. Problematically, the public nature of the imperatives creates new administrative pressures within the system. As ambiguity increases, both in goals and methods, individuals within an organization are generally required to exercise greater discretion in accomplishing tasks. Weick (1976) speculated that loosely coupling provided a functional structure for organizations working with a high degree of uncertainty, notably schools. Referring to attempts to reestablish administrative legitimacy by centralizing planning authority, Habermas (1975, p. 71) notes with regard to curriculum development, ironically,

Whereas school administrators formerly merely had to codify a canon that had taken shape in an unplanned, nature-like manner, present curriculum *planning* is based on the premise that traditional patterns could as well be otherwise.

Administrative planning produces a universal pressure for legitimation in a sphere that was once distinguished precisely for its power of self-legitimation.

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<sup>79</sup> Although the administrator felt the IPGs and testing were “a dream come true for staff development”, district imperatives regarding staff development may run afoul of state law regarding site-based management. Generally advisory, campus advisory committees under TEC 11.253 hold approval power over the portion of improvement planning addressing staff development.

Although tighter linkages may appear desirable, it is unclear how the heavily scripted curriculum will be negotiated in the lifeworld of the classroom where complexity and ambiguity are “normal”.

A district administrator speaking to a university class early in the 2002-3 school year, acknowledged a number of “bumps in the road” with regard to implementation of the IPGs and testing. For one, the administration of the beginning of year (BOY) benchmark testing was “harder” on the teachers than the district had anticipated. The associated technology posed problems. At that time, teachers were required to input student assessment data by hand, item by item, and neither data nor analysis was available to the teacher to inform practice. The administrator was confident that, in time, teacher access to student level data and entry of student information would occur “on-line”.<sup>80</sup> Reflective of the management discourse, the administrator acknowledged the district-wide frustration among the teachers, but deflected the claims commenting that the teachers “could not see the big picture” that was guiding the central administration decisions.

### **Announcements and imperatives: Rationale for internal colonization**

In many ways the announcements and imperatives discussed here provide the rationale for the penetration of classroom and campus discussed in the following section on LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>. In both cases, we see power claims asserted as the legitimacy of the administration is called into question. With regard to announcements, we see a clear

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<sup>80</sup> Nearly eighteen months later, this vision had not been realized. Teachers were still inputting data and although performance analyses were provided to the campus administrators, analyses were not readily available to the teachers.



connection between market pressures (those reflected in the threatened introduction of private management companies as well as those resulting from the “market like” environment of the state accountability system) and strategic changes in the district’s communication with the public and in the district’s control over campus-level activity. We also see an announcement of a contract with a private company used to enhance belief the administration’s ability to steer the organization.

With regard to system imperatives, we see the emphasis on technical solutions to administrative legitimacy issues with the reinforcement of the management hierarchy and attempts to “tighten the couplings” with more prescriptive instructional guides and associated monitoring. Both announcements and imperatives invoke and reinforce a traditional management discourse regarding the administrative roles vis-à-vis the public and the “technical core” of educators.

It is important to note that the “traditional” negotiation of curriculum at the classroom level, ostensibly among the teacher, the students, and their parents, is far from ideal and is strongly implicated in the class and race inequities evident in schools (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Foley, 1990; Oakes, 1985; Valenzuela, 1999; Willis, 1981). The point of emphasis here is that the replacement of a non-ideal negotiation due to power imbalances<sup>81</sup> with the imposition of a uniform curriculum articulated in the IPGs and monitored with the Benchmark tests, nine-week tests and weekly assessments seems

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<sup>81</sup> In Habermasian terms, the negotiation takes place within “systematically distorted communication” due to imbalances “communicative competence” as teachers often possess professional knowledge to which parents and students often defer.

unlikely reduce these inequities<sup>82</sup>. Read through Habermas' communicative action theory, system imperatives to deliver a predefined curriculum enforced through high-stakes assessments inhibit socially integrative inter-subjective processes of engaging students and educators in dialogues about the means and ends of schooling within the classroom and campus "lifeworld". As a result, teacher work is continuously intensified and de-professionalized contributing to teacher alienation and burnout (Apple, 2000) and at the same time enforcing a non-dialogic, and alienating "banking" model of education (Freire, 2000) for students.

In short, the administrative announcements and system imperatives reflected in the Blueprint, IPGs and interim assessments reflect power claims invoked through a management discourse setting the stage for an "internal colonization" (Habermas, 1987) or, alternately a "cultural invasion" (Misgeld, 1985) of the classroom. As a colonization, this "system-wide structure to guide teaching and learning", ultimately short circuits dialogic communication needed in a for a healthy campus or classroom lifeworld,

The transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements (Habermas, 1987, p. 126).

While the announcements and imperatives informed by the management discourse provide the rationale for the invasion, these might be nothing more than a performance of administrative intent. To illustrate how these announcements and imperatives play out at

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<sup>82</sup> As implementation issues were encountered, district officials explained that the IPGs are "guides". However, in an environment of school reconstitution based on low-test scores, the associated assessments likely reinforce teacher and campus administrator perceptions that the IPGs are "non-negotiable".

the campus level, how they are enacted and enforced, the following section examines the *Principles of Learning* a common instructional framework initiated district-wide in 2000-1, and an associated activity referred to as a *LearningWalk*. According to the superintendent, the instructional framework is intimately related to the other initiatives discussed above: “The IPGs supply the ‘what’ and ‘when’ for our teachers. The Principles of Learning and teacher experience provide the ‘how’” (Superintendent, 2003, p. 11). At a school board meeting in January of 2004, the superintendent suggested the Principles of Learning provide the means to “penetrate” the district’s 103 schools and 5400 classrooms. This language certainly evokes the sense of systemic “invasion” and “colonization” of the campus and classroom “lifeworlds” to which Habermas refers in his communicative action theory.

#### **ENACTING TECHNICAL CONTROL: PENETRATING THE CAMPUS AND CLASSROOM WITH LEARNINGWALKS<sup>SM</sup>**

The preceding section examined the intensification of a management discourse through a number of administrative announcements and imperatives. Arguably, the intensification was animated by the performance monitoring system and the raising of stakes associated with student achievement. As a legitimizing discourse, the administrator “talk” evidenced in the press releases or commentary can remain at an abstract level and be used to deflect demands on schools by outside parties. Some theorists suggest that this sort of buffering has in fact been one of the primary duties of school administrators (Lortie, 1975; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Weick, 1976).

As we shall see in this section, administrators in Texas Independent School District, arguably prompted by performance accountability pressures are no longer buffering teachers from interference. In fact, administrators have taken on a much more activist role vis-à-vis classroom teachers. In addition to the scripting of curriculum and instruction and the monitoring through interim assessments, the administrators have taken up a much more active, physical presence in the classroom. This move away from norms of non-interference (Lortie, 1975), can be understood within a Habermasian framework as an effort to replace traditional social integrative processes of the classroom with systemic integrative mechanisms. The theoretical distinction between these process is discussed briefly, followed by an examination of LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> as systemically integrative practices.

### **Habermas's system-lifeworld model**

Jurgen Habermas's work on the expansion of the welfare state and the subsequent development of legitimation crises was introduced in the previous chapter to help account for the emergence of performance accountability systems as tools steering and legitimating instruments of a smaller, stronger state administration. Of concern here are the insights from his communicative action theory provides regarding the interplay between the economic and administrative steering systems and the socio-cultural lifeworlds of citizens. Where his conceptualization of internal colonization of the campus and classroom lifeworlds account for the invocation and reinforcement of the management discourse above, his system-lifeworld analysis helps identify the problematic nature of attempts to simply replace traditional norms with systemic

imperatives. Moreover, this model lays the groundwork for his normative communicative action theory providing avenues to re-norm institutional frameworks in more just and democratic ways. By differentiating lifeworld and system as discussed below, he re-theorized Durkheim's distinction between social and system integration processes. The fundamental differences in these processes suggest problematic features of the reforms discussed above.

***The dilemma of modern capitalism: System or social integration***

Habermas recognizes a clear distinction between social integration and system integration, and his communicative action theory is an effort to come to terms with the implications of that distinction. Habermas's distinction between system and social integrative processes stems from a reconsideration of Durkheim's concern with social cohesion in modern society (McCarthy, 1991). Durkheim believed social cohesion in traditional society stemmed from "mechanical solidarity" based upon similarities among individuals and heavily dependent on common rituals and traditions. Modern society, in contrast, increasingly relied on "organic solidarity" rooted in interdependence among individuals with an increased division of labor. That is, individuals with different values and interests are nonetheless drawn together due to mutual need for others to perform specific tasks.

Unlike social philosophers such as Adam Smith and Herbert Spencer, Durkheim was not optimistic about spontaneous integration of individual interests through the market. "If the division of labor produces solidarity, it is not only because it makes each individual an agent of exchange, to use the language of the economists; it is because it

creates between men a whole system of rights and duties joining them together in a lasting way" (Durkheim, 1984, p. 337-8). He instead suggested that so-called organic solidarity had to be anchored in some form of normative consensus (McCarthy, 1991). In the conclusion of *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim (1984, p. 333) argues, "since the division of labor becomes the predominant source of social solidarity, at the same time it becomes the foundation of the moral order", but he appears to view the foundation as shaky.

Traditional normative foundations were undermined by capitalist modernization with no suitable replacement. The result, according to Durkheim was "anomie", a condition of confused, unclear or absent social and/or moral norms precipitating deviant behavior, a condition intensifying in modernity. Thus he offers, "man is the more vulnerable to self-destruction the more he is detached from any collectivity, that is to say, the more he lives as an egoist" (Durkheim, 1972, p. 113). He believed that in modernity, norms dissolved due to the weakening of social bonds resulting from increased societal complexity and the division of labor associated with industrialization.

Habermas (1987, p. 117) picks up on Durkheim's line of thought in the second volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action*,

It is not Durkheim's answer but the way he poses the question that is instructive. It directs our attention to the empirical connections between stages of system differentiation and forms of social integration...society is conceived from the perspective of acting subjects as the *lifeworld of a social group*. In contrast, from the observer's perspective of someone not involved, society can be conceived of only as a *system of actions* such that each action has a functional significance according to its contribution to the maintenance of the system.

Habermas's system-lifeworld model is an attempt to address Durkheim's problematic of social cohesion (McCarthy, 1991). "This distinction between a social integration of society, which takes effect in action orientations, and a systemic integration, which reaches through and beyond action orientations, calls for a corresponding differentiation in the concept of society itself" (Habermas, 1987, p. 117). The explicit distinction between social and system integration informing this model is helpful in illuminating problematic features of recent "systemic" reform models discussed above. This differentiation is briefly outlined in the following section.

***Conceptualizing the integration dilemma: Uncoupling lifeworld and system***

Working from Durkheim's distinction between socially and systemically integrative process, Habermas posits two types of learning processes driving socio-cultural evolution: technical or instrumental knowledge serving material interests and moral-practical insight needed for social integration. These learning processes become the defining features of his two-component, "system-lifeworld" model of society. Instrumental rationality is central to so-called "system" processes pertaining to material production, while communicatively rooted moral-practical insight animates "lifeworld" processes of cultural development and identity formation. Habermas's autonomous, but coupled, system and lifeworld approximate Marx's distinction between the "realm of necessity" and the "realm of freedom" (Habermas, 1987, p. 340).

Habermas further subdivides the system into the economy and the state administration. Similarly, the lifeworld is divided into private and public spheres. A central focus of his system-lifeworld analysis is the interaction between the

political/economic system and the public/private lifeworld. In late capitalism, money and power mediate this interchange and the roles of private person and public citizen give way to those of market consumer and welfare state client. Of concern in late capitalism is that systemic encroachment into the lifeworld interferes with the creation of shared cultural meanings. Ultimately, “colonization of the lifeworld by system imperatives...drive moral-practical elements out of private and political-public spheres of life” (Habermas, 1987, p. 325) leading to “deformation of everyday practice, [in which] symptoms of rigidification combine with symptoms of desolation” (p. 327). Habermas clearly shares Durkheim’s concern with “anomie” and Weber’s concern regarding the “iron cage” imposed by the hyper-rationalization of modern society (Weber, 1976).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, a number of critical scholars have expressed concern at the invocation of certain management as ubiquitous answer for educational ills. This study seeks to understand the micropolitics of navigating, negotiating, and contesting systemic reforms animated by performance monitoring pressures and informed by a traditional, but problematic management discourse. The next section describes the enactment of the management discourse expressed above through an intensification of compliance monitoring by district administrators followed by an examination of teacher perceptions of the program.

### **A district response to systemic intensification**

The previous chapter discussed the intensification of Texas’s standards and assessment program in the 2002-3 school year. The state suspended its four-level rating system during the initial academic year of the TAKS assessment system, as the



commissioner and State Board of Education considered the appropriate performance levels for campus and district ratings. Given the projected reduction in passing rates noted, local administrators were understandably concerned about the number of campuses that might be rated low-performing under the new assessment and rating systems. Speaking to Board in March 2004 about, the superintendent complained the state's new standards were too rigorous, provided for no phase-in and would likely identify a third of the campuses across the state as low performing (no more than 400 of the state's 7000 schools had been so identified in any one year since the introduction of ratings).

To head off problems, Texas ISD developed an intervention plan based on a district-devised rating system in the fall of 2003. Like the state, the district used a four-tier system with Tier 1 containing the lowest performing campuses. The spring 2003 TAKS performance was considered in the identification of schools in the tiers. In December, the district began to incorporate performance on the Benchmark testing to adjust the tiers. According to the associate superintendent of elementary schools, other criteria included: principal experience, prior supervisor evaluations, history of achievement, and assessments of progress with the district's curriculum based campus visits.

The Tiers are used to gauge levels of district oversight and intervention. The eleven Tier 1 schools, four of which were Blueprint schools, are subject to strong oversight including weekly visits from the assistant superintendent and monthly "LearningWalks" (described below) by central office staff. Tier 2 campuses receive visits twice a month and monthly LearningWalks". In addition, Tier 1 and Tier 2

campuses were required to submit lesson plans for review and the results of the district developed nine-weeks assessments discussed above. Recently, the weekly instructional plans and weekly assessments developed for the Tier 1 schools became mandatory for Tier 2 campuses as well. Campuses in Tier 3 receive one visit per month, and Tier 4 one per semester.

As with the initiatives discussed above, the Blueprint, the Instructional Planning Guides and the Benchmark testing, the interventions associated with the tier system appear to be informed by a management discourse. The nature of these interventions, however, is far more active (and invasive) than either the administrative announcements or system imperatives discussed above. Enacted in part through “LearningWalks”, these “penetrations” can be characterized as an “internal colonization” of the classroom lifeworld by district administrators. The remainder of the chapter uses document analysis, participant-observation, and teacher interviews to depict these activities as proposed, as practiced, and as perceived at one elementary campus, Chavez ES.

### **Chavez Elementary School**

Chavez ES<sup>83</sup> is located at what might be considered the gateway to the less affluent eastside of the district, just across the highway and just south of a main thoroughfare running parallel to the river. Since opening in 1976, Chavez has served a predominately low-income, Latino population. Currently, the student body is 84% low-

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<sup>83</sup> Chavez ES is the main topic of the following chapter. The campus and the teachers interviewed will be introduced in much greater depth at that time.

income, 94% Hispanic and nearly 40% were identified as having limited proficiency with the English language.

The campus enjoys a distinction among the eastside schools. In 2002, Chavez was the first campus on the eastside of the city to earn an Exemplary rating from the state. Notably, the campus's performance improved after languishing for seven years at an "Acceptable" level without substantial turnover of faculty or administrators. Although it has been difficult to pinpoint a single reason for the performance improvement, a number of faculty members suggest key factors included improved communication within the school and broader involvement of the faculty in planning and governance. To some extent, these changes developed during a school-university partnership initiated in 1999.

In early September, a colleague and I, both familiar with the campus through this partnership, were visiting with two of the teachers. They were demoralized having just discovered that the school was designated as "Tier 2" due to poor performance on the 4<sup>th</sup>-grade writing test. "We dropped to a Tier 2 school. Tier 1 is the *lowest*," the first complained. The other responded, "It's like we're back to square one. More visits from central." One of these visits each month was a "LearningWalk". The following section examines these visits associated with a district-wide instructional program as efforts to "colonize the lifeworlds" of the campus and classroom.

## **The Principles of Learning and LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>: Penetrating the campus and classroom**

Prior to the Blueprint, IPGs and Benchmark testing, the district began training teachers and administrators in the Principles of Learning in the 2000-1 academic year. POL is a common instructional framework designed by The University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning. According to the district website, the partnership with the Institute for Learning "is re-creating [Texas ISD] as a high-performance learning community...[and] a model urban district focusing all resources and energy on teaching and learning"<sup>84</sup>. The Institute's philosophy of "effort-based education" "assumes that sustained and directed effort yields high achievement, but can also create ability." Through "deep, continuing, and active engagement in instructional practices", Institute partners "design and test tools for professional development in school districts committed to standards-based education and sustainable educational reform."

The Principles of Learning (POL, hereafter) "are condensed theoretical statements...designed to help educators analyze the quality of instruction and opportunities for learning that they offer to students" (The Institute for Learning, 2003b). In a discussion about monitoring of curriculum and instruction at a school board meeting in January of 2004, the superintendent noted the mounting pressures on the district resulting from the intensified assessment system and the increasing constraints on resources. Noting the district efforts to prepare, the superintendent argued the POL address the issue of "how you penetrate the system, with 5400 classrooms and 103 schools."

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<sup>84</sup> Information regarding the Institute for Learning, The Principles of Learning, and The LearningWalk are taken from the district's website and confirmed with the Institute's website.

It would appear from a management perspective at least one use of the POL then is the monitoring and enforcement of instructional practices and curriculum delivery. The penetration appears to occur through professional development activities such as the *LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup>* “an organized visit through a school's learning areas” in which administrators and other teachers “move in and out of several classrooms... view it [student work] through one or more Principles of Learning and ask themselves if the students completing the work were engaged in deep thinking and problem solving” (The Institute for Learning, 2003a).

The tier system provides some evidence of this usage. As noted, campuses on lower tiers, perceived to be lagging behind, are subject to greater oversight and decreased discretion. Describing adjustments to the tiers at mid-year, the associate superintendent for elementary schools stated,

At mid-year we reviewed the state of our schools to ascertain if a campus was making progress in addressing the district's curriculum<sup>85</sup>. We based our assessment on our visits to campuses (directors and I totaled from 120 to 140 visits or learning walks a month and the curriculum team made even more visits).

According to the institute's website, “True LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> are...never stand-alone events used to showcase or evaluate the work of teachers and students. They are part of a recursive process of constantly improving and refining instruction through professional development and study”. While the evaluative dimension of the walks is downplayed, their use in conjunction with the scripted curriculum of the IPGs and under the threat of a

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<sup>85</sup> As discussed in below, the district curriculum that is assessed is a combination of the content from the IPGs and the instructional practices of POL.

Blueprint-like reconstitution of the campus staff seem to reinforce the administrative regime heavily informed by a management discourse. As discussed below, *LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>* are an important technique in the “colonization” or “invasion” of the 5400 classrooms in the district.

### ***Learning about LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>***

Throughout the fall of 2003, a colleague and I have spent something over 100 hours observing faculty meetings and working with a core group of educators at Chavez ES. Much of our work at the school occurred after the students had taken the bus home or had been picked up by parents. One evening we were observing a “math night” session for parents put on by two of the school’s bilingual teachers. The principal stopped by toward the end of the session and mentioned that a LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup> was scheduled for the next morning and asked if we would like to participate.

We jumped at the chance. As noted, we previously had little opportunity to observe work in the classrooms. Participating in a LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup> provided a great opportunity to watch a number of teachers in action. Further, the teachers at the campus expressed a sense that the campus and its new principal were being unduly scrutinized due to the faculty’s activism in the hiring process the prior year. The invitation allowed us to visit the classrooms with central office administrators, as well as campus administrators, teachers and instructional specialists. We felt the activity might provide some insight into the relationship between the campus and central office administrators.

### *The LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup>*

We arrived on campus at 8:30 am for the LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup> and met in the office of the reading specialist, Sally Ruiz<sup>86</sup>. Breakfast tacos, fruit and coffee were provided. Eight people were present in addition to my colleague and I. Campus representatives included the principal, the assistant principal, the reading specialist, a resource teacher and an early childhood teacher. Central office representatives included an elementary school director, Mr. Lobo<sup>87</sup> and the math, social studies and language arts curriculum specialists for the district.

#### **Pre-visit discussion.**

Following introductions, the principal, Maricella Fuentes, provided a folder indicating the grade levels to be visited (third, fourth, and Pre-K) along with the locations of the classrooms, findings from the earlier LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> and test scores for students in each classroom to be visited. The group then discussed what they would look for in the visit. Each curriculum specialist discussed the evidence of instruction<sup>88</sup> they expected to see in the classroom including items related to the POL such as displays of student work, criteria charts indicating how student work would be evaluated<sup>89</sup>, evidence of

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<sup>86</sup> The Chavez faculty encountered in this chapter will be introduced more fully in the following chapter, which focuses on the campus.

<sup>87</sup> Mr. Lobo was the principal of the school for 20 years and promoted to Area Superintendent in 2002 and with a district re-organization was designated as one of two elementary school directors assisting the Associate Superintendent for Elementary Schools.

<sup>88</sup> The term evidence was used frequently and as discussed below used in such a way as to suggest that the administrators had a pre-formulated scheme of what they should see prior to entering the classroom. This suggested the LearningWalk appeared focused on learning whether teachers were meeting expectations specified in the POLs and IPGs.

<sup>89</sup> The presence of criteria charts reflects “Clear Expectations” a central theme in POL. Criteria for evaluation should not only be clearly available and understood by learners, but ultimately developed with the learners as well.

“Accountable Talk<sup>sm</sup>”<sup>90</sup> between the teacher and student and among the students, and evidence of “Academic Rigor”<sup>91</sup>. In addition, the specialists identified the specific instructional content they expected to see based on the curriculum prescribed by the IPGs<sup>92</sup>. This content was described with great specificity for each area and the specialists expected to see evidence of: counting to 1000 by 100s (mathematics); study of the pilgrims, reference to monuments and memorials for Veteran’s Day, and discussions of real and mythical heroes (social studies); and, in process displays of writing and use of the vertical team writing plan (language arts).

During the discussion, Mr. Lobo identified a number of good practices he witnessed in LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> at other elementary schools. These included the development of very explicit criteria lists to facilitate the LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> by identifying “evidence of the core curriculum”. The curriculum specialists affirmed the benefits of criteria charts<sup>93</sup>. Reflecting on the use of checklists at one school, the language arts specialist noted with enthusiasm that (paraphrasing), “it helped teachers. The next time we visited they all looked the same.”<sup>94</sup> Mr. Lobo also noted an effective display of work

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<sup>90</sup> “Accountable Talk<sup>sm</sup>” is a central them in POL whereby learners are expected to demand justification for claims and to supply justification upon request. Initially teachers model “accountable talk” but with time students are expected to internalize it and use it in daily interactions.

<sup>91</sup> Like Clear Expectations and Accountable Talk, “Academic Rigor” is a central theme suggesting that student learning is being pushed to grade level expectations and above.

<sup>92</sup> The AS informed the principal that the correct terminology for monitoring the IPGs is “is the core curriculum being implemented?” He said with a wink that if she didn’t want to look silly she needed to use the new lingo.

<sup>93</sup> The use of criteria charts for LearningWalks was identified in the two-year review of the Blueprint as a practice that was being encouraged in the focus schools in the district.

<sup>94</sup> It was unclear whether the chart reduced variation among the classrooms by informing teachers about the desired presentation, among the visitors by focusing attention, or both. I believe “they” referred to the classrooms, not the teachers.



at one campus in which students displayed illustrated stories with the associated evaluation criteria. The stories were then priced and put up for sale.<sup>95</sup>

Two aspects of the Mr. Lobo's comments seem noteworthy. First, he acted in some ways as a vehicle for communicating good practices and encouraging dialogue among campuses. He actively encouraged the Ms. Fuentes and reading specialist to visit the other campuses to get ideas. As her former supervisor at the campus, he has acted as the principal's unofficial mentor and may have been informing her about items that would enhance her evaluations. For example, he indicated with a wink that if she wanted to appear "with it" the new district terminology for following the IPGs was "implementing the core curriculum." Ms. Fuentes appeared genuinely appreciative of his advice and the campus reading specialist did visit the other campuses and returned with ideas for improving writing instruction at the campus.

At the same time, Mr. Lobo's comments established an explicit comparison and appeared to assume that the campus and the principal were lagging behind (perhaps because they were identified as a lower tier school or because he was the former principal and her former supervisor). Without any defensiveness, the Ms. Fuentes indicated that in fact she had developed criteria charts, but she also wished to look at the others to get ideas. None of the central office administrators expressed interest in these criteria charts.

Interestingly, in noting one idea for a criteria chart, Mr. Lobo explained that the campus of origin explicitly requested they receive credit if others campuses were to use the idea. This seemed to indicate that principals feel it is important to demonstrate and be

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<sup>95</sup> It was unclear whether other students or parents purchased the stories, whether actual money changed hands, and whether the price and grading criteria were explicitly linked.

recognized for what they are doing to implement district initiatives. That is, it is not quite a “free” sharing of ideas among peers. While the Institute for Learning states “true” LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> are not intended to be “showcases”, this interaction suggests that campuses and campus administrators may view the visits as an opportunity to present practices for recognition by their supervisors and prestige among their peers.

### **Visiting classrooms.**

The group of ten split into four teams to visit the classrooms for approximately 45 minutes. I visited four pre-Kindergarten classrooms with the principal: two bilingual, one English-only and one special needs classroom. Since no IPGs are available for pre-K, we did not have an explicit curriculum guide. I relied on the principal and the teachers for the information. Both bilingual classes were with special areas teachers, allowing us to observe only the classroom layout, materials, and displays of student work. From the perspective of a high school teacher, the classrooms were extremely “busy” in terms of visual displays and manipulatable items. In another classroom, we observed a pre-K class as they moved from story time to an activity in which they helped the teacher make bread.<sup>96</sup> In the special needs pre-K, four students demonstrated several physical activities, somersaults, stretching, toe-touching, etc. The children seemed to view these as play and as “showing off” for the adults. The teacher noted their “performances” showed great improvement in coordination during their time in school.

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<sup>96</sup> On the way out of one classroom, the principal showed me a picture of her daughter, a pre-K student. On the way out of the second classroom, the principal introduced me to her older daughter, a university student completing a project at the school.

### **Debriefing.**

Returning from LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup> an hour later, the group debriefed. The instructional specialists reported that they saw much that they expected. The social studies specialist commented that she was happy to see the Texas and U.S. flags on display and a performance of the pledge of allegiance. Although no mention was made of the pilgrims, the resource teacher did note a rich discussion Spanish colonization of the Americas connecting Halloween, chocolate, Spain, Coronado, and the Amazon. The math specialist stated that she did not see evidence that the teachers were using the district “investigations” model. She suggested that they might be doing it, but they needed to make it more “public”. She also noted the math instruction seemed to be about a week behind, as she saw evidence of counting to 100 by 10s, but not to 1000 by 100s.

With regard to POL, all specialists noted evidence of AccountableTalk<sup>sm</sup> and Clear Expectations. The campus reading specialist raised a question about what constituted “evidence” of AcademicRigor<sup>sm</sup>. The director noted that the academic rigor is “built into the core curriculum”, so alignment with the IPGs constitutes evidence of rigor. In what I found to be a revealing conversation after the meeting, one specialist confided to me that the IPGs were “really wonderful” for the central office administrators, as much or more than for the teachers. She felt the POL were “fine”, but tended to be somewhat vague and hard to monitor. She suggested the scheduled curriculum made it much easier for the specialists to monitor instruction and provide specific feedback when they visited campuses. It seemed very clear then that the IPGs and LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> were part and parcel of an effort to facilitate and extend technical control at the classroom level.

At least two issues were notable regarding the debriefing. First, it appeared that within the context of the LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup>, most of the participants accepted a certain directionality with regard to the comparisons. The IPGs and POL were accepted as the standard and the classrooms and were judged relative to the standard. Mr. Lobo identified best practices and the curriculum specialists affirmed these. After the LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup>, the assistant principal and the resource teacher affirmed the need for the checklists, which would facilitate documentation in the very brief visits. That checklists typically focus attention on the presence or absence of pre-specified criteria would seem to suggest the intent is to assess how the classrooms “measure up”. In addition to comparisons to the checklists, teachers were explicitly compared to one another.

In some cases, individuals from the campus appeared to be pointing out shortcomings to demonstrate knowledge of “work to be done”. In fact, the campus personnel appeared in many cases to be more critical of the observed classrooms than the central office personnel. While much of the discussion was constructive and many of the comments were positive, it would be hard to characterize the activity as “non-evaluative”. Their comments and body language gave the impression that the campus administrators and the reading specialist felt very much under the microscope of the central office. It seems likely these feelings would no doubt intensify if the associate superintendent had been present as scheduled.<sup>97</sup>

In contrast to these responses, the resource teacher, Ken, seemed to openly challenge some of the accepted logic. Although I didn’t ask him, his raising the example

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<sup>97</sup> The principal expressed frustration that the elementary superintendent did not come, as it showed a lack of concern about the campus. I found this response interesting.

of Spanish colonists might have been a deliberate effort to poke fun at the emphasis on study of the pilgrims by the social studies specialist. His challenge to the notion of reading academic rigor off the IPGs was much more direct. He noted [paraphrasing], “when I look for rigor I am looking for the core curriculum, but also for engaged kids, and lots of PYP out there [a comprehensive school reform being implemented by the vertical team of schools]”. Mr. Lobo responded that those certainly counted. Ken went on to question the implied uniformity of best practices [again, paraphrasing], “rigor will vary according to the teacher and the students’ learning styles. At this campus, teachers try to match teaching and learning styles when putting the classes together in the spring”.

Ken’s comments called into question the assumption that the visitors could make simplistic comparisons among teachers or “see into” the campus and classrooms in a 45-minute visit. In a later interview with Ken, I found out he visits classrooms around the school regularly, a privilege he enjoys due to his position as the resource teacher. He also noted that he routinely visits the middle school and receives feedback on former Chavez students. His comment above suggested that in his opinion the faculty is not only knowledgeable about academic rigor, but unbeknownst to the central office has been actively working to increase it.

While Ken’s comments were well received by Mr. Lobo and the specialists, they seemed in sharp contrast to the general direction of the activity. He seemed to view the POL, IPGs and the authority of central office personal as open to challenge. As discussed below, the fact that he took advantage of the opportunity to raise questions is important, as the nature of the activity seems to preclude this kind of engagement of the

central office by the teachers, which leads to the belief that LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> perform a monitoring function.

### **Teacher response to the LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup>**

Much of the discussion of the chapter has focused on what has been said by the district administration about the performance and the management of campuses and classrooms. As noted administrative announcements and system imperatives expressing administrative intent can be viewed power claims resting on a presupposition that justification to those affected is unnecessary. What follows is a brief examination of the perceptions of LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>, by a number of teachers at Chavez ES. Where the management discourse discussed above appears premised on a belief that the development, adoption and enactment of policies need not be justified to those whom they affect, the comments below suggest an alternate discourse among some classroom teachers at the school.

#### ***A letter to the faculty***

Following each LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup> the principal composes a letter to the faculty indicating the objectives of the walk and describing evidence of implementation of the POL and the core curriculum (IPGs). With regard to shortcomings, open questions are posed. In this case, the questions were: “Considering that we have now been working with the Principles of Learning for four years, how can we resurrect the enthusiasm for making criteria charts and rubrics public?” And, “How can we promote teachers sharing

their work with the core curriculum with other teachers within and across their grade levels?”

At the beginning of the next faculty meeting, the principal discussed the LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup> with the faculty. In raising the issue of criteria charts, one teacher recalled to the amusement of the faculty [paraphrasing] “last year they told us we had too many criteria charts so we took them down. Now they don’t have enough?” The principal laughed, and noted that the old criteria charts were too obviously teacher developed and the intent was to involve students in developing the criteria charts. Recalling training on criteria charts, another teacher noted that the development with students as discussed in the training might require two to three days. In a frustrated tone, another teacher noted that no time was allotted in the IPGs for students to create criteria charts. Using the district lingo with some sarcasm, she said, “it’s not part of the *core curriculum*”.

The principal attempted to move the discussion in a positive direction noting an idea to use a shower curtain and Ziploc bags to display the charts and student work. Another teacher responded that the idea had already been tried and discarded at the campus, “We have them-in the closet”. An apparently rhetorical question from one teacher, “Who are these for anyway?” drew knowing looks from others, suggesting the LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup> functioned in some sense as a performance for the central office, rather than a development activity.<sup>98</sup> The principal brought the discussion to a close shortly afterward.

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<sup>98</sup> In a discussion of management discourse, Gee et al (1996) suggest that technologies in the “new work order” take on dual roles of increasing the productivity of and providing a means to monitor the worker.

I don't want to overplay the discussion of the LearningWalk<sup>sm</sup>. The principal did provide a forum to discuss the findings rather than simply disseminating the letter via email or placing it in teacher's mailboxes. While the teachers were somewhat skeptical about the findings and the activity in general, they were in no way hostile toward the principal. For the most part the discussion was limited due to the setting (in a full faculty meeting) and timing (after school, sandwiched between two other presentations). Still, the faculty was able to express some frustrations with the claims implied in the questions. A couple of weeks later, one teacher was indignant about the way negative findings are presented, "They pose them as questions. Do you think anyone really goes back and really discusses those questions? Please."

### *The El Comite Discussion*

At a meeting of a core planning group, El Comite Avance<sup>99</sup> at the beginning of December teachers vented frustration about the LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>. In this case, the teachers explicitly connected the LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>, the IPGs and the performance monitoring system. In the meeting, the teachers groused that Tier 2 status was "punishment" for the prior year's writing and science scores. The principal suggested placement on Tier 2 was not meant to punish, to which one teacher responded that it "certainly feels that way and it looks that way". As a Tier 2 school, the campus had been subjected to four formal visits by teams of central office administrators between late-

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While the testing apparatus clearly fit this concept, prior to the LearningWalk and this comment I had not made the connection to more "low-tech" instructional practices like displayed criteria charts, etc.

<sup>99</sup> El Comite Avance is a core group of teachers who have become very involved in campus planning and decision-making over the past several years. The group and its role in the school will be discussed more fully in the following chapter.



September and November<sup>100</sup>. In addition, as a Tier 2 campuses they were receiving increased scrutiny of Benchmark testing, detailed checking of instructional alignment with the IPGs through the interim assessments, reviews of lesson plans, and mandatory training sessions.

One teacher argued that the district interventions were promoting goal displacement with teachers encouraged and even forced to move on to satisfy the inspectors, regardless of whether students mastered the material. Another teacher viewed the LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> as a way for central office administrators to “cover their asses” by documenting what they had done, regardless of whether it was effective.

The reading specialist seemed especially frustrated. In her mind, the curriculum of the IPGs was low-level, pedantic, and overly focused on test-preparation skills. She felt that student may be picking up test-taking skills, but were generally turned off by the curriculum and were not reading outside the classroom. In her opinion, the school needed to shift instruction toward more critical reading strategies and reading materials that would engage students. She was confident that the campus could identify and implement such a program. She felt they had demonstrated the ability to do so when they moved the school to Exemplary in 2002. The school’s reading scores in 2003 were at the upper end for the district. In the absence of LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>, she felt this might be possible. However, with the frequent observations enforcing the low-level IPG curriculum and the frequent testing required by the district, she felt the campus was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

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<sup>100</sup> Tier 3 and Tier 4 schools receive one LearningWalks per year.

### *Individual perceptions*

Interviewed later, the teacher who perceived the district interventions as punishment commented that the placement on Tier 2 and the associated scrutiny was an “unmitigated Hell”. She felt the LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> were intimidating and suggested her students were not only distracted but frightened by the central office administrators who she said “all dressed in black suits, even the women, and walked around with clipboards.” A fifteen-year veteran, she is considering leaving teaching. In formal and informal interviews, she continually expressed dismay that the teacher efforts at empowerment seemed continually thwarted. She noted that while the campus as a whole was responsible for achieving Exemplary status, the principal and superintendent received the credit and the faculty “got punished” with the placement of a heavy handed interim principal unwilling to share power with the faculty.

Other teachers find the heavy scrutiny distasteful as well. A pre-K teacher characterized the LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> as overbearing,

Well the school has been much more under the microscope by the central leadership [with the Tier 2 rating]...We had more LearningWalks. We had more people you know, “in our faces”, let’s face it, saying, “this week in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade you should be covering this, this and this, and I don’t see evidence of that in your room”...I mean there was really, heavy scrutiny involved.

Confirming the impression of heavy handedness, a third grade teacher felt, “Its just condescending, basically...[the impression is] ‘You’re doing something wrong, so we want to see what it is...Not that we want to come help you, we just want to see what you’re doing wrong.’” While, she said she personally didn’t feel a need to create a “dog

and pony show”, she did note a preoccupation on the campus with preparations for administrative visits, “Oh, learning walks (she groans), ‘We’re getting another learning walk, and their looking for this... You better...’”

The LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> appear to evoke some level of artificiality, with teachers “making public” materials to evidence the Principles of Learning, Clear Expectations, AccountableTalk<sup>sm</sup>, Academic Rigor, et cetera. Acknowledging the “dog and pony” performances, the pre-K teacher noted it was not completely pointless, but was overdone,

I think there is some of that in there... “Someone’s coming, so we better get it up on the walls”, but I think... there is some good that comes out of it as well, with the feedback that you get. You should be thinking about what you are doing and what you should be doing, and what should be up on the walls in your room, and I think there is some value to it. It’s just when it happens so frequently, like it did in the fall, that you feel picked on.

In fact, every teacher interviewed stated that LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> could be used productively to promote sharing and reflection on their practice. The third grade teacher commented,

I mean there is nothing wrong with someone looking. Its not about, “Oh, we don’t want someone in here”, but it is disruptive... They say “we’re not going to bother you” but you’ve got ten people walking through your classroom and you tell the kids to stay on task, but its hard for them.

In fact in an earlier interview, this teacher credited the superintendent and with bringing some needed consistency, alignment and accountability to the classroom through the POL. She also lauded the hands on approach of the interim principal the prior year who monitored lesson plans and did frequent classroom visits. In planning meetings, she

repeatedly raises the issue of consistency within and among the grade levels that is the central justification of the IPGs monitored through the LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>.

However, she explicitly rejects the scripted curriculum of the IPGs as a productive tool in the alignment process, but refers instead to campus-wide discussions focused on performance data associated with the school university-partnership as instrumental. In a discussion with university students, she emphasized the importance of these sessions,

A turning point was the realization that it wasn't just the responsibility of one grade level. It was always the upper grade levels that were responsible because of the test, but the earlier grade levels realized that everyone has a part and began to ask, what do I need to do to get my or our students there?

Another teacher concurred, "At one meeting we used the data to identify at-risk kids. When you read the names and realize that I had that kid...You think about your impact." The issue seems not to be the LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> or the Benchmark testing per se, but only as they are used by administrators to enforce the IPGs,

Everybody should be on the same page at the same time...They would come through and say, 'Well one 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher has this, but how come this 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher doesn't have that?'...They expected everyone to be on the same week doing exactly the same thing...and it is not working, it is not doing what is supposed to be doing, because you can't put everyone on the same page, because nobody starts on the same page and nobody learns on that same pathway.

LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> provide a way to penetrate the classroom, to use the superintendent's terms. This is not in and of itself a bad or unnecessary thing. However, as enacted by

central office administrators in this district, the nature of the LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> seems problematic. The response to LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> seems to be very different when they are done, as the principal stated “for us” rather than “for them” (the central office). While the following chapter takes up the issue more substantively, it may be instructive to concretely introduce Habermas’s concept of communicative action here, contrasting campus-initiated learning walks with those by district administrators noted above.

### **Campus-initiated LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup> as a means to communicative action**

Many modern social theorists have theorized the loss of autonomy associated with the increasing rationalization of society, Weber’s iron cage. Habermas’s reconceptualization of the reification of oppressive social structures as a “colonization of the lifeworld” by economic and administrative system imperatives is one attempt to establish the connection between structure and agency by integrating the system and lifeworld paradigms (McCarthy, 1991). His communicative action theory (Habermas, 1984; 1987) posits a more inclusive version of rationality, balancing instrumental rationality with communicative rationality (Braaten, 1991) to depict the interplay between structure and agency.

Central to his framework is the possibility of emancipatory, collective action based on inter-subjective understanding. For Habermas, the aspiration to reach consensual understanding corresponds to an intrinsic emancipatory interest on the part of the participants (Habermas, 1972). Mutual understanding, coordinating action, and socialization according to Habermas must occur through “communicative action”, requiring that “participants carry out their plans cooperatively in an action situation

defined in common” (Habermas, 1987, p. 127). “Public, unrestricted discussion, free from domination...at all levels of political and repoliticized decision-making processes is the only medium in which anything like ‘rationalization’ [of the broader type] is possible” (Habermas, 1970, p. 118-9). Within this paradigm, the active and deliberate reshaping of the institutional scripts of public schools requires the moral-practical rationality of communicative action rather than increased technical control informed by instrumental rationality.

### *Addressing issues of trust and norms of non-interference*

In the fall of 2004, teachers associated with the core planning group, El Comite noted, emphasized the need for the faculty to pull together and support one another and the new principal if the campus was to continue to chart its own course. “In a heartbeat central can send someone down and chew the principal out...if you have empowerment through collaboration, you can maintain.” During summer planning meetings, the core group established a goal for the year of organizing in a way that broadened faculty involvement in decision-making. In particular, the group expressed a desire to involve teachers in discussions of how to best use common meeting time to improve classroom practice through professional sharing. Rather than stepped up supervision, increased dialogue among the faculty was viewed as the best means to improve the consistency within and among grade levels with regard to curriculum delivery.

In a private conversation later that week, Sally revealed that the “politics of sharing” at Chavez were problematic due to prickly relations among colleagues. In her opinion, while sharing was viewed positively in the abstract, the practice of sharing was

often tense, raising questions about “who” needed sharing and “how” the sharing was presented. To some extent, well intended, but insensitive efforts to improve communication actually alienated colleagues. Thus, while expertise existed in the school, she stated that it was sometimes advantageous to seek help from external experts. We discussed possible ways that the core group could promote sharing sessions presented in more palatable ways.

The idea of visiting each other’s classrooms was proposed of increasing collaboration and collegiality. In late September, the topic of classroom visits was discussed among the core group. An informal poll of the faculty by Sally indicated substantial discomfort with the idea. Many felt the visits would inevitably be evaluative. The group was reluctant to force the visits, worried many might feel pressure to perform for each other and the visits would turn into “dog and pony shows” typical of teacher evaluation. One member of the group suggested the faculty was not yet in a “trust zone” and others nodded. Susan, a pre-K teacher, suggested that if creating a collegial environment appeared to be a priority, focusing on enhancing trust among the teachers was crucial.

The discussion of a lack of collegial trust was interesting given our experiences with collective planning through the school-university partnership. That is, the faculty appear very able to work collaborative with regard to the recent hiring process, planning, etc. That collective decision-making was confined to campus-wide issues, and that classrooms remained a largely private space for teachers is consistent with the literature (Fullan, 1995; Smylie, 1992; Smylie, Lazarus, & Brownlee-Conyers, 1996). Still, this privacy is interesting given the open-concept design of the building allowing anyone

walking through the halls to look into any classroom. The fact that most teachers are in class, with the exception of one planning period, limits opportunities to actually “look in” on one another.

### ***Campus-initiated learning walks***

Despite the concerns expressed, as the year progressed the faculty did take steps to develop greater collegial sharing and trust. Interestingly, in light of the discussion above, one effort was to initiate learning walks by teachers and parents to spark discussions. I had an opportunity to participate in two of these campus scheduled and designed LearningWalks<sup>sm</sup>. The first invited parents, nearly 25 attended, to visit classes and discuss their observations and concerns. No central office administrators were present. No criteria charts were provided, although one campus administrator felt one should be created. Following the classroom visits, the principal freely engaged with the parents in Spanish and English regarding a number of topics including: class size, wandering attention on the part of students, behavior issues and bullying.

The second learning walk was for the teachers themselves and focused on observing strategies associated with a campus-based initiative to develop critical reading skills. Throughout the walk, the teachers sought and found evidence of the reading initiative. Picking up on an ideal from one teacher’s display, the follow-up discussion focused on extending the strategies to include more critical/evaluative dimensions. Not surprisingly, the teachers identified fine-grained aspects of the curriculum that were easily overlooked by outsiders. This had the effect of affirming the teaching of others. One of the teachers often concerned with vertical alignment and consistency noted,



“They really are learning this stuff in 1<sup>st</sup> grade! Where does it all go over the summer?”

<sup>101</sup> More than simply affirming others, the visiting teachers took ideas away, “stealing” several organizational and instructional ideas from various classrooms.

Due to the timing of these campus-initiated learning walks and the formal interviews, it has not been possible to delve into the faculty response, yet. Still the immediate responses of the principal, teachers and parents seemed very positive. The tenor of the discussions seemed much less deficit oriented, i.e. focusing on what wasn't there, than the district initiated learning walks. These efforts at trust building appeared very promising and distinctly different than the more compliance oriented visits. The following chapter discusses the emergence of a collective voice at the campus challenging traditional decision-making patterns in campus governance. Given time and discretion, it seems possible that, an expansion of these campus-based initiatives could generate the type of communicative action needed to: 1) erode the professional norms often used to exclude parents and community members from decision-making, and 2) challenge norms of non-interference in classroom practice in similar ways. Unfortunately, administrative encroachment discussed above directly interferes with these types of efforts by demanding the time, attention and energy to demonstrate compliance to systemic demands.

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<sup>101</sup> Until 2002, the campus was on a year-round schedule. The bilingual teachers, this 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher among them, feel the extended summer break is problematic for English language learners.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the district mediation of performance pressures brought to bear by Texas's performance accountability system. An examination of a number of initiatives in Texas ISD suggests that accountability pressures precipitated an intensification of technical control over campus and classroom decision-making. Administrative announcements and system imperatives invoked and reinforced a management discourse justifying this control., enacted through increased surveillance through assessments and visits. These administrative responses are predictable and "reasonable" in a narrow sense, in that they correspond to a one-sided purposive-rational or instrumental action. Predicting the encroachment of this type administrative control in education over two decades ago, William Foster (1980, p. 501) noted,

Planned curricula development which reduce the teacher's autonomy in developing educational aims similarly reflects an instrumental rationality whose failure to provide a meaningful education may threaten the legitimacy not of the academics who develop them but of teachers who are forced to use them.

However, from a Habermasian perspective, attempts to replace problematic norms with formalized rules and procedures are ineffective and inappropriate to achieve the manifest goal of a more just schooling system. Substantive altering of unjust and undemocratic institutional scripts cannot be resolved through improved technical control, but rather through communicative action rooted in moral-practical rationality and enacted through collective and deliberative activity on the part of stakeholders.

As Ball (1987, p. 10) notes, “the boundaries of control are continually being redrawn and they are drawn differently in different schools”. Thus, while the encroachment and legitimation of system imperatives through management discourses as discussed above are both subtle and persistent (Anderson, 1990), they should not be portrayed as irresistible. While powerful and constraining, these intensified management systems are not totalizing. Accounts of institutions such as schools must avoid a “pessimistic functionalism”, excluding the possibility of resistance, and recognize that although structural relations within them are durable, they are not eternal (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Schools and schooling as institutions should be approached “in historical and contemporary terms, as social sites in which human actors are both constrained and mobilized” (Giroux, 1983, p. 62).

Teachers are not without agency, although it is often untapped or suppressed by “irrational, unproductive, unjust, and unsatisfying social structures that limit their self-development and self-determination” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 597). Discussing the “Hidden History of Praxis Theory”, Carspecken argues that as expressive beings, humans need and seek opportunities to “construct and maintain positive identities and to explore their further potentialities as self-producers” (Carspecken, 2002, p. 75). Commenting on reform policies in the early eighties, Michael Apple (1981) suggested teachers were being effectively “proletarianised” as line workers doling out pre-packaged curricula and associated testing. As a result, he speculated that teachers would increasingly work collectively and politically to contest alienating forms of control over their work.

Paradoxically, the increasing alienation of teachers through imposed and controlling reforms may undermine the historical isolation of teachers and the associated hierarchical, and undemocratic management of schools. Perhaps this explains the move to collective effort by the Chavez teachers to challenge leadership and work norms. This effort is the central topic of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **EMERGENCE, MAINTENANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF COLLECTIVE VOICE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Beginning in the late 1970s, many states, including Texas, began to develop comprehensive performance monitoring systems to make the educational system more responsive to public demands. Texas, like a number of southern states, was a notorious underachiever in terms of academic achievement and equity of opportunity relative to other states for much of its history (Shirley, 1997; Valencia, 2000). Between 1979 and 1999, the Texas legislature brought into law an increasingly comprehensive educational accountability system administered by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The system reflected the national trend of a heavy emphasis on high-stakes student assessments<sup>102</sup> and public comparisons of school performance (Elmore et al., 1996). Notably, Texas was one of the first states to address equity through a campus and district rating system based on the performance of a number of racial/ethnic and socio-economic student groups.

As discussed in chapter four, a prominent feature of Texas-style accountability is its performance monitoring system that seeks to improve

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<sup>102</sup>For students, graduation and grade level promotion are linked to meeting minimum standards. For campuses and districts, the stakes include negative (or positive) public opinion, financial rewards and possible state oversight and takeover.

responsiveness by focusing public pressure with performance comparisons of districts and schools through the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA),

The fundamental assumption of performance monitoring is that organizations in the public sector will become more efficient if they are forced to function in an environment similar to that of a marketplace (TEA 1996, p. 8).

Whatever the assumptions informing the system development, Skrla, Scheurich and Johnson (2001, p. 227), remind us “accountability systems and their equity effects...are dynamic (over time), highly complex, [and] varied.” Given this complexity,

It is crucial to document the processes and effects of the various and sometimes contradictory elements of [these reforms] and of the ways in which they are mediated, compromised with, accepted, used in different ways by different groups for their own purposes, or struggled over in the policies and practices of people's daily educational lives (Apple, 2000, paragraph 8).

To document these processes and effects, this chapter examines teachers' perceptions of the changes in faculty participation in decision-making around the time of the action-research partnership.

Where chapter four examined contrasting logics to account for the development of the system, chapter five focused on a series of administrative initiatives in one Texas school district apparently animated by the pressures brought to bear by the new system. That chapter concluded with a look at the enactment and enforcement of administrative control at one campus, Chavez ES, a campus that had previously demonstrated success in the state system. This chapter looks at that apparent success story in the market-like Texas performance accountability system and in that same urban school district. The analysis center's on teacher's perceptions of the organizational and leadership changes associated with relatively rapid student achievement gains in an urban elementary school in central Texas serving low-income, Latina/o families. In many ways, the story that emerges provides a counter-,or at the very least a complicating, narrative to the presumed plot-line of school reform offered by the management discourse discussed in chapter five.

The analysis focuses primarily on the period of achievement growth from 1999 to 2002, which coincides with a school-university partnership introduced in the first chapter and discussed in greater detail here. The findings suggest that the changes in administrative practice associated with the achievement gains is linked to a renegotiation of work and leadership norms among the faculty and between the faculty and the campus administration. A summary of those changes is

presented in a brief co-written narrative of the emergence, maintenance and development of collective voice constructed with the help of a number of teachers. The following section reflects on the “communicative action” associated with this change and the partnership activities. In conclusion, the recent district imperatives discussed in the previous chapter are reconsidered in light on a potential erosion of the organizational improvements to the detriment of student achievement and teacher morale. To begin, the following section introduces the school, the participants and the partnership.

## **CHAVEZ ES: RENEGOTIATING WORK AND LEADERSHIP NORMS**

### **The site and context**

#### *The district*

Chavez ES is located in Texas Independent School District (ISD), a large urban district serving approximately 80,000 students in over 100 campuses. The district’s enrolled student body is diverse: 52 percent of the students are Hispanic, 31 percent are Anglo, 14 percent are African American, and 3 percent are Asian. More than half the students qualify for free or reduced lunch programs, and approximately 20 percent are English-language learners.



As noted in the previous chapter, the Texas ISD has a relatively long history of disparities in services for, and achievement of, student of color and students of poverty (Martinez, 2002).. Although court-mandated busing ended in the late 1980s, the district remains heavily segregated (Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), 2003) and perceptions of marked disparities in services among residents remain (Policy Research Project on Ethnic and Race Relations, 2001). Marked performance differences are also apparent, with disproportionate numbers of schools rated “Low-performing” to the east of the highway and disproportionate numbers rated “Recognized” and “Exemplary” to the west (AEIS, 2003). The previous chapter noted mounting pressures on the district from parents, community members, advocacy groups, and city leaders to improve services to the east-side schools (Martinez, 2001; Reston, 2001). The pressures intensified with the transition to the new TAKS assessment system in 2003 and new restrictions on generating revenues as a property-wealthy district under the state’s wealth re-capture plan.

### ***The neighborhood***

Chavez ES is located near the city center, just to the east of the highway that literally and figuratively separates the historically underserved east-side communities from the more affluent on the west. According to the 2000 Census,

the predominately Hispanic neighborhood (84%) in which Chavez is located reports a median household income of \$23,597, approximately half of the city's median of nearly \$43,000.

With its position barely, but definitely on “the wrong side of the tracks” the east-west differences are particularly apparent. On the corner immediately east of the highway underpass, a dozen or so day workers are typically waiting each morning in the parking lots of a variety store and a pawnshop. Many are still sitting on the curb in the late afternoon when we head to the campus for after school meetings. A block and a half west of the highway, conference attendees walk between several high-end hotels and the city's expanding convention center. Although teachers note that gentrification is changing the enclave around Chavez, there are few obvious clues to suggest this: only few of the small cottages of the neighborhood have been refurbished and many are in need of substantial repair with sagging sills and roofs; many of the well-worn cars parked along the street are in need of bodywork and paint, window and doors on the shops in the area and a number of the houses are heavily barred. In contrast, development and renovations are ongoing in the downtown area: looming above the highway just to the west are several high-rise condominiums overlooking the river; with several more under construction; less than a mile to the west, construction is underway on a new city hall.

### ***The student body***

Since opening in 1976, Chavez has served a predominately low-income, Latino population. Currently, of the approximately 400 students enrolled, more than 95% are children of color, 85% are eligible for free or reduced lunch and nearly 40% are English language learners<sup>103</sup> (ELLs). Adjustments to attendance boundaries and changes in neighborhood demographics related to gentrification resulted in slightly declining enrollments from nearly 480 in 1993-4. A significant drop of nearly 50 students came with district decision to relocate the sixth grade to the nearby middle school resulted in a much more substantial drop after the 2000-1 school year. Demographics have also changed at the school with the percentage of low-income students declining from 91% in 1993-4 and the percentage of ELLs growing up from approximately 25% during the same period. Although the state figures do not report the distinction, bilingual teachers at the school report a growing number of ELLs with limited prior exposure to schooling.

### ***The faculty***

With a majority of the teachers having 11 or more years of teaching experience during the 2001-2002, Chavez benefits from a stable and experienced faculty. The average campus tenure of 12.4 years is three years more than the

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<sup>103</sup> Nearly all ELL students at the campus are native Spanish speakers.

average for high poverty elementary schools (>80% free or reduced lunch eligible) in the district. Although a number of veterans have retired in recent years, a number of the teachers have worked at the school since it opened.

With regard to gender, Chavez is not unlike most elementary schools across the state: only three of the 33 teachers are male. With regard to ethnicity, while not matching, faculty ethnicities are more reflective of the largely Hispanic student body than either district and state averages. Slightly less than forty percent of the staff is Hispanic, approximately double that of the district and state averages. With the exception of one African American teacher, the rest of the teaching staff identifies as Anglo. Nearly one third of the teachers serve the large proportion of ELL and bilingual students in the bilingual program. Many others in the school are bilingual or conversant in Spanish.

Like the teaching faculty, the campus administration has also been remarkably stable. For its first quarter century, only two principals served the campus<sup>104</sup>. The second, Al Lobo, spent 20 years at the school before a promotion to area superintendent in 2001. The current principal completing her first year, Maricella Fuentes, was a 4<sup>th</sup> grade bilingual teacher and assistant principal at the school. She is also a parent of one current and two former Chavez students. The

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<sup>104</sup> Contrast this tenure, with those of the principals at the high school of Chavez's vertical teams, which had seven appointed principals over an eight-year period, and several more interim principals during that period.

selection and hiring of Ms. Fuentes selection as is a central issue in the Chavez ES story discussed below.

### ***The building***

While the district's commitment to eastside schools has been questioned, many individuals associated with the Chavez ES have demonstrated a longstanding commitment to honoring the Latino culture and heritage of its students. Some sense of this commitment is also manifested visually in a variety of artwork displayed throughout the school. Prior to the students' arrival on campus, the architect placed a display at his own expense, approximately 25 feet long and 6 feet high, of pre-Columbian figures in the entrance of the school. The center of the display is an Aztec warrior in full dress, constructed from 100 or so, raised painted wooden tiles. Spreading out over the display from this central piece, are hundreds of assorted other painted cutouts figures. A donated collection Mexican folk art is displayed throughout the library. The art teacher was unclear regarding the details of the donation. She has used the pieces for inspiration in the lessons; student pieces reflecting the style of the originals are displayed in the library and the classroom. The art teacher indicated that she incorporates art that draws from the students heritage whenever possible, and deemphasizes more traditional "Western" art.

One of the most impressive displays is a large mural chronicling the socio-political history of Mexico covers the four walls of the library atrium. A well-known local artist and parent of a former Chavez student painted the mural in the early 1990s. Beginning with a pre-Columbian agrarian society, the mural depicts the arrival of Cortez and subsequent slaughter and colonization of the indigenous people, figures in the struggle for Mexican independence including Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, Benito Juarez and Emiliano Zapata<sup>105</sup>. Latino children and families are depicted in the latter portion of the mural. A parent of a Chavez student, who watched the painting of the mural as a student in the early 1990s, recalled her classmates modeling for the children in the mural. The teachers note with some resentment that the artwork makes the school an attractive space for district meetings and trainings, often inconveniencing the faculty and students.

### ***Programs***

Programmatically, Chavez ES has demonstrated commitment to the largely Hispanic student body of the school as well deviating from district norms in a number of areas thought to better serve the students. During the 1990s the

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<sup>105</sup> The depiction of the struggle for Mexican Independence in the school may be especially important for students who frequently encounter the story of the fight by white colonists to “free” Texas. As is typical in Texas, a number of the high schools in the district are named for legendary Texas colonists. “Chavez” is in fact named for a Latino scholar who was an early and vocal critic of assimilationist educational policies and practices.

school instituted a dual language program under federal grant. The campus was, until two years ago, one of a handful of elementary campuses in the district with a sixth grade<sup>106</sup>. In addition, the campus was one of a half-dozen or so schools operating on a year-round schedule featuring more frequent, but short school breaks<sup>107</sup>. While not necessarily the intent, both deviations from district norms were perceived by a number of teachers interviewed as being particularly beneficial the school's English language learners. According to the teachers, given the additional year at the elementary level, the school delayed full transition to English to the fifth grade allowing greater first language development and ultimately better overall academic development. The shorter summer break was felt to improve retention of English language skills.

***Student and campus performance: A turnaround***

From the 1993-4 to 1999-2000 academic years, the campus languished at a minimally acceptable level of performance as measured by the state rating system (comparative information on test scores is provided in Appendix D). During this

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<sup>106</sup> The sixth grade was moved to a nearby middle school in 2001 as part of a district initiated adoption of a comprehensive school reform model. This policy has had many unintended, but substantial consequences for the school including 1) problems staffing special area classes (art, music and PE) due to the reduction in enrollment, and 2) new challenges for the bilingual program which feels pressure to transition LEP students earlier. As opposed to full day bilingual instruction in the K-6 format, sixth grade students will receive only 1 hour of ESL instruction in the 6-8 middle school format.

<sup>107</sup> A state policy change in 2001 that did away with alternate testing days for year-round schools effectively forced the school to adopt a traditional schedule.

period, frustration with the lack of progress despite a myriad of initiatives resulted in growing tension between the long-time principal and the teachers. One teacher stated,

We were floundering. We were trying a whole bunch of different things and we really didn't give ourselves time to perfect what we were [doing]...And I don't think a lot of the approaches that we were trying were...beneficial to our population of children.

Given substantial disagreement about the appropriate campus goals, criteria of success, and means to achieve either, the campus seemed unable to collectively agree on and sustain a course of action.

Beginning in the 1999-2000 academic year, the campus began an action-research partnership with a research and service group located at a nearby university, which involved faculty and doctoral students in the change process<sup>108</sup>. Operating from the notion of school improvement as a “struggle for betterment” (Oakes et al., 2000), this action-research partnership focused on increasing student achievement by enhancing faculty involvement in campus decision-making. Project activities engaged teachers and administrators in more

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<sup>108</sup> The authors' involvement with the campus stems from this school-university partnership. Thu Suong has been actively involved with the project and the school since the fall of 2002. Brendan has been involved with the project and off and on with the school since the fall of 1999 and with the school intensively since the spring of 2003.



deliberative governance activities focused on collective and strategic planning (see Appendix C for an overview of the project).

During the period of the partnership, the school's rating increased from minimally acceptable to "Exemplary", the highest state rating schools may obtain. A veteran teacher, highly active in the school and in the reform process, commented that the dramatic increase in ratings caught the school off guard. Asked to retrospectively attribute the gains, she said,

We never actually sat down as a faculty to say, "We did this, we did this, we did this, here's what worked", and I don't know that there was ever consensus on that. It was more like, "we think that it was the fact that the faculty started having input and that we started some after school tutoring" and there were several conjectures. But did we ever determine it was one thing? No. And I don't know that you ever do figure those things out in education. There is so much guesswork. You can put all the numbers down on paper you want, but when it actually comes down to what was the human interaction and the human change that made those numbers what they were, you don't always get to that.

The success of the school precipitated the promotion of the long-time principal within the district, perhaps not surprisingly, but certainly unanticipated by the faculty. In our work with the school through the partnership the following year, we noticed a lot of turmoil associated with the change in administrators. The

teachers felt that the district had not dealt with them fairly and did not recognize the “faculty” role in the success. Teachers were uncomfortable with the district appointed interim and felt the school lost momentum or even took a step backward.

Discussing the story with a colleague, Thu Suong Thi Nguyen, it became clear that it was important for the teachers to “tell the story” of the prior years, both as a means to collectively remind themselves of the success and to use the story to demand greater voice with the new leadership and the district. Moreover, we both felt that the teachers spoke more compellingly about the change in the culture of the school than did the university researchers associated with the partnership. We approached two teachers who agreed to work with us to investigate and write the story of the campus turnaround, from the perspective of those involved. The result was a short co-written piece that provided to the faculty for review.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>This piece is included in the text below. The original intent was to investigate and co-write the story with the two teachers. During the summer, the teachers helped to develop the interview protocols, recruit participants, and even offered to interview other teachers. As the school year began, the teachers had less time to devote to the project. Although they did not collaborate on the actual writing, both reviewed the piece and provided feedback.

## **THE CHAVEZ STORY**

To reconstruct the story, we drew on previously gathered documents from the partnership activities, approximately semi-structured interviews, observations of twenty planning and faculty meetings during the summer and fall of 2003 and dozens of informal interviews over that time. Constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used “to ‘make sense’ of the data in ways that ...facilitate the unfolding of the inquiry, and...lead to a maximal understanding...of the phenomenon” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.224-5). Trustworthiness of the study was enhanced with member checks, triangulation of data among the interviews and with available documents and researcher observations, and peer debriefing between the researchers.

It is important to note that the analysis only approximated the purely inductive approach to grounded theory idealized by Strauss and Corbin (1990). As the study and analysis progressed, the interplay between the literature and the data resulted in an ongoing refinement of themes and complication of theory in a manner that was by turns deductive and inductive. While literature based themes were invoked, efforts were made both to ground these in the data and to maintain a high level of reflexivity to avoid simply fitting the data to the theory.

Renegotiating work-life in the lifeworld: A Habermasian perspective

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, proponents of devolved decision-making authority in education argued “decentralized units, increase knowledge about, access to, and participation in governance; make organizations easier to change; and prevent undue consolidation of power at geographically distant locations and hierarchically remote organizational levels” (Murphy, 1991, p. 2). Studies in mid-1990s found subsequent restructuring reforms had not substantively altered classroom practice or raised student achievement (Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1995; Murphy & Beck, 1995). Accountability driven models using performance comparisons to spur local level reform (Elmore et al., 1996) followed on the heels of these reforms emphasizing greater school-based authority.

A number of critical scholars suggest the performance monitoring systems associated with these later reforms feed “management discourses” (Ball, 1990b) diametrically opposed to the earlier logic (Apple, 2001b; Engel, 2000; Gee et al., 1996; McNeil, 2000). Commenting on the intensified management in British reforms, Ball (1990b, p. 153) noted “teachers are increasingly subject to systems of administrative rationality that exclude them from an effective say in the kind of substantive decision-making that could equally well be determined collectively”. The discussion offered by Apple, Ball and others suggest a longer look at the

work of Jurgen Habermas may be helpful in putting these management discourses into perspective and in projecting potential consequences of the related reforms.

Situating the intensification of the management discourse in education in a Habermasian framework is helpful in two ways, one descriptive the second normative. From a descriptive standpoint, his system-lifeworld model of society (Habermas, 1987) locates the emergence of the management discourse as “system imperatives” as a means to fend off a legitimation crisis in the public administration generally (Habermas, 1975), and of public schools (Foster, 1980; Shapiro, 1984) in particular. His work regarding legitimation crises helps explain the development of the smaller but powerful regulative state to which Apple (2001) ascribes the emergence of a particular management discourse in education over the past two decades.

Generated from a critical standpoint, his system-lifeworld model also provides a normative vision, alerting us to the problematic application of instrumental logics in the management of human beings resulting in a “colonization of the lifeworld” (Habermas, 1987). He calls attention to the futility of attempting to replace traditional means of social integration through norms and rituals with systemic “imperatives” and “pronouncements”. Further, he alerts us to the alienating effects of enforcing these imperatives through objectifying management logics in public spaces such as schools, effectively reducing citizens

to market consumers and/or state clients. Ultimately, he suggests “colonization of the lifeworld by system imperatives...drive moral-practical elements out of private and political-public spheres of life” (Habermas, 1987, p. 325) leading to “deformation of everyday practice, [in which] symptoms of rigidification combine with symptoms of desolation” (p. 327). His normative vision points to a more inclusive vision of rationality in which the technical-rational logics emphasized in management systems are balance with moral-practical logics emanating from communicative activity in the “lifeworld” (Braaten, 1991).

More than simply instructional sites, schools are also arenas of cultural, political and economic contestation (Giroux, 1983). While powerful and constraining, these intensified management structures are not totalizing. Discussing the “Hidden History of Praxis Theory”, Carspecken (2002, p. 75) argues that as expressive beings, humans need and seek opportunities to “construct and maintain positive identities and to explore their further potentialities as self-producers”. Suggesting individuals will seek opportunities in their work to fulfill “praxis needs” for self-expression and self-formation,

When goal directed tasks are controlled by others, are menial, fragmented, and do not facilitate self-expression, then people will develop cultures that try to maximize what few opportunities for self-expression do exist in the tasks themselves...and simultaneously meet praxis needs by resisting

cultural forms associated with the authority figures of the setting:  
teachers, foremen, employers. (Carspecken, 2002, p. 66),

Using Carspecken's (2002) delineations regarding self-formation, the *emergence*, *maintenance*, and *development* of a collective voice are examined through teacher reflections on an expansion of faculty involvement in significant campus-level decisions. The findings suggest that the wider distribution of leadership reflected in the empowerment of the faculty was instrumental in increasing student achievement and may contribute to attracting and retaining highly qualified and committed teachers for high need schools like Chavez ES.

### **Chavez Elementary: Collective voice in an urban school<sup>110</sup>**

#### ***Chavez ES by the Numbers...***

#### **The Setting.**

Chavez Elementary School sits on the northern edge of the Maple Creek neighborhood in a large central Texas city. North of the river and east of an interstate highway, the neighborhood is bounded on the north and east by Cesar Chavez and Luling streets respectively. According to the 2000 Census, the

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<sup>110</sup> The following story (pp. 274-290) piece was co-written by Brendan Maxcy and Thu Suong Thi Nguyen. A slightly different version without pseudonyms was presented to a number of Chavez faculty members in March 2004 for review and discussion in connection with our ongoing action research with the campus.

predominately Hispanic neighborhood (84%) reports a median household income of \$23,597, not much more than half the city's median of nearly \$43,000.

### **The school.**

Chavez ES opened in 1976, replacing the historic Pine ES located just across the highway. The campus was named for a professor considered the father of Mexican-American studies at the nearby state university. Special architectural features were incorporated into the building design to reflect the Mexican-American community around it, including a multicolored floor design in the main lobby and exterior designs near the main entrance and on the canopy.

### **The students**

While the numbers vary due to high student mobility (28%), state figures indicate that Chavez ES served 388 students in 2002-3 of whom fourteen were Anglo, seven African American and the vast majority Latina/o. Approximately 45 students received special education services. Nearly 85% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch program, down from 91% in 1993-4. Nearly 40% of the students are English language learners, a number that has increased by thirteen percentage points over the same period.

Over the last nine years, the enrollment of Chavez ES has dropped substantially. In part, this reflects adjustments to the attendance boundaries and



changes in neighborhood demographics related to gentrification. The most substantial drop occurred at the end of the 2000-1 school year. In the fall of 2001-2, the school's sixth grade classes along with those of three other k-6 campuses, were relocated to the nearby middle school. The change was part of an effort to create a Middle Years Program (MYP) at Lewis MS to better prepare students in the Jones High School vertical team for the more rigorous coursework to earn a diploma accredited by the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO).

**The faculty.**

Since its opening in 1976, only four principals served the campus: Robert Guajardo (1976-80), Al Lobos (1981-2002), Elisabeth Martinez (2002-3), and Maricella Fuentes, appointed in the spring of 2003. Ms. Fuentes was a former bilingual teacher and assistant principal at the school, and a parent of two former and one current Chavez ES students.

Chavez ES benefits from an experienced teaching faculty, with an average tenure of 12.4 years, more than three years above the district average for high poverty elementary schools (>80% free or reduced lunch eligible). Fifty-two percent of Chavez ES teachers had 11 or more years of teaching experience during the 2001-2002. Of the 33 teachers, only three are male. One teacher is African American, eighteen are Anglo, and fifteen are Latina/o. Although the

demographics of the school do not exactly match the student body, the faculty is more diverse than the district and the state where seventy percent of the teaching force are Anglo.

***Success according to the numbers...***

According to the Academic Excellence Indicator System, from the 1993-1994 to 1999-2000 school years, Chavez ES languished at a state accountability rating of Acceptable. In the 2000-2001 school year, the school jumped to the Recognized level. The following year, the campus reached the highest rating of Exemplary. Chavez ES was the first high poverty campus in the district to achieve that rating.

***Chavez ES beyond the numbers: What the number cannot say...***

The numbers suggest a triumphant story, particularly for a school serving a traditionally underserved and underperforming student population. As impressive as the numbers are, they cannot tell the story of the underlying change at this campus. Through a series of interviews conducted during the summer and fall of 2003, the human side of this story is presented. The story that follows suggests the growth of collective a voice within the faculty was central to the changes.

### *The emergence of a collective voice*

In the fall of 1999, Mr. Lobos, then principal of Chavez, enlisted the aid of a research group at the local university to help the faculty make better use of student performance data. He later said, “I was looking for something to get us over the hump.” Looking back, one teacher noted that the presence of the research group created an opportunity, “It started out with data but became about reform, empowerment, decision-making as a group; giving our selves voice.”

Mr. Lobos used one session with the research group as an opportunity to challenge the faculty. He stated the goal of the campus was to achieve an “Exemplary” rating *within one year*. Given the flat performance of the previous six years, many of the faculty members openly voiced skepticism.

#### **Confronting barriers.**

Invited by the faculty to facilitate a discussion of the necessary steps to meet the charge, the research group began by asking, “What barriers existed to becoming an exemplary campus?” Through an organizational analysis, the faculty identified “knowledgeable and effective leadership” as a primary need. Among the issues noted were an authoritarian leadership style, problematic communication patterns, and time constraints due to an overabundance of poorly coordinated initiatives. The faculty also argued that an exemplary school must focus on the whole child—test scores alone should not define exemplary.

So began the initial dialogs among Mr. Lobos and his teachers often mediated by the director of the research group and his students. Reflecting on the process, one teacher felt the faculty capitalized on the offer of mediation quite deliberately,

We kind of used you as the scapegoat. We could raise issues through the process and the principal would listen. We found more productive ways of raising issues. It moved beyond venting. Venting is important, but we needed to move to some action, and the process helped in that. It was very helpful to have a third party.

#### **A critical incident.**

A critical incident occurred later in the year concerning a staffing decision. Due to an exceptionally large 4th grade class, the faculty felt an additional 5th grade teacher would be needed in the upcoming year. However, without consulting the faculty, Mr. Lobos decided to devote staffing funds to hire a technology consultant. Troubled by this unilateral decision, a group of teachers discussed the issue with the entire faculty.

With the support of the faculty, this group approached Mr. Lobos in a meeting mediated by the director. Making it clear that they spoke for a large majority of the teachers, the group persisted until the principal agreed to fund the 5th grade position and look elsewhere to fund a technology consultant. Looking

back one teacher believed, “That was kind of the turning point. He had said over and over again, ‘No, we are not getting another fifth grade teacher’ and we said, ‘Yes we are!’ “

**An emergent voice.**

Out of this incident came three important changes. First, a substantial change in the teachers’ perception of their own ability and power to affect campus decisions in areas traditionally outside of their sphere of influence. Among the teachers, this incident was described as their “line in the sand” and as an opportunity to either “put up or shut up”. One teacher said of the incident, “Eventually it all got settled and I think that...people then found a voice, ‘We’ve had success doing this, now, let’s see if we can use our voice in other areas.’” Second, the small group of teachers formed a steering committee for the campus. As its role in decision-making formalized, the committee took on the name, El Comite Avance, “the committee for advancement”. Finally, with the emergence of a stronger teacher voice and coincident demands for involvement in campus decisions, Mr. Lobos' style adapted to stronger teacher leadership. One teacher saw the change as reciprocal,

We changed the ways we did things with the administration; we asked why instead of backing down, and there was a change in the administrator’s attitude.

Speaking of the benefits to the campus of the work with the university, Mr. Lobos said,

It helped develop the communication that needed to occur--developing perceptions of leadership. Teachers felt they were providing leadership. Leadership needs to come from within and administration needs to facilitate and bring it about.

Suggesting the work “was an education in itself,” he commented on changes in his own style, he noted:

We were able to work together because of the communication skills. It helped me to improve my skills and has helped in my current position. These skills have carried over.

### **Results.**

The following year, the ratings changed as well. Chavez ES attained a rating of “Recognized”. One year later they became one of only two high-poverty schools in the district to attain an “Exemplary” rating. Each year, through focused efforts in the academic arena as well as in the emphasis on effective communication and the valuing of individuals, the faculty felt a growing sense of empowerment. One teacher put it this way,

It has been interesting to see the change over time. We have really taken on much more leadership within the faculty rather than waiting on it from the administration. The first year we wanted better leadership; the next year we wanted empowerment. We realized we were part of the leadership.

### *Maintaining a Collective Voice*

In July of 2002, the summer after the school achieved an exemplary rating, the district promoted Mr. Lobos to area superintendent and appointed an interim principal. To be certain, the district's failure to notify or discuss either decision, surprised and frustrated the faculty. This no doubt contributed to a strained relationship with the district's appointed successor.

In general, those interviewed felt the interim was extremely capable, noting for one that her grant writing ability had brought the school needed monies. "The interim principal was hard working", according to one teacher "but, not the best match for our school." Some felt she was not accustomed to the strong faculty voice:

She didn't feel comfortable with the whole idea because she was more comfortable with the traditional hierarchical system and we had moved away from that... That's probably great for a lot of schools, but that's just not what we needed anymore.

At different points, the interim expressed concern that the voice of the steering committee was strong, but not wholly representative of the faculty. While those interviewed did not indicate that the interim necessarily broadened input, a number agreed that participation in decision-making did not always reflect all voices. In addition to imbalance within the teacher voice, observations suggest teacher and administrator voice carry more weight in planning and decision-making than the voices of parents.

#### **Finding their voice.**

From the point of view of those interviewed, relationships of trust and effective communication, so important to establishing the more democratic governance they had achieved, suffered with the turnover in leadership. With in interest in re-establishing a more collaborative leadership model and regaining the momentum of the prior years, the faculty asserted its voice in the hiring process. One teacher recalled, “We were willing to put our necks on the line to protect that, because, indeed, we worked our butts off to get to Exemplary.”

Having not selected a principal during Mr. Lobos’ 20 years tenure, the faculty was unfamiliar with the process. Despite provisions for teacher and parent input into the selection process, a key district administrator expressed a strong preference to appoint the interim to the position. The faculty feared their pursuit



of a candidate sharing an interest in more democratic and distributed leadership would be deflected.

In an effort to bolster their chances, a faculty member recalled “We organized and [became familiar with] the process, which we felt was being controlled by the district; we got organized...and the parents organized.” Members of the steering committee researched the unfamiliar selection process to determine the roles for teachers and parents. Teachers sought assistance from the university to develop questions to raise in the selection process that would articulate the type of leadership they felt the school needed. Parents became involved and organized a letter writing campaign to the Superintendent

**Articulating a preference.**

By the middle of the year, key members of the faculty had organized teachers and parents to work as a unified force to promote the assistant principal Ms. Fuentes to the position. This effort would leverage their status as one of only two high-poverty schools in the district to reach an “exemplary” rating. A strongly worded letter to the superintendent was drafted and signed by the faculty as a whole. Citing the recent jump in state ratings, the letter stated that Chavez ES was a unique school, with a unique history and would be best served by a principal familiar with the school and the reforms that led to that improvement. Ms. Fuentes, the letter noted, had been a parent at the school as well as a teacher and

administrator for ten years and had been through the reforms that resulted in shared leadership at the school. The letter closed,

... We do not make our recommendation idly, and we expect you will consider this letter with the same seriousness you reserve for your most important decisions. Committed leadership matters to us and to our students' achievement.

Ms. Fuentes was appointed principal. The interim assumed the principalship of a school in the district.

#### **Reflecting on the effort.**

The following September, several teachers from the steering committee shared the story with a class of educational administration students at the local university. The teachers were pleased with the effort to organize and unify parents and teachers to influence the outcome and get “their principal of choice”. One teacher commented of the effort and the outcome,

We felt it was a really important thing. I think a few years ago we would have accepted the choices of others. That's a reflection of how our faculty has changed.

At the same time, the group expressed concern that the “stakes” for the campus had gone up within the district. They believed the campus and the new principal

would face additional pressure and scrutiny from the district to maintain an exemplary rating and high test scores. Given the principal's commitment to collaboration and the level of trust between she and the teachers, they were cautiously optimistic about meeting the expectations,

The key is the sense of empowerment. If in a heartbeat central can send someone down and chew the principal out, [raises eyebrows]...If you have empowerment through collaboration, you can maintain.

### *Developing their collective voice*

After a difficult year and a sense of lost of momentum, the steering committee felt it was important to focus their efforts to streamline planning and meeting time to improve classroom practice, "We realized that if we are empowered, we have to find a way to organize it so that it is effective." In a series of summer planning meetings, the steering committee and the principal considered ways to better organize the school with the intent of extending the leadership more broadly and making better use of time. With this in mind, they devised a structure of cohorts reflecting various goals and responsibilities of the school. Proposed to the faculty at the beginning of the year, it was adopted.

### **Implementing the cohorts.**

To date, implementation of the cohort structure has been slow and difficult for a number of reasons. First, implementation was slowed as attention and time was devoted to finalize the campus improvement plan. Commitment to planning as a faculty, meant meeting time early in the year was absorbed by tasks typically completed in the spring. Unfortunately, finalization of the plan was delayed by district-mandated changes in format and content that were not announced until late-September.

Next, although the overall scores for the school exceeded the district average, lower scores in the areas of writing and science resulted in the campus being designated a Tier 2 school by the district. To some degree, the lowered status was demoralizing. In addition, stepped up demands for staff training, preparation for frequent “LearningWalks” by central office administrators and expanded testing for students, diverted time and energy away from campus-level initiatives.

Third, the initial allocation of cohorts did not fit with the ongoing needs of the campus. That is, some cohorts were only needed early in the year, while others focused on ongoing needs. As a result, the number of cohorts was reduced in November and members regrouped around four academically focused groups: Language Arts, Science, Social Studies and Bilingual Education.

### **Making the adjustment(s).**

Midway through the year, it is unclear how fruitful the effort to further develop the collective voice of the faculty has been. With a new but familiar principal and an assistant principal new to the role and the campus, the first semester has understandably been a period of learning adjustment. Still, the teachers interviewed report that the relationships with both administrators is excellent and moving in the right direction.

As a result of strong mid-year test performance, the campus was moved to Tier 3 status. The psychic boost was accompanied by a lifting of district mandates and greater space to pursue campus initiatives. The language arts cohort is promoting a campus-wide effort to identify and implement new critical reading strategies that excite and engage the students. As a result of the loss of the sixth grade, the bilingual cohort is working hard to align and adjust the bilingual curriculum to hasten the transition of English language learners.

### **Addressing dilemmas.**

The year has revealed a number of difficult to resolve dilemmas. Some of those interviewed suggest that it was easier to work collaboratively when the teachers perceived a common problem, namely the need for greater input with the administrators. It may be more difficult to work together to examine and change classroom practices. Is it possible to balance professional autonomy with a

collective effort to improve? Can colleagues share “best practices” without demanding uniformity in instruction? One teacher remarked that sharing may be difficult since the school may not be in the “trust zone”. Another countered, “If collegiality is important to us as a school, then that is what we have to build.”

A second dilemma concerns faculty participation in decision-making. A difficult staffing decision early in the year divided and demoralized the faculty. Reduced enrollment with the loss of the sixth grade in 2002, meant staffing for special areas (art, music and physical education) was cut to four-fifths full-time equivalents. Late enrollments and added district resources resulted in an increased staffing allotment for Chavez ES in early September, 2003. A proposal to bring special area teachers back to campus on a full-time basis, was rejected in favor of directing the additional resources that would be required for tutoring and support services for students struggling with state tests.

The decision resulted in hurt feelings among long-time colleagues and fractures within the faculty. To a person, those interviewed felt the quick decision required by the district did not allow for the faculty as a whole to consider and discuss alternatives. It remains unclear if it might have gone differently had time allowed more deliberation. The faculty is confronted with the ongoing dilemma of how to collectively and collaboratively decide issues with the potential to divide the faculty.

Recalling the struggle to overcome a culture of isolation in the school during the early days of the partnership, one teacher noted, “People sitting across from the table from each other said, ‘I have never even talked to this teacher before and we’re on the same campus’. She then commented, “I have to tell you we’re kind of back to that point again.” It appears that the struggle to develop community is ongoing.

### ***Conclusion***

It seems fair to say that the faculty at Chavez ES has moved far toward the “knowledgeable and effective leadership” it sought four years ago. Whatever the initial idea was, that leadership appears now to be distributed among the faculty. During the summer restructuring meetings, one teacher saw empowerment of the faculty and arguably the school in relationships,

You never really have faculty empowerment until you know that administrator and that administrator is willing to share those responsibilities... You don’t really have empowerment, until there is a relationship.

The challenges to maintaining and developing the relationships needed for a powerful and unified campus voice are complex and many. Still, the school seems determined to find structures that collect more voices and increase

opportunities for leadership. It seems likely that these opportunities will attract and retain highly qualified and devoted teachers. Recruited by a school consistently recognized as “Exemplary”, one teacher seriously considered leaving the school. Of her decision to stay, she stated,

Nothing seemed to be going on there. The teachers did their own thing and the school was effective, but...here we are always trying something new. Our kids are always changing. We have to work to find new ways to help them. I wanted to see this [the reform] through. It is not perfect, but we are headed in the right direction.

This is a compelling comment on the story behind the numbers. Our findings suggest Chavez ES has been most successful when the faculty has banded together, used “hard” and “soft” data to set its own course, and found new ways to serve its students. It did this by tapping into talent and energy within the school to develop the necessary leadership, rather than seeking it elsewhere.

It remains to be seen how the school will address new challenges associated with the intensified requirements and the associated promotion policies for the rising 5th grade class. It seems both retaining and capitalizing on the talents of the current staff, attracting and nurturing new faculty members, and seeking the support, knowledge and energy of parents and community members will be key themes in the next chapter.



The foregoing story concerns the renegotiation of work at an urban elementary school operating within the Texas performance accountability system. The school in some ways represents a “success story” in the Texas system. It is a school serving low-income, Hispanic children that over a three-year period rose from marginally acceptable to the state’s highest performance rating of Exemplary. As discussed below, to attribute this success to the imperatives associated with the performance accountability system is to diminish and even negate the efforts to those at the school level that altered the instructional and leadership practice of the school. The following section examines two partnership activities at the school in an effort to explicate the “communicative action” underlying these practical changes.

#### **THEORIZING THE RENEGOTIATION OF WORK AND LEADERSHIP NORMS**

A major concern of modern social theorists, perhaps most notably Max Weber, has been the loss of autonomy stemming from increasing rationalization of society. Habermas’s communicative action theory (Habermas, 1984; 1987) is an effort to come to terms with the implications of that distinction by offering a more inclusive version of rationality, balancing instrumental rationality with communicative rationality (Braaten, 1991). In fact, Habermas’s re-conceptualization of the reification of oppressive social structures as a

“colonization of the lifeworld” by economic and administrative system imperatives is an attempt to establish the connection between structure and agency by integrating the system and lifeworld paradigms (McCarthy, 1991).

It appears from a Habermasian perspective, that central to praxis opposing the alienating effects of encroaching technical control by the system is a contest within the lifeworld of the campus (or classroom) between moral-practical and instrumental logics.<sup>111</sup> As discussed below, examination of the micro processes through which Chavez engages in improvement planning manifest the communicative processes central to social-integration. Habermas’s language-based critical hermeneutics provides a normative model through which to view these dialogues.

### **Habermas’s critical hermeneutics**

The task of the critical theorist is to lay bare institutional arrangements to reveal externally and internally imposed distortions of communication masking these reified structures. Focusing on three problematic features of language, difference, deferral and ambiguity, Derrida called into question the simultaneity of awareness and perception that provide the basis of “truth” in positivism

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<sup>111</sup> This accepts McCarthy’s assertion that formal organizations such as schools are both systemically and socially integrated, rather than accepting Habermas’s hard line that “social-integrative mechanisms are put out of play in formal organizations” (McCarthy, 1991, p. 129).

(Agger, 1998). “For Derrida, the meaning of a word is constantly deferred because it can have meaning only in relation to its difference from other words within a given system of language” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 264). As a result of this critique of "the metaphysics of presence", traditional conceptions of validity became problematic as did traditional methods of “objectively” studying issues of communication (Carspecken, 1996).

The response of some critical researchers was to reconceptualize these issues using different foundations. In re-crafting his critical theory, Habermas employs a communicative foundation which “conceptualizes knowledge and social practice not in terms of a duality between subject and object...but through a reconceptualization of *the subject as inherently intersubjective*” (Agger, 1998, p. 94, italics in original). For Habermas, language and communication are the central features of the human lifeworld. In conjunction with reflexivity, language and communication possess the potential to resist the systemic imperatives of money and power and to recast society in humane ways.

Unhappy with the relativism of other approaches to understanding and interpreting of communication, Habermas developed a critical hermeneutics emphasizing self-reflective analysis of discursive foundations and intersubjective understanding (Mallery, Hurwitz, & Duffy, 1987). For Habermas and others, understanding is always socially and historically situated, and thus, truth and

meaning are not discovered, but negotiated through social discourse. Whereas some heavy social constructivists or “ludic” postmodernists posit multiple, irresolvable realities (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998), for critical theorists like Habermas, a single, common reality is presupposed when individuals seek to come to an understanding (Carspecken, 1996). The central assumption of Habermas’s critical hermeneutic approach is that truth claims can be resolved in the lifeworld through reasoned discussion resulting in consensus.

The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements (Habermas, 1987, p. 126).

For Habermas, the aspiration to reach consensual understanding corresponds to an intrinsic emancipatory interest on the part of the participants (Habermas, 1972). In seeking common understanding, individuals assume the possibility of an “ideal speech situation”, in which participants freely pursue common understanding through debate and dialogue. Realization of ideal speech situations requires communicating according to,

that fundamental system of rules that adult subjects master to the extent that they can fulfill *the conditions for a happy employment of sentences in*

*utterances*, no matter to which individual language the sentences may belong and in which accidental contexts the utterances may be embedded (Habermas, 1979, p.26).

Communicating within this fundamental system connotes “communicative competence” reflecting the ability to discursively redeem a number of “truth claims”.

Carspecken (1996), drawing strongly from Habermas’ work, identifies three “communicative validity claims” associated with three ontological categories: objective claims, subjective claims, and normative/evaluative claims<sup>112</sup>. Objective validity claims refer to statements that may be judged as true or false through multiple access by others through their senses. Objective claims are issues of description not inference, or evaluation. In contrast, subjective validity claims concern individual emotions, desire, intent, and are not directly accessible by others. Normative/evaluative validity claims are claims about what is proper, appropriate and conventional. Although contestable, these claims are grounded in a belief that others should conform to a convention. Assessing the validity of normative/evaluative claims is not a matter of agreeing with or

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<sup>112</sup> Habermas often notes four claims: comprehensibility, truth, sincerity, and appropriateness. Certainly debatable, we will assume here that the speaker’s claims are “comprehensible” by the listener(s), and focus on the latter three.

contesting the claim, but rather to reveal that such claims exist and are understood, at least implicitly by participants.

As implied by the term ideal, this speech space, which is approached but never reached, is free from systematically distorted communication that would result from other- or self-imposed constraints. The central theme of Habermas' critique of modernity is that systematic distortions result from the encroachment of system imperatives on the lifeworld<sup>113</sup>. Clearer understanding necessitates compensating for these distortions, which in turn requires an account of their social and historical development. In the following section we outline our work in terms of nurturing a more balanced lifeworld in which various stakeholders can mutually agree upon an understanding of a problematic situation and on an appropriate collective response.

### **Campus improvement planning: Raising and redeeming truth claims**

Much of the work with campuses associated with the Educational Productivity Council's school-university partnerships centers on promoting more collective, deliberative, democratic campus improvement planning. From a

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<sup>113</sup>The ideal speech situation is a device to make us mindful of the different ways actual communication becomes distorted, informing our praxis so that we can attenuate these distortions in some limited way. Thus, where the lifeworld is active, the ideal speech situation is evocative. According to Habermas, "One should not imagine the ideal speech situation as a utopian model for an emancipated society", (quoted in *Political Experience and the Renewal of Marxist Theory*", in Dews 1986, p. 90, Cf. Forester, 1993).

standpoint of technical support, this work might be viewed as a means to an end: a well-articulated plan could lead to clearer actions and straightforward evaluation of progress. The improvement plan offers a means of managerial control by specifying ends, identifying responsible parties, facilitating progress monitoring. Alternately, the dialog and deliberation within the planning process can be understood an end in itself: an inclusive, thoughtful discussion of goals and action steps is meaningful to those involved.

In a review of praxis theory, Carspecken argues that as expressive beings, humans need and seek opportunities to “construct and maintain positive identities and to explore their further potentialities as self-producers” (Carspecken, 2002, p. 75). In this sense, campus improvement planning presents an opportunity for those involved to collectively produce the educational culture of the school. Viewed in this way, it is possible to recast a number of the partnership improvement planning activities within a frame of communicative action, where raising, validating and acting on truth claims become central elements. The discussion that follows will examine two of these activities briefly: a performance analysis and an organizational analysis.

### ***Raising claims with the performance analysis***

To a large degree, the invitation of the Educational Productivity Council to the Chavez ES campus and the subsequent partnership derived from the group's ability to present performance data to the teachers in more approachable ways. As noted in the *Overview of the Regional Alliance for School Improvement* (see, Appendix C),

A performance analysis is presented in February drawing on campus, district and state level data to initiate a dialogue regarding areas of concern identified by the faculty and staff. It is hoped that the analysis helps the faculty and staff establish measurable goals for the campus.

### **Test performance as “objective” claims.**

Within the partnership sequence, the performance analysis is the first formal activity in creating an improvement plan for the following year. As initially conceived, the intent of the activity was to “objectively” identify areas of concern toward which the entire faculty could agree to focus. The testing data provided by the state provided a means to raise “objective” claims about problematic performance in various subject areas (e.g. problem-solving skills), and of greater concern to us, performance gaps among student groups within the school and within the district (e.g. lower scores for students of color and students of poverty).



Over time, it became apparent that the performance analysis served as an opening to communicative action generated through a campus dialogue. For Sally Ruiz, a twenty-eight year veteran at Chavez, an examination of the performance data brought on an epiphany and an internal dialogue more than a year before the partnership began. At that time she faced up to some difficult “truths” and the shortcomings of her practice slapped her in the face at a district meeting to examine test performance at the middle school to which the Chavez students matriculate. As a fifth grade teacher, the gap between her perceptions of student performance and their subsequent performance in middle school was eye opening,

While I was seeing success in terms of what was going on in the classroom...that success didn't then transfer on to test scores and I remember being very, very embarrassed and very ashamed at the sixth graders' scores [former Chavez students]. In certain areas, in math, they were performing at 35%, and that just blew me away and I thought “Why? What's not going on here?”

Moreover, comparative performance data prevented attribution of the problems to the students as often occurs in deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997).

I had seen the results of [a neighbor school with a similar student population] which is down the street and their sixth graders were performing at the nineties already, eighties—we were still back here in the seventies and sixties or even fifties and forties and thirties in some

areas...I was embarrassed, I was ashamed and I thought, “You know, these kids can do better and I can do better”.

Like Sally’s confrontation with the performance data, comments by teachers and administrators suggest the analyses presented by the EPC were helpful in the early stages of planning. Among other things the longitudinal links between the grade levels were brought to the fore. Several teachers suggested that this drew teachers from the untested primary grades into the general discussion of achievement in the school that seemed previously to pertain only to the upper grades. While she is not a wholesale fan of the testing program, Kathleen, a third grade teacher, suggests the pressure from testing was a catalyst for dialogue within and between grade levels.

The pressure from testing promoted greater responsibility by teachers to re-examine their practice. We needed that. I don’t like everything about the testing. It created a lot of stress this year, but it forced us to look at what we were doing. We really needed that. It also brought early grades into it, because it became apparent that third grade passing depended so much on the early years.

As a pre-kindergarten teacher, Susan’s students are not subject to standardized state testing (yet). She acknowledged that initially the primary teachers did not

feel the pressure of the testing, but the guided performance analyses presented by the university began to bridge that gap.

You can say, “Well, we’re not tested, so...”, but at a certain point I think everyone who had that child feels really kind of responsible for the lack of success. So, it has spurred conversations among the teachers who had him and with their colleagues.

She recalled one presentation in particular which examined the longitudinal performance of Chavez students and identified a number of borderline students. Seeing the names and performances of former students, she began to ask herself questions such as, “What did I do? What didn’t I do? What could I do?”

Thus, presentations of “objective” performance data raised claims that challenged individuals and groups of teachers to reconcile some uncomfortable “truths” about their work with the students. It is important to state that the tests are not in this case “true” reflections of success or failure. Rather, the tests point to some contradictions that the teachers felt, individually and/or collectively, compelled to resolve in some way. That is, to the degree that their sense of accomplishment in their lifework was based on a variety of desired outcomes for their students, of which success on the tests was at least one, they needed to re-align their practice.

### **From objective to subjective and normative claims.**

Habermas argues that whenever one claim is raised, objective, subjective or normative, the other two are implicitly raised as well. The “objective” analysis of performance data additionally addressed subjective claims, and indirectly normative/evaluative claims. An objective look at the scores elicited subjective claims from teachers regarding their lifework of educating children, notably for Sally and Susan feelings of shame, embarrassment and bewilderment.

Other personal feelings were also evoked, including anger and frustration. One teacher located blame with teachers who were reluctant to move out of a comfort zone, “A lot of teachers have traditionally taught from the book and didn’t deviate too much. Many weren’t using the [state curriculum]. It was like a new thing, ‘Oh, we’re supposed to teach these?’” Another veteran identified the same problem, but expressed frustration with the administration’s failure to lead,

It turns out that, while we were given the [state curriculum] at that time, what the state was asking us to do, there was no accountability in terms of, “Let me see if they’re in your lesson plans? Let me see if you’re doing that in the classroom?”

The partnership activities related to performance analyses provide opportunities to raise objective claims. In particular, examinations of performance challenged Sally’s belief that “all was well” with her instruction and Susan’s belief that

“testing is solely a concern of teachers in the tested grades”. Further, the emergent discourse around these claims evoked subjective claims regarding responsibility that were previously unacknowledged and/or held as private concerns.

For Habermas, the opportunity to “discursively redeem” these claims that is, to “criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements” is constitutive of the communicative action needed to re-norm the organization. Norms of non-interference in teacher’s work lives that discourage “interfering” in another’s classroom are well-documented (Lortie, 1975; Weick, 1976). According to Sally a mindset of, “stay away, this is my little domain, this is my territory. I’m doing the best that I can and just leave me alone let me do my job,” was well-entrenched at Chavez,

You have to understand where we were before...where everyone did their own thing and they weren’t really working together as a team. So, I mean, that had to come about as you build relationships with one another and then you learn to work together.

Thus, the norms of non-interference discouraged publicly raising and discursively redeeming the subjective claims noted above. As discussed in the following section, an impromptu organizational analysis provided an opportunity to raise and redeem these subjective claims publicly and at the same time begin to

challenge normative claims common to the “management discourse” (Ball, 1990b) noted in the prior chapter as well.

***Raising claims through through the organizational analysis***

An organizational analysis follows the performance analysis in the list of activities in the Overview of the Regional Alliance for School Improvement (see, Appendix C):

The organizational analysis, or Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA), performed in February engages the faculty and staff in a dialogue to identify and discuss organizational issues that create barriers to meeting the campus goals. By communicating concerns in a public and constructive manner, the faculty can act collectively and deliberately to work through self-imposed barriers and to overcome externally imposed barriers.

Although the application varies somewhat according to the needs of the school, the partnership activities often employ a technique called Interactive Qualitative Analysis (Northcutt, 2001) within the analysis. The IQA is a somewhat involved affinity analysis that proceeds as follows: 1) Individuals are asked to write individual responses to a central question on index cards; 2) The responses are posted on the wall and the individuals arrange the cards in thematic groups. The grouping continues until all individuals elect to stop; 3) The group names each

thematic group by consensus, 4) The group identifies a causal arrow among each group, by coming to consensus on if-then statements (e.g. if [theme 1 improves] then [theme 2 improves]).

### **Redeeming subjective claims about the campus leadership.**

The importance of the organizational analysis became clear soon after the work with Chavez ES began in the Fall of 1999. Discussions of “objective” performance criteria revealed serious differences of opinion between the principal and certain faculty members. The principal, Al Lobos, viewed achieving an Exemplary rating in the state system as “the” goal for the school and viewed the performance analysis discussions as something to “get us over the hump”. Following one performance presentation, the principal announced that the school’s goal was to reach Exemplary status in one year. The principal appeared to view a climb to Exemplary performance as a matter of motivation on the faculty’s part. His announcement drew angry responses from the faculty.

Invited to work with the campus, the EPC introduced the IQA at Chavez ES as a class exercise to demonstrate the technique. The question posed in the IQA emanated from the performance analysis (and the heated discussion between the Chavez teachers and Mr. Lobos), “What are the barriers to Chavez ES achieving an Exemplary rating?” The initial IQA process identified “educating

the whole child” as the primary outcome for the school and “knowledgeable and effective leadership” (or lack thereof) as the primary barrier.

The “primary outcome” and the “primary barrier” revealed substantial divergences in two important subjective claims. With regard to the first, a number of teachers argued that a rating based solely on test scores in reading, writing and mathematics failed to capture important aspects of their work, and desired a more robust goal relating to development of the “whole” child. It appeared that the teachers’ view of their “life work” was not reducible to pen and paper assessments. Opening the performance up for a more “public” debate revealed divergence in the subjective valuation of “performance” measures.<sup>114</sup>

The second claim, a need for knowledgeable and effective leadership, concerned the attribution of the lack of performance growth. The claim appeared to stem from a perception that the lagging performance reflected the absence of a clear and coherent vision. That is, rather than a lack of effort and energy by the teachers, the principal was failing to provide direction and a cohesiveness plan of action for the campus. Felicia a special education teacher expressed it this way,

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<sup>114</sup> The principal, who had been at the school for nearly twenty years, later noted that the discussions initiated by this project revealed that he did not know his faculty as well as he had previously thought. At one meeting with university students, he expressed some consternation, noting that his control of the improvement planning process was intended to save the teachers time to accomplish their work.



We were floundering. We were trying a whole bunch of different things and we really didn't give ourselves time to perfect what we were... trying, different approaches. And I don't think a lot of the approaches that we were trying were...beneficial to our population of children.

Asked where the less effective approaches came from, she indicated that some were district mandates, others were ideas campus administrators borrowed from other schools, and still others were from "word of mouth" among teachers at the school. In her opinion, many of the strategies were borrowed because they were effective for a different population of students, but did not serve Chavez students well. One veteran suggested the administration was simply out of touch with the classrooms,

The administration that we had previous to this didn't necessarily look at the quality of the instruction that was going on in the classroom. I remember feeling very frustrated, um, having a mandate sent down that made no sense...I'd rarely see the administrator.

Another veteran suggested the principal's "directive" style exacerbated the problem and became a focal point for the organizational frustrations,

He was a very directive leader, very old style...He made a decision and we lived with it. Well we finally said, "Unh-uh! We want more input," and we put our foot down on some things we knew were right.

The opportunity to raise concerns with some degree of anonymity through the IQA allowed a much greater range of subjective claims to be raised than might come out if the initial claims were made publicly. Reflecting on the partnership in the fall of 2003, the current principal who had been a teacher and then assistant principal in the initial years of the partnership suggested that the discussions were important because they turned attention to the organization itself not just the students. Terming this organizational data the “soft” data, she argued, “It changed our view of data. It changed from data being hard data, numbers, to numbers and soft data. We began to chart teacher attitudes. It has opened up communication among faculty.”

While some of the original subjective claims were stated in impolitic ways (one card simply read, “Get rid of the principal!”), teacher reflections about the activity suggest that it was important to “put things on the table” so to speak. Prior to the partnership, the norms of non-interference resulted in a faculty that worked together without communicating with one another. Sally recalled,

Teachers would go into their own classroom and that would just be their own little world. There was no communication between grade levels, among grade levels. There was more of a dissemination of information and not even all information that was to be disseminated to us, was given to us.

Nancy, a twenty-five year veteran suggested the initial discussions were uncomfortable. Referring to it as a “blood letting”, she said, “I mean it was awful stuff that we had to go through...the inner reflecting we had to do, just figuring out, “Oh my gosh, I didn’t know that’s how you felt”. Sally too felt a major change stemmed from developing conversations and relationships among colleagues. “We were able to learn to get to know each other first and to start discussions and to start building relationships and to start looking at the issues and problems and to start looking at the success or lack of successes that our children were experiencing.”

The second and third IQA stages of refining the claims into general themes and positing causal links, promoted reflection and also seemed to transform the claims into more actionable terms (e.g. The need for more knowledgeable and effective leadership, became a need to create not simply wait for that leadership). In large part this collective activity of reaching consensus on the naming and ordering of themes, represents an attempt to deliberate from subjective claims to inter-subjectively created objective claims on which to act collectively. Far from positivistic notions of objective truth, this interpretation of the IQA presupposes that “truth” is consensually determined. Such activity promotes the sort of theoretical reflexivity, “the systematic exploration of the unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the

thought,” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 40) needed to expose the ways we are often constrained by barriers of our own making.

**Making claims on leadership norms.**

Felicia attributed the turnaround of the school to the faculty pulling together around planning with a common goal of improving student achievement. Asked to identify when the cohesiveness became apparent, she suggested that it was when the faculty began “talking out our problems and how we’re going to address them and how we’re going to fix them”. She found that through those deliberations, a sense of empowerment emerged within the faculty,

We could choose the things that we thought would help the kids in the classroom...I think when we felt that we, the teachers, were listened to and our ideas mattered. I think that’s when I saw more of a change in the teaching that went on and how the kids started progressing a lot.

As opposed to the arbitrary adoption of practices and programs, she suggests that planning took on a much more deliberate quality,

When we started trying programs that we thought would work and we backed them up with research and...looked at what other schools were doing with similar populations. ...and the teachers had more of say-so in what we were going to do then I think, that’s how we turned around going from Acceptable to Exemplary.

Sally agreed, noting that the growing awareness of the data was an important change for the school, but the application of the data to deliberative planning was the key.

Now... that's the first thing that we do is look at data and look at the reasons for why children are not being successful in certain areas and then coming up with a plan: How do we take care of it? How do we attack the problem? So, and then you have people talking together and having discussions and talking about solutions.

As discussed in the "Chavez Story" above, collective voice emerged and developed during the partnership. As Susan noted, the insertion of the faculty voice in the choice of principal reflected change in campus norms, "I think a few years ago we would have accepted the choices of others. That's a reflection of how our faculty has changed." Kathleen sees a certain irony in the "barrier" identified in the original IQA.

It has been interesting to see the change over time. We have really taken on much more leadership within the faculty rather than waiting on it from the administration. The first year we wanted better leadership; the next year we wanted empowerment. *We realized we were part of the leadership.*

Whatever the original intent of the performance and organizational analyses, the findings such that they provided opportunities to raise and discursively redeem objective, subjective and normative claims. Reflecting on the partnership, Kathleen argued, “It started out with data but became about reform, empowerment, decision-making as a group; giving our selves voice.” Moreover, consistent with Carspecken’s (2002) assertion that individuals seek opportunities to fulfill “praxis needs” for self-expression and self-formation, Kathleen felt the faculty capitalized on the activity and the mediation provided by the university quite deliberately,

We kind of used you as the scapegoat. We could raise issues through the process and the principal would listen. We found more productive ways of raising issues. It moved beyond venting. Venting is important, but we needed to move to some action, and the process helped in that. It was very helpful to have a third party.

Arguably, it was in this mediating role that we were most effective and the activities were most successful. By opening spaces for discussions, reflecting “truth” claims back to the participants and possibly attenuating power imbalances simply by being present. One teacher noted the immediate import and possible lasting effect of this, “Having an outside group watch helped. He (the former

principal) had to watch how he behaved. I think he changed, too. He gave up some power and became a better person.”

### **RECONSIDERING THE MANAGEMENT DISCOURSE**

Our findings suggest in this case, perhaps anecdotally, that the opportunities to raise and discursively redeem “truth” claims were important in the renegotiation of work and the re-norming of leadership within the campus. Regardless of their impact on student achievement, the reports by the teachers that these opportunities were important in their work lives and influenced decisions to remain at the school should not be dismissed. But, the fact that student achievement, as measured by test scores, rose dramatically during this period, more so than schools in the district serving similar student populations, suggests that the activities may have instrumental value as well. Unfortunately, the sort of “communicative action” within the campus lifeworld central to the Chavez turnaround seems at odds with administrative initiatives in the district.

As discussed in chapter five, critical scholars identify a “management discourse” informing traditional administrative practice and intensified within current performance accountability operating environments (Apple, 2001c; Ball, 1990b; Gee et al., 1996). From the perspective of management theory, schools as “loosely coupled systems” (see Weick, 1976) are “locked into irrational

chaos...[and need] to be brought into its [management's] redeeming order” (Ball, 1990b, p. 157). Within the management discourse, teachers are transformed into “technicians” delivering the curriculum and principals “as managers” (Ball, 1990b). Ball cautions that in such situations “teachers are likely to emerge more clearly than ever as alienated workers with little control over their own work situation (p. 155). In a reform environment informed by this discourse, “teachers are increasingly subject to systems of administrative rationality that exclude them from an effective say in the kind of substantive decision-making that could equally well be determined collectively” (Ball, 1990a, p. 153).

In our work with Chavez ES in the current academic year, we find evidence of an intensification of this management discourse in response to the recent intensification of Texas’ performance accountability system is evidenced. Where the Chavez teachers found and asserted a collective voice vis-à-vis a directive campus administration, they now find themselves repeating that effort vis-à-vis a highly prescriptive district administration. The district’s management discourse is manifested through a number of interrelated initiatives enacted over the past two years.

The district prescribed Instructional Planning Guides (IPGs), “detail every skill that teachers should teach and students should learn from pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade” to “ensure consistent, quality instruction in every grade,



every subject, and every school.” Enforcing the prescribed curriculum are two forms of monitoring: testing and campus “learning walks”. The district testing schedule (see Appendix E) now includes beginning, middle and end of year benchmark tests, nine-week assessments, and for some “focus” schools, weekly assessments, each aligned more or less tightly to the district curriculum. The assessments both reflect and are used to determine variations of campus discretion in curriculum delivery, with autonomy reduced and surveillance increased at “lower tier.” Responding to a question about the district’s performance “Tier” system, the elementary superintendent indicated that she and her directors “totaled 120 to 140 visits or learning walks a month and the curriculum team made even more visits.”

One might expect that Chavez, as the first high-poverty, predominately Hispanic Exemplary campus in the district might enjoy greater latitude. In fact, Susan, a pre-K teacher suggests the visits to Chavez felt quite heavy handed,

Well the school has been much more under the microscope by the central leadership [with the Tier 2 rating]. We had more visits. We had more LearningWalks. We had more people you know, “in our faces”, let’s face it, saying, “this week in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade you should be covering this, this and this, and I don’t see evidence of that in your room”. I mean it was that strong, on some of the LearningWalks that we had...Coming from central office, saying “these are the IPGs for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, this is what the

instructional planning guides say for this week for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and in some classes we see evidence of that but in some we don't." I mean there was really heavy scrutiny involved.

The visits often focused on particular grade levels. Teachers noted that the third grade received more administrative visits than others, perhaps because grade promotion depends on the third grade test or due simply to scheduling convenience. Kathleen a third grade teacher, found the increased scrutiny distasteful, "Its just condescending, basically...[the implication is] 'You're doing something wrong, so we want to see what it is...Not that we want to come help you, we just want to see what you're doing wrong.'" She went on to question the logic of the initiatives,

They expected everyone to be on the same week doing exactly the same thing...and it is not working, it is not doing what it is supposed to be doing, because you can't put everyone on the same page, because nobody starts on the same page and nobody learns on that same pathway.

For the teachers, this encroachment of management is insulting. Frustrated with the loss of respect implied by the reduced autonomy, Sally asked, "Haven't we already proved that we know what we are doing?" Donna simply said, "We're not imbeciles!" Reflecting on the turnaround of the school, Nancy the music

teacher suggests the spaces for that collective voice and the time to gather it are eroding,

Well, I think when we finally won voice...and we put our foot down on some things that we just knew were right that he wasn't standing behind us on.... That was kind of the turning point. So, we came together as a faculty to be able to do that...It takes a lot of work, a lot of time, and now we don't have that time. We were given lots of after school time for this community building within the faculty, and we don't have that time anymore...For the central office the focus is definitely on testing and I think the classroom teachers would say the same thing. They're now being told exactly what to teach and when to teach it in so many instances.

So, while a number of teachers with whom we spoke had initially hoped that Chavez ES would be rewarded for achieving Exemplary status with greater discretion, they instead find themselves in an ongoing battle.

## **Conclusion**

Anyone that has sat in the teachers lounge or an after school happy hour is aware that teachers have no shortage of concerns or ideas that would improve the school. Unfortunately, these claims are often left at the private "venting" sessions, because venting them publicly might result in retribution. Further, school norms supporting the apolitical myth (Eliot, 1959) often characterize these

claims as inappropriate, reflective of self-interested and disgruntled teachers. New teachers are often warned to stay away from such pariahs occupying the teacher's lounge.

Habermas's early work focused on the important role of a "critical public sphere" in raising concerns about the state administration, which originated in the coffee houses, taverns and salons of eighteenth century England and France (Habermas, 1989b). The subsequent emergence of a relatively free press provided a vehicle for expression of these concerns. In some ways, the performance analysis and IQA activities provided similar vehicles to bring objective, subjective and normative claims into public view. The authority to introduce such a vehicle in a formal organization such as a school would appear to be premised on a normative claim that teachers have a right to raise such claims. This claim is further validated (or not) to the degree which teachers make claims publicly and thus (re)claim their subjectivity within the school.

The findings in this chapter suggest that performance data and performance pressures introduced by the Texas performance monitoring system may have catalyzed dialogues regarding the work being done (or not done) at Chavez. However, the teachers cite the deliberations about practice, challenging norms of non-interference by engaging the administration and one another, as the key element of the campus's turnaround.

Although acknowledged as both tenuous and incomplete by those interviewed, the emergence of this “communicative action” seems to be a, if not the, crucial component to breaking away from dysfunctional practices and establishing the capacity to serve those students traditionally underserved by our schools. Within the Texas performance accountability environment administrators and teachers are under great pressure to quickly turn around schools. The hope that the random application of various remedies from other schools or the prescription of a master plan will cure the ills of dysfunctional public schools is seductive. The story at Chavez ES, a relatively quick turnaround, suggests that the process was agonizing and time consuming. It is unclear how Chavez will maintain and expand their collective and deliberative efforts within the intensifying management discussed above, but asked if they could, Kathleen said emphatically, “We have tasted the honey and we can’t go back!”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### INTRODUCTION

This study sought to better understand the internal struggles of one school, as a cultural and political site, as its faculty navigated, negotiated and contested converging reform initiatives informed by a strong district management discourse animated by performance accountability pressures. To this end, the study offered a multi-level analysis connecting campus level micropolitics to pressures from the state's performance monitoring system mediated by district reform initiatives. Drawing on an array of research reports and performance data available to the public through the Texas Education Agency, *Chapter Four: A Multi-focal Policy Analysis of Texas-style Performance Accountability*, examined the policy environment associated with the Texas accountability system. *Chapter Five: District Mediation of Performance Monitoring* used administrator commentary, press releases and print media, participant observation and formal interviews with teachers to depict and understand the reform context animated by accountability pressures in one large urban school district in Texas. Moving inside the district, the third level of analysis in *Chapter Six: Emergence, Maintenance and Development of Collective Voice* drew on interviews, participant observation and

documents associated with an ongoing school-university partnership to understand the renegotiation of work and leadership norms in one highly successful campus serving a high-poverty, predominately Hispanic student population.

At each level the account is partial and could be complicated in any number of ways including the application of alternate theoretical perspectives, the addition complementary and contrasting cases and voices and different selection and reinterpretation of the data. Still, through this partial account it is possible to gain some insight into the animating pressures emanating from the Texas system, the way one district responds to these pressures and mediates the pressures through specific reform policies and the ways teachers at one campus address challenges created or revealed by the system and associated district policies. The following section provides a summary of the findings followed by a brief discussion. The final section suggests a number of implications and offers recommendations for policy makers, administrators and university researchers.

## **REVIEW OF FINDINGS**

### **State-level analysis**

Adopting a multi-focal approach, chapter four attempted to gain insight into a complex and particularly contentious policy issue: the impact of

performance accountability systems on equity. The analysis focused on the equity effects of the system in light of the recent intensification of the Texas performance accountability system with a more rigorous assessment system and new stakes for students. Rather than offering a definitive evaluation, the analysis offered contrasting assessments by viewing the system with different conceptual lenses: a traditional administrative perspective rooted in rational-technical logics and a critical perspective based on the work of Jurgen Habermas drawing on a more inclusive communicative rationality.

The lenses provide distinctly different accounts of the recent intensification of the accountability system mandated by Senate Bill 103 in the 76<sup>th</sup> legislative session and enacted in the 2002-3 academic year. From the traditional administrative perspective, the performance accountability system presumes a universe of rational actors and attempts to leverage market forces by aligning preferences and rewards and improving the quality and flow of information among stakeholders. The intensification reflects necessary adjustments in system goals to spur progress and to improve the quality of information available to the public and employers. As a result of tighter couplings within the system due to clearer specification of goals and information regarding performance, administrators become more responsive to the public and employees become more responsive to administrators.



In contrast, the critical analysis drawing on Habermas's theorization of legitimation crises (Habermas, 1975, 1979) characterizes the accountability system as a state legitimacy project whereby the state separates its legitimation and administrative systems. The state effectively redefines its role as performance monitor and leaves local administrators to identify and implement the best means to state-defined ends. The intensification reflects an effort to maintain an achievement ideology, which not only tolerates but trades upon the persistence of achievement gaps. As servants beholden to moneyed interests and invested in the status quo, state officials and policy-makers invoke market rhetoric as a means to improve on the meritocratic ideal and employ statistical sleight of hand to obscure the system's persistent race-class stratification.

Drawing on different paradigmatic premises, the two rationales are in some sense incommensurable (Kuhn, 1970) characterizing the goals and problems of public schooling differently and thus offering different solutions. The juxtaposition of accounts calls into question the common sense upon which each is premised. Given the "softness" of some common sense leverage points, the final section takes up the issue of the system's reliance on technical control to reform the institutional frame along more just lines. At a fundamental level, concerns about the specification of ends and the instrumental treatment of individuals within the system are raised. More concretely, an inherent

administrative efficiency bias in the system employed in conjunction with the school finance system is examined. It is suggested that the use of the monitoring system to focus administrative initiative, educator energy and public resources on a narrow slice of state defined curriculum, undermines the efforts of equity advocates to balance school-based opportunities for all student groups. The pressure brought to bear with performance monitoring and this efficiency bias, appear to intensify a so-called management discourse discussed in the district analysis.

### **District-level analysis**

By outlining some of the logics animating the changes in the current operating environment of the state's public education system, the foregoing discussion offers a prelude to chapters five and six focusing on district and campus efforts to navigate, negotiate, and resist pressures for change. Chapter five examined the reform environment of one large urban school district in central Texas. Combined with those pressures associated with the performance accountability system, the district faced substantial pressure from advocates for historically underserved communities in the city and a resource crunch related to the declining property-values and the state's wealth recapture school finance plan.

The analysis suggests that the pressures channeled through the efficiency-oriented administrative logics identified in the previous chapter, intensified a management discourse (Ball, 1990b) within the district. Within this discourse, central office administrators assume greater decision-making authority vis-à-vis the public and the public school employees. In one instance of unilateral decision-making, the district reconstituted six underperforming campuses prior to discussing the plan with either the employees of the school or parents of the students involved. Moreover, the district administration extended technical control over curriculum and instruction through a number of initiatives including: imposing a highly detailed, scripted curriculum for all grade levels; instituting a wide array of interim assessments including, beginning, middle and end of year benchmark tests, nine-weeks tests, and in some cases weekly tests; monitoring and enforcing compliance through routine campus-classroom visits by teams of district administrators.

An explicit goal of the performance accountability system is to “promote action within and across all sectors of the system that is directed to the tangible outcomes established by the indicators” (Texas Education Agency, 1996, p. 8). It is clear in the district analysis that the district administration took strong steps in that direction, steps that parallel the imposition of Tayloristic management chronicled by Callahan (1962) in the early part of the last century. While

legitimate within a management discourse, these efforts to “tighten the couplings” are not without problems. A highly sophisticated plan on paper, the system-wide imposition of a curriculum is hard pressed to account for the complexity of a district facing rapidly changing demographics for its population of nearly 80,000 students. Interviews and observations suggest that the monitoring and enforcement of compliance is alienating to teachers who find their discretion to negotiate the curriculum curtailed and work under the very real threat of a district takeover and reconstitution of the schools.

### **Campus-level analysis**

The sixth chapter examines an apparent success story within the Texas performance accountability system: Chavez ES, a school serving a low-income (85%), predominately Hispanic (95%) student population that climbed from marginally acceptable to exemplary according to the state rating systems. From the 1993-4 to 1999-2000 academic years, the school remained at the low-end of the Acceptable category of the state rating system. During this period, frustration with the lack of progress despite a myriad of initiatives resulted in growing tension between the long-time principal and the teachers. One teacher stated,

We were floundering. We were trying a whole bunch of different things and we really didn't give ourselves time to perfect what we were

[doing]...And I don't think a lot of the approaches that we were trying were...beneficial to our population of children.

Given substantial disagreement about the appropriate school goals, criteria of success, and means to achieve either, the school seemed unable to collectively agree on and sustain a course of action. Beginning in the 1999-2000 academic year, the school began an action-research partnership with a research and service group located at a nearby university, which engaged teachers and administrators in more deliberative governance activities focused on collective and strategic planning. Between the 1999-2000 and 2001-2002 academic years, the school's rating increased from minimally acceptable to "Exemplary", the highest state rating schools may obtain.

Teachers at Chavez ES attribute campus achievement gains to collective and deliberative planning and implementation of reforms. An analysis of a school-university partnership suggests that the associated activities may have contributed to enhanced "communicative action" (Habermas, 1987) among the faculty by creating space for and facilitating the raising and redeeming of a number of truth claims regarding campus performance, organization, and leadership. While the performance accountability systems did not appear to create nor lead directly to tighter couplings among the faculty members, information related to performance was used to raise claims and initiate difficult

dialogues. Similarly, teacher comments don't suggest that initiatives by the district or campus administration led inevitably to improved student achievement. Instead, the action by teachers, vis-à-vis the campus and district administration, was in many ways a collective effort to challenge problematic leadership and management traditions. Ultimately, it is argued that the development of "communicative rationality" within the campus regarding student achievement, teacher work, and administrative traditions resulted in the development of more "robust" couplings among the faculty, as opposed to "tighter" couplings imposed and enforced by district administration.

#### **RECONCEPTUALIZING THE PROBLEMS, THE REFORMS AND THE RESISTANCE**

As noted above, performance accountability systems use performance monitoring and comparison to promote systemic reforms toward state specified goals. The study proposed to examine the micropolitical dynamics manifested in the re-culturing of campus governance in response to systemic reform imperatives. The study focused on a successful campus situated in a management-oriented district reform environment responding to intensified performance pressures and a squeeze on financial resources. So what did the study reveal about the micropolitics of systemic reform initiatives?

First, it is important to recognize the nature and power of the accountability pressures brought to bear by the performance accountability system in Texas. From an administrative perspective, the “loosely coupled” nature of the school organization is viewed as largely dysfunctional, allowing individuals to evade and resist administrative prerogatives with impunity (Ball, 1987). State performance accountability systems offer public officials and public school administrators a powerful tool to increase responsiveness. In the absence of such a tool the state lacks the power to catalyze meaningful school restructuring, increasing the likelihood that schools would simply remain in institutional ruts and perceived problems would persist.

By creating tighter couplings between the state and local schools and between administrators and teachers, performance accountability systems offer improved steering premised on “common sense” assumptions about rational actors, preferences, and markets. To this end, the Texas system creates a “market-like” environment with clearer alignment of preferences and rewards and improved information flows allowing market forces to increase the efficiency of the system. The system explicitly appeals to the common sense of the inevitable efficiency of a “free market” to design and, for lack of a better term, market the system to the public (Texas Education Agency, 1996).

Promoters of these market-based accountability systems appear quite optimistic about the efficiency of markets in heavily institutionalized environments and about the fairness of markets as steering systems. This optimism contrasts with a rather cynical notion of the associated rational actors as wholly self-interested, utility maximizers (Coleman, 1990). Despite the emphasis on freedom in free market and free enterprise approaches, as conceived by Adam Smith market systems are particular means of creating social order and are dependent on some level of state activity creating an environment conducive to market exchange. Whether through more active efforts related to property rights (e.g. decisions related to redistributing property taxes) or more subtle efforts at ideological maintenance reflected in the public relations of accountability, these state activities are not neutral (Spring, 1994). The application of market systems to the administration of public education systems may reflect an effort to re-affirm the current social order and reinforce the status quo in the face of rapidly changing demographics and social norms.

If performance accountability systems, like the one employed in Texas, are premised on rational actor logics to re-form the institutional framework by redirecting the behavior of self-interested actors toward state defined preferences, the empirical look at the responses by Texas Independent School District and Chavez ES are quite revealing. The district response of assuming greater



decision-making authority and extending and intensifying technical control over work in schools is not surprising for an administration working within a traditional management discourse. From a Habermasian perspective, the response reflects an expected but problematic emphasis on technical rationality to the exclusion of communicative rationality. The resulting pressures exacerbate an efficiency-bias within traditional administration undermining other manifest goals such as the promotion of equity.

Beyond an efficiency bias, the hope for these systems is premised on the highly questionable assumption that administrative elites possess a more just vision for the system than those laboring within it. Tightening the couplings to increase responsiveness to administrative edicts is unlikely to fundamentally alter the most persistent and pernicious problems of the educational system, if as seems likely racism, class-ism, sexism and other institutionalized biases permeate all levels of the system, including the administration. Increased technical control is likely to torque up rather than change a flawed system.

The leverage needed to reshape a more just and more democratic institutional framework require the moral-practical logics of communicative action on the part of those within the system. The management discourse evidenced in Texas ISD appears to preclude the type of dialog and deliberation key to communicative action as conceptualized by Habermas. At a fundamental

level, central administration communiqués and edicts regarding governance, curriculum development and instruction send clear messages about the legitimate authority within the system: authority is vested in the administrators and compliance will be enforced.

This authoritarian administrative approach reflects an ahistoricism and naivety regarding enacting fairness through technical control. First, the presumption that fairness may be achieved by uniform application of a curriculum and an instructional program denies the tremendous complexity of a system serving 80,000 students within very diverse community in which the demographics are rapidly changing. Uniformity of treatment makes little sense for a population of students with widely different backgrounds and needs. Further, common calls by administrators and others to “look forward not back”, fail to acknowledge that current inequities stem from a long history of disparate services to children that were poorer and non-white. A system which treats similarly those with different needs and a vastly different prior treatment by that system, is no more just than one that treats those with similar needs and experiences differently (Zajac, 1995).

Second, the approach of promoting justice by extending technical control presumes that the problems of the system lie in the loose couplings and hopes that by tightening those couplings district administrators can direct the system in more

equitable ways. Thirty years ago Katz (1971) argued that the preceding century of elite-driven urban school reform "originated from impulses that were conservative, racist, and bureaucratic". Are administrative elites today less subject to the same institutional fields that in Bourdieu's (1992) terms "structure and are structured by" the habitus of teachers? Scheurich and Young (1997) argue that institutional, societal, and civilizational racism permeate and fundamentally distort our ways of studying education and its administration. While it would be inaccurate and unfair to suggest that administrative elites are solely responsible for the institutionalization of racial bias (or class, gender, sexual orientation bias, etc.) evident in the public education system, the suggestion that elites are somehow immune to that bias or more capable of rising above it or of developing administrative tools to hold it at bay is similarly dubious. Arguably, those exercising greater power in the system are both complicit in enacting the bias and often benefit disproportionately from it. Thus, the suggestion that improved technical control of the system provides an antidote to institutionalized inequities seems highly questionable and seems to reflect the lop-sided technical rationality of much of traditional, functionalist administrative theory (Foster, 1986; Habermas, 1973; Scheurich, 1995).

The collective response by the Chavez faculty seems interesting by contrast to the managerial nature of the district response. To be certain, the district

initiatives discussed in chapter five appear to be a dramatic intensification of that deskilling process. Still, as Giroux (1983, p. 62) reminds us, schools and schooling as institutions should be approached "in historical and contemporary terms, as social sites in which human actors are both constrained and mobilized". If micropolitical studies tell us nothing else they reveal the inevitable though unpredictable resistance by individuals and groups to the imposition of management systems which seek to direct action toward predetermined ends.

Commenting on reform policies in the early eighties, Michael Apple (1981) suggested teachers were being effectively "proletarianised" as line workers doling out pre-packaged curricula and associated testing. As a result, he speculated that teachers would increasingly work collectively and politically to contest alienating forms of control over their work. The efforts to "discursively raise and redeem truth claims" about the work and the leadership of the campus was a decided departure for the Chavez faculty. As noted by Robert Donmoyer in the summer of 2002, these efforts also ran counter to the sociology of schools as described by Lortie and others. Without attempting to generalize, it seems that the dynamics in this school were such that a traditional administrative push by a long-term principal precipitated a reconsideration of campus leadership, first in practice and later in theory. Demands for knowledgeable and effective leadership

by the principal gave way to an emergence of more knowledgeable and more effective leadership from a much wider array of faculty members.

Micropolitics refers to the “strategies by which individuals and groups in organizational contexts seek to use their resources of power and influence to further their interests” (Hoyle, 1982, p. 88). The comments by the teachers suggest that a central political struggle within the school was a renegotiation of decision-making authority as the teachers sought greater control over their work and recognized a collective interest in challenging leadership norms. Energized by success and focused by the encroachment of district authority within this new sphere of influence, the faculty asserted itself more forcefully in the selection of a new principal.

The examination of one campus navigating, negotiating, and contesting systemic reform pressures in one urban district operating within one state’s performance accountability system is by no means generalizable. The effects of state level pressures mediated by district policy and playing out in widely varying campus and community contexts are extremely complicated. Still the study and theorization of the case may yield insights that may be useful for policy-makers, administrators and researchers. Carspecken’s conceptualization of praxis theory provides a convenient plot line for the story: individuals need and inevitably find avenues of expression in their work. Habermas’s critical hermeneutics gives a

conceptual scheme to better understand the critical incidents: given opportunity to deliberate collectively, individuals can come to new understandings about and can subsequently alter self- and institutionally imposed constraints. Moreover, Habermas's theories of legitimation and system-lifeworld tensions are suggestive of the nature of the on-going struggle within schools and districts among administrators, teachers, parents and students: communicative action among individuals seeking to reformulate institutions in more just and more democratic terms will inevitably be in tension with administrative systems seeking manage institutions in the most efficient manner. The following section attempts to delineate a number of implications for policy-makers, campus and district leaders and university researchers.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Implications for policy-makers**

In a re-examination of the school-based management (SBM) literature, Fullan and Watson (2000, p. 460) note, "even the best research on SBM identified factors and conditions associated with success, but *it does not tell us how to establish those conditions when they do not exist.*" What might policy makers take away from this story about the micropolitics of renegotiating the organizational culture of a school in a systemic reform context?

The restructuring reforms initiated in the late 1980s and early 1990s sought to reform schools through fundamental changes in student expectations, teacher practice, school organization and governance (Elmore, 1990). Beginning in the mid-1990s, a number of scholars argued that school restructuring efforts with the devolution of authority through school based management (SBM) were failing to impact classroom instruction (Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1995; Murphy & Beck, 1995). Fullan (2001) argued “re-culturing” must accompany restructuring if schools are to become genuine learning organizations. Similarly, Bates (1982, p. 9) advocates attention to cultural aspects of the school organization in his critical approach to educational administration,

Organizations are cultures rather than structures and it is the maintenance and contestation of what is to constitute the culture of organisational life that provides the dynamic of rationality, legitimation and motivation in organisations. This dynamic is the praxis of administration.

Suggesting that rational choice models would benefit from cultural theory of preference formation, Aaron Wildavsky (1987, p. 5) argued that the “continuing reinforcement, modification, and rejection of existing power relationships teaches people what to prefer...[thus] preferences are formed through opposing and supporting institutions.” Adopting and adapting Wildavsky’s model to Fullan’s “re-culturing” of schools, one might argue that the reforms at Chavez reflect a re-

formation of preferences, and thus a renegotiation of institutional culture. That is, the Chavez faculty shifted the institutional culture toward one of a more preferred configuration of group boundaries and/or degree of regulation.

Given the limited success of restructuring reforms to alter classroom practice (Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1995), policy-makers enacted performance accountability systems to bring to bear public pressure to drive reforms toward specified goals (Elmore et al., 1996). The policies to animate reform through performance accountability systems have a clear, though narrow logic that in the abstract is appealing to politicians and policymakers seeking legitimacy in reforming the education system. Market logics have typically been valorized in this country, making the common sense of the system both appealing and easy to explain to the public at large. But, unfettered markets are given to extremes and are not always fair arbiters of life opportunities. In fact, the development of public education owes much to the appeal of a meritocratic ideal and the hope that schooling could help level the playing field for those lacking the resources that often open life opportunities (Habermas, 1975).

It is unlikely that performance accountability systems will soon go away given a growing public emphasis on “accountability” (Cibulka, 1997). As discussed in the close of chapter four and in the main of chapter five, these systems appear in this case to intensify a management discourse focused on



efficiency and control rather than equity or other values. Given the historical inequities of the public education system in Texas and elsewhere, the efficiency-oriented reform initiatives animated by accountability pressures seem in Texas ISD to torque up the system in ways that may exacerbate rather than reduce inequities.

The experience at Chavez ES may or may not be unique. In terms of demographics, structure, and community context Chavez ES has much in common with any number of the 7,000 schools across the state of Texas. Still, the schools relatively sudden rise in ratings suggests that the school was in some ways unique. The analysis of the change in leadership norms in chapter six, suggests that opportunities to raise and discuss issues related to the performance of the school reflected in achievement scores, organizational dysfunctions that limited the collective efficacy of the group and leadership traditions that excluded important stakeholders from important decisions. These opportunities developed in fortuitous ways as the partnership with the university developed. The partnership capitalized on time and resources made available by the district for professional development activities. These opportunities emerged out of a number tense conversations revolving around performance accountability pressures and frustration with stagnant performance a lack of coordinated effort to improve that performance.

If the pressure brought to bear on districts and campuses by performance accountability and performance monitoring systems intensify management discourses as suggested in chapter five, the likely result will be an intensified and rigidified educational system in which its persistent and most pernicious problems are exacerbated. If policy-makers wish to alter the institutional framework in more just and democratic ways, the technical control systems (e.g. performance monitoring) must be complemented with provisions promoting communicative action whereby individuals occupying the campus and classroom lifeworlds can collectively and deliberatively reconsider and re-form the institutional scripts and norms of those lifeworlds. At Chavez ES, this occurred concretely through provisions for additional time devoted to performance review and planning and the inclusion of a third party from the university to encourage reflexivity and mediate the dialogs. Unfortunately, with the intensification of the testing system discussed in chapter four, the district has redirected funds away from these types of capacity building activities to the development of a prescribed curriculum.

Further, policy-makers must be sensitive to the focusing effect of performance monitoring and the degree to which this circumscribes opportunities for practitioners and parents to differently define the ends of education. While much of the curriculum appears to be “common sense”, common sense is constructed differently in different communities and the common good can be

both defined and approached in many different ways. Given the functionalist logics woven into the fabric of traditional administrative theory and practice (Ball, 1987; Foster, 1986; Habermas, 1973) and the continued influence of these theories in the field (English, 2003; Scheurich, 1995), assessment systems using so-called “multiple conjunctive criteria” will promote directing and narrowing efforts toward determinate performance indicators. This is clearly seen in the effort by Texas ISD to prescribe and enforce a detailed curriculum confined to the tested core curriculum, which purportedly contains “every skill that teachers should teach and students should learn”. This sort of focusing is in fact the express logic of the system.

In contrast, authors such as Valenzuela (2002) argue systems using “multiple compensatory criteria” can potentially avoid or mitigate this limiting effect for a number of reasons including a broader distribution of decision-making, decreased likelihood that a single test will have a determining and limiting effect on student opportunities, and a mitigating effect on the narrowing influence noted above. From the standpoint of communicative action, the deliberation regarding the content of, the performance on, and appropriateness of various criteria draws on and promotes communicative rationality needed to balance the technical rationality invoked and reinforced by the imposition of control systems, for good or for bad. The potential benefits noted will only be

realized if policy-makers complement multiple compensatory criteria with provisions for the resources needed to promote and sustain the needed deliberations.

### **Implications for campus and district leaders**

The implications from chapters five and six for campus and district leaders are fairly straightforward. From a district standpoint, the apparent common sense of tightening couplings through curriculum prescription and enforcement is problematic on at least two fronts. First, as noted above, the fantasy of tight coupling as a means to redress inequity and injustice rests on a related managerial myth that administrators are in some way more just and more ethical than those below them in the hierarchy (Bowles, 1997). For the reasons noted above, it is naïve to presume that bias embedded in the institutional scripts of teaching practice are less prevalent in administrator practice. Reinforcing and rigidifying an unjust system will not remove this bias. Rather, in Habermas's terms the institutional scripts must be subject to an expanded, moral-practical rationality qualitatively different than the rational-technical rationality that informs administration.

Second, attempts re-establish legitimacy by assuming control over the complex and uncertain task of curriculum development and instruction can create

“unsettling publicizing effects” as administrators create for themselves new expectations that are difficult if not impossible to fulfill (Habermas, 1975). District administrators place themselves in a dilemma when management discourse is invoked to justify the tightening, leading almost inevitably to resistance which is very difficult to control given the looseness of the system. Compliance enforced at a distance through an upsurge in interim assessments erodes instructional time. In addition, these produce alienating effects as teachers losing control over their work find themselves unable to meet praxis needs for expression (Carspecken, 2002). Further, the thrust and parry between administrators and teachers exhausts precious energy that needs to be focused on coming to terms with and altering unproductive organizational patterns and developing and delivering more effective instruction. In short, tight coupling may be a costly undertaking in schools. This is really no surprise as Weick’s initial conception centered on loose coupling as a functional feature of school organization given the variety of goals and uncertainty in delivery technology (Weick, 1976). While far from the Weberian iron cage of bureaucratic control idealized within the management discourse, loose coupling serves school administrators as much as schoolteachers. Under the adage, “Be careful what you wish for”, administrator’s fancy for tight couplings may be neither possible nor preferable to loose couplings.

Accepting Weick's characterization of loose couplings as descriptively accurate, administrators might be served by resituating his functionalist, systems approach within Habermas's critical theory rather than Frederick Taylor's scientific management theory. That is, rather than seeking ways to establish tight couplings to reduce "soldiering" enhance worker productivity, they might instead find ways to develop "robust couplings" by deliberately taping and fomenting the collective wisdom of a broader segment of the community. The contrast between the approaches described in chapters five and six are instructive. The district attempted to establish tight couplings with explicit policies announced to the public, imposed through curricular and instructional imperatives, and enforced through interim assessments and close-in surveillance. The campus appeared to establish "robust" couplings by first allowing and later encouraging dialogue among teachers regarding the performance of students, organization of work and nature of leadership at the school. Where the district administration appears to require increasing resources to enact technical control through planning, monitoring and enforcing compliance to system imperatives, the faculty appeared to generate power through communicative action evidenced perhaps in the gains in student achievement, but definitely in the ability to establish control over their work vis-à-vis the campus and district administration.

The development of robust couplings in a loosely coupled system should not be left to chance. As Fullan (1995) noted, schools can be very isolating places and the development of collaborative, learning cultures within schools generally remains a distant dream. Chavez ES had many advantages including an experienced and committed staff and a stable campus administration. Still the changes in organizational and leadership culture discussed in the last chapter appeared to require substantial time, energy and third-party mediation and facilitation, not typically available. Campus leaders might be well-served by securing these resources. While any campus may benefit, district leaders might prioritize such resources according to some assessment of need.

It would be nice if the activities could be developed into a replicable model for campus change, a toolkit, that campus and district leaders could apply generally. It may be possible to initiate a number of the activities. Notably, leaders must find ways to frame equity issues within the “horizon” of the campus lifeworld in ways that these appear both problematic and actionable. The framing of issues may focus on achievement gaps as discussed in chapter five, but might also raise issues regarding definition of achievement, the appropriateness of the achievement monitoring, etc. To be certain, the Chavez ES dialogues incorporated information from the state assessment system. In addition, the discussion among the faculty focused on the narrowness of these measures as proxies for an

“exemplary” school in some broader sense. Recognizing that the ends for the school, as much as the means by which to achieve the ends, are negotiable and contestable, campus leaders can encourage reflection, deliberation and action regarding means and ends.

Further, campus leaders must attend to the nature of the deliberation and aspects which limit and distort the discussion such as: 1) the exclusion of interested parties (e.g. too many of the parents and students), 2) the ability to manage the discourse through agenda setting (e.g. the district use of “non-negotiable” goals and objectives), and 3) constraints created through enacting unexamined institutional scripts (e.g. acceptance of marginal roles in planning and decision-making by teachers and parents).

As discussed above, traditional educational administration informed by the management discourse and a narrow technical rationality, promotes efficiency with improved technical control. Rather than imposing “right action” through technical control in a tightly coupled system, campus leaders must instead facilitate “communicative action” by promoting less distorted deliberation among interested parties. While deliberation within existing institutions such as schools will necessarily be distorted by a variety of problematic but often unexamined or underappreciated power dynamics campus leaders can work to balance these distortions as they become apparent.



### **Implications for university researchers**

A central concern of this study is challenging conventional wisdom regarding the school administration and leadership. Despite a great deal of research and rhetoric about the benefits of teacher leadership, Tayloristic notions continue to inform school administration and administrator training (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). These traditional models of leadership are heavily institutionalized and continually reproduced as “common sense” about how schools work. Arguably, this management discourse is reinforced in a number of ways within schools and within the academy, through an untroubled acceptance of a variety of power-laden expert-novice relationships including administrator-teacher, professor-student, university-school, and perhaps most notably, theory-practice. The tendency to reduce these dialectics into didactic dichotomies, reduces potentially fruitful dialogic relationships to “banking” models (Freire, 2000) of education and administration.

In many ways the pedagogical approach employed in this project sought to challenge novice-expert conventions within the interactions with practitioners and within the design of the related coursework. The approach was dialogic and revolved around a much more fluid teacher-student dynamic than is often found in professor-student and school-university partnerships. As discussed by the Chavez ES faculty, the role of the university in this case was less about providing

expertise than about mediating difficult discussions. The university partners seemed at times to: 1) provoke discussions by opening unexamined issues to inquiry; 2) balance discussions by creating greater awareness of distortions in the dialogs and introducing methods to include and value a larger number of voices; and 3) move discussion to action by inquiring about practical next steps.

The fomenting of “communicative rationality” within the university activities contrasts with the imposition of technical rationality represented in the reform initiatives instituted and enforced by the district as discussed in chapter five. The analysis in chapter five suggests the district is moving, whether deliberately or naively, to reduce that type of discretion even at campuses like Chavez that have demonstrated success. Ironically and sadly, overreaching by the district in an attempt to reestablish legitimacy through intensified management simultaneously undermined the frontline workers on which it largely depends in a loosely coupled system and is quickly losing credibility among those workers. With the intensification of the management discourse resulting from new performance accountability pressures, university researchers might work with campus and district leaders as occurred in the Chavez ES effort to generate a counter discourse rooted in communicative rationality.

## CONCLUSION

Management discourses emphasizing efficiency and practicality offer “an all-embracing conception of organizational control” (Ball, 1990a, p. 157). Arguably, such a discourse has informed educational administration since the introduction of Taylor’s principle of scientific management at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This multi-level study examines the development of the Texas performance accountability system, the intensification of management practices in one Texas school district and the ongoing renegotiation of work and leadership in one campus in that district.

Situating the management discourse within a Habermasian framework, the general line of argument in this study is that mounting legitimation crises in public administration generally and school administration in particular, result in state-level policy-making as legitimation projects to stave off the crisis. At the state level, the Texas policies appear consistent with a smaller, stronger, regulative state (Apple, 2000). This is done by separating administrative and legitimating functions with the state retaining a monitoring role and leaving local education authorities to balance competing public demands for quality, equity, choice and efficiency among other valued outcomes.

Although the state takes a less direct role in altering local practices, the pressures created by its “market-like” performance monitoring system appear to,

as intended, direct local efforts toward the state defined performance indicators. An examination of Texas ISD suggests an intensification of that district's management discourse in response to mounting public pressure by community groups frustrated with the central administration's inability to ameliorate longstanding performance gaps among schools and between student groups. No doubt predating the system, the public frustration was made increasingly visible by the state's performance monitoring system. Evidence of the intensification of managerial control is found in a number of highly prescriptive policies enacted to reconcile district administrative efforts with public expectations.

Interestingly, it appears that while the public groups used the state system to pressure the district for reforms, district administrators largely excluded both the public and the public school employees from the planning process. That is, legitimacy of the reforms largely rested on administrative authority rather than any democratic process, whether representative or deliberative. Within a management discourse, the introduced policies (as power claims rather than truth claims) need not be discursively redeemed with the public or within the public school. Rather, they are simply announced as imperatives.

This is highly problematic from Habermas's point of view. To the degree that the claims underpinning the policies cannot be discursively redeemed at the local level, they are likely to lead to alienation among those charged with

implementation. To the degree that the alienation erodes the desire of those at the local level to carry out the policy, new management policies are introduced to ensure compliance. Thus attempts to reestablish legitimacy through increased technical control generate conditions that require additional technical control, which can quickly outstrip administrative capacity. Habermas's normative frame suggests greater democratic deliberation will be required to "re-norm" the institutional framework in more equitable ways. To this end, attempts must be made to re-establish communicative action at the local level, whether that is the district, the campus or the classroom, by providing time and space to allow those local stakeholders to "discursively redeem" claims raised directly or indirectly through policy developed at the system-level.

Ironically, the district's managerial response contrasts with more democratic reforms at the campus studied, Chavez ES, where leadership and decision-making were distributed more broadly over the past five years. The efforts at Chavez appear consistent with Carspecken's theorization that praxis needs giving rise to self-expression inevitably lead individuals to attempt to reconcile policy with practice within their work lives. Unfortunately, efforts to do so publicly and collectively are often discouraged by administrative practices informed by management discourses reliant on power rather than truth claims. Thus, while interviewed staff members attribute the revitalization of the campus

and marked achievement gains by students to the redistribution of campus-level leadership, growing centralization of the district decision-making are in marked contrast to the campus-level reforms. The results of the intersection of the district's intensified management discourse and the recent shift toward a more democratic discourse within the campus governance remains unclear.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Accountability Reform Policy Timeline, 1979-1999

Appendix B: Finance Reform Policy Timeline: 1949-1999

Appendix C: Overview of A Regional Alliance for School Improvement

Appendix D: Comparison of passing rates

Appendix E: District Testing Dates: 2003 – 2004

Appendix F: Participants

## **Appendix A: Accountability Reform Policy Timeline, 1979-1999**

The following is a brief timeline regarding key events in Texas school accountability reform from 1979 to 1999. Historical information regarding Texas school reform was drawn from: *The Educator's Guide to Texas School Law*, (Kemerer & Walsh, 1996). *The Development of Accountability Systems Nationwide and in Texas* (Texas Education Agency, 1996, 2000c), *Agency Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2001-2005* (Texas Education Agency, 2000c). Unless otherwise noted all legislative action refers to the Texas legislature.

### **1979 Texas Assessment of Basic Skills instituted by the 66<sup>th</sup> Legislature**

From 1980 to 1984, the state used the Texas Assessment of Basic Skill (TABS) as a diagnostic tool to determine the level of basic skills in reading, writing and math. No stakes were attached to the test for students.

### **1981 House Bill 246 by the 67<sup>th</sup> Legislature**

Called for a coherent and articulated curriculum and led to the development of the Essential Elements curriculum framework. The State Board of Education adopted the curriculum in 1984.

### **1984 House Bill 72 by the 68<sup>th</sup> Legislature (special session)**

The bill followed the recommendations of the Select Committee on Public Education (SCOPE) commission by Governor Mark White in 1983 and chaired by H. Ross Perot. Along with a number of major education reforms, the bill led to a major rewrite of the Texas Education Code and instituted the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) aligned with the Essential Elements. The TEAMS test is notable for two reasons: 1) For the first time the test, as a graduation requirement, carried stakes for students, and 2) the test marked a shift to an emphasis of student performance as the basis of accountability (Texas Education Agency, 2000c). Students passed at rates of 80% on first try and re-testers passed at near 100% rate (Haney, 2000).

### **1989 Education legislation by the 71<sup>st</sup> Legislature**

Shifted district accreditation to emphasis to indicators in the Academic Excellence Indicator System

### **1990 Legislation based on a sunset review of Texas Education Agency**



**Led to a revamping of the testing system to increase accountability to the student population(Texas Education Agency, 2000c) including the following:**

- 1) Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) was developed and put in place from 1990-4. Students were given exit exams in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade in reading, writing and math although the performance standard was at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level. The test was criterion referenced, focused on critical thinking skills, and much more difficult than the TEAMS test. The “cut score” was set by the SBOE at 60% for the first year and 70% thereafter (see Haney, 2000 for analysis of setting of the cut score).
- 2) School accountability tied to performance of disaggregated student groups (African American, Asian, Hispanic, White, and Economically Disadvantaged) in three categories: TAAS pass rates, dropout rates, and attendance. Schools received ratings of Exemplary (>90% pass rate, <1% dropout), Recognized (>80% pass rate, <3% dropout), or Acceptable (>25% pass rate, <8% dropout). The standards for acceptable schools increased each year to a 50% pass rate and a 5.5% dropout rate.

**1995 Senate Bill 1 by the 74<sup>th</sup> Legislature**

Led to a major rewrite of the Texas Education Code and to the development of a new curriculum framework, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TEKS were developed in 1996-7, adopted by the SBOE in 1997, and implemented in schools in the 1998-9 school year.

**1999 Senate Bill 103 of the 76<sup>th</sup> Legislature**

Led to the development of a new testing instrument, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Among other things the bill moved the exit examination from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and added two new examinations in science and social studies. In addition to moving the exit exam up one year, the exit standards increased from the eighth grade level to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade level, including information from: Algebra and Geometry, Biology and Integrated Physics and Chemistry, English I and II, and World and U.S. History.

## **Appendix B: Finance Reform Policy Timeline: 1949-1999**

The following is a brief timeline regarding key events in Texas school finance reform from 1949 to 1999. Historical information regarding Texas school finance reform was drawn from: *The Basics of Texas Public School Finance* (Walker & Casey, 1996), *The Educator's Guide to Texas School Law*, (Kemerer & Walsh, 1996), and *Making Money Matter: Financing America's Schools* (Ladd, Hansen, & National Research Council (U.S.). Committee on Education Finance, 1999), *Legislative Reform of the Texas Public School Finance System: 1973-1991* (Hobby & Walker, 1991), and *Implications for Texas School Finance Policy on District Spending* (Aleman & Brownson, 2001). Unless otherwise noted all legislative action refers to the Texas legislature.

### **1949 Gilmer-Aikins Laws (Senate Bills 115, 116, and 117) by the 51<sup>st</sup> Legislature**

Gilmer-Aikins Laws establish the Minimum Foundation Program, which provided for state financing of 80 percent of the cost of a minimum level of program funding. Local districts were required to provide the remaining 20 percent, and were allowed to enrich spending beyond the state minimum based on local willingness and ability to pay.

### **1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act by the U.S. congress**

As part of the War on Poverty, former Texas Senator and then-President Lyndon Johnson signs the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Title I of the legislation provides increased federal funding for compensatory programs for low-achieving students from low-income families. Since its inception, Title I programs have provided about 100 billion dollars in aid to schools serving large numbers of economically disadvantaged children (Traub, 2000). The legislation also provided funding for Head Start pre-school programs designed to prepare low-income pre-school students for entry into school.

### **1971 Serrano v. Priest decision by the California Supreme Court**

The first successful state court case (California) arguing for school finance equity. The California Supreme Court found that the state's property wealth based school funding system violated the equal protection clauses of the U.S. and California constitution. The system resulted in funding disparities in excess of 6 to 1 between the highest and lowest funded elementary school districts.

**1973 Rodriguez v. San Antonio Independent School District by U.S. Supreme Court**

A Serrano type case argued in federal rather than state court, initially found the Texas school finance system unconstitutional under the equal protection clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The decision was over-turned by the U.S. Supreme Court. According to the court, although the Texas system was in need of equity-based reform, education was not a guaranteed right under the U.S. Constitution and the case fell under state not federal court jurisdiction.

**1975 House Bill 1126 by the 64<sup>th</sup> Legislature**

The bill increased funding of the Minimum Foundation Program, renamed the Foundation School Program, provided equalization aid to property-poor districts, and shifted to state rather than county estimates of property value to figure the local share.

**1981 Education legislation by the 67<sup>th</sup> Legislature**

Increases the Foundation School Program by \$1.5 billion for teacher pay raises, equalization aid, and maintenance and operations allotments. Senate Bill 30 clarifies property tax assessment and collection legislation.

**1984 House Bill 72 by the 68<sup>th</sup> Legislature (special session)**

Based on the recommendations of the Select Committee on Public Education (SCOPE) appointed by Governor Mark White and chaired by H. Ross Perot, the Texas legislature passed sweeping reforms to public school operations and finance. State educational aid increased by approximately 19 percent funded by \$4.9 billion tax increase spread over three years. Initiatives benefiting property-poor districts and low-income students included increased state spending for: 1) pre-K programs for low-income students, 2) class size caps for elementary grades, 3) increased allotments for low-income and bilingual students, 4) increased equalization funding for property poor districts.

**1987 Edgewood v. Kirby decision by Texas Supreme Court**

State district judge Harley Clark rules the Texas finance system unconstitutional due to violations of the “equal protection” (Article I, Section 3) and the “efficient system” (Article VII, Section I) provisions in the state constitution. The decision was reversed by the state court of appeals in 1988. In 1989, the State Supreme Court reversed the appeals court ruling, in a unanimous decision (Edgewood I). The court sets a May 1, 1990 deadline for the legislature to reconfigure the finance system.

**1989 Education legislation by the 71<sup>st</sup> Legislature (1989)**

Legislation increased education funding by \$450 million above that necessitated by growth in the number of students. A small degree of equalization occurred through Senate Bill 1019.

**1995 Senate Bill 1 by the 71<sup>st</sup> Legislature (special session)**

Among other things, the bill established that 95 percent of Texas students would be in a wealth-neutral finance system by 1995 and that the state system would provide for a guaranteed yield in second-tier funding.

**1990 Edgewood II decision by the Texas Supreme Court**

In a retrial of Edgewood I, the court found that Senate Bill I had failed to adequately restructure the system and failed to tap pockets of wealth in a manner which equalized the state school finance system.

**1991 Senate Bill 351 by the 72<sup>nd</sup> Legislature**

Following the court ruling in Edgewood II, Senate Bill 351 created a wealth recapture plan based Count Education Districts (CED).

**1992 Edgewood III decision by the Texas Supreme Court**

The court found that the lack of voter approval for school district taxes and the provisions for a state property tax made Senate Bill 351 unconstitutional.

**1993 Senate Bill 7 by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Legislature**

Senate Bill 7 required districts a wealth level at or above \$280,000 per student to engage in tax base reduction under a number of voter approved options. Revenue generated by the excess tax base would be used to augment the revenues of property poor districts. Combined with a tax rate cap of \$1.50 per \$100 per student, the recapture provision limited the gap between property wealthy and property poor districts making similar tax efforts to \$600 per student.

**1995 Edgewood IV decision by the Texas Supreme Court**

The Texas Supreme Court ruled that the finance system under Senate Bill 7 meets the constitutional requirements. The wording of the majority opinion by Scott McCown suggested that the future constitutionality of the system is tied to the adequacy of funding to meet the achievement levels specified by the legislature.

**1997 House Bill 2724 by the 75<sup>th</sup> Legislature**

Addressing court concerns regarding district disparities in facilities, the legislature created an Instructional Facilities Allotment (IFA) to provide

equalization aid to property-poor districts for the construction and maintenance of instructional facilities.

**1999 Senate Bill 4 by the 76<sup>th</sup> Legislature**

The legislature provided the largest single increase in educational funding in state history, \$3.86 billion for increases in: a) teacher salaries, b) the basic allotment, c) pre-K, kindergarten, and Head Start programs, and d) additional monies for the IFA programs.

## **Appendix C: Overview of A Regional Alliance for School Improvement**

### **BRIEF HISTORY**

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| 1999-00 | Educational Productivity council (EPC) began work on high-involvement campus-improvement with Chavez elementary school.  |
| 2000-01 | The EPC began work with a middle school at the invitation of the new principal, a graduate student participant in the work at Chavez.  |
| 2001-02 | The EPC received funding from the Texas Education Agency to expand the project into the regional alliance. Three additional campuses were included in the alliance: an elementary, a middle, and a high school.  |
| 2002-03 | Entered the second full year of the regional alliance. With the merging of efforts with the Collaborative Inquiry Group at The University of Texas, the Regional Alliance began work with a second middle school and an additional elementary school. Unfortunately, due to potential conflicts associated with a district initiative for under-performing schools, the EPC and Texas Independent School District agreed to discontinue the work with the other middle school. |

### **OBJECTIVES**

The initiative focuses on the use of campus performance data to initiate and sustain a dialog within the campus and the community to help the stakeholders:

- Establish collective goals for the campus through discussion and deliberation
- Critically examine the organizational structure and culture of the campus
- Actively restructure and re-culture the campus organization and governance to better serve the students and staff on the campus

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- Campus improvement depends on the collective wisdom and collective action of the entire campus community, thus the authority for campus improvement planning ultimately must rest within the entire campus community.
- Communication and trust are interdependent and must be continually nurtured.

- Change takes time; time is always in short supply; those who will spend time changing must be involved in prioritizing how time will be spent.

#### **MAIN PARTICIPANTS**

- The Texas Independent School District
  - Chavez Elementary School (1999-00, 2000-01, 2001-02, and 2002-03)
  - Elementary school 2 (2001-02 and 2002-03)
  - Elementary school 3 (2002-03)
  - Middle School 1 (2001-02)
  - Middle school 2 (2002-03)
  - High school (2001-02 and 2002-03)
- The Region XIII Educational Service Center
- The Texas Education Agency
- The University of Texas Department of Educational Administration
  - The Educational Productivity Council
  - The Collaborative Inquiry Group
  - Graduate students from the Public School Executive Leadership Program

#### **ANNUAL ACTIVITIES**

1. *Develop campus overview:* To become familiar with the campus and to begin to identify campus concerns, the university support team develops an overview of the campus based on existing data and inquiries of the faculty and staff.
2. *Establish campus support:* A campus support team is established to facilitate campus communication and to help coordinate the project activities with the university support team.
3. *Schedule the activities:* The campus support team, the university support team, and the campus administration negotiate a schedule for the three primary activities for the spring semester: a performance analysis, an organizational analysis, and collective campus planning activities.
4. *Analyze campus performance:* A performance analysis is presented in February drawing on campus, district and state level data to initiate a dialogue regarding areas of concern identified by the faculty and staff. It is hoped that the analysis helps the faculty and staff establish measurable goals for the campus.
5. *Analyze the organizational culture and structure:* The organizational analysis, or Interactive Qualitative Analysis (IQA), performed in February engages the faculty and staff in a dialogue to identify and discuss organizational issues that create barriers to meeting the campus goals. By communicating concerns in a public and constructive manner, the faculty

can act collectively and deliberately to work through self-imposed barriers and to overcome externally imposed barriers.

6. *Collectively and deliberately plan for improvement:* In March and April, the focus shifts to involving the entire faculty in collective and deliberative planning activities. Engaging the entire campus in planning increases the likelihood that the goals and strategies are known and deemed legitimate by those in the campus community whom they directly affect.

#### **INSTITUTIONALIZATION THROUGH SPIRALING THE ACTIVITIES**

The goal of the regional alliance is not simply to enact, but to institutionalize, the activities listed above. Rather than engaging in one-time events or repetition of a simple cycle, the intent is to spiral through the activities three times over the entire term of the project. In the interest of creating a self-sustaining process, a second intent is to continuously de-center the role of the university in the effort.

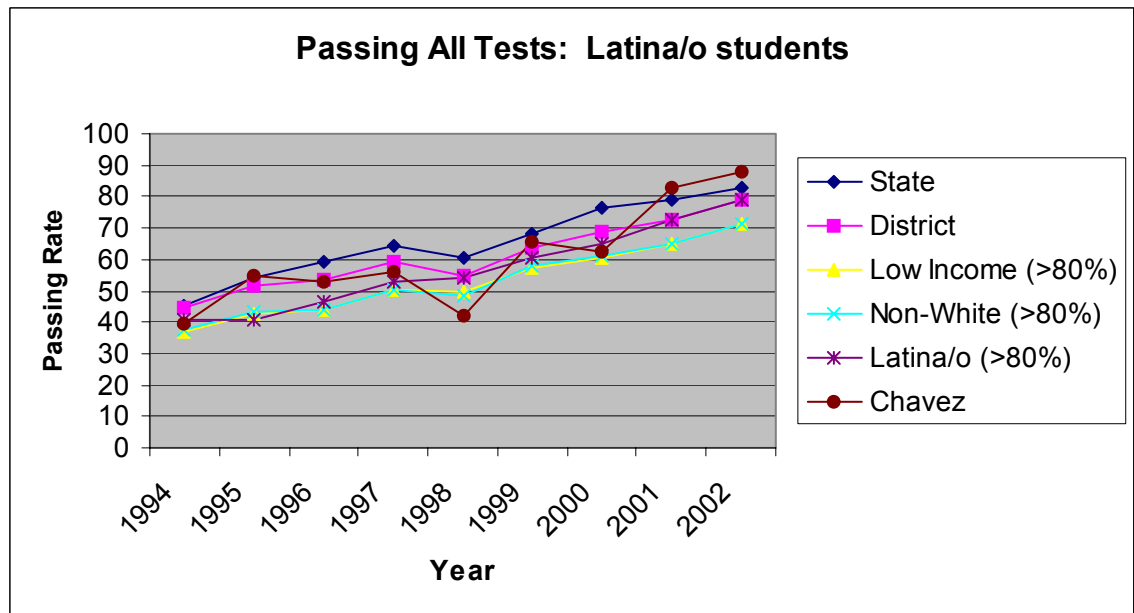
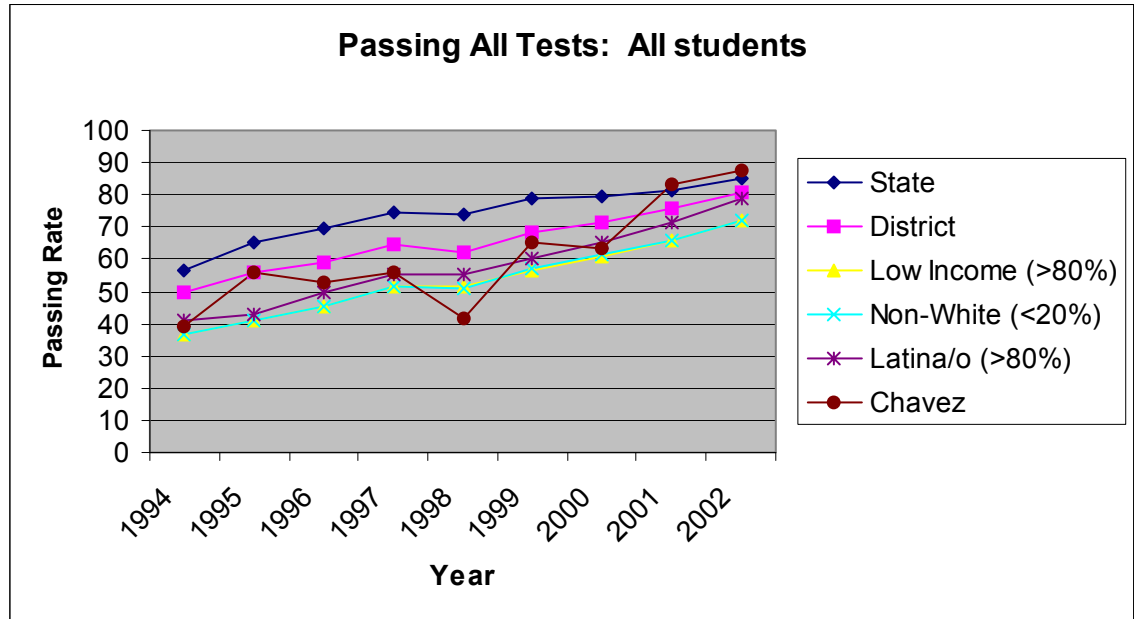
Under this scheme:

- Each campus engages in each activity listed each year of project, but with a deepening and widening of involvement in the latter years.
- As the campus engages in the activities in the second year of the project, efforts are made to: 1) deepen critical awareness of the process among the faculty members, and 2) increase parental and community involvement in the dialog and decision-making. Likewise, in the third year, the focus is on deepening critical awareness, and increasing student involvement.
- As the project progresses, the campus support team assumes an ever-greater role in coordinating and facilitating the activities.

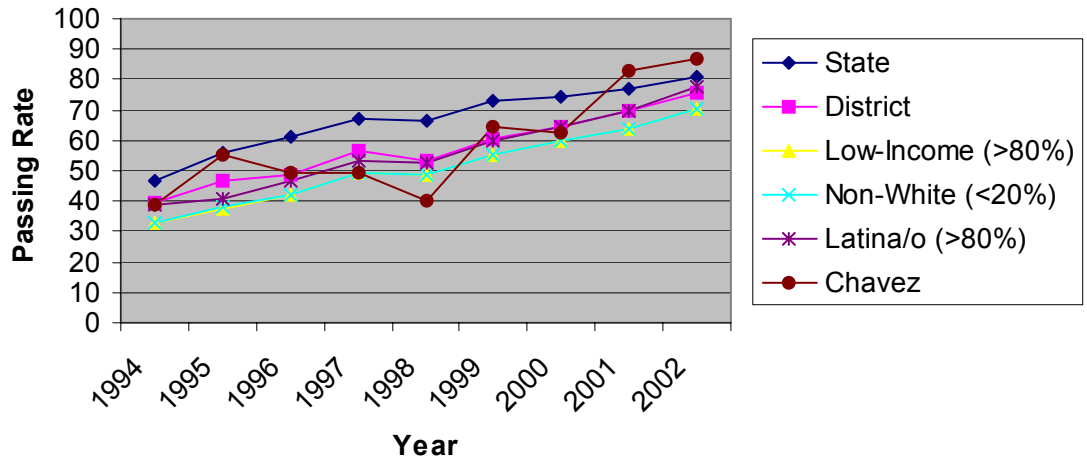
It is anticipated that at the culmination of the project an effective and self-sustaining planning infrastructure and culture will exist within the campus community. While the campuses may continue to benefit from a critical friend, this role is continually de-emphasized.



**Appendix D: Comparison of passing rates**



### Passing All Tests: Low Income students



## Appendix E: District Testing Dates: 2003 – 2004

<b>Legend</b>	
<b>Block = State-mandated test</b>	*Includes data entry deadline (Note: teachers are required to enter student scores by hand)
<i>Italic = District-mandated tests (Note: 9 week tests mandated for “focus schools”, voluntary otherwise)</i>	**State-mandated activity that will affect most campuses.
Note: The district also mandates weekly subject area tests for “focus” schools.	***A state-developed oral language proficiency test is currently under development and will be administered on a date to be determined.

Month/Year	Testing Date	Test
August 2003	Testing Window (Aug. 19-Sept. 19)	TPRI / Tejas LEE Grade 1; DRA Grade 1
September 2003	Testing Window (2-19)*	<i>Beginning of Year Benchmark: Reading &amp; Writing - Grades 2-9; English/Language Arts - Grades 10-11</i>
	Testing Window (15-16)**	TEA Fall TAKS Study
October 2003	Testing Window (6-17)	<i>ITBS/Logramos Grade 5 (optional)</i>
	Testing Window (6-24)*	<i>Beginning of Year Benchmark: Mathematics - Grades 2-11</i>
	8-13 Monday-Friday	<i>9 week tests in core areas (mathematics, reading, social studies and science and writing)</i>
	Testing Window (Oct. 27-31)**	National Comparative Data Study
	21 (Tuesday)	TAAS Exit Level Writing (retest)
	22 (Wednesday)	TAAS Exit Level Mathematics (retest)
23 (Thursday)	TAAS Exit Level Reading (retest)	
November 2003	Testing Window (Nov. 17 - Dec. 12)*	<i>Middle of Year Benchmark: Reading &amp; Writing - Grades 2-9; English/Language Arts - Grades 10-11; Science - Grades 4-11</i>
December 2003	15-18 (Mon. –Thurs)	<i>9 week tests in core areas (mathematics, reading, social studies and science and writing)</i>
	16-18 (Tues.-Thurs.)	Senior High Semester Exams
January 2004***	Testing Window (6-30)	TPRI / Tejas LEE Grades K-1; DRA Grades K-1
	Testing Window (12-30)*	Middle of Year Benchmark: Social Studies - Grades 5-11

	Testing Window (Jan. 26-28)**	Field Tests: TAKS Grades 4 and 7 Writing; TAKS Grade 4 Spanish Writing; TAKS Grade 9 Reading; TAKS Grades 10-11 English Language Arts; SDAA Grade 9 Reading; SDAA Grade 10 Language Arts; TAKS Spanish
February 2004	Testing Window (2-20)*	Middle of Year Benchmark: Mathematics - Grades 2-11
	24 (Tuesday)	SDAA Grades 4 and 7 Writing TAKS Grades 4 and 7 Writing TAKS Grade 4 Spanish Writing TAKS Grade 9 Reading TAKS Grades 10-11 English Language Arts TAAS Exit Level Writing (retest)
	25 (Wednesday)	TAAS Exit Level Mathematics (retest)
	26 (Thursday)	TAAS Exit Level Reading (retest)
**Field Testing is state mandated and will affect all campuses.		
March 2004	3 (Wednesday)	TAKS Grade 3 Reading TAKS Grade 3 Spanish Reading
	8-12	<i>9 week tests in core areas (mathematics, reading, social studies and science and writing)</i>
	24-25 (Wed.-Thurs.)	Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) Grades 3-12
April 2004	Testing Window (April 26-May 21)*	<i>End of Year Benchmark: Reading, Writing &amp; Mathematics - Grade 2</i>
	Testing Window (April 26-May 21)	TPRI / Tejas LEE Grades K-1; DRA Grades K-1
	27 (Tuesday)	SDAA Grades 3-8 Mathematics TAKS Grades 3-8 and 11 Mathematics TAKS Grades 3-6 Spanish Mathematics TAKS Grade 10 Social Studies TAAS Exit Level Writing (retest)
	28 (Wednesday)	SDAA Grades 3-8 Reading TAKS Grade 3 Reading (retest) TAKS Grade 3 Spanish Reading (retest) TAKS Grades 4-8 Reading TAKS Grades 4-6 Spanish Reading TAKS Grade 10 Mathematics TAKS Grade 11 Science TAAS Exit Level Mathematics (retest)
	29 (Thursday)	TAKS Grade 5 Science TAKS Grade 5 Spanish Science TAKS Grades 8 and 11 Social Studies TAKS Grade 9 Mathematics TAKS Grade 10 Science TAAS Exit Level Reading (retest)

May 2004	Testing Window (10-12)**	Field Tests: SDAA Grades 4 and 7 Writing; SDAA Grades 3-8 Reading; SDAA Grades 3-10 Mathematics
	Testing Window (3-21)	<i>ITBS/Logramos Grade 2 (optional)</i>
	Testing Window (3-21)*	<i>End of Year Benchmark: Writing - Grades 3, 5, 6, 8, 9; Science - Grades 4, 6, 7, 8, 9; Social Studies - Grades 5, 6, 7, 9</i>
	17-21	<i>9 week tests in core areas (mathematics, reading, social studies and science and writing)</i>
	24-26 (Mon.-Wed.)	Senior High Final Exams
June 2004	1-3 (Tue.-Thur.)	Credit by Exam
	June 29 (Tuesday)	TAKS Grade 3 Reading (retest) TAKS Grade 3 Spanish Reading (retest)
July 2004	6 (Tuesday)	TAKS Exit Level English Language Arts (retest); TAAS Writing (retest)
	7 (Wednesday)	TAKS Exit Level Mathematics (retest); TAAS Exit Level Mathematics (retest)
	8 (Thursday)	TAKS Exit Level Social Studies (retest); TAAS Exit Level Reading (retest)
	9 (Friday)	TAKS Exit Level Science (retest)
	13-15 (Tue.-Thur.)	Credit by Exam
**Field Testing is state mandated and will affect all campuses.		

(Adapted from the district calendar, with 9-weeks testing added)

## **Appendix F: Participants**

### ***El Comite Avance members***

Seven members of the core planning group, El Comite Avance were interviewed.

They are ordered by their tenure at Chavez ES.

**Sally Ruiz** is a Latina is a 30 yr veteran from the Texas panhandle. She began teaching just across the highway at Pine ES and moved over to Chavez ES when it opened two years later. She took on the role of reading specialist this year after funding for her position as instructional specialist was cut. Prior to her four years as instructional specialist she was a bilingual teacher in the upper grades. A number of bilingual teachers at Chavez ES interned with Sally. Sally has acted as contact person with for the project and is tremendously gracious with her time. She always appears to have boundless energy and a sort of pragmatic optimism. Her commitment to the teachers and students at Chavez ES are impressive. Despite an incredibly difficult year with the loss of a number of family members, she seems always to be thinking of ways to better serve the students and improve the climate of the school.

**Maria Zamora** is a Latina from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas. She is 25-year veteran at Chavez ES, having begun her career there after training for two years in a Teacher Corp program at the local university program. She teaches 2nd grade bilingual students. Maria is also a Chavez ES parent; her high school age

son attended Chavez ES. Maria is a committed member of the El Comite meeting and often plays the role of skeptic. She puts in long hours with the school, but is sensitive to the toll the demands of the school are taking on the faculty as a whole. She expresses a tremendous commitment to the children and seems often to be conflicted about her role in preparing the students for a test that she feels is narrowing their education.

**Donna Duchamps**, an Anglo teacher originally from Michigan is a 16-year veteran at Chavez ES. Formerly a reading specialist, she took over a non-bilingual kinder class this year. Like a number of teachers, she student taught at Chavez ES and was later offered a position. Donna seems particularly sensitive to the effects of testing pressures on the campus climate and expresses a good deal of dismay at the heavy testing focus, concern about the toll on teachers and kids and frustration with the heavy-handed style of the district administration. Donna was one of the first teachers we contacted to discuss collaborating on the study. She was very helpful in brainstorming and revising the interview questions and helping us identify and make contact with teachers

**Kathleen Westfield** is an Anglo teacher originally from Chicago, IL is a 13 year veteran at Chavez. She teaches a 3rd grade non-bilingual class. Prior to teaching, Kathleen studied and worked in theatre production in the area. A highly respected teacher, Kathleen's irreverence was instrumental in moving the early

faculty discussions forward. Her ability to speak boldly, but with great humor allowed her to place important but difficult to broach issues on the table. Always energetic, she was particularly enthused by the faculty's ability to take on greater leadership vis-à-vis the campus and district administration.

**Felicia Yeats** is an African American special education teacher from Texas and 12 year veteran of teaching and at Chavez ES. Felicia credits mentoring by a long time veteran, the former mayor's wife, with helping her through her early years and establishing herself at the school. She expresses a strong attachment to the school rooted both in a commitment to working with students of poverty, and working with a committed and innovative group of teachers. Along with Donna, Felicia agreed early on to work with us on this study and was very helpful in brainstorming and revising the interview questions and helping us identify and make contact with teachers.

**Susan Williams** is an Anglo pre-kindergarten teacher originally from Ohio. A 9-year veteran at Chavez ES, she taught at a number of different grade levels depending on staffing needs. Susan taught at high school level out of state prior move to Texas. She seems to particularly enjoy her current work with both the students and colleagues at the pre-K level. She recently spearheaded an effort to earn accreditation for the pre-K program from the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Extremely gracious with her time, Susan seems



able to take a thoughtful and philosophical stance to the happenings at Chavez ES and her insights have been very helpful in the study.

**Ana Alvarez** is a Latina and 8 year veteran from San Antonio, TX. She teaches bilingual 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. After student teaching in the district, she planned to spend the spring relaxing and looking for a job in the fall she was recruited by her cooperating teacher's brother to Sanchez. She interviewed "just to get the experience" and ended up taking a job that December. Ana grew up in a community much like that of Chavez and says that drew her to the school. Ana brings great energy and a practical approach to the El Komite meetings. The discussions sometimes bog down into philosophical discussions and/or venting, and Ana is often the member who articulates practical steps to move things forward.

#### ***Non El Komite Avance members***

Three participants who were not heavily involved with the core planning group were interviewed.

**Nancy Stewart** is an Anglo music teacher originally from Kansas. Having taught briefly in south Texas, she has been at Chavez ES for 26 years. She is a highly recognized teacher in the district, named district teacher of the year in 2002-3 and recently receiving a lifetime achievement award for her work. She

seems to have tremendous energy and is in the final stages of her doctoral study. She expresses a tremendous commitment to her students and to the school. While she was an active participant in the earlier reform efforts, she has had to scale back her time commitment recently due to her own studies and also due to staffing changes that force her to split time between Chavez ES and another elementary school.

**Ken Rawls** is an Anglo special education resource teacher originally from Kansas and currently the only male teacher at the school. A 5-year veteran at Chavez ES, teaching is a second career and avocation for Ken. After spending a number of years in jewel sales, he decided to pursue a career in education and wanted a position where he could make a difference. He pursued position at Chavez after long-term substitute during his Master's program. Ken was recently selected campus teacher of the year. Although not a member of El Komite, Ken occasionally sits in the meetings. He often offers quite frank commentary

**Jennifer Bennett** is an Anglo teacher of a 4th grade non-bilingual class. In her second year at Chavez, she was a student teacher at a nearby elementary school. Jennifer has wonderful things to say about the school and her colleagues and not surprisingly indicates that she is feeling more comfortable and confident in her second year. The first year was no doubt difficult for Jennifer as 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers are responsible for an addition test in writing.

### *Administrators*

In addition to the teachers, two administrators, Al Lobos and Maricella Fuentes, provided insights and commentary both in informal discussions and in a number of visits to the university to comment on the partnership activities.

**Al Lobos**, a Latino was principal at Chavez for 20 years, which included the initial years of the partnership. In 2002, he was promoted to area superintendent. After a district restructuring plan, he currently works as an elementary school director overseeing approximately 30 schools including Chavez ES. His comments are drawn primarily from panel sessions.

**Maricella Fuentes**, Latina is finishing her first year as principal at Chavez ES. A former assistant principal (3 years) and bilingual teacher at Chavez, she was the overwhelming choice of the faculty to assume the principalship. Ms. Fuentes is also parent of past and current Chavez students. Her eldest daughter and son graduated from Chavez and are now attending college and high school respectively. Her youngest daughter is enrolled in a bilingual pre-K class at Chavez ES. Ms. Fuentes is extremely gracious with her time. Her comments come from panel sessions and innumerable informal interviews

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## VITA

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