2004

Creating classroom community through autonomy and collaboration

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CREATING CLASSROOM COMMUNITY THROUGH

AUTONOMY AND COLLABORATION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Elementary Education

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

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May 2004

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ABSTRACT

CREATING CLASSROOM COMMUNITY
THROUGH AUTONOMY AND COLLABORATION

By: Katharine Michiko Lee

This qualitative research paper describes how one individual teacher creates community in his classroom by providing student autonomy and dialogue in collaboration. The research was done in a first grade classroom at a public elementary school in Santa Clara, California. Observations, interviews, and documents were analyzed to provide a thorough understanding of the teacher's pedagogy and practices. The results of this study show that an essential element which determines the creation of community in a classroom is the sense of "connectedness" among members of the class. This sense of "connectedness" takes time and careful planning to create. The teacher in this study took specific measures by structuring opportunities for autonomy and collaboration so that this sense of "connectedness" could form.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

BUILDING A COMMUNITY THROUGH DIALOGUE

> A strong sense of classroom community contributes to
> many positive student outcomes. Students who have it do better
> over time than students who don't. And teachers who are
> successful at creating it are better at helping their students grow
> ethically and socially as well as academically. (Schaps, Lewis and
> Watson 1996, 29)

What is classroom community and how do you create it? This study will discuss

how one teacher balances autonomy and collaboration to create community in a first

grade classroom. Theorists Thomas Sergiovanni (1994), Paulo Freire (1970), and

Nicholas Burbules (1993) provide a platform for discussion covered in this paper.

The concept of classroom community was not significant to my life until I worked

as an English teacher in Japan from 2000-2002. Community in Japanese classrooms is

strong, thriving, and vital to success in both academic and social areas. Stepping into my

first Japanese classroom, I noticed how comfortable all the students seemed to be with

each other. They acted as if they were siblings, sometimes bickering, sometimes

laughing, and always helping each other. During work periods they became magnets,

clustering up in pairs or small groups to discuss their ideas and opinions about the

curriculum content at hand. When there was discrepancy within in a group, the students

did not get defensive or put each other down but instead, they listened to each other and

"talked it out."

The Japanese phrase *shuu dan shugi* which translates to the sense of "groupness" (Wu, David & Tobin, 1989) is used to describe community in Japanese schools. "Groupness" is not only being in a group; it is feeling, acting, and thinking about others in the group. Being a true community involves many intricate fibrous networks that together help weave a "feeling of community." These networks involve implicit emotions – both towards the group as a whole and intrinsically towards each other as individuals.

In an effort to maintain homeostasis with the philosophies of the Japanese school where I taught, I tried to be a "democratic teacher" just as I perceived all the other teachers to be. One of the classes that I taught was an English elective class entitled "International Understanding." I taught this class in English to 40 ninth grade Japanese students. Unlike the other classes that I taught, this class allowed me total freedom in regards to course content. Also, there were no required text books or curriculum standards that I had to adhere to. Instead, I had the freedom to create curriculum at my discretion. Understanding how important it was to have "student buy-in" and motivation, I wanted to co-create the curriculum with my students. I told this plan to my students stating that I wanted the class to be democratic and full of student input.

My first step in being a democratic teacher was to get to know my students. I had them fill out a questionnaire in English which asked questions pertaining to their academic interests: "Why did you choose this elective class?" "What do you want to learn in this class?" "What is your favorite subject in school?" I also asked questions pertaining to their home life: "What is your family like?" "What do you like to do in your

spare time?" When I got the questionnaires back all but five were left blank. I was shocked and slightly offended. The questionnaires that had been filled out had similar comments on them such as, "I like Backstreet Boys," "I have a dog," or "I play soccer." I later learned from a colleague that my students *did* have many ideas for curriculum development as well as the motivation to learn; however, they did not have the knowledge of the words in English to express their wants and needs. Some students knew how to express themselves in phrases such as "I want no homework" or "I want a fun class" however I suspect they did not see that critical dialogue was a part of their role in the classroom. I also realized that I had not built my role in the classroom as one of dialogic partner. From this, I realized that I had the challenges of getting them to participate in dialogue, giving them the necessary tools for dialogue, and building the particular classroom into a dialogic community.

This story exemplifies the need to first teach the skills of critical dialogue. Virginia Satir (1972) states all language is learned. According to her, humans are not born with the ability to speak from day one. Just as an infant's or toddler's speech develops over time through practice and from modeling by caregivers, students no matter what age or ethnicity, also need to be taught how to have a true dialogue. She states that when students critically engage in dialogue, they become empowered. My experience in Japan taught me that it takes time to create classroom community. I learned that it is important to first share thoughts, ideas, and information between teacher and students so that mutual trust can develop. In my case, I had expected my Japanese students to instantly warm up to me and to trust me prior to any dialogue. Many of my students were

inherently shy, and for me to expect them to openly share their thoughts, needs and life experiences on our first class meeting was a bit overwhelming for them.

I began to realize that classroom community is not something that you can create over night. Community is not a feeling that can grow instantaneously but rather it is an arduous process. When I observed other classrooms in my Japanese school, I marveled at the strong sense of community the students and teachers shared. I wondered what those teachers did to create such a comfortable atmosphere where students could critically dialogue and work collaboratively with each other. I wondered what elements those classes had that mine did not. I believed that the way the Japanese teachers set up their classrooms reflected the climate of Japan's societal norms, values and customs. I presumed that American classrooms could not compare.

In January 2003, I was introduced to "Steve" a veteran teacher who was at that time, teaching the second grade in Santa Clara, California. I was in need of a cooperating teacher for my full-time student teaching practicum. To my great fortune, Steve agreed to mentor me. After my first week of teaching with him, I realized that there was something different about his classroom. It reminded me of the classrooms in Japan, in the way that the students and teacher cared for one another and how they worked cooperatively as a group. His classroom had a strong sense of a "classroom family and kinship" which served as the backbone for mutual respect, cooperative learning, trust and kindness towards the members of the classroom. I wondered how such a strong community came to evolve. I wondered what kind of "magic" he used to create such a wonderful atmosphere. Gradually, as I worked in his classroom, this "magic" began to

reveal itself to me. As this occurred, his classroom became the breeding ground for many questions which resulted in the birth of my project.

In this study, I examined how one teacher created classroom community by providing structure for student autonomy and collaboration in his classroom. I also investigated how the teacher used dialogue to support his structure for both autonomy and collaboration in his classroom. Chapter two entails theoretical and empirical research supporting my inquiry. Chapter three describes how I explored my research questions through the use of interviews, observations and document analyses. Chapter four provides a report and analysis of the data collected. Chapter five entails a concluding summary, discusses implications and offers suggestions for creating community in a classroom. The paper ends with an epilogue reflecting on my growth as a teacher and learner as a result of my engagement in this project. Though the focus of this research is on community, curriculum is also mentioned in the paper. However the focus is not on curriculum content per say, but rather on how community weaves and permeates throughout the curriculum.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following is an overview of the major studies and arguments related to the field of community in classrooms. The definition of community that will be used in this paper is *gemeinschaft,* a term borrowed from German sociology explained in further detail below. First a presentation of theoretical and empirical research explaining the benefits of classroom community will be made. Next, Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of banking education will be used to explain how desocialization, critical consciousness, democratic authority, autonomy, and collaboration empower students. Finally, the works of Nicholas Burbules (1993) will be used to explain how the role of dialogue can establish community in the classroom.

What is Community?

Do all people strive to be a part of a community? Richard Leaky (1977) says that Homo sapiens exhibited trusting relationships as well as sharing and helping behaviors even before language was developed. He alludes to the notion that humans are inherently social creatures and desire a sense of belonging and that this sense of belonging and caring for one another is what creates community among social groups. So what *really* is community? There are many various definitions and words associated with community. According to Nel Noddings (1984) community is caring for each other; Marilyn Watson (2003) suggests that trust results in having community; Eric Schaps (2003) states that community is bonding with one another; and Roxanne Kriete (2003)

proposes that community means having the same values. Although the concept of community is abstract and subjective without a standard formula or check list, Sergiovanni (1994) offers a description of two types of communities, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* that he borrows from German sociological theory. In German, *gemeinschaft* translates to "community" and *gesellschaft* translates to "society." These terms were first introduced by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies (1887) who wrote that communities which shift from *gemeinschaft* towards *gesellschaft* are "moving away from a vision of life as sacred community and towards a more secular society" (Tonnies in Sergiovanni 1994, 7).

Gemeinschaft

Sergiovanni (1994), like Tonnies, suggests that *gemeinschaft* comes in three forms: *gemeinschaft by kinship*, *gemeinschaft of place*, and *gemeinschaft of mind*. According to Sergiovanni, *gemeinschaft by kinship* comes from the unity of being, this is a "we" identity that families and extended families provide. Interaction with members is based on mutual understandings similar to a family structure. These relationships involve caring, trust, and a sense of "connectedness." *Gemeinschaft of place* emerges from the sharing of a common habit or locale, for example; *my* class, *my* school, *my* neighborhood, *my* town, or *my* country. This common membership results in a sense of belonging where the individual's "I" concept widens to a "We" concept shared with others. These relationships involve "mutual understandings about how members will live their lives together as neighbors" (Sergiovanni 1994, 7). *Gemeinschaft of mind* refers to "the bonding together of people that results from their mutual binding to a common goal, set

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of shared values, and shared conception of being" (1994, 7). This further strengthens the

"We" identity. According to Sergiovanni,

> Relationships within a community are based not on contracts but
> on understandings about what is shared and on the emerging web of
> obligations to embody that which is shared (1993, 7).

Sergiovanni insists that all three play integral parts in building community within the

educational setting because:

> In *gemeinschaft*, natural will is the prime motivating force. People relate to each
> other because doing so has its own intrinsic meaning and significance. (Tonnies in
> Sergiovanni 1994, 9)

Gesellschaft

Alternatively, Sergiovanni uses another term, *gesellschaft,* to describe an

opposing view of *gemeinschaft*. *Gesellschaft* communities focus on the end goal rather

than the process. *Gesellschaft* is product oriented and the focus of energy is on the end

goal in mind. Life in a *gesellschaft* society is impersonal. There is an artificial sense of

concern for others' welfare and happiness. "In *gesellschaft*, rational will is the prime

motivating force. People relate to each other to reach some goal, to gain some benefit"

(Tonnies in Sergiovanni 1994, 9).

However, Sergiovanni cautions us in thinking about *gesellschaft* communities

disparagingly. He states that many *gesellschaft* communities such as those in technology

or medicine have benefited society in many ways. Though it is virtually impossible to

be either all *gemeinschaft* or *gesellschaft*, Sergiovanni states that schools typically tend to

be more *gesellschaft* than *gemeinschaft* in nature. Evidence of this tendency is seen when

schools put priorities on end goals such as meeting state and national standards.

Hagstrom (1992) identifies the Discovery School in Fairbanks, Alaska as a school

that transformed from being a *gesellschaft* to a *gemeinschaft* community. Before it

became Discovery School it was called Denali Elementary School which he described as

"worn out and unwanted" (Hagstrom 1992, 23). The position of principal had been

vacant for this neglected school and at the request of the school district, David Hagstrom,

a professor at the University of Alaska at Fairbanks, was persuaded to fill the position.

Hagstrom accepted and thought about how he could change Denali School. He

commented:

> After years of observing leaders bully children, teachers, and parents
> into reform, I wanted to try a different approach to leadership – to be
> an encourager, not a dictator, a facilitator, not a know-it-all.
> (Hagstrom 1992, 23)

Hagstrom called for a meeting where two teachers and two parents responded

with interest. When they first met, they had a discussion about how curriculum could

better reflect children's lives outside of school. One parent commented "Our kids are

natural explorers when they are on their own at home. Why can't the curriculum make

more of that fit?" From this inquiry, the group decided that it was necessary to re-

examine the school as a whole. The first course of action was to rename the school. The

name they chose was Alaska's Discovery School. Next, they developed a school mission

where the goal would be to create:

> . . . a place where children and adults alike would have the opportunity
> to discover (a) the wonders of their world around them and (b) their own
> potential for greater human growth and development. (Hagstrom 1992, 24)

From then on, the school held meetings at six o'clock in the morning for parents

and teachers who were interested in discussing a "greater alignment" between the

curriculum and the nature of children. Though the initial meetings began with a group of only five concerned individuals, as the weeks went by the group grew in numbers. After four months the group extended out to other members in education – high school teachers, university faculty and community members. This collaboration of "activists" developed and implemented team-teaching lessons with university professors and teachers at Alaska's Discovery School. The collaboration of community members and teachers also led to a year-round community garden. These efforts caused the school to flourish into an empowering learning community. Sergiovanni attributes the success of Alaska's Discovery School to its successful shift from a *gesellschaft* to a *gemeinschaft* community.

Why Community?

Why is community so important? Wolk (2003) asserts that "community is not just a place to live but an active way to live together" (15). Sergiovanni (1993) comments because break-downs in the family structure, being a part of a classroom community has never been more needed. He states that,

> When families fail, children sometimes withdraw inward, hardening their shells and insulating themselves from the outside. But the typical response is for them to create their own "families" by turning to each other for support. Gangs, for example, provide the security, affection and sense of belonging missing from other sources. (12)

However, being a part of a classroom community offers students a sense of being connected to, valued by and having influence with their classmates and teacher (Schaps, Lewis, Watson 1996). Sergiovanni (1994) agrees that community offers more than just a physical place to go or a "thing to belong to."

> The need for community becomes urgent when we consider the consequences of its loss. Students who are fortunate enough to

experience belonging from family, extended family, friends and neighbors feel attached and loved, experience the warmth and safety of intimacy, and are more cooperative and trusting of others. (12)

Kriete (2003) states that many elementary and middle schools today start the school day with daily rituals in an effort to build community. She and others realize that building community in a classroom not only fosters relationships amongst peers but offers much more.

Kriete (2003) describes the Responsive Classroom Approach that was developed by the Northeast Foundation for Children located in Greenfield, Massachusetts. One component to this program is the morning meeting. These daily morning meetings allow students to share their personal successes, problem solve and reflect with their peers. Another component of the program is having shared experiences as a group, such as singing songs, chants or participating in kinesthetic activities. These components are embedded with opportunities for children to care about one another and respond to each others' needs. Steven Wolk (2003) points out that while considering community in a classroom, teachers recognize that there are varying personalities, unique talents and individual needs of the children in the classroom:

> When teachers make a regular and focused effort to get to know their students as individuals, they show students that their teacher sees them – not as "5th graders" or "students" or even worse – standardized test scores, but as individuals who have interesting and important lives outside of school. Showing students that you value their interests, culture and life experiences helps foster healthy relationships. (Wolk 2003, 16)

How Do You Create Community?

Having community in the classroom is beneficial; however, it is difficult to attain and often fails. Sergiovanni attributes this failure at reform to its superficial nature.

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Irwin Blumer, school superintendent in Newton, Massachusetts states that often the

arduous nature of the task is underestimated. He states:

> Real change can only come as a result of the commitments of both
> the minds and hearts of the total school community –teachers, parents,
> students, administrators and school boards. (Blumer in 1994, 1)

Sergiovanni agrees with Blumer adding that,

> The mind and heart represent our accepted understandings and beliefs
> of how the world works. These understandings and beliefs function as
> theories of practice that first determine and then affirm what we do. (1)

Chet A. Bowers (1987) states that in education, there are many taken-for-granted beliefs

and assumptions. In order to understand these we must critically examine our habitual

language and symbolic behaviors, what they represent, how they affect us and how we

are connected to them. Freire (1970) proposes this is critical consciousness.

Critical Consciousness and Banking Education

What is critical consciousness? Freire (1970) agrees with Alvaro Vieira Pinto that

it is a "way towards something apart from itself, outside itself, which surrounds it and

which it apprehends by means of its ideational capacity" (Pinto in Friere 1970, 69). An

examination of this concept through a critical lens, according to Freire, means

transforming oneself to "the true realities of the world." However, this transformation

poses many challenges because education is typically structured for oppression. To

explain this concept further, he offers the concept of "banking education."

Under banking education, Freire asserts that students cannot gain critical

consciousness. Instead, they remain "receptacles" to be "filled" by their teachers. Freire

explains: "students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor...the teacher

makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat (72)."

Students are only allowed to receive, file and store information given to them. Banking

education maintains the following attitudes and practices:

a. The teacher teaches and the students are taught.
b. The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing.
c. The teacher thinks and the students are thought about.
d. The teacher talks and the students listen – meekly.
e. The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined.
f. The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply.
g. The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.
h. The teacher chooses the program content and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it.
i. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.
j. The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire 1970, 73)

Freire states that the attitudes and practices above suppress the creativity of

students while reinforcing the interests of the oppressors (teachers). In order to

understand critical consciousness further, we must first examine the role that teachers and

students play in education.

Freire describes the teacher-student relationship as that of *narration*. "This

relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the

students)" (71). Not only does the teacher deposit information into students, but the

information is a biased narration of the teacher's construction:

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance (71).

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This disconnect, says Freire (1970), leads to a dehumanization where the students' natural existence contradicts the situation which oppresses them. Freire states that,

> Sooner or later, they [students] may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation. (75)

This struggle for liberation involves a critical examination of the dichotomy among human beings. Freire asserts that the banking concept of education implies that a person is "merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or *with* others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator" (75). According to Freire, a person who is not with the world or with others lacks a conscious being. "He or she is rather the possessor of *a* consciousness: an empty "mind" passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside" (75). In the banking classroom Freire states that:

> The educator's role is to regulate the way the world 'enters into' the students. The teacher's task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to "fill" the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge. (76)

It is thereby appropriate to now explore what constitutes "true knowledge" at this point. According to Freire:

> Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world and with each other. (73)

Shor (1993) agrees with Freire that banking education socializes students into becoming their teachers' products. This is an unnatural way of living, inconsistent with human nature. He states:

> People are innately curious and curious about learning but political undertones in education either "develop or stifle" their [children's] inclination to ask why and to learn. (12)

According to Shor, the power in education is to socialize students into either critical thought or into dependence on authority. Essentially, students' minds remain autonomous or passive: "always waiting to be told what to do or what things mean" (Shor 1993, 13). Shor advocates that education should be a social experience rather than an activity governed by authorities.

One step towards the desocialization of students is the movement towards having democratic classrooms. The term "democratic classrooms" according to Shor, implies a classroom that orients:

> . . . subject matter to student culture – their interests, needs, speech and perceptions – while creating a negotiable openness in class where the student input jointly creates the learning process. (Shor 1992, 16)

Why is it so important for student input to be included in the learning process? Dewey states that knowledge is gained from action. For him participation is an essential component because democracy and learning meet in the classroom. Dewey defined democracy as "more than a form of government, it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey in Shor 1992, 136). Shor claims that when students begin to question curriculum, events and knowledge given to them, the reality of what "IS" begins to take a different shape and form –students begin to construct their own meaning. In addition, Sergiovanni adds that democratic communities "help their students meet their needs to belong, to be active, to have control and to experience sense and meaning in their lives" (122).

Democratic Authority and Autonomy

One way that Sergiovanni (1994) recommends students make meaning of their lives in the classroom is by co-creating the curriculum. However, how do students do this without any knowledge of the curriculum? In order to answer this question, we must first examine what "co-create" means. According to Shor, the creation of curriculum is a mutual process. Students need the teacher to structure and facilitate the learning process. However, though it may be structured, or "set up," the learning process is NOT a one-way transfer of information from teacher to students. He asserts that:

> Students need a general, critical education that teaches them to question,
> to do research, to work alone and in groups, and to act from reflective
> knowledge. (Shor 1993, 143)

Democratic authority describes the position a teacher takes in setting up this type of atmosphere of learning. In his own classrooms, Shor shares his desire to "democratize learning" but does not want to "stop being an authority in the classroom." He further remarks:

> My authority changes. My teaching practices and my comments
> seek a democratic position in class instead of a unilateral and teacher
> -talk authority that students both expect and resent. (Shor 1993, 165)

Furthermore, according to Burk and Fry (1997) teachers who practice democratic authority further engage their students towards democracy through autonomy. According to them, autonomy is described as "the ability for an individual to make informed responsible decisions while taking relevant factors into account" (647). Burk and Fry state the case of "Nina," a first year teacher who believes that autonomy can be used as the "avenue for preparing children to participate in their democratic society" (647).

She says:

> A democratic person is, in the real sense, an autonomous person.
> Democracy and autonomy embody the same principles of equality –that
> all people, regardless of abilities, socioeconomic status, race, etc., have equal
> rights to dignity and respect and this should be the goal for education for
> children (Burk and Fry 1997, 647).

Yet how is democracy developed in the classroom? Brint, Contreras and Matthews (2001) report that many educators endorse the need for participatory curriculum; however, in their research they found that the majority of teachers they interviewed said it was important to teach democracy in the form of "good citizenship." When asked to define "good citizenship" the teachers defined it as "maintaining order to work effort, following rules [or] respecting authority" (173-175). However, what defines good citizenship as democracy? How do teachers consciously make efforts to assure true democratic practices are taking place in our classrooms?   Who defines what democratic practices are? Teachers and students together must communicate with each other to form a democratic classroom because, according to Freire, "life holds meaning through communication" (1970, 77).

The Dialogical Relation

One form of communication that is essential to classroom democracy and community is dialogue. Crapanzano and Swearington (in Burbules 1993, 15) state that:

> The word *"dialogue"* derives from the Greek root *"Dia"* which
> means more than simply "two" but connotations of "between,"
> "across," or "through," which can apply to more than two persons
> as well.

Whereas,

> *"Logos"* is the Greek term used not only for "word" or "speech,"
> but also for "thought," "reason," and "judgment.

Burbules (1993) asserts that effective dialogue is dependent upon the "establishment and maintenance of a particular kind of relation among participants" (15). According to him, what sustains effective dialogue is:

> Not only lively interchange about the topic at hand, but certain commitment to one's partner, a commitment that might not precede the dialogue, but arises only gradually in the spirit of engagement. (15)

Through this sustained "commitment" that we make while in dialogue, Burbules (1993) claims that there is an existence of a "bond that joins two (or more) persons in the cooperative pursuit of knowledge, agreement, or interpersonal understanding" (19). This bond is often referred to as a "social relation" between dialogue participants. Freire (1973) states that when the teacher and students engage in dialogue, they are participating in a "joint act of knowing and re-knowing the object of study" (14). Noddings (1984) agrees that there is a cognitive interest, but also states that through this interaction of dialogue, participants begin to develop a *feeling* towards one another. She states,

> What I am advocating is a form of dialectic between feeling and thinking that will lead in a continuing spiral to the basic feeling of genuine caring and the generous thinking that develops in its service. (186)

Noddings (1984) believes though participants' beliefs may not agree, through the act of dialogical exchange, the other person's point of view is still received. This acceptance of varying points of view, despite a difference of views promotes tolerance and understanding. Therefore, Noddings asserts that it is vital to have dialogue in education. There are certain types of dialogue in education according to Burbules (1993): dialogue as conversation; dialogue as inquiry; dialogue as debate; and dialogue as instruction.

Furthermore, as we engage in dialogue, specific emotional factors begin to surface. These emotional factors of dialogue are described by Burbules (1993) as concern, trust, respect, appreciation, hope and affection. The following two sections offer descriptions of dialogue in education as well as the emotional factors in successful dialogical relations.

Dialogue in Education

As stated above, Burbules (1993) offers four types of dialogue in education: *dialogue as* *conversation, dialogue as inquiry, dialogue as debate* and *dialogue as* *instruction.*

The purpose of *dialogue as conversation* is mainly for understanding. The conversation is carried out because we wish to understand how our partners in dialogue experience or perceive a certain topic. This conversation promotes tolerance and respect across differences.

The purpose of *dialogue as inquiry* is mainly towards answering a specific question, solving a specific problem, or resolving a specific dispute. This type of dialogue involves being open-minded to various alternatives. In this example, dialogue is used to "provide substance for a further process that compares, evaluates and builds upon these different views, in order to make choices from them" (Burbules 1993, 116). For example, two students may dialogue about their opinions on how to solve a math word problem. One student may say that she used multiplication whereas another student may say that he added over and over. Both may get the same answer but through dialogue, the students' minds become more flexible to problem solving. Often teachers use dialogue as inquiry during class meetings. For example, if a class is having a problem with pencils

disappearing from desks, the teacher may ask, "What can we do to solve this problem?"

The class would then engage in a dialogue of inquiry where students offer various

solutions to the specific problem of missing pencils.

The purpose of *dialogue as debate* is mainly to exercise contrasting views and

alternative positions. This type of dialogue has the propensity to become competitive.

However, its merit is not manifested in competition, but instead on fostering skills such

as listening, taking turns and stating one's position with the other's position in mind.

The purpose of *dialogue as instruction* is to "move the discussion towards a

definite conclusion" (Burbules 1993, 120). Teachers who use the Socratic method are

practicing dialogue as instruction. They do not tell students or give them information, but

instead guide students through careful questioning and suggestions. Students with their

teachers eventually realize the answer through the course of dialogue.

Burbules (1993) represents dialogue as,

> A continuous developmental communicative interchange through
> which we stand to gain a fuller apprehension of the world, ourselves
> and one another. (8)

Dialogue in the classroom provides opportunities for teachers and particularly the

students to express themselves. When a student can bring forth his/her thought processes

to language, he or she understands their learning at a deeper level. There are many ways

dialogue can be implemented in the classroom. Classroom meetings offer a good

foundation for learning how to speak, listen, and take turns with one another. Some

students also have "dialogue journals" where the teacher and student dialogue with one

another through writing. Dialogue however practiced, should occur every day and in every way.

Burbules (1993) recommends that students be immersed in dialogue at all times. He describes dialogue as, not simply making "small-talk" or "chatting" but rather as a form of continuous, on-going, open-ended conversation. Truly engaging in dialogue with someone requires commitment. Burbules asserts,

> What sustains dialogue over time is not only lively interchange
> about the topic at hand, but a certain commitment to one's partner. (15)

Emotional Factors in Dialogue

How and when does this commitment to dialogue begin? Dialogue with another person is not dependent upon similarities in age, gender, intelligence or experience. If this were the case, there would be no dialogue between children and adults. Burbules (1993) states that the relationship in dialogue is found in the level of reciprocity between the parties involved. This reciprocity must be mutual with respect to concern for the other person. There must also be opportunities for participation and inquiry in dialogue, or it would simply be like one person lecturing to another. In dialogue the parties gain mutual knowledge, learn about themselves or the other party involved, or reach agreements. As dialogue continues, participants become deeply invested in their dialogue partners.

This deep investment in our dialogue partner leads to what Burbules (1993) calls the emotional factors in dialogue: _concern, trust, respect, appreciation, hope_ and _affection,_ which all reinforce the "bond" shared between the parties involved in discourse.

When these six elements are experienced in a dialogical relationship, conversations become more meaningful and heartfelt.

Concern develops as we engage in dialogue with someone. As dialogue takes place, the parties involved in dialogue are concerned about each other at this time. For most of us, it takes time to become concerned for another person. As they begin to tell us more about them, we feel deeper concern for them. We feel empathy for them which forms connectedness.

Trust according to Patricia White (in Burbules 1993) is the feeling of being able to "count" on someone without explicitly stating it. She says,

> The more attention that it needs to be given to establishing and
> maintaining trust, the more problematic and uncertain the relation
> is. (37)

In dialogue, many things are dependent upon trust. For example, what we say during a conversation is trusted by parties that the other will keep it in confidence. Time is required for trust to develop. As trust flourishes and we know we can "count on" a person, bonds of connectedness begin to form.

Respect does not mean equality. Equality means sameness, however according to Freire (1970) respect is a mutual understanding that both partners, despite any differences, will have something to give and something to gain through their dialogic relationship. Respect allows the dialogic relationship to remain egalitarian. He states that the respect for one another sustains the relationship even when sharp differences in knowledge, value or belief emerge. Respect promotes tolerance and understanding.

Appreciation for one's dialogue partner is needed especially when there are differences in culture, language or points of view. Burbules (1993) states that appreciation is more than tolerance but rather, appreciation is valuing our dialogue partners on their own terms and being and to truly take an interest in learning from them.

Hope is the set aside from the others in that it is not a total emotional factor. Some individuals enter a dialogical relationship with hopes that they will get something out of the conversation, such as new knowledge or shared interests with another person. When people participate in dialogical relationships, they are not guaranteed any outcomes, but "hope for the best," meaning for some outcome that is pleasing to them and their partner.

Affection refers to the feeling of connectedness between two people. This affection causes people to sympathetically listen to what their partners have to say. This feeling of attraction or intimacy with someone during dialogue draws us in deeper towards understanding each other. The culmination of emotional factors in dialogue within dialogue in education provides for a foundation of connectedness among teachers and students.

> Connectedness affects the substance and form of the conversational process specifically, where participants make a special effort to listen sympathetically to what their partners have to say, suspending judgment at least until they feel they have grasped being made from the other's point of view. (Mary Field Belemky, et al in Burbules 1993, 39)

Connectedness plays an important role in *gemeinschaft*. When a person feels a connection to another person, their motivating factor is based on natural will. Sergiovanni (1994) states that in all social relationships, natural will or rational will

serves as the motivating factor. In *gemeinschaft*, natural will fuels social interaction. He

states,

> People relate to each other because doing so has its own intrinsic
> meaning and significance. There is no tangible goal or benefit in
> mind for any of the parties to the relationship. (9)

However, in *gesellschaft* communities, Sergiovanni (1994) states that:

> People relate to each other to reach some goal, to gain some benefit.
> Without this benefit the relationship ends. (9)

Nevertheless, Sergiovanni is not saying that one type of community should take

precedence, instead, he (1994) insists that communities should not possess qualities of

only either *gemeinschaft* or *gesellschaft*, but instead should have a combination of *both* to

be successful. He states that if a community is too *gemeinschaft* in nature, progress

would be blocked, however if a community is too *gesellschaft* in nature, community

would be weak or lost. The question of whether to have *gemeinschaft* or *gesellschaft*

then becomes the question of how much *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* is appropriate for

a successful community.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Why Qualitative Research?

The primary value of qualitative research lies not in the verification
of generalization of universal truths but in the rich description of
thoughtful explanations of complex processes, relationships and
environmental influences. (Jacob in Burbules 1987, 646)

Qualitative research assumes that reality is socially constructed (Glesne and

Peshkin, 1993). Qualitative research is often described as messy. Its primacy is on the

subject matter and its goal is to show in detail how the many intricate and complex

factors together explain the phenomenon under study. In quantitative research, the

researcher looks at the project from an *etic* or outside perspective. Variables are

manipulated and isolated by the researcher – but always remain measurable, often with

numbers. However, in qualitative research, the researcher takes an *emic* or insider's point

of view to the data being collected and observed. The researcher then becomes not only

the instrument for which variables are measured, but also the interpreter for how the

variables are analyzed. Above all, qualitative research does not "try to solve a problem"

through repeated experimentation, but instead seeks to explicitly, in detail, describe and

explain a social phenomenon. This method of research provides data that is rich in

content and context. Under the umbrella of qualitative research, there are various

philosophical orientations to interpretive research.

The Project

Because this study is an interpretive case study of one specific teacher and how he creates community in his classroom, the qualitative methods carried out in this study included classroom observations, audio taped conversations/interviews with the teacher and document analyses. A total of three months were spent in Steve's classroom. Classroom observations took place between 8:30AM and 2:30PM and were done on an average of three times a week during the three-month period. During the course of observation and interaction in his first grade class, there were 20 students in total: six boys and fourteen girls from five to six years of age.

The Approach

Dialogue between the teacher and students was audio taped and later transcribed. Classroom observations were a mix of strictly observing and interacting with the children while observing. Three, one-hour, open-ended interviews were conducted with the teacher after school where audio taped conversations and handwritten notes were gathered for later analysis. Interviews were modeled after the dialogic retrospection approach (Kieffer 1981). Under this approach, with the exception of the first interview, the researcher presents the participant with transcriptions of the previous interview. The participant is then asked to reflect upon what was said in the previous interviews and to follow up with any clarifications or misinterpretations. Because dialogic retrospection allows the participant to actively participate and reflect upon what was said, the validity and truthfulness of the statements in the interview is increased. Document analysis was done on "Steve's Space" the weekly emails from Steve to the parents of his students, on

informational fliers, and on weekly memos to the parents. Monthly parent meetings were also attended where more notes were taken as well as documents collected and analyzed.

The School Site and Student Population

This project was done at Garden Valley (K-5) Elementary School in Santa Clara, California between February 2004 and April 2004. Garden Valley was chosen because of the affiliation that I had with the school as a student teacher between January 2003 and May 2003. The school emphasizes "whole child" teaching that includes developmentally appropriate curriculum as well as an arts, music and drama program. The school also has an extremely strong parent participation program where parents are required to work in the classroom four hours a week. Parents also attend monthly parent meetings where the parents gather together and meet with their child's classroom teacher to discuss curriculum, field trips and other class activities. The school has a faculty of nineteen teachers and twenty-five staff members. At this school, there are a total of 353 students who come from mostly middle class families that are diverse in ethnicity, primary language and religious backgrounds. The faculty meets twice a month as a school-wide staff and twice a month in grade-level meetings.

The Research Participant

This paper is based on a case study of one individual teacher, Steve, a 58 year old white male who was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. His interest in working with young people began when he worked as a camp counselor. He realized through this experience that he enjoyed working with elementary school aged children. This led him to pursue a career in teaching. He moved to San Jose and obtained his multiple subjects

credential at San Jose State University in 1968. He then found a job as teacher in Santa Clara County. After he started teaching, he met a teacher in his district who was a student of Jean Piaget's work. Because of their acquaintance, he developed an interest in Piagetian theory which took him to England in 1973 where he studied the British Primary School system. After returning from England, he began his graduate studies in early childhood education (ECE) at San Jose State University. He completed his MA in 1975. As he grew as a teacher, so did his relationships with not only his students, but with the parents of his students as well. He began to think about the importance of relationships and learning. This led him to pursue graduate work which he completed in 1981 in the field of marriage, family, and child counseling (MFCC) at Santa Clara University. Steve has been teaching for thirty-six years. He attributes his teaching foundations to theorists such as Piaget, Erikson, Maslow and Rogers.

The Researcher

I did my undergraduate work at the University of California, Davis in psychology and communication. Following graduation, I moved to Japan to teach English. My reason for wanting to work in Japan was my interest in comparative education. I hoped that I could learn more about Japanese pedagogy through experiencing it first hand. However, as I spent more time in Japanese classrooms, I became keenly aware of the tight knit camaraderie between Japanese students. Following my experience in Japan, I applied to San Jose State University's Critical Research Academy in the fall of 2002.

My affiliation with Steve began in January 2003. Because of Steve's extensive experience as a classroom teacher, he came highly recommended as a mentor teacher by

the principal of Garden Valley. My professor from the Critical Research Academy, Dr. Kristeen Pemberton, knew that I was looking for a student teaching placement and so she asked Steve to mentor me. For the next five months, I student-taught collaboratively with Steve. He and I continued to be acquaintances after my student teaching experience. To my great fortune, when I asked Steve if I could conduct research on how he develops community in his classroom he obliged.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter the data will be reflected against the literature to describe how the "connectedness" found in *gemeinschaft* of kinship evolves. The chapter first describes how Steve helps to "awaken" his students' critical consciousness through desocialization. Next, an analysis of how Steve uses structure to facilitate autonomy will be described. Finally, the chapter discusses how collaboration and dialogue are used to create community of kinship in the classroom.

"Awakening" the Critical Consciousness of First Grade Students

Under Freire's (1970) concept of banking education, the teacher is the "narrating" Subject while the students are the "listening objects." This one-way depository type system of narration prevents students' critical consciousness from developing. However, Steve's philosophical underpinnings are heavily grounded in student empowerment and consciousness.

When I first met Steve he was teaching in the second grade. He told me that it was the second year of a two-year 'loop' with the students, meaning that he had been with the same students when they were first graders and was continuing as their teacher for second grade. The first thing that I noticed about his classroom was that he did not have a desk in the room. Everything in the room, aside from an individual cubby hole for

each child's belongings (backpacks, jackets, etc.), was communal property. Steve and his students shared everything in their room.

Steve sees himself as a community member in his classroom. In an interview he said, "I have all this life experience to share with my children - - I am a resource." However, he realizes the benefits of collaboration in saying, "But then again, other children as well as the other parents are resources too."

According to Piaget (1965):

A child's language and thoughts are different from adults. The teacher
must be cognizant of this and must therefore attempt to observe children
very closely in an attempt to discover their unique perspectives. (230)

Steve's strength lies in his constant awareness of where his students are coming from, what their needs are and how they interact with the world. Steve comments:

I am always assessing how each child is responding to my suggestions.
I'm wondering how appropriate the task is for each child and how
I can meet their individual needs. The task is not as important as how
each child is thinking about themselves and the problem. I try to
think about what I can suggest or model that would encourage
independence and build confidence.

Traditional education, which entails banking education, implies that a person is "merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or *with* others" (Freire 1970, 75). Being *in* the world means to passively accept things as they are. Being *with* the world means raising consciousness of how all things are interconnected and what their true meanings are.

Steve brings awareness of this interconnectedness by teaching math concepts in relation to the students' lives. One activity that demonstrates this is when Steve and the students use the "number of the day" to co-create mathematical word sentences. To be more specific, if it is the 47th day of school, the students will come up with number

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sentences that equal to 47, such as "0+47 = 47" or "10 + 10 + 10 + 10 + 7 = 47" or "100 – 53 = 47." He also takes a daily lunch count of how many students bring lunch from home and how many students buy lunch. With those two numbers, he asks, "Which number is greater?" "Which number is less than?" He also asks "If there are 12 students buying hot lunch and 6 students bringing lunch from home, how many students are absent today?" Students in Steve's class explore math concepts concretely. For example, in solving the equation 12 + 9, he does not teach the traditional method of "carrying the one and bringing down the two." Instead, the students use either base-ten math blocks or Unifix cubes to physically represent what 12 and what 9 look like and add up to. From this, the children develop flexibility in thinking about math. They also see that 11 and 10 make 21, or that 8 and 13 make 21.

To further help students make connections, Steve integrates all subjects of curriculum by teaching thematically. For example, during the month of October Steve's curriculum focused on leaves and the changing of the colors from summer to autumn. They did art activities with leaves (painting on the leaves and then making imprints of the veins in leaves). Other activities included reading books (fiction as well as non-fiction) and singing songs about autumn. They also counted leaves and used them for math experiences. He and his students then went into the neighborhood of their school and raked leaves from the residential houses. The students also enjoyed playing in the leaves.

During the month of October the school-wide walkathon was held. Each student kept track of how many laps they walked. In a letter to the parents, Steve describes how he integrated math in the walkathon experience:

> Our walkathon was a fun day. Most of our children walked 20 laps
> or more. We spent the past two days totaling our laps. Table and Pair
> Teams worked to sum up their totals using Unifix cubes. We drew
> pictures to represent our results. And we used numbers to prove our
> thinking. Then, we put all of the blocks together and our grand total
> came to 651 laps. That's amazing. A team from our class shared our
> results with our fourth graders who are doing some research with our
> school results. All of our results are flying from banners in our room.
> I'll save them as a way of talking about math and the needs and
> development of mathematical thinking throughout this year.

Relating students' personal experience to curriculum facilitates students' critical conscious thinking about how math relates to their world.

Shor (1992) states that education often "socializes" students into predetermined roles of behavior or expectations. Students then become dependent upon authority figures for definition or direction. As a result, students "forget how to think" for themselves. Shor asserts that teachers work towards *desocialization,* which he defines as "questioning the social behaviors and experiences in school and daily life that make us into the people we are" (114). Indications of desocialization in Steve's classroom lie in the context of dialogue and the role of democratic authority that Steve plays in his classroom. For example, during a class discussion, Steve says to his students, "Boys and girls, you have rights. And if someone treated you in a way that was harmful to you, I would want you to stand up for yourself." In an interview, he mentioned that teachers should be advocates of children, rather than authoritarians of children. In regards to getting the "approval" from the teacher, he states,

> Another thing is for other kids to talk about their friends' work.
> I don't think that it always has to be or that it should be the teacher
> who gives the approval or comment.

Banking education implies that knowledge is to be given by teachers and to be received by students. Steve, however, believes that learning should come from within and that both teachers and students can mutually learn from each other. Zachloid (1996) states that "As children build on what they know, they become more confident. They then in turn become active participants in their own learning." Steve agrees and says,

> There are times when everyone is involved in appropriate
> activities or experiences, ones that they can be successful in and
> ones that they can understand…each child has something special
> to offer.

Using Structure to Facilitate Autonomy

Freire (1970) and Shor (1992) agree that students need to make their learning in the classroom meaningful to them. However, it is difficult to find a "universal" norm of meaningful experiences for all students, simply because students vary in socioemotional, physical and cognitive levels. The answer, says Zachloid (1996), is autonomy:

> Giving children the opportunity to become autonomous by allowing
> them to make decisions does not mean losing control; it means providing
> a framework for learning, having expectations and then adding plenty of
> wiggle room for times of self direction. (51)

One framework that serves for autonomy in Steve's classroom is the Contract. The Contract is a "menu-type" packet from which work is expected for that day or week. Sometimes the contract is open ended and students can choose from several reading experiences such as: reading a book independently, reading a poem independently, reading a book *to* a friend, or reading a book *with* a friend. Other times, the Contract will have specific experiences that Steve creates daily that need to be done such as: a math word problem, printing pages, or an experience with art.

The Contract gives students choices. Some students prefer to work on an experience that they can do with ease, and then "work their way up" to more challenging experiences on the Contract. Other children prefer to devote their initial energy for "tackling" more challenging activities on the Contract first. DeVries and Zan (2003) state that:

> When the adult respects the child as an individual with a right to exercise his or her will, their relationship has a certain psychological equality that promotes autonomy.

During the course of my observation, one student made a complaint about the Contract. He said that the work on the Contract was hard and that he was bored with it. Upon hearing this, Steve stopped the work period and said to the class:

> I just had someone share some feelings with me that "school is hard" and that they didn't want to do the Contract. And you know what? School *is* hard. I can make accommodations, you can come and talk to me about how much you can do. You have choices. But if you say, "I don't want to do *any* reading, math, or writing" that's not okay. You need to talk about how you are meeting your personal best.

What Steve calls "personal best" refers to actively engaging in work at a challenging yet successful level. He states,

> I have talked with all children about appreciating our own unique growth. We have talked about learning to talk and walk and read at different times. Each child has a personal best to develop each day.

Shor (1990) states that:

> . . . the depth of the teacher's democratic habits influences student participation and learning.... The more egalitarian the relationship between teacher and students in the classroom, and the more curriculum [was] built around the culture of the students... the more chance it has to lower student resistance and to engage student participation. (112)

The "wiggle room" that is provided for students to internalize the daily exercises,

activities or assignments on the contract sends a message to the students that Steve respects their various learning styles and trusts them that they will take active participation in their learning.

A second form of "structure" that Steve created towards promoting student participation and autonomy is his "homework program." The homework program in Steve's class is different in that there are no "standard" daily or weekly worksheets or assignments. The only requirement to homework is that it must reflect student thinking in the form of words, pictures, charts or graphs and numbers. I asked him how he developed the homework program and he said,

> The homework this year all came about from a parent meeting at
> the beginning of the year. There were some strong opinions expressed
> by parents just talking about all the different kinds of things going on in
> their lives. They said that their life was very busy and that they valued their
> family time. It was a really good discussion because it brought up a lot of
> issues that were important to bring up so people could talk about what their
> children needed in terms of not having stress in their lives. And certainly
> children need to play a lot and I was thinking that they also need time to
> practice some of their basic skills. It has been my belief to have kids
> not only work at some of those skills at school but also a little bit at home.

The students make daily efforts on homework but only "submit" their homework on their homework sharing day. On a child's homework sharing day, his or her homework "portfolio" is brought in to share with the class. Every day, a different child shares his or her homework. There has been an interesting array of homework presentations. For example, one student who is an avid NASCAR racing fan watched several races one weekend with his father. He then made a chart of how many races he watched, and specific drivers and what place they took in each race. He drew pictures and wrote a paragraph about NASCAR racing. Another example was a musically

talented boy who brought in a video of himself playing the keyboards and showed it to the class. He also made a chart of how many hours a day he practiced his keyboard and wrote a story about his first recital. A third example was one student who was a flower girl in her aunt's wedding. For her homework sharing, she drew pictures of the wedding, wrote a narrative essay of her experience and made equations with the number of guests at the wedding. A fourth example was a student who took digital photos of her pets and wrote a story structured with a beginning, middle and an end (which is a first grade language arts standard). She later read this story aloud to her classmates. A fifth example was a student who made predictions on how far he could hit a golf ball on three separate swings. He charted each swing and compared and contrasted the distances. Steve's intention with homework is to use it as a medium of empowerment. He states,

> My thing about homework has always been that it's a good way for
> students to feel responsible, make a commitment to something,
> and work on it at home and bringing it back to school.

Steve feels that homework is also purposeful in that it serves as a means of communication between himself and his students' parents. He said:

> . . . it's also a good way for the home to know what's going
> on at school and what kind of skills we're working on and what kind
> of things the children are doing. I never really want homework to be
> an assessment kind of thing where parents are trying to work with their
> kids and at the same time trying to assess where their kids are, but
> rather something that they do together and have fun in doing so.

Many of these homework sharing experiences have turned into centers during afternoon "choice time." One example of a homework sharing that evolved into a student-led center was a magnifying glass exploration center where students made statements comparing and contrasting random items under the magnifying glass. In

another example, a student taught his peers how to play simple songs on the keyboard. Steve often encourages students to offer their homework projects as a center. He says:

> Our homework program has borne some positive fruit. Many children offer their homework as a center. It was very magical on Friday to watch our children get involved in their own center ideas.

A third facilitator of autonomy found in Steve's classroom is class jobs. Class jobs were created through class discussions. Steve and the students talked about how they needed to care for their classroom together. Class jobs range from emptying garbage cans to making sure all back packs and jackets are taken home at the end of the day to scrubbing desk tops. Steve suggests that class jobs offer students a sense of responsibility as well as pride in their classroom. He states:

> What I have found is that young children often want to contribute to their classroom by performing class and school jobs. They can be very industrious about their work and they seem to feel very accomplished about completing their job. There are highly intrinsic rewards for a job well done.

Using Dialogue in Collaboration

As mentioned in Chapter Two the word "dialogue" implies an exchange between, of, or within two or more people. Therefore, in this section collaboration and dialogue will be discussed in conjunction with one another. In Steve's classroom, collaboration and dialogue are frequently used to solve social, emotional and academic challenges in the classroom.

During an interview between Steve and I, I described the concept of communicative competence as proposed by Jurgen Habermas (1984) and Bowers (1987) to him. Communicative competence, according to Bowers is, "the individual's ability to

negotiate meanings and purposes instead of passively accepting the social realities defined by others" (Bowers 1987, 2). Students who are communicatively competent are able to question and negotiate the things meaningful to them in their life. However, this is impossible without the preliminary foundation of knowledge provided by the teacher. Steve agreed that it is his job to help provide a "platform" for the students. He said,

> What I learned is that in some cases, like the language that you
> are talking about… it just doesn't necessarily come without
> presenting a model and giving the kids some kind of structure.

Structured Collaboration

Having "Scouts" in Steve's class provides a structure for students to develop their communicative competence. A Scout is a student whose responsibility is to "monitor and scout out" students who are working hard and working collaboratively with peers during the work period or when the class gathers together on the rug. Two Scouts are chosen daily from a rotation amongst all twenty students. At the end of every work period or class discussion, the Scouts choose one or two students each who they thought were working hard or listening well, solving their problems or managing their own behavior. The Scouts then give feedback to their peers in front of the class. Initially, the students' feedback statements were general compliments such as, "You were being good." Or "You were sitting nicely on the rug." However, Steve builds his students' communicative competence by asking them, "Can you describe what nice means?" "What does being good look like?" Because Steve asked specific questions, the students had to come up with their own constructed realities of appropriate behavior. When the student is not able to deconstruct meaning from terms such as "being nice," Steve will

offer terminology or other language that can be used to express what it means to "be nice." Upon thinking about his students and how they "scout out" he smiles and says,

> This particular group is doing that kind of scouting and sharing out. And you can just see that they really have learned how to talk to each other and they have shared their thoughts and feelings with each other. That's great.

During the second month that I was observing Steve's class, he changed the physical structure of his classroom. Prior to the reconstruction, the students had been in table groups of four. However, Steve had decided to implement a "pair-structure." I asked Steve why he restructured the room placing emphasis on pairs rather than small groups. He remarked that he wanted to facilitate further collaboration between peers. He felt that having students in pairs facilitated more interaction and demanded more participation and collaboration. He said,

> We're doing it already, but we can do even more, like talking to each other, learning how to share. Learning how to help each other rather than relying on adults. I would say that I put a lot on kids relying or helping each other. I do value that a lot.

He tells his students that they are going to "try something new" and says to them,

> Today, the person at your table is your mentor, your friend. You need to work together and collaborate. That means you need to solve problems together. Together. You need to cooperate.

Placing importance on meaning and understanding the reasons for doing this, he takes this opportunity to hold a class discussion about the new pair structure. He says, "Turn to a friend and talk about what collaboration might *look* like." The students talk with each other and then share out their ideas to the class regarding what collaboration might look like. Steve validates comments shared by his students and at times, asks

guiding questions such as, "Can you be more specific when you say 'taking turns'?" or "What does 'taking turns' look like?" He then makes suggestions about how the desks should look and that they should be working on the same page together. He mentions that students need to remember to use their "listening skills" when talking with peers. Next, he models what collaboration should *sound* like, emphasizing tone of voice, and suggests that students use phrases such as: "I agree", "I disagree" "Please explain to me..." "Please show me..." and "What do you mean by.." He then calls the names of the students who will be working with each other. The children are excited to begin working with their new partners. Some pairs immediately begin to work collaboratively together, while others seem to take a bit of time to get used to each other. Steve describes the new structure to his parents in a weekly email:

> We are now sitting in pairs at desks rather than in fours. Each pair represents a mentoring or collaborating team. The teams are rotating and changing every three to four days so that children will get to work and know many children in their class. We're not giving up the routines that have been established, in fact they have become the foundation and take off platforms for where we are going and for our future explorations.

Steve recognizes the initial difficulties with collaborating in pairs saying,

> I realize that there is so much that needs to be practiced and learned. Clarifying our understanding of terminology and directions and learning how to present our thinking on paper and to a friend and a class is huge. We as teachers and adults need to watch and observe and be ready to get involved with each pair by asking each child to talk about their thinking and what they see and hear their friend saying. We need to look for concrete work and representational work that makes sense to us or that is confusing to us and ask children to develop their thinking or consider new ways of thinking.

Despite many positive things about the paired collaborative work, there were many pairs that needed some guidance on understanding how to work with a person who

may have an idea different than their own. At the end of the first day of the new pair-structure in his classroom, he gathered his students on the rug meeting area and talked about the purpose of pair work. He opens the discussion by saying, "Talk with a friend about why we changed things today. Why did we go to working in twos today?" Responses from the class were: "To work with a new person," "To meet new people," and "To make new friends." A girl sitting in the back shoots her hand up into the air and says, "It's like making new friends, but keeping the old!" with that, the class breaks into singing a spontaneous rendition of the song "Make New Friends." Steve asks his class, "What does collaboration mean?" Through this open discussion, the students create meaning with purpose. Steve also gives them some language to use during collaboration. Dialoguing about the pair structure provides opportunities for the students to acquire personal meaning to their lives. They no longer see it as something they *have* to do. They see that the pair structure benefits them in that they can learn and teach each other. The dialogue sends the message to the students that Steve values children teaching children. After a week of the new pair-collaboration structure, Steve reflected,

> I realize that our children need to spend lots of time building and talking about their thinking. I realize that learning how to share and make compromises with a new friend takes time to develop. I realize that so many of our first graders could represent their thinking on paper when there were enough adults in the room to help them sort through the challenge of taking turns, using a ruler, scribing liens and writing equations with numbers and sentences.... Learning how to work with a peer and learning to develop independence from adults are important life long learning skills.

In describing how parents can support the collaboration process he says:

> We [parents and Steve] need to be present to ask children to model skills for their friends and sometimes we need to present a conventional

model or choice. We need to give them suggestions and then move away and come back later and observe and comment on their production and let them know about the growth that has occurred.

Students working in pairs create structure in how to socially interact with others. At the same time, it facilitates the formation of bonds between students. These bonds create the "connectedness" that forms the community in Steve's class.

Dialogue in Education

Wolk (2003) asserts that, "engaging in discourse is the foundation of both living in a democracy and learning in a classroom." In Steve's class, as structure serves the means of transportation towards community, dialogue creates the roadways which lead to community -- the more dialogue, the more opportunities and paths available to them.

Aside from structuring pairs or having Scouts, Steve also uses dialogue to openly address issues in class. Steve comments:

I've also found that talking about it all the time helps. I've found that I much rather... I think that it's so much better to process a problem when it occurs rather than to have a circle or an [official] class meeting once a week. I'm not trying to put that down but I think when the problem is occurring you can address these kinds of issues of listening to each other and processing problems.

These issues can be brought up by anyone in the class. By openly discussing issues that arise in the class, a message is being sent to the students that Steve invites their input, thoughts, suggestions and problem solving solutions. In doing so, the students are sent messages of respect and a sense of responsibility in attending to these matters in an "adult-like" manner. Though he acknowledges that his students are young, Steve values children solving problems through dialogue. In an email to the parents, he says,

We have already worked through some "problems." Social skills are

important life skills. Learning to cope with "teasing" or not having a
friend are challenging trials for some first graders. Learning how to
share friends is also a very big challenge. I will always listen to all
parties before making judgment. I will always try to get children to
listen to each other and have them attempt to resolve any disharmony.
I have found that giving "both parties" an opportunity to tell their story
helps to extinguish hurt feelings.

As mentioned in chapter two, Burbules states that dialogue in education comes in

four forms: _dialogue as conversation, dialogue as inquiry, dialogue as debate, and_

dialogue as instruction.

Dialogue as Conversation according to Burbules (1993) is conversation for the

sake of greater understanding. For example, one day when I observed in his classroom, a

child came up to Steve and told him that another child had yelled in his face. Steve took

this teachable moment to address this issue openly in a discussion format to the students.

He said:

> There was a situation that occurred today that I wanted to talk about.
> The situation is like when people say something and they use their voice
> in a way that the voice sounds scary. It makes you feel scared and when
> you feel scared then you feel that your heart is beating really fast or you
> may feel like you're short of breath...okay? You feel your eyes get
> bigger and you're just not sure what to think. You feel like you want to
> back away and you may feel like you want to go away or that you need to
> be with mom or dad. You need to feel safe inside and you don't feel safe.
> So what I want to talk about was if somebody talks to you, whether it is a
> child or an adult talking and they talk to you in a way that their voice or their
> face makes you feel frightened what can you do? So talk with a friend for a
> second and share what you would do.

Then the students talked in pairs and collaborated with each other on ideas of what they

would do if someone said something frightening to them. Steve asked, "Does anyone

have an idea of what to do when you are scared that they'd like to share?" As the

children shared their thoughts on what they would do to help themselves in a scary

situation, Steve listened to them, confirmed their statements and when necessary, asked

follow-up questions. Through this dialogical interaction, the students gave ideas of what

they would say in a situation where they were scared. Some suggestions given by the

students were: to walk away, to run away, or to say "Stop it, you're scaring me!" Steve

acknowledged all of the suggestions given by all the students. He didn't confirm or reject

statements but instead listened to them. At times, he would ask follow up questions by

first confirming what was said such as "You would say, 'Stop it, you're scaring me.'

And then what would you do? What would you say?" Then he said,

> Boys and girls. You have rights. Sometimes children *and* adults say
> things to children, even in our school that's --- that's not kind. And just
> because it's an adult, you still have rights to be respected and cared for.
> So um-if a child or an adult says something that doesn't really sound nice
> or scares you, you can say something back or do what he said, 'just walk
> away' and that's perfectly normal and okay.

Steve takes a few more ideas from other students. Then, he asks for a volunteer in the

class to stand up and says:

> Okay. Say we're standing right here. And we have an invisible
> boundary between us. When people talk with each other they have
> space between them in which they feel safe. Some cultures in the world,
> they feel very safe being very close. In some cultures, people feel more
> comfortable when there's more space. In North America, we usually
> feel more comfortable like this [Steve takes a step away from the child
> leaving approximately six inches between them]. In our culture, when
> we're talking we like to look each other in the eye. That's why
> sometimes we say, "Please look at me when you're talking." But in some
> cultures that's not the way it is, but in our culture it is. But, here's
> the deal. This is what I want to talk about. This is a suggestion.

> One thing that people are saying is that "you can leave." And that's
> a healthy thing to do. But sometimes you need to express yourself
> and say, "Why did you do that?" or you might say, "You made me
> feel really angry when you said that" or "Why did you say that? It made
> me scared." But if you go like this to some people, [gestures to have

his demonstration partner step closer towards him] and step forward like this, it can be an unsafe thing to do. Because when you step forward, the other person can go like this [mimics a physical reaction in slow motion]. They can push you away or they may feel very frightened and may hit, they may push, they may hit and then they may run. What I want you to think about is boundaries. I want you to be able to tell people how you feel. You don't want to do this. [Steve puts his hand on his demonstration partner's shoulder.] You don't know how they'll react. You want to use words in a way and say, 'When you talk to me that way, you really, really scared me! Your words scared me. I felt really, really sad inside.' But you don't want to yell at them and say, "WHY DID YOU YELL AT ME?? YOU REALLY, REALLY SCARED ME!!!!" You want to have safety first.

Through this re-enactment of modeling and dialogue, the students are better able to understand the concept of personal space and personal safety. This dialogical interaction can be considered dialogue as both conversation and inquiry. It serves as *dialogue as conversation* because it is promoting a deeper understanding of tolerance for each other's individual differences. It also serves as an example of *dialogue as inquiry* because Steve and the students together collaborate on various solutions of how to react in such a situation. Expressive language is also being developed which adds to the communicative competence of the students.

Another example of how Steve uses *dialogue as inquiry* took place when some students in the class came to Steve and told him that a girl in the class was saying some "swear words." Steve could have addressed this privately with the girl, however instead he chose to attempt to 'solve the problem' collaboratively in a whole-class discussion. He did not place focus on the girl who was being accused, but instead spoke openly to all his students:

There is an issue that we need to solve. The issue has to do with kindness and how we talk to each other. Okay, I've been told that

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some people are swearing in class. It means that some people were
using language that wasn't kind. Sometimes that language could be
cussing, [looking at some puzzled faces] ... some people don't know
what that is. It really has to do with kindness. It really has to do with
how the words sound and what you're communicating with friends.
So, what I'd like you to do for just a second is either talk with a friend
about what you know or don't know about cussing and swearing and
about what language is inappropriate or appropriate. So talk together
for a second.

The students immediately turn to a classmate next to them and discuss their ideas. He

brings the class "back together" as a group and says to his students,

Boys and girls I'm pleased that you are so engrossed in your conversations.
I saw that some of you [giving non verbal complimentary head nods
to some students] turned to face each other and leaned into each other
as you were collaborating. Okay, so does anyone have an idea by raising
their hands, about a feeling, words, or an idea about language which
doesn't sound kind or a belief that you learned from your mommies or
daddies about what's inappropriate or appropriate?

One student mimics his mother and says sternly, "No swearing." Steve says, "That

sounds like a rule. Why do you think your mother made that rule?" This is also an

example of desocialization (as mentioned in chapter two). In a world where children are

socialized into thinking that parents and teachers are always the authority and should be

respected and listened to, Steve challenges the student to critically comprehend why his

mother made that rule. If Steve said, "She's right, you should listen to her" he would be

socializing the student. However, instead Steve asks the student to think about the

meaning behind the "rule" his mother made. One student makes the comment, "My mom

swears when she's driving." Steve says:

You mean, you sometimes hear grown ups swearing because their
upset or something that happens when they're driving? Okay. I want
to say something about what you just said. Sometimes adults do swear.
They swear because they are mad, angry or afraid. All kinds of reasons.

> Swearing is just another form of communication, telling people how
> you're feeling or what you're thinking. But the question that
> we're discussing right now is – is it the *most* – is it the *best* form of
> communication... of getting your thoughts across.

The conversation continues with other children sharing their thoughts to the class. One

girl offers that some people swear because they think it's cool. Steve asks,

> Okay, so we've said that people swear because they are scared, afraid,
> angry or they think it's cool. Let's talk about one, whether it's appropriate
> for school and two, if there are other words that we can use to express
> our feelings that are more kind.

The class agrees that it isn't appropriate for school. They also come up with words or

expressions that they could use in lieu of "swear words" that can help them express their

feelings. This is yet another example of how Steve uses open dialogue to solve problems

as well as how he builds communicative competence in his students.

Through dialogues such as these, the students feel listened to, respected and a part

of the class. They also feel that Steve trusts them to talk about such important "adult-

like" issues and appreciate resolving these issues through dialogue and collaboration.

Shor (1992) states that "participation leads to empowerment" (19). When Steve engages

the students in class discussions about issues that arise in the classroom, their

participation in the construction of problem solving is "true learning" because the

students are constructing their own realities. Furthermore, their dialogue establishes a

reflective process about what they know about swearing and what they believe to be

appropriate in their classroom. He also educates the whole child, keeping in mind the

students' developmental level, personal attributes and emotions. Talking collaboratively

in pairs and as a whole group helps to mold students' moral identities while fostering democracy in his class.

Steve says that it is important to talk about things openly in his class. He feels that through the support and collaboration of peers, children can be empowered. He states, "I'm dedicated to the students processing problems." An example of how a student processes a problem can be found in the case of a girl who was extremely frustrated because she could not figure out how to solve a math problem. She came to Steve in tears about not being able to figure it out. Steve presented this problem to his class and asked them to help their friend and fellow classmate solve her problem. He said:

> Our friend here has a problem. I want you to know, all of you boys
> and girls, that I am asking a lot from you. And you're not all going to
> get it at first, but that's okay. I want you to make it okay if you don't
> solve this problem right now.

As her peers listen intently, the girl and Steve describe her "problem" to the members of the class who all seem very concerned. Steve tells his students about a time where he was faced with a difficult challenge:

> I wanted to ride that tandem bicycle with my wife so bad, but the
> chain just kept falling off. I could not put it back on. I had grease all
> over myself, I was frustrated, I couldn't think straight. I was very upset.

The girl who was frustrated chimed in and said, "I am frustrated too and I don't feel good inside." Steve says, "Neither did I!" He continues his story by sharing with his students how he had to just give up and walk away from the bicycle for a while, recompose himself and then try again. He says to his class, "And you know what? When I came back with a clear head, I did it! I put the chain back on the bike." He then turns to the girl and says,

I want you to believe that I know you can do it. Here's the deal,
you can carry that bad feeling inside of you all day if you want to
or you and a friend can do some thing else on the Contract right now.
But I want you to trust me that I'll help you with the problem.

He asks the class, "Does anyone else have an idea of what she (turning to the girl) can do in the mean time?" Her classmates offer her many suggestions and words of encouragement. Steve turns to her and adds, "You wrote gobs and gobs of sentences on your story. And so, you can just take a little break from this math problem and come back to it."

Dialogue as debate which exercises alternative position in dialogue is also used in Steve's class. Piaget (1965, 228) asserts that:

When one student talks to another he comes to realize that his is not
the only way of viewing things. He sees that other people do not
necessarily share his opinions. Interactions inevitably lead to conflict
and argument. The child's views are questioned. He must defend his
ideas and he must justify his opinions. In doing so, he is forced to
clarify his thoughts.

In Steve's class, the students dialogue with each other (if not only for a few minutes) about their thoughts on a regular basis. During a whole group lesson, Steve will often run it in a "10-2 talk" manner, where he will talk for ten minutes and then give the students two minutes to dialogue with one another. After the students dialogue for two minutes with each other, the class comes together as a whole group and the students share their ideas out loud to the class. Another example of daily dialogue is the "number of the day" activity during math workshop, (as described in the beginning of this chapter). He will write the "daily number" (which corresponds to the number of days that they have been in school since the beginning of the school year) on the easel and say,

Work with a partner and come up with an equation for this number.
You can use Unifix cubes, draw pictures or make tally marks. Check
with your friend to make sure your equation equals this number. See
how many ways you can write an equation for this number.

During this collaboration time dialogical exchanges between students take place where

each student's equation is presented to the other. If the students do not agree that the

equation equals the number of the day, it needs to be resolved through a re-explanation or

with the help of math manipulatives such as Unifix cubes. They also get a chance to

dialogue in their pair collaboration teams during the "free work period" as the

experiences on the contract are explored.

Other times that *dialogue as debate* is used in Steve's class is during science

lessons. For example, looking at my field notes, I noticed a time that Steve and his

students discussed the lunar eclipse that was to happen that night. He and the students

engaged in a very lively conversation about the positions of the moon, sun, earth and

comets as well as asteroids in relation with one another. The students initially

brainstormed their ideas with a partner and then shared out their "theory" through

dialogue and physical demonstration using a baseball, tennis ball, basketball and other

various items that the students used to represent asteroids, comets, meteorites, etc.

An example of how Steve uses *dialogue as instruction* was recorded in my field

notes. I noticed that for about a month and a half, Steve and the students were "building

staircases" out of Unifix cubes. He had demonstrated how to build a "staircase" in either

ascending or descending order. For example, the first "step" had two Unifix cubes (math

manipulatives), the second step had four cubes stacked vertically on top of each other, the

third step had six cubes; whereas the fourth step had eight cubes, and so on. Steve did

not tell his students (as he modeled his construction) that he was adding two cubes per step. He continued to build his staircase to the tenth step. He then asked if his students noticed any patterns in his staircase. He proceeded to ask how many cubes were in his first step, second step, and third step, followed by questions about patterns and the total number of cubes. He also asked the students to make predictions as to how many cubes the eleventh step would have (based on the pattern). Steve did not tell his students the concept of a repeating pattern; instead, he had his students make observations of their own which led to the development of the concept.

As mentioned earlier, the school had a walkathon in early October. Prior to the start of this walkathon, the class engaged in dialogue. He opened the discussion by checking to see what the students knew about the walkathon, "Does anyone know why we are having a walkathon today?" The general consensus was "To make money." Steve then explained that the money raised in the walkathon benefited the arts and music program at school. He then challenged his students to do their personal best in walking around the track. He said, "Turn to a friend and tell them what your personal best will be. How many laps around the track will you walk?" Afterwards, the students shared out with the whole class their personal goals. Steve also reminded them about their personal health and safety and said, "Be sure to keep yourself hydrated and energized. We have water and oranges for you all. If you get tired, you can take a break and rest for a while." Even though this discussion delayed the students from the walkathon by 30 minutes, it was important and beneficial. The dialogue gave the students a sense of meaning to the walkathon. They were more motivated to fulfill their personal goals because they knew

how it would benefit their school and their class. The students were empowered because they saw the interrelatedness between what they were about to do and how it would affect their lives.

Using Dialogue for Reflection

Freire (1970) states that reflection is the act of combining action and practice, what he refers to as "praxis." Steve comments:

> Most recently, we are doing a lot of collaboration and reflection work. And we haven't had much experience with that. I just recently have thought about the importance of the reflection part. The kids do a fairly decent job of sharing their ideas, but in terms of them becoming aware of what someone else is saying and hearing what other people are saying. We've done a lot of work giving compliments to each other, like listening to each other, gaining information from each other, helping each other, taking turns, well, those are really life skills. And I think the reason that I want to struggle, wrestle and stick with it [reflection] is that I really see it as a life skill. As they learn to share, listen to each other and take turns, they can be each others' teachers.

When I asked Steve if it were possible for kids at the age of five or six to comprehend metacognition and reflection, he said, "I think it's really hard. It's hard for many of them. I think it has to be modeled by adults. You really have to teach it." However, he says there is evidence of it in class, recalling a time when a boy in class yelled "Shut up!!" to his classmates, and then immediately afterwards said to them, "I shouldn't have said that."

Doll (1993) states that:

> Reflection is taking experience and looking at it critically, variously, publicly: that is, connecting our experiences with others' experiences, building a network of experiences wherein past, present and future are interrelated.

In a staff meeting, the topic of communication and reflection was brought up. This made Steve think about how reflection could be incorporated into this class. He comments:

> I realized that I have been giving students a lot of practice sharing
> with each other. I often say, 'turn to a friend or partner and share
> your ideas' and our first graders respond in a very positive way. But
> we haven't spent enough time on the reflection part of communication
> and learning how to share our thoughts and feeling about what we are
> hearing and seeing and learning from others. This is our next big step.
> Reflection is the critical thinking part of communication.

When Steve initially described reflection to his students, he used the metaphor of looking into a mirror and seeing your reflection. He explained through modeling how reflection can help you grow and learn more about yourself and gave examples of how he uses reflection in his personal life. Since that discussion, Steve has made time for the students to not just share, but to reflect upon work that is shared. Often, at the end of the day, students reflect on their day and the positive things that occurred as well as other things that could have perhaps been done another way. In an email to the parents, Steve shares the progress that the kids are making,

> Our students have been learning how to reflect upon the work that is
> being shared. Children are talking about the appearance of work as they
> talk about colors and neat lines, letters and numbers. Children are also
> beginning to share their strategies and thoughts such as Joey did when he
> taught his class about a 'neat way' of adding two digit numbers.

Creating Trust through Dialogue

Constant dialogue allows students to exercise listening, speaking and comprehending skills. As mentioned in chapter two, Burbules states that as we engage in dialogue, we make commitments to others. Through these "deep investments" with our

dialogue partners, we develop concern, trust, respect, appreciation and affection for one another. These values represent what Burbules calls the emotional factors in dialogue. All of these factors reinforce the sense of connectedness that we feel when we engage in dialogue with others.

It is obvious that dialogue is necessary to solve problems. However, "topics" are not necessarily needed at all times for dialogical interactions to establish the sense of connectedness. Noddings (1992) refers to this as "ordinary conversations." This discourse involves talking about each others' interests, hobbies, and "non-academic" related topics. A reciprocal exchange of one person's thoughts and feelings on the subject is made. Such conversations according to Noddings (1992), builds a more loving and trusting relationship between each other.

Aside from solving problems, comprehension, and "ordinary conversation," dialogue serves another purpose. Within discourse, messages of trust are also embedded in the context during the dialogical exchanges. For example, during an interview, Steve comments on how through dialogical exchanges, trust is created:

> Like when I call on kids when they raise their hands. When I call on kids
> and they volunteer. I will work with them until they feel successful. I think
> that they've seen that enough so that they trust me that I won't fail them or
> put them in a situation that'll make them feel like they're going to fail.

Evidence of the trust was seen in my field notes where a girl raised her hand to offer her thoughts on something and said, "I'm going to take a risk." Steve responded with a huge smile on his face and said jokingly, "I love it when you risk it all." Embedded in this exchange of dialogue between the student and Steve were the emotional factors of trust, appreciation and affection. The student, in saying that she was

going to take a risk, was showing Steve that she trusted him. He affectionately joked and showed his appreciation to her for taking a risk. Steve however, did take into account the student and her personality before responding to her comment in the way that he did. Had it been another student that perhaps may have misread his affectionate joking he might not have responded in that exact way. In regards to students volunteering, he says,

> My greatest concern is to the individual who has been put on the spot and I don't want to take anything away from them. I want them to feel enabled, powerful and empowered . . . it's not necessarily having "the answer" that's not the important thing. . . but that trust again, it will be there.

As mentioned in chapter one, my Japanese students were reluctant to talk to "take a risk" and speak in English because trust was not yet established between teacher and student. Trust between teacher and student does not develop overnight. It is a gradual process that requires patience and persistence. However, the rewards are worth it, as Watson states "A solid trusting student-teacher relationship is the foundation of a classroom community of partners" (Watson 2003, 30).

This foundation of trust reinforces the sense of "connectedness" between all members of the classroom. When students feel that their classmates and teacher can be trusted, they feel emotionally safe in the classroom. This feeling of "safety" empowers students to take on challenges, academically and socially in the classroom, which all are necessary for growth and development.

As mentioned in chapter two, the sense of "connectedness" is found in *gemeinschaft* communities. Steve's classroom has strong qualities of a *gemeinschaft* community. However, his classroom community does not exist without structure, purpose and goals, all of which are found in *gesellschaft* communities. One example that

is both *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft* in nature is the Contract. The Contract, as previously described, serves as a framework for independent and collaborative learning and exploration. However, it also serves as a medium for students to follow as they complete their learning experiences. When a student fulfills the Contract with their "personal best" effort, the students then make "choice activities" such as: playing with computer software programs, playing with Lego's or Kinex, playing with Play Dough or painting with watercolors. Another example is the "Three Agreements." There are no rules in Steve's class. Instead, there are the "Three Agreements" which are: a) safety first, b) solving problems and c) kindness. These three agreements are often discussed and used throughout the day. These three agreements made by the students and teacher serve as a platform for daily behavior and norms. Breaking or not meeting the Agreements warrant a discussion. These examples give insight into the necessary balance between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* qualities which prove Steve's classroom to be successful.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Schaps, Lewis and Watson (1996) define classroom community as "the feeling of being connected to, valued by and having influence with their classmates and teacher." Steve's classroom exemplifies the essence of classroom community. I have come to the conclusion that in Steve's classroom; the "connectedness" felt through the relationships between the members of the classroom is what creates his classroom community. This connectedness is why *gemeinschaft* by kinship is the most prevalent in Steve's classroom. Though *gemeinschaft* of place and *gemeinschaft* of mind were also existent in Steve's class, it was *gemeinschaft* by kinship, the "connectedness," that perpetuated the existence of the other two. It is the connectedness that empowers Steve's students to do their "personal best." It is the connectedness that motivates Steve to trust his students and provide autonomy and the "wiggle room" they need to go about their day in meaningful ways. It is the connectedness that bridges support between what goes on in the class and what goes on in the homes of the children. Because of the connectedness among the teacher, the students and the parents, Steve's class has become an empowering, safe and pleasant, caring place to learn.

It is true that connectedness takes time to evolve. However, I have also found that other supporting factors that helped create connectedness. These supporting factors are

Steve's personal values and philosophies, which he carries out into his practice. Of all Steve's personal values and philosophies, three stand out the most: 1) a passion for learning, 2) a "loving spirit" towards children and 3) an appreciation for change.

Continuous learners also referred to as "life-long learners" have a passion for knowledge. Like Steve, they realize knowledge and learning come in many forms at various times. Learning may be autonomous and individual but it may also be collaborative. Nevertheless, life-long learners realize everyone has a talent, a value or a gift –something to contribute to the learning community. Steve's belief that every child has his or her own "unique talent or skill" is seen in his insistency on student-student interaction for learning, collaboration and dialogue. I asked Steve what kind of "image" he would want visitors to his classroom to see, he answered:

> What I would want them to see is **children**. So not necessarily adults, but see the children involved in a process, their processes and lots of different processes.... So they would see children working in pairs, they would see children working alone, they would see children at their desks, they would see children on the rug, they would see children reading the walls, they may see children observing other children... or they might see a group outside of the classroom before they walked in..... they'd probably see very often that I'm reading with a child ....and there might be another child standing by my side or I might be kind of on my knees working at a table.

Steve comments, "I am always learning. I learn so much from the students and parents." This openness that Steve has for his students helps plant the seeds of community.

Secondly, Steve's "loving spirit" towards children is seen and felt in his teaching, through his dialogue and actions. In our first interview, he said,

> I talk with the kids about being like their mom or like their dad in the classroom and I'm here all the time and for them, to um, you know feel that. I know that I feel very loving towards all

of them, and each of them is different and each of them has different needs. But kind of that loving spirit is very much a part of the relationship and developing that connectedness to each other.

Steve often tells his students that he wants to give TLC (tender loving care) to everyone that needs TLC from him. He truly believes that all children can be successful no matter where they are on the developmental continuum given that they do their "personal best." He has affection for his students and is always assessing what they are feeling, saying and doing. He says, "I'm always thinking/caring about each child and try to make decisions that will promote their growth."

Thirdly, his appreciation for change allows for creativity to flourish. He states,

My goal is not to have a 'robotic' environment where everyone is functioning like a well oiled machine. I do need to have parameters though that promote independence, focus and shared learning. I see myself and my children constantly changing and so I need to figure out what I need and what my children need.

Too often, teachers become inflexible and stuck in "old routines." Being open to "new things" provides for creativity. In sum, Steve describes his classroom community by saying:

Community has to be likened to being a family. I think that what I learned about teaching – that **the key to teaching is relationship building.** I think that when people, as people develop a relationship and trust one another – um, and they feel safe with one another, then they're able to enjoy all of the joys that are a part of a classroom and they can be critical of each other and they can challenge each other. I can challenge children to be more or can take them to another step or what have you because I think the children believe that, you know, I'm there for them and I'm there with them. Together, we meet the challenges of a day.

Implications

Due to the nature of this case study research, there are certain implications. First I would like to state that the culture and philosophy of this school is grounded in a child centered, open philosophy which may have played a factor in the creation of community within Steve's classroom. Given a different school or different classroom, things might be different. Listed below are some implications that may arise in a different classroom:

1. **Second Language Learners.** In this paper, I am advocating for dialogue to be used constantly and profusely, as it was in Steve's class. However, it should be noted that there was only one second language learner in Steve's class during the time the research was conducted. Because the majority of his students were native English speakers, dialogue was able to flourish quickly with depth and meaning. This is not to say that true dialogue would not be able to take place at the level it occurred in Steve's class, however, much more time would be needed to provide non-native English speakers in an English only classroom with enough support and practice to dialogue at the level of sophistication of native English speakers.

2. **Lack of Parental Support.** Many things in Steve's classroom, such as the homework program are dependent upon support by the parents in the home. Because the school site was heavily grounded in parent participation, parental support has always been strong in and outside of the classroom. However, just as Steve worked to develop connectedness between himself and his students, he did so with his students' parents. He sent weekly emails and letters home which kept the parents informed of what was going on in the classroom at all times. He held monthly parent meetings where the parents and he could

openly discuss issues. He also had "Family Fun Nights" where the students, their families and he would meet at night in the classroom and have parties or social gatherings. He also kept lines of communication with the parents through frequent conference and phone calls home, for not just typical "negative" things but also for positive things that went on in the classroom. Having channels of communication between parents and the teacher often facilitate parental support.

3. Institutional Support. Because Steve had the support of school administrators, he was given a lot of freedom in choosing text books to use and other "standards-based" curriculum that he deemed appropriate. Sadly, many schools do not give teachers this sort of liberty. Often, teachers feel "isolated" and frustrated when they try to implement postmodern practices in a *gemeinschaft* – based community. If that is the case, finding at least one other colleague on the school site for support is necessary. If support cannot be found in colleagues, often a progressive parent will serve just as strong a pillar as a "professional" teacher colleague.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations towards creating community in a classroom.

1. Treat all children with respect and dignity.

2. Enmesh students in dialogue, "every day and in every way."

3. Form "connectedness" with parents – they are great allies. Educating children is most successful when the home and school are interconnected and support each other.

4. Guide students towards self discovery. Students gain meaning through their own processes of doing and through their personal experience.

5. Appreciate, acknowledge and embraced diversity of ethnicities, languages, cultures as well as points of views, and abilities from all members of the class.

As a result of this research study, I have gained significant insight into the role that structure and communication take in classrooms. Dialogical community based classrooms seem chaotic and disorganized; however, I have come to realize that when successful, they are highly structured. It is within the structure of the classroom that autonomy, collaboration and dialogue flourish.

Prior to this research study, I had thought of "structure" as a remnant of modernity. However, structure does not always mean restrictions. Rather, structure is a set of guidelines that determines the direction. They do not spell out what every step will look like, but rather give a "blueprint" of what can be accomplished. I've also come to realize that teaching is culturally related. A teacher's personal values, norms or beliefs play a daunting role in what the culture of the classroom will be like. It is appropriate for a teacher to share these values, norms or beliefs with the children, for each child will also bring his or her own set into the classroom. However, the only way that these values, norms and beliefs that form classroom community can merge is under the grace of structure and dialogue.

EPILOGUE

Being in the Critical Research Academy has been a transformational learning experience. Through the courses that I took in the Critical Research Academy and throughout the process of conducting qualitative research, I have felt perturbations, frustrations, and elations. As a result of it all, I see myself differently as a teacher, researcher, and learner.

As a teacher, the Critical Research Academy has taught me to critically examine my surroundings, my symbolic behaviors and gestures, my relationships with others, and the language that I use in the classroom. Initially, the professors in the Critical Research Academy had me reflect upon my life as a learner. Though I enjoyed doing this, I wondered why my professors were so insistent on focusing on my past when I was supposed to be preparing for my future as an elementary school teacher. As the semester went on, I began to see how my experiences as a learner affected me as a teacher. I was encouraged to ask questions and critically analyze my world as I knew it. I felt uncertain and began to question everything. As I delved deeper into my past learning experiences, I began to see how they connected with my perspectives on teaching. During my student teaching, I thought about everything. I asked myself, "How can I teach this is another way?" "How could this be misinterpreted?" "In what way can I teach the content so that it is not misunderstood?" Through this, I realized that teaching was socially embedded. This new understanding strengthened my skills as a teacher and made me more cognizant of my students' needs in the classroom.

As a researcher, I was excited to understand how community came to existence in Steve's class. However, this inquiry proved to be more complex than I anticipated. I had expected to find the answer right away. At first, I thought it was his "Three Agreements." Then I realized that wasn't the *true* reason. As the data poured in and raced throughout my mind, I ruminated over other possibilities. I grappled with the mixed messages that the data revealed. Because qualitative research is messy and subjective, I felt uncomfortable. I was uncertain if I was collecting enough data, let alone, the "correct" data. I did not understand the data and became frustrated that I could not piece it together. Remembering how reflection had helped me in the first semester in the Critical Research Academy, I reflected upon the data as a whole. By doing this, I looked at not only what the data was telling me, but also the context in which it was told. For example, I began to listen to what Steve was saying to his students, not only in content, but in what specific words the messages were said and how it was being delivered. I then began to reorganize the data in various combinations. I took a step back and reflected again upon what the data was *really* telling me. Because I had stopped trying to manipulate the data and truly "listened" to it, the bits and pieces began to form a coherent picture.

As a result of this qualitative research process and taking courses in the Critical Research Academy I am not the same person that I was before. Throughout this experience, my patience and trust in myself and others has been tested. Now, I am comfortable with the uncertainty of there being no "right" answer. Instead, I value the process. I have also learned the importance of insistent questioning, critical analysis,

dialogue, and reflection in education. Because of this journey, I have come to realize that all things in life are interconnected and constantly changing. As teachers, we must continually re-evaluate our society, our schools, our students, and ourselves. This process results in a transformation of perspective which enables us to empower our students and ourselves.

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