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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

**Reforming a Middle School for Educational Equity:
Implications for Teacher Interaction**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Teaching and Learning

by

Barbara Edwards

Committee in charge:

Dr. Paula Levin, Chair
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2007

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The dissertation of Barbara Edwards is approved, and it is
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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2007

DEDICATION

For Alan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Tables	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Vita	xi
Abstract.....	xii
CHAPTER 1: THE NATURE AND NORMS OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL INTERACTIONS	1
Introduction	1
Conceptual Framework	3
Definitions	5
Nature of Teacher Professional Interactions	7
Cultural Context of Teacher Professional Interactions	13
Teacher Professional Interactions as Community	16
Remaining Questions.....	20
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY	21
Research Questions	21
Data Collection: Selection.....	22
Data Collection: Sources	26
Data Reduction and Analysis	32
Positionality	34
CHAPTER 3: THE STRUCTURE AND CULTURE OF CHARTER MIDDLE SCHOOL	37
Research Setting: Charter Middle School	37
Research Findings	42
First Question: Espoused Theory of Teacher Interaction.....	42
Second Question: Nature of Activities of Teacher Interaction	47
Third Question: Teachers' Meaning-Making.....	51

CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTING THE CULTURE.....	55
The Hiring Process as a Tool of Cultural Construction	55
Language Use as a Tool of Cultural Construction	59
The Meaning of Metaphors	64
Direct Instruction of Lessons of Culture	66
Exceptionalism	70
Implications for Teacher Interaction	74
CHAPTER 5: URGENCY – TYRANNY OF THE IMMEDIATE	78
The Founding of CMS	78
High Profile	82
High Pressure.....	83
Implications for Teacher Interaction	86
CHAPTER 6: STUDENTS FIRST	90
Enactments of “Students First”	90
Implications for Teacher Interaction	95
CHAPTER 6: CMS TEACHER INTERACTION AND THE RESEARCH LITERATURE	98
CMS and the Nature of Teacher Interaction.....	98
CMS and Cultural Norms	102
CMS and Community	105
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION.....	108
Research Questions	108
How School Reform Affects Teacher Interaction	110
Implications for Research and Practice	113
Appendices	116
Appendix A: Focus Teacher First Interview – List of Eliciting Quotations.....	116
Appendix B: Focus Teacher Exit Interview – Summary of Video Segments Used as Elicitors.....	117
Appendix C: Interaction Log Protocol	118
Appendix D: List of School Documents and Video Recordings.....	120
References	121

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Comparative Demographic Description of Students.....	38
Table 2: Teaching Experience and Educational Level of Teachers	38
Table 3: Comparative Ethnicity of Teachers and Students, 06-07	39
Table 4: Sample of a Sixth Grader’s Schedule.....	42
Table 5: Topics of Teacher Interactions.....	50
Table 6: Nature of Teacher Interactions.....	51
Table 7: Timeline for the Founding of the CMS Charter.....	79

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank the hard-working staff of Charter Middle School who opened their school to me and assisted me in countless ways. I am particularly grateful to the focus teachers who gave me time they didn't have to engage seriously in the interviews and complete the interaction logs. Like their colleagues, they are intensely committed to their students' success. If students could achieve based on the good will and hard work of their teachers, I have no doubt that every student at CMS would be college-bound.

I feel fortunate to belong to two communities of wonderful people who have supported me in my graduate years. The five members of my Ed.D. cohort have been collaborators and advisors at every stage of the process, and in the recent stressful months, they have also served as a support team. I am grateful to Michael Hargrove, Kathy Kailikole, Joanne Price, Marcia Sewall, and especially, Susan Scharton. My colleagues in my workplace at UCSD CREATE have served as audience for mock presentations, suggested references, talked with me about my ideas, and generally tolerated my preoccupied look for the past four years. I have learned so much from working with these extraordinary professionals.

Other friends have helped me by piloting the equipment and protocols, reading drafts, and lifting my spirits through their friendship. Thanks to Amy Bridges, Jo Brinkman, Kiersten Chuyen, Pam McGregor, Kenia Milloy, and Sally Ngyuen.

The faculty at Education Studies are terrific. In particular, I have benefited from conversations and courses with Janet Chrispeels, Alison Wishard Guerra, Jim Levin, Claire Ramsey, and Randy Souviney.

I am especially lucky to have worked closely with two faculty advisors, Paula Levin and Bud Mehan. Paula, the soul of the Ed.D. program, served as my chair. Early on I learned to audio record our conversations because, with the speed of her mind, I missed lots the first time. She can interrogate an idea and flush out many assumptions implicit in a statement, and seems to have limitless endurance for rethinking an idea. More than anyone, Paula has shown me what an intellectual is.

For more than a decade, Bud Mehan has been a mentor, a colleague, a professor, a friend, and now a dissertation advisor. Since 2001, I have had the privilege of working for him and with him at CREATE. He has helped me complete this project in many ways. He suggested a summer reading seminar when I was feeling overwhelmed by the literature. He read early drafts, helped to chase down citations, and engaged me in conversations about my thinking. He taught me how to write a field note and how to work sensitively within a real school setting by sharing some of his own struggles with positionality. For all this help, I am very grateful.

I want to thank my family, where once again I feel very fortunate. My mother-in-law and father-in-law, both educators, have encouraged me for years to pursue my doctorate, and have been supportive throughout the process in many ways. My own mother provided a model of life-long learning by starting her own graduate career at the age of 47. She, too, has been wonderfully supportive of my decision to return to

graduate school. During his life, my father took great pride in my accomplishments; I know he would have been happy to celebrate this one as well.

My children, Kelsey and Ben, have graciously tolerated my preoccupation with my project. Each helped keep me sane by reminding me on a daily basis that the world is larger than my research.

Finally, I thank my husband, Alan Houston, without whom I would not have completed this process or even dared to begin it. He has played many roles in the past four years. He has talked through ideas when I was confused, reassured me when I had doubts, and took on domestic chores when my deadlines loomed. All the while, he was completing a major project of his own. For his encouragement and his steadfast support, I dedicate this work to him.

VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

**Reforming a Middle School for Educational Equity:
Implications for Teacher Interaction**

by

Barbara Edwards

Doctor of Education in Teaching and Learning

University of California, San Diego 2007

Dr. Paula Levin, Chair

A growing body of research concludes that teacher knowledge is critical for high levels of student achievement. One mechanism for improving teacher knowledge is the development of “professional communities” of teachers at a school site. Indeed, many policy-makers and educators have placed considerable faith in these communities without a detailed understanding of the efficacy or dynamics of teacher interaction in the workplace.

This research study examined teacher professional interactions at one school site, and how those interactions were situated within a larger context of social and political forces during a period of reform. Three questions guided this study: What is the theory of action regarding teacher interactions and onsite professional

collaboration espoused by the school leadership? What is the nature of the activities that constitute these interactions? What value or significance do the teachers attribute to these interactions?

Using ethnographic methods, this case study focused on teacher interactions during a period in which this charter middle school was undergoing substantial reform. The data sources included participant observations, teacher and administrator interviews, teachers' logs of their interactions, audio and video recordings of interactions, and school documents.

The school leadership believed that teachers should have a common classroom structure, teach common curricula, and make "their practice public." To do this, they provided regular opportunities within the school day for teachers to meet. Teacher informal interactions were primarily instrumental, focused on an urgent or short-term need, and attentive to a range of student needs, non-academic as well as academic. Teachers reported that their heavy workload and long hours precluded more reflective or sustained conversations with their colleagues.

Teacher interactions and activities take place within a particular social context. At this charter middle school, that context was a dynamic restructuring and re-culturing of the school. The findings about teacher interaction raised by the original research questions are best understood within the context of this particular reform effort: transforming a school for student equity. In particular, the development of a school-specific culture, the urgency of the work, and the enactments of the "students first" policy were influential elements of the reform.

CHAPTER 1: THE NATURE AND NORMS OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL INTERACTIONS

Introduction

Schools are designed to be places of learning, but not necessarily for the adults who inhabit them. Appropriately, the primary focus of a school's work is *student* learning, and yet a growing body of research reports that ongoing *teacher* learning is a critical component for high levels of student achievement (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Greenwald, Hedges & Laine, 1996; Haycock, 1998).

The importance of teacher knowledge and continuous learning is relatively uncontested in the literature; the research on the most effective means to that end is less clear. Common vehicles for K-12 teacher learning are summer institutes and weekend workshops designed to deepen teachers' content knowledge and improve their pedagogical strategies. While this kind of professional development is valuable, it has clear limitations. First, these programs decontextualize the work of the teacher and remove it from the real world of teachers and students. Second, a teacher's colleagues in these professional development programs are typically teachers from other schools who may or may not share the same challenges with regard to their students and their instruction. Curricula may differ, and students' instructional needs vary widely from school to school. These differences may limit the value of joint professional development work. Finally, teachers who attend off-site professional learning programs often report that when they return to their schools, they find little support for the changes they are making as a result of these off-site learning experiences (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Wilson & Berne, 1999).

In recent years, teacher professional development has moved closer to the “situated practice” of teachers in their actual classrooms and with other teachers in their school. While this job-embedded context affords different kinds of opportunities (participating teachers from a school may have common students and a similar social and academic climate, for example), it also creates new challenges. Site-based teacher learning programs assume that colleagues at a school site can and want to work together, but these assumptions are not always warranted.

Educators, both researchers and practitioners, also make assumptions about the efficacy of these school-based teacher groups. They assume that teachers working together will promote individual growth, change teaching practice, or increase the collective capacity of the teacher group (Little, 2003). But community has a wide variety of meanings and teacher professional community can take many forms and serve many purposes. Calling teachers’ joint work “professional community,” therefore, does not ensure any particular kind of relationship or outcome. These ambiguities have not, however, dampened the enthusiasm of those calling for the establishment of teacher professional communities (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Garet et al., 2001; Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998; Richardson & Placier, 2001). As Little (2003) points out, this “optimistic premise of professional community” is not warranted by the research. In truth, the research paints a much more complicated picture of the nature and effectiveness of teacher professional communities. I summarize this research later in this chapter.

My research interests relate to teacher professional relationships at a school site, and how those relationships serve as resources for their own learning and professional growth. This study fits within that larger scope by focusing on teacher interaction at a school during a period of substantial reform. I have investigated when and why teachers interact, what happens in these interactions, and what meaning and value teachers ascribe to these interactions. I have also examined the school's formal and explicit statements about the role of teachers as professional colleagues in order to compare the institutional expectations, the observed interactions, and the meanings attributed to these interactions.

I explored teacher interactions that are both planned and spontaneous, and as they occurred in pairs of teachers, small groups, departments and whole faculty meetings. The content of these interactions was broad, and included individual students, curriculum materials, lesson plans, teaching challenges, equipment problems, school operations, community events, and personal matters.

Conceptual Framework

Several theoretical perspectives on teaching and learning inform the conceptual framework for this study. I begin with a socio-historical understanding of learning as a process of constructing knowledge through interaction with others (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Learners, be they teachers or students, are not empty vessels ready to receive wisdom from the master teacher as described by the transmission of knowledge model (Freire, 1981; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). Instead when teachers

learn, they bring knowledge, beliefs, and experiences with them to every interaction; they learn by engaging with their colleagues and others through a continuous and reflexive process of constructing knowledge in a particular historical and cultural context. The study of teachers engaged in the learning process must, therefore, be a fine-grained examination of the actual interactions of teachers *in situ* (Little, 2003; Mehan, 1975; Waller, 1975) and the meaning teachers attribute to those interactions.

An additional theoretical frame from the sociology of education is also useful for understanding the components of school reform and their respective areas of influence. Mehan (1992) has employed a tripartite set of categories to illuminate the problem of educational inequity: culture, structure and agency. Agency-based accounts focus on the actions people take and the choices they make in a particular context; structural accounts emphasize the social, political and economic forces or constraints and their impact on individual actors; and the cultural dimension highlights the role of values and beliefs in people's actions. Researchers have attempted to locate the source of the educational inequity in one of these elements, with a tendency to ignore or diminish the role of the other two. Mehan and his colleagues believe that social action is mutually constitutive, meaning that each of these three elements influences and is influenced by the other two in a recursive process. School reformers often mistakenly isolate or privilege one of these elements without crediting the role of the other two (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Mehan, 1992).

Finally, I make connections to the literature of organizational learning. Argyris and Schön (1978) described an organization's formally espoused and

explicitly stated values as their “theory of action.” They contrasted this theory with the organization’s “theory-in-use,” the tacit values and beliefs enacted in the behaviors of the people in the organization. I have found the language of espoused and enacted theories of action useful for my analysis here.

After a brief section of definitions of key terms, I summarize research on work-place teacher interaction in three areas relevant to this study. The first set of studies are related to the activities, structures and the purposes of the teacher interactions. The second group of studies brings together cultural analyses of teacher interactions, that is, research related to the norms of the teaching profession and teacher interactions, as well as to the meanings teachers assign these interactions. The third group focuses on the conceptual model widely used to understand joint teacher work, that of a community.

Definitions

Defining key terms in this literature is not a trivial matter. “Culture” and “community” are two highly contested terms in the social sciences. To complicate matters, their meanings within the context of schools are often quite different from their meanings in the non-school world or in scholarship.

Culture, for example, has a variety of meanings both in everyday language and in the social sciences. One common understanding of culture in the context of schools is as a reference to racial or ethnic groups, as in such expressions as the cultural diversity of a school, or a multi-cultural curriculum. This is not the meaning I have

intended. Rather, I am defining the term here as it is used by social scientists.

“Usually anthropologists have thought of culture as a system of ordinary, taken-for-granted meanings and symbols with both explicit and implicit content that is...learned and shared among members of a naturally bounded social group” (Erickson, 1987, p. 12). Whether or not we are aware of culture or its underlying values and assumptions, it is there.

Collaboration describes the activity of teachers working together. This work is typically a task-oriented and time-limited activity, such as developing a curriculum unit or writing a test. Teachers who are collaborative are those who are interested in working with their colleagues for a specific purpose. This interaction is also called “joint work.” Teachers working collaboratively may or may not consider themselves part of a community.

Community is a particularly difficult idea to define. In a school context, community often refers to the neighborhood families and businesses, or simply the parents of students at the school. Within the school, the term is often used to describe the whole faculty and student body.

“Community” can also describe groups of teachers who work together, and it is this meaning which is particularly problematic in the current context of teachers’ joint work. Grossman, Wineburg and Woolworth (2001) described the problem this way. “Researchers have yet to formulate criteria that would allow them to distinguish between a community of teachers and a group of teachers sitting in a room for a meeting” (p. 943). Drawing on contemporary uses of major social theorists,

Westheimer (1998) attempted to do just that. He identified five features usually present in communities: 1) shared beliefs and interests, 2) participation, 3) meaningful relationships, 4) interdependence, and 5) concern for individuals and minority views. Community is a pervasive metaphor in the world of schools. I review that literature, along with research on the nature of norms of teacher professional interactions.

Nature of Teacher Professional Interactions

The literature about the nature and organization of teachers' professional interactions includes research on the kind of activities teachers do jointly, how the demographic makeup of the group affects its work, and what results from these interactions. Research that relates to on-site joint teacher work must also incorporate the challenging physical layout of most school buildings. Teachers spend most of their work day with students in classrooms isolated from one another in what has been called the "egg-crate school" (Lortie, 1975). These structures limit the "publicly available features" (Little, 2003) which provide a learn-by-observation option in many other professions. Furthermore, a teacher's planning time is typically spent alone in his or her classroom with a desk and access to supplies. Even if there is a common working space, one teacher's preparation period is likely to be other teachers' teaching time.

As a result of these structural challenges, teacher professional interactions at the work place are most often formal and deliberate. They are motivated by teachers' perceived needs, either instructional, curricular, or organizational (Johnson, 1990) in

order to accomplish either “supportive” or “developmental” tasks (Stevens & Kahne, 2006). Supportive practices which occupy teachers’ collaborative work most of the time are focused on specific tasks or problems which occur naturally while teachers carry out their daily responsibilities. Developmental practices, on the other hand, address less immediate and less specific concerns facing teachers and are instead directed at supporting the collective capacity of the teacher group.

Patterns of Teachers’ Joint Work

Teacher groups take many forms and serve many purposes. In an attempt to understand more about how these groups are organized, how they develop over time, and how the membership of the group impacts the work, several researchers have identified patterns or developed typologies of professional interactions. These studies include how the work responds to various teacher needs (Johnson, 1990), the impact of levels of teaching experience of the members (Johnson, 2004), the kind of work done in teacher groups (Stevens & Kahne, 2006), the continuum of independence to interdependence (Little, 1990; Westheimer, 1998), the developmental stages of community formation (Grossman, et al., 2001), and the value of collaborations organized by people outside of the collaborating group (Hargreaves, 1994). Each of these approaches is summarized in this section.

Johnson (1990) categorized teachers’ collegiality as a response to needs that the teachers experienced at the workplace. She identified three categories: personal needs, instructional needs, and organizational needs. Personal needs included social

interactions about problems (classroom or personal), reassurances, and compliments. Johnson argues that these interactions were an important antidote to the teachers' isolation and "such talk provides the basis of trust for more organized collegial exchange" (p. 159). Teachers also work with each other in response to "instructional needs" and "organizational needs." Instructional needs included the sharing of classroom materials and ideas, pedagogical advice and academic expertise. The organizational needs reflected teachers' interest in coordinating the curriculum and instruction across classrooms and teachers (e.g. grade-levels in elementary schools, disciplines in secondary schools), team-teaching classes, and broader school work like the establishment of teaching standards.

Johnson (2004) provided another perspective on the collaborative work of teachers in a study about "professional culture" in 50 schools in Massachusetts. Professional culture, Johnson writes, is "the blend of values, norms, and modes of professional practice that develops among teachers in a school" (p. 141). She is particularly interested in how the membership of a teacher group, determined by the relative percentages of new and veteran teachers, is related to the professional growth of the teachers in the group. In schools with a predominant number of new teachers, she found a "novice-oriented professional culture," one which was a valued social support network but did not draw from the resources and experience of senior colleagues. "Veteran-oriented professional culture," on the other hand, was more likely to respect the independence and autonomy of the teachers and ignore new teachers' needs and special talents (p. 141). Johnson found that schools with a mix of

new teachers and veteran teachers, an “integrated professional culture,” was most likely to be correlated with schools in which teachers’ professional growth was most explicitly valued, and “teachers assisted each other and shared responsibility for their students’ learning as well as their own” (p. 159).

Studies have also identified general patterns of the tasks of these interactions. Stevens and Kahne (2006) reported that interactions of teachers at their schools fell into two general areas which they labeled “supportive” and “developmental.” Supportive practices, which occupied teachers’ collaborative work most of the time, were focused on specific tasks or problems which occurred naturally while teachers carried out their daily responsibilities. Development practices, on the other hand, addressed less immediate and less specific concerns facing teachers and were instead directed at supporting the collective capacity of the teacher group.

Several studies of teacher interactions focus on the growth and developmental patterns of the group. Little (1990) described four stages along a “continuum of collegial relations” from teachers working independently to teachers working interdependently. They are 1) storytelling and scanning for ideas, 2) aid and assistance, 3) routine sharing of materials and methods, and 4) joint work or “occupational community.” This last category includes a wide range of collaborative arrangements but all are characterized by a shared responsibility for the work; “each one’s teaching is everyone’s business and each one’s success is everyone’s responsibility” (Little, 1990, p. 523).

Westheimer (1998) has a similar continuum, but he describes it in the context of school as an institution of democracy. His continuum characterizes groups of teachers, which he calls communities, rather than the individual teachers. A liberal community is one which emphasizes rights and responsibilities, and in which teachers have individualized goals and pursue them autonomously most of the time, similar to the “independent” end of Little’s continuum. In a collective community, on the other end of the continuum, members have shared goals and the work is “interdependent and collaborative” (p. 128).

Grossman and her colleagues posit a developmental view of community formation, and provide four categories within which teacher communities develop. The categories are: 1) formation of group identity and norms of interaction, 2) navigating fault lines (working with conflict, difference), 3) negotiating the “essential tension of teacher community” (the tension between deepening the teachers’ content knowledge and learning new pedagogical practices), and 4) communal responsibility for individual growth (p. 988). As with the models developed by Little (1990) and Westheimer (1998), the final stage in each of the four areas is characterized by interdependence and commitment to colleagues’ professional growth.

Researchers of teacher collaboration have also raised questions about the meaning and value of collaborations when they are guided and controlled by people outside the group (Hargreaves, 1994; Little, 1990). Hargreaves contrasts “collaborative culture” and “contrived collegiality” and claims that the primary distinction between the two is the nature and extent of the administrative control over

these processes. He identified five qualities which tend to be present in “collaborative cultures.” These collaborations are 1) spontaneous, 2) voluntary, 3) development-oriented (meaning, “teachers work together primarily to develop initiatives of their own.... When they have to respond to external mandates, they do so selectively, drawing on their professional confidence and discretionary judgment as a community”), 4) pervasive across time and space, and 5) unpredictable (“the outcomes of collaboration are often uncertain and not easily predicted”). Contrived collegiality, on the other hand, is administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable (Hargreaves, 1994, pp. 192-196).

Impact of Teachers’ Joint Work

Researchers have been interested in the impact on individual teachers of their participation in joint teacher work. As a result of collaborative activities, teachers reported that they felt personally and professionally empowered (Hollingsworth, 1992), they became more articulate about issues of equity and hierarchy (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993), they increased their sense of responsibility for student learning (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), or, more generally, they developed a heightened sense of professionalism (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). Studies also suggest a correlation between teacher collaboration and career commitment (Johnson, 2004; Little & Bartlett, 2002). Conley & Levinson (1993) found, however, that only those directly involved in the work redesign, the objectives of the collaboration, experience personal satisfaction. In other words, the satisfaction is the result of the collaborative process,

not the use of the product (such as a jointly constructed curriculum unit) of those collaborations.

I found a limited number of studies examining the link between on-site teacher interactions and student learning. Louis & Marks (1998) studied 24 schools across the nation, and found a positive relationship between teacher participation in a professional community and the intellectual quality of student performance as measured by authentic assessments they developed. Four quantitative studies using data from the 1988 National Longitudinal Study showed a statistically significant effect of teacher community on student achievement (Lee & Smith, 1995, 1996; Lee, Smith & Croninger, 1997; Rowan, Chiang & Miller, 1997).

Collectively, this literature yields two kinds of data. These studies either describe and categorize motivations for and patterns of teachers working in groups, or they examine the benefit for individual teachers who work in these groups. While valuable for what they offer, neither type of research focuses primarily on how a teacher's colleagues serve as a resource for teacher learning, especially as that learning informs the ultimate goal of improved student learning. The research does not address how these group interactions change the participating teachers' understanding of their professional identity, their students' needs, or their instructional practices.

Cultural Context of Teacher Professional Interactions

The dominant cultural norms of the teaching profession have played an important role in teacher interactions. Researchers have written extensively about the

norms of individualism (Lortie, 1975) and privacy and autonomy (Little, 1987, 1990). In addition, teacher culture includes related norms of non-interference with other teachers (Little, 2003), and norms that discourage disagreement and scrutiny of a curricular decision. Wilson and Berne (1999) examined patterns of teacher learning about subject matter, and found that “the norms of school have taught them to be polite and nonjudgmental, and the privacy of teaching has obstructed the development of a critical dialogue about practice and ideas” (p. 186). Together, these cultural factors encourage teachers to assume a “go-along, get-along” posture with their colleagues which often results in a “pseudo-community” (Grossman, et al., 2001).

Rather than supporting reform, studies suggest that this artificial construction of a community interferes with the teachers’ ability to effect change at the school site. Sarason (1996) excerpted an unpublished study by Wasley, Hampel & Clark which evaluated five schools participating in the Coalition for Essential Schools. They concluded that each school’s effectiveness was limited by its poor ability to maintain “civil discourse,” defined as both a set of values and a set of techniques (Sarason, 1996, p. 352). Achinstein’s research (2002) goes a step further. Her case study of two urban middle schools showed an “unexpected marriage” of community and conflict. “Conflict generates opportunities to strengthen communities, for in the conflict lies an occasion to examine differences of beliefs, solicit alternative voices, bridge across differences to find common ground, and seek opportunities for change and growth” (p. 449). How teachers manage the inevitable conflicts – whether they are suppressed and

ignored, or conversely, are the grounds for civil discourse and professional growth – is related to the potential for organizational learning and change.

Other scholars claim that difference and disagreement is a critical component of the school as a democratic institution. Grossman and her colleagues believe that “a primary goal of a community of learners in a pluralistic society is to learn to see difference as a resource rather than a liability” (Grossman et al., 2001, p. 991). Westheimer (1998, 2006) argues that both teachers and scholars embrace the rhetoric of community without struggling to understand what is common in the community. Both “researchers and reformers maintain that what is important is that beliefs are shared. But do they care whether the beliefs that are shared are worth sharing?” (1998, p. 139). Since these beliefs affect the classroom and the instruction whether or not they are articulated, he believes it is critical for the group to attempt to define them.

The generally accepted norms of teacher interaction, therefore, appear to be in tension. Norms of privacy, non-interference, and autonomy of teachers’ work seem to run counter to norms of community and collaboration. These norms are not, of course, static as it may seem in the literature; they are dynamic, relational and situational. Much of the research on norms of teacher culture does not address these more complex interpersonal and inter-professional dynamics which characterize actual teacher interactions nor does it examine how these norms are enacted in the critical decision-making and problem-solving work of teachers.

Teacher Professional Interactions as Community

One conceptual model has been used predominantly by researchers and practitioners to describe teacher professional interactions, the metaphor of community. As the studies reviewed here indicate, there are variations on this theme of community. Scholars describe these as “teacher professional communities” (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Little, 1993, 2003; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Westheimer, 1998, 2006), “professional learning communities” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Talbert, 1993) or “teacher learning communities” (Lieberman, 2000; Shulman & Sherin, 2004).

Community of Practice

The community of practice or “situated learning” theory has been developed by Lave and Wenger (Lave, 1985; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This notion of community is characterized by a group’s participation in a common mediated activity where the acquisition of knowledge occurs over an extended period of time, and is the result of the interactions, conversations, and participation of the community members. Participation is understood through a spatial metaphor; the more engaged and experienced participants are considered “central,” and the less engaged or newer members are more “peripheral.”

Wenger (2003) traces the notion of a community of practice to the model of an apprenticeship in which “the community...acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice” (p.5). This term was used to describe the system through which people

learned trades, but it did not apply to formal education. In that historical context, practice and learning were inextricably linked, and this connection is the critical feature of a true community of practice. A community of practice today could refer to many occupations and professions.

But this particular model of community is based on the assumption that the work of the community members is public. The apprenticeship model of teaching and learning requires simultaneous participation of members in a common task or activity. The schedule and structural features of schools do not normally afford teachers the opportunity to see each other “work” when that work is narrowly defined as classroom teaching. The exception to this statement, and a time when schools do behave as communities of practice, is the student teacher experience. A student teacher observes her master teacher initially, and then gradually assumes more responsibilities and takes more independent action. Once she becomes a fully credentialed teacher, however, she is likely to work in her classroom apart from her colleagues except for the period of time she herself might serve as a master teacher for a student teacher.

Not all the work of a teacher takes place in a classroom, of course. As members of departments or grade-level teams, they are likely to have opportunities to work with their colleagues outside of their classroom. Some schools have structured schedules so the teachers have common times each week to meet, develop lessons, compare assessment tools, and generally share their practice. In these settings, teachers’ joint work is more easily characterized as a community of practice since it provides “publicly available features” (Little, 2003).

Community of Learners

A community of learners (or learning community) was a term used by Brown and Campione (1996) to describe a learning theory which reflects an understanding of the learner as an active constructor of knowledge. This understanding replaced the behaviorist model of learning in which the learner acquired knowledge through repetition and positive reinforcement of simple associations. Not content with a theoretical construction, Brown and Campione also designed an instructional program for students based on this understanding which they called “Fostering Communities of Learners.” Components of this program such as reciprocal teaching are popular pedagogical strategies today.

This initial work on communities of learners focused on students, not teachers, as learners. But with an increasing emphasis on teachers as continuous learners (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2005), this model was applied to teachers as well. Shulman and his colleagues, for example, focused on developing a community of teachers as learners within various subject matter areas (Shulman & Sherin, 2004).

Furthermore, the word community in education is used in many different contexts. The term may refer to a school’s neighborhood as in “community involvement” or “community relations.” It may refer to an even larger group. The students and their families, the administrators, the teachers and other school staff, the neighborhood, business and university partners, and the governing board can all be

said to be part of the school community. Community is also used to describe a variety of adult sub-groups including teachers within a particular department, grade-alike teams, or in cross-subject affiliations like teachers of Advanced Placement or English as a Second Language courses. In fact, the term community is so flexible and so varied in its meaning, as several scholars have noted, it is not particularly useful (Grossman et al., 2001; Westheimer, 2006).

In addition, community is a value-laden term. The model of community is an appealing one because it “conjures images of a culture of consensus, shared values, and social cohesion” (Achinstein, 2002, p. 421). A “school community” or the “community of ESL teachers,” for example, connote a positive set of relationships with a unified vision. Bellah and his colleagues (1985) are among researchers who have contributed to this idealized understanding of community by interpreting the contemporary American problem as a loss of community and a decline in civic involvement. They define community as “a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it” (p. 333). In addition, they claim that people of a community share a “constitutive narrative” that provides a socio-historical focal point around which the community is organized.

The conceptual model of community is, therefore, a limited tool for understanding the complexity of professional relations among teachers. The term emphasizes the common enterprise of teachers working together, but it lacks precision.

Remaining Questions

The research on teacher professional interactions describes the varied activities and organizational features of these teacher groups, and the results of those interactions for individuals as well as groups. This research identifies a complex set of norms which simultaneously push teachers together and pull them apart. The model of a community for teacher work is both promising and concerning. On the one hand, it offers a metaphor for a productive association among professionals with similar values and goals. On the other hand, the meaning of the term is unclear and it relies on unexamined assumptions about the ability of a school to establish and maintain effective communities.

The point is not to label some teacher groups “community” or even to debate the meaning of the term. Rather, it is important to understand what activities constitute teachers in interaction at a school site, and how teachers understand the value or meaning of these interactions. These issues are the focus of my research study.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Sarason (1997) observed that school reforms are usually studied after the fact. While this retrospective view clearly has value, it can provide only a limited understanding of the process of the reform itself. Being present at the creation of a reform while immersed in it has a different set of benefits. An examination of the generative process, as opposed to the inputs and outcomes, can provide a more detailed understanding of the people, the politics, and the general dynamics of the reform. In addition, a study of an ongoing reform has the possibility of shaping its direction, suggesting mid-course corrections, and helping to make that reform more successful.

The school that served as the focus of my research study was undergoing substantial restructuring and re-culturing. Within this dynamic context, I examined teacher professional interactions using ethnographic methods and a case study approach (Merriam, 1998). The data sources included observations and fieldnotes, teacher and administrator interviews, teachers' logs of their interactions, audio and video recordings of interactions, and school documents.

Research Questions

Within this context of a school undergoing reform, the research on the nature of teacher interaction responded to the three groups of questions.

1. What is the organization's espoused theory (or theories) of teacher professional interactions in this school?

2. What is the nature of teacher professional interactions in this school? What kinds of activities characterized these interactions? When and why do the teachers meet or talk? What kinds of interactions occur within the time designated for professional development or department meetings, and what kind occurs in more informal or spontaneous settings?

3. How do teachers understand these interactions in terms of their work and their learning? What values, attitudes, and assumptions do they bring to these interactions, and how do these interactions alter their values, attitudes and assumptions?

Data Collection: Selection

Selection of School

The Charter Middle School (a pseudonym) served as the site of this case study. CMS is a public charter middle school which served grades 6 – 9 during my year of study (2006-2007). That year was its second year of operation as a charter school.

I selected CMS as the site of the study for three reasons. First, as a newly chartered school, the CMS governing board and leadership team have been explicit about its mission and guiding principles. In addition to the charter, there were a set of founding documents which articulated the purposes of the school, as well as a set of beliefs and expectations about student learning, teachers, and the larger community. The process of hiring teachers was one vivid example of how the school's values and mission took shape. In its first year as a charter school, all teachers were hired

through an application and interview selection process. Teachers who taught at the school before it became a charter were not guaranteed a position. They were asked to apply to teach at CMS like all other candidates, and in the end very few returned. A school remaking itself is arguably the clearest example of an intentional community since the leadership and governing board have to communicate to the larger public the new vision while also distinguishing it from its previous instantiation.

Second, CMS was representative of urban schools with low-income and diverse student populations which have been chronically under-resourced. Located in southern California, the CMS student body was comprised of 69% Latino and 21% African-American, and 80% of the students were eligible for a free or reduced fee lunch in 2006-2007 (WASC Report, 2007). Because of the school's proximity to several disputed gang territories, student safety coming from and going to school is a constant concern. CMS was a challenging environment for teachers as well as students, so it was not surprising that before the charter the school had difficulty hiring and maintaining a complete teaching staff. For these reasons, CMS served as an example of schools which are the most critical for the future of public education in urban areas. An improved understanding of the professional culture at this school will hopefully improve similarly challenged schools.

Finally, I have selected CMS because I had access to it through my professional responsibilities, access that both facilitated and complicated my role as a researcher in this school. I address the nature of these complications in a later section on positionality.

Selection of Focus Teachers

I selected the “focus teachers” through a process with several stages. Because I was interested in understanding the diversity of experiences teachers had in their professional relationships with each other, I selected the final five teachers using a “sampling for heterogeneity” method (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In other words, from the pool of available teachers, I selected five teachers whose teaching experiences and backgrounds provided the greatest range of contrast with their current teaching assignment.

When presenting my research design to the staff, I explained the additional time burden required to serve as a focus teacher. If they were not interested in this role, but consented to the rest of the study (being video and audio recorded in group interactions), I asked them to note that on the consent forms. Only one teacher in the faculty of 56 checked the “I do not consent” box; three others consented to the study, but noted that they did not wish to serve as a focus teacher. All other teachers gave complete consent. I gave the administrators a similar consent form, and all eight agreed to be observed and recorded.

Since I would be observing and recording the focus teachers in group interactions, I did not want to select a focus teacher who shared a formal group association with the one non-consenting teacher. Therefore, I eliminated from consideration other members of the non-consenting teacher’s department and team

(the interdisciplinary, grade-specific subgroups). This decision still left me with considerable choice.

Two disciplines at CMS enjoyed a privileged status. Mathematics and literacy teachers received support from department coaches, daily classroom time (other disciplines meet every other day), a second teacher in most classrooms, and regular professional development meetings. In addition, classes in these two departments were taught exclusively in the morning time blocks, times widely believed to be the best times for students to learn. I decided to select most of my focus teachers from these two disciplines to ensure that there would be regular group interactions (professional development meetings) to observe.

In a conversation with the school's Chief of Staff, I reviewed the teaching histories of the members of these two departments. I wanted to find a group which represented the broadest possible range of teaching experiences, and I wanted to select teachers who had a basis for comparing their current experience at CMS with another school, or with CMS in a previous year. This step eliminated first year teachers.

In the end, I invited six teachers to participate as focus teachers, and five of those teachers agreed. Of these five teachers, however, two resigned from CMS before the winter holidays, and so complete data records only exist for the three remaining focus teachers.

Data Collection: Sources

Observation and Fieldnotes

I spent many hours as a participant observer at CMS. Between August and February I made 54 trips to CMS, sometimes for a quick conversation and sometimes to observe for several hours. I began observing when the staff was assembled for 13 days of professional development meetings which began before school started in mid-August. These sessions focused on “nuts and bolts” issues (like uniforms and attendance procedures), the “culture” of the school and classrooms, and on subject-specific instruction. Some of these sessions occurred in a large group setting in which inter-disciplinary teams sat together at tables, and some happened within the departments. In these initial weeks of observation, I visited as many sub-groups as possible, in order to learn about all areas of the teachers’ work and the structures and functions of the teams and departments. I also observed an interview of a math teacher candidate and an executive leadership team meeting.

I made a point of having unscheduled time at the school as well, in order to have more casual conversations with the teachers as they were setting up their classrooms or waiting for a meeting to begin. I made a conscious effort during this time to learn the names of all the teachers, to have individual conversations with many teachers, and to become generally familiar with the teachers’ world at CMS. I thought these conversations would help build our trust in each other and also demystify the role of the researcher.

The master schedule provided time for teachers to have regular meetings during the school year. One morning each week, the students arrived ninety minutes late so that the entire staff could meet. In addition, both the mathematics and literacy departments met during a common, unscheduled period once every two weeks. Course-level and grade-level groups in these two departments also met at least once every two weeks, and I attended these meetings whenever possible. I observed an average of approximately three formal meetings each week in the period from August to February.

Throughout my observations, I made extensive notes in a journal, recording both descriptive information and my reflections. Given the research questions, I was particularly interested in listening for the teachers' attitudes about working together, their beliefs about their ongoing learning, and comments regarding their colleagues' roles in their work. I also recorded comments in these areas when offered by the director and other members of the executive leadership team. As soon as possible after my visit to CMS, I typed up these notes into more complete fieldnotes, separating description from reflection, and noting larger themes and questions as they emerged.

Interviews

I conducted a pilot interview with three CMS teachers during the summer of 2006 before my data collection began. The primary purpose of these interviews was to obtain a general sense of the assumptions, expectations and terminology regarding teacher collaboration and professional development at this particular school. Since I

did not know many of the teachers before my data collection began in August, I asked the associate director of the school to help me identify informants for these pilot interviews. I was interested in interviewing teachers who were not likely to be focus teachers in my actual study, who were thoughtful and articulate about their work, and who were likely to be in town during at least a portion of the summer. The associate director suggested five teachers and offered to email them about my upcoming contact. From that list of five teachers, four returned my email inquiries, and I subsequently completed interviews with three of those four.

In addition to providing an initial understanding of teacher interactions at CMS, these interviews served other purposes. They allowed me opportunities to test my digital recorders, they helped me improve my interviewing skills, and they provided me a useful comparison of transcribing and note taking methods. I transcribed the first interview by typing directly from the audio recording. For the second teacher's interview, I spoke directly into ViaVoice (voice recognition software), repeating both my questions and the teacher's responses into the microphone. When I had completed that process, I reviewed and made manual corrections to the ViaVoice transcription. Finally, I listened to the third teacher's interview, taking notes on what was generally being discussed and the time stamp of the recording. This indexing method allowed me to return to the sections of the interview that were most relevant to my study.

Using a different method to transcribe each of the three pilot interviews was a useful exercise, and a reminder of the relative strengths of each method. The

ViaVoice method took less time but required several passes through to refine the transcription. The direct transcription was most accurate but was a decidedly longer process. The method I used for the third interview – indexing the changes in topic with a time stamp but not transcribing every word – was the most efficient method. The notations allowed me a way to return to a portion of the interview to be transcribed if in later analysis that portion seemed valuable. In most cases, this third method was the one I used when I worked with the interviews in the study.

In October, I began the first of two sets of interviews with the focus teachers at CMS. Each interview was approximately one hour in length and took place in the teacher's classroom. The primary purpose of the first interview was to elicit the teacher's perspectives on purposes and value of professional interactions at CMS. In February, I conducted the second set of interviews, also an hour in length. Because two of the focus teachers had left CMS, I was only able to hold exit interviews with three teachers. All three of these interviews took place off-campus, in a nearby coffee shop or at the local branch of the public library.

Both sets of interviews with the focus teachers included the use of artifacts to elicit their responses. The purpose of the elicitors was to record the teachers' understandings of the espoused theory of the school as well as the enactment of that theory (Argryis & Schön, 1978). The artifact for the initial interview was a set of quotations pulled from school documents and statements from the leadership team which related to the school's expectations about teacher interaction and professional relationships (see Appendix A for the list of eliciting quotations). For the exit

interview, I used two segments of video recording and a spreadsheet of that teacher's interaction logs as the elicitors of the teacher's thinking. (See Appendix B for summary of video segments used as elicitors.)

Teacher Interaction Logs

The interaction log is an instrument intended to record some basic information about the interactions a particular teacher has with other teachers at the workplace within the course of a given day. In order to refine the use of the interaction log, I piloted it – both the equipment and the protocol – with five teachers who work at schools other than CMS. One teacher was an elementary teacher, two were middle school teachers, and two were high school teachers. I allowed these five volunteers to record this information by either dictating it into an audio recorder which I provided or by writing it up. All but one teacher chose to use the audio recorder. The fifth provided me an email with the requested information.

I asked each teacher to give the time of day the interaction occurred, who initiated it, where it took place, and the general purpose of the interaction. I provided each teacher a written protocol as well as examples (see Appendix C). I also attached a paper on which I asked them to offer suggestions for improving the process. For the four teachers who chose to use the audio recorder, I provided a small plastic pouch with the audio recorder, a spare set of batteries, my contact information, brief directions regarding how to use the recorder, and a short list of the interaction elements I had asked them to record (e.g. who initiated the contact, what the purpose

was). I asked the teachers to choose a day within a two week time span in September to pilot the interaction log.

The five teachers had a variety of experiences collecting these data. One teacher, the only one who chose to do the written record, reported that the process was straightforward and my directions were complete. Another teacher reported that she attempted the process on two or three occasions before finally completing the log. Even then, she was unsure that she had completed the log correctly. Although she did not complete the feedback form, in a phone conversation she offered excellent suggestions for improving the process. She suggested, for example, that I include a small card with a checklist of the interaction log elements in the packet with the audio recorder so that the teacher could view it while recording. The other three teachers fell between these two extremes. In the end, I reviewed their logs and their suggestions, and revised the protocol for the interaction logs for use in the formal study based on their experiences.

The focus teachers at CMS completed an interaction log on four different days during their fall semester (November through January). I asked the focus teachers to briefly record interactions with other teachers throughout the day on a total of four days per teacher. I asked the teachers to select four different kinds of days (e.g. late start day, regular days, “A” days and “B” days) in order to get a broad representation of their interactions. They were asked to record these interactions on an audio recorder which I provided them, or write them down in a notebook.

Several of the teachers chose a combination of these, making written notes throughout the day and then making one longer audio recording at the end of the day based on their notes. Finding time to do the interaction log in any form proved nearly impossible for one of the focus teachers, and so I made special arrangements for her. I shadowed her for an entire day and recorded the interactions myself as I observed her. By the end of the data collection period, I had received four days of logs from three teachers, and these logs provided me with sufficient data to look for patterns of interactions, without imposing undue burden on any individual teacher.

School Documents and Video Recordings

I selected key school documents for review of assumptions, expectations, and specific language regarding teacher collaboration and professional development at CMS. These documents included the school's charter, mission statement, academic plan, and the statement of teacher commitments. I also reviewed video recordings from CMS professional development sessions in the summer of 2006 in order to discern expectations about how teachers should work together. (See Appendix D for a list of the documents.)

Data Reduction and Analysis

I have used elements from the model of grounded theory (Glaser & Straus, 1967) to reduce and analyze my data. Using a socio-cultural theoretical orientation and the research questions as the primary guides, I reviewed the data noting the

relevance to the questions of this interaction, interview, or document. Next I took these lessons, patterns, or themes and applied them to the next data source in the style of constant comparison (Taskakori & Teddlie, 1998). Using this reflexive and iterative process, the data informed and refined the theoretical claims, and these claims have in turn, shaped the filter through which I reviewed the data.

Throughout the review of indexed interviews and my fieldnotes, I looked for the ways teachers interacted with their colleagues, how they characterized these interactions (their meaning, their value, conditions of their value), as well as description of institutional factors which inhibited or facilitated their work together. I also looked for patterns of discourse to identify ways in which teachers responded to their colleagues' questions and concerns (Little, 2006). Specific examples of the kind of data I examined closely are: pronouns teachers use to describe their interactions with other teachers (“‘We,’ ‘I,’ and ‘they’ convey meaningful boundaries” p. 527, Little, 1990); evidence of conflict in interaction, responses to it, reflection on it; teachers' language which promotes disagreement, and that which promotes “contrived collegiality”; explicit discussion of group dynamics or interactions; assumptions, implicit or explicit, about the purpose of teacher interactions or the value of professional development time; evidence or talk of interdependence; talk or attitudes about individual or minority opinions; and references to community at CMS.

After each interview with a focus teacher, for example, I immediately made notes on what surprised me, what was similar to or different from other focus teachers' experience or understanding, and my general reflections. Next, I listened to the

interview in its entirety, recording the general topics with a time stamp and a brief description. When I had completed that process for all five interviews, I went back to each one to listen closely to sections in which the teachers were describing the professional interactions at school (research question #2), or their understanding of the activities, value, and rationale of these interactions (question #3). I also compared the teachers' understandings to one another, noticing how the focus teachers compared their experiences to other teachers at CMS, and how they compared their experiences at CMS to their experiences at schools where they previously taught. These interview data were also compared to the descriptions and rationale of teacher interactions offered by official documents and leadership team members.

Positionality

Prior to the research study, I worked at the university as the coordinator of teacher professional development, a role that complicated my work as a researcher at CMS. In my professional role, I had met with members of the CMS leadership team approximately six times regarding professional development opportunities for the CMS faculty. At that time, I had had no direct contact with CMS teachers nor did I know any of them through other professional networks. The university research center where I am employed, however, has been centrally involved in the establishment of CMS as a charter school. In fact, my supervisor played a key role in the governance of the school. Although these relationships certainly helped me to gain access to CMS as the site of my study, they presented myriad challenges as well.

The first of these challenges surfaced during my presentation to the CMS faculty about my research in the meetings prior to the opening of school. I explained the purpose of the work, the data collection plan, and then I distributed forms for the teachers and administrators to give or withhold consent to participate in the study. One teacher reasonably asked if I could continue to serve as a resource for matters related to professional development, and I readily agreed. At the time, I felt grateful to the teachers and I was eager to return the favor in whatever form it might take. Sharing something about professional literature, current research findings, or recommended summer programs, for example, seemed like a simple and natural way for me to help teachers who were interested in those vehicles for professional growth.

Chief of Staff Goodwin¹, however, expressed concern about my offer to help. She feared that my advice or suggestions might lead CMS teachers to participate in professional development activities that did not support CMS leaders' carefully designed plans for their teachers. As a result, I limited my role during the research period to researcher, and I explained this decision to teachers who wanted to discuss professional development with me.

A different concern arose at another point in the year. The school leaders worked hard to limit what they termed "negativity" among the teachers, and Ms. Goodwin discussed this concern with me early in the year. She was worried that "teachers would see me as a place for negativity" since they could talk with me and maintain some degree of anonymity. I talked with one teacher at a time when he was

¹ All names in this study are pseudonyms.

feeling unhappy in his work. Rumors of that conversation made their way to Ms. Goodwin. She asked to speak with me privately and then repeated her concern about negativity. I reassured her that I had not and would not repeat this teacher's concerns to anyone. In the end, I handled these conversations professionally and the research was not disrupted.

When I encountered the inevitable conflict-of-interest (whether perceived or actual) or confusion of roles, I followed the example of Hubbard, Mehan & Stein (2006). Two of the researchers in that study had multiple roles in the district they were studying, and sometimes obtained important information while they were in non-researcher roles. They considered these data "off-the-record" and therefore not valid data sources unless and until they were independently confirmed.

In addition, I have tried to be as transparent as possible about my data collection and data analysis processes. Part of the process of transparency was member-checking, the process of asking informants to review the researcher's preliminary findings and interpretations in order to check the data and the narrative account. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 315) have called this step "the most crucial part of establishing credibility" in qualitative research. Accordingly, at the end of the data collection period, I presented my preliminary findings to interested teachers and administrators at CMS. I then incorporated their concerns and comments into the analysis and discussion of the research presented in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3: THE STRUCTURE AND CULTURE OF CHARTER MIDDLE SCHOOL

This chapter introduces the structure and culture of Charter Middle School (CMS) and provides basic information about the student and teacher demographics, the governing structures, and the school's academic plan. Following this description of setting, I turn to the three research questions – espoused theory of teacher interaction, the nature of teacher interaction, and the meaning teachers attribute to these interactions – and their respective answers.

Research Setting: Charter Middle School

Demographic Profile

Charter Middle School opened in September 2005 after the school at this facility had failed to meet academic performance goals for six consecutive years. The establishment of CMS was the result of months of hard work by neighborhood families, school staff, university faculty, and other community supporters. The turbulent and political process of the founding of the school had long-term consequences for the school's relationship to the district, the teachers' relationships to each other, and the nature of the work at CMS. I take up these themes in detail in chapter 5.

Located in a low-income neighborhood in large city in southern California, CMS opened in 2005. That year, it served 750 students in grades 6 – 8 with a diverse student body described in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparative Demographic Description of Students

Percentage of Students by Ethnicity	CMS 05-06	District 05-06	California 05-06	CMS 06-07
American Indian	0	0.5	0.8	.1
Asian	6.5	8.7	8.2	.3
Pacific Islander	1.9	1	0.6	1.4
Filipino	0.9	6.9	2.6	.5
Latino	61.8	43.5	47.6	69
African American	25.9	13.9	7.8	21
White	3	25.6	30.3	2.5
Multiple/No Response	0	0	2	5

Source: Education Data, 2006 for 05-06, and WASC 2007 for 06-07

A year later, in 2006-2007, CMS enrolled approximately 800 students in grades 6 – 9, with the ethnic distribution shown in Table 1. (District and state demographic data for 2006-2007 were not available.) Sixty-three percent of the students were English language learners and at least 48% spoke a language other than English at home (WASC Report, 2007).

The research took place during CMS' second year of operation, 2006-2007. On the opening day of that school year, 56 teachers (18 men and 38 women) and 8 administrators (5 men and 3 women) constituted the staff of CMS.

Table 2: Teaching Experience and Educational Level of Teachers

Prior years teaching	None	1- 4 yrs.	> 4 yrs.
	32%	55%	13%

Educational level	Bachelors	Masters	Unknown
	71%	21%	8%

Twenty-five faculty members had preliminary or emergency credentials, and of those who were fully credentialed, four lacked credentials in the subjects they were teaching. Several of the experienced teachers had not taught in traditional secondary schools. The staff included teachers who had taught in an international school and a charter school. Several other teachers had taught only in elementary schools.

The teaching faculty had the ethnic/racial distribution represented in Table 3.

Table 3: Comparative Ethnicity of Teachers and Students, 06-07

Percentage by Ethnicity	Teachers	Students
Asian	16	.3
Latino	13	69.2
African American	4	21
White	64	2.5
Other/No Response	3	5

The administration included five men and three women who had an ethnic/racial composition similar to the faculty.

This demographic profile of the CMS staff is relatively typical of teachers and administrators in urban schools. Two features of this profile are particularly characteristic of urban schools: the limited amount of teaching experience of the faculty, and the incongruity between the ethnic and racial distribution of the students and that of their teachers (Lankford, Loeb, & Wycoff, 2002).

Governing Structure

The school was governed by a twelve-person Board of Directors.² The board included representation from CMS parents, CMS teachers and administrators, faculty from the partnering university, as well as leaders from several community organizations and a former state legislator. The director of the school, similar to a principal, reported directly to the Board. The director supervised three administrators who were responsible for major divisions of the work of the school. The chief of staff managed the operations of the school including human resources, university partnerships, parent engagement and grants; the assistant director was in charge of building and grounds, discipline, technology, and the elective courses; the academic director was in charge of the Departments of Math, Literacy, Science, History, and ESL. In addition to these four key administrators, the “executive leadership team” also included department chairs, three department coaches (former teachers who supported teachers in the Math and Literacy Departments) and the executive assistant to the director.

Although not employees of the school, another dozen adults staffed the departments which constituted the on-site Family Support Center. These services available for students and their families included counseling, drop-out prevention, alcohol and drug programs, and anger management. Most personnel for these programs were bilingual (Spanish-English), and much of the information was available in both languages.

² Although many features of this school will undoubtedly change, I am describing it as it existed in 2006-2007. I have chosen to use the past tense for this description.

The Academic Plan

The CMS vision was stated succinctly on all school publications. “The mission of [Charter Middle School], in partnership with [name of local university] and our community, is to accelerate academic achievement for ALL students through a college culture and curriculum.” To support a school-wide college-preparatory curriculum, CMS provided several forms of additional help for the students: a second adult in some classrooms, a longer school day, additional class time for students struggling in either math or literacy (English), and Saturday Academy, a special help session offered every Saturday morning.

The master schedule rotated “A” and “B” days. Every day had four major periods of 85 minutes each (70 minutes on the shorter Wednesday schedule), with two periods in the morning and two in the afternoon. All students had math and literacy in the morning periods on both A and B days. In the afternoon, students rotated among social studies, science, ENS (exercise and nutritional science) and electives. The afternoon classes met every other day, either on A days or on B days. (See the sample schedule for CSM 6th grader in Table 4.) Several math teachers also taught science in the afternoon, and several literacy teachers also taught history-social studies in the afternoon. Most teachers of history, science, and elective courses were assigned to a math or literacy class in the morning to support the primary teacher there.

CMS had three shorter non-academic periods every day as well. Before 1st period are team meetings. Teams were composed of grade-alike groups of students and some of that group’s teachers. The math and literacy teachers in a particular team

were called “partner teachers.” The twenty minute period of team was “where students experience kinesthetic and team-building activities” and got mentally prepared for their day (WASC Report, 2007). Just before or after lunch (depending on a student’s grade level) was the advisory period which functioned as a homeroom. The day ended with “encore,” a more informal time when students could be involved in outdoor sports, learning a new hobby, or starting on their homework.

Table 4: Sample of a Sixth Grader’s Schedule

	"A" Day	"B" Day
7:50 - 8:05	TEAM	TEAM
8:08 - 9:33	Math	Math
9:36 - 11:01	Literacy	Literacy
11:04 - 11:39	Lunch	Lunch
11:42 - 12:20	Advisory	Advisory
12:25 - 1:50	World History	Latin
1:55 - 3:20	ENS	Science
3:25 - 4:00	Encore	Encore

Research Findings

First Question: Espoused Theory of Teacher Interaction

School documents and presentations by CMS leaders communicated a set of values and beliefs which related to teacher interactions in both formal meetings and informal conversations among teachers. The clearest statement of those expectations was in the “Teacher Commitment Form” which every teacher signed at the beginning of the school year. The statement of the commitment form also served as the standard to each teacher’s annual performance evaluation. The sections which most directly relate to teacher interaction are excerpted here.

COACHING:

- I will reflect on our professional growth as educators and actively participate in professional development.
- I will implement new learning in order for continuous improvement to occur.
- I will seek out coaching from our colleagues.

COLLABORATION:

- I will plan lessons with fellow teachers so that our students receive a consistent quality education from all teachers.
- I will open our classroom for others to learn.
- I will share and receive ideas around instruction with others.

Teachers were expected to regularly attend and participate in department and whole school professional development sessions, and they were expected to teach common curricula (when provided) and adopt common classroom structures and pedagogical strategies. In keeping with the school's espoused belief that "our practice is public," teachers were also expected to open their classrooms to school personnel and outside visitors.

School leaders I interviewed told me that they believed teachers should share responsibility for the students in the school, and that their joint work should reinforce rather than challenge the work of their colleagues. They believed that the value of "students first" and the goal of preparing their students for a college preparatory curriculum should inform the substance of all teacher interactions, and that no time should be wasted on non-essential activities. This belief was summarized by the term "urgency" which is posted in classrooms and referenced in many school documents.

The Culture of CMS. The elements of the espoused theory of action at CMS were captured in the term "culture." "Culture" and "school culture" have varied

meanings and purposes in education. Sometimes the term is a simply a substitute for school climate, the general feeling of a campus. Erickson (1987) has identified a set of more specific definitions of “school culture,” all of which, he claims “presume that culture is essentially ideational – not behavior itself but a set of interpretive frames for making sense of behavior” (p.13). Based on the data collected in this study, the CMS leadership did not use the term culture primarily to mean school climate or to interpret behavior. Instead, phrases like “the culture of learning” primarily described behaviors which served the goals of safety, orderliness, and learning, in that order. Although learning was the ultimate goal according to CMS leaders, they talked frequently about the need to provide a safe environment, quiet hallways and orderly transitions between classes in order to allow learning to take place. The focus on safety and order was understandable given the historical context of CMS before the charter.

CMS was located in close proximity to five gang territories, and in previous years students had been accosted walking to and from school. These violent activities sometimes followed students onto school grounds and resulted in an environment in which students reported they did not feel safe. Over the course of the year before the charter began, for example, twelve students were expelled because they carried weapons on campus. Chief of Staff Goodwin told me, “My first year here [three years before the school went charter] two kids were buried every month that I worked here. Over 20 kids died my first year here.”

Director Moreno was asked by a group of educators visiting CMS if he started the school design by studying “the data” (meaning, students’ test scores, percentages

of English learners, for example). He replied, “No, I decided to start with keeping the students from killing each other” and he seemed to mean this statement quite literally.

For Director Moreno and other members of the leadership team, “not killing each other” translated into the development of a set of values, norms, and behavioral expectations, a “culture of learning.” In the first year of the charter, the CMS administration made this cultural transformation its highest priority. They began this work by providing a week of professional development they called “culture camp.” During this week, the entire staff learned the CMS values and behaviors, how to model them, and how to teach them in the first weeks of school in the students’ own “culture camp.”

The most obvious expression of this cultural shift was the students’ attire – a required uniform of white shirt with the school logo, tie (for both girls and boys), khaki pants or skirt, and shoes of particular colors and kind. In addition, pants needed to have belts, be worn above the hips, and shirts had to be tucked in. Maintaining this standard for all students all day long took a considerable amount of adult attention.

In order to minimize the disruption to learning, students were expected to move in an orderly fashion from one classroom to another. Students moved from class to class quietly in a single file line, only entering the next class when that teacher invited them in, and they remained quiet and in line. Students who needed to go to the nurse or the bathroom during class followed a spelled-out protocol for such excursions. The students moved through their day in this manner; the only exceptions were a relatively unstructured 30 minute lunch period and the final 30 minutes of the

day in which they could choose to engage in a non-academic activity such as soccer or crafts.

Inside the classroom, the cultural lessons continued. Students were expected to go directly to their seats, and begin quietly working on the “prelude,” a kind of brain warm-up activity which was posted on the whiteboard. Students were taught to address adults they encountered with “good morning, Mr. Jones” and “yes, sir” or “yes, ma’am.” Near the end of each class, one student led her fellow students in an “honoring the teacher” ritual, a chorale thank you to the teacher.

Although the ultimate goal, as stated in the CMS mission statement, is the *academic* achievement of all students, the school leadership chose to begin the work with a transformation of the culture of the school. This ordering – culture before academics – was built on several premises. First, the leaders reported that learning and achievement cannot be clearly addressed until the numerous distractions from learning are removed. These distractions included an unsafe or noisy campus, disorderly or chaotic classroom environments, disrespectful language and behavior, or simply a disorganized binder. The school leadership also believed that these important cultural pieces needed to be the primary focus of the school’s work in the first year or so, rather than leading with academics alone or choosing to focus simultaneously on cultural and academic transformation.

Second Question: Nature of Activities of Teacher Interaction

On-Site Teacher Professional Development. The academic plan of CMS included a commitment to job-embedded professional development of the teaching staff, and the master schedule reflected this commitment. Every department had a common preparation period every day, allowing teachers to meet regularly for any reason. The Literacy and Math Departments also had coaches (veteran teachers) who worked with teachers individually and organized department professional development meetings. These meetings typically focused on: sharing a common unit of instruction, developing a common assessment, discussing strategies for preparing students for standardized tests, developing curriculum portfolios for a WASC review, or analyzing student test scores. Teachers also met in additional sessions in their course-level (e.g. algebra, geometry) or grade-level (7th grade literacy) sub-groups.

The department level meetings were usually led by department coaches or the academic director. The agenda of these meetings was determined in part by the perceived needs of the teachers and their students and in part by requirements originating outside of the classroom, such as WASC review and the state's standardized tests. The agendas for the Math Department professional development meetings, for example, were the result of a careful process which began before the academic year. The Math Department coach Jacob Thompson met with a CMS curriculum consultant as well as a group of returning math teachers in the summer. Once the school year began, Mr. Thompson adjusted the plan for the professional development sessions based on the needs of the specific teachers he observed in their

classrooms. Examples of agenda items for the Math Department were the purposes of charting, de-escalating violence in the classroom, and analyzing student data.

Both the Literacy and Math Departments had classrooms available for these meetings which served dedicated teacher-learning space. These classrooms also served as the offices of the department coaches and general resource centers for teachers in those departments. The course-level or grade-level group meetings usually took place in the classroom of one of the participating teachers. These meetings were more informal, led by the teachers, and typically addressed an immediate need of the group, such as the development of next week's test.

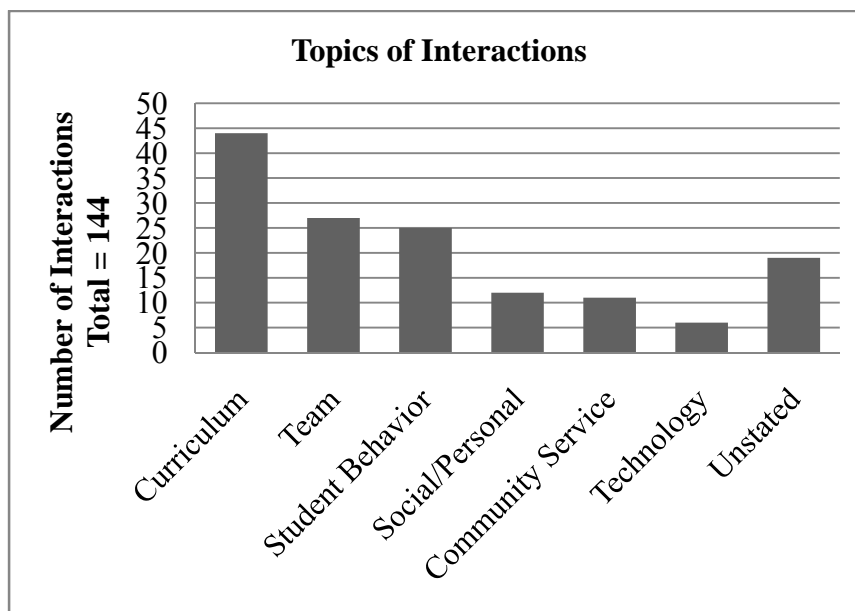
In addition, every Wednesday morning students came to school 90 minutes later than usual, and the entire faculty met during this time. According to the distributed "calendar of learning" and Director Moreno's description in an early staff meeting, these sessions served four purposes: team planning, committee meetings, parent conferences, and general school business. Teams, composed of students from a grade level and some of their teachers, met to discuss struggling students or plan activities for "team," the first twenty minutes of each day. Most teachers served on one or more school committees, such as grant/fundraising committee, parent engagement, and the enrollment committee. According to the calendar, a portion of the Wednesday meeting time was allocated for committee work approximately once per month. Parent-teacher conferences were held during this time on four separate Wednesdays in the year. The most frequent focus of this time, however, was general school business. It was within this period that, for example, CMS staff learned how to

operate the new voicemail system, discussed plans for the upcoming WASC review, and received the state mandated training from Child Protective Services.

Whatever else was on the agenda, every Wednesday also included a reminder of the mission and the “big picture,” plentiful thanks to the teachers for their hard work, and general encouragement from the school’s leaders. This agenda item sometimes took the form of an allegorical story or a personal reflection. Chief of Staff Goodwin and Director Moreno who usually led this portion of the meeting were both powerful speakers, and the teachers listened attentively. According to my interviews and conversations with them, the director and chief of staff believed this morale boost was a critical component of the support they provided for their teachers.

Informal Interactions. In addition to formal and planned meetings of teachers, there were, of course, many informal and spontaneous interactions among the teachers, especially among partner teachers who had students in common. Based on the focus teachers’ interaction logs (see Table 5), the content of these interactions usually related to curriculum (e.g. borrowing the global atlases for the next class), team (e.g. planning team activities for the next day), or student behavior (e.g. detention, uniform violations). Interactions outside of these categories were concerned with a range of issues including computer and equipment failure, community service work, and personal exchanges. Of the 144 recorded interactions,

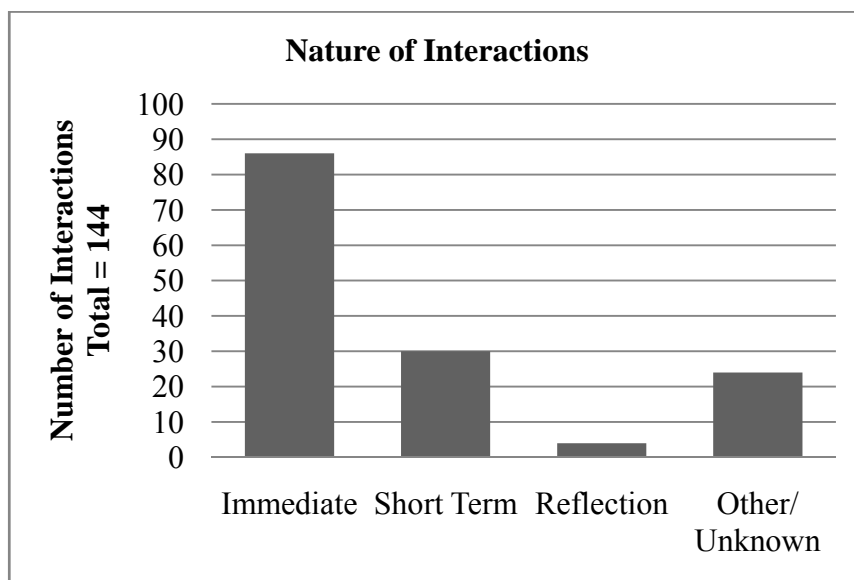
Table 5: Topics of Teacher Interactions



115 (or 80%) were with other teachers. The rest of the interactions were with school administrators (12%), non-teaching staff (7%), and parents (1%).

The teachers' unplanned, informal interactions were primarily focused on immediate matters. Of the 144 interactions recorded by the focus teachers, 60% related to issues of immediate need (see Table 6). This group of interactions included getting curricular materials for an upcoming class, coordinating detention rosters, and deciding how to cover the class of an absent colleague. Another 21% regarded short-term issues, such as planning for an Associated Student Body (ASB) activity, or discussing a health benefit with the human resources coordinator. Four of these interactions (3%) involved a reflection on curriculum or instruction (e.g. Did that strategy work for you? Did your students understand the division of fractions lesson?). None of the interactions related directly to subject matter content.

Table 6: Nature of Teacher Interactions



The teacher interactions at CMS occurred in both formal and informal settings, addressed a range of topics, and were primarily focused on matters that required immediate attention rather than long-range planning. The master schedule, the teachers' formal commitment, and administrators' expectations all encouraged frequent interactions among teachers in departments and in teams. I turn now to the ways in which the teachers at CMS made sense of these interactions.

Third Question: Teachers' Meaning-Making

Not surprisingly, teachers varied in their understandings of the meaning and value of their interactions with their colleagues. The teachers I interviewed from the Math and Literacy Departments which had regular professional development meetings were appreciative of the resources they were given and the support provided them by

the coaches. But several of these teachers also resented the frequency of the meetings because they felt the meetings took away much-needed preparation time. One teacher reported that meeting twice a week was too much time given other pressing responsibilities to call parents, work with individual students, and grade papers. Interviewed teachers expressed other concerns about the scheduled professional development meetings. In particular, one teacher reported that the meetings did not necessarily address his needs, and another teacher said that the meetings sometimes resulted in additional work. That teacher described a meeting in which the course-level group created a common unit test, and she reported that she could have accomplished this task more quickly by herself.

Some teachers in departments other than the Math and Literacy Departments expressed disappointment that they did not have regular professional development meetings or other formal opportunities to collaborate with their department colleagues. One focus teacher noted in an interview that the Wednesday meetings are called professional development, but “it’s all logistics...and announcements.”

Most teachers I interviewed understood their interactions needed to be task-oriented. One focus teacher reviewed the chart which summarized his interaction logs, and he commented on the problem-solving nature of the interactions. “Most of them had a directive and I spoke [to the necessary person] and accomplished the directive and then moved on,” he said. He preferred this form of interaction to a meeting because it was a more efficient use of his time. For all of the focus teachers, time was a scarce resource which frequently worked its way into their comments.

They reported that their heavy workload and long hours precluded more reflective discussions or sustained conversations with their colleagues about non-urgent matters.

One of most prominent features of the teachers' understandings of their interactions related to a fear of "getting negative." Teachers expressed concern about asking challenging questions or expressing a critical opinion about a school policy or value because they feared school leaders would understand such a contribution as undermining the work of other teachers. This talk about attitude was patterned. As the interviewed teacher began to step out of his role as implementer of the vision to reflect on what worked and what did not work, he would immediately censor himself. He would then remind me (and himself?) that he had chosen to teach here, as though this reflective perspective could not co-exist with choosing to teach at CMS.

This concern about "getting negative" is representative of the way in which the interactions of teachers are influenced by the larger context of the reform. The teachers reported that public comments which could be construed as critical or challenging might threaten the reputation and image of CMS in the broader community. These comments which they understand as "negativity" therefore threatened the viability of the school.

CMS, like any school, is situated in a particular social, political, historical, economic, and cultural context. Because CMS was undergoing substantial reform during the time of my research, these contextual factors took on more significance than might be the case in other schools. The next three chapters examine the relationships among this larger context, the CMS reform, and teacher interactions in

order to better understand the particular forms and meanings of teacher interactions at CMS.

CHAPTER 4: CONSTRUCTING THE CULTURE

CMS leaders were able to take advantage of the structures and processes that accompany the development of a new school to begin to establish a distinct culture, and transform “a culture of chaos into a culture of learning,” as the director frequently said. They used, in particular, the process of hiring new teachers, the use of carefully selected language and metaphors, and they provided both teachers and students with explicit instruction about the culture. I address each of these components in the next section before turning to the implications for teachers and their interactions.

The Hiring Process as a Tool of Cultural Construction

CMS administration had the opportunity to select their entire teaching faculty when they opened the school in 2005. According to the director, they hired only teachers they thought were a match with the vision of the school, a vision they laid out in their website application materials. Teachers who had taught in the school before its conversion to a charter were asked to apply if they felt they could embrace the new mission. Of those who chose to apply, six teachers were hired back.

The website application information read, “If your belief system is aligned with [CMS] and you are enthusiastic about bridging the achievement gap for urban students, then please consider applying.” The materials also highlighted the difficulty of the work, stating both that the entire curriculum was college preparatory and that “the vast majority of our students are from two to four years below grade level... [and so] the task of all the teachers is to accelerate the curriculum in order to bring students

to grade level” (CMS website). Interviews with candidates reiterated this point.

Director Moreno provided the candidates graphic examples of disrespectful behaviors and inappropriate language they were likely to encounter if they taught at CMS. “We paint the picture that this is hard work,” he told some visiting educators, and a successful candidate will “come back with passion and explain that they want to work here...want to take on this missionary work [because they] love the kids.”

When asked what the most important characteristic of a teacher candidate for CMS is, Director Moreno responded, “Heart and passion and commitment first.”

Chief of Staff Goodwin also used the word “heart” when responding to this question, and she defined this quality as the applicant’s ability to connect with students. She said,

If you have a natural disposition to connect with kids, I think that is the number one born-with attribute that you could come into this school with. If we get a sense in the interview room, that you’re not going to connect with our kids – and it’s what we look for in demonstration lessons – how are our kids reacting to you, how are you responding to their comments... it’s really around connection. And I think that you can give people skills to connect with kids, but you can’t give them the heart to connect with kids... So I think the heart is what they have to come with. I think everything else can be taught.

CMS leadership does not apologize for the hard work and long hours the teachers put in and are expected to put in. Chief of Staff Goodwin reflected on the reason some teachers left after the first year of the charter. “We flushed out people who *believed* they had a heart for the work and [kept] people who *really* had a heart for the work. At this point in the charter, it’s more of a vocation, a calling. You really

have to want to put in the hours” (emphasis added). In my interviews with the focus teachers, I asked them to respond to the idea that this job is a vocation and not “just” a job. Making connections with her religious values, a focus teacher I called Ms. Kaur explained her decision to teach at CMS.

I’m a [name of her religion].and to me, being of service is important. I say prayers for being able to serve. And so, so to me, I bring that to it, that sort of spiritual sense that I want to be and should be serving...And I think if you don’t have kind of some spiritual foundation, that this is a calling, or this is life’s passion and whatever, I’m not sure how one would survive. Because it’s just too demanding for it to be a job. And I feel like ... if someone feels like teaching is a job, why are they a teacher? Go work in an office nine to five.

Mr. Harris, another focus teacher, reflected a similar sentiment. An experienced teacher, he elected to teach in an urban school.

I’ve never looked at this as a job. It’s something I do. It’s something I’m meant to do. It’s something that I enjoy doing. I look forward to it. It’s a passion. I don’t know why anybody, I don’t know how you could survive as a teacher if you looked at it as a job because it’s just too difficult. It’s an emotional rollercoaster everyday. You have your extreme highs of course and then you have your extreme lows. And your highs would probably be much more limited if you do think of it as a job and not as a facilitator to success for these kids... I look at it that I might be that one person that might make that one difference in their life. I look at it maybe even as an obligation, a responsibility.

These teachers came to CMS expecting hard work, and assuming that other teachers would share their passion and commitment.

The application materials also referred to this passion. The website information revealed a component of the CMS belief system, and presented it as a

contrast with other schools where teachers presumably do not believe in their students' potential.

You have probably encountered people who make excuses for why 'poor students can't achieve.' And, most likely you've known some people that don't truly believe that urban students can compete academically with their wealthier suburban peers. If you are tired of these excuses and want to work in a school where all your colleagues share your professionalism and passion for making a difference, then become a teacher at [CMS]. . . [If you] want to work with a group of professionals that are searching for solutions, not excuses, then consider applying for a position at our school. (CMS Website)

This logic appealed to a third focus teacher, Ms. Stevens, when she was applying for a teaching position at CMS. She told me that the teachers in the school where she had previously taught were ineffectual and did not seem to care about their students' futures. Moreover, she added, neither the principal nor the district leaders held them accountable, and she reported finding their attitudes frustrating. She summarized her initial reaction to the CMS website information.

When I saw their [CMS] mission statement, and I remember it said things like, we hold everybody accountable, are you tired of seeing people who are not doing their job and I'm saying yes! I am tired of that. . . . So when I saw this ad, and it was like, we don't want any child to be left behind, we don't want anyone to be taken out of the running for college, we believe everybody has a future. . . . I was like yes! After [her experience at her other school] I really, really agree with that!"

Judging from the statements of these focus teachers, the hiring process at CMS was an important tool in constructing the new culture by communicating the central beliefs.

Language Use as a Tool of Cultural Construction

Culture is embedded in language. The school leaders have exploited the power of language in redefining the culture, structure and practices of the school. “New metaphors have the power to create a new reality” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 145). Because the metaphors embody a different culture, they deliberately force students and teachers out of a familiar (and now unwanted) culture. For example, students entered the school through “the gates of wisdom.” They ate lunch in the “dining hall” not the cafeteria and they attended classes on the “campus” of the school, not the school grounds. According to the director, this language was intentionally borrowed from college culture in order to prepare CMS students to think of themselves as college-bound.

Renaming is another constitutive language practice. Accordingly, titles of administrators were borrowed from other non-school worlds. The head of the school is not a principal but a “director”, and other key leaders are “associate directors” or “chief of staff.” These titles are common in non-profit organizations, government agencies and the business world, but are not typical in schools. These titles were likely chosen to reflect CMS leaders’ belief that an efficient organization (not the typical school) is important in order to maximize the time and other resources for student learning.

School leaders also taught using stories with symbolic importance. At a September meeting of the leadership team, for example, Chief of Staff Goodwin read excerpts from *Teamwork Makes the Dream Work* (Maxwell, 2002), an account of a

group who attempted to climb Mt. Everest. The imagery from the book – climbing a mountain, leaving bodies behind, working as a team to survive – lent itself easily to comparison to the CMS work ahead.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), several metaphors can be used for one concept because they illuminate different aspects of that concept (p. 97). Such was the case at CMS. The construction of the culture borrows metaphors of sports, family, as well as business, war, and even religious communities, each addressing different aspects of CMS culture. I focus here on the two most ubiquitous metaphors used at CMS, sports and family, and their respective roles in the construction of the new CMS culture.

Sports

The primary group affiliation at CMS was one's team. Named for the ten University of California campuses, each team had 30 – 50 students from the same grade level. These students typically had most of their classes together, and the teachers of those classes are assigned to that team as well. Teams met together first thing each morning to do chants and cheers, offer apologies for missteps, and single out teammates who they wished to thank publicly. This time was designed to help students make the transition from home, and to get “pumped up” for the day ahead. Teams met again mid-day for a 30 minute advisory period, and again in the final 30 minutes of the day for sports or other electives.

Administrators gave teams points for exceptional enthusiasm, minimal number of uniform violations and other behaviors deemed consistent with CMS values. Based on the points in part, a team of the week was named and provided with a reward like a pizza party. In this way, school leaders reported that the organization of teams taught both cooperation with teammates and healthy, respectful competition with other teams.

Coaching, another metaphor from sports, was one of the six “C”s which constitute the teacher commitment form; the others were collaboration, character, content, commitment, and connection. Each teacher signed this document pledging to uphold each of the values in their work at CMS. These six categories also constituted the basis of the teacher’s annual performance evaluation.

The leadership team included three former teachers, formally called coaches, who worked full-time with their peers, doing demonstration lessons, observing, helping plan instruction and leading departmental professional development. Director Moreno, who taught one class to students, also coached and was coached by his colleagues, and was emphatic about its importance. “If I don’t want to have a coach,” he said, “I probably shouldn’t be at this school. If I don’t want to coach, I probably shouldn’t be at this school.”

This sentiment also embodied his belief that coaching and improving was a lifelong enterprise, and no one, however experienced or celebrated, was exempt from coaching or being coached. In faculty meetings it was not unusual for a presentation or activity to be followed by a structured reflection on that activity such as a charting

of effective “teaching moves.” “Every moment is a teachable moment. It is a continuous dialogue,” Director Moreno commented.

Language of teams and coaching were the most common examples of the sports metaphor, but there are other occasional sports analogies. For example, several teachers talked about “being on top of their game” or “stepping up their game” referring to their classroom instruction. Director Moreno referred to first year of charter, “we hit a home run in attire, we hit a single in student achievement, but at least we got on base, and it’s only the first inning.”

Family

A second metaphor that was widely used to describe the school community at CMS was family. This metaphor was summarized in the oft-repeated chant: “who are we, proud to be, C-M-S family.” School leaders told the faculty “We operate as family.”

As with other metaphors, power is embedded in the use of this image, even when there is not an explicit understanding or a consensus regarding what is meant by this metaphor. The CMS staff members I interviewed understood the metaphor in different ways. For Ms. Stevens, family referred to the character development responsibilities the school had assumed.

We have a lot of positive family values that we are trying to teach our students. The whole respect and being responsible for your actions. It’s all what families teach their kids...I think the kids really feel part of a family here too. ... Learning is actually more than just pen and paper and reading books, it’s

becoming who you are going to be in the future, and that's the family thing.

Ms. Kaur believed that the school was family because the adult members of the family genuinely love the students and care about their future. She said,

I feel that people here give a lot. So in that sense I think it is operating as a family. I think the teachers do really love their students, this is not a job for them, and the leadership team really loves the kids and the students. So I guess in that sense, given how hard people work, I feel like that is in terms of family.

Chief of Staff Goodwin talked about family in the context of working with the families in the neighborhood. She said this image was the result of the neighborhood families' interest in understanding their school as a kind of extended family.

The family goes back to what we know about our families in the community. Which they taught us early on, they don't want to hear from us when ...we need something from them. We need a paper signed, or we need something back from them. They believe in family at the core of their life and what they do. They want to know that we are a family. And that this is an extended family, they want to view us that way. And that came out of some discussion with some parents...

That if we have this vision of this school that will become the center of a community, that is open 24/7, that has classes where parents can come to learn English, for instance, the tax preparation help that we have, the long-term vision of having a full athletic facility that could be used by the community, that there's classes all day on Saturday for both kids and adults... that we would have to develop that family here first.

Ms. Goodwin seemed to be suggesting that families in the neighborhood needed to be able to trust the school as they trusted their extended family members.

Focus teacher Ms. Stevens noted the functional value of the term family.

Rather than saying we operate as a team, I think family sounds like.. we spend so much time together and we're really doing something that we believe is different and really big. So I think when you go through an experience like that, you get much closer with people. So I think the word family was thrown out there to kind of speed that up a little bit...we are really close with one another, if you have a problem, don't hesitate.

Ms. Stevens's comments connected back to her understanding of the work as a way of life, and not simply a job. The term family, she reported, highlights the importance of the relationships among the CMS staff and students.

The Meaning of Metaphors

If "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 5), what understanding is enhanced through the use of the metaphors of sports and family at CMS? These metaphors presented a different understanding of the role of the teacher than is traditionally seen in schools.

The sports metaphors – teams, coaching, getting on base – helped structure the way students were supposed to relate to each other and to their teachers. The metaphor also structured teachers' relationships to each other as well as to their students and the school administrators. Athletic teams must support each other to win, and individual showiness is generally discouraged. In this way, school staff used these metaphors to teach both cooperation, internally, and competition externally. For teachers who were coached and were expected to coach other teachers, the metaphorical language emphasized the nurturing yet demanding position of athletic team coach, an attitude of

“I’m on your side and we’re in this together.” Given the norm of privacy and noninterference in the teaching profession (Little, 1990), this metaphor is a particularly powerful challenge to traditional teacher-teacher relationships.

The family metaphor was even more transformative because it emphasized the broad scope of responsibilities of a CMS teacher. Family meant different things to different staff members, but the general sense was that the school community can be seen as an extended family tied to each other through genuine affection and concern for the others’ well-being. Parents in a family care about their children primarily and continuously, and they care about their emotional and social development as well as their intellectual development. Similarly teachers at CMS were expected to “live the job,” as one teacher explained it, putting their students’ welfare and growth at the center of their lives.

The implications of these quasi-parental responsibilities for teachers at CMS were not clear. If CMS staff and students constitute their family, what is the impact on teachers’ personal lives? One teacher who was helping the director interview a prospective teacher told the candidate, to be a teacher here “you just have to let go of your life.” Another teacher summarized it this way.

I wouldn’t just call it a job; it’s definitely my life. Everything I do right now is school. At times, I mean, that’s great. That’s passion, but at the same time, sometimes it’s hard because as a 25 year old... it would be nice to have a life. But I definitely would call it more than a job. Like I think of a job as...you can go there and leave it behind. This, you don’t ever leave behind...Most of my time is spent thinking about school or doing things for school.

I did not collect data on teachers' personal lives, whether they have partners or dependents for example, so I do not know what portion of the teachers had families or other time-intensive obligations outside of the CMS work. Although the five focus teachers were not selected to be demographically representative of the teaching staff, three of them were single, and the other two were married and childless. Perhaps teachers with substantial personal obligations simply chose not to apply to or not to accept a position at CMS.

Direct Instruction of Lessons of Culture

In addition to the use of metaphor and symbolic language, the new culture at CMS was also explicitly taught. Before the school opened in the fall of 2005, the faculty met for a week of daily professional development sessions. The purpose of "culture camp," as the school leaders called it, was to learn the values and expectations of the newly forming culture, and to learn how to communicate that culture to the students. During culture camp, the faculty learned a set of lessons designed to teach them the beliefs and rituals of this new culture. For this instruction, they assumed the role of the student, raising their hands to be called on, standing to "honor the teacher" at the beginning and end of class. During the first two weeks of school, every teacher taught these same lessons to his or her own students.

There was a deliberate construction of the teachers' culture as well. For example, teachers were asked to dress in a professional manner ("business casual") as a sign of respect for students as well as to provide a model of professional dress for

their students. Men always wore ties except on the sports fields. Denim was not acceptable. Even on “casual Fridays” when a polo shirt sporting a college logo was acceptable, blue jeans were not. Teachers were taught how to talk about their students in a way that does not demean them or blame. Rather than “he didn’t understand that,” they are taught to say, “He wasn’t ready for that” or “I didn’t teach that in a way that made sense for him.” In public settings, teachers were discouraged from making statements that might be construed as negative, since such a comment had the effect of dishonoring the hard work of one’s colleagues, the leadership reported.

Cultural lessons, for both teachers and students, were not just taught at culture camp. These lessons were continuous and were addressed in the context in which they arose. One element of the culture, for example, was the importance of a meta-cognitive reflection on the group work. After most presentations at faculty gatherings, one of the school leaders would ask the teachers to step back from the content of the presentation and reflect on the “teaching moves.” What worked? What suggestions did they have? What will they take away that they can use in their classroom?

Another lesson of the developing culture concerned the teachers’ dress code. Chief of Staff Goodwin met with the female staff during one of the designated professional development periods to discuss expectations regarding professional attire for the female adults on campus. She began, once again, by contrasting the current school with the school in previous years. “Four years ago,” she said about her first year at the school, “it was hard to tell the difference between the students and the staff.” Students now wear uniforms and she explained it is time for teachers to “take it

to the next level,” implying that teachers, like their students, now needed to dress more formally every day.

Significantly, Ms. Goodwin did not review a set of rules or specific “dos and don’ts”; rather she appealed to their sense of professionalism. “What model of professionalism do you want to put on show for our kids?” and later, “Think of that one young lady who wants to be you.” This cultural lesson was done with an appeal to a general and assumed understanding of “teacher as professional” and “teacher as role model.” Ms. Goodwin also provided some counter-examples of role models in this talk. She reported that undergraduate tutors from the partnership university have arrived in inappropriate dress. They are sent home if they “are showing any midriff or tattoos, [or if they] have every piercing known to mankind, and what I’m saying is we can’t go there.”

“Constructing a culture” at CSM was a process rather than an event. Model expressions of the new culture were publicly appreciated, and deviations from it were also noted. Norms from the “old” culture inevitably surfaced, and without vigilance on the part of the school leaders the vision might have been compromised, or at least this was the fear expressed by Chief of Staff Goodwin. She carefully monitored the influences, external or internal, that might derail the belief system and practices that they had worked so hard to develop, she explained. Despite various requests for research to be conducted at this school in its first year, for example, she (or the board) did not agree to any such request for fear it would compromise this fragile new organization, as she described it.

There was some justification for Ms. Goodwin's concerns. She cited several cases when visitors with a limited understanding of the school made public reports which she believed misrepresented CMS or represented only part of the story. Her concerns, therefore, resulted in a controlled environment in which outsiders were at risk of being viewed with suspicion, and perceived violations of the norms by insiders were called out, labeled "negativism," and corrected.

On several occasions, one of the school leaders would repeat a teacher's frustration reportedly expressed as "I'm done with this place." Each time, this expression was interpreted by the administrator as an insult or sign of disrespect for the other teachers. At one Wednesday morning meeting, Director Moreno explained its effect. "I'm done with this place' kills the place for those still here. It's not me you're affecting, it's each other. It's the negativity that affects others."

This exchange was the general pattern. A specific example of this occurred at the conclusion of one interview, when the interviewed teacher felt a need to clear up a possible area of confusion.

Teacher: Just to let you know, whenever I say things that are negative to the school, I do feel really guilty about it. Because I wouldn't be here if I didn't believe in it, and I feel guilty about saying it in a public setting, saying anything negative...For me to say anything negative makes me feel like [I'm going] against our school which is not the case at all, I completely believe in my students.

Interviewer: Is negative the same as critical? Would there be a way to voice differences for you and not feel guilty about...?

Teacher: I don't know in this context talking about school, if I could ever not feel guilty... I don't want to say anything to make the school look bad because I definitely believe in it. And

I think that is something also that I learned as part of the culture of the school, there should be nothing negative said.

This teacher made several assumptions here. First, she assumed that saying something critical was “going against the school” or “making the school look bad;” one could also imagine a teacher offering constructive criticism out of a desire to improve the school. Second, she seemed to equate “going against the *school*” with “going against the *students*.” This shift in the object of the comment from the institution to innocent students made a critical comment seem especially inappropriate. Third, she referred explicitly to “the culture” she had been taught and to the specific instruction that “nothing negative [should be] said” at least “in a public setting.” She may have meant that nothing negative should be said in a public setting (in reference to the regional public library where we were) or that nothing negative should be said to an outsider (like a researcher).

Three interviewed teachers referred to the injunction against “going negative,” but this exchange revealed the clearest statement of this value of the CMS culture. The inference here was that teachers were not provided and did not have a mechanism for helping to improve the school; they did not seem to believe they could be both critical of the structures and policies and still be devoted to the mission and the students of CMS.

Exceptionalism

Exceptionalism is a term that was introduced by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* to contrast the United States with European nations and to highlight the

distinctive qualities, both good and bad, of the United States. Since that time, the idea has been used by sociologists, historians, political scientists and others to describe a belief in the uniqueness of the nation (or other object of study) and to discuss implications of that belief (Madsen, 1998). The concept provides a useful frame for understanding CMS as well.

Founders of CMS acknowledged a debt to several innovative school models (e.g. Amistad, KIPP Adelante, Preuss³) from which they have taken design elements. For the most part, however, CMS leaders portrayed it as a unique endeavor, entirely unlike any other school with which the teachers may be familiar, a kind of educational exceptionalism.

An illustration of this exceptionalist understanding took place at CMS during an interview with a math teacher candidate. The candidate referred to two local high schools where she had done some substitute teaching. Director Moreno clearly communicated his feelings about the transfer of knowledge she was attempting. “Take [named high school], and put a big X through it,” he said as he drew an X in the air with his finger. “This [school] is wholly different.”

CMS leadership understood the CMS vision as unique so that teachers could not or should not draw on their experiences at other schools. This attitude had the potential to disenfranchise teachers as is evident in this example in a story told by Ms. Goodwin.

³ For information on these schools, see their websites. Amistad Academy, www.achievementfirst.org/schools.amistad.html; KIPP Adelante, www.kippadelante.org/; and Preuss, preuss.ucsd.edu.

We knew we were going to be doing things differently, and asking people to think about things differently, and go at the work differently and start in a different place, right. So, a good example of that is having all the interns from [partnership university] and...when we were having a conversation and I thought ah, this person is too young into the profession to be this resistant. And then she just finally kind of put it on the table and said, you know, we came in with our lesson plans for the first two weeks done, that's all we've been planning all summer long, and we came in and you basically threw those in the garbage and said no, we're going to do this, and I've never taught before, and I'm scared to death. Right, and so, it was like this, we knew we were going to ask people to do things differently.

It is easy to understand how the interns (novice teachers still receiving teacher training) in this story had developed some security by creating lesson plans for the first weeks, and how difficult it might must have been to have that security removed. Ironically, “doing things differently” may be easier for an experienced teacher than it is for a new teacher.

This sense of exceptionalism may prevent opportunities to learn from teachers' existing knowledge and previous experiences. Even a new teacher has “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) from her work as a student teacher, her teacher preparation program, or even her own student days. Rarely did I hear the introduction of a new unit or strategy begin with a question about the teacher's pre-existing knowledge or experience with this strategy. In one case, the new strategy was introduced with a statement about its complexity and then “I can't teach all you need to know [about this strategy] in 90 minutes,” the length of the meeting. But the presenter did not ask if any of the teachers had worked with this strategy, and what might be learned from their experience. The assumption conveyed

was either that none of the teachers were familiar with this strategy (despite the fact that the group included some teachers with five or six years of teaching experience) or that if they did have experience with it, it would not add value to the discussion.

By limiting the input of the teachers, whether intentional or not, the CMS belief system resulted in a uniform culture, not only in matters of behavior and attire, but in the classroom as well. In every classroom the day's agenda was posted on the left side of the whiteboard and the homework was displayed on the right side. Each classroom had a "meeting area" away from desks which included a rug and bean bag chairs or a couch. Focus teacher Ms. Stephens summarized it in this way.

There is a definite expectation for each classroom and each teacher to be very similar to one another... Here we are expected, every lesson starts with a 'prelude,' it's silent, they come up to the meeting area... we do a 'launch' or an 'engage' ...then you send them back to their seats for an 'explore,' you bring them back up for a 'summary.' That kind of thing. So that is expected in every single classroom.

For the CMS leaders, this uniformity was quite intentional. In faculty meetings and an interview, Ms. Goodwin gave three reasons for the uniformity in classrooms. The leadership believed that it is better for students to have the same organizational structure and rhythm in each classroom so they did not have to figure out each teacher's system. Secondly, a common structure was easier for the teachers since students can not (or can not as easily) play them off each other. "In Ms. Jones' room, we don't do it that way." But most importantly, Ms. Goodwin reported that having a faculty of "lone rangers," each making his or her own classroom decisions did not work. That system in other schools and in CMS in its earlier version had not

served students well, she told me. Having common curriculum units and one structure for classroom instruction, her argument continued, will provide the leadership a way to evaluate the effectiveness of this system. We won't know what is effective if we have many styles and curricula.

One might argue with Ms. Goodwin that comparison of different methods or approaches is a more useful tool for understanding what is more or less effective classroom instruction. Assuming the practice of the "lone rangers" was public, a school might have more opportunities to evaluate the relative value of a particular instructional method. In other words, the difficulty in evaluating effective instruction in traditional settings may have more to do with the privacy of the practitioner than the diversity of the practices.

Implications for Teacher Interaction

Case study research necessarily originates from a particular point in time and carries it with its assumptions so embedded in the culture that they are imperceptible. Such is the case in my investigation of teacher interactions and teacher community at CMS. By artificially freezing the school in its second year of operation, I may have done a disservice to the ambitious reform that was being attempted. That was the concern of at least one member of the CMS leadership team.

When I met with a small group of teachers and administrators to discuss my preliminary findings, Chief of Staff Goodwin asked if I assumed the way they were doing the work then was the way the work would always be done. It was important to

her that I understood this work and its admittedly high cost to teachers' health and well-being as a temporary state. "It's like opening a restaurant," she told me in an interview. She continued.

The owner can never leave the shop. So the owner always has to be there to overlook how the service is, how the chefs are doing, how the maitre d' is doing at the door, looking at marketing, is the bartender, how much are they serving, what are the portions. They just have to pay attention to every detail in order for the business to set the direction that it is going to go in, and to make a name for itself. And I think that is what we are in the business of, we are looking at everything, we are looking at every detail of the work that we do at all levels of the organization, and making sure that school counseling is going in the right direction, teaching and learning is going on the right direction, support services are going in the right direction, and that we're all working together and nobody is going off on their own and opening their side little hors d'oeuvres business over here....Over time, you build capacity in people and then the owner can finally spend less time in the business as other people take on the vision and the mission and you get into a way of doing things.

I understood her analogy to be comparing restaurant owners and the CMS teachers, and it seemed to be suggesting that as the culture takes hold ("you get into a way of doing things"), the teachers will be able to pull back from their constant and exhausting vigilance of both academic progress and the inculcation of the "culture of learning." If the current pace and demands maintain, CMS may not be able to keep the same teachers for more than a few years before they burn out, or decide the workload cannot co-exist with family obligations or a rich personal life.

Two important scholars of teacher community have argued that in the long-run teachers in the forefront of ambitious reforms may be *more* likely to become "disillusioned and fatalistic later in their careers" than teachers who had "simply

tended the gardens of their individual classroom” (Huberman, 1989; Little, 1996).

These consequences – the turnover of teachers and the disillusionment of early career teachers – have real consequences for students in urban schools.

This interpretation of the restaurant analogy – relating to teachers – emphasizes the hard work of running a new restaurant. Another way to understand Ms. Goodwin’s analogy is in terms of the administrators as restaurant owners, an interpretation which highlights close management by the owners. In these initial two years, school leaders have been protective of their “new baby” as Ms. Goodwin once termed it. As a result, they had centralized control of professional development; they had discouraged public expressions of unhappiness, frustration and disagreement; and they had limited the contributions teachers could bring to the CMS work from other schools and experiences. Ironically, this centralization and control may interfere with long-term progress, even if it helps realize CMS goals in the short run.

Interviewed teachers had differing opinions about the centralization and common instructional practices required by the school leadership. One teacher told me,

In other schools, yeah, they want some similarities but a teacher is free to do what they believe, like do a certain system for homework...it’s usually not frowned upon... Here, you have to be pretty much similar. And I understand that, it is for the students’ benefit, and it is based on the belief system of how the school is organized, based on [school director’s] belief system as well as other people who created the school. And so coaching, I think, is important because they do want a certain style of teaching and they do want outcomes for students.

Coaching, this teacher implied, served the purpose of ensuring similar classroom structures and instructional practices, and this similarity is good for students, she claimed.

Expectations for uniform practices and classroom structures were most explicit in the Math and Literacy Departments. One focus teacher who was not in either of those departments reflected on this uniformity in an interview.

We all have to teach certain standards, we all have to teach certain skills. How you teach it obviously is different. ... The English teachers all teach the same thing at the same time. The math teachers all teach the same thing at the same time. ... [When I learned this], it blew me away. I couldn't do that. I tried doing that once when I was a student teacher, and I totally disagreed with what the teacher was teaching, my master teacher, and that class wasn't successful. Because I was trying to teach her [way], but I didn't buy into it myself. [If I were in the Math or Literacy Departments], I would have major difficulty I think. Because I like to throw in my own things.

It is interesting to note that although these teachers represented different views about the uniform structures, both teachers appealed to students' well-being ("outcomes" or "success") to justify their perspective.

The school leaders espoused that the development of CMS school culture was a critical first step for improving academic achievement of their students. The enactment of this cultural development had implications for teachers and their interactions. The exceptionalism limited the value of teachers' prior knowledge, and the emphasis on similarity of instructional practices limited the ways in which teachers could teach. The historical context of CMS, addressed in the next chapter, provides additional challenges for teacher interactions.

CHAPTER 5: URGENCY - TYRANNY OF THE IMMEDIATE

Charter Middle School began as a transformation of one of the region's lowest performing and most dangerous secondary schools. The story of the turbulent process which resulted in the approval of the CMS charter provides an important context for understanding the nature of teacher interactions at CMS. I turn to that story next, then to the high-profile and high-pressure qualities of the CMS environment, and finally to the implications of this environment for teacher interaction.

The Founding of CMS

After failing to reach the benchmarks for academic progress for six consecutive years, the leaders of Pre-charter Middle School faced a set of sobering choices as described in No Child Left Behind federal education law. They could allow the school to be taken over by the Department of Education, contract with a private entity to operate the school, or reorganize as a charter school. The core group – parents, teachers, university faculty, and community members – chose to develop a charter school application. This group worked long hours for months to plan for an ambitious middle school designed to prepare every student for college. Given that 85% of the students had tested “below grade level” on 2004 California standardized tests, this goal was a tall order.

Despite this noble goal, the need for significant change in the academic program, and broad-based neighborhood and community support, the road to district approval of this charter was an exceptionally rocky one.

The design group was comprised of Pre-charter Middle School administrators and teachers (including the principal), faculty and staff from the local university, and parents and other community supporters. In September 2005 (see Table 7), they began meeting to create the vision, develop an academic plan, and complete the other requirements established by the district school board. Among those requirements was the need to demonstrate neighborhood support for the school by obtaining the signatures of at least 50% of parents of students who intended to enroll in CMS. Members of the charter planning group went door to door over the winter holiday break and gathered signatures of over 700 parents (Gao, 2005).

Table 7: Timeline for the Founding of the CMS Charter

2004	
June	Pre-Charter Middle School fails 6th year in row
September	Decision to go charter
September	Group begins developing charter plan
November	Superintendent loses board majority in elections
December	700 neighborhood parents sign their support for charter
2005	
January	Board fires superintendent
January	Board requires majority of teacher signatures
February	58% of teachers sign their support for charter
February	School board removes principal in closed session
February	Board member offers a competing plan for Pre-charter MS
March	School board unanimously approves charter for CMS
May	CMS Board formed and reappointed principal
July	New superintendent is named
September	CMS Opens

In January the school board added an additional requirement: at least 50% of the existing teachers must sign a petition of support for the new school. This

requirement also did not prove to be the fatal blow the board might have imagined. By February, the planning group submitted a petition with 58% of the teachers' signatures. But the school board had one additional surprise in store. On February 9, the board voted to remove the charismatic principal from his job and reassign him to the district office. The vote was taken in closed session, and no official explanation was offered (Gao, 2005).

Again the school board may have miscalculated their steps. Rather than slowing the charter planning process, removing this popular principal helped to mobilize the teachers, the students, and their parents. There were demonstrations on campus, and local media were present to record the events. Judging from editorials and letters to the editor in local papers, public sentiment was running against the school board ("Union in control," 2005; Wolking, 2005). Several people also questioned the board's decision to bypass the superintendent in this decision. One paper's editorial called the reassignment "a naked power play" (Sutton, 2006a).

The board was scheduled to vote on a group of charter applications, including the one from CMS, in early March. Several weeks before that day, the board member who represented the CMS region of the district released her own plan to restructure Pre-charter Middle School. Her plan which was backed by teacher union leaders retained district control over selection and evaluation of administrators. In the end, the plan was not brought before the board for consideration perhaps because the CMS application was approved first.

Another element underlying the school board-CMS group dynamics related to the district superintendency. When the CMS group first decided to develop a charter school, the superintendent of the district supported charter schools. As a consequence of the November elections, however, this superintendent lost his majority on the board. Two months later the school board bought out the remaining year on his contract, and hired an interim superintendent. It was during the tenure of the interim superintendent that the board reassigned the principal at Pre-charter MS, an apparent attempt to thwart the development of the CMS plan.

On the night of the school board vote on charter applications, the auditorium was packed. Students, parents and teachers made impassioned speeches to the gathered crowd. Many people also held signs indicating their support for the CMS charter. “The night of the vote, it was clear that this board, so quick to undermine [CMS]’ efforts behind closed doors, could not do so in public. Whether motivated by shame, legal threats or last-minute sensibility, reluctant trustees voted unanimously to support the charter application” (Sutton, 2006a).

This school board’s surprising vote ended months of struggling, petitioning, and private meetings. The vote also served to reward the tenacity of neighborhood families and other supporters with the promise of a school that might finally serve the educational needs of the neighborhood children.

High Profile

That struggle, as well as many that have followed since that approval of the charter, occurred largely in public view – in newspaper articles, in school board meetings and in community discussions. The governor of California, the chancellor of the local partnering university, and a host of other dignitaries welcomed the students on opening day. Since then, there has been a steady stream of visitors from national and local media, universities, teachers, school reform organizations, foundations, and community groups.

CMS leaders may not have chosen this kind of public scrutiny, but given the controversial beginnings and ambitious agenda, their work led to a high profile position among educators. CMS represented a particularly bold experiment in urban school reform. The proposed transformation of this school, both culturally and academically, was watched closely by school reformers across the nation. Although they might not have chosen it, the CMS leadership embraced this spotlight as part of their commitment to “making our practice public,” as the director frequently reminded the CMS faculty.

Director Moreno and his colleagues prepared carefully for every visitor to campus. When a local reporter was planning to visit the school, for example, Director Moreno prepared the faculty. He started by asking them, “What story do we want this newspaper to tell?” After first reminding the faculty how proud he is of them, recognizing how hard they are working, he then asked them another question. “What will the reporter see as she visits classes, walks through the hallways, and talks with

students and faculty?” This question was a rhetorical one, designed to review what she *should* see: teachers in the hallways during transitions, teachers on time to supervisions, and similarly prescribed behaviors. In this way, the very public nature of the school provided opportunities for the staff inside the building to take on the perspective of an outsider.

High Pressure

In addition to its high-profile status, CMS was a high-pressure environment. This pressure is the result of the school’s goal of preparing all students to be ready for successful completion of a rigorous and college-prep high school curriculum. Given their inadequate academic preparation before middle school and the limited number of years students spend in middle school, this goal was enormously ambitious.

As with all charter schools in California, the CMS charter lasted five years and would only be renewed if substantial growth in student achievement can be demonstrated. Research about educational change, however, suggests that a major reform effort such as the one taking place at CMS requires at least five years for the changes to become institutionalized (Fullan, 1983). When the state secretary of education visited the school in the fall of 2006, he made this point to the faculty. “This is the most important work going on in California today,” he told them. But even with this hard work, he said, “it will take between five and seven years to close the achievement gap.”

Pressure on the CMS staff was also generated by the district's continuing challenges to this and other charter schools. Struggles over enrollment numbers (and associated state funds), facilities and other operational issues have been a serious drain on school's resources and staff time. One local writer summarized the cynicism about the district's motives.

Claiming they are simply following the law, [district] officials are rigorously applying legal technicalities against many of the district's charter schools to create financial and academic hardships clearly designed to impede progress and undermine success (Sutton, 2006b)

In the first year of the charter, a grand jury investigation probed the purpose and success of the school. The school leadership never learned who initiated this investigation or why, but they did know that it absorbed a significant amount of time and energy, resources that might have been directed to the work itself. The chief of staff position was designed, in part, to respond to these ongoing district requests and to manage the ever-present impending crisis. On the other hand, responding to external threats does have some positive benefits. Many political groups have been galvanized when they face a common external threat (Nathanson, 1988). Is it possible that the district's challenges have had that effect on CMS personnel, ironically making them a more formidable "opponent"?

An additional source of pressure existed. From observations and interviews, it is clear that the teachers and administrators at CMS understood their responsibilities to be much broader than a traditional educator. In addition to academic instruction, they were responsible for their students' compliance with dress code policies, orderly

transitions between classes and, broadly speaking, character development. With the expectation that they gave themselves over to the job, like “signing up for the priesthood” as Director Moreno called it, teachers at CMS experienced little distinction between their personal and professional lives. In other words, their work was never done.

Even within the more limited realm of the academic responsibilities of the teachers, there was pressure to use every moment wisely. The urgent tone, one academic coach told me, is necessary given the poor academic preparation of the CMS students. She said, “Our kids are so behind, and if we just throw meaningless lessons at them and waste their time and do fun games, that is *such* a disservice. Every minute needs to count.”

There was urgency “about their physical lives as well as their academic ones,” Chief of Staff Goodwin explained. She identified the summer between 7th and 8th grade as a critical time for boys to be approached by gangs, and so it is important to give the students a sense of hope and self-esteem before that critical juncture in their lives. “So I guess not only for their achievement life, but for their physical life as well, there is a sense of urgency. To get it right, and to get it right quick, to not waste time, to not get hung up on adult issues and bureaucracy and those kinds of things,” Ms. Goodwin explained.

The interviewed teachers commented frequently on the pressure they felt as a result of the high-profile nature and ambitious goals. One focus teacher, told me that “We have to portray our school in a positive way. We are under a microscope –

visitors, media, people who want to donate money.” At another point, she said, “[There’s] lots of pressure... There’s a school riding on it.” A second focus teacher, referred to the pressure she experienced. “These high expectations, and the supports [school leadership], they’re trying their best, but I feel like we are trying to accomplish a lot in a short amount of time... I feel the load.”

Implications for Teacher Interaction

This sense of urgency had broad implications for teacher interaction. The teachers’ unplanned, informal interactions were primarily focused on immediate matters. The focus teachers kept “interaction logs” on each of four days, and recorded what they talked about, with whom they talked, and who initiated the conversation. As reflected in Table 6, most of these interactions (80%) were related to immediate need issues, and only 3% were neither immediate nor short-term issues.

Perhaps spontaneous and quick interactions are only suited to comments about practical matters or the business of schools. Perhaps my limited sample did not represent the interactions of most teachers at CMS. But for these teachers the urgency appeared to push them into the role of teacher as technician rather than as professional. In the language of Hargreaves (1994), these teachers’ joint work was, at least during the time of my study, “implementation-oriented” rather than “development-oriented.”

Interactions at Wednesday morning meetings were also influenced by the urgent nature of the work. School leaders realized that in a high pressure, high profile, ambitious school like CMS, the faculty members needed continuous encouragement

and morale boosting. Almost every week, the Wednesday meeting began with a reminder of the mission, a look at the big picture (stepping back from the smaller matters which dominate daily work), or a celebration of recent successes. Frequently, the administration showed a set of slides depicting happy and hard-working CMS students and teachers set to popular music with lyrics about hope or survival. In general, the hard work and long hours took their toll on the teachers, and these Wednesday meetings were designed to re-energize them.

Of the various forms of teacher interactions, the bi-monthly department meetings were most closely related to issues of teaching and learning. If professional development at CMS had a venue for intellectual renewal and engagement with colleagues, it would take place in these meetings. But, here again, the urgency of the work constrained the kind of topics that could be addressed in these sessions. For example, many department professional development sessions were devoted to lessons which would help the students prepare for the state standardized tests in the spring. Many schools actively prepare students for these tests, but at CMS the tests – and therefore the preparation – took on a kind of a special importance.

One focus teacher was appreciative of the common structures and regular meetings, but she regretted not having time for more reflective conversations with her colleagues. She said,

We don't teach in isolation in the sense that I can close my door and nobody knows what is going on...we have structures in place [to share our practice] but there's no time. So I feel that we're doing similar things, but how a teacher carries it out in her room...grading, all that stuff...it's happening in isolation because we just don't have the time. Except last Thursday [at a

department meeting], I haven't seen any other teacher's student work.

One of the department coaches struggled to work within these constraints while contributing to systemic change. He described one department meeting he was leading in which he asked the teachers where, in the instructional sequence, did the learning occur? When did the light bulb go on for the students? These questions initiated a rich discussion among the teachers during which they considered, what is learning? What causes students to "get it"? Is "getting it" a moment or a process? In his interview, he reflected on that conversation with characteristic thoughtfulness.

Because what I know about my teachers is that these kind of really important belief system conversations come up and they engage in them and that's great, but I have to balance that with the immediate needs of our classrooms. So we are not as an organization at a point where I can really just engage in that with the teachers and let them figure it out over a couple years.

The district's going to shut us down in two years if we don't have good test scores. And that's an incredible, incredible philosophical struggle with me every day. Is how to balance...Between systemic change and beliefs about teaching and learning [on the one hand] and immediate changes and results in the way state defines student productivity [on the other].

So I always ask myself – what are my teachers going to do differently in their classrooms this week because of that meeting and on that particular meeting? I don't know. That's why I say it was one of the ...I mean in some ways it was one of the best [professional development sessions] ...because that conversation came up, in some ways it was one of worst ones because I don't know that any immediate effect came for them.

Mr. Thompson's description here implies that he understood this focus on the immediate as a developmental phase in the organization's growth. But he also

understood the value of the teacher's own growth especially the learning that is facilitated by engaging with one's colleagues "over a couple years." The undisputed need to produce short-term results required some longer term sacrifices, and teachers' intellectual and professional growth may be among those sacrifices.

All forms of teacher interaction were affected by the socio-political context of the founding of the school. The ambitious goals of the school, the limited time frame in which to demonstrate success, and the high profile nature of the school combined to influence teacher interactions. One additional factor impacted teacher interaction, and that was the core value of "students first." The next chapter examines this value and its impact.

CHAPTER 6: “STUDENTS FIRST”

The central value in the CMS culture was “students first.” This phrase appeared on school letterhead, on CMS t-shirts, in the mission statement, on campus signs, and in school documents. Upon first examination, this value appeared unremarkable for a school. Putting “students first” in a school is akin to encouraging a person to love her mother. But this value helped CMS to distinguish itself from common practices and beliefs in other schools in three ways: 1) students first is in contrast to teachers first, 2) students’ non-academic needs came before students’ academic needs, and 3) students’ cultural instruction came before students’ academic instruction.

Enactments of “Students First”

First, “students first” in practice meant students’ needs and not teachers’ needs had priority. The master schedule at CMS, for example, was constructed around creating the best learning environment for the students rather than the convenience or desires of the teachers. Many schools try to accommodate requests of individual teachers when scheduling their prep period. The teacher’s childcare arrangement might benefit from a prep period on one end of the day or the other, or a teacher who also coaches might request a last period prep to allow time to change clothes and get to the field or gym. Both are reasonable requests, but such accommodations did not occur at CMS. Instead, CMS leaders reported that the schedule was designed exclusively around students’ needs. The day began with a transition period called

“team” in order to get reconnected to one’s classmates and teachers and begin waking up the brain. In the next two periods, when the leadership believed students were most receptive to learning, everyone took the two subjects deemed most important – math and literacy. This schedule presents some staffing and facilities challenges since all math and literacy teachers teach simultaneously, and classes in all other subjects take place in the afternoon.

A second way in which “students first” was enacted in the work at CMS regards the non-academic needs of students. In the current environment of high-stakes testing, many schools place academic achievement or, more broadly, student learning as the top priority. At CMS, “students first” was used to explain the value the staff placed on the wide range of student needs, not simply on the needs of the child as a learner. This justification was not the result of an explicit social or political commitment to caring for “the whole child” but instead was a practical matter. The student cannot learn, school leaders have explained, until the obstacles to that learning – both academic and non-academic – are eliminated or greatly reduced. And the obstacles for the students at CMS were daunting.

Eighty percent of the students at CMS qualified for the federal program for free and reduced fee meals, a standard indicator of poverty (Education Data, 2006). Berliner (2006) has argued that the impact of poverty on students’ school experience has been greatly underappreciated. He calls it “the 600 pound gorilla in the room.” Many parents in the CMS community work several jobs and have limited time to respond to teacher phone calls or attend school functions. Parents who are available

often have modest amount of formal education and do not feel comfortable or capable of helping their children with homework (Lareau, 2000; Villaneuva & Hubbard, 1994). Poverty also often means inadequate health care, and the many problems which result from it and interfere with students' ability to learn. These include complications from untreated ear infections, uncorrected vision problems, asthma, nutritional problems, and lead and mercury poisoning (Berliner, 2006).

CMS students came from neighborhoods that are reportedly home to five different gangs. It was not surprising then that gang violence spilled over into school grounds, and threatened students' safe travel to and from school. According to the CMS leadership and the school's charter, these non-academic needs were a critical part of the school's responsibility. Evidence of that was the Family Services Center which provided CMS families with a range of social services within the CMS facility.

Finally, many students were new immigrants to the United States and had the added challenge of learning a new language. Sixty-three percent of CMS students fell into this category, officially designated "English learners" (WASC Report, 2007). Instructing students who are not fluent in English affected the pace of instruction. Only a few teachers at CMS were fluent in Spanish (the language of most students who were "English learners") and so most teachers were not able to use students' "funds of knowledge" to enrich instruction (Moll et al., 1992).

Lest all these disadvantages result in staff members developing a sense of pity, or lowering their expectations for their students, the school leaders also provided explicit instruction regarding how to think about these students. In a nutshell, the

approach was “no excuses.” Drawn from a book by Thernstrom & Thernstrom of that name (2003), this philosophy is applied in the KIPP Adelante and Amistad schools. The phrase is meant to challenge teachers who, proponents of “no excuses” claim, have coddled these students and rationalized their inadequate academic preparation by attributing it to their difficult economic reality. This “coddling” has in the past prevented some teachers from offering a rigorous curriculum and holding their students to high expectations. By constantly reminding the teachers – and the students – that their social conditions will not be an excuse for lowered expectations and watered down curriculum, the leadership team worked urgently to develop and maintain the high standards associated with a “college-going culture of learning” as they called it.

“Students first” had a third form of expression. At least in the first two years of CMS, the leadership had intentionally focused on developing what they called “the culture of learning.” How students moved from class to class, whether their shirts were tucked in, and how they addressed adults were all matters that appeared to take priority over academic matters. If the classroom transition from desks to the common meeting area was noisy and slow, for example, the class was instructed to return to their desks and do it again and again until they completed the transition correctly. Teachers and administrators were aware that these transitions took precious time away from instruction, but it was a choice they made despite the cost. The leaders’ espoused belief was that the need to focus on the culture will diminish in time, and this kind of sacrifice of academic time will be increasingly less frequent.

Putting students' cultural instruction first meant making choices that were not necessarily intuitive, as in this example. One morning in November, Chief of Staff Goodwin led a group of 12 or 15 teachers in a professional development session in the school's library. During the meeting, four male students and their teacher entered the library en route to the classroom inside the library. Ms. Goodwin, who was presenting material when they entered, stopped herself to address the group. She said, "Good morning, gentlemen." They mumbled a responsive "Good morning." She corrected them, "Good morning, *ma'am*." They understood her implicit criticism and dutifully responded "Good morning, ma'am" and continued on their way.

Ms. Goodwin chose to interrupt the adult instruction to acknowledge the students, even though nothing in their behavior suggested they needed her attention. Moreover, they had a teacher with them if they had needed some adult help. She created an opportunity to instruct these students on what she might call a cultural lesson, how to greet adults. This lesson also served to model this teaching mode for the teachers in the meeting that morning.

The event was especially instructive because just before the students entered the library, an adult man wearing blue jeans (a sure sign he was not familiar with CMS culture) wandered into the library. He seemed to be looking for someone or something. He walked into the library a few steps and then back out two or three times before exiting entirely. In contrast to her response to the student group, Ms. Goodwin did not acknowledge his presence, greet him, or ask him if she could help him in any way. This man was unfamiliar to me (not a teacher, administrator, or

active parent), but it is possible that she knew him and knew his purpose, and made a calculated decision to ignore him. Choosing between an opportunity to instruct students how to address an adult and continuing with a professional development presentation, this administrator chose to put students' cultural instruction first.

In summary, putting students first meant putting adults second, it meant putting students' non-academic needs before their academic needs, and it meant putting students' cultural instruction before their academic instruction, at least in the short term. The espoused value, putting students first, is based on the understanding that students are the priority. They are first, as in placing first in a competition or going first-class. In the second and third examples, however, first has a different meaning; first is a temporal quality. Addressing students' non-academic needs and teaching them the qualities of a "culture of learning" are necessary first steps before getting to the more important goal of student learning.

Implications for Teacher Interaction

Putting students first in the various ways described here had important implications for teachers' work and interactions in at least three ways. First, because students first meant in practice putting students' cultural, social, emotional, and financial, as well as academic needs first, teachers at CMS had a broad range of obligations for their students. As a result teachers may have had more interactions with each other than their colleagues in other schools (because they had more to

manage), but based on my sample, most of the interactions were concerned with meeting their students non-academic needs.

Second, because students have priority, adults at CMS may have had less flexibility and fewer resources to attend to their students' needs. For example, rather than hiring substitute teachers from outside the school when a teacher was out, CMS teachers were asked to find a CMS colleague to cover their classes. The rationale for the in-house substitute relates to the exceptionalist status of CMS, that is, that only CMS teachers had the understanding of the "culture of learning" the students need. When the absence was more than a few days, the effect of the policy was to extend the work of the teachers who are already working long hours and stretched thin. It is hard to imagine that teachers who were assuming responsibility for their colleagues' classes had sufficient time and energy to attend to their students' needs.

Third, teachers' interactions were usually mediated by students' needs. In other words, the teachers did not necessarily develop an independent commitment to each other. According to research on teacher retention, the most common reasons teachers give for leaving the profession is their feeling of isolation (Ingersoll, 1997; Reed, Rueben, & Barber, 2006). Being with students all day long does not of course mean they are isolated from people, but that they are isolated from other adults. It is their colleagues, not their students, who nurture their professional growth and respond to their personal needs.

In my presentation of preliminary findings to the CMS staff, I used the analogy of the airplane oxygen masks to describe this phenomenon. In the case of a loss of

oxygen in the cabin, the flight attendant says, parents are encouraged to put the oxygen mask over their own nose and mouth before attending to their children. This statement needs to be said, I suggested to a small group at CMS, because it is counter-intuitive. Parental instinct is to care for one's own children even when it requires a parent to sacrifice her own interests and needs. The airlines' concern for the safety of all the passengers means making sure the needs of the care-providers are attended to first. It is a strategic decision which serves the goal of maximizing the health of their passengers.

Chief of Staff Goodwin rejected the analogy outright. She said, "When I came here four years ago [before the conversion to charter], the adults were breathing pure oxygen and the students were starving, they were on life-support." Right now, she continued, the students need oxygen to keep them from dying. Ms. Goodwin seemed to be suggesting that the remedy for the *de facto* "adults first" policy (breathing pure oxygen) is "students first." Of course, starving the adults of oxygen will not serve the students either, especially if that results in teacher burnout or excessively high teacher turnover.

The larger point here is that an espoused value like "students first" had implications for everyone at CMS. I have described three ways in which this value was enacted at CMS and how it influenced teacher interactions.

CHAPTER 7: CMS TEACHER INTERACTION AND THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

In this chapter I return to the research on teacher interaction to examine how the experiences of the CMS teachers support or challenge the findings of earlier research, and how that earlier research illuminates our understanding of the teacher interactions at CMS. I begin with the literature on the developmental patterns and activities of teacher groups, then move to the studies on the cultural norms of the teaching profession, and finally to the community research.

CMS and the Nature of Teacher Interaction

Little (1990), Westheimer (1998), and Grossman (2001), have identified patterns which characterize how collaborating teacher groups develop and change over time. Little, for example, describes the initial stages of community in which teachers use “storytelling and scanning for ideas” as the primary way of interacting with their colleagues. As the group matures, she reports, the work becomes increasingly interdependent until ideally, “each one’s teaching is everyone’s business and each one’s success is everyone’s responsibility” (Little, 1990, p. 523).

The data from this study suggest that the CMS teacher groups had two independent trajectories on this path, depending on whether academic or non-academic (“cultural”) matters are the focus of their work. Teachers’ work was most interdependent when they were meeting in their teams to discuss students. There they shared and designed support programs for those who were “at risk” as a result of poor grades, unacceptable behavior, poor attendance, or other concerns. The plans for these

students were specific to students' problems. The plan included, for example, extra academic support, regular contact with the student's parents, and discussion with other adults at the school to get a more complete picture of the individual student's areas of success and challenge. Although academic success was often the source of the primary concern, the teachers' conversations were not about the content of the coursework or the student's misconceptions about the subject matter. Rather it was about the mechanisms for providing additional assistance to the student, certainly an important first step. In contexts outside of my data collection, teachers may have worked together to address the specific issues of teaching and learning which face the student, but I did not witness such conversations nor were they reported in the logs or interviews.

Teacher support for each other at CMS was summed up in the oft-repeated phrase "we've got each others' backs." When teachers explained the meaning of this phrase which involves a sports or military metaphor, it was always with reference to non-academic matters. One focus teacher, for example, explained the meaning of the phrase this way:

If your kid is messing up in the back of the line and you don't know it, someone, another teacher who is walking by is going to be like, hey, straighten up, now tuck in your shirt and get in line. And you don't have to worry about them walking away and just letting some kid getting away with it, and you're like on your own with these 33 kids.

In the area of content knowledge and curriculum development, the CMS teachers worked more independently than they did on non-academic matters. One third of interactions recorded on the interaction log (see Table 5) related to curriculum,

but these interactions were usually requests for materials or equipment. These are the type of exchanges Little has identified as “aid and assistance” and in her schemas they constitute the second of four stages of group formation (Little, 1990). Only four of the 144 interactions involved comments on instructional practices or topics which could be construed as teachers’ joint work and shared responsibility. These comments are characteristic of Little’s fourth stage of group formation.

This independence may have been a missed opportunity especially within the Math and Literacy Departments. Much of the course-level curriculum in these departments was the same from teacher to teacher, offering an optimal environment for discussing the content, sharing one’s instructional practice, and learning from each other. Teachers in other departments work more independently than their colleagues in math and literacy because they do not have regular professional development meetings or expectations from the leadership that they will teach the same curriculum.

These two developmental paths, one for academic work and one for other matters, can also be seen in the context of Hargreaves’ classification. Hargreaves (1994) divided teachers’ interactions into “collaborative culture” and “contrived collegiality.” Using this schema, most CMS teacher interactions (including department professional development) fall primarily into the category of “contrived collegiality.” The department meetings for the Literacy and Math Departments are required, regularly scheduled (“fixed in time and space”), administratively-regulated, and designed to predictably implement strategies (e.g. preparation for testing) or a lesson of study (e.g. the persuasive writing unit).

Team meetings and joint work of partner teachers might, on the other hand, be more readily classified as “collaborative culture” interactions. These conversations are spontaneous and voluntary, driven by the participating teachers’ initiatives in response to a problem or a plan to provide support for a student who is falling through the cracks. In addition, these interactions are pervasive across time and space. They often occur in the evenings or weekends, during lunch, or through email; in other words, they are not bounded by the school day.

Hargreaves’ schema assumes an established school in which the foundational culture is in place, rather than a new school like CMS which is creating a new vision and culture. While there may be lessons to be learned from Hargreaves’ categories, they have limited application to the activities among teachers at CMS. Moreover the experienced teachers assumed in Hargreaves’ model are more likely to have the confidence to reflect on their practice, and join their colleagues for development-oriented conversations. Teachers in their first years in the classroom are usually more concerned with issues of classroom management. Eighty-eight percent of CMS teachers had fewer than five years of teaching experience; they may have been grateful to have had “administratively-regulated” sessions in which they received and prepared the upcoming lesson. In other words, the developmental level of the teachers’ interactions may be as much a function of the inexperience of the teachers as the character of their relationship to each other. Schools like CMS with a preponderance of new teachers would be an ideal setting in which to study the relationship between collaborative interactions of teachers and years of teaching experience.

CMS and Cultural Norms

The reforms at CMS have challenged some of the traditional norms of teacher culture. The frequent professional development sessions and the classroom open-door policies have helped to break down the privacy and autonomy that characterizes teachers' relationship to their work in many schools (Little, 1990). "We make our practice public," the director told the faculty repeatedly.

Teachers at CMS also had little autonomy in making decisions about their classroom instruction. Literacy teachers at CMS, for example, were provided the curriculum units and were expected to teach them in a similar way, using pedagogical strategies which had been carefully written up and often modeled by the department coaches. The Social Studies and Science Departments did not have common curriculum materials, and when they shared materials, these teachers individualized their use of them. But whatever the subject, all classes at CSM followed the same structure. They began with a "prelude" (quiet seat time), and then moved through a sequence of stages identified as "launch," "explore," "summary" and "practice." There were other elements common to all classrooms, which included having a meeting area, posting the agenda, and extensive use of charts. These elements limited a teacher's power to make decisions about the structure of her classroom, although she could make instructional decisions within those parameters.

CMS teacher culture did not include the norms of privacy and autonomy as they are described in the research, but the norms of non-interference (Little, 1990) and "polite and non-judgmental" behavior (Wilson & Berne, 1999) were solidly in place

there. Disagreement with other teachers or with administrators was an infrequent event in public settings at CMS. The leadership carefully monitored comments that might be construed as “negativism,” monitoring that may have had the unintended effect of silencing thoughtful critiques or limiting probing questions.

Director Moreno has encouraged teachers to talk with him privately about their concerns, and these conversations undoubtedly take place in other venues to which I did not have access. But research on professional community reports that airing and negotiating the differences publicly within a community is an important part of the work, and is work that ultimately benefits the community (Achinstein, 2002). For whatever reason – fear of “negativism,” dissonance in the belief system – CMS leaders appeared to discourage public debate and disagreement.

Grossman and her colleagues (2001) describe a team-building activity for the development of the community of English teachers the authors were studying. The activity they chose was the reading and discussion of a few common texts. They describe the evolution of the group.

In the beginning, these texts only highlighted our differences, but this was a crucial step that pushed us beyond the limitations of pseudocommunity. Our collective growth came not because we lost the distinctiveness of the different readings we brought to [the four books], but because we came to understand these differences more fully (p. 992).

Achinstein (2002) goes even further in an article about a case study of two urban middle schools. She claims that a healthy community has necessarily surfaced conflicts and differences, and learned from these discussions.

When teachers enact collaborative reforms in the name of community, what emerges is often conflict. The study challenges current thinking on community by showing that conflict is not only central to community, but how teachers manage conflicts, whether they suppress or embrace their differences, defines the community borders and ultimately the potential for organizational learning and change. (Achinstein, 2002, p. 421)

But the point is larger than the benefits of disagreement and conflict within a community. Westheimer (1994) and Grossman (2001) put the development of communities (both teacher and student) in the context of the democratic project, and the ultimate purpose of schooling to cultivate citizens for our democracy.

If teachers themselves cannot reclaim a civil discourse and an appreciation and recognition of diverse voices, how can they prepare students to enter a pluralistic world as citizens? If we are unable to broker the differences that divide us, how can we tell students to do otherwise? Of all the habits of mind modeled in schools, the habit of working to understand others, of striving to make sense of differences, of extending to others the assumption of good faith, of working towards the enlarged understanding of the group – in short, the *pursuit of community* – may be the most important. (italics in the original; Grossman et al., 2001, p. 1000).

These studies suggest that the CMS “family” might have been strengthened rather than diminished by public discussion of the differences of opinion among the faculty. Moreover, the students at CMS could have learned some important lessons of living in a pluralistic society such as tolerance of difference and peaceful resolution of conflict.

CMS and Community

CMS faculty and administration used the word “community” to refer to the neighborhood and to families of CMS students. Community was not the term normally used to describe the relationships among the adults, or the adults and the children at CMS; other metaphors (family, team) were used for this purpose. But quite apart from what it was called, CMS certainly embodied elements of community, as the concept is understood by social scientists. Bellah and his colleagues (1985) defined community as “a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it” (p. 333). They also describe the importance of a central narrative for a community, and for CMS, that narrative is the dramatic story of their founding. Director Moreno routinely shares the story with visitors to the school by showing some of the video clips from local news programs. He has also stated his desire to “teach this history” to new staff and students each year. In this way, CMS leadership cultivates an understanding of itself as a community even when that term is not applied.

One specific form of community which has been applied to educational settings is a community of practice. Community of practice (Lave, 1985; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000) refers to an environment in which the learning results from participating with others in an activity in increasingly meaningful ways. If we think of a community as a set of concentric circles, where long-term participants and the important actors (like school leaders) are at the center, a member’s involvement is

described as moving from the periphery to the center of the activity and the community. This model applies most readily to learning a trade as an apprentice learns, as well as other kinds of “learning on the job.” Traditionally, much of the work of a school takes place in the privacy of a classroom with one adult and a group of students. This lack of “publicly available features” (Little, 1990) of the work of teachers would normally limit opportunities for teachers to learn from each other.

CMS has broken down some of these privacy walls by having a support teacher (a second adult) in many classrooms, and by opening classrooms to frequent visitors. But what the public nature of these classrooms allows, the exceptionalist understanding of the reform prevents. In other words, the CMS leaders believed that this reform was unique, and thus teachers’ prior knowledge and experiences were not relevant. The teachers might have had more opportunity to see each other teach at CMS – “legitimate peripheral participation” in the language of community of practice – but what was learned in that observation was not necessarily valued by the administrators at the center of the community of practice.

In interviews, teachers reported that even by mid-year they did not know the names of all of their colleagues, and they would have appreciated some community-building activities (e.g. a name game, personal introductions) during the professional development meetings before school started. Teachers also reported that the master schedule, with only Math and Literacy in the morning, created an artificial division between the “morning” teachers and the “afternoon” teachers. In a school which placed “students first” and in which teachers’ interactions were most frequently

mediated by students' needs, there may have appeared to be little reason for teachers to develop an independent commitment to each other.

CMS administrators and founding documents espoused a general belief system, common goals for their students, and a cohesive force resulting from the challenge of an external adversary, the hosting district. These qualities undoubtedly contributed to the sense of community among the adults. As a result of these qualities, school leaders may have assumed that CMS adults constituted a coherent community and that they did not need to nurture the development of a community.

Whether the CMS teacher interactions formally qualify as a "community" by one person's definition is not as important as whether their interactions have supported their ongoing learning. In the next section, I summarize the research findings and the elements of the socio-political context which played such a central role in the teacher interactions and how the administrators and teachers understood those interactions.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

My study has investigated formal and informal teacher interactions at Charter Middle School, a school undergoing reform in a large city in Southern California. I selected CMS in part because it was reinventing itself, and I believed that the values and beliefs of the school leaders would be explicit during this reform period. In addition to new understandings of teacher interaction, I learned how important the larger socio-political context is in determining both the nature of reform and the teachers' interactions. The context influenced teacher practices and interactions, as well as the administration's espoused theory of teacher interactions and the teachers' own understandings of those interactions. Next I summarize the three questions that guided this research and what the data have revealed about each.

Research Questions

1. What is the organization's espoused theory (or theories) of teacher professional interactions in this school? The leadership of CMS communicated a number of values and beliefs which related to teacher interactions in both formal meetings and informal conversations. Teachers were expected to regularly attend and participate in department and whole school professional development sessions, and they were expected to teach common curricula (when provided) and adopt common classroom structures and pedagogical strategies. In keeping with the school's espoused belief that "our practice is public," teachers were also expected to open their classrooms to school personnel and outside visitors.

School leaders believed that teachers should share responsibility for the students in the school, and that their joint work should reinforce rather than challenge the work of their colleagues. They believed that the value of “students first” and the goal of preparing their students for a college preparatory curriculum should inform the substance of all teacher interactions, and that time should not be wasted on non-essential activities.

2. What is the nature of teacher professional interactions in this school?

The nature of the activities varied with the particular structure of the interaction. The entire faculty met for 90 minutes each week, a meeting normally led by the school director or the chief of staff. The meetings usually consisted of announcements regarding school business, a message or story designed to boost teacher morale, or time for smaller groups of teachers to meet.

Members of the Math and Literacy Departments met as a whole department or in course groups once each week. These meetings were organized and led by department coaches. They provided time for teachers to review new curriculum units, learn a new teaching strategy, or discuss preparation of their students for the state testing in the spring.

Teachers also talked with each other casually throughout the day. Most of these interactions (80%) concerned matters that were urgent or important in the short term. The most frequent topics of these conversations were curriculum materials, team planning, and student behavior.

3. How do teachers understand these interactions in terms of their work and their learning? Teachers varied in their understandings of the meaning and value of their interactions with their colleagues. Teachers in the Math and Literacy Departments, who had regular professional development meetings, were appreciative of the resources they were given and the support provided them by the coaches. But several of these teachers also resented the frequency of the meetings because they felt the meetings took away much-needed preparation time. Some teachers in other departments expressed disappointment that they did not have regular professional development meetings or other formal opportunities to collaborate with their department colleagues.

Most teachers I interviewed believed that their interactions needed to be task-oriented. They reported that their heavy workload and long hours precluded more reflective discussions or sustained conversations with their colleagues about non-urgent matters. Teachers expressed concern about asking challenging questions or expressing a critical opinion about a school policy or value because they feared school leaders would call such a contribution “negative” and understand it as undermining the work of other teachers.

How School Reform Affects Teacher Interaction

The specific nature of reform at CMS also influenced teacher interaction. In particular, the development of a specific CMS school culture, the urgency of the work,

and the enactments of the “students first” policy were elements of the reform which had a considerable influence on the theory and practice of teacher interaction.

The most important aspect of the CMS reform was the transformation of “a culture of chaos into a culture of learning,” a phrase the director used frequently. This new “culture” included a set of behaviors for both teachers and students that, school leaders believed, would ensure a campus that was safe, orderly, and ready for students to learn. They believed this culture needed to be established before instruction could become the focus. School administrators used the hiring process, constitutive use of language, and direct instruction to communicate the desirable values and behaviors of the “culture of learning.” For teachers, this new culture meant that they were to teach in a common pedagogical frame, and for teachers in some departments, teach similar curricula. Professional development meetings were often used to help teachers implement these common structures.

A second influence on teacher interaction was the urgency of the mission. Most students arrived below grade level and in a few short years at CMS, these students were to be ready to enter and be successful in a college preparation curriculum in high school. In addition, the school’s original five year charter would only be renewed if CMS could demonstrate improvement in student achievement. These factors created a high pressure environment for the CMS staff. Moreover, this ambitious program was unfolding in the public eye, on the front page of the local newspaper, in school board meetings, and in local politics, a partial result of the contentious, political process that characterized the founding of the school. The

impact on teachers was clear. Every interaction with each other and with students was to be purposeful and supportive of school's mission, and teachers were expected to work long hours. Teachers experienced the job as "a way of life" and several commented that they had sacrificed a personal life to work at CMS.

The third aspect of the school reform which impacted teacher interactions was the espoused school policy known as "students first." Although this policy seems an obvious value for a school, the way in which it was enacted had particular consequences for teachers' practices and interactions. "Students first" meant that 1) students, rather than teachers, were first, 2) students' non-academic needs came before students' academic needs, and 3) students' cultural instruction came before students' academic instruction. For teachers, the "students first" policy meant attending to students' cultural, social, emotional, and health needs, as well as their academic needs. This policy substantially increased the teachers' range of responsibilities for their students.

Teacher interactions and activities take place within a particular socio-political context. At CMS, that context was a dynamic restructuring and re-culturing of the school. The findings about teacher interaction raised by the original research questions are best understood within the context of this particular reform effort: transforming a school for student equity.

Implications for Research and Practice

There are limits to the claims one can make by taking a snapshot in the midst of a movie, as I have done here in my examination of teacher interactions at CMS. The restructuring and re-culturing efforts were a dynamic process, especially because it was only in its second year of operation. Moreover, I have developed a new respect for the importance of the role of the broader context of the school in understanding the school dynamics. In this case study, the context influenced the reform and the teacher interactions to an extent I did not predict and in ways I could not have imagined. I have learned much about teacher interaction, their purposes and their value at CMS, but perhaps the most important lesson is the importance of context.

Like CMS, all schools exist within a particular social, political, economic, historical, and cultural context. We should therefore be cautious about making generalizations about “middle schools” or “urban schools” or “charter schools” or about replicating in a new context efforts which have appeared to be successful in different context.

With those limitations in mind, I have extracted two lessons and one caution as contributions to the dialogue of researchers and practitioners seeking to improve educational equity for all students. First, the caution.

Reformers like those at CMS are driven by passion and a deeply held belief in the need to provide poor students a first rate secondary education and the promise of a college education. This conviction provides seemingly inexhaustible fuel for the effort. But there are real costs to the organization, to the teachers, and even to the

students. The CMS experience may help us understand the importance of thinking about sustainability of the reform right from the start. Success is not measured by one group of students who benefit from the zealotry and energy of the early efforts, but by the long-term value and the ability of the effort to transform the system.

For the two lessons, I return to the framework provided by the interaction among culture, structure and agency, the three areas critical to successful educational reform (Datnow et al., 2002; Mehan, 1992). Structure refers to the social, political, economic forces and constraints involved in the work. The ongoing political struggles with the host district have certainly impeded smooth progress at CMS. Moreover, the limited period of time that the charter was given by the state to demonstrate improved student achievement pushed the CMS staff to choose frequently between a course of action that yielded short-term gains and broader, more long-term changes. The structural matters that were within the control of the governing board and leadership of CMS have clearly served to support their work. The master schedule, embedded professional development, interdisciplinary teams were elements that other schools would be well-advised to consider importing.

Of the three elements, the CMS reform led with culture, and that remained its most clearly defined and strongest component. The belief system regarding students' capabilities was evident throughout the school's work. The basic value and anchor of the program was that all students are "college material." Director Moreno asked the faculty on more than one occasion, "If you don't think our kids are going to college, why are you teaching here?"

The culture also included the belief that genuine caring for the students and hard work will be rewarded eventually with improved student learning. Director Moreno frequently told the staff that they were the most hard-working faculty in the country, and that they are revolutionizing urban education. From what I have witnessed, he may well have been right.

Transforming urban schools into equitable institutions for students, especially poor students and students of color, is the most important challenge for educators today. Research studies and public attention have focused on governing structures, accountability measures, finances, and curricular innovation, among other areas. But the critical role that teachers play in these reforms is undervalued and easily overlooked. How teachers work with each other and learn from each other, and how that work is facilitated or impeded by the larger structural and cultural issues of the reform are issues of paramount importance for the success of the reform. Researchers, reformers, policy-makers, and parents who are committed to educational equity for all students would do well to invite the voices and experiences of teachers in interaction to the discussions about this critical work.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Focus Teacher First Interview – List of Eliciting Quotations

“We have each others’ backs.”

“There is no teaching in isolation.”

“We operate as a family here.”

“This is not a job. This is a vocation; it is a calling.”

“It’s not how heavy the load, it’s how you carry it.”

“What model of professionalism do you want to put on show for our kids?”

“I want to know how to get better everyday. It’s not a punishment.”

“Part of the charter is having a career path for teachers too.”

Two of the six Cs are COACHING and COLLABORATION.

Appendix B: Focus Teacher Exit Interview – Summary of Video Segments Used as Elicitors

Context: In a professional development session from August 18, 2006, teams were asked to respond to the question, “how does your team need to collaborate to be successful?” During the sharing out, the following statements were made.

“Recognizing individual differences. Not try to make us all be the same. We are individuals, and validate our differences. So if someone wants to take a nap, we support them. No, just kidding.”

“Having each others’ back. Being supportive. Helping each other. As was mentioned over there, if someone is being a bit tired, we just pump them up, and make sure we keep each other going, give each other energy.”

“One of the hardest things that you are going to have to do this year, and returning teachers can totally attest to this, is you are going to have a time where somebody on your team or maybe outside your team does something that really doesn’t sit right with you. With a student, with another teacher, with a parent, with a staff member. And the hardest thing that you’re *going* to do, and that you *must* do, and that you *have* to do is to address that with that person.

Julie said, we talk to that person first. You may have your confidante that you say, how can I do this, that I’m talking to about it. But it is really important for you to go and address that with that person.

And take, that’s one of the big risks. Is putting yourself out there in that vulnerable way to say, ‘you know what, the way that you talked to that kid yesterday really didn’t sit right with me, and here’s why.’ And be ready for the conversation back to that.

And every single one of us on the other side of that coin has to be ready to have that conversation happen with us on the other end of it. Because this job is incredibly hard. We’re going to make some mistakes, and we’re not going to learn from those mistakes unless we address them with each other and grow from them. And that’s a huge risk, and it’s really hard, but it is so absolutely worth it, and the kids are so absolutely worth it that I really want to highlight that a little bit.”

Appendix C: Interaction Log Protocol

1. Which days do I record this information? Please select four days between now and January 15 and record your interactions with all other adults at [CMS] on those days. You may pick any days, but please vary the kinds of days you record. For example, select some A days and some B days, one or two on Wednesdays and the others on full period days, one or two when you have scheduled meetings and the rest when you don't.

2. How do I record this information? You may use the digital recorder I have provided for your log, or you may simply write down the interactions on paper or at the computer. In either case, please record the information as soon after it happens as possible.

3. What do I record? Record the information below for all interactions you have with other adults that occur on that day at the school site. In particular, please answer these questions:

- *What is the date and day of the week?* (You only need to record this once, at the beginning of your log.)
- *What time of day is it?*
- *Who initiated the contact?*
- *What was the form of the contact?* (email, note in my mailbox, stopped by my classroom and talked...)
- *Who was involved?* (members of the [university] team, Director Moreno and me, two other teachers from neighboring classrooms, ...)
- *What was the purpose of the interaction?* (return books, share weekend plans, gossip about the new music teacher, plan a team meeting)

So the recorded information can be pretty brief. Here are some hypothetical examples:

- 8:15 am - Another math teacher stopped by my classroom to give me a copy of her Halloween math worksheet.
- 10:00 am - I emailed the counselor to ask if one of my students had taken the English language test, and to get the results.

- 10:25 am - Parent called me to see if her son's seat could be moved because he couldn't see the board.
- 2:10 pm - An unidentified adult – district staff? – stopped by my room apparently looking for another room.
- 3:30 pm – My student teacher from last year stopped by to say hello and tell me about her summer trip to Costa Rica. We also talked about schools where she might apply to teach.

Questions you might have:

1. What do I do if the tape recorder doesn't work? Please put in the spare batteries in the case. If that doesn't work, stop recording that day. I'll get you a working recorder for another day.

2. Must I use the recorder? No, if you would prefer to write all this down on paper or type it into a word document on your computer, that's fine. If you do that, please record this information as soon as possible after the interaction just as you would do if you were using the audio recorder.

3. What counts as an interaction? Any contact you have through phone, email, letter, or face-to-face with another adult, whether the adult is a teacher, parent, custodian, administrator or community member. Include all interactions, whether they are social, school-related, or anything else.

4. Do I need to include names? No. You may include names of students or adults, but you do not need to. Please DO identify the people with whom you interact, however, by providing their job or role (e.g. "a science teacher," "a student's mother").

5. If you have any other questions, feel free to call me on my cell phone during the day. You may also email me at: bedwards@ucsd.edu.

Appendix D: List of School Documents and Video Recordings

Bell Schedule

Charter School Proposal Outline

Director's Reports

Literacy Department Professional Development Materials

Mathematics Department Professional Development Materials

Staff Directory

Teacher Application Materials

Teacher Commitment Form

"The Professional Teacher" Professional Development Materials

Video Recordings of Selected Days of 2005 and 2006 Summer Professional Development Sessions

Visitor Packets

WASC Report, 2007

Weekly Bulletins

Whole Faculty Meeting Agendas

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