

Rural Schooling in Georgia: The Experiences of a Minority Community Service
Organization Involved in Local School Decision-Making and Activities

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Education

Liberty University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

Cynthia Louise Altman Lowe

December 2009

Rural Schooling in Georgia: The Experiences of a Minority Community Service
Organization Involved in Local School Decision-Making and Activities

By Cynthia Louise Altman Lowe

December 2009

APPROVED:

COMMITTEE CHAIR

Clarence Holland, Ed.D.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Russell Brock, Ed.D.

Cherie Whitehurst, Ed.D.

ASSISTANT DEAN, ADVANCED PROGRAMS

Scott B. Watson, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Cynthia Louise Altman Lowe. RURAL SCHOOLING IN GEORGIA: THE EXPERIENCES OF A MINORITY COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZATION INVOLVED IN LOCAL SCHOOL DECISION-MAKING AND ACTIVITIES. (Under the direction of Dr. Clarence Holland) School of Education, December 2009.

This dissertation study was a descriptive case study of a minority community service organization whose members were actively involved in local school decision-making and activities in a rural Northeast Georgia community. Rural schools face unique challenges in light of current educational trends. To address the challenges, rural schools must learn to encourage, develop, and sustain effective collaborations with increasingly diverse social groups in order to capitalize on all available social, economic, and intellectual resources. The purpose of this study was to collect and examine the stories and experiences of members of a rural, minority community service organization who actively sought a role in school decision-making and activities in order to develop strategies to increase diverse community involvement in rural school systems. Six community organization members participated in two individual, semi-structured interviews and one semi-structured group discussion. The participants answered questions pertaining to their experiences, motivation and goals for school involvement, successes and failures, and any obstacles they faced. In addition, commonalities and differences were explored between the study organization and a parallel minority community service organization. The data revealed that organization members expressed a desire to serve as advocates for the community, a responsibility to improve the quality

of life in the community, and the belief that race continues to impact the opportunities available through schooling. However, the data also revealed obstacles to involvement that included distrust, racism, and limited access to opportunity. Strategies suggested by the data included effective communication and improved dissemination of information to all community groups, increased minority involvement in schools, recruitment and hiring of minority faculty, and increased collaboration between community and the school board.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank Eric, my husband, for sharing life with me. For understanding the missed family dinners, the late nights, and the years of tuition and classes all so I could pursue my goals. We made the sacrifices together and did this together.

To Will and Paiger, thank you both so much for the 12 years of your lives that you waited on me to come home from class, to finish a paper, to read an article. Thank you for your patience and understanding, not to mention your computer expertise. You are both by far your father's and my greatest accomplishments.

Next, I wish to thank my parents, Ronald and Linda Altman, for their unwavering example of commitment, sacrifice, and hard work. I could never say often enough what truly amazing people you both are. Thank you for your example of service to others---to your family, your community, and your country.

To my committee members, Dr. Holland, Dr. Brock, and Dr. Whitehurst, thank you for your time, contributions, and most importantly, encouragement. I asked each of you to collaborate with me on this dissertation because I saw much to admire in both your character and your professional example.

I also wish to thank the participants in my research study for their willingness to share their stories and experiences. Your support made this research possible.

To my co-workers, for all your support, help, and especially friendship, thanks so, so much.

Finally, to my peers and the School of Education faculty at Liberty University, thanks for the encouragement that sustained me through this process. Thank you for the clear vision of what schools should aspire to be for the coming generations.

CONTENTS

	APPROVAL PAGE.....	ii
	ABSTRACT.....	iii
Chapter		
1	INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.....	1
	General Background of the Study.....	1
	Statement of the Problem.....	4
	Guiding Questions.....	5
	Professional Significance of the Study.....	5
	Key Terminology.....	7
	Summary.....	9
2	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	10
	Introduction.....	10
	Conceptual Framework.....	10
	Critical Theory.....	12
	Constructivism.....	27
	Reforms and Trends in Education.....	28
	Constructivist Leadership.....	39
	Summary of Reforms and Trends in Education.....	40
	The Value of Family and Community Involvement.....	40
	Barriers to Family and Community Involvement.....	49

	Summary.....	55
3	METHODOLOGY.....	57
	Purpose.....	58
	Research Questions.....	58
	Research Context and Participants.....	59
	Qualifications as a Researcher.....	60
	Prior Approval and Planning.....	61
	Data Collection.....	62
	Data Analysis.....	64
	Validity.....	66
	Ethical Considerations.....	66
	Statement of Subjectivity.....	68
	Summary.....	70
4	THE FINDINGS.....	71
	Introduction.....	71
	The Study Community.....	72
	The Study School District.....	73
	The Study Minority Community Service Organizations.....	74
	Mission and Beliefs Statements.....	76
	Participants' Perceptions of the Current Quality of Schooling.....	86
	Participants' Perceptions of Community Involvement.....	92
	Research Question One.....	97

	Research Question Two.....	110
	Research Question Three.....	120
	Research Question Four.....	124
	Data Identified Barriers.....	125
	Data Supported Strategies for Removing Barriers.....	128
	Summary.....	130
5	SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION.....	131
	Restatement of the Problem.....	131
	Review of the Methodology.....	132
	Summary of the Findings.....	133
	Discussion of the Findings.....	136
	REFERENCES.....	143
	APPENDICES	
	Appendix A: Interview Guide 1.....	153
	Appendix B: Interview Guide 2.....	154
	Appendix C: Interview Guide 3.....	155
	Appendix D: Consent to Participate.....	156

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

As a teacher, parent, and community member of a small, rural area, the writer has a particular interest in the unique educational needs where she lives and works and other areas like it. Also, the writer feels it is imperative to look critically at the differentiation of opportunities available to rural students and the manner in which that might be impacted by the current social, political, and economic trends in education because, as Jimerson (2005) writes, “every student, in every locale, should have access to an excellent education, in his or her own community, supported by good public policy” (p. 218).

Since the 1964 “one man, one vote” political decision of *Reynolds v. Sims*, the current political power rests with the more populated, wealthy, urbanized districts. Because isolated rural districts generally have more trees and acres than people, the political status of these areas has been severely limited (Dayton, 1998, p. 143). The decision stripped the rural areas of much of their ability to self-determine their own local policies and the power to effect change in policy that might benefit the local community. The disempowerment of rural people has meant that rural schools often contend with mandated policy meant to address the needs of more urban or suburban areas (Arnold, 2005; Dayton, 1998; Feldmann, 2006; Nachtigal, 1994). Feldmann (2006) argues that “the paradigms of federal and state agencies and bureaucracies in conceptualizing the

nature of rural communities have often led to ill-fitting, standardized policy for agrarian schools. Local school control, which is passionately valued by many rural citizens, has been eroded by consolidation and other industrial templates for education” (p. 34).

According to Nachtigal (1994), “as the political influence of people living in rural areas has declined, so has their ability to determine what their children will be taught, by whom, and how. Most importantly, rural people have been silenced in the national conversation about the purposes of education” (p.161). As the standardization of curriculum and assessment dominates current educational policy, the importance of community building, place history, and local knowledge has been eclipsed. However, “these are places where rural communities have strong connections with local schools and local decision-making is highly valued” (Jimerson, 2005, p. 213). Furthermore, Theobald (1997) writes that the “celebration of urban industrial progress in the pages of our history books contributes indirectly to the stereotype of rural places, and therefore rural people as unimportant” (p. 62). “The idealized industrial, urban model of schooling and the outdated notion of social progress have resulted in circumstances for rural people that, if left unchecked, will limit the future for all of us” (Haas, 1990, p. 7). It is true that many allow rural areas to go quietly unnoticed; yet, “while the scale of the schools in rural areas is, on the whole, small compared to urban schools, the scope of the rural education enterprise is not. Forty-three percent of the nation’s public schools are rural...” (Beeson & Strange, 2003, p. 3). Without strengthening the schools and communities of rural places, while allowing them to disappear through neglect or subordination, a major foundation of the nation is being placed in severe jeopardy.

The Current State of Rural Education in Georgia

According to The Rural School and Community Trust (2008), 31.7% of Georgia's students, or 482,528 specifically, attend a rural school. Having the third largest rural school population in the nation, Georgia's schools contend with low socio-economic status, high English Language Learner populations, some of the nation's lowest educational attainment among rural adults, and the second worst graduation rate in the country. Yet, even with the third largest rural population in the country, Georgia's rural students actually attend schools that are 7.5 times larger than the national median and are the fourth largest in the nation.

Georgia's rural students are crammed into some of the largest consolidated schools in rural America. In addition, Georgia's rural poverty and low level of education among the state's adult population create an urgent need for community and policy action. However, "the focus on a global economy at the expense of the community economy, and the placement of fiscal soundness above community soundness, has encouraged the on-going disappearance of the small community school through district consolidation" (Nachtigal, 1994, p. 163). Not only would the preservation of the community school build relationships that encourage stakeholder and student affiliation and involvement with the school, but it would also capitalize on the strengths of the rural community, such as knowing and being known, a sense of place, and local control.

Why are rural school districts choosing to act in ways that are detrimental to the smaller rural school? Many of the current trends in education that directly impact school systems in Georgia discount the needs of the rural school system and community. By examining critically the current trends in education in Georgia and their impact on rural

schools and communities, community stakeholders in rural schools may be encouraged to collaborate and act collectively in order to save both rural school systems and communities from being swallowed up in an educational reform movement driven by the concerns of national and global economies and the needs of the larger, more influential urban areas.

Statement of the Problem

Rural school systems tend to be left out of the conversations about schooling needs because the communities lack political clout. Arnold (2005) stresses that “rural children and youth represent a substantial minority of U.S. students, yet the unique educational needs of rural communities have been largely ignored by the U.S. Department of Education”. In order for rural schools and communities to exert the control necessary to secure the schooling experiences for students that serve not only the students’, but also the communities’ interests, rural community members must become active in all facets of school policy-making and school system activities. However, as rural communities become increasingly more culturally and racially diverse and their populations more mobile, it becomes more necessary to seek out and encourage conversations and collaboration among groups that comprise these rural communities. Crites (2008) asserts that schools “can and do influence the level of parent and community participation in students’ education, but school administration must determine the most effective means of overcoming barriers to involvement” (p. 5). Schools have a responsibility to explore the motivations of those who are active in school system activities, as well as the obstacles they may encounter. In addition, by learning about the experiences of community members who are active in school system activities, rural

schools may overcome barriers to community involvement and engage diverse community groups to share in the dialogue about the most effective manner in which to educate all of the community's children.

Guiding Questions

Several questions will guide the research that will seek information that may increase community involvement in rural schools, encourage community involvement that reflects the increasingly diverse populations within rural communities, and ultimately, strengthen rural schools through collaboration and collective action. The questions formulated for this research project include:

1. What are the experiences of a minority community service organization's members as they are actively involved in a rural school system's policy and decision-making?
2. What can the stories of their experiences tell educational researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners about the purposes and school activities of the participants and the obstacles faced by the minority community members who seek a voice and collaboration with a Northeast Georgia rural school system?
3. What commonalities and differences emerge from interviews of members in a parallel community organization that are also involved in school system policy and decision-making?
4. What steps can rural school systems take to remove identified barriers to diverse community organization involvement in meaningful school policy and decision-making?

Professional Significance of the Study

Matthews (1996) posits that reclaiming the public schools would seem to be a responsibility that the public has to assume. Also, he argues that it is unlikely that schools will change unless citizens increase their capacity to band together to become active agents of support and change within their rural community and schools. The purpose of this study is to collect the stories of a minority community organization's members who assume an active role in the local rural school system's activities in an attempt to better understand the purposes and goals that drive active minority community members, the obstacles to school involvement they encounter, the successes and failures they face, and finally, the implications for school systems that desire increased minority community involvement in schools. By examining these stories, rural schools may better understand the manner in which to encourage and increase community involvement and thus benefit from collaboration with all stakeholders.

Furthermore, the researcher seeks to discover the stories of minority community members who are presently active in the school system. Because research literature that explores community organization involvement in rural school policy-making is essentially non-existent, this study, though bound by time and place, will begin the conversations about increasing minority community involvement in rural school policy-making. The study can certainly be situated among the other literature that examines school/parent/community collaborations (Epstein, 1987, 1995, 2002; Jordan, et al., 2002; Lareau, 2000; Million, 2003; Swap, 2003); however, its specificity of looking at community service

organization involvement in policy-making and school activities fills a significant gap in the existing literature, which tends to consider involvement at the school and classroom level rather than the system or political level. By conducting research that examines a minority community organization's collaboration with a local school system in matters of policy and decision-making, themes might emerge that inform educational stakeholders about the most beneficial and effective manner in which to provide schooling experiences that ensure equitable and successful outcomes for increasingly diverse rural communities.

Key Terms

For the purposes of this study:

- *Rural communities* include those towns with fewer than 2,500 citizens and unincorporated areas in non-metropolitan counties that have fewer than 50,000 citizens (Hobbs, 1994).
- *Community members* include all residents and those who work in areas surrounding a school system. Examples of community members in this study include local chicken and beef growers, blue collar workers, church members, civic organization members, bank employees, and local small restaurant owners.
- *Community service organizations* refer to those formally established and recognized groups of community members whose mission is to serve, represent, and support the surrounding community through various organized activities.

- *Home/school/community/collaboration* denote a partnership model of school reform
- *Collaborative relationships* recognize the importance of shared decision-making around community goals, needs, and the purposes of schooling. Furthermore, collaboration must be built on relationships that exhibit mutual trust and caring and provide opportunities through social interactions for those in the community to have their voices heard in these decisions (Bauch, 2002).
- *Rural schooling* includes those classroom and learning activities that occur through school sponsored events. Although this definition allows for learning opportunities that may involve a multiplicity of locations, teachers, and activities, the writer presents that it is limited by its centralization of the school as educator.
- *Rural education* recognizes that learners have teachers and learning experiences across numerous occasions and activities. If rural community members are to strengthen their communities and promote an equitable and adequate education for all of their children, then families, communities, and schools must embrace the idea of *rural schooling* as only one aspect of *rural education* and realize that learning encompasses a much greater breadth and depth than just schooling can provide.
- *Standardization* is used to discuss the set of required standards, skills, and knowledge established by local, state, and federal school policy used to evaluate and assess classroom achievement.

- *Consolidation* is the term used to denote the closing of smaller community schools in order to create a larger more centralized district school.

Summary

The benefits to schools and student learning by increased parent and community involvement and collaboration have certainly been identified in research literature (Crites, 2008; Epstein, 1987, 1995, 2002; Jordan, et al., 2002; Lareau, 2000; Million, 2003; Swap, 1993). However, the vast majority of that literature examines issues related to increasing involvement at the classroom and school level. There is a significant deficit of research exploring community involvement in school system policy and decision-making. Research that considers the current opportunities for and impact of minority community involvement on rural school systems specifically is absent, but necessary, if increasingly diverse rural communities are going to learn to communicate effectively and collaborate in ways that protect their schools and communities and secure a local control of schools that ensures the protection of a valued way of life and learning.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Education remains central to the American dream. Many people view it as the means of social mobility and social stability. To others schooling can seem an obstacle to overcome and difficult to navigate effectively. Critical theorists explore the power relations behind schooling and schools' place in a wider society. In this chapter, the writer will provide a brief history of the evolution of critical theories, an explanation of critical theory as it is applicable to education, and various views represented in critical educational theory, including critical race theory. Further, the writer will provide an explanation of social constructivism as it is relevant to educational leadership and community involvement. In addition, this review of literature will analyze the empirical research available that examines the trends in education, the current impact of the trends on rural schooling, the value of community involvement in schools, and the possible barriers to that involvement.

Conceptual Framework

As rural communities become more diverse and the populations more mobile, schools must seek innovative strategies to connect with all stakeholders. In addition, as the federal and state governments increasingly mandate policy for local school systems, rural communities and schools must become adept at acting collectively to exert the political power necessary to influence educational policy and decision-making and secure a quality and equitable education for all students. Furthermore, as federal policy

mandates often are not handed down with the necessary and appropriate funding, rural school systems, already struggling with a less than adequate tax base, must look for creative ways to meet the demands of the current trends in schooling. In order to capitalize on human and social capital within the rural community, school and community leaders must be willing to examine historical practices that may possibly limit community involvement of all social groups and to begin the conversations concerning possible strategies to encourage diverse community involvement in rural school decision-making.

This study is significant because it begins to examine the motivations and experiences of minority community service organization members who are actively involved in school decision-making in a rural school system. Though overlooked in educational research literature as an asset in rural school decision-making, community civic organizations represent active, collective, influential members of various social groups within a community. These community service organizations are often holders of economic, social, and cultural capital that could be shared with public schools, and these organizations possess the potential to effect change and progress in rural school systems.

In order to frame the study and provide the foundation upon which to situate this work, the writer will use the existing literature to provide an explanation of the theoretical perspectives through which to view the phenomena of diverse community involvement. In addition, the writer will examine the existing literature that addresses the impact of the current trends in education on rural schooling. Next, in order to address the needs of rural schools reacting to the current trends, the writer will review the existing literature on family and community involvement and the barriers that hinder it.

Finally, considering the gap that exists in educational research literature exploring community organization involvement in school decision-making, the writer created research questions that guide the study and examine the phenomena through the collected experiences of minority community organization members who are actively involved in school decision-making. By providing the opportunity for participants to tell their stories through an interview research design, the writer will collect data that will contribute to examination of diversity in community involvement and the possibilities that collaboration between schools and community organizations represents.

Critical Theory

History of Critical Theory

The term critical theory is generally associated with the group of German social theorists affiliated with the Institute for Social Research founded in Frankfurt in 1923. Among the most noted of these founding theorists are Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. The Frankfurt School believed that theory needed “to challenge the status quo and be made useful in the movements that would bring about radical and liberatory social change” (Calhoun & Karaganis, 2001, p. 179). The Frankfurt theorists assimilated a “commitment to identifying, explaining, and criticizing hierarchies of dominance and subordination, particularly those of an economic order, in a human society” (Audi, 1999, p. 540).

According to the Frankfurt School of theorists, the conditions of knowledge itself are not self-evident, but must be examined critically. According to Calhoun and Karaganis (2001), all human beings see the empirical world, but use different languages, concepts, and theories to understand it and to communicate that understanding. Critical

theory commits itself to examining the effects arising from the differences in seeing the world, judging the world, and communicating about the world.

In addition, critical theorists accept that reality is not simply a matter of surface appearances, but of unseen causes and conditions. In order to understand a society, one must attempt to understand the historical process through which social practices come. Why do certain societies create certain laws? How do dominant classes arise? It is central to critical theory that these occurrences are not seen as natural, but dependent on the time, place, and circumstances in which they occur. A key aspect of critical theory includes the tendency for the creations of human action and culture to appear to be natural and as though they were “products of nature instead of human choices” (Calhoun & Karaganis, 2001, p. 180).

Critical theory never stagnates, but continually seeks to improve upon existing theories. Theory develops out of the current context of time and place. Also, according to Calhoun and Karaganis (2001), by examining critically the theories, including their own, of the past and present, critical theorists build new theories, as well as explain the limits that could not be transcended by the previous ones. Critical theorists also believe that theory is shaped by an engagement with society that attempts to achieve a unity between theory and practice, known as praxis. It is action in society, not just some kind of academic study that is of societal importance. It is not enough to study the struggles of society structures; one must take action to improve those structures to better the lives of others.

To conclude, a critical approach to theory allows for hope. Through a critical examination of the structures of society and action to improve that society, critical

theorists believe that the living conditions of human beings can be improved, that in regard to schooling and education, the building and transforming of theory can lead to equal access to knowledge and opportunity. Critical theory has historically been and continues to be a theory of emancipation and hope that maintains a foundation of praxis, the crossroads of theory and practice. Recognizing that an unequal society is created out of the interaction between dominant and subordinate groups, critical theorists more importantly acknowledge that hope exists to improve upon current societal situations.

Traditional Educational Theory/ Critical Educational Theory

Schooling is a social structure in which social, political, and economic conflicts play themselves out on a daily basis. Many people continue to see schooling and to use schooling as a means to social and class mobility. Others never realize the potential that schooling is supposed to offer. Mass public schooling, along with private schooling, prepares students to assume a position in society. Often that position simply mirrors the position of the family of which the student is a part. Why are political and social classes so often seemingly reproduced? Weiler (1987) argues that critical educational theorists raise the question of the connection between schools, class interests, patriarchy, and race, in order to locate the individual struggle and action within larger social and economic forces.

Traditional educational theory generally accepts the existing arrangement of society as just. Schools are seen as institutions that distribute students into a fair society. If the school is perceived as failing, traditional theory assumes it is because schools are not reproducing the idealized United States society (Weiler, 1987). The able should rise

to the top and become leaders, while the less able or less motivated fail. Everyone finds his/her deserving place.

However, critical educational theorists view society with a critical eye. They do not place failure necessarily with individuals, but possibly with oppressive and exploitive societal structures. Critical educational theory also perceives the world as changeable. It is true that many critical educational theorists are more utopian than traditional educational theorists. However, Weiler (1987) asserts that defining aspects of critical educational theory include a moral imperative and an emphasis on empowerment and social transformation. Further, Chubbuck (2007) concurs that schools need “the level of dialogue and reflection that produces compassionate wisdom and, out of that wisdom, transformative action to alleviate human suffering. And we need teachers who are sufficiently grounded in an ethic of faith to support this work” (p. 262).

Critical Educational Theory

According to Wolcott, “theory is a way of asking (inquiring) that is guided by a reasonable answer” (2001, p. 81). Critical educational theory is a way of questioning the structures of schooling in a manner that seeks answers to improve the conditions under which students are educated, as well as the outcomes of schooling. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) in Crotty (1998), criticalists accept the basic assumptions that certain groups oppress subordinate groups through cultural, societal, economic, and political practices. In a given society, certain groups establish the accepted rules of society. Because the dominant group also maintains control of the political practices of the society, they may establish the value placed on particular knowledge and behaviors and the means for assessing the holders of that knowledge. In so doing, the dominant

group creates social, political, and economic practices that serve their own interests and encourage the reproduction of the current structures of that society.

Further, Anyon (1981) posits that critical educational theorists believe the educational opportunities afforded to different social groups reinforce the existing structures that support the dominant group. For example, through the use of curriculum, ability grouping, and methodology, students are divided by the dominant cultural group's view of their potential, a view often reflective of the student's social status. In addition, the objectives of schooling are frequently distinctly different based on the status of the school population. Working class populations often receive an education curriculum that supports the behavior development of reliable workers, while creative thinking and independent abilities are encouraged to a greater extent as the social status of the school increases, thereby preparing those students for higher education and professional positions in society.

To continue, critical educational theorists are concerned with the reproduction and production of class through schooling within a society (Weiler, 1987). Reproduction theory is concerned with the processes through which existing social structures maintain and reproduce themselves. Many critical theorists (Anyon; 1981; Bourdieu, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1975; Freire, 1970) agree that students are shaped by their school experiences to accept a class position and to reproduce existing power and economic relationships. Weiler (1987) also asserts that the valued knowledge of schools is the cultural knowledge of the dominant class. Dominance through social and cultural control, known as hegemony, allows the dominant classes to reproduce their dominance and to seem naturally deserving of that status. Therefore, students of this dominant class appear

more capable because they already understand what knowledge and behaviors are valued and are able to maintain their status.

Critical educational theorists also believe that unequal educational opportunities for the classes reproduce these classes. The reproduction of unequal class structures can in part be attributed to the structures of the educational institutions and the manner in which these institutions serve different social classes. However, reproduction theory has been criticized for viewing individuals, both students and teachers, as passive participants. The theory fails to acknowledge the active resistance of human beings, known as agency, to the structures of schooling (Weiler, 1987).

Production theory, however, does not view individuals as passive receivers of class structures. It considers the individual's own agency and resistance and the opportunity for change in the existing social structures (Anyon, 1981; Gramsci, 1971; Weiler, 1987). Gramsci's (1971) thought centers on a concern for the myriad ways in which dominant classes in any society impose their own views on the subordinate classes and the possible ways for the oppressed to oppose existing structures and change them. Because Gramsci valued the awareness of individuals, he saw tremendous potential in schooling to provide an emancipatory education. According to Weiler (1987), it is this insistence that individuals are not passive receivers of the status quo and that learning is not simply mechanical that creates the view of schooling as a site of production of class and social structures. It is also the recognition of the human potential to affect both society and the restraints of hegemonic practices that provides hope for the future and continual improvement of schooling and society.

Viewpoints within Critical Educational Theory

Critical educational theorists concern themselves with the inequalities of society and the effects of this inequality on opportunity and access for individuals. The concepts of subordination and oppression by dominant social groups limit the ability of individuals to transcend their recognized place in a stratified society. Critical educational theorists explore the manner in which concepts such as social class and culture, gender, economics, and race play out in the social setting of schools. According to LeCompte, Millroy, and Preissle (1991):

Education does not stand alone, a neutral instrumentality somehow above the ideological conflicts of society. Rather, it is deeply implicated in the formation of the unequal cultural, economic, and political relations that dominate our society. Education has been a major arena in which dominance is reproduced and contested, in which hegemony is partly formed and partly fractured in the creation of the common sense of the people (p. 509).

This section of the paper will examine the diverse sub-theories in critical educational theory relevant to the purposes of this study.

Critical educational theory and social, economic, and cultural class.

To begin, certain theorists accept that social class and culture allow certain dominant groups to more fully manipulate the schooling experience than other marginalized groups, allowing for the accumulation of more cultural capital (Anyon, 1995; Bourdieu, 1989; Carspecken & Apple, 1993; Swartz, 1997; Weiler, 1987). Schools offer the primary institutional setting for the production, transmission, and accumulation of the various forms of cultural capital, the knowledge and modes of thought that

characterize different classes and groups (Bourdieu, 1989; Swartz, 1997). Although public schools are intended to alleviate social and economic inequality by equalizing opportunity and access, in fact public schools reinforce the existing social relationships of a society. First, Swartz (1997) argues that schools not only transmit technical knowledge and skills, schools also socialize individuals into a particular cultural tradition, performing a cultural reproduction function. The students who are members of the dominant social and cultural groups have been prepared to demonstrate the accepted behaviors and perform the cognitive tasks that signify attainment of the goals of public schools. Upon entering schools, individuals become stratified partially based on the knowledge and practices of their social and cultural groups. Thus, schools also perform a cultural reproduction and legitimating function. By deeming those behaviors and practices demonstrated by the dominant class and cultural group to be the most sought after and developed, schools create an idea that differences in achievement among classes and cultural groups are natural and not reflective of possible inequalities of the school structure. Gintis (1998) posits that “education is an institution for socializing youth into the dominant social structure. You can’t depend on schools to create an equal society” (p. 120).

However, in addition to the reproduction function of schools (Bourdieu, 1989; Bowles & Gintis, 1975; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Swartz, 1997), other critical theorists recognize the ability of individuals to affect their social and class position. Critical of the view of students and teachers as passive parts of the process of reproduction, production theorists are concerned with the ways in which individuals and classes assert their own experiences and resist the ideological and material forces imposed upon them in a variety

of settings (Weiler, 1987). Central to production theory is the “concern with the various ways in which the dominant classes in any society impose their own conception of reality on all subordinate classes in any society, and the possible ways in which the oppressed can create alternative cultural and political institutions to establish their own understanding of oppression in order to oppose and change it” (Weiler, 1989, p. 13). Known as hegemony by Gramsci (1971), the worldview accepted by the dominant classes and social groups is used to marginalize subordinate groups in order to maintain the dominant group’s position in society. However, Weiler also asserts that through counter-hegemonic action it is possible for subordinate groups to resist through their own agency. However, the forces of hegemony and agency exist in continual struggle among social classes and cultural groups, with marginalization and resistance playing out in schooling, economics, and politics.

In addition to the concepts of group and individual hegemony and resistance, Apple (1984) asserts that it is necessary to look beyond the actions of groups and examine why the institution did what it did in ways that went beyond these individuals’ actions. It is necessary to analyze the institution itself and the connections it has to other powerful social agencies generating the dominant rules and practices of educators’ lives. The institution itself plays a role in creating and recreating the future opportunities of the students. Schools reflect the needs of a society and the global economy. By stratifying individuals into groups based on their abilities determined by the dominant groups, the needs of an industrial society will be met. Those students demonstrating more acceptable knowledge and behaviors will have access to higher education and entrance into managerial and professional positions. Likewise, students having the most difficulty

acquiring those abilities and social behaviors, or resisting adopting those abilities and behaviors, will be relegated to the lowest status jobs in society. The masses in the middle will provide the largest group of skilled workforce, having been trained through schooling to exhibit those behaviors necessary to the industrial workforce, such as punctuality, attention to detail, and carrying out orders. Apple (1984) stresses that:

Schools are designed to not only teach the knowledge required by our society, but are organized as well in such a way that they ultimately assist in the production of the technical/administrative knowledge required among other things to expand markets, control production, labor, and people, engage in the basic and applied research needed by industry, and create widespread artificial needs among the population (p. 22).

Thus, schools serve to preserve the need for production and consumption. This cultural capital tends to be controlled by and serve the interests of the most powerful groups, uniting cultural capital, or lack of it, with the economic capital of the individual and society. The understandings of the nature of power and cultural capital provide a context in which to question the role of institutions in perpetuating an unequal society.

Institutions are under enormous stress to perform vital cultural reproduction functions for the larger economy, and by looking solely upon the individual student or teacher to impart blame, one fails to recognize the much larger role of the institution itself (Carspecken & Apple, 1992).

Apple (1995) further discusses the correspondence between what industry needs in regard to cultural capital and the ideology of workers to what is being taught in schools. Although the curriculum may appear fundamentally the same between schools,

the hidden social and cultural curriculum (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1995) taught to different class children ultimately determines their place in the workforce. However, even in light of the hidden curriculum, Apple cautions against accepting a simple reproduction theory of social class. Just as he recognizes the agency of people in adapting their own situations in schools, he also sees resistance in the current and future workplace.

Contrary to the simple model of social reproduction, Apple (1984) argues that the educational system does not produce a mirror image of what has always been. In light of the hidden social and cultural curriculum taught there and the increasing control by economic and political forces, the exceptions must be attributed to individuals' own resistance. Apple stresses that to accept the basic explanation that workers simply accept their loss of control and job creativity would fail to acknowledge the various ways pacing and production are managed by worker resistance and agency. If workers are not easily conforming to the demands of the workplace, then possibly neither are teachers mindlessly conforming to the management ideologies encroaching upon schools. Therein lays the possibility for transformation. As pressure rises to serve industry and economy through schooling, the stress could lead to a mobilization of educators and students toward transforming those limits that bind classes.

Apple (1984) further posits that for real transformation to take place events must begin to happen. First, the true history of the worker and labor traditions must be recaptured and legitimated. Internal labor forces must be educated about the increasing control of capital, cultural, political, and economic democracy, and especially alternatives to current political and economic structures. Also, Apple points out that scholarship needs to be done on the real histories of schooling, and models of teaching must be

developed which attempt to reduce the bridge between mental and manual labor. Of course group communication is necessary. Working class parents and workers groups must be included in the formulation of the proposals and the criticisms of the current system. In this way, a social commitment is made, and the teacher, community, and students learn and create knowledge together.

Critical race theory.

Critical educational theorists also recognize the influences of race on education. Bartlett, McKinley, & Brayboy (2006) argue that “race has been and continues to be significant in matters of schooling. Popular, public discourses and academic discourses reflect continuously on the racial achievement gap in schooling...” (p. 361). The impact of race on educational achievement is under theorized (Delpit, 1995; Fordham, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Although many studies explore the effects of social class and gender, race alone matters as well. To begin, Ladson-Billings and Tate include three propositions upon which to base their discussions of social inequity and school inequity. They are:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property rights creates a tool through which one can understand social and school inequity (1995, pg. 48).

To expand, Ladson-Billings and Tate propose that although many studies explore the effects of social class and gender, race alone matters as well. Holding constant for gender and economic level, middle-class African Americans still do not achieve at the

rate of white students. Issues of gender and class do not alone account for the extremely high rates of school dropout, suspension, expulsion, and failure among males of color.

Further, U.S. society is based on property rights. The proposition is best explicated by situating it within the context of critical race theory. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) write that a country as the U.S., which was built on the rights guaranteed to property owners, has not been able to really address individual rights. The founding fathers, though they discussed individual rights, actually had no understanding of rights other than those of property rights. This continues to be central to the continuation of Black disadvantages and deprivations. Even though much work has been done to secure individual rights and civil rights, the benefits continue to accrue mainly for property owners.

In addition, the voices of the oppressed are necessary to objectively judge the success of U.S. schools. People of color are routinely silenced, even in university and research settings. Data is analyzed that constructs realities in ways that benefit the dominant and maintain their privilege (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Without the authentic voice of people of color, it is doubtful that anything useful will be known about education.

Critical race theory also recognizes the concept of whiteness. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), students are forced to adhere to perceived white norms and sanctioned cultural practices. Also, whiteness allows for specific social, cultural, economic, and political privileges. Because whiteness confers higher economic and social status, predominantly white schools provide the students with more resources, thus more opportunities. Reputation and status are also conferred upon white students,

programs, and schools. To label something black is to lower its status. Last, the authors present that whiteness gives the right to exclude. It at one time allowed the exclusion of minority schooling altogether. Then, separate schools were created. However, presently gifted programs, AP classes, and honors programs continue to exclude most students of color.

Finally, criticism has been directed at the current concept of multicultural education. The multicultural paradigm encourages assimilation through the reduction of prejudice. However, multicultural education programs have been trivialized to a celebration of folktales and food, nothing substantial. More importantly, multiculturalism is useless without a radical change in the status quo. It should not be solely about education and acceptance, but reform and equality for all races (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Also framing their arguments with a critical race perspective, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argue that black students do poorly in school because they experience ambivalence in regard to effort and success in school. The dominant culture has historically felt that black Americans were not capable of intellectual achievement and academic success; thus, black Americans began believing in their own inadequacies. Academic achievement became a white American prerogative. Black Americans discourage others in their community, even unconsciously, from emulating white Americans in academic pursuits and “acting white” (pg. 177).

Furthermore, the ecological structure of black Americans has provided substandard schooling that has been controlled by white Americans. Distrust develops from the substandard schooling making it difficult for black Americans to believe what

the schools say or to act within the school norms. Also, the history of compulsory ignorance for black Americans has meant a lack of a legacy in educational achievement. The resistant behaviors demonstrated by many black Americans in schools are coping skills that, in fact, perpetuate the failure of black Americans. Finally, the job ceiling imposed on black Americans also creates frustrations with the educational system for not being able to ensure employment for those black Americans who succeed in school (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

In addition to social forces affecting black students, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) write that the manner in which black students respond to other black students who are trying to make it is also important to determining academic success. Through their case study at Capital High, the authors concluded that membership in a fictive kinship and an oppositional process make it difficult for students to accept school practices and to cross cultural boundaries. Although high-achieving students do not identify with the fictive kinship system, they must learn strategies to camouflage their academic pursuits. These might include preoccupation with sports, associating with “hoodlums”, and/or downplaying their abilities.

To conclude, the first and critically important change must occur in the existing structures of opportunities. Just as Anyon (1985) found in her own studies of social class, race, and education, educational reform has to begin with social reformation. Without liberating the oppressed groups, the school structure itself, reflecting the structure of our society, is a powerful, limiting force. However, teachers are in a position to create, or recreate, society through the practices within the classroom. According to Luttrell (1996), public schools are the central place where individuals create a sense of

themselves as members of the “somebodies” or the “nobodies” (p. 97). Too many students find schooling nearly impossible to navigate and themselves shut out of opportunity and social mobility, while others are limiting their chances at upward mobility by raging at the schooling structures that confine them. Secondly, critical race theorists state that schools and the black communities must recognize the influence of the fictive kinship system and the burden of acting white. The schools must provide counseling and reinforce black identity in ways compatible with academic pursuit. Also, the black community must recognize and celebrate academic achievement. The community members must provide strong evidence that they appreciate and value educational pursuit and achievement, just as they currently do with sports and entertainment. Finally, it is a daunting, but necessary, task to determine the myriad causes of inequity in education. Gillborn (2005) asserts that “critical scholars can raise new questions, challenge so-called ‘commonsense’ and disrupt the assumptions that currently shape education (in policy and practice)” (p. 497). It is the intersection of many social constructs that influence vast numbers of students, teachers, and the schooling structure. The stratification of class societies and inequality of access to educational opportunity and benefits continue to be problematic within societies.

Constructivism

Constructivism provides a foundational perspective for this literature analysis and study. Constructivist theory stresses the individual’s role in gaining knowledge and understanding. Through personal experiences and interactions, individuals create and recreate their own knowledge. Thus, knowledge is created and limited by the individual’s experiences. However, the ability to see or not to see interactions and experiences in

certain ways is significantly influenced by social relationships and culture. The words used to discuss interactions and experiences, as well as the interpretation of experiences, are created through accepted structures and practices of the culture in which an individual is immersed. In addition, the words used to articulate this knowledge, as well as the acceptability of new ideas are largely determined by the individual's cultural affiliation and community values.

The key idea that sets constructivism apart from the other theories of cognition was launched about sixty years ago by Jean Piaget (von Glaserfeld, 1996). Piaget theorized that knowledge comes neither from the subject nor the object, but from the unity of the two (Piaget & Inhelder in Brooks & Brooks, 1993). It seems like such a simple proposition: individuals construct their own understandings of the world in which they live; yet, it is a powerful statement. It refutes the banking system of education where education is deposited in the individual and places the acquisition of knowledge within the ability of the individual. Marlowe and Page (1998) present that constructivism rests on four major tenets:

- Individuals learn more when they are actively engaged in their own learning.
- By investigating and discovering for themselves, by creating and recreating knowledge, and by interacting with the environment, individuals build their own knowledge structures.
- Learning actively leads to an ability to think critically and to solve problems.
- Through an active approach to learning, students learn content and process at the same time (p. 16).

Standardization of Curriculum and Testing

Education has become a crucial set of institutions through which the state attempts to produce, reproduce, distribute, and change the symbolic resources, the very consciousness of society (Apple, 1993; Schaeffer, 2005 & Schultz, 2002). This role makes the current movement toward standardization even more conflicting. With the standardization of school practices and knowledge, schools encourage students to accept a homogenized version of very diverse knowledge and possibly very questionable and conflicted “truths”. Smyth (2008) asserts that the value of accountability is at the heart of the plan, but one size cannot be forced on every school in every district in every state” (p. 137). Furthermore, according to Apple (1996), in the current educational movement, “educational interests are not in increasing the life chances of women, people of color, or labor. Rather the current educational movement aims at providing the educational conditions believed to be necessary both for increasing international competition, profit, and a position in the global economy” (p. 66).

However, these reform aims do not take into account the inequalities that exist in economic, social, and political structures. Beyond the standardization of curriculum and assessment, opportunity and resources must somehow be made standard as well. Schools that serve poor students, rural students, and students of color are unlikely to have access to resources, and students will have little or no opportunity to learn despite the attempt to mandate educational standards (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Also, many school reforms, including standardization, have little if anything to do with many students and the cultural and economic realities of the students’ lives, and in part because of the socio-cultural inappropriateness of standardized curriculum, the reforms actually impede

progress (Anyon, 1995). Policy makers must recognize the inherent flaws in judging diverse students in a standard manner. As long as testing takes place in an oppressive situation and measures curriculum that is culturally and linguistically unsuited to students, scores will fail to recognize the true abilities of marginalized groups and falsely support the superiority of the dominant societal group (Anyon, 1995). If standardization is an unavoidable product of the current trends in education, then policy makers must make a concerted effort to include the ways of knowing and assessing that are reflective of a community of diverse families and students.

Educational Policy

Since the 1964 “one man, one vote” political decision of *Reynolds v. Sims*, the current political policy power rests with the more populated, wealthy, urbanized districts. Because isolated rural districts generally have more trees and acres than people, the political status of these areas was severely limited (Dayton, 1998). This decision stripped the rural areas of much of their ability to self-determine their own local policies and their power to effect change in policy that might benefit their own communities. The disempowerment of rural people has meant that rural schools must contend with mandated policy meant to address then needs of more urban and suburban areas.

According to Nachtigal, “as the political influence of people living in rural areas has declined, so has their ability to determine what their children will be taught, by whom, and how. Most importantly, rural people have been silenced in the national conversation about the purposes of education” (Nachtigal, 1994, p. 161). As the aforementioned standardization of curriculum and assessment dominates current educational policy, the importance of community building, place history, and local

knowledge has been eclipsed. Also, Theobald writes that the “celebration of urban industrial progress in the pages of our history books contributes indirectly to the stereotype of rural places, and therefore rural people, as unimportant” (Theobald, 1997, p. 62). Furthermore, “the idealized industrial, urban model of schooling and the outdated notion of social progress have resulted in circumstances for rural people that, if left unchecked, will limit the future for all of us” (Haas, 1990, p. 7). Without strengthening the schools and communities of rural places, while allowing them to disappear through neglect and subordination, a major foundation of the nation is being placed in severe jeopardy.

Furthermore, Pittman, McGinty, and Gerstl-Pepin (1999) posit that the specific needs of rural communities assume distinctly secondary importance under the rubric of national economic development. The movement toward providing workers for the new global economy has created a new structure of control in educational policy. Rural influence, however, continues to be silenced. For reasons such as political strength, economic interests, and more vocal representation, urban interests have assumed the forefront of educational priority and “rural school concerns with fostering and protecting the surrounding communities are strikingly absent and ignored from the vantage that schools serve to develop the national economy” (Theobald, 1997, p. 96). The entities now directing much of educational reform include corporate interests, textbook companies, special interest groups, the media, and a now reform-minded federal government.

According to Stephens (1994), the coalition of the nation’s governors with a sitting United States President has created a centerpiece of educational policy for virtually all states in the coming years and has shaped a strong federal presence in all

educational arenas. This new, virtually unstoppable partnership, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) moves the federal government out of the role of educational rights protector to the creator of national educational policy; yet, “NCLB sets up many rural schools for failure [and] will instigate a series of negative consequences that ultimately will decrease educational opportunity for rural children” (Jimerson, 2005, p. 217). Without adequate political representation in policy decisions, rural interests will continue to be subordinated to national interests, thereby allowing more industrialized urban centers to take center stage. Rural inhabitants lose faith in their ability to effect relevant change as they see the “reality that their elected school board member has virtually no control over the educational system that has been prescribed by others through legislation, bargaining, state policies, and judicial precedent” (Seal & Harmon, 1995, p. 122). The lack of perceived power perpetuates the inability of rural areas to network and lead initiatives to create reform; thus most reform efforts in rural areas continue to be “improvement done *to* (or more generously, *for*) families, students, teachers, and communities, rather than *by* them” (Sher, 1995, p. 145). Additionally, Jimerson (2005) asserts that rural demographics and NCLB mandates and injustices disable rural schools from providing any sense of a quality education, at least as defined by NCLB. Rural areas, in order to create the schools that prepare rural youth for positive living based on the community’s prescribed principles and culture, must seek ways in which to exert control over the policy, curriculum, and educational funding.

Educational Funding

To continue, the lack of political power with which rural communities contend allows for the unequal disbursement of educational funding between rural and more

industrialized areas. During this time of educational budget cutting, “rural schools, like many urban schools, face serious funding challenges aggravated by this combination of limited educational resources and increased educational needs” (Dayton, 1998, p. 142). Bryant (2007) posits that “the crisis in education is most apparent in the simple issue of how a school is to be funded. The disparity in the amount of money available to students of different backgrounds and in different school settings is an issue that has been discussed frequently in academia and our government” (p. 7). Through the larger issue of political disempowerment, rural areas find the funding challenges to be intensified by the political competition for the growing scarcity of educational funding and the limited ability of rural areas to raise adequate funds through taxation.

In many people’s minds the portrait of rural areas tends to be highly idealized. Pictures of community picnics, country roads, front porch visits, and farm animals cloud the true picture of most rural areas. Although parts of the above portrait are true strengths of many rural communities, Dayton writes that “many rural areas suffer from limited employment opportunities, income lag, underdevelopment of human resources, inadequate infrastructure, a continuing financial crisis in agriculture, a weakening political base, and population loss” (Dayton, 1998, p. 145). However, Schwartz & Sherman (1995) posit that many rural schools and communities, “lying well beyond the media spotlight and largely ‘out of sight, out of mind’ to most big-time school reformers and policy-makers” (p. 144) do not receive the attention that more visible urban areas secure. Because of their greater visibility, urban areas have been more able to coordinate lobby for funding and have been more successful at having urban needs heard. Rural communities, by definition, are composed of individuals who are “acculturated to be

independent, ‘rugged individualists’ – much more comfortable dealing with problems face-to-face in a one-on-one basis than in acting collectively to advocate for their interests” (Nachtigal, 1994, p. 163).

Because of the inequities and the current drive by policy makers to mandate educational reform without increased funding, school districts have to rely on local taxation for schooling expenditures. In the case of *Edgewood V. Kirby* in 1989, the funding advantages of wealthier districts were found to be “so significant that wealthier schools may have as much as 700 times more taxable wealth and receive as much as 10 times the per pupil revenues available to poorer schools” (Dayton, 1998, p. 142). In addition, rural schools face limited property tax bases. Much of the land in rural areas is made up of farmland and unimproved timberland. Also, as rural community members age, communities and schools must contend with decreasing personal wealth and a population much less interested in school improvements and reform efforts. However, rural areas have attempted to raise revenue through local sales tax programs, but according to Dayton, local sales tax programs increase the inequities of funding as “centers of commerce increasingly move from smaller communities to larger metropolitan areas” (Dayton, 1998, p. 145). The move of commerce to more urban areas takes the sales tax funding along with it. More metropolitan areas stand to benefit at the demise of rural commerce and communities.

However, as the Annenberg Rural Challenge (1999) asserts, sometimes performing to higher standards will cost more. Some areas will require more funding than others in order to raise performance levels, and every child has the right to equal access of opportunity; yet, “rural schools are having extreme difficulty meeting the bare

minimum needs of their students, and ...these schools have been stretched well beyond their ability to function” (Bryant, 2007, p. 8). Rural areas must collectively voice the costs of reform and demand that state government use its legitimate authority to provide equal educational opportunity for every child.

Outward Migration

As economic trends facilitate the flight of opportunities and resources from rural communities, the migration of the youth from these rural communities to more urban areas continues as well. Although two of the strengths of rural areas are the value of relationships and the commitment to community, they are being placed in serious jeopardy by the need for young people to seek opportunities elsewhere. The depiction of rural areas as second best in the media, as well as the “limited range and number of educational and career opportunities in rural areas [are] the principal factor[s] thought to make rural adolescents face the conflict of leaving home to realize their aspirations” (Hektner, 1995, p. 3).

First, current economic trends have brought about the restructuring of agriculture, manufacturing, and mining sectors leading inevitably to the unemployment of rural residents. In addition, the changes in the economic underpinnings of rural America have reduced the incomes of those rural residents able to find work. The outward migration from rural to urban areas in order to secure gainful employment robs rural communities of its residents, either by “the more educated leaving for larger cities, or by students leaving to attend college or to work in urbanized areas” (Khattri, Riley, & Kane, 1997, p. 81). The flight of the most educated, promising youth leaves behind a community that continues to struggle with poverty and lack of resources, but additionally faces the

struggle without certain knowledgeable members who might have made a positive contribution toward leading the community in directions that promote the community's well-being.

Furthermore, as many of the educated and talented community members migrate to larger urban areas, community resources migrate as well. The movement of resources and commerce from rural to urban settings continues the destruction of rural communities. First, rural families must travel to shop in other areas. The money spent then becomes part of the local sales tax of metropolitan districts. As sales tax initiatives to fund education increase, metropolitan areas reap the benefits of the rural communities' misfortune. Also, as local residents shop outside of their own communities, local businesses will inevitably fail. These business failures further limit the property and sales tax base of rural school districts. Local school districts then cannot provide adequate funding, so local boards raise the tax rates to compensate. The cyclic result of the property tax increase discourages new industry from developing in rural areas and rural poverty is perpetuated. Without local industry to provide employment that provides a living wage, residents must, even reluctantly, seek opportunities elsewhere. According to Khattri, Riley, & Kane (1997) rural areas with persistent poverty have fewer indigenous organizations representing local interests than wealthier areas. Where community resources do exist in poorer rural communities, resources have usually originated in the larger society and are controlled by external interest.

Consolidation

Furthermore, as economic trends, outward migration of rural members, and lack of services continue to deplete rural communities, school districts explore educational

reforms that might provide for quality educational opportunities for its members in spite of the current difficulties. The widely implemented consolidation of small local schools into larger district schools faces a controversial acceptance.

Few public policy issues touch the heart of a community more than the loss of the public school through reorganization or consolidation of school districts. In rural areas the closing of the local schools can mark the beginning of the disappearance of the community as the social center. Often economic and political atrophy follow. (Ward & Rink, 1992, p. 11).

Although many rural states feel that consolidation is the only method for poor rural school districts to provide the breadth of educational classes required by accountability standards, the economic resources to increase per student spending, and the opportunity to provide more adequate educational facilities, it is only recently that the enormous cost of consolidation is being recognized. DeYoung writes that “many places that once provided schooling no longer do so; they have been improved out of existence” (1991, p. 121). Mistakenly, the consolidation movement encompasses the idea that the circumstances of education must be “moved out of the hands of the people themselves and into the hands of the experts” (Theobald, 1997, p. 106-107). The suggested philosophy that underpinned the consolidation movement that “bigger is better” was a defining characteristic of the twentieth century and continues to be the driving idea of the twenty-first as well.

However, consolidation has only succeeded at satisfying the economic interest of various parties. Feldman (2006) posits that rural communities have “in a sense relinquished a certain amount of individual identity and political autonomy in exchange

for a variable amount of monetary gain” (p. 33). In the current era, “economic development has become an ideological component of our daily lives--an ideology that clearly benefits those in economic and political control of society and subordinates the alternative social interest less associated with economic growth” (DeYoung & Howley, 1990, p. 84). There has been a lack of value placed on other strengths of rural communities such as “a fond identification with a certain place, close ties with people, and a shared history of experience and values” (Howley, Harmon, & Leopold, 1996, p.151). Consolidated schools are representative of the devaluation of rural interest and may only be better in the sense that they serve as useful tools for national and international growth. According to Howley (1993), the “increased litigation over consolidation reflects new efforts by states to cut costs from education budgets” (p. 76) in order to increase fiscal efficiency promoted by the industrial model of schooling. However, the economic growth that consolidation purportedly supports trickles down to rural communities, as the commerce and employment opportunities continue to migrate to more metropolitan areas.

Furthermore, at a time when education policy makers are beginning to develop programs to address the need for “community” in larger consolidated schools, consolidation continues to destroy actual schools that promote true community embeddedness. Sher posits that “in certain parts of metropolitan America such innovations as small ‘schools-within-schools’, decentralization, school/community partnerships” are being embraced (1995, p.143). However, in many rural areas where many of the new “community innovations” already exist naturally, communities are still being coerced into accepting consolidation into larger and larger schools for economic

benefits. “The combination of professional expertise, state authority, and business influence has proven sufficient to overcome widespread local resistance to reorganization” (Howley, 1993, p. 80). And with the silencing of local resistance, the very strengths of rural education, such as a value of people, the importance of collective history, and the shared sense of place are lost to the people of rural communities along with the unifying force of the community school.

Constructivist Leadership

Rural areas, in order to create the schools that prepare their youth for positive living in their own communities, must seek ways in which to create collective action to exert control over policy, curriculum, and educational funding. Bauch (2002) asserts that this collaboration develops through constructivist leadership. First, constructivist leaders are able to deconstruct old myths and assumptions and construct new visions and goals through conversation. Further, constructivist leaders are flexible and able to consider the views of others. Finally, constructivist leadership is driven by a sense of moral purpose, not by institutional constraints and bureaucracies. The leaders of rural communities must recognize the centrality of families’ and the community’s needs to schooling purposes, seek the views of these community members, and through constructivist leadership collaborate on the most effective means for protecting and preserving their community and ideals. Without the active pursuit of family and community views, the “lines of conflict will likely overlap the lines of race and class, increasing the potential for politically crippling polarization” (Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999, p. 164). It has reached a time of concern for the viability and survival of rural schools if community members fail to collectively demand that school organizations be returned to the control

of a unified community, committed to reflecting the community's core principles and values, and given the power to educate rural children in the manner that considers the community's needs.

Summary of Reforms and Trends in Education

By looking at the current state of rural education in Georgia, educational professionals and community members can see that rural school stakeholders must become involved in the politics of school reform. As federal government has redefined its role in state education from protecting rights to mandating policy and state governments have committed to standardizing curriculum and assessments in order to receive federal funding, the voice and control of less influential rural areas has diminished to the point that rural schools and communities are being silenced in the conversation about school reform and improvement. In order to preserve community schools, secure future local opportunities for rural residents, and protect valued ways of life, rural community members must become involved in local, state, and national educational policy development. Only through collective action can the power necessary to force recognition of rural needs be exerted. Only through the future examination of the experiences of rural community and school stakeholders who become involved in local, state and national policy activities can rural school leadership work collaboratively and respectfully with diverse community members in order to effectively preserve their schools, their communities, their identity, and their valued ways of life.

The Value of Family and Community Involvement

The following section of this paper reviews the existing literature with regard to family and community involvement. Through the analysis of the literature it becomes

apparent that there is scant research in the area of true community organization involvement in school policy and decision making. The existing studies view the community as an economic partner and resource support for the school or simply interchangeably with families. However, through a review of the literature that addresses community and family involvement, issues can be gleaned that speak to the potential and difficulties of community involvement in policy and decision-making.

Students have many teachers throughout the day in youth organizations, families, and school classrooms (Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001). Likewise, many people outside of the classroom have influence over the educational experiences of the students inside. In fact, the “recent educational initiatives fail to recognize the important dilemma that today’s schools cannot do it alone. Students’ opportunities to learn and, by extension, teachers’ opportunities to teach in contemporary America require that schools and communities join in some new—and some old—ways” (Honig et al., p. 999). A joint effort on the part of schools and families is especially vital to rural communities that are striving to protect their unique ways of living. Nitzberg (2005) writes that “community building focuses on the capacity and empowerment of the [community] residents to identify and assess opportunities and affect change. It also focuses on the development of individual leadership” (p. 8). Just as one of the most significant difficulties of rural communities is the fracture caused by the flight of their youth to more metropolitan areas, the unification around a common purpose and collaboration of rural membership could provide the power needed to affect support for rural initiatives.

How can families and communities serve as valuable members in the home/community/school collaboration in ways that enhance the educational experiences

of students and ultimately the well being of the community? Mathews (1996) posits that reclaiming the public schools would seem to be a responsibility that the public has to accept. Also, it is unlikely that schools will change unless citizens increase their capacity to band together and act together. The possibilities that exist for parental and community roles in education are infinite, but for the purposes of this paper will be limited to child advocacy, protection of the community's sense of place and purpose, and decision and policy making roles.

Families and Communities as Advocates

First, there exists a strong relationship between parental involvement in an advocacy role and student achievement. Families who are able to effectively navigate the educational system on behalf of their children provide resources not always available to all children. Swap (1993) argues that collaboration in the classroom increases the resources available to families and can help to individualize and enrich student work. In addition, participation in the classroom helps to combat the lack of information many families feel places them at a disadvantage when advocating on their children's behalf. Classroom collaboration can provide a "critical linkage in family/school relationships due to the families' conceptions of their role in schooling and the information they gather about their child's schooling" (Lareau, 2000, p. 65). By creating a sense of efficacy in families and communities that they have the ability to help with schooling and education and by eliminating the mystery of teaching, classroom volunteering achieves much more for education than simply aiding the teacher. In addition, Lareau (2000) writes that the teachers included in her research are convinced that families advocating for their child through classroom involvement give their children a "critical boost, keeping children who

are not brilliant at all from floundering” (p. 144). Also, Swap (1993) supports the benefits of parental roles in the classroom by recognizing their positive influence on students’ self-esteem, attendance, and behavior.

Furthermore, families acting in an advocacy role may open learning opportunities that would not have been available otherwise. Parent advocates hold schools accountable to what the families feel are reasonable standards. There does, however, exist in this role the likelihood for conflict. It certainly requires confidence on the part of the families and teachers to recognize themselves as equal experts on their child’s learning. However, families have tremendous power in this role to determine certain aspects of their child’s learning experiences. Lareau (2000) further asserts that children who have families with the proclivity for intervening in their children’s schooling experience and for adding to that school program at home create a “two person single career in education. Both the parent, as guide, and the child are equally involved in the child’s success” (p. 82).

Without an advocate from home or the community, children must attempt to navigate through the institution by their own abilities, diligence, and temperament. Advocacy from families and possibly community members, though at times a potentially difficult position, obviously provides a distinct advantage to students.

Families as Protectors of Place and Purpose

If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from school. However, if educators see students as children with lives outside of school, they are likely to see the families and community as partners with the school in children’s education (Epstein, 1995). In rural areas this is especially important as communities struggle for viability (Howley, A., Bikel, R., & McDonough, M., 1997).

Peshkin (1978) argues that educators and noneducators alike must recognize that schools do more than educate children; they also maintain communities. Families and community members can play a significant role in preserving a community's sense of place and purpose by educating those in policy making positions about the community, providing opportunities for learning in context, and motivating students within the community to recognize their responsibility to their community.

If we think of education as part of our work as citizens, it changes our relationship to schools, making it more likely that we will see them as our agents, as institutions that help us carry out our responsibilities. And schools that are doing our job have a greater claim to our allegiance (Mathews, 1996, p. 54).

For schools to be true service to the communities they serve, professionals within the schools must be educated about the communities in which they teach. Families hold a wealth of information about community needs, learning styles, place history, and more. Schools must look beyond standardized curriculum and mandated testing to see the knowledge that exists within their own communities and its relevance to the well-being of the community itself. With more complete information on the community's experiences and funds of knowledge, educators have a more sophisticated understanding of the students, their families, and their social world (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

Furthermore, families and community members can be involved in educating children by providing opportunities for learning in context. Schooling in classrooms often times reduces knowledge to isolated skills and fact recall. However, with parental and community support the knowledge gleaned in the classroom could be utilized in

relevant and meaningful ways to the community. Local businesses perform on a daily basis many of the basic skills from math classes as well as the more complex concepts from economics courses. Possibly surprising to some, many opportunities exist to apply classroom knowledge in real ways and to learn additional community knowledge with hobby groups such as quilters. Some of the knowledge most important to rural communities struggling to maintain a sense of identity rests with the retired and elderly community members' historical knowledge.

Through projects outside the classroom and by inviting the community into the classroom learning is made real and families and the community feel a common mission with the schools. In addition to providing opportunities for students to learn about the functions of their community, Epstein (1995) writes that frequent interactions between schools, families, and communities create the common message from various people about the importance of school, of working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school. By involving large numbers of community members in diverse roles, more students stand to benefit from parental and community involvement (Davies, 1991).

In addition to providing meaningful learning experiences for students, collaboration with families and communities also instills a sense of responsibility for community among the students. Peshkin (1978) posits that school curriculums place individual needs as first priority, followed by national needs. The local needs and values of the community tend to fall in distant third. However, in fragile rural communities, local needs must garnish some forefront exposure. By creating opportunities that place students within their community to learn, students see first hand the strengths and

weaknesses of their community and their place in it. Families and community members have a vital role in encouraging students to recognize the responsibility all citizens have to their community. Budge (2006) stresses that:

Leaders exercising a critical leadership of place may serve as a springboard for future generations of citizens that are accountable to each other and to the community they inhabit. Nurturing a critical sense of place enables students to cherish and celebrate local values, histories, culture, and the ecology of the place they inhabit, and at the same time learning to critique and confront the social, political, economic, and environmental problems in their local communities (p. 9).

Finally, families and community members, through their work with students, “allow students to see things whole and in the manner in which leadership moves and has its being. They see the school and community boundaries as one, and the entire community becomes a laboratory for learning” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 24). Rural schools facing problems such as funding inequities, outward migration of the young and talented, and the disappearance of resources can capitalize on the insight, enthusiasm, and problem solving of their youth. Asking students to seek solutions to community problems benefits students by giving them a strong sense of valued place within the community and by helping them to see their own importance in the social and natural world around them (Khattri, Riley, Kane, 1997). The students in turn begin to develop their commitment to community service early and through learning the community grows stronger. True collaboration between schools, students, families, and communities serves the community in which it occurs.

Families and Communities as Shared Decision Makers

Families and communities, in their role as the holders of community knowledge, should also have a meaningful place in schooling decisions. As argued previously in this paper, schools can have a central effect on the well being of the community through the preparation of students and the recognition of community needs. However, in spite of the acknowledgement that schools affect communities, many Americans no longer believe the public schools are their schools (Mathews, 1996). At a time when schools seem overwhelmed with social and economic difficulties, most of which are not of their making, people “are not rallying around them. Instead of moving closer to these institutions, Americans are moving away” (Mathews, p. 2). In light of the fact that many of the difficulties teachers face originate outside of the classroom, schools must recruit help from outside the school to address the difficulties as well.

The enormity of the institution that is public schooling has a propensity to swallow up meaningful reform that originates within the schools. Mathews (1996) asserts that “fundamental change has to start with the public and within the community if it is to be effective against the structural impediments in schools that tend to block that change” (p. 5). The call to shared decision making and shared responsibility for schooling shifts the familiar family and community role of support to one of collaboration with schools on equal footing. Although most things new are at times quite difficult, it must be recognized that a community “is a place where those who may not even like one another nevertheless work together to advance the welfare of that which they hold in common” (Theobald, 1997, p. 121). This, too, should be true of schools. Families and community

members must assume a larger role in schooling and education through the contributions of diverse perspectives and shared decision making with their community schools.

The motivation for families to assume the added responsibility of decision making lies in the belief that “public support for education is vested in the trust that the return on our investments (time, concern, and taxes) to educate other people’s children transcends benefits to individuals” (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998, p. 9). Struggling rural communities depend on the school to promote a sense of responsibility for the common good of the community.

However, by inviting in the community, in addition to recognizing a much larger perspective, the difficulties of diversity are sure to arise. Epstein (1995) asserts, though, that true partnerships withstand questions, conflicts, debates, and disagreements; provide structures to solve problems; and are even strengthened after differences have been resolved. Public life itself takes shape when people join not just with friends, neighbors, and co-workers, but also with the relative strangers of the larger community (Mathews, 1996, p. 65). Through the development of a confidence that schools can benefit the common good, diversity and conflict can come to be seen as a positive and meaningful aspect of the shared decision making and policy creation process.

Parental involvement through shared decision making also benefits schools by providing varied and diverse experiences, knowledge, and perspectives to better inform educational issues. To really understand the impact that policy and reform have on students’ learning, and ultimately the community’s well being, it is necessary to view the possible ramifications from different perspectives. Also, through the process of brainstorming and discussion, school officials and community stakeholders may arrive at

a consensus of what the nature of the problems in their schools really are. Mathews (1996) argues that collaboration is essential in decision making because it is not uncommon for citizens [and school officials] to spend their energy debating which of a number of predetermined solutions is best, seemingly unaware that there is no agreement on the nature of the problem” (p. 48). For schools in rural communities that serve the larger purpose of maintaining and invigorating their communities, collaborating with families and community stakeholders in a meaningful exchange of ideas concerning policy and practice decisions encourages members of the community to feel a personal stake in the success of the school, more protective of the well being of the schools, represented by the school’s mission, and more supportive of the school’s plans for improvement.

Barriers to Family and Community Involvement

Although parental and community involvement seem obviously major components of a healthy and effective school, the ability to create true collaboration and equal conversations is never easy. Because many times the needs of families, teachers, and the institution of schooling itself are at direct odds with one another, barriers are confronted that cause many schools and families to decide that the effort does not produce enough rewards. Throughout this section of the paper, the literature is reviewed in an attempt to examine many of the barriers to true collaboration from the perspectives of families and communities, teachers, and schools as an institution.

Parental and Community Barriers to School Involvement

To begin, it is not always simply a matter of family and community members deciding to involve themselves in schools and to participate in school decision making.

Many things may impede involvement in the school system. Lareau (2000) found social class to be a strong determinant of parental involvement. She posits that the “standards of schools are not neutral; their requests for parental involvement may be laden with cultural experiences of the intellectual and economic elites” (p. 8). Families, due to the position of their own social class, may or may not feel comfortable with these practices and expectations. Fitchen (1981) writes that:

Given the inadequate social connections between the fringe and rural areas and the larger community, individuals cannot be assured of success in community participation, and there are no ways to prelearn appropriate roles, nor opportunities to forge an identity with outside groups and situations. As a result, individuals who feel marginal to the larger community usually limit their participation in it as much as possible (p. 200).

However, families’ actions are not tied to how strongly they want their children to graduate from high school, as teachers often misconstrue (Lareau, 2000). Although families from differing social classes report the same motivation for their child’s school success, social class influences how proactive the families are in achieving that success. Lareau further argues that professional class families take a more obvious active role in attempting to individualize their child’s schooling experience than do working class families. Although many educators recognize active involvement as an indicator of a caring parent, they may also complain that families acting in such a manner are attempting to usurp the educator’s authority.

If the proactive actions of the professional class of families are indicative of concern for the child’s academic welfare, what then might be the perception of families

who do not assume such a role? Many educators view a lack of visible parental involvement as a lack of motivation or concern. However, Lareau (2000) again argues that many working class families, feeling unable to appropriately teach their child, defer to the teacher and school personnel in matters of their child's education. Unlike their more privileged counterparts, working class families tend to grant their teachers full professional status and defer to their specialized training.

In addition, Swap (1993) finds that the increased diversity among the parent and community population and a sense of being different from the school personnel may lessen families' and community stakeholders' comfort in seeking contact with teachers and administrators. Feeling on the outside of the schooling loop perpetuates a lack of confidence that keeps families from assuming a proactive role in schooling. Minority and immigrant families can create a social network to navigate schooling successfully. Although it is often done well, true collaboration with schools may continue to be complicated by cultural differences and language barriers that "even where broad goals are fundamentally compatible, differences in style, barriers to communication, historically brewed suspicions, and the politics of symbolism may make it exceedingly difficult for parents and educators to recognize and articulate their shared interests" (Henig et al., 1999, p. 164). Although a lack of visible parental and community involvement may appear superficially to signify a lack of engagement and high academic expectations, most families truly want success for their child. Parental and community member involvement is not necessarily contingent on aspirations, instead it is frequently linked to schooling competence, social confidence, the information they have about schools, and their conception of their role in schools (Lareau, 2000).

Teacher and Personnel Barriers to Family and Community Involvement

The ever changing role of families in society causes the role of schools to evolve along with it. Many educators express anger at these changing conditions and tend to blame families for devoting less energy to their children's education and well being (Swap, 1993, p. 15). Although families are caught as well in a storm of economic uncertainty, changing demographics of families and communities, not to mention the effects of divorce, early pregnancy, and drug and alcohol abuse, schools tend to blame families for what can be construed as an attitude of indifference. The school personnel who feel this way, "generally feel that since it is the families who are failing to meet their responsibilities to today's children, it is not the school's responsibility to reach out to families in new ways" (Swap, 1993, p. 15). Because families are aware of the harsh judgment by school personnel, they may feel their presence is not welcome.

In addition, the reduction of true parental involvement to trivialized symbolic rituals discourages involvement that might encourage meaningful collaboration between homes and schools. By bringing families, community stakeholders, and teachers together in brief, controlled encounters, conflict is avoided. Encounters such as parent conferences and open houses do serve the purpose of bringing schools and communities together and into the school. In addition, they do have symbolic importance, reflecting the mutual commitment of both parties to the education of the child, a connection that families and teachers value. These events also maintain continuity and tradition (Swap, 1993). But without a concerted effort by school personnel to encourage families to accept more leadership and decision making roles, the involvement will remain only symbolic and not substantive and engaged.

Finally, schools may see themselves as the protector of knowledge and the expertise to teach. Miller (1993) finds that school personnel may often feel possessive in matters of curriculum, policy, and practices; many educators feel that their expertise is being discounted. As professionals, they expect professional authority and autonomy. And their expertise is indispensable to home, community, and school collaboration. Teachers know teaching, but families and community members know the children intimately and are experts on the community needs and collective values. It is true that “professional educators possess important understandings of the child, but it is only partial. The other piece required for filling in the whole child resides in the families and in the community where children play out their lives” (Miller, p. 96).

Institutional Barriers to Parental and Community Involvement

Unfortunately, adult collaboration in any form is relatively rare in schools. Collaboration is not the dominant model for the management of schools or the practices of teaching. Within the institution of schooling, teachers have rarely been encouraged to find their own voice, nor have students been provided true autonomy in decisions about learning. Instead teaching and learning continue to be an isolating experience. (Swap, 1993, p.17). In an institutional environment where decisions tend to be made in hierarchal fashion, from school board to central office, to administrators, to teachers, to students, it would be quite the exception to find many cases of shared decision making that includes families and community members. Schools actually have what Swap terms the delegation model. Families signal that they do not need to be involved as education has been delegated to the schools, and the schools do not invite families and community members to participate in a job they feel has been delegated to the school personnel. Specifically,

the delegation model discourages the ideas and engagement of families and community members. In addition, Pryor (2008) finds that parents may not be “participating partly because the structures through which they were supposed to assume some control did not seem to include them. When they gave voice to their ideas, nobody appeared to be listening. Schools still seemed unaccountable to the community” (pp. 198-199).

Furthermore, the institution of schooling seeks to create portraits of what normal schooling looks like. Public schooling has an uncanny ability to perpetuate itself despite numerous and various efforts at reform. There are many thoughts on the cause, including a lack of time given to reform, inadequate funding of reforms, failure of personnel and community to buy into the reform package, etc. However, the appearance of a school reform that does not fit the traditional picture of public schooling meets resistance from many stakeholders. The reforms do not present the familiar vision of what schools should be and do. Haas and Nachtigal (1998) argue that activities that value collaboration, a sense of place, and the importance of living well within a community will have to be thoroughly explained to all stakeholders. It will require confidence in the schools as the reforms may not appear logical or practical if they do not fit the traditional and familiar.

In addition, rural schools particularly face a barrier to parental and community involvement because of the common practice of school consolidation. Due to the inequities in public funding, rural areas are being forced to give up their community schools for the fiscal well being of the institution.

Few public policies touch the heart of a community more than the loss of the public school through reorganization or consolidation of school districts. In rural areas the closing of the local school can mark the beginning of the

disappearance of the community as a social center. Often economic and political atrophy follow (Ward & Rink, 1992, p. 11).

Incorporating a small school into larger networks of schools undermines particularism (Peshkin, 1978). Although rural schools repeatedly argue that the strength of their schools rests in the ties to the community and their ability to address needs unique to the community, consolidation continues to move schools out of small community districts to larger more populated ones. However, without a feeling of strong community ties to the school, rural families feel less represented, less engaged, less affiliated, and ultimately less responsible for the school's well being, contributing to the continued downward spiral of many rural communities.

Summary

The review of the literature began by providing a detailed explanation of critical theory and its use as a theoretical perspective to frame this study. Critical theory provides a lens with which to view the societal structures that subordinate certain groups of people based on cultural practices and social status. Specifically the literature review examined the issues of social class and race as obstacles to equitable schooling opportunities, stakeholder involvement in schooling, and educational success. Furthermore, the literature examined constructivism as a theory of creating and communicating knowledge. Knowledge is created through the interaction between an object and a learner. The literature supported the concept that the words one uses to demonstrate acquired knowledge and the acceptability of the knowledge differ based on cultural practice and social status, making communication both value-laden and at times difficult.

Next, the literature review suggested that the current trends in schooling impact rural schools in such a way as to require communication and collaborative action on the part of all rural community members. Considering the current move toward both state and national curriculum standardization and the shift to a more centralized control of national educational policy through the adoption of No Child Left Behind, the literature supported the need for rural communities to exert collective voice on matters of localized school decision making in order to protect those communities' visions of schooling goals and objectives. In addition, the literature suggested that rural schools and communities face struggles as rural schools grapple with insufficient and inequitable funding to carry out national and state mandated initiatives, an outward migration of the best and the brightest of young community members in search of more career opportunities, and a move toward school district consolidation into larger and larger schools, which removes a sense of community ownership and affiliation with a local school.

Finally, the literature review supported parental and community involvement. Schools and schooling can be enhanced through parents and community members acting as advocates for students. In addition, they serve as protectors of a sense of place and purpose for rural communities and support students, schools, and communities by participating as shared decision makers with other stakeholders. However, the literature analysis suggested that certain obstacles hinder family and community involvement. In order to overcome barriers, the literature suggested that communities must increase meaningful stakeholder involvement and constructivist school leaders must identify those community, personnel, and institutional barriers that discourage collaboration and collective action between rural schools and the communities they serve.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The preceding chapter presented and analyzed the existing theoretical and empirical literature relating to the current trends impacting rural schooling in America and the need, value, and possible barriers to increasing community organization's involvement in those schools. This study was designed to address the gap in research examining specifically community involvement in school decision making and policy creation in rural schools and to begin the conversation about increasing opportunities for diverse community members to be engaged in rural school system activities.

The purpose of this chapter is to articulate the methodology of the research study that will be utilized to investigate community members' experiences in shared decision making with a school system. The chapter presents a description of the study design and context, the research participants, the collection and treatment of data, the analysis of collected data, and the procedures implemented in order to ensure validity, including a statement of subjectivity.

This case study was descriptive of a bound time period, of a bound group, in a bound setting. Although it was limited by its specificity, it contributed to the examination of the effects of family and community involvement on schooling in rural areas in the Southeastern United States. This study recognized the participants as the holders of knowledge that pertained to their own experiences. The researcher's role was to collect, analyze and interpret that knowledge in a manner that identified commonalities, or themes, among the participants' stories.

Purpose of the Study

The overarching purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of a minority community service organization involved in the decision making and policy creation of a rural public school system in Northeast Georgia in an effort to increase diversity in community involvement in school system activities. The study examined the participants' goals and purposes for community activism through schooling. The research produced qualitative data that was used to identify the obstacles and successes the participants encountered and the manner in which to remove those obstacles. In addition, data was analyzed in ways that contributed to the literature regarding increasing diversity in community involvement in schools and equity in access to schooling opportunities. The purpose of this study was to collect the stories of a minority community organization's members who were actively engaged in school decision and policy making in a rural community and to determine ways to increase the representation of all diverse groups in a school's community who actively collaborated on school system decisions in order to strengthen rural schools and ultimately communities.

Guiding Questions

1. What were the experiences of a minority community service organization's members as they were actively involved in a rural school system's policy and decision-making?
2. What could the stories of their experiences tell educational researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners about the purposes, obstacles, and successes of minority community members who sought a voice and collaboration with a Northeast Georgia rural school system?

3. What commonalities and differences emerged from interviews of members in a parallel minority community service organization that were also involved in school system policy and decision-making?

4. What steps could rural school systems take to remove identified barriers to diverse community organization involvement in meaningful school policy and decision-making?

Research Context and Participants

The study data was collected during the second semester of the 2008-2009 school year, and the analysis and reporting of that data was carried out over the summer and first semester of the 2009-2010 school years. The research was conducted in a rural, Northeast Georgia community located approximately 10 miles from the state flagship university and 80 miles from a major metropolitan area. The community supported minimal industry. Most workers commuted to jobs outside the local community. Those who worked within the community mainly worked in poultry and livestock production, manufacturing, or some form of agribusiness. The local public school system was the county's largest employer.

The school system served a primarily agricultural community, with approximately 200 students per grade in Pre-K through twelfth grades. However, due to a 23% drop-out rate and student failure to pass state standardized exit exams, the school system only graduated approximately 135 students each school year. Racially, the student population consisted of approximately 80% Caucasian students, 16% African American students, and Hispanic students, with several newly arrived refugees from the former Burma.

District faculty was comprised of 95% Caucasian faculty members, 4% African American, and less than 1% Hispanic faculty members.

The writer chose the site for several reasons. First, as a teacher and member of the community, the writer had familiarity and insider's status. Because many of the cultural practices of the participants and the writer were similar, they could have conversations from familiar perspectives. Although it was true that ultimately the experiences of the researcher and participants were quite different as well, the influences of their common Southeastern, rural backgrounds provided common ground. Also, trust had been established between members of the participating organization and the writer through many shared experiences associated with schooling and community involvement. In addition, many of the political practices of the area were typical of the rural communities of the Southeastern United States. Land ownership and longevity of community membership were strong determiners of class, more so than educational attainment, employment status, or economic level. Because of the stability of the community and the lack of major industrial or population change in many years, there was a wealth of historical memories of the participants with which to work. Finally, because many of the social structures of the community were consistent with other rural communities in the Southeast, the data could be generalizable to a larger population than just the community from which the data was collected.

Qualifications as a Researcher

The researcher has been employed in both teaching and leadership capacities within the schools of the chosen community for 15 years and has worked in all of the schools that comprise the system. Throughout the years in the school system, the

researcher has served on myriad school and community committees, community resources collaboratives, and district wide school improvement cooperatives. In addition the researcher has lived in the community for 21 years and has been active in all facets of community and schooling activities.

As a researcher, the writer has been instructed in many forms of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In addition, the writer has participated in designing and implementing pilot studies and informal research projects. Further, the writer is prepared to define and limit a topic, review relevant, research-based literature and situate a study among existing research, design research methodology, and interpret and report data considering personal subjectivities to limit bias.

As an education professional, the writer maintained a relationship with the many diverse groups of the community and worked to improve the collaboration between the community and the school system. Also, as a community member, the writer had a vested interest in the success of the school system in providing an equitable access to schooling opportunities so that the well-being of the community might be strengthened and maintained.

Prior Approval and Planning

Because the study did not involve actual research in a school setting, the writer only needed the agreement of the minority community organizations' adult members to have an interest and agree to participate. However, as a consideration, the writer informed not only the superintendent of the school system, but the principals of each of the system's four schools. It was a requirement to secure IRB approval of the study, and that was done prior to collecting any data.

Data Collection

For this research, the writer employed a qualitative descriptive case study of three to five participants of a minority community organization active in the creation and facilitation of school policy within their rural community. Case studies are intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit or bounded system (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, Stake (1995) considers qualitative case study to be a practice characterized by the “main researcher spending substantial time, on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, revising meanings of what is going on” (p. 242). The researcher of this study conducted interviews to provide the participants the opportunity to tell their own stories. Based on both the constructivist belief that individuals hold knowledge that is unique to their own experiences and that culture significantly influences the perception of the experiences, interviewing recognized the value of the individuals’ knowledge and respected the participants as the holders of that knowledge. Over a bound period, the researcher interviewed each participant about his/her school and community activities and his/her perceptions of those activities.

The primary method of data collection was open-ended interviews. The researcher conducted three individual interviews of approximately 45 minutes each and utilized open ended semi-structured interview protocols with each participant. Lastly, the participants were invited to participate in a group interview in which they shared and questioned each other. However, the researcher guided the interviews with semi-structured, open ended questions. The group interview was held after the participants had the opportunity to examine the prior collected individual interview data.

The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed by the researcher as a means to spend more time immersed in the data. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, which allowed the researcher to ensure understanding and to use expressions and emotions as well as words to understand participants' meanings. The interviews were conducted at the local public library at scheduled times with the participants.

Prior to securing agreement to participate in the study, the researcher explained to the organization and participants that the study involved recorded interviews. They only participated if they chose and could withdraw from the study at any time. Also, they could refuse to answer any question and ask for clarification as needed. In addition, the participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity by the writer using pseudonyms and only maintaining recordings for a specified length of time in a secure location. Also, any risks were explained prior to participant agreement.

Next, the researcher developed a rapport with the participants by discussing the importance of openness and candidness. In order to improve the school system, the data had to be reliable and straight forward. In addition, the participants were told that they would have the opportunity to review the data prior to use in order to verify the accuracy of their responses and meanings. Member-checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was one aspect of triangulation that ensured reliability of the study data, findings, and implications. Other sources of data that were collected and analyzed as further triangulation included school system mission and beliefs statement, community organization mission statements, minutes of relevant organization meetings, newspaper articles, and relevant school board meeting minutes. Lastly, the researcher's own

thoughts and memos were collected in writing throughout the research process in order to acknowledge and decrease research bias and increase validity reliability of the data analysis.

Data Analysis

The writer used a constant comparison method to analyze the collected data and contribute to the creation of grounded theory. Grounded theory is “an interactive process by which the analyst becomes more and more grounded in the data and develops increasingly richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works” (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 783). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the four stages of constant comparative method are:

- Comparing incidents applicable to each category
- Integrating categories and their properties
- Delimiting the theory
- Writing the theory

However, the stages are not quite linear in that each stage continues to go on until the analysis is complete.

According to the constant comparative method, the researcher utilized the following process. First, the data was simultaneously collected, analyzed, and coded into many categories using grand inferences, commonalities, or themes, to assign categories to the data (Ary et al., 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The coding was done subsequently on margins of the transcribed data and then on individual note cards. While coding the data, the researcher applied the most basic rule of constant comparison according to Glaser and

Strauss, “while coding an incident for a category, compare it with previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category” (p. 106).

From the constant comparison of categories and groups, theoretical themes began to emerge. These theoretical themes became the theory grounded in data and were constantly revised as the data grew and changed. The researcher then applied the second rule of constant comparison methods according to Glaser and Strauss (1967), “stop coding and record a memes on your ideas” (p. 107). Memoing aided in clearing confusion and brought order to the appearance of chaos. Next, as the data continued to grow and became difficult to manage, the researcher delimited the data in two ways. First, it was necessary to reduce the data by examining the previous categories and consolidating them into higher order concepts. Following the reduction of terminology and text, the researcher delimited the theory by reducing the number of categories used for coding by elimination and compilation. Finally, the researcher realized that the categories were saturated in theory and became aware that certain theories had been sufficiently supported by data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Because the researcher interpreted the participants’ stories and actions through personal beliefs and cultural influences, validation relied on triangulation of data, member checking, and the continual awareness of personal subjectivities and the way they might have influenced the data analysis. However, because the constructivist framework of the study recognized the uniqueness of knowledge and the complex nature of authentic communication, the researcher employed triangulation to validate the trustworthiness of the data and findings. According to Reissman (1993), trustworthiness moves the process into the social world (p. 64). As the analysis was refined and ended,

the researcher recorded the theories generated by the data and memos and used that data to support findings and make implications for future research and practice.

Validity

In order to reduce the risk of compromised validity and reliability of findings (Crotty, 1998; Wolcott, 2001) the researcher utilized strategies to reduce personal bias and increase credibility. First, the researcher articulated a statement of subjectivities in order to acknowledge them and to practice constant awareness of those personal subjectivities. Secondly, the writer created baseline data through interviews of participants from a primary community organization and then collected interview data from a secondary parallel community organization to explore possible commonalities and differences among emerging themes. In addition, recognizing the limitations of any and all methods of data collection, the writer employed triangulation of the data through several methods. In addition to data collected through open-ended interviews, the researcher collected and examined archival documents such as meeting minutes, missions and belief statements, organization charters, school and organization websites, and newspaper articles. Further, the researcher employed memoing as data was collected and analyzed as a means to record the thoughts of the researcher as an observer/participant. Following data collection through interviews the participants had the opportunity to member-check their responses to ensure the accuracy of the data and interpretations. Finally, the process of data collection and analysis was approved by the committee, including interview data, artifacts, and archival documents.

Ethical Considerations

Following IRB approval, the researcher informed the participants about the study with full disclosure. In order to secure the written, informed consent of the participants, the researcher met with the participating organizations and participating individuals to thoroughly explain the purpose and procedures of the study and their rights and protections as a participant. The researcher participated in the study as an observer-participant with personal subjectivities that could have introduced bias into the study. In order to reduce the risk, the researcher included a statement of subjectivity and kept subjectivities in the forefront and treated them with constant awareness. According to the Internal Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University (2008), the researcher must protect the identities, privacy, rights, and dignity of all participants. The researcher explained that participants may discontinue participation at any time and ask that personal data be destroyed and not be considered in the findings of the study. The researcher fully disclosed any and all risks associated with participation and acted at all times with honesty and integrity. In addition, the researcher assured anonymity and confidentiality by using pseudonyms and/or codes for any identifying information, storing consent forms in a separate location than data, and by limiting access to identifying data and only with prior approval of the participant. Further, the researcher secured the approval of the IRB of Liberty University by designing a written consent form for each participant to sign according to the requirements of the IRB, securing the approval of the Human Subjects Committee of Liberty University, and assuring the ethical treatment of participants and the protection of their best interests. The writer's statement of subjectivity follows in the next section.

Statement of Subjectivity

As a teacher, parent, doctoral student, and lifetime rural community member, the writer felt that she was in the unique position of being able to critically view parental involvement from various perspectives. In the process of scholarly research, the writer's positions as a teacher and a parent allowed her to evaluate research on parental and community involvement and the implications from an informed perspective. What will work in the structure of Southern rural public school institutions? Could the writer as a professional find ways to encourage and enable the community to assume the recommended responsibilities? Finally, as a community member, would the writer be able to meet her own expectations? The writer's various positions allowed for a multiplicity of views and layers of critical thought.

First, the writer's history as a rural community member served to focus her research interests in and personal alliances with rural communities and their schools. The writer was born and was raised in a very small, isolated community on the Southeastern tip of Georgia on the edge of the Okefenokee Swamp. It was an idyllic childhood for the writer and her siblings. The writer's parents were both very active in all aspects of schooling. Further, the writer's parents and grandparents volunteered in the classroom, worked for fundraising, devoted much of their free time to supporting extracurricular activities, and even led a grassroots community organization in support of the consolidation of the county's schools. The writer took for granted that learning was a family and community affair. The writer's parents worked with many of the community's children through community organizations, their church, and their positions at the local

hospital, due to their own unique ideas about personal responsibility to the people of the community. In addition, the writer and her siblings were encouraged to write letters on local issues to the county commissioners, school boards, and the local paper. However, the writer, as an adult, was well aware that her parents were some of only a few politically and socially active community members who made many of the decisions of what would be offered to the community children and the manner in which the services would be rendered.

As an adult member of another very similar rural community, the writer saw the patterns of community decision making to be almost identical to what existed in her childhood community. A few families maintained generational control of the school boards, local councils, county boards, and the local newspaper. The writer thought it not an accident that these were the adults whose children excelled in the local schools, attended college, and many times grew to assume active positions in their own schools and communities, thereby perpetuating for their children whatever advantages community leadership brings.

However, being a politically active community member herself, the writer might not have questioned the decision-making structures if it were not for her other positions as a local teacher and doctoral student. To elaborate, teaching broadened the writer's concerns beyond her own children to include the community's children as well. The writer's opportunity to see the advantages afforded a student whose parents were adept at manipulating their schooling experiences led her to be interested in ways that the advantages might be equalized throughout all of the community's children, regardless of their parents' positions or social groups.

For rural schools to be a reflection of their community, and for the needs of all of the community to be met, there must be a more diligent effort to include the diversity of needs present among all groups of people. As a teacher and scholar, the writer hopes to find ways in which rural schools can foster positive relationships with stakeholders that move beyond the symbolic partnership to a true sharing of knowledge and decision making that might more adequately meet the needs of the larger society and not limit that partnership to just a few.

Summary

This chapter has explained the methods used in this qualitative study of the experiences of participants from a minority community service organization involved in school decision and policy making. The constant comparative method and the creation of grounded theory supported the writer's epistemological belief that knowledge was created by the individual influenced by culture and experiences. The chapter presented a research design that included recorded, transcribed, and analyzed semi-structured interviews. In order to increase the validity and reliability of the findings, interviews of a secondary minority community service organization were included as well to collect data that may uncover commonalities and/or differences with the baseline interview data themes. Further, the chapter explained that triangulation of the data was provided by memoing, member checking, and archival documentation. Using grounded theory allowed the experiences and stories of the participants to create the theories, recognizes and values the participants as holders of knowledge, and respects and acknowledges the unique perspectives of both the researcher and the participants. The next chapter presents the findings obtained from the aforementioned methods.

CHAPTER IV

THE FINDINGS

Introduction

In order to increase not only community involvement, but diversity in community involvement in schooling and educational decision making in southern rural school systems, it is necessary to examine the stories of those who are currently involved. By considering the experiences of minority community service organization members who actively seek involvement with the study school district, it is possible to identify the purposes of the community organization and individuals. In addition, data can be collected that begins the conversations concerning community involvement successes and the obstacles that hinder the participation of community organizations in school decision making, ultimately adding to the research literature concerning practices that increase diverse community involvement in school decision making.

As stated in Chapter 1, the study reported here examined in detail the experiences of individuals active in a minority community service organization that participated in education and school decision making activities. This chapter begins by describing the study community and school system. Next, the chapter provides a description, including organization histories, missions, and major activities, of both the participating minority community organization and the parallel community service organization selected to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. Following the community organization descriptions, the chapter reports the examination and comparison of the mission and belief statements of the schools that comprise the study school district and

the study community service organizations as a means to inform the reader of the foundations and purposes of each service organization and school entity. Next, the chapter will include a report on the participants' perceptions of the quality of education provided by the study school system and the state of community involvement within the school system. Finally, this chapter is then organized in terms of the four specific research guiding questions posed in Chapter 1.

1. What are the experiences of a minority community service organization's members as they are actively involved in a rural school system's policy and decision-making activities?
2. What do the participants' stories tell researchers and practitioners about the purposes, obstacles, and successes of minority community members who seek a voice and collaboration with a Northeast Georgia rural school system?
3. What commonalities and differences emerge between the study minority community service organization and a parallel community service organization also involved in school system policy and decision-making?
4. What steps can rural school systems take to remove identified barriers to diverse community involvement?

The Study Community

The Northeast Georgia community where the study takes place, a rural, non-industrial county, was located 80 miles east of a large metropolitan city and approximately 10 miles from a major state university. Over 400 square miles comprised the large county, yet, the population consisted of only approximately 14,000 residents. The racial and ethnic makeup of the community's residents included 80% Caucasian,

16% African American, and 2% Hispanic. Of the county's nearly 3,600 households, 21% had incomes of less than \$10,000, while 13% had incomes of \$50,000 or greater. The per capita income was approximately \$18,000 compared to the state's average income of \$23,000.

The majority of workers were employed in the following fields: machinists (16%), precision production/repair (15%), administrative support (14%), and services (10%). Another 25% of the workers were employed in the fields of professional specialties, executive/managerial, and sales. With little employment opportunity within the county, 61% of the work force traveled outside the county for employment. Of the jobs in the county, agriculture had proportionately more jobs than any other county in the region. Farming and agricultural services, including agribusiness and poultry and livestock farming, provided about 23% of the county's jobs. The five largest employers in the county following the county school system were as follows: printing business, car dealership, electric coil company, nursing home, and a pork production farm. The last census of the county workforce between the ages of 20 and 69 indicated that 28% are not high school graduates. Thirty percent held only a high school diploma, while 42% had some college classes or a college degree.

The Study School District

As reported in Chapter 3, the study school district was comprised of four schools: a primary school that housed Pre-K through second grades, an elementary school that included third through fifth grades, a middle school that consisted of sixth through eighth grades, and a high school that served grades nine through twelve. The school system student population demographics were representative of the surrounding community. The

community and student population consisted of approximately 80% Caucasian, 16% African American, and 2% Hispanic. However, it should be noted that the administration and faculty population was comprised of 95% Caucasian and less than 5% minority members. There was one African American administrator at the primary level and no minority office support staff. All members of the central office staff were Caucasian. A large majority of the custodial staff in the district were African American. One African American female served on the district board of education with all other Caucasian members. Finally, it was also important to recognize that the study school system recently made Annual Yearly Progress according to No Child Left Behind, meaning all four schools met requirements for all subgroup populations. School systems that achieved the honor were in a minority throughout the state. Further, the district high school earned the Governor's Cup, an award presented by the governor and state school superintendent to the high school that increased Scholastic Aptitude Test scores the largest increment over a three year period. In addition, the district middle school was named a 2009 Georgia School of Excellence, a designation given to twenty-seven of the state middle schools demonstrating the greatest improvement in state standardized test scores.

Study Minority Community Service Organizations

The Involved Men and Women

The Involved Men and The Involved Women were connected minority community service organizations that operated as two components of one organization. Formally known as The Involved Black Men, the group was established as a local organization under the 100 Black Men of America, Inc. and the 100 Black Men of Atlanta, Inc. to address local concerns of low minority high school graduation rates, high

minority school suspension rates, few school system minority faculty members, and low minority college attendance. The local Involved Men and Women organization maintained a membership of approximately 75 people. Comprised of mostly influential community members, including minority church, business, and educational leaders, The Involved Men and Women have grown to serve the community in myriad ways, including economic development of challenged communities, public policy, health and wellness, educational issues affecting youth, mentoring, and leadership of the African American community. According to the 100 Black Men website, the local organizations were established to “provide leadership in practice, education, and research to enhance African/ African American communities. [They] supported professional development and comprehensive training for members, youth and adults, designed to build their capacity in order to strengthen community life worldwide (100 Black Men, 2009).

Informed Production Network

In addition, Informed Production Network, another local minority-focused community organization, provided community services to the study community as well as to several surrounding communities. Operating under the slogan, “Networking to Educate an Entire Community”, Informed Production Network enlisted the support of approximately 750-800 members and has been in operation since 1990. Membership in the organization supported a newspaper, *The IPN Herald*, which reported on local, state, and national issues of interest to the African American community. Also, Informed Production Network supported Ashley’s Home, a community resource center for students and adults that provided information and support concerning obtaining a General Equivalency Diploma (GED), postsecondary education and training, guidance for unwed

mothers, tutoring, and summer educational programs. Organization members also met monthly to encourage and support minority business entrepreneurship, coordinate youth heritage expos in support of African American history, plan educational fairs, and explore teen leadership opportunities. Members of the organization regularly attended district school board meetings, served on various school committees, and were active in local school and community politics.

Mission and Beliefs Statements

The mission statements of the organizations and institutions involved with the study provided insight into the established purpose and driving goals of the schools and the service organizations. The mission and beliefs statements of any entity serve as the foundation from which to plan activities, the perspective from which to judge success and failure, and as the collective voice of the organization members articulating those ideals to which the organization aspires. Further, Boerema (2006) states that mission statements, “especially in community based organizations, serve to define the boundary of who is included in the organization. In addition, they can be used as a marketing tool to identify the nature of the services offered” (pp. 184-185). The following mission statements of the participating schools and community organizations contributed background information for the reader to have an informed view of histories, activity choices, sense of success or failure, and potential areas of conflict.

Community Primary School

First, the primary school of the study community embraced the mission of accepting all students as individuals and providing a varied and challenging program that guides each child toward success. Many beliefs supported the mission including the

belief that all students could learn when learning was relevant to their lives. In addition, the primary school believed that the curriculum should be balanced to provide a secure educational foundation and to be meaningful to students' lives. The faculty believed that open and honest communication was a shared responsibility of staff, parents, and guardians; the school environment should be safe, clean and inviting; and all students should become responsible citizens. It should be noted that the community primary school also included a parent and visitor visitation policy and a school volunteer and mentor policy which communicated guidelines for visiting and/or participating in the school volunteer programs. Furthermore, the school explained that the school council, established as a requirement of No Child Left Behind, worked to improve communication and participation of parents and the community in the management and operation of the school. Council members were elected through a ballot system overseen by the school district. Finally, the school also recognized the Parent Teacher Organization as an organization that supported learning through fundraising and by providing volunteers.

Community Elementary School

Next, the community elementary school's mission statement articulated the mission and belief that education was the shared responsibility of school and community. The community elementary school accepted that by putting children first, the responsibility fell on the school to provide a varied and challenging program, to accept all students as individuals, and to guide them toward successful achievement. Ultimately, they embraced the mission to establish a strong foundation for lifelong learning. Although the school's mission statement was concise without additional belief statements, there was an additional posting of Public Law 107-110 from the No Child

Left Behind Act of 2001. The law stipulated that a local educational agency will implement programs, activities, and procedures for the involvement of parents in programs. From that law, the school system developed the Title I Parent Involvement Policy. This policy, included with the elementary school's mission statement, explained the district's adherence to PL 107-110, the opportunities provided for parent involvement, the responsibilities of the district board of education to inform and include parents, and the means to provide feedback to the district concerning parent involvement.

Community Middle School

The mission of the district middle school was to foster lifelong learning and responsible citizenship in a safe and challenging environment. According to the beliefs developed by the school stakeholders, the middle school believed that learning is the primary focus of the school. They felt that students learn best when they are actively involved and that curriculum and instruction must accommodate individual learner differences. Furthermore, the school felt they must provide opportunities for all stakeholders to share responsibility for student learning and that learning was enhanced by mutual respect among students and staff. The middle school faculty members believed that a safe and well-maintained environment facilitated student learning. In addition, the middle school included a formal parent policy on their website. The policy asserted that in order for the school to accomplish its mission, a partnership with families was essential. The policy also provided opportunities for parental involvement. It was noteworthy that the policy was developed with input from parents, teachers, and community members. The school website also listed the local Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club as community organizations that provided support to the school.

Community High School

Finally, the community high school aimed to provide a safe environment in which students were actively engaged in meaningful learning experiences in order to prepare them for a global society. The stakeholders espoused certain beliefs including that student learning was the primary focus of all decisions impacting the work of the school. In addition, each student of the high school was a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. Each student's self-esteem was enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect among stakeholders. The community high school embraced a belief that students needed to apply their learning in a meaningful context, have appropriate and varied opportunities for success, and diverse learning activities through which to demonstrate their achievement. Finally, the community high school also included within the course description guide a detailed explanation of the school's perception of the expected roles of the school, students, and parents in the design of the high school learning process and the most effective use of educational opportunities afforded by the high school. The school, students, and parents shared the responsibility to be involved in the learning and educational planning process. Also, the high school accepted that each assumed the responsibility of seeking information, presenting necessary information to others, and expecting strong work habits from students. Finally, the school expected parents to regularly ask questions, express concerns, read all materials sent home from the school, and provide feedback.

The Involved Men and Women

In the spirit of the 100 Black Men of America, Inc., the mission of the Involved Men and Women was to improve the quality of life within the community and enhance

educational and economic opportunities for all African Americans. The organization was committed to the intellectual development of youth and the economic empowerment of the African American community based on the following precepts: respect for family, spirituality, justice, and integrity. Further, the organization sought to serve as a beacon of leadership by utilizing their diverse talents to create an environment where African American community children are motivated to achieve. The organization also aspired to empower African American people to become self-sufficient shareholders in the economic and social fabric of the community. Specifically, the Involved Men and Women felt that education was one of the core foundations of the mission. To facilitate the intellectual growth and development of African American youth, the organization members were active in educational policy and practices, in addition to providing forums to address the needs of African American youth and the broader community. Finally, in order to fulfill their mission, the organization committed to providing leadership and mentoring to students and other community members.

Informed Production Network

According to the Informed Production Network newspaper, *The IPN Herald*, the mission and purpose of the organization was to allow creative minds the opportunity to create and network with others, along with giving them a means of exposing their talents. Additionally, the organization sought to be the supportive and financial segment of the H.O.M.E Program. An acronym that represented Helping Others Magnify Education, the H.O.M.E. Program was a non-profit organization that provided a full line of educational services to the entire community. Included in the educational services was an organization newspaper that addressed community, school, and political issues and events

relevant to the African American community; a resource center focused on providing information, opportunities, and resources to African American youth; and a variety of leadership and educational expos and seminars. The aim of the Informed Production Network was to educate an entire community.

Analysis of Mission and Beliefs Statements

Through the analysis and categorization of the mission and beliefs statements for each community organization and each of the study schools, several themes were identified pertaining to the motivations and goals of the participant organizations and schools. Although much of the interview data described the complex and complicated relationships that existed between schools and involved outside stakeholders, the missions of the participating organizations and schools suggested similar beliefs and goals.

Mission Statements and Student Learning

According to the Involved Men and Women's mission statement, education was the core mission of the organization. The organization committed to monitoring educational policy, trends, and implications in order to be informed and effective in supporting education for African American youth and to the intellectual development of the African American community. Although The Informed Network stated a mission of "networking to educate an entire community" the organization did not actually mention student learning through schooling or involvement with schooling. The Informed Network did profess a mission of "allowing creative minds the opportunity to create and network with others". Likewise each of the four schools within the study school district made student learning the first priority. The high school and middle school reported a

belief that student learning must be the primary focus of all decisions impacting the work of the school. The elementary school asserted that the faculty must put children first, while the elementary and primary schools committed to providing a varied and challenging program.

Mission Statements and Values

It can be tricky business to consider values education and public schooling together. However, teaching is by nature a moral and ethical activity evidenced by numerous values education curriculum for public schools, teaching contract moral clauses, and mission statements of both the service organizations and the community schools. Within the mission statement of the Involved Men and Women, the organization committed to encouraging self-sufficiency within the African American community. In addition, the organization believed that their mission was served through instilling and encouraging respect, spirituality, justice, and integrity among their own members, students, and the larger community. However, The Informed Production Network made no obvious value-laden statements in their mission beyond committing to providing leadership within the community. To continue, the community high school believed that the self-esteem of stakeholders was enhanced by positive relationships and mutual respect. In addition, they accepted the responsibility for preparing students to be positive participants in society. The study middle school believed that they should foster responsible citizenship and mutual respect. Although the study elementary school did not mention value statements and beliefs in their mission statement, the primary school believed in honest and open communication and developing students into responsible citizens.

Mission Statements and Guidance

Each participating community organization and, of course, schools had a responsibility and opportunity to guide students and even families and communities in particular directions. The mission statements of the study participants and community schools shed light on the direction intended by that guidance. The Involved Men and Women intended to guide students and the African American community through leadership and mentoring opportunities. In addition, the organization believed that by guiding African American youth and the community, they could motivate them to improve their lives and community. Guidance was provided by the organization's commitment to mentoring and providing community centered opportunities. The Informed Production Network did not specifically articulate a focus on guidance though they did mention a mission to provide opportunities, resources, and information. The community high school did not mention the intentional act of guidance or related activities in their mission statement; however, the course description guide did articulate a commitment to the role of advising students in course selection, completion of diploma requirements, and post-secondary options. Although the middle school did not mention guidance as a mission, both the elementary and primary schools of the community believed that they had a responsibility to guide students to achievement and to success.

Mission Statements and Improving Student Lives

According to the mission and beliefs statements, each of the study community service organizations and the community schools accepted the responsibility to improve students' lives. First, the Involved Men and Women embraced the mission of improving the quality of life within the African American community. A focus on education was the

core component for the organization realizing that quality of life improvement. The Informed Production Network sought to provide information, opportunities, and resources for the community in an effort to educate an entire community. Likewise each of the community schools believed they must work to improve student lives. The high school faculty collectively agreed to provide a safe environment for learning and to prepare students for society. In addition, they agreed that each student was a valued individual and that it was important to increase self-esteem through mutual respect and positive relationships. Likewise, the middle school faculty members believed that they should foster a desire for life-long learning within students. In addition, the middle school embraced a mission of accommodating differences among students, encouraging mutual respect among staff and students, and creating a safe haven in which students could learn. The elementary school believed that students' lives could be improved by recognizing each child as an individual with unique needs. Finally, the community primary school articulated a belief that all students are unique individuals who can learn when the activities and material are relevant to their lives. Furthermore, the faculty members worked to provide a safe learning environment for students and to provide a program that was varied and challenging in order to meet each student's needs.

Mission Statements and Family and Community Involvement in Schools

It was very important to note that each community organization viewed education and schooling as a focus of their service and a vital component to their ability to effect change and improvement in the lives of community members. In addition, it was of equal importance to recognize that each of the schools within the study community embraced community involvement as a means to improve the schooling experiences of all

stakeholders. The Involved Men and Women focused on increasing educational and economic opportunities for African Americans as a means to improve the quality of life within the community. Although the Informed Production Network did not specifically include involvement in the local schools as a component of their mission, they did commit opportunities, resources, and information to educating the entire community.

The community high school asserted that opportunities were provided that developed positive rapport between faculty, students, and community members. In addition, the school believed that parental and community involvement should be encouraged so that all stakeholders could together provide an excellent opportunity for the students of the community to be educated. Furthermore, the community middle school articulated a desire to provide opportunities for stakeholders to be actively involved. In addition, the school included a formal parent involvement policy that specifically listed opportunities provided by the school for parents to be involved and avenues to provide feedback on the policy or parent involvement. Further, the community Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club were listed as community organizations active in the school, but no other currently active community organizations or opportunities for other organizations to be involved were included.

The elementary school included in their mission and beliefs statement a belief that education was a shared responsibility between schools and communities. In addition, the school website included PL 107-110, the No Child Left Behind parent involvement law that required schools to implement a formal program for parent involvement in schooling. However, no community involvement plan was mentioned.

Finally, the community primary school did not mention community involvement in the formal mission and beliefs statement. However, the school website did include a explanation of PI 107-110 No Child Left Behind Title I School Parent Involvement policy. Included with that was an explanation of the school's policy on parent visitation, limits to visitation, the mentoring and volunteer policy and the school's requirements of mentors and volunteers, and finally, an introduction to the school Parent-Teacher Organization and the opportunities afforded through that organization to raise funds for the school and/or volunteer. If schools and influential community service organization members could learn to communicate effectively, listen objectively, examine their own bias, and picture new possibilities for schooling, each could capitalize on the resources of the other and find new ways to improve the lives of students and strengthen rural communities.

Participants' Perceptions of the Current Quality of Schooling in the Study Community

Asked the question, "How would you say the community's schools are doing educating children?" the participants expressed both strengths and weaknesses demonstrated by the community school system.

Participant One

Participant One, a member of The Involved Men, had one child in the community primary school. He grew up surrounded by a large extended family within the local community, was a very successful state championship athlete in the local schools, and obtained post-secondary education at a state college. He worked with a state university in the neighboring county and volunteered his time as a community coach with the high

school's football, basketball, and track programs. Asked about the school system's effectiveness serving local students, he contributed, "from my point of view, just me having a kid in the school, from what we teach them at home and what he learn at school, I think it's about good. They are really working with him because it's a lot. So I think they are doing an awesome job. And then seeing the SAT score coming up, that's awesome; that is awesome". He found the school system's strength to rest in the women. When asked why he felt that way, he responded, "We got more women that come here with all these guys. There are more guys to me in the school system and the women come here and work hard with them. We get more guys in the schools to teach kids, you have a better man. That's why so many guys don't have respect, because they were never taught...I think getting more guys in here would help turn [the community] around".

Participant Two

A member of The Involved Women, Participant Two, grew up in a neighboring community. One of her children was a graduate of the local community school system; her son was completing his senior year at the study community school. When she was asked by the writer her perception of the state of education in the local schools, Participant Two asserted that the school system made annual yearly progress according to No Child Left Behind, but said it laughing. When the question was repeated, Participant Two posited:

From what I can see, we could do better. But I don't know that's necessarily the school's fault; might be a state thing. I think we have strong academics. I really do. Sometimes we are lacking a little bit administration but---

The writer asked Participant Four to elaborate and she continued:

Let the teachers do their jobs and support them because all parents are not going to agree, so I think they need to be involved, not micromanaging, but involved in education and know what's going on instead of sitting in the office just waiting for a parent to come and complain.

Participant Three

Participant Three, a local, well-known community pastor, also served as vice-president of The Involved Men. He was one of the founding members. Having grown up locally, Participant Three was a successful track athlete, who attended college on a track scholarship. Furthermore, Participant Three held both masters and doctorate degrees, officiated college basketball, and served as head pastor of a local church. When asked about the school system's success in educating students, Participant Three replied that, "We are better than we used to be, so I'd give us a B+; a whole lot better than we used to be. There's still room for improvement, but a whole lot better than we used to be". He continues to state that he finds the strengths of the school to rest in improved state test and national achievement scores. Participant Three asserted:

...from what I am seeing now the one thing is the performance on the tests. What I could see across the board, we have improved and all this stuff and I'm just hoping that we are not like some schools because I've checked across the board. Some schools are just teaching the tests and not helping the kid and I have a problem with that. If they are teaching the test, what's going to happen when they get out in the real world? But I think that's one of the strengths now, that we are doing well or doing better only in standardized tests.

Participant Three continued to express his concern that the school system should look to hire new faculty that would bring in fresh perspectives and invigorate the school system:

If we are going to improve, let me say we've got to improve first, I am going to say faculty and staff. I see too much buddy, buddy, so I think first of all in my opinion straight up, some people need to go. Bring in some new blood because sometimes it's good to get new blood into the system.

Participant Four

Participant Four, a member of the Informed Production Network, moved into the local community nine years ago. He has had three children in the local school system. One was currently participating in the special education program at the community high school and was an eleventh grader. The oldest left the community school and obtained a General Equivalency Diploma. Another daughter left the community school, graduated from high school in a neighboring county, and attended a local college. A former Marine, he was married to a community activist that worked with others in need in several surrounding communities. In addition, though never elected, Participant Four qualified to run for the local school board twice and the county commission once. He planned to qualify to run again in the next election. Participant Four added his thoughts on the current state of education in the local school system:

I don't know what it is they are supposed to be teaching the kids, but the bottom line is the results are still being the same kind. And like I said, we're hearing a lot of it is that what they have on the [Georgia High School Graduation Tests] is nothing that's like whatever the little bit that they get through school; it's nothing like on the test. You can't succeed or pass anything if you don't have the material.

Participant Four also mentioned concerns about the faculty:

Now, I don't know all the teachers in the school system, but for the ones like I said, the kids that we've talked to, a lot of them have given us the impression that the teachers don't really care what's going on with them. It's kind of like, I got a job; I'm getting paid; and don't deal with me.

Participant Five

Participant Five, who also moved to the area several years ago, worked as a community activist through the Informed Production Network. A leader in the organization, she managed programs and resources offered through Ashley's Home, a community education and social resource center. Prior to moving to the study community, Participant Five served as a neighborhood social activist and as an elected official in Chicago. In addition, Participant Five served in the military and founded an abused women's shelter. When asked by the writer about her perceptions of the community public school system, Participant Five expressed her views and concerns:

I think it's really hard not to teach a kid because kids have natural instincts to learn. So, I don't think [the local schools] are doing anything extra. I mean like I said what they have, what the kids got to work, what they grab. And they are doing as good as everybody else.

Participant Five found the schools' only strengths to be "basic academics". She asserted that schools must do much more to address the needs of students:

They have to get out of the box. They have to allow teachers, the new teachers that come in, I understand the old teachers because of what they want, what they would talk. But the new teachers are coming with new ideas. They got to allow

them to use what they learned. And what they do is they get these new teachers that come in and then they give them rules and say this is it and that's why they leave. So I think they allow the process to work as it's supposed to. The older ones sit back and let the new ones come in and do what they need to do. It will make deadlines easier; it will make classrooms more interesting; and everybody actually get what it supposed to be at schools.

Participant Six

Participant Six was a 21 year old former student of the community schools. She was attending a technical college and served as a member of the Informed Production Network. Participant Six served as an organizer for student programs, organized community service projects in area communities, and worked with Ashley's Home in several capacities, including answering phones, helping visitors locate resources and information on computers, filling out GED applications for visitors, and raising funds. She also voiced many concerns when asked how well the community schools were serving students:

Okay, I think that they could do more as far as, they can't control the Georgia High School Graduation Tests, they cannot control that, but as far as actually taking the time to maybe ask the students what is it that [they] are having problems on and working on it, because ...teachers don't say this, so therefore they have no clue. So it's hard for [them] to say you should know this, you should know this, so here we go. Ask now what it is that [students] were having difficulties with, you know maybe ask the students, and then [teachers] are not going in there blind.

Participant Six did go on to note that the extracurricular activities and athletics were strengths of the school system because they provided motivation for students. Also she mentioned that there were some excellent teachers that cared about students.

Community Organizations' Members' Perceptions of Community Involvement

In order to understand the participants' perception of the current status of community involvement within the community schools, the writer asked the question, "How would you describe the current status of community involvement in the local schools?" It is noteworthy, that each participant felt that there was not enough community involvement, and that various community groups were underrepresented in school decision making.

Participant One

Participant One felt that certain groups were active in schooling, but that much more needed to be done:

Right now, I say from my point of view, The Involved Men is the people that are doing a good job. I don't think we got enough people that have been to the school come back and help out, but you can always get a negativity of it. But they'll never come back and help with it. That's how I view it.

When asked by the writer his perception of the role of the community in schooling, Participant One responded that:

...to help the young kids out, to get them to the level that they need to be, if you don't help the young kids in school the worst is going to happen and you look back you say you should have done this, you should have done that. If you are coming to school to help pick a kid with no father, picking a kid with no mother,

just taking them under your wing and showing what they need to know, you know that's what I do. ... For me, I say teaching the young men to be a man after they leave school, have respect for women, have respect for their parents, and if you playing a sport, have respect for your coaches. If you don't have respect, you are losing in life.

Participant Two

Participant Two considered specifically African American community involvement in the local schools. It was also interesting to note that Participant Two considered community and parent involvement interchangeably. Participant Two responded:

I don't see much diversity. The only African American involvement I really see are in mentors. You know we have several of those, The Involved Men, who are active and most of them are mentors in the schools. Other than that, I don't see a lot of parental involvement coming on.

Again, Participant Two equated community involvement with parent involvement. She felt that there was some community involvement, but it was limited by the schools and minimized to a superficial gesture:

The school wants it and the school wants it on their terms. I think the school takes issue with a parent just wanting to drop by one day and have lunch with their child unannounced. I don't know, but what I see is that it seems to be more of a publicity thing, you know. We want to do this; like we want to have parental involvement night; we want to do it when we can invite the media and make the

school look good, not so much to benefit the students, but to make us look good on paper or whatever.

Community involvement, Participant Two felt, remained necessary to school success for all children. She felt that the community must provide support for the activities of the schools in all manners, “financially, spiritually, labor, body, you know, whatever it takes. Just get involved”. Participant Two did recognize the importance of community and parental involvement to the future of the community:

I think it should be, well you know from my experiences I think it’s a plus. I think you need to be involved; you need to know what your child is doing, and if you don’t have children, you should still be concerned about the product....The product who’s going to come back out and support your community.

Participant Three

Participant Three responded with concern about the lack of representation of the entire community. He stated that in his view, community involvement was “very limited; I think it could be a whole lot more, but it’s very limited”. Participant Three continued to explain:

With the school system, especially the board of education, where they call [The Involved Men] to make administrative decisions, it should be a joint effort type with the community. I say the community should have a large say, and I know you need somebody to talk to about all that stuff, but I still think the community should have a major say so and not just one or two people.

Further, Participant Three continued to express concern that only certain segments of the community were being chosen to collaborate with the school systems when making

decisions. He explained that The Involved Men got involved years ago to address the lack of more representative community involvement:

That's one reason The Involved Men got involved years ago. I'm sure you've read the paper. I was in the paper a couple of years ago because part of the community was being involved and the other part wasn't and that's not good.

Participant Four

Participant Four, when asked by the writer about the state of community involvement in the study schools, expressed frustration that, presently, the community is simply less engaged in what is going on with young people:

So I think that the community should be more involved in all the kids that are in the community and find out if they are if they are in school, why they are not in school. And I think the community, as far as parents, should communicate with each other more. Nowadays, like I said, when I was growing up, it was more or less like, if you did something wrong, another parent was allowed to discipline you.

In addition, Participant Four asserted that the involvement he saw in the schools tended to be superficial and more like a visitation than involvement:

Personally, and from what I've seen, actually today is nine years we've been here from Chicago, so from what I've seen in the nine years, I don't see a whole lot of involvement. What I see is the community participating maybe in the high school basketball games, the sports programs, the pizza nights, that kind of stuff, but I don't really see the community being involved in the educational aspect of what goes on in schools.

Participant Five

When presented with the inquiry into the current status of community involvement in the community schools, Participant Five did not mince words:

School territorial and if it is not within their little peer group, they don't want, they don't want to hear what community have to say. They set up; you have the board meeting, and they say that you can make a comment, but the comments are lost. It's like, okay, thank you. You know they don't do any follow up because they are—their minds are made up what they are going to do and how they are going to do. So there is nothing. I've been asked to be on a couple of committees and the outcomes, whatever, is going to be the same. So there is nothing.

Participant Five further asserted that she does not see the level and depth of community involvement changing without a community wake up call:

I don't even know if it's going to change. I don't see, you have the community only wake up when something happened to one of their kids or their neighbor bring them into it, but then as school goes, people are scared of the unknown. Nobody's willing to take the extra step. I've been fighting for so long.

Participant Six

Participant Six felt that community involvement was very important to student achievement even on the smallest level. However, she expressed concern that there should be more community members involved in the school:

I find that there should be, that there could be more involvement because there isn't, a lot of people just don't do anything. It's just like whatever goes on they don't—it's whatever; so I think there could be a lot more.

In addition, Participant Six spoke about the increased student motivation that comes from having a community member concerned about schooling:

You know, recently, since I was a student and not so long ago since I graduated, it feels good to have you mom go how was school, just that. It's not much, but just asking first, it starts with it. And then, if there's a problem or something, maybe I can get you a tutor or maybe I could ask a teacher or something. It starts at home though.

Research Guiding Questions

Research Question One: The Experiences of Minority Service Organizations Members Involved in Schooling

This section of Chapter 4 describes the myriad experiences concerning community involvement the participants chose to recollect. Nitzberg (2005) asserts that community building focuses on the capacity and empowerment of the [community] residents to identify and assess opportunities and effect change. It also focuses on the development of individual leadership (p. 8). Although prior empirical research failed to examine community service organizations as instruments of change within schooling, literature did support the importance of family/community/school collaboration in students' education. How have the participant organizations and individuals served as valuable members in the home/school/community collaboration? The experiences of the participants illustrated their commitment to advocacy, protecting place and history, and sharing decision making, all research supported valuable facets of involvement in rural schooling.

Participant One

When asked about his experiences, Participant One talked about his role as a community coach with the school system. He has been involved with, “football, basketball, track, anything the coach needs help with, I volunteer my time. That’s just what I do mostly; I do football and track...” When asked by the writer if he considered himself a mentor to the athletes he coaches, Participant One stated, “I do; I do think it’s my calling”. He continued, “My goal is to get in the school system and become a coach. I mean that has always been my dream and I was coached by some good men...and they always told me...you are going to be a coach one day; you are going to be coach and I just go around helping people. I just lend a hand”.

Participant One considered his school involvement to be motivated by the legacy of men involved in his life throughout high school. Coaches who worked with him in recreational sports and throughout his schooling positively impacted his life choices and the person he became. Participant One added:

...somebody volunteered their time with me when I played rec. Those people didn’t have to teach me that. They were out doing it for free and to me a lot of coaches get into this business because of the money. It’s not about the money to me because you can get a job anywhere.

Participant One continued to explain that the coaches in his life taught him about the kind of person he should become:

When I was in school, Coach John was like a daddy. I could go to their house and spend the night and didn’t have to have a friend there. They were some of my best buddies, not Black buddies, but best buddies. And Coach John taught me how to

be White; he taught me how to be Black. So he brought it all together and brought the best out of me.

As a community coach, Participant One felt that his role as a mentor, gave back to his community and taught young Black men, “to be a man after they leave school, have respect for women, have respect for their parents, and if you playing a sport, have respect for your coaches”. He felt that “if you don’t have respect, you are losing in life”.

The writer also asked Participant One to describe the success he has had in his school involvement. He did not hesitate, but said emphatically:

Seeing a kid going to college like the teenagers I work with. They had no idea of going to college. They wanted a job and to get a car. So I talked to them. I said, ‘Man, there’s more to life than a car and a girlfriend. You are going to stay here because a girlfriend is still in school? Don’t set your eyes on a woman or a man right now, you’ve got too much to live for.’ And when I see them go to college, it touched me right there.

Participant One further added that he advised students he mentors that, “if you just focus on yourself, like [the Black] community always says, you go to the mirror; you blow a kiss at yourself first, and then everybody else will come”.

Participant Two

Next, Participant Two, when asked about her experiences with schooling, chose to describe first her desire to guide students and help others:

Whenever I can, I try to mentor to other kids, not as a mentor, but just a concerned person trying to support education. Talk it out; tell them the

importance of it, how important it is to stay in school, and just if you want to be a productive citizen, you have to have an education.

She felt that her experiences and background benefitted students and she enjoyed teaching:

I mean I like to help people and I like to be involved with people and I like teaching, sharing my knowledge because I think I have a pretty good background and I came from [neighboring county] during the time of civil rights...

It was important to note that Participant Two shared her experiences growing up in the rural South in the 1960's and the manner in which the civil rights era continued to influence her motivations. She asserted that "coming up in the 60's when African Americans didn't have the same rights as others, I think that it is very important to educate yourself so that you can function..." During the interview discussion, Participant Two eloquently described her concerns about the African American community if more people did not become involved that can share their experiences as minority community members and instill higher expectations for African American educational success:

...you walk in the store now, young African American guys don't realize the stigma attached to the race, you know. They are perceived as thugs, drug dealers, because a lot of them are and a lot of them are because they haven't taken the time to get their education they need to function and get a real job in a real world. So they are taking the easy way out and the easy way out to many, so they think, because they haven't done what it takes to get an education, to be educated so they don't know. So they are thinking this is the right way to go, to rob, and steal, and possibly kill. So they end up on the wrong side of the law in jail, incarcerated

or on the street drinking or whatever because they don't have anything else to do. But had they been really pushed early on to succeed in school and do everything they could do, perhaps it would have been different.

In addition, Participant Two explained that more African Americans have to be involved in school so that African American students have positive role models to inspire them. She also worried that in her experience African American students in the community were becoming apathetic because they don't have people sharing with them their history and the legacy of racism:

I think the results of [African Americans not being involved in schooling] is that we are going to see more and more children coming out of school just not caring because they don't have a history to remember because they haven't been taught. And I can see more and more anger developing because they don't understand what has happened in the past and how you know some things you kind of have to let go and others you still need to be aware of because it's not all gone, the racism is still very much alive.

Surprisingly, Participant Two, when asked about her successes pertaining to school involvement, did not describe any situations in which she felt very successful beyond recognizing that "I guess it's my gift to people who are disadvantaged, disabled, or something; that's what I've done most of my life".

Participant Three

The writer asked Participant Three about his experiences through his involvement in the schools. He began by explaining his experiences forming The Involved Men:

Eleven or twelve years ago, I was reading the paper from [the study community], and I noticed from the paper, they only had 11 Black students to graduate from the high school. And so I called a couple other guys I knew in the community and we were discussing it and I said, 'I don't like what we are seeing'. And we started doing some homework, so I called this guy in the department of education to do some data for me and we found out that during that time that even in the beginning of that year there were like 25 Black guys, by the end of the year, they were down to 11....And you know some of the kids' folks ended up not being involved, but a lot of it was mistreatment from the board of education, from the system, unequal punishment for the same, I don't want to say crime, offenses.

At that point, Participant Three began a many year commitment to community service through The Involved Men. The group decided that they must reach Black students to be an encouraging factor and an advocate for Black families and/or Black students without family support. He continued describing his experiences:

And we decided that we wanted to do that and also let these kids know that there was somebody they could look up to or go to. They only looked at the staff, kindergarten through eighth grade, not even 10 Blacks in there. So you think about kids and who are they going to look up to? They don't understand that, okay, if I'm Black kid, I can't be a success and that's not good. And we just wanted to address that.

When asked by the writer about his school involvement, Participant Three chose to describe his experiences as a mentor with The Involved Men. In the interview conversations, Participant Three talked about the many roles filled by a student and

family mentor. He volunteered as surrogate parent, a family advocate, a support for the school, and as a program director. First, Participant Three presented that he, as vice-president of The Involved Men, and other members “are monitoring what’s happening; we have mentors in the schools, and we are regular attendees at the board of education meetings”.

Also, Participant Three elaborated on his experiences advocating for families of African American children. First, he explained that he tells African American parents “all the time, go to school, be involved in school”. However, many of the community parents did not feel comfortable approaching the school about a problem, so they solicited the help of The Involved Men. However, it did not always go in a positive direction, as community involvement frequently created situations of conflict:

I’ve had issues where the principal didn’t like me for awhile. They had to go back and talk to other teachers. Word got back, but I still addressed the issue and I still treated the principal with respect because of the position they hold. I mean, I might not agree with what they do or what they say, but I’m going to still treat them with a lot of respect because of the position they hold. But I’m going to fight to the end to make a suggestion. And my thing, just like I told them, I don’t expect you to mistreat a White kid, a Black kid, or another person, all we need is a level playing field.

Participant Four

The writer asked Participant Four to describe his experiences while working within the school system. He began by describing an effort to become involved in coaching:

When my daughters play basketball, I come and support that. I even asked at one point to assist coaching, and I was told, thank you, but no thank you. Now personally, I think that was because during that time we were complaining a lot at the school, and I think that it had a lot to do with we'd be too close to what's going on in here now.

Participant Four eventually removed one of his daughters from the community schools to graduate at a neighboring county school. He continued to have an 11th grade student at the community school.

Also, Participant Four detailed his experiences creating a Youth Expo, a display of exhibits on notable African Americans who have made major historical contributions. Although area schools participate in the Expo, the local study school and community do not:

Yeah, and [the Expo] has given African American kids the knowledge of who they are and where they come from. But at the same time, it's not just for African Americans, it's for the schools, so anybody can come and find out about the Expo and find out about the exhibits that we put up. And then we have the kids in certain classes to create exhibits. That way they have to research, they have to know what they are doing, and it gives them a project. So we try to do as many programs or get involved with the schools' lessons.

In addition, Participant Four talked about his role as a mentor and advisor for young people. Many of the young people that the Informed Production Network members work with have dropped out of school, failed to pass the required Georgia High School Graduation Tests, and/or were seeking General Equivalency Diplomas. Participant Four

contributed that it has proven to be an excellent environment to mentor young people. The young people who frequent Ashley's Home have become alienated from the community school. Many have failed to pass the required graduation tests at least five times. They may have had a baby at a young age, family instability, or needed help securing a job. The young people who found their place with the services at Ashley's Home needed the direction of an adult. Participant Four directed them:

Get your education and the last thing I tell all these kids when I talk to them during the Expo, I tell them you can have the biggest house in the world and it can be taken away; all the cars in the world can be taken away. You can have all the money that can be taken away. There's one thing that nobody can take from you: education, knowledge. Once you have knowledge nobody can take that from you. You can be on the street living under a bridge, if you know how to cook you can get a job to cook; if you know how to fix cars, you can be a mechanic.

Furthermore, Participant Four felt that to be an effective mentor, it was necessary to know young people, to be able to relate to their issues and interests. He added:

I think that if you talk to kids in a way where they can relate to what you saying and not think that you are being phony, you'll get a better response from them if you are down to Earth and you are being you. And they know you are being you; they will respond and open up more.

Finally, Participant Four stressed that the Informed Production Network was committed to educating everyone in the community. Although they did not see a role for the Informed Production Network in the local school system due to past conflicts and disagreements, they continued to commit to educating young people as a resource for the

school or possibly a parallel partner. Participant Four shared that “anything that we feel is educational; we implement that into helping the kids. The main thing is that we try to implement reading, writing, math because you have to know the majority of those kinds of words”.

Participant Five

Participant Five described her experiences working with schools as an attempt to develop a shared partnership with the schools. She began by stating that the schools really do not want community involvement because of the message they seem to send:

They kindly tell me no. They act like they listen, then they send you to someone else and you tell them the same thing all over again and they send you to someone else and then you don't hear anything. So, nothing.

However, Participant Five also stated that much of what she does was not part of the schools' responsibility. She felt that she served a population that had already given up on school. Participant Five viewed her work as a supplement to schools who could not possibly meet all the needs of all young people. She responded that the activities and resources she provided were not something the school did not provide, “but I don't think they see it that way. They see it as a threat; they see it as me saying you're not doing your job; you can't do your job”. Participant Five added:

I know the kids that I help and I know when they need me. I know they have better insight on themselves and what they can do. Most of them come to me because everyone has already told them they couldn't do anything, they're not going to amount to anything and there is not going to be no trouble....So, I just don't think I have a role in the school. I think I have a role as a partner with the

school, and I think that's what I want. And it is because of the rules and regulations.

According to the interview discussion, Participant Five saw her role as a community member involved in education outside the schools. She communicated that she no longer involved herself in the local school, but did continue to commit to educating the community. However, Participant Five did feel that the community would benefit from collaboration between the Informed Production Network organization and the school system:

I don't think we can do it alone. I don't think we can do it alone. I want [community school drop-outs] to have their GED and I could go ahead and get a license to do the GED. I don't want to have to do that. I want the resource. I want us all to work together. And I've been successful in that part, in making, or I've thought about working together, making them together. And that's all I want. I want all the resources out there to be available for the people that really need to use them... You're on the books and you're the one that they want to say is the link to the Black folks out there and you don't have nobody but yourself.

Furthermore, Participant Five described her frustration that she has offered resources and support to the school at no charge, but they have not accepted it. In a rural community, with a very limited tax base, and one of the lowest teacher supplements in the state, it would seem logical to capitalize on the local resources the community has to offer. However, according to Participant Five:

You should understand, school system has limited funds, and they can only do what their budget say if they can do. So therefore, if we feel as a community that

it needs be more security, then we need to get up off our butts and go down and voluntarily say we need to come in here...but the school should let us....If I have something you in the school should let me bring it, too. I'm not charging you, but you would rather pay somebody and say that policy say you had to. Where you'll get a better person with me because it's all about the kids....It's not about how much money you paying me....but I don't see any changes unless we teach our kids and the young people coming up to voice their opinion when they need to and do something about it.

Participant Six

During the interview discussion, Participant Six seemed very enthusiastic about her role in community service and involvement with the schools. However, she was concerned that the local community school did not seem to want to collaborate with their organization, though they were repeatedly invited. The Informed Production Network did partner with schools in surrounding counties and Participant Six felt that those school systems wondered why their own community did not want to work with them:

...every time we wanted to do something, they don't want to work with us, they don't even think about it. Or if other teachers don't want to do about it, maybe this teacher wants to be involved and it's like they just know. We can't really do it. I mean every time it comes about that we have a new suggestion about something we do because that's our local school, and they say our local school can't even do it even though the rest of the schools are doing it. It's just crazy because everybody knows...you are from [study community].

When asked to elaborate her thoughts on why the school refused to collaborate with them or participate in their programs for students, Participant Six surmised:

Maybe they think that maybe it's not going to be successful, but how would you know, if you don't give us a chance. Or maybe there's not going to be a good [turnout]. You don't do it this time maybe at least cancel it, but I think they don't think it's going to be successful or feel that it might be a waste of time. But at least give somebody a chance.

However, Ashley's Home and Participant Six continued to work with African American students who they felt fell through the cracks of the local school system. Providing tutoring services for families who cannot afford to pay for tutoring services, parenting classes, and multiple resources and information on obtaining a GED, securing financial assistance, and attending post secondary training, The Informed Network continued to serve the community's education needs, but felt alienated from working in the local community's schools. Participant Six described educational support activities she continued to be involved in:

Okay, we have scholarships plans where we raise money for any kids that need money to take their GED exam or maybe they are not in school for whatever reason, but they still need at some point to have an education somehow...we help get the funds for that and pay for that. We have cans; we sell cans and that too helps pay for the GED. We pass the word around, if you need help to find an education, you ask questions and you come here [to Ashley's Home] and ask those whether you know, and we'll let you know. You ask, 'I could go to school for driving?' Yes you can, and it's amazing how much kids don't know.

However, Participant Six felt that her most valuable experience was the Senior Recognition Ceremony held by The Informed Production Network at the end of every school year to recognize the seniors of the multi-county area who met all of the course credit requirements but could not graduate simply because they had not passed all five state graduation tests. She contributed that students were in school for thirteen years, “including kindergarten, and just to have a ceremony say okay, even though you didn’t pass, somebody is still with me. It’s not like everybody is looking down on me. Like a made a big mistake, but somebody is still giving me motivation to keep going...”.

Research Question Two: The Purposes and Successes of and the Barriers Faced by Minority Service Organization Members Involved in Rural Schooling

In light of the current trends in schooling presented in Chapter Two, rural schools are placed in a position to seek support in all manners possible. Researchers have long examined the positive contributions of family involvement and business partnerships, but have failed to consider the impact that service organizations can have on the positive outcomes of schools. Bryant (2007) argues that the “condition of many of our rural schools is at the very least substandard, and the living condition of the people in rural America is often one of dire poverty” (p.10). Not only are the families in rural areas struggling from the current economic conditions, but likewise are the schools. These struggles are often magnified for rural minorities. In order to address the needs, community service organizations can be an effective ally of the school and community. In this section, the writer reports the experiences of the participants in this study, in order to discover their purposes and successes and the barriers they faced as a means to begin

the conversations about diversity in community service organization involvement in rural schools.

Participant One

Participant One identified his purpose for involvement with the community school as a desire to mentor kids and to be a positive Black role model for young Black men in school. He began by positing:

Black kids are somewhat hard to deal with because their parents teach them that White people are racists. They never grow up with racism, but it's what their parents teach them. Their parent teach them to turn from White people and that is crazy! Once you get a Black coach here and lead [Black students] in the right way and show them racism is, but it's not here. I think that would be good.

Participant One committed to volunteer work and continued to encourage other Black community members to volunteer in the schools because he believed that it would motivate Black students to take education more seriously:

I think more kids would stay in school without dropping out; I think you got some kids that could play sports that's Black that won't come out because you got a White coach. And the teachers would, if you get them there, and the teacher showing them they made it. See, another Black person make it. That's rather better.

However, Participant One realized that there were barriers to gaining access to the schools in ways that would influence hiring practices or school decisions. These barriers frequently directly related to issues of race. First, Participant One felt that Black and White community members, especially students, needed a common place to

communicate. He argued that the different racial groups remain segregated in housing areas, churches, social functions, and only worked together through sports. The separation bred unfamiliarity, possible distrust, and a lack of effective communication, all detrimental to effective collaboration.

Next, Participant One posited that former community members have a responsibility to give back to the community through supporting youth. However, he found too few actually do that. When asked by the writer to elaborate about that, Participant One stated that “if [former students] just come back and just grab a kid that they see that need help and just talk to him, those kids will be in another level.” When further inquiry was made by the writer as to why more former students did not return and become active in schooling, Participant One asserted that “they got control problems, they got women problems, and they got men problems, period. They don’t want to do it; they are lazy; and they think everybody owes them something. But nobody owes you anything”.

Lastly, Participant One spoke passionately about the difficulties that continued to exist between racial groups in the study community and the surrounding areas:

Take like this, I work at The University of Georgia and I work with most White guys. Most, when Obama hit president, they stopped speaking to me...when he became president, some of the guys I used to go out to eat with after work and stuff; they don’t even speak to me. I speak to them because that’s the way I was raised, but seems like it got worse. I mean [racism] didn’t get better or worse, it just brought it back to the community.

His continued response illustrated his own frustration and hurt feelings and one possible motivation to help Black students:

Oh God, it's awful! I mean half of the people that are being racists, you don't even know what it means. You didn't grow up in it, so how can you be racist? How can I be called a nigger? If you read the definition, it don't say Black or White; so how can you call me that, you know? It's crazy.

Participant Two

Participant Two, who described her dedication to education and to mentoring as a motivation arising from growing up in a rural community during the civil rights era, argued, as was reported previously, that African American students must continue to learn about their history. It was important according to Participant Two, to let some things go, but just as important to know and remember others. She spoke about the impact of Black educators on her life, racial experiences in response to questions about her goals for involvement, and the barriers that she and others faced when working with schools:

I came from [neighboring county], and I came during the time of the civil rights, and I am one of those who wants a big push for Black educators. And most of my educators had a big influence on my life, all of them had. And I probably had one favorite teacher, but I can name stuff that I learned from every one of them, so each one of them played a big role in my life and my decision to choose education.

Participant Two ran and was elected to the study high school School Council, a required component of the No Child Left Behind requirements. The School Council

included faculty members, administration, and community members/parents and was meant to be a collaborative effort to improve schools. However, Participant Two described an experience of superficial involvement and lack of importance:

And school council is a joke! Well for one, I was on school council. They may have had two meetings, and one of them I missed, but that's all and that's over. And in that one meeting, I asked a question through the principal. I asked the principal because I had a concern, and I wanted to know why African Americans or any other minority were not represented on the Homecoming Court. I asked that question because there weren't, there were none and hadn't been in a few years. Yeah, and the explanation I got was the ratio, you know the proportions of students in the school, you know that's why.

Participant Two understood the difficult dynamics of racial discussions among diverse groups, which was why she laughingly described the manner in which she prefaced the above question at the School Council meeting:

I don't know, I don't know if it would help, but the school actually runs itself because I'm sure that they've had complaints about [no minorities on Homecoming Court] before, not just from me, and I really wasn't complaining. I was asking a question, but when I asked the question, I qualified it with, 'You probably won't invite me back after I ask this question, but I'm going to ask it anyway'.

Participant Three

Having been given the opportunity to share with the writer his experiences through The Involved Men and as an individual in the study school system, Participant

Three spoke descriptively about his dedication to the African American community. He spoke of his responsibility as a community leader through his role as an influential church pastor and his extensive post-secondary education. Participant Three felt that through mentoring and focusing on the education of African American young people, he could help provide “a level playing field”:

I have taken that personal goal to fight and to stand up for the rights of all kids....I know kids don't realize, see you need somebody caring about you and not just write the kid off because you might have behavior problems...and I think teachers have to realize that...a lot of kids come home where Mama is getting beaten by Daddy every night. You expect them to do well; you wonder why they act up when that's all they see. And so we've got to be able to know that kid and help that kid get the help he or she needs and that makes a big difference. And I've learned that even for pastors in church, you've got to know what's going on at home because when the kid acts up most of the time there's a reason behind that.

Participant Three also stressed that even students who do get into trouble need to have access to all the opportunities of education and schooling. He stated that he expects students to stay out of trouble, but he would fight even for troubled students if he perceived that they were being treated unfairly:

Well, I put it on the school system. I see it all the time because a certain kid, he worked around it; working at the school, he was allowed to graduate because he was a good kid, but what's going to happen to this bad kid do the same thing? I got a problem with that. I don't believe anybody should be allowed to do that [have a weapon at school], but I got to fight for this kid even though he's bad

because you let this good kid get by with the same thing....this kid is going to keep disrupting the class; I don't like that, but I think in the same frame, we've got to make sure from administration standpoint that we do the right thing.

To continue, when the writer asked Participant Three if he had been as effective as he'd like to be, he responded by saying:

Not yet. There's always room for improvement and there's still a lot of work to be done. But the thing is a lot of the time our people are so easy to get weary. Well, [the school system is] not going to do anything, so they give up on it. It's not fair to the kid. We should fight to make sure those kids can get successful, because if they are not, they end up in jail or prison. It's our fault also because sometimes kids need somebody to tell them, they can look up to, and say they really care about me.

Finally, Participant Three and the writer discussed what things Participant Three still hoped to accomplish through involvement in the schools. He responded that he hopes to accomplish the mission of The Involved Men "to make sure that every youth of this county have an equal opportunity to become productive and take care of themselves". He stated that there continued to be a lot of work to do, but the "school system plays a great role".

Participant Four

The writer asked Participant Four interview questions concerning his purpose and goals for involvement in the schools. He responded that when he was growing up, he was always taught to give back. He explained that his family did not have a lot of money; he didn't think they were even middle class. However, he and his siblings were always

taught to give back and that there were always people in worse situations that needed help. Participant Four expressed his role in schools as:

In the school, well me personally, I feel that any child that comes to me for any information on how to make their life better in high school, if I have that knowledge, I think I should share that with them. I also think that if a parent comes to me and asks me questions about what do they think needs to be done as far as the school system, I think that I should share my knowledge with them.

Participant Four acknowledged that there were barriers that created difficulties when working with the schools. The Informed Production Network mainly worked on the periphery of the school system and/or with students who had not been successful in schools. However, he argued that “there are going to be times when you have obstacles stop you. You can either go around it, go over it, or go through it....You don’t let outside influences influence you if it’s something you want to do”. He continued that students had to understand that “the first thing you have to do is you have to want a better life and then once you realize you want a better life then you got to go through the steps and know how to get a better life”.

Participant Five

When asked by the writer about the purpose and goals of involvement in schools Participant Five articulated her goal:

To make sure that every child...when they leave me, they have a better concept of who they are and what they want. That’s my goal. It’s simple and it’s honest that I just want when they leave me, they just have better understanding of themselves and whatever decision they make, I want it to be theirs....I want it to be your

decision.... I want it to be yours, good, bad, indifferent, and you realize the consequences.

Participant Five talked about her many experiences in community service, neighborhood councils, shelter work, community service boards, and support of military families overseas to name a few. In addition, she made two notebooks available that were filled with letters of appreciation for her commitment to service from various community, military, and political leaders. The notebooks also contained years of newspaper articles and clippings detailing her service to families, community, and schools. However, Participant Five asserted that she has yet to determine her purpose:

I think every time I try to figure out why I'm doing something, it's wrong. It's not why we last started. My purpose for being around school has nothing to do with the school; it is because of the kids. I started working with, like I said, little babies that needed help. I realized that babies like me, and as I went through transition, I guess it was whoever needed [my help]; it kind of evolved. My goal is to keep this generation from being homeless. And I realized when I was working with the homeless, that the kids had more sense than the adults because the adults was set in their ways and no matter what I told the adults it didn't matter. But the purpose, it isn't really going to be revealed to me. It hasn't been revealed to me.

Participant Six

Lastly, when asked by the writer about her experiences and her goals for involvement in schooling, Participant Six spoke from her own experiences as a recent high school student. Her conversations focused on difficulties with funding a non-profit,

communicating with students on a personal level, and being a problem solver for students who were struggling with getting an education.

Participant Six spoke of using her memories of the struggles she faced in school as insider knowledge to recognize needs in current students:

I realize what I went through in school and what I wished that I had had. I'm helping [at Ashley's Home] with the same resources, helping other kids find those different resources, or having somebody, you know, if we do see a teenager or something, ask how is school. Just to ask because I didn't have it. So, I know how important it is now and when I do see someone, I'm like 'how's school or how's school going?'

After describing the above desire to provide students with resources and support, Participant Six realized that her purpose was to encourage students because in her words, "I'm a leader and I went through it, so I can show somebody or I'll help somebody else get through it".

However, Participant Six recognized that her ability to provide resources and work with the schools remained complicated by obstacles. Funding concerns seemed ever present:

Okay, if we don't have money for it, we get out there and do fundraisers, if we need the money for that event or a GED, we still do it. We don't have the money but we are still going to help. That's not going to, we are not going to say 'okay, we can't help because we don't have the money'. This shouldn't stop you from saying okay....Sometimes you have to think about the other person. If you could help that person, why not? Who is it hurting?

During the entire interview Participant Six showed real disappointment and frustration that the study school system did not respond to the Informed Production Networks offers to share resources or requests for support. According to Participant Six, invitations were sent to school officials and announcements of upcoming Ashley's Home events were sent to the study schools, but there was no feedback:

I would love for [study community] to be involved. Like I said, we are [study community], we are [community school system] students, but we can get to only the ones that know about us....We are locally here; we went to school as kids, me and my sisters, so I just don't understand it....No, I just think our local schools should get more involved and just communicate, talk about it. Come out and see what we are doing over the [study community] and how many people are doing this....[Ashley's Home] has invited the principal, the superintendent, everybody. We sent them an invitation to come out and just take a look and see what we are doing.

Research Question Three: Commonalities and Differences between the Experiences and Perspectives of the Study Minority Community Service Organizations

The data and documents showed that The Involved Men and Women and Informed Production Network demonstrated several commonalities. By examining the collected data, mission statements, and organization activities many areas became apparent in which the parallel organizations shared interest and goals. It is important to note that both community service organizations are registered non-profits.

First, both organizations appeared to be committed to serving all areas of community needs. The two organizations spoke of monitoring the activities and status of

the study schools. In addition, they also committed themselves to providing financial assistance when needed for clothes and supplies for schools, GED testing fees, and scholarships. Both organizations provided social support to the community through unwed mother programs and parenting classes, can drives for the local food bank, and church activities. Furthermore, advocacy for those in need, including students, seemed to be a priority according to the data, and members of both organizations recognized themselves as community leaders with enough community power to be able to advocate for others. According to the mission statements of both organizations, encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship remained a focus of the organizations as well.

Next, the mission statements of The Involved Men and Women and Informed Production Network placed supporting education as the primary focus to improving the lives of the communities they serve. They each supported their mission by participating in myriad school and education activities. For example, Informed Production Network provided tutoring and GED preparation classes. In addition, the resource center included post-secondary training information and applications, as well as computer access to apply for financial assistance and jobs through the labor department. The Involved Men and Women also placed education first by operating computer labs, attending all school board meetings, and mentoring in the schools through their organized program. In addition, members have served on school councils, special committees established by the superintendent to increase diversity in faculty and staff, and as community members overseeing the implementation of the system's school improvement plan for special education. Finally, both organizations accepted that at times their roles may be in conflict

with the study school system, but stressed that they were prepared to continue to fight for justice and equality of educational opportunities for their community.

Both community organizations acknowledged that race continued to play a role in school and community relationships and activities. The organizations supported the hiring of faculty and staff that represented the demographics of the community. Each committed to serving as effective minority role models, but felt that young people needed to see more educated and successful minority adults working in their schools. In addition, members of both service organizations stressed the importance of understanding the historical significance of race and the manner in which it continued to impact the African American community.

However, there existed fundamental differences between the two community service organizations as well. For example, the service delivery models of the two study organizations were quite different. The two organizations differed in their approach to addressing conflicts with the school system and the difficulties associated with collaboration. In addition, the leadership and members of the two organizations had very different backgrounds. Finally, the two organizations targeted different recipients of their services and support.

To begin, The Involved Men and Women continued to struggle working inside of the schools through committee involvement, mentoring, advocating with administration, and attending school board meetings. However, Informed Production Network argued that they saw themselves as working parallel with the schools with the students that were not successful in schools. Though they sought to mutually share resources with the school system, Informed Production Network did not want to operate under the rules and control

established by the school system. However, The Involved Men and Women accepted the conflict as part of the collaboration process and recognized the opportunities that insider status in schools could provide to forward their organization mission.

Another difference between the two study community service organizations rested in the very different backgrounds of the organization's leadership. The founders of The Involved Men and Women were born and educated in the local area and had community insider status. They attended community schools and have a history residing in rural communities. However, the leadership and founders of Informed Production Network began their community service work in inner-city Chicago. They settled in the study community approximately nine years ago in order to be closer to Atlanta and continued their community service work in the study community. Though they had worked to imbed themselves in local schooling and politics, it had proven to be a difficult process to establish a familiarity and trust with the local community.

Finally, the organizations had selected to represent different community groups. The Involved Men and Women articulated through interview data, activities, and mission statement that they were committed to improving the African American community. However, the Informed Production Network stressed that they welcomed working with any community member who needed help. Although the study community has recognized Informed Production Network as an organization focused on the African American community, the leadership asserted that they were committed to all races. Nowhere in the mission or beliefs statements of the organization did it identify the organization as a minority organization or limit their service to the African American or minority

community. The designation as a minority organization was placed on them by the study community and schools.

Research Question Four: Strategies to Overcome Identified Barriers to Diverse Community Involvement

In Chapter 2 of this study, the existing literature reported possible obstacles that impede community involvement. Schools tend to have expectations that reflect the cultural elite of the community (Fitchen, 1982; Lareau, 2000; Swap, 1993), making it uncomfortable for marginalized groups to assume engaged roles in collaboration and decision making. In addition, even where the goal may be compatible, the differences in style and communication may create conflict and obstacles (Henig et al., 1999). Further, schools make assumptions that parents who are not present in the classroom and school arranged events, simply do not care about education. The school in turn does not reach out to them. Also, many of the school arranged parent involvement activities are trivial rituals and serve only a symbolic function. They do not support nor encourage meaningful engagement or partnerships in decision making (Swap, 1993). Finally, Pryor (2008) asserts that often parents use the established structures in schools to seek collaboration and a voice, but find the school does not seem to be listening. Eventually, many parents become frustrated and alienate themselves from the schools.

The data from this study showed that many of the community participants described obstacles to their own involvement in school decision making that reflected those reported in research literature. However, they offered possible strategies that could help encourage a more true collaboration between the school system and the community organization. It was important to note that the mission statements of all study schools and

both study organizations embraced education as a means to improve student lives and a commitment to seeing each student as valuable and unique. As all study organizations and schools shared a similar belief and pursue a similar goal, it was important not only to identify the barriers that impede effective partnering, but also to create strategies to overcome them.

Data Identified Barriers

The analyzed data supported emergent themes that identified obstacles to active community engagement in schooling. These themes, or categories, included distrust, racism, and limited access to opportunity. Furthermore, through analysis of the interview data, themes also emerged that suggested strategies to overcoming the obstacles to community engagement in schooling. Those strategies included effective communication, minority involvement in schooling, and collaboration with the school board.

Distrust

To begin, trust must be fostered between the minority communities and the school system. According to the data of this study, not only did many African American community members not trust the school to support them, but they felt that the school in turn did not trust the community. Participant One felt:

[The schools] are afraid of losing control....When people don't want change, it's usually because they are afraid. And the community doesn't, you know, they don't trust the school system. I think because parents who have complained, the parents who have said that they see this is not going the right way or have questions about this, I think most of them get blown off. And when that happens, they get discouraged and you have some that get discouraged and just leave it

alone. But then you have some that say okay, you close the front door, I'm going out the back then. And you don't have a lot of parents like that around here.

Without trust between the school system leadership and faculty and community stakeholders, it was nearly impossible to develop positive relationships necessary to authentic communication.

Racism

Next, the complications of historical racism continued to negatively impact the relationships between schools and stakeholders. According to study data, the minority community service organization members accepted the responsibility of monitoring school decisions for evidence of racial discrimination, both intentional and institutional. However, the legacy often inhibited minority community members from effectively working with a 95% White faculty. Participant Two asserted:

So you have to learn how to involve yourself in all the activities and do that with all races. Some people who are or who've been raised to fear White people, hate White people, they just shun away from White people, yet you are sending your kids to all White teachers.

Furthermore, Participant Two argued that minority community members were reluctant to become involved in schooling because of a lack of confidence, their fear, and community racial history:

Confidence, fear, just fear of the unknown, fear of getting past the past. No I mean your past is always going to be your past, but what we live through, I mean you never forget it, but you also remember it enough to know you don't want to go back to it.

In addition, the study community tended to keep all activities, with the exception of athletics, segregated. Churches, housing areas, social activities all seemed to be racially separate by choice. However, the tendency to view all activities as associated with the Black community or White community, limited the access that community organizations had to people who needed help. Participant Five posited:

I just wish the community could see or open their eyes. It is not a Black or White thing. People feel it has to be a Black thing and [Ashley's Home] is not. I don't have nothing on my door, nothing out there say I'm a Black female doing this or that. The White kids can't come in. But that's what they think, until somebody come and then they go tell somebody else.

Limiting Access to Opportunity

The data described concerns that opportunities through schooling have been limited to only select groups in the study community. The participants voiced concern that the school system chose to communicate concerning policy and decision making with only select community groups that more closely aligned with the "economic elite" (Lareau, 2000, p. 8). Participant Three explained:

I'm going to tell you one problem I had. When I was talking to one of the administrators, talking to him about getting some information, he said, 'I made that announcement at the Rotary Club'. The community you are involving and who you are involving, you know for a fact, the Rotary Club only is comprised of a very small number of the community. The information can be a great thing, but you've got to get it to the total community.

Participant Three continued:

And it's been passed down in this county. We are keeping certain things for certain people. That's basically what it is. Certain areas you don't need to be in, but it's passed down from generation to generation. And the thing is, that's why I said you need some new blood coming from outside. We've got to level the playing field.

Data Supported Strategies for Removing Barriers

Both of the study community service organizations that participated in this study argued that there continued to be much work to do to combat the obstacles to true community and school collaboration. The organization participants suggested strategies that could help schools and various community organizations to collaborate effectively to reach very similar goals for education.

Effective Communication

First, effective communication must be fostered among the diverse groups within the community. Schools must look for all manners of collecting and disseminating information. Participant Three suggested:

The paper is a good way to do it, and everybody is online now. Now that's a good thing. The next thing, [in the minority community] the church. So we know the areas we can reach people, but we must do that.

Furthermore, Participant Six suggested encouraging feedback from students. She expressed concern that often students are actually left out of conversations about their schooling and preparation for standardized testing:

But I think more teachers need to get involved with their students and maybe take a survey. What is it that I can help with? What is it the child knows? Surveys are

always good and you never know whose name is on it. You just give a survey to see what it is that your students want, what it is they're lacking, what can I help you out with. Communication is the key to everything...

Minority Involvement in Schooling

To continue, participants argued that the community must remain active within schools. In order to be proactive in addressing difficulties or potential problems, parents and community advocates must have created positive relationships with school faculty and staff. Participant Two stated:

When something happens with your child because you weren't involved, you want to come mad, and this is not the way. You need to be there all the time and see what's going on, get to know the teacher whatever race he or she may be. And you may find out that we are not all bad and not all White people hate Black people, contrary to popular belief.

Participant Two suggested that minority parents have to learn how to involve themselves in schooling in positive ways.

Collaboration with Board of Education

Finally, according to the data, the participants would like to see more collaboration and communication with the school board. It was stated that currently the school board seemed to be accountable to the school, but should be accountable to the community and students. With the school board feeling a sense of accountability to the school system, it created an obstacle for community members seeking adequate representation. To accomplish the change in perspective, Participant Four suggested:

I think you should have a community person from each district to sit down and talk to the board, and somewhere in that realm you should have the kids involved....I'll say community leaders, these high school students, and the board and you all have a meeting on how to make things better, the relationship better with the community, the kids and the school board. The community leaders go back and report to their community, the church, website, whatever. And the kids come back and report to the high school....That way everybody is on the same page, everybody feels like they can speak freely and understand, oh this is why you don't trust us, this is why we don't trust them. Like I said, no, it's not something that's going to happen in 24 hours, but you got to have those three enemies talking. Because if you give them, the government agencies, the opportunity to make all the rules and regulations, you have no say, you have no say about anything.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented the stories of the organization members. The findings suggested that the service organizations were committed to education as a means to improve the lives of students. The participants had experienced successes in their activities, but have also faced barriers that have made collaboration with school difficult. The findings also indicated the participants were willing to face the obstacles to secure a quality education for all students. The findings included the participants' suggested strategies for increasing minority community involvement in schools. A more detailed summary and a discussion of the findings are presented in the final chapter.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the final chapter is to restate the problem, review the methodology, summarize the study findings, and provide implications for future research and practice.

Restatement of Problem

Rural school systems tend to be left out of the conversations about schooling needs because the communities lack political clout. Arnold (2005) stresses that “rural children and youth represent a substantial minority of U. S. students, yet the unique educational needs of rural communities have been largely ignored by the U. S. Department of Education”. In order for rural schools and communities to exert the control necessary to secure the schooling experiences for students that serve not only the students’, but also the communities’ interests, rural community members must become active in all facets of school policy making and school system activities. However, as rural communities become increasingly more culturally and racially diverse and their populations more mobile, it becomes more necessary to seek out and encourage conversations and collaboration among groups that comprise these rural communities. Crites (2008) asserts that schools “can and do influence the level of parent and community participation in students’ education, but school administration must determine the most effective means of overcoming barriers to involvement” (p. 5). Schools have a responsibility to explore the motivations of those who are active in school system activities, as well as the obstacles they may encounter. In addition, by learning

about the experiences of community members who are active in school system activities, rural schools may overcome barriers to community involvement and engage diverse community groups to share in the dialogue about the most effective manner in which to educate all of the community's children.

Review of the Methodology

As stated in Chapter 2, this study was an exploration of the stories of a minority community service organization's members who were actively engaged and involved in rural school decision making and activities. This dissertation reported the findings of a qualitative case study of the participating community organization. The writer wanted to uncover the motivation of the involved participants to join with the schools, what their goals and purposes were, and what successes and obstacles they were encountering. This required words. Numbers in a quantitative design would not provide the richness and detailed stories that were unique to each individual. Only through a narrative that described the nuances of these particular people's life experiences and the particular place and time, could the writer provide an opportunity for the participants to tell their stories, to include what is valuable to them, to share from their own perspective. The value of a qualitative design rested in the participants creating the data from lived experience and using their own language to describe and illustrate those experiences. Qualitative design gave voice. In a study with a purpose to identify strategies that would increase the voice of minorities in rural school decision making, it made sense to use a research design that gave voice to the participants as well.

Having insider knowledge as a community member and faculty member in the community schools, the writer chose the participating organization based on knowledge

of the organization's activities in schools. The writer began by contacting the organization leaders and requesting their participation in the study. In order to increase validity of the findings, the writer requested that at least one be a female participant.

The participants had to be involved in the community schools and interested in participating in three interviews. The leaders presented the opportunity to the membership, and three members contacted the writer to volunteer to participate. In order to increase the validity of the findings and increase generalization, a parallel minority community service organization was interviewed as well. The writer contacted the local, parallel minority community service organization and presented the same request. Likewise, the organization selected three members who were active in the community schools and interested in participating in three interviews.

The writer scheduled two individual interviews with each of the six participants. Each interview took approximately one hour. Following the individual interviews, the transcribed data was made available to the participants for member-checking. Finally the writer hosted a group discussion as the third interview. The writer utilized a semi-structured interview protocol, but participants also asked questions of each other. The interviews generated over 100 pages of data. At the conclusion of the data collection, the writer analyzed and categorized the data to identify emergent themes. The findings are discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

Summary of the Findings

First, the writer provided a description of the study community, the study school district, and each of the study minority community service organizations. Included in this

section were community and school population demographics, the history of the community service organizations, and the activities of the community organizations.

Next, the findings included the examination of the formal mission statements for the schools within the study community and the formal missions of the two minority community service organizations. Through analysis of the various mission and beliefs statements themes within the belief systems emerged including the manner in which the statements considered student learning, values, guidance, improving student lives, and community involvement in schooling.

Following the examination of the mission statements in Chapter Four, the writer reported the community organization members' perceptions of the current quality of schooling being provided to the students of the study community. The participants asserted that the schools were doing well teaching basic academics, but were not doing enough to address all the needs of students. The participants mentioned the rise in standardized test scores and meeting the requirements of No Child Left Behind Annual Yearly Progress as positive improvements the schools have made. However, they also expressed concern that teachers may only be focusing on teaching the tests. Further, the participants posited that the disparities in discipline among different racial groups, the lack of minority faculty and staff members, and the lack of African American history being taught to students continued to be problematic issues.

Next, the findings included a description of the participants' perception of current community involvement in the study school system. The participants expressed concern that there was little diversity in community involvement, that the schools sought collaboration with only a select few community organizations and individuals and

controlled the terms of that involvement, and the involvement was ineffective and ignored. However, the participants continued to stress that community involvement was valuable even on the smallest level and that more community members needed to become involved.

The writer then reported the findings that addressed the four research questions that guided the study. First, the writer described the experiences of the participants as they participated in school involvement activities. Participants shared their own early family and schooling experiences, what motivated them to become active in schooling, as well as their recent experiences in working with the community school system. Next, the writer reported the participants' stories of purpose, success, and the barriers that they felt hindered effective, diverse community involvement in schools. The writer then compared the commonalities and differences between the study organization and the parallel organization chosen to increase validity of the findings. The writer found several commonalities such as mission, a desire to serve as advocates for the community, a responsibility to improve the quality of life for community members, and the belief that race continues to impact the opportunities available through schooling. However, the study organization focused on specifically serving the African American community, while the parallel organization was focused on helping the entire community. In addition, the study organization focused its efforts on collaborating with the school system to serve students. The parallel organization worked outside of schools to serve students they felt fell through the cracks.

Finally, the writer presented the strategies suggested by the categorized data to address the barriers to diverse community involvement identified in the study. The

emergent data-based barriers included distrust, racism, and limited access to opportunity. The strategies suggested by the analysis of the data included effective communication with improved methods of collecting and disseminating that information, increased minority community involvement in the schools, recruitment and hiring that target minority educators, and increased collaboration with the school board in ways that effectively engage both community members and students in an effort to improve communication and create trust among the stakeholders.

Discussion of Findings

Writer's Reflections

The findings of this study indicated that much work continues to be needed in southern rural communities to create school environments that welcome and encourage collaboration with diverse community members and community organizations. Unfortunately, the findings of this study indicated distrust among the community members and the schools. It is also discouraging that the findings seemed to suggest a perception on the part of the minority participants, that there persists unwillingness on the part of the school system to share decision making powers with community organizations whose members are not of the dominant cultural and economic group.

Rural communities in the Southeast are changing. Their populations are changing due to economic conditions, increased mobility, flight from more urban areas, and immigrant influx into agricultural localities. In order to meet the needs of a changing school population, school leaders should be working toward building bridges with different community groups, establishing positive lines of equal communication, and capitalizing on the resources within the community.

Furthermore, as federal and state educational initiatives continue to mandate educational policy for school systems, the members of rural communities are being forced to act in a collective manner, both with various community groups and even with other communities. Collective action will require effective communication, true collaboration, and a mutual respect for the instructional knowledge of educational professionals and the local and historical knowledge of community members. Neither can do it alone.

However, the findings of this study seemed to further indicate that the participants of this study view the relationship between the schools and minority organizations involved in school decision making activities to be adversarial. They use words like “fight”, “territorial”, “racism”, “enemies”, and “fear”. The writer recognized that the participants were actively involved in all aspects of schooling and frequently in attendance at school system events. If these participants had such negative feelings about their involvement with schools, what must the silent stakeholders have to say?

Finally, in the writer’s reflections on the study findings it was important to note that according to the schools’ and the organizations’ mission and beliefs statements, the organizations and schools all wanted the same thing. Each was working to provide a quality education for all the students of the community as a way to improve the lives of everyone in the community.

Theoretical Implications

Although there exists a significant gap in research literature that addresses specifically minority community service organizations involved in school decision making, this study can be situated among the existing literature concerning the impact of

race in schooling and the obstacles that impede community and parent involvement in schools.

Race.

For those concerned about the impact of race on schooling, more qualitative study is needed to collect the stories of minority community organization members involved in schooling. Bartlett, McKinley, & Brayboy (2006) argue that matters of race impact the opportunities available through schooling. The achievement gap between White and minority students resists reform efforts to address it. Schools continue to have larger numbers of minorities who receive out of school suspensions, are identified as in need of special education services, do not take advanced course work, do not graduate, or attend college. The impact of race on educational achievement is under theorized (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Although many studies explore the effects of social class and gender, race alone matters as well.

The participants of this study shared through their experiences that race continually impacts their involvement in schooling. Themes emerged from the analyzed data that examined the various issues of race and education. First, the historical significance of race is ever present in the minds of the minority participants and shapes their understanding of relationships between community cultural groups. There exists much research on race matters in schooling (Bartlett, McKinley, & Brayboy, 2006; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). However, it would add to the literature base if further qualitative research explored the stories of minority stakeholders and the development of their own perspectives of race and the problematic nature of overcoming racial boundaries and prejudice. It was surprising to the writer the depth of

the frustration and sadness apparent in the participants concerning their experiences with race in community and school situations.

In addition, the data seemed to suggest that a faculty more racially proportionate to the community racial demographics would benefit minority students academically and socially. More minority faculty would provide more successful minority role models for students, increase understanding between faculty and students of color, and possibly facilitate more minority involvement in the schools. Further research, both of a quantitative and qualitative design could provide more data from which to possibly draw conclusions concerning the problematic nature of race in schooling.

Obstacles to community involvement.

Many people throughout the community influence schools' ability to teach students. Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin (2001) stress that education incorporates the experiences and opportunities that exist both within and outside of classrooms. It would make sense to collaborate with those outside of the classroom walls that potentially influence student learning. Among those who influence student learning are families, churches, recreation departments, public safety, and community organizations.

This study seemed to indicate that there existed potential conflict when bringing those with a vested interest in education together. However, at a time when educational funding and policy decisions are problematic for rural areas (Bryant, 2007; Dayton, 1998; Sherman, 1995), schools must explore strategies to overcome the potential barriers in order to capitalize on local resources and community capital.

First, many community members feel uncomfortable in schools due to the

cultural expectations of the social and economic elite (Lareau, 2000). Those who work in schools are commonly the highest paid and educated group in rural communities. It can be difficult for community members to see themselves as qualified contributing members to a community and school collaboration. Often, they will defer to the expertise of the educational professionals. However, it is a responsibility of the school to recognize and acknowledge the social, community, and historical expertise of the community members. They know the students' and the community's needs.

In addition, it can be difficult to partner in new ways that place community expertise as equal to professional expertise in matters of schooling. Matthews (1996) asserts that the community must reclaim the reins of schooling and determine what is being taught, by whom, and how. In southern rural communities, race, poverty, and social class often intersect. For this population, involvement in schooling can seem overwhelming and intimidating (Fitchen, 1981; Lareau, 2000; Swap, 1993) and influential minority community members with more social capital have the opportunity to act as surrogate advocates on behalf of these families and students. By collecting and examining the stories of the advocates and families, the opportunities for effective partnerships could be broadened to include other non-traditional collaborative roles in community involvement within rural schools.

Recommendations for Practice

A study that only begins the conversations on community service organizations involved in schooling, specifically minority community organizations involved in rural schooling, cannot provide a basis for making a research supported practice decision. However, it can suggest certain strategies for school practitioners.

- School leadership must encourage equal communication with the community about the needs of students and the effectiveness of school policy. It is easy to create an adversarial relationship with community members wanting change, but it is necessary to realize that often the missions are the same.
- School leadership must seek to actively recruit, hire, and retain, qualified faculty and staff members who represent the demographics of the school and community population.
- School leadership should communicate with other school systems and communities to look for innovative and creative ways to encourage community and school collaboration.
- School leadership should not only look for ways to encourage community organizations to collaborate on the business of schools, but should seek opportunities to collaborate and be a possible resource for the business of the community organizations as well.
- School leadership should serve as a role model of collaboration, flexibility, and interest in the community beyond the school.
- School leadership should be willing to listen and to hear. Stakeholders want to be validated and acknowledged, but action is ultimately required.
- School leadership should provide professional development designed to assist faculty with developing positive relationships and facilitating effective and authentic communication with diverse community members.

Recommendations for Further Research

Additional research appears to be needed exploring the role of community service organizations in schooling. First, this study was bound by time and place. Its specificity to rural southern areas and minority community organizations limits its generalizability and creates the need for first replication to validate the results through comparison of data. In addition, rural areas are quite different throughout the country and world. Historical patterns, social and cultural constructs, and regional practices vary, as do population demographics. These variations would certainly impact the results and call for further examination. There is much work to do on understanding the dynamics of rural schools and their communities. This study was a beginning glimpse of the possibilities for community organizations to be an effective ally with rural schools.

In addition, the findings of this study indicate a possible need for further research into schools and community organizations that have successfully created a partnership of resources. Current economic conditions establish the need for communities to collaborate in creative ways to share and multiply resources. Community organizations and social collaboratives that include school leadership can identify problems, collaborate on solutions, pool resources, and share in the results. However, more research appears to be called for that examines current and/or future functioning collaboratives, the experiences of the participants, and the outcomes of their activities in order to add to the literature base concerning community organizations and school partnerships.

References

- Annenberg Rural Challenge. (1999). *Inside the Annenberg challenge*. Retrieved at http://www.annenberginstitute.org/Challenge/pubs/Inside/spring_1999.html
- Anyon, J. (1981). Social class and knowledge. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 11, 3-42.
- Anyon, J. (1995). Race, social class, and educational reform in an inner-city school. *Teachers College Record*, 97, 69-94.
- Apple, M. (1984). Teaching and 'women's work': A comparative historical and ideological analysis. In E. B. Gumbert (Ed.), *Expressions of power in education: studies of class, gender, and race*. Atlanta: Center for Cross-Cultural Education at Georgia State University.
- Apple, M. (1993). *Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age*. New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (1995). *Education and power* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. (1996). *Cultural politics and education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Arnold, M. (2005). Rural education: A new perspective is needed at the U. S. Department of Education. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 20(3). Retrieved 11/24/08 from <http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/20-3.pdf>
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L., Razavieh, A., & Sorenson, C. (2006). *Introduction to research in education* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Higher Education.
- Audi, R. (1999). *The Cambridge dictionary of philosophy* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press

- Bartlett, L., McKinley, B., & Brayboy, J. (2006). Race and schooling: Theories and ethnographies. *The Urban Review*, 37(5), 361-374.
- Bauch, P. (2002). *School-community partnerships in rural schools: Leadership, renewal, and sense of place*. Retrieved December 29, 2008 from http://www.cybertext.net.au/civicsweb/Printable_Papers/CIVICSBauch.htm
- Beeson, E., & Strange, M. (2003). Why rural matters 2003: The continuing need for every state to take action on rural education. *Journal of Research on Rural Education*, 18(1), 3-16.
- 100 Black Men of America, Inc. (2009). *What they see is what they'll be*. Retrieved February 16, 2009 from <http://www.100blackmen.org>
- Boerema, A., (2006). An analysis of private school mission statements. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 81(1), 180-202.
- Bowles, S. & Gintis, L. (1975). *Schooling in capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In J. Karabel & A. Halsey (Eds.), *Power and ideology in education* (pp.487-510). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brooks, J. & Brooks, M. (1993). *In search of understanding: The case for the constructivist classrooms*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Bryant, J. (2007). Killing mayberry. *The Rural Educator*, Fall, 7-10.
- Budge, K. (2006). Rural leaders, rural places: Problem, privilege, and possibility. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 21(13), 1-10.

- Calhoun, C. & Karaganis, J. (2001). Critical theory. In G. Ritzer & B. Smart (Eds.), *Handbook of social theory*. London: SAGE.
- Carspecken, P. & Apple, M. (1992). Critical qualitative research: Theory, methodology, and practice. In M. D. LeCompte, W. L. Millroy, & J. Preissle (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research in education*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Chubbuck, S. (2007). Socially just teaching and the complementarity of Ignatian and critical pedagogy. *Christian Higher Education*, 6, 239-265.
- Crites, C. (2008). *Parent and community involvement: A case study*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: SAGE.
- Davies, D. (1991). Schools reaching out: Family, school, and community partnerships for student success. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 72(5), 376-382.
- Dayton, J. (1998). Rural school funding inequities: An analysis of legal, political, and fiscal issues. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 14(3), 142-148.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural politics and education*. New York: Teacher's College Press.
- DeYoung, A. (1991). *Struggling with their histories: Economic decline and educational improvement in four rural southeastern school districts*. New Jersey: Ablex Publishing.
- DeYoung, A., & Howley, C. (1990). The political economy of rural school consolidation. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 67(4), 63-89.

- Epstein, J., Sanders, G., Simon, B., Salinas, K. Rodriguez-Jansorn, N., & Van Vorris, F. (2002). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. (2nd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Epstein, J. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701-712.
- Epstein, J. (1987). Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement across the school years. In K. Hurrelmann, F. Kaufmann & F. Losel (Eds.), *Social intervention: Potential and constraints*. New York: de Gruyter.
- Feldmann, D. (2006). Curriculum and community involvement. *Midwestern Educational Researcher*, 19, 33-35.
- Fitchen, J. (1981). *Poverty in rural America: A case study*. Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Fordham, S., & Ogbu J. (1986). Black student's school success: Coping with the "burden of acting white". *The Urban Review*, 18, 176-206.
- Fordham, S. (1996). *Blacked out: Dilemmas of race, identity, and success at Capital High*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M. B. Ramos, trans.), New York: Penguin Books.
- Gillborn, D. (2005). Education policy as an act of white supremacy: Whiteness, critical race theory and educational reform. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 20(4), 485-505.
- Gintis, H. (1998). Interview with Herbert Gintis. In C. A. Torres (Ed.), *Education, power, and personal biography: Dialogues with critical educators*. New York: Routledge.

- Giroux, H., & McLaren, P. (1989). Introduction: Schooling, cultural politics, and the struggle for democracy. In H. Giroux & P. McLaren (Eds.), *Critical pedagogy, the state, and cultural struggle*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). The discovery of grounded theory. In *The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks*. Q. Hoare & G. Nowell-Smith (Eds.), New York: International Publishers.
- Haas, T. (1990). Leaving home: Circumstances afflicting rural America during the last decade and their impact on public education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 67(4), 7-29.
- Haas, T., & Nachtigal, P. (1998). *Place value*. West Virginia: Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.
- Hektner, J. (1995). When moving up implies moving out: Rural adolescent conflict in the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 11(1), 3-14.
- Henig, J., Hula, R., Orr, M., & Pedescleax, D. (1999). *The color of school reform: Race, politics, and the challenge of urban education*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Hobbs, D. (1994). Demographic trends in nonmetropolitan America. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 10(3), 149-160.
- Hollway, W. & Jefferson, T. (2001). *Doing qualitative research differently: Free association, narrative, and the interview method*. London: SAGE.
- Honing, M., Kahne, J., & McLaughlin, M. (2001). School-community connections: Strengthening opportunity to learn and opportunity to teach. In V. Richardson

- (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th ed.). Washington: American Educational Research Association.
- Howley, A., Bickel, R., & McDonough, M. (1997). The call for parent involvement in rural communities: Mantra and mystification. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 13*(2), 101-107.
- Howley, C. (1993). A territorial imperative: The authority of the state to reorganize public schools and districts. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 9*(2), 74-83.
- Howley, C., Harmon, H., & Leopold, G. (1996). Rural scholars or right rednecks? Aspirations for a sense of place among rural youth in Appalachia. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 12*, 150-160.
- Jimerson, L. (2005). Placism in NCLB: How rural children are left behind. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 38*, 211-219.
- Jordan, C., Orozco, E., & Averett, A. (2002). *Emerging issues in school, family, and community connections*. Texas: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Khattri, N., Riley, K., & Kane, B. (1997). Students at risk in poor, rural areas: A review of the research. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 13*(2), 79-100.
- Kincheloe, J. & McLaren, P. (1994). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Ladson-Billings, G. & Tate, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47-68.
- Lareau, A. (2000). *Home advantage: Social class and parental intervention in elementary education*. New York: Falmer Press.

- LeCompte, M., Millroy, W., & Preissle, J. (Eds.). (1991) *The handbook of qualitative research in education*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.
- Luttrell, W. (1996). Becoming somebody in and against school: Toward a psychocultural theory of gender and self-making. In B.A. Levinson, D.E. Foley, & D.C. Holland (Eds.), *The cultural production of the educated person: Critical ethnographies of schooling and local practice*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Marlowe, B. & Page, M. (1998). *Creating and sustaining the constructivist classroom*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Mathews, D. (1996). *Is there a public for public schools?* Dayton: Kettering Foundation Press.
- Miller, B. (1993). Rural distress and survival: The school and the importance of “community”. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 9(2), 84-103.
- Million, J. (2003). No parent left behind, either. Communicator, PR Primer. Retrieved 11/24/08 from <http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.dp?contentId=291>
- Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132-140.
- Nachtigal, P. (1994). Political trends affecting nonmetropolitan America. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 10(3), 161-166.
- Nitzberg, J. (2005). The meshing of youth development and community building. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 106, 7-16.

- Peshkin, A. (1978). *Growing up American: Schooling and the survival of community*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Pittman, R., McGinty, D., & Gerstl-Pepin, C. (1999). Educational attainment, economic progress, and the goals of education in rural communities. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 15(1), 19-30.
- Pryor, J. (2008). Can community participation mobilise social capital for improvement of rural schooling? A case study from Ghana. *Compare*, 35(2), 193-203.
- Riessman, C. (1993). *Narrative analysis*. Newbury Park: SAGE.
- Ryan, G. & Bernard, H.R. (2000). Data management and analysis method. In N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- The Rural School and Community Trust. (2002). *America's forgotten children*. Retrieved October 3, 2002, from http://www.ruraledu.org/keep_learning.cfm.
- Schaeffer, F. A. (2005). *How should we then live: The rise and fall of western thought and culture*. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books.
- Schultz, G. (2002). *Kingdom education: God's plan for educating future generations (2nd ed.)*. Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press.
- Schwartz, M., & Sherman, N. (1995). Centralization versus local autonomy: Stalemate in village development in a politically sensitive region. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 11(2), 173.
- Seal, K. & Harmon, H. (1995). Realities of rural school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(2), 119-124.

- Sher, J. (1995). The battle for the soul of rural school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(2), 143-148.
- Smyth, T. (2008). Who is No Child Left Behind leaving behind? *The Clearing House*, 81(3), 133-137.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stephens, R. (1994). Recent education trends and their hypothesized impact on rural districts. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 10(3), 167-178.
- Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture and power: The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Swap, S. (1993). *Developing home-school partnerships: From concepts to practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Theobald, P. (1997). *Teaching the commons: Place, pride, and the renewal of the community*. Colorado: Westview Press.
- Theobald, P., & Nachtigal, P. (1995). Culture, community, and the promise of rural education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77(2), 132-135.
- Von Glaserfeld, E. (1996). Introduction: Aspects of constructivism. In C. T. Fosnot (Ed.), *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ward, J., & Rink, F. (1992). Analysis of local stakeholder opposition to school district consolidation: An application of interpretive theory to public policy making. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 8(2), 11-19.
- Weiler, K. (1987). *Women teaching for change: gender, class and power*. Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, Inc.

Wolcott, H. (1999). *Ethnography: A way of seeing*. Walnut Creek: Altamira.

Wolcott, H. (2001). *Writing up qualitative research (2nd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

APPENDIX A

Interview One-Individual Interview

1. How would you describe the current status of community involvement in the local schools?
2. What do you think is the role of the community in the schools?
3. What do you think is your role in the schools?
4. In what schooling activities have you personally been involved?
5. Why did you choose those activities?
6. What is your purpose for being involved in schooling activities?
7. What goals are you trying to reach through involvement in the local schools?
8. Is there anything else you would like the opportunity to say about community involvement in the local schools?

APPENDIX B

Interview Two- Individual Interview

1. How are the local schools doing educating children?
2. What are the school system's strengths?
3. How do you think the local schools can improve? In what areas?
4. Can community involvement help with that improvement? How?
5. What have been your experiences as you have been working with the schools?
6. What successes do you feel that you have had?
7. Have you faced any barriers that have hindered your involvement in the local schools?
8. Have you been as effective as you would like? Why or why not?
9. What are you still trying to accomplish?
10. Is there anything else you would like to say about the school system or your experiences working with the school system?

APPENDIX C

Interview Three-Group Interview

1. How did your organization come to be involved in working with the school system?
2. Why do you feel that it is important for minority organizations to be involved in the decision making activities of local schools?
3. Currently is there sufficient diversity in school decision making? Why or why not?
4. What success has the organization had? What facilitated that success?
5. What do you feel has made it most difficult to achieve your goals for schooling?
6. What could the school system do to remove any barriers to diverse community involvement?
7. Now that you have seen the interview data, what seemed most significant to you?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences, community involvement in schools, the data, or this study?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Rural Schooling in Georgia: The Experiences of a Minority Community Organization
Involved in Local School Policy and Activities
Cynthia Louise Altman Lowe
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of minority community involvement in rural school policy and decision making. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an active member of a minority community organization that participates in schooling activities. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Cynthia Louise Altman Lowe, Liberty University,
School of Education

Background Information

The purpose of this study is:

To explore the experiences of a minority community organization involved in the decision making and policy creation of a rural public school system in Northeast Georgia in an effort to increase the community involvement of different groups in the community in school system activities. The study will examine the participants' goals and purposes for being involved in schools, will produce responses that will be used to identify the difficulties and successes of the participants, will suggest possible strategies to overcome the difficulties, and will add to the research literature on community involvement in schooling.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you would be asked to do the following things:

- First, the participants will be interviewed by the primary researcher. The first two interviews will be open-ended and the questions will be somewhat planned by the researcher. They will be digitally recorded. The researcher also will create a printed written record of the interview responses. The interview will take place in a private room at a local public library with the researcher and the participant present.
- The third interview will be a group interview of all participating organization members. Before this interview, participants will have a chance to read the responses to the first two interviews to make sure their responses were as they wanted them to be. Then, the group interview will be lead by the researcher and will also follow a plan of open-ended questions that will lead to possible group discussions. The group interview will be digitally recorded and the researcher will

also create a printed written record of the interview responses. The group interview will take place in a private conference room in the local public library. The researcher and all participating organization members will be present.

- Finally, the participants will allow the primary researcher to observe and take notes at organization activities and meetings that involve issues related to the research study.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has several risks:

The risks associated with this study are minimal and no more than encountered in everyday life. There could be psychological stress when examining the difficult issues of race and diversity. Also, there is the minimal risk that there could be disagreements among the organization's members regarding their responses to interview questions. Finally, because there is the possibility that organization members could identify other participants, there is a minimal risk that a participant would face mild consequences from his/her responses or participation. Also, should issues arise that require reporting such as child abuse or the threat to harm self or others, the researcher will be required to report that information.

The benefits to participation are:

The direct benefits to the participants will be the opportunity to share experiences and knowledge about minority community involvement and schooling. As active members in a minority community organization already, the study will provide participants with another way to positively affect schooling and to feel valued, respected, and knowledgeable.

This project will positively affect schools, different groups within schools, and ultimately society. By collecting information that can be used to increase community involvement in schooling, schools and future researchers will have more knowledge with which to develop strategies to better serve all students and help them to reach their full potential.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will be allowed to see those records. The confidentiality of organization members and the organization will be protected by storing identifying information separate from interview data. The primary researcher will also use pseudonyms (false names) and codes for identifying information. No information will be shared beyond the persons necessary to the study (researcher, committee members, necessary school officials, participants), unless there is a threat of bodily harm to self or others as required by law.

The information collected, including identifying information, interview responses, any written records of the interview responses, digital recordings, observation notes and researcher's notes will be stored in a secure location for a minimum of two years and a

maximum of four years at which time the information will be destroyed. The information will be stored separately from identifying information. There is the possibility that within four years the data will be used for future publication and/or as part of a larger study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Cynthia Louise Altman Lowe. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 706-255-9192, calowe@liberty.edu or clowe@oglethorpe.k12.ga.us. The student will be working under the direction of Dr. Chick Holland, 434-592-4275, cholland@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____

Date: _____