Collective Efficacy, Social Context, Teachers' Work, and Student Achievement: A Mixed-Method Study

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Education)
in The University of Michigan
2011

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DEDICATION

To my grandparents: George and Wedad Ajluni & Nicholas and Nellie Salloum who courageously left the Middle East in search of better opportunities for their families…

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a supportive community to foster the intense work and dedication required to complete a dissertation.

To my amazingly flexible, supportive, and dedicated committee members: you have all taught me so much in these final years of graduate school, this project is infinitely better with all of your advice along the way. To Jane Dutton for pushing me to pursue my passion and helping me to grow as a qualitative researcher. To Rob Jagers for being a great supporter of this work, and for extending the opportunity to work at Skyline High School which helped sharpen the applicability of my work. To Carla O'Connor – my mentor, role model, teacher, collaborator, and friend. I appreciate the high standards you held me to; I worked as hard as I could to make this study the best I was capable of. You have taught me through your example about the kind of scholar and teacher I want to be. I am indebted to you for all of the time and insightful commentary over the years. To Roger Goddard – my incredible advisor, despite his allegiance to Ohio State – without you this work would not have been possible. I am so thankful that I volunteered to work on MSTEMS the first semester of graduate school. I appreciate all of your guidance over the years, your positive and uplifting attitude, keen remarks, and the incredible opportunities you extended to me. I did not, however, appreciate you moving to Texas – but I am amazed how well we were able to work from such a distance.

This project would not have been possible without the help of the students, teachers, principals, and school districts at which I conducted my study. They graciously welcomed me into their schools and classrooms and I will be eternally grateful for their time and support.

To others at the University of Michigan who enhanced my skill set – especially Valerie Lee – for teaching rigorous quantitative courses that are foundational to my work. To Anne-Lise Halverson who extended the opportunity to teach at MSU where I gained confidence and began to envision myself as a professor. To Carol Barnes, Diane Massell, and Brian Rowan who generously provided me not only with funding, but valuable hands on policy experience, from which I grew tremendously. To Sarah Constant and Cathy Reischl who provided the opportunity to field instruct – which was one of my most treasured learning experiences at the University of Michigan.

To friends at the University of Michigan who were always supportive. To Sarah Tucker, Francesca Forzani, Nate Schwartz, and Melissa Stull who were amazing listeners, and friends through this entire process. To Serene Koh for being a gifted 795 partner, great supporter of my work, and unbelievably sharp editor. To Liz and Megan (of course)

iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF APPENDICES

ABSTRACT

Collective efficacy – a group's belief in its capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to reach a goal – is understood to be an important organizational property because it facilitates attainment. Social cognitive theory has been leveraged in many quantitative studies illustrating that teachers' collective efficacy has a strong relationship to student achievement. The purpose of this mixed method study was to (1) confirm that collective efficacy was to related to 4th grade students' odds of passing state standardized assessments in reading and mathematics across an entire state, and (2) learn how collective efficacy operates to impact student achievement. Employing data drawn from a stratified random sample of schools in a large state, Hierarchal Generalized Linear Modeling (HGLM) results demonstrate that for every standard deviation increase in collective efficacy, a student's individual odds of passing a state assessment increased by 35% and 42% in mathematics and reading respectively.

In an effort to understand the relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement, two high poverty schools in the same district from the quantitative sample were selected for case study – Barcliff and Meadows. Schools were differentiated by levels of collective efficacy and student performance. Through analysis of teacher interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations, several key differences emerged. Importantly, Barcliff teachers described their students as full of potential compared to the greater degree of deficit thinking that was apparent at Meadows. These belief systems seemed to be related to the nature of the professional learning community (PLC) in each

building as established by the principal. The Barcliff principal was an instructional

leader; as such the intention of their PLC was to improve teacher learning in order to

enhance student learning. In contrast, Meadows principal's leadership around instruction

was incidental and the PLC was thought of as a structure without an explicit focus on

teachers' learning to bolster student learning. This study illustrates that the degree to

which schools were organized to support teachers' work contributed to their levels of

collective efficacy; in other words, collective efficacy and PLCs were mutually

supportive with both contributing to student achievement levels.

Chapter 1

Introduction

According to recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, fourth graders from low income communities are three grade levels behind their high income peers in reading and mathematics. Approximately half of these students will not graduate from high school; students that manage high school graduation will likely have reading and mathematics skills on par with a high income eighth grader (NAEP, 2009). To complicate matters, educational disparities disproportionately influence African-American, Latino, and Native American children, who are three times as likely to live in low-income areas (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2010). These differences in skill and achievement are not due to lack of ability or motivation, rather they may in part be attributed to chance. Often the quality of schooling to which children have access is reliant on their zip code, a product of socioeconomic status (SES). What is more, schooling not only sustains these achievement gaps but often exacerbates such differences. Schools matter. In this dissertation, I focus on how schools may disrupt achievement gaps to serve students more equitably.

As explicitly stated in the opening line of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), "To close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind," schools have been called upon to enhance student achievement, especially for underserved populations. Both NCLB (2002) and the

1

American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (2009) communicate the importance of student achievement with the former laying out ambitious goals and consequences for student achievement, and the latter providing unparalleled levels of short term funding. Because of the pressure upon schools to improve school-wide student achievement, evidence to support such goals can improve practice. It is important to investigate how schools contribute to narrowing or exacerbating achievement gaps, especially for underserved populations. There are a myriad of questions one could pose to learn about why student achievement differences exist, why gaps in achievement are sustained, and why some schools serve students in more or less equitable ways. Often, public policy focuses on educational inputs such as teacher quality, finances, and other material resources. Much more difficult to impact, but no less significant are informal school structures. A key informal school structure is the organizational climate or the "shared orientations that hold the unit together and give it a distinct identity" (Hoy & Miskel, 2001, p. 176).

One important school-level resource that contributes to a productive school climate is collective efficacy, or a group's shared belief in their will and skill to reach a particular goal (Bandura, 1997). In other words, in schools characterized by high levels of collective efficacy, the faculty believe they can engage in actions that facilitate student learning. As will be examined in this dissertation, collective efficacy has a powerful relationship with student achievement that is strikingly stronger than SES (Bandura, 1997).

I chose to study collective efficacy in this dissertation for at least two reasons. First, collective efficacy has a demonstrated link to student achievement (Bandura, 1997; Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy & Woolfolk Hoy 2000). Second, focusing on pliable elements of schooling is a productive direction for educational research. Traditional public schools have no control over the clientele they serve. There is little that schools can do to change the material conditions to which students go home. For this reason, in this dissertation I focus on elements that can be manipulated in schools to improve outcomes for students. While stable, collective efficacy, is not enduring.

In schools where teachers are characterized by strong collective efficacy beliefs, the faculty trusts that they can successfully educate students. Schools with high levels of collective efficacy maintain strong expectations by setting ambitious goals and committing to accomplish them. High levels of collective efficacy are associated with a robust sense of purpose that helps groups see setbacks as temporary obstacles to rise above rather than evidence confirming their inefficacy (Goddard & Skrla, 2006). For example, potentially threatening or insurmountable situations (such as high stakes testing for NCLB compliance) are viewed as challenges to be met or overcome. Therefore, the stronger an organization's collective efficacy beliefs, the more likely its members are to put forth the sustained effort and persistence required to attain desired goals.

Scholarship demonstrates that schools characterized by strong levels of collective efficacy are more likely to have high levels of student achievement than schools with lower levels of collective efficacy (Bandura 1993; Goddard 2001).

While these findings hold promise they are not without limitation. First, past quantitative studies of collective efficacy and achievement utilized convenience samples. There is a need for scholarship that draws upon a representative sample of schools so we can generalize knowledge of the effects of collective efficacy across larger populations. Second, how collective efficacy functions to impact achievement is not well understood. Finally, it is difficult to disentangle the directionality of the relationship between collective efficacy and achievement. Is it that collective efficacy predicts student achievement, or that having strong student achievement leads to increased levels of collective efficacy?

Therefore, in this work, I draw upon quantitative and qualitative data to: (a) test whether collective efficacy is related to student achievement across the population of elementary schools in a large Midwestern state; and (b) investigate how collective efficacy operates to affect student achievement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Collective efficacy is understood to be an important organizational property because the strength of social institutions depends in part on communal ability and willingness to solve problems (Bandura, 1997). Collective school belief systems can have vitalizing or demoralizing effects on how well schools function (Purkey & Smith; 1983; Brophy & Good, 1986). Collective efficacy evolved from Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1997) and was adapted to the field of education through the study of teacher efficacy, and later collective teacher efficacy. Social cognitive theory espouses reciprocal causation among the self, environment, and behavior (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). If we consider social cognitive theory in an educational setting, teachers both contribute to and are influenced by collective efficacy beliefs in their schools. While teachers harmonize their individual efforts with the work of others, they are simultaneously affected by the beliefs, motivation, and performance of their coworkers. It is easier for a teacher to remain upbeat and positive in a constructive work environment as opposed to a negative one. Teachers are influenced by the dispositions of their colleagues, as such group beliefs have an association with individual attitudes (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). These interactive effects make collective efficacy an emergent group property that is more than the sum of its parts.

In order to fully understand the concept of collective efficacy and its effect on student achievement, it is necessary to trace the development of this construct. To understand such work I will review the theoretical and empirical foundations of self, teacher, and collective efficacy.

2.1 Self-efficacy Beliefs

Self-efficacy beliefs[1] are a key element of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1993, 1997). Perceived-self efficacy is defined as an individual's beliefs in his or her ability to produce desired levels of performance (Bandura, 1997). In other words, efficacy beliefs mediate thought and action (Raudenbush, Rowan, & Cheong, 1992). However, self-efficacy beliefs are merely one component of this theory; self-efficacy operates in concert with other factors to govern human thought, motivation, and action. Other determinants within social cognitive theory are knowledge structures, cognitive models, adaptive functioning, cognitive guidance, and routinization (for more details, see Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is one important mechanism through which thought leads to agency and an individual's overall judgment of her capacity to complete a task. For example, athletic success requires more than physical skill; athletic performance also depends on an individual's understanding of her own capability. Not surprisingly a firm sense of efficacy has been shown to positively influence human performance (Bandura, 1997).

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[1] In order to be consistent with efficacy scholarship, I use the terminology researchers used in publication to refer to various forms of efficacy beliefs. For example, I use the terms: self-efficacy, self-efficacy beliefs, perceived self-efficacy, perceived self-efficacy beliefs, teacher self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, and perceived collective teacher efficacy throughout this document.

6

According to social cognitive theory, people with a robust sense of self-efficacy approach difficult tasks as challenges. They set high goals for themselves and maintain a strong commitment to meeting these goals. When faced with a set-back, they are resilient and therefore recover quickly. Those with higher levels of efficacy attribute failure to insufficient effort, knowledge, or skill. In comparison, those with lower levels of efficacy tend to shy away from difficult tasks; they view these situations as intimidating or impossible instead of challenging. People with lower efficacy have modest ambitions and weak commitment to the goals they set. When faced with an impediment, these individuals focus on their personal shortcomings and give up quickly. Because they view poor performance as a deficit in aptitude, they are unlikely to be as resilient and lose faith in their capability. Therefore, people with similar skill levels but variant levels of self-efficacy may perform at different levels (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990; Bouffard-Bouchard, Parent & Larivee, 1991; Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

Self-efficacy beliefs have an important application in the field of education; examining conditions under which teacher efficacy beliefs are maximized might prove beneficial to increase student achievement. In the sections that follow, I study the application of efficacy beliefs in an educational context: teacher efficacy and collective efficacy.[2]

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[2] Student efficacy is another important application of social cognitive theory to an educational context. See Pajares, 1996 for a comprehensive review.

2.2 Teacher Efficacy

The extant literature demonstrates that teachers' efficacy beliefs are related to several important outcomes, not the least of which is student achievement. For example, teachers with high levels of efficacy develop challenging activities to help students succeed; in contrast, teachers characterized by low levels of efficacy doubt their competence to influence student learning (Allinder, 1995). Teachers with low efficacy may avoid activities that they believe exceed student capabilities; therefore, teachers with low efficacy may not persist in helping students who are having difficulty, nor expend energy to find supplementary materials, or re-teach content in ways that aids student understanding. Here I focus on three ideas within the teacher efficacy literature: (1) the measurement and definition of teacher efficacy, (2) the variables which predict teacher efficacy, and (3) the outcomes of teacher efficacy. In this section, I will attend to each of the categories, and include exemplar studies demonstrating each strand.

2.2.1 The Measurement and Definition of Teacher Efficacy

The meaning and measurement of teacher efficacy has produced disagreement among scholars (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Gutskey, 1988; Gutskey & Passaro, 1994; Henson, Kogan & Vacha-Haase, 2001; Pajares, 1992; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005). In order to understand the nature of this debate, some historical context of the concept is useful. Teacher efficacy evolved from Rotter's (1966) locus of

control[3] and Bandura's (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory. Using Rotter's theoretical perspectives, researchers at the RAND Corporation studying effective reading instruction viewed teacher efficacy as the extent to which teachers believed that they could control the reinforcement of their actions (Armor et al., 1976). RAND researchers used two survey items to measure teacher efficacy: (1) *When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment,* and (2) *If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult students.* Importantly, the former captures a general view of teaching, whereas the latter taps a teacher's perception of her own capability. These items mark a critical distinction in the efficacy literature which I discuss below.

Consistent with the distinctions in the original RAND teacher efficacy research, and grounded in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, Gibson and Dembo (1984) created a 30 item scale to measure teacher efficacy. In this work, the researchers postulated two facets of teacher efficacy: general teaching efficacy and personal teaching efficacy. General teaching efficacy refers to a teacher's general outlook on the ability of teachers to positively influence student learning. In contrast, personal teaching efficacy has been defined as a teacher's belief that

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[3] For clarity, it is important to differentiate self-efficacy from locus of control. Self-efficacy is concerned with an individual's perceived capability to perform a given task, in this case, teachers' beliefs in their capability to complete a task in a particular context with given students. In contrast, locus of control is concerned with contingencies – whether *outcomes* are determined by one's actions which are in one's control. Beliefs about whether one can produce certain *actions* (perceived self-efficacy) are not the same as beliefs about whether actions affect outcomes (locus of control). While these two constructs are not related to one another empirically, self-efficacy has a strong relationship to behavior, whereas the relationship between locus of control and behavior is typically weak (Bandura, 1997). However, the theory of locus of control provided the initial groundwork for the development of teacher efficacy.

he or she personally has the skills necessary to affect positive student outcomes in the face of adversity or difficulty (Gutskey, 1988; Gutskey & Passaro, 1994). In this work, general and personal efficacy were moderately correlated. Importantly, personal teaching efficacy has been shown to shape the way teachers approach their role in the classroom, and has been related to student learning outcomes (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Moore & Esselman, 1992). Personal teaching efficacy is also context specific; the same teacher may have different levels of efficacy when in different contexts (Raudenbush et al., 1992). This point is vital because it suggests that *context* plays a key role how teachers make sense of their own capability.

Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) moved this field forward when they created an integrated model of teacher efficacy (see Figure 2.1). In this model, the scholars delineated the four sources of efficacy beliefs (physiological and affective states, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience, and mastery experience) but they included two additional elements from Rotter's locus of control theory: (1) analysis of the teaching task, and (2) assessment of teaching competence. They defined teacher efficacy as *the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context.* In analyzing the context and task, a teacher considers factors that make teaching complicated as these factors are weighed against resources available. The teacher then views such factors as opportunities or constraints. In assessing one's teaching competence, the teacher judges her own capability in relation to this

particular teaching context. The interaction of these two components leads to judgments about self-efficacy for the teaching task at hand (Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

Critiquing previous measures of teacher efficacy for a lack of reliability and specificity, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) developed a 24 item Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale consisting of three dimensions: instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. They argued that the difficulty in creating a teacher efficacy measure is the balance between specificity (asking questions with a particular task in mind) and generality (if measures are too specific they lose their predictive power). The authors argued that this measure more precisely captured a broad range of capabilities that teachers considered important to good teaching within being so specific that it was useless. Next, this review turns to a consideration of research on the effects of teacher efficacy beliefs.

2.2.2 Effects of Teacher Efficacy

Researchers who developed teacher efficacy scales often employed them as independent variables. I located numerous quantitative studies where teacher efficacy was utilized as a predictor variable, relating teacher efficacy to both teacher and student outcomes. Teacher efficacy beliefs have been associated with student achievement and attitudes, as well as teacher attitudes, behavior and general satisfaction. In this section, I will discuss the extant literature linking teacher efficacy to such outcomes.

2.2.2.1 Teacher Attitude and Disposition.

If a teacher feels capable, it seems logical that he or she might have a better attitude, contributing to overall job satisfaction and ultimately enabling the individual to remain in the profession. Low rates of teacher retention are considered an epidemic in education, as an estimated 40-50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2003). Thus, instilling a sense of efficacy in the newest members of the profession, student teachers, seems important to overall retention rates. Fives, Hamman, and Olivarez (2007) learned that student teachers with higher levels of efficacy exhibited fewer symptoms of burn-out such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of students, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Their data illustrated that teacher efficacy increased during student teaching over time regardless of grade level or context; in addition, as efficacy increased, symptoms associated with burn-out decreased. This finding holds for practicing elementary and middle school teachers as well; self-efficacy has a negative and significant relationship to symptoms of burn-out (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). It is possible that efficacy contributes to retention as it is related to teacher commitment, responsibility (Coladarci, 1992) and satisfaction (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Steca, 2003).

Not only do efficacy beliefs relate to teachers' feelings about work, but it impacts determination within their classroom as well. Allinder (1995) discovered that special education teachers with higher levels of personal teaching efficacy set end-of-year goals that were more ambitious for their students. Others noted that

teachers with high efficacy valued educational innovations (Cousins & Walker, 2000).

2.2.2.2 Teacher Behavior.

Teacher attitudes and dispositions are important factors for how students experience school, given that such beliefs impact teacher action. In a key study, Gibson and Dembo (1984) affirmed such a link by comparing the classroom behavior of high and low efficacy teachers. The researchers noted several differences in instructional behavior; teachers with low efficacy were less likely to persist in failure situations, and were more likely to criticize students, as compared to teachers with higher levels of efficacy. A key strength of this study was that teacher behavior was observed by researchers, while other scholars relied upon teacher self-reports of behavior.

Researchers have found that low-efficacy teachers were more likely to circumvent subjects with which they were uncomfortable. For example, Enochs and Riggs (1990) learned that elementary teachers reported avoiding teaching science if they were less proficient with the content. Others discovered that high efficacy teachers reported that they were more likely to experiment with instruction, including a willingness to try a variety of materials and approaches, the desire to find better ways of teaching, and the implementation of progressive and innovative methods. High efficacy teachers also reported more extensive planning and organizational skills (Allinder, 1994). In sum, research suggests that teachers with high efficacy tend to persist in failure situations, hold high beliefs

for students, experiment with instruction, and embrace risks. Of course, the next logical question is whether or not such behaviors are linked to student outcomes.

2.2.2.3 Student Attitudes.

Teacher efficacy has also been tied to student attitudes. Midgley, Feldlaufer, and Eccles (1989) studied teachers' and students' efficacy for mathematics before and after the students' transition to middle school. The longitudinal examination revealed that teacher efficacy beliefs had a stronger relationship to positive changes in low-achieving students' self and task perceptions in math as compared to higher-achieving students. Higher achieving students seemed rather impervious to their teachers' sense of efficacy. The fact that teacher efficacy beliefs have a stronger impact on low achieving than on high achieving students is especially provocative given the tendency of administrators to assign teachers with low efficacy to groups of low-achieving students (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Midgley et al. (1989) also demonstrated that teacher efficacy beliefs were related to shifts in student beliefs about their performance, potential, and difficulty of the subject matter, at least for mathematics. Because this study is longitudinal, it provides strong evidence that teacher efficacy impacts student self and task perceptions. Finally, this study sheds light on questions of educational equity; if low-achieving students are less likely to be assigned to teachers with high efficacy, this is one way they are denied equal access to instructional resources. In other words, generally low achieving students are the ones that benefit the most from efficacious teachers, but they are unlikely to be the recipients of their time and instruction.

2.2.2.4 Student Achievement.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to examine teacher efficacy is to learn about how such beliefs impact student learning. The literature demonstrates that teacher efficacy is positively and significantly related to student achievement (Armor et al., 1976; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bandura 1993, 1997; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Moore & Esselman, 1992). As discussed above, there are several reasons why teachers with high levels of efficacy have a positive impact on student performance. As demonstrated by the previous empirical work and supported by social cognitive theory, with increased levels of efficacy individuals are more likely to put forth effort, and maintain resilience under challenging or demanding circumstances. This is underscored by research that suggests that more efficacious teachers engage in qualitatively different instruction as compared to teachers with lower levels of efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). While the literature demonstrates that student achievement is affected by teacher efficacy, equally plausible is that student achievement fosters teacher efficacy. Teachers who work in schools with high achieving students may feel capable of continuing such progress. In contrast, it is possible that low student achievement could suppress teacher efficacy if educators view raising student achievement levels as impossible. Consistent with the reciprocal nature of teacher efficacy, I will next discuss how scholars conceive of the influences on teacher efficacy.

2.2.3 Contributors to Teacher Efficacy

In a review of the literature conducted by Fuller, Wood, Rapoport, and Dornbush (1982), the authors concluded that teacher efficacy was related to a

variety of organizational outcomes and thus, worthy of further pursuit. Fuller and colleagues recommended that the field move forward and consider teacher efficacy as the *dependent variable*, specifically linking teacher efficacy to characteristics of organizational structure. Several researchers responded to this idea and their work is presented here. In this body of research, teacher efficacy has been explored primarily using quantitative methods. Three main categories of independent variables have been utilized to explain teacher efficacy: school culture, school context, and leadership.

2.2.3.1 School Culture.

Certainly, school culture is an important element in the development and maintenance of teacher efficacy. Organizational culture is similar to the air we breathe; its quality may not be considered unless it is compromised. Because school culture is an essential part of school functioning, teachers are inevitably influenced by their environment. For example, opportunities for modeling and vicarious experiences (e.g. to observe and be observed by others, co-teach, co-plan, discuss instruction, and the like), are all informed by the structure, atmosphere, and culture of a school. Similarly, relationships with colleagues and school leaders can contribute to teacher efficacy. In examining teacher efficacy, school culture is an important facet of school functioning to explore, and yet tension exists around what aspects of culture have the strongest relationship to teacher efficacy beliefs.

Some researchers have investigated the notion of school community and its relationship to efficacy (Ross & Gray, 2006). Using High School and Beyond

data, two groups of researchers quantitatively examined the influence of school community on teacher efficacy (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Lee, Dedrick, & Smith, 1991). Bryk and Driscoll (1988) conceived of community as students and adults sharing a common purpose, beliefs, goals, and values. The researchers discovered that a strong community had a powerful, positive effect on teacher efficacy. Likewise Lee, Dedrick, and Smith (1991) found that the strongest predictor of teacher efficacy was community; the scholars described a positive school community as composed of supportive, respectful relationships, and the sharing of common beliefs.

Other scholars have investigated the influence of a positive atmosphere (Moore & Esselman, 1992) and healthy climate characterized by strong academic emphasis – (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993) on teachers' efficacy. Similar to the studies on school community, these researchers found that teachers' perceptions of instructional dimensions of school climate (defined as lack of impediments to effective learning and the degree of teacher/staff collegiality) were related to teacher efficacy and job satisfaction (Moore & Esselman, 1992). However, Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) found evidence that teachers' perceptions of school integrity, a school's ability to cope with its environment in a way that maintains the educational emphasis of its programs, was associated with higher levels of teaching efficacy. The authors of this study acknowledged that it is likely that this relationship is reciprocal – teacher efficacy impacts the organizational climate, while climate also impacts teacher efficacy. These results complicate earlier work on teacher community, as Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) suggested that

personal teaching efficacy is a consequence of meeting instrumental needs and is unrelated to expressive relationships among teachers and administrators. In addition, the authors argued that job satisfaction and emotional support are important to teachers, but these qualities are unrelated to efficacy beliefs. These findings suggest that it is not simply a result of adults being nice to one another that impacts efficacy, rather it is a climate characterized by academic emphasis (setting high expectations for students) that is related to teacher efficacy. The scholarship presented here illustrates that there are several aspects of school culture that relate to teacher efficacy levels. School climate is multidimensional; therefore there are several ways to articulate aspects of culture, which in turn correlate with teacher efficacy.

2.2.3.2 School Context.

One's efficacy beliefs depend on the particular conditions in which one works. When a teacher instructs a course for which she is unqualified (i.e. an English teacher teaching calculus) she could have a reduced sense of efficacy in that situation as compared to teaching a course within her expertise. Scholars have also explored structural variables that are associated with higher levels of teacher efficacy. Analyses demonstrate that teacher efficacy is substantially greater when teachers serve students of a higher SES (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). Implied by this finding is that teachers tend to have lower levels of efficacy when working with impoverished students. One team of researchers found that the effects on teacher efficacy of teaching outside one's area were greater than the effects of track or grade level (Ross, Cousins, Gadalla, & Hannay, 1999). In other

18

words, teachers feel most efficacious in secondary schools when they teach courses that are within their expertise. This finding is complicated by Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong's (1992) study which illustrated that teachers working in honors and academic classes had higher levels of efficacy. Therefore, it is likely that teachers feel the most efficacious when they are teaching students who are seen as academically orientated and when the course taught falls within a teacher's area of content expertise. These ideas are muddied by the fact that teacher efficacy is more influential for lower achieving students (Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989), as low achieving students benefit more from high efficacy teachers. It seems important then, to make sure that teachers who are working with lower achieving students are working within their subject area to feel successful.

Other school characteristics are also related to teacher efficacy. For example, Bryk and Driscoll (1988) found that teacher efficacy is somewhat lower in large schools. This finding is not surprising, as it is likely that in a smaller setting teachers might know more students personally, and are empowered to provide better instruction. Researchers have found that elementary teachers feel more efficacious than do secondary teachers (Fuller & Izu, 1986; Moore & Esselman, 1992). There are several logical reasons why teachers may feel more or less efficacious given the grade levels. Generally elementary teachers work in self-contained classrooms; therefore they have fewer students and more time to accomplish such work, as compared to secondary teachers. Furthermore,

achievement gaps tend to widen over time (Jencks & Phillips, 1998) which might lead elementary teachers to feel more capable of teaching younger children.

Taken together, these studies illuminate a common theme: disadvantaged students are less likely to encounter efficacious teachers as compared to more advantaged peers, yet disadvantaged students are most likely to benefit from high efficacy teachers. The social class of the students taught, the subject area, track placement, school size and level, are all factors which influence teacher efficacy. This finding again highlights the current inequities that exist in our school system; low-income children have limited access to teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy, which compromises student learning. Despite this, there are schools that serve low income students in which teachers possess high levels of efficacy. It is critical to examine such schools to learn about the operation of such beliefs. These studies in concert indicate that there are several variables that could be manipulated to produce situations in which teachers feel more efficacious, ultimately facilitating student outcomes. For example, administrators need to ensure that teachers are qualified to teach their particular content and that they have the proper support to work in their context. Future researchers may wish to investigate conditions where teachers working with low-achieving students feel most efficacious. For example, does providing sustained, relevant professional development that emphasizes strategies for teachers to reach struggling learners help increase levels of teacher efficacy?

2.2.3.3 Leadership.

While the organizational context is related to teacher efficacy, researchers also sought to learn if leadership (both teacher and principal) impacts teachers' efficacy beliefs. The previous section demonstrated that several school structural elements are related to teacher efficacy. Administrators have the capacity to establish structures that positively influence norms and behaviors; such structures could result in a heightened sense of professionalism for teachers. As the official school leader, principals are able to support teachers by reducing feelings of uncertainty, empowering shared decision-making, and fostering norms of collaboration and collegiality. Through teacher survey, Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) discovered that the extent to which the principal has influence with superiors and a willingness to use it on behalf of teachers is related to teacher efficacy. Lee and colleagues (1991) found that strong principal leadership was related to teacher efficacy. Two principal characteristics were particularly important: buffering and delegating. Buffering allows teachers more classroom autonomy, and delegating refers to giving teachers more leadership roles within the school. This finding is consistent with the concept of distributed leadership or the delegation of authority in schools (Spillane, 2005). This position suggests that leadership does not rest with an individual alone, but is extended across multiple stakeholders. Providing structures that allow teachers to take on roles that distribute leadership and influence would empower teachers and enhance efficacy.

Other scholars focused on teacher leadership, as opposed to principal leadership, in relation to teacher efficacy. For example, Moore and Esselman

(1992) found that an influence of school based decision making was significantly related to a stronger sense of teacher efficacy. Ross, Cousins, Gadella, & Hannay (1999) found that teacher efficacy was influenced by teacher leadership roles; teachers who were subject heads had higher levels of teacher efficacy compared to teachers who did not hold a leadership position. Taken as a whole, the aforementioned studies suggest that principals who distribute leadership, promote teacher autonomy, are interested in instruction, and support teachers, contribute positively to teacher efficacy. Many of these studies, however, provide only declarative knowledge for leaders to cultivate teacher efficacy; the research leaves the procedural knowledge undefined. For example, how does one promote teacher empowerment?

Teachers' efficacy is an important variable in research and deserves the continued attention of investigators. Although the effects of teacher efficacy on various outcomes tend to be modest, noteworthy is the consistency of positive effects across investigations. As a self-referent property, teacher efficacy is an excellent predictor of individual behaviors that are associated with student achievement (Allinder, 1994; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). However, aggregated measures of individual efficacy do not predict organizational success well (Goddard & LoGerfo, 2007). As described in the introduction, with increased attention from policy makers and school reformers on schools as organizations, it is important to consider what factors predict organizational effectiveness. Over the past decade, researchers have extended the study of teacher efficacy to the parallel organizational construct, collective

efficacy. In the next section of this chapter, I explore the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of collective efficacy.

2.3 Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy is grounded in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997) which is concerned with agency, or the capacity for people to make and impress choices. Central to the exercise of group agency is a "group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). In schools, the key question is, *Does the collective staff view themselves as capable of successfully educating students?* It is important to clarify that collective efficacy beliefs are judgments about capability, not necessarily accurate assessments of such skills. However, the self-assurance with which people approach and manage complicated responsibilities dictates if they make better or worse use of their capabilities (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, the stronger a school's collective efficacy beliefs, the more likely teachers are to put forth sustained effort and persistence to meeting goals.

2.3.1 Sources of Influence on Collective Efficacy Beliefs

Collective efficacy beliefs are influenced by the same four sources of information associated with self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1986, 1997). According to social cognitive theory, mastery experiences at the school-level include both success and failures; success tends to build collective efficacy, while failure tends to undermine it. One particular form of mastery

experiences, student achievement, has been related to collective efficacy (Goddard, 2001). Not only is direct experience an example of a mastery experience, but other sources, such as the accomplishments of other schools, provide vicarious experience. Another means of strengthening a school's collective efficacy is verbal persuasion – which might be delivered in the form of workshops, professional development or other group meetings, where the faculty as a whole attends. However, verbal persuasion is the weakest form of building efficacy beliefs, so it is unlikely that these experiences alone build collective efficacy. Finally, organizations, like individuals, have affective states; they react to stress, pressure, success, and challenges. As discussed earlier in this review, fundamental to social cognitive theory is that both individuals and collectives make decisions through agency. Efficacious organizations react to tough situations by making decisions which enhance collective efficacy. On the other hand, organizations with a low sense of collective efficacy might make different choices, attenuating efficacy levels. While relatively unexplored in the literature, it is likely that strong leadership across these dimensions facilitates the development and maintenance of collective efficacy as it does for teacher efficacy. Individual teacher efficacy is related with leaders that allow teachers autonomy as well as providing teachers leadership roles within school (Lee et al., 1991); it is plausible that collective efficacy might have similar relationships with school leadership.

2.3.2 The Measurement & Operationalization of Collective Efficacy

Measured through teacher surveys, both teacher efficacy and collective efficacy are empirically related constructs (Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Kurtz & Knight, 2004). In fact, collective efficacy accounted for approximately 75% of the between-school variance in teacher efficacy in at least one study (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). Schools populated with teachers that have high levels of self-efficacy also tend to have high levels of collective efficacy. Despite this correlation, collective efficacy is more than an aggregate of individual teacher efficacy; rather, it refers to how individuals working in school interpret their conjoint capabilities. Goddard's measure of collective efficacy, most prevalent in the literature, was based upon Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy's (1998) model of teacher efficacy.

Making a collective efficacy judgment requires consideration of the teaching task and its context, and an assessment of group competence. By task analysis, teachers must weigh factors that act as constraints against the resources available. Teachers may think of their students and families as resources or deficient toward reaching educational goals. Students that depart from the dominant culture could be seen as "hard to teach" if teachers subscribe to a deficit perspective. On the contrary, other teachers might view the same students as full of potential, and think carefully about student resources as pertaining to instruction. Teachers must analyze the task at hand in relation to their group competence, or their estimation of the skill level of their colleagues.

Utilizing 21 items, the initial collective efficacy measure contained both positively and negatively worded questions which assessed both group

competence and task analysis. These initial items were tested within one urban district. In subsequent work, a short form was developed, condensing the original 21 item scale to a more efficient 12 item measure (Goddard, 2002).

However, other tools have been used to measure collective efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) created a scale that focused on instruction and classroom management. This measure has not met the same predictive power as Goddard's scale, though it has a small correlation to eighth grade writing (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004) and elementary mathematics (Parker, Hannah, & Topping, 2006). Alternatively, at least one paper utilized a national data source (the Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000) to create a measure of collective efficacy (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007). However, Ware and Kitsantas's measure of collective efficacy was incidental and not as theoretically grounded as previous efforts. The researchers operationalized collective efficacy as teachers' control over decision making, which does not align well to social cognitive theory. While teachers' control over decision making is related to teacher efficacy, Ware and Kitsantas do not capture teachers' judgments of collective capability.

Important to the reliability of collective efficacy is how the questions capture the construct. Collective teacher efficacy is an emergent level group property; it is not merely the sum of individual efficacy beliefs. The key distinction in measuring collective efficacy as compared to teacher efficacy is question phrasing; collective efficacy items are group-oriented, whereas teacher efficacy items reference the individual. For example, compare a collective efficacy item: *teachers in this school are confident that they can motivate difficult*

students, to a teacher efficacy item: *I am confident that I can motivate difficult students.* In order to test the predictive power of such measures, Goddard and LoGerfo (2007) discovered that aggregated self-efficacy perceptions do little to explain group variance, whereas intergroup variability is explained better when the group-referent questions are asked. This finding is logical, as the outcome unit of analysis is also group-referenced.

Because the collective efficacy research base is almost entirely quantitative, we know how collective efficacy has been operationalized, measured, and its effects (to be discussed in the subsequent section). Yet, because the measure is quantitative we know little about the processes by which collective efficacy works. We do not know about teachers' collective work to improve instruction, parental outreach, and interactions with students and how such work may differ based on the level of collective efficacy beliefs. However, there is a burgeoning mixed-method line of inquiry which provides some insight as to why collective efficacy matters to achievement (Klassen, Chong, Huan, Wong, Kates & Hannok, 2008; Parker, Hannah, & Topping, 2006). For example, using a case study, Parker et al. (2006) examined a low SES school with relatively high student performance. The researchers had the faculty vote on the factors that led to their success and also conducted a group discussion about such issues. Parker et al. (2006) found that school climate or ethos, quality in-service training and a focus upon pedagogy were perceived as the most potent factors in raising student attainment. Klassen et al. (2008) were interested in cross-cultural differences in collective efficacy and school climate in Canada and Singapore. Through

interviewing 24 teachers, the researchers discovered that Canadian teachers

perceived a greater range of social problems in their students as compared to

Singaporean, which impacted teacher motivation. While these results are

interesting and suggestive, they are limited as the implications for practice are

narrow. Neither situated their work as a naturalistic observation, learning how

collective efficacy informs teachers' work. Still missing is usable knowledge

about how collective efficacy operates on the ground to effect student

achievement.

2.3.3 Effects of Collective Efficacy

Collective efficacy has been treated primarily as an independent variable

in the extant literature. Most work within this line of inquiry examines the

relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement. However,

collective efficacy is also predictive of teacher outcomes such as job satisfaction

(Caprara et al., 2003), commitment (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007), and willingness to

help colleagues (Somech & Darch-Zahavy, 2000).

A powerful predictor of organizational effectiveness, collective efficacy is

often related to student achievement. In Bandura's (1993) seminal study,

collective efficacy was positively and significantly related to differences among

schools in student achievement in both mathematics and reading. Strikingly, the

study further revealed that collective efficacy explained student achievement

beyond SES. Multilevel work by Goddard and colleagues expands upon

Bandura's initial scholarship. Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2000) found

that collective efficacy was related to individual student achievement in

mathematics and reading in urban elementary schools after controlling for race and SES. Collective efficacy is a critical predictor of school achievement in elementary (Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000), middle (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004), and high school (Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002).

Collective efficacy is a promising line of research due to its relationship to student achievement. Of course, this work is not without flaws. Several of the studies on collective efficacy are conducted at the school-level instead of considering the multilevel nature of collective efficacy and student achievement. For example, aggregating student achievement to the organizational level introduces aggregation bias to quantitative models (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) and misestimates relationships. In addition, past studies of collective efficacy are usually conducted with convenience samples, limiting generalizability. In order to more fully understand if collective efficacy is a robust predictor of student achievement, it is necessary to test its effects using multilevel models, across different samples which in turn extrapolate to different populations.

2.3.4 Contributors to Collective Efficacy

This literature review has illustrated that collective efficacy is an important variable associated with student achievement. However, in order to make this information of use to practitioners, one must raise the question of how to foster and sustain collective efficacy beliefs. Because collective efficacy has been linked to critical outcomes, the study of collective efficacy as a dependent

variable becomes increasingly important. In this section, I consider studies that have examined the sources and predictors of collective efficacy.

2.3.4.1 Collective Efficacy and School Context.

As established in the teacher efficacy literature context is particularly important aspect of collective efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Scholars have considered how school social composition is related to levels of perceived teacher collective efficacy. Goddard and Skrla's conducted a multilevel study of a school district known for successfully closing achievement gaps (2006). The researchers discovered that past academic achievement, the rate of placement into a program for gifted children, and faculty ethnic composition explained 46% of the variation among schools in collective efficacy beliefs. In addition, the researchers learned that teachers with more than 10 years of experience and teachers of color reported slightly higher levels of collective efficacy as compared to teachers with less experience, and non-minority teachers. An important take-away from this study is that collective efficacy varies by school and it is not simply a proxy for student demographics. In other words, there are other variables which predict collective efficacy above and beyond student SES – collective efficacy is not simply a function of SES.

2.3.4.2 Instruction.

At the heart of collective efficacy are teachers' beliefs that they are enabled to use powerful actions to impact student learning. One of the most prominent actions in which teachers engage is instruction. At the time of this literature review, I located one unpublished paper that addressed differentiating

instruction and collective efficacy. "Differentiation involves teachers' adjustment

of task complexity, level of support (scaffolding), pacing, teaching methods and

resources, activities, and student products to meet students' readiness levels,

interests, and preferred learning modes" (Goddard & Goddard, 2006, pg. 5). In

this multilevel study, the researchers found that schools reporting higher levels of

differentiated instruction had higher levels of collective efficacy. Other work

suggests that instructional autonomy is related to collective efficacy; 1 SD

increase in collective efficacy was associated with a .41 SD increase in the extent

that teachers were able to influence important instructional decisions (Goddard,

2003). These studies provide promise in studying how collective efficacy relates

to teachers' work. In schools with high levels of collective efficacy, teachers are

more likely to differentiate instruction and influence decision making. Further

qualitative studies are needed to understand how collective efficacy operates to

influence teacher work and bolster student achievement.

2.3.4.3 Leadership.

Informally, educators have long known that leadership makes a difference

to school climate. Unfortunately, empirical evidence illustrating how, why, and

under which circumstances leadership matters to fostering collective efficacy is

scant. One study demonstrates that principals do not have a direct effect on

achievement, but contribute to it indirectly through collective efficacy (Ross &

Gray, 2006). Research in this vein offers a promising direction for scholars and

practitioners alike who are interested in institutional agents who might be able to

alter collective efficacy. A recent study examined school structure in relation to

collective efficacy (Adams & Forsyth, 2006). Using hierarchal multiple

regression, the researchers found that an enabling structure – where the policies,

regulations, and procedures are helpful and add to problem solving – contribute to

explanations of collective efficacy beyond prior achievement. This study relates

to leadership, as the principal is responsible for creating and enforcing school

policies and procedures. Furthermore, social cognitive theory neglects how an

organizational leader influences collective efficacy. One could suggest that

principals engage in verbal persuasion (a source of influence on collective

efficacy beliefs), but that is certainly not the extent of their influence on collective

efficacy. As argued by Goddard and Salloum (2011), more needs to be known

about whether leadership behaviors and designs influence collective efficacy

through the four sources of influence (verbal persuasion, vicarious experience,

mastery experience, physiological and affective states) specified by social

cognitive theory or whether leaders appear to make unique contributions to group

confidence through their practice in ways that social cognitive theory currently

does not address.

Viewing these studies in concert demonstrates that collective efficacy has

potential for malleability. The evidence suggests that instructional practice and

teacher autonomy are both positively related to collective efficacy. In addition,

collective efficacy is not entirely determined by student demographics, rather

mastery experiences such as student achievement are more powerful in explaining

collective efficacy. Evidence suggests that principals bear the responsibility of

shaping the school culture and could be instrumental figures in the development

and sustainability of collective efficacy. Much more remains to be known about whether leadership is a separate factor that operates uniquely at the group level and is thus more germane to the study of the sources of influence on collective efficacy beliefs than to self-efficacy beliefs. Finally, empirical work has yet to learn to what teachers attribute collective efficacy, and how it shapes their work. Learning about how collective efficacy is formed and the implications for teachers' work will provide tangible evidence towards bolstering collective efficacy in schools.

2.3.4.4 Where the Literature Falls Short.

Despite this strong research base, much remains unknown about collective efficacy. The previous studies relating collective efficacy to student achievement tend to rely on convenience samples, meaning that the schools selected for inclusion were not randomly selected. Problematic with this approach is that previous results may not generalize to larger populations. Furthermore, much of the work on collective efficacy conceives of student achievement at the school-level rather than the individual level, allowing for aggregation bias when using ordinary least squares regression at the school level. Findings from the collective efficacy literature should be considered less definitive; what is required to strengthen this line of inquiry is multilevel empirical work which replicates these results utilizing a random sample.

Given that the majority of studies are quantitative in nature, it is important to point out the question of causality. While it is possible that collective efficacy is predictive of student achievement it is also likely that the inverse relationship

also occurs – that student achievement is predictive of collective efficacy. The issue of causality is difficult to disentangle, but it is nevertheless an important limitation of this body of work. While I am not proposing a randomized control trial in this dissertation, I am hopeful that my exploratory work will provide insights into the question of causality.

An additional shortcoming of the collective efficacy literature is the lack of qualitative work illuminating *how and why* collective efficacy matters to student achievement. Currently, it is difficult to translate this research into practice because there is no systematic study of how collective efficacy operates to effect student achievement. A qualitative investigation of collective efficacy would make the findings more useful to practitioners.

2.4 Research Questions

The previous discussion illuminates the need for a mixed-method study that investigates the impact of collective efficacy across an entire state, paying particular attention to how collective efficacy is formed and operates on the ground. In light of these gaps, my dissertation will investigate the following research questions:

2.4.1 Is collective efficacy a statistically significant and positive predictor of differences among Michigan public elementary schools in fourth grade students' odds of meeting proficiency on state assessments in reading & mathematics?

In other words, there is a literature base that illustrates a connection between collective efficacy and student achievement. Past studies of collective efficacy are usually conducted with convenience samples, limiting

generalizability. My work will extend and build upon prior research by testing whether collective efficacy is important to a representative sample of Michigan elementary schools. The strength of this investigation lies in the sampling procedure used to select schools for inclusion. As will be described in chapter three, Michigan elementary schools were stratified and randomly selected based on school location, levels of prior achievement, student demographics, and school size. This careful selection process ensured that the sample of schools included for study mirrored the state population of elementary schools. Therefore, results from this work generalize to Michigan and other states with similar student populations.

2.4.2 How is collective efficacy articulated? How does collective efficacy operate to affect student achievement?

Research question one addresses whether collective efficacy has a relationship with achievement. Yet this question does not address *how* collective efficacy operates in order to produce a relationship with educational outcomes. Generally, high levels of collective efficacy are not found in schools serving low-income students. Despite this pattern, high efficacy schools serving low-income students exist. A cross-case comparison between two low-income schools with different levels of collective efficacy and achievement provides a fruitful site for this work (as described in chapter three). In particular, an exploration of low-income schools with varying levels of collective efficacy and student achievement will provide a rich account of the specific actions, routines, or processes that contribute to collective efficacy beliefs.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

To address my research questions about the role of collective efficacy beliefs in practice, I designed a mixed method study (Greene, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). I use quantitative methods, employing a hierarchical generalized linear model and data from a representative sample of Michigan elementary schools (2004-5). I also draw upon qualitative methods by examining two case study schools from the quantitative sample.

This study utilizes a two-phased design (Creswell, 2003) in which the researcher "proposes to conduct a qualitative phase of study and a separate quantitative phase of the study" (pg. 177). The affordance of this strategy is that the paradigms of the approaches are clearly separate, and it allows the researcher to think through the assumptions of both models throughout study. In addition, this method allows researchers to consider separate questions and make inferences based upon both data sets. In this way, this study will provide a generalizable account of the importance of collective efficacy, while also offering deep case study to illuminate the operation of collective. The quantitative portion of this work tests the hypothesis that collective efficacy predicts differences among Michigan's public elementary schools in student achievement. While there is a theoretical framework that supports such findings and explains them, such explanations are not specific to an educational context. Social cognitive theory

36

hinges on human agency and suggests that teachers in high collective efficacy schools will not give up on their students. Yet, it does not provide insight into how collective efficacy matters to collective work or why teachers working in a low SES school are able to maintain high collective efficacy in spite of challenges. The purpose of the qualitative phase of this work is therefore to providing tangible evidence about how these beliefs matter to teacher work. This study will contribute to the field by providing evidence specific to education which will expand social cognitive theory. In addition, it will add to the knowledge base about how and why collective efficacy matters to teachers' work. Here I discuss the methodology for both the quantitative study and qualitative study, but for ease of understanding, the results of both studies will initially be discussed separately; the results of both studies will be integrated in the final two chapters.

3.1 Quantitative Method & Analysis

In this section I describe the sample, method of data collection, measures employed, analytic technique, and results from the quantitative component of the study.

3.1.1 Sample

In collaboration with researchers at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, a stratified random sample of Michigan public elementary schools was selected based upon schools' prior achievement, demographics, size, and geographic location, in 2004-5. Using public data from the Michigan Department of Education, eligible non-charter, public elementary schools

containing both 4th and 5th grade classrooms were randomly selected, because

when these data were collected, state testing began in 4th grade. A total of 130

schools were contacted and 78 schools agreed to participate in the study by

completing surveys (60% response rate). I conducted analyses on the stratifying

variables for school selection and the schools in the sample were not statistically

different from the schools that declined participation. Weights were created to

adjust for non-response at the school-level.[4] Thus, one advantage of this sample

is its representation of the Michigan elementary school population along the

stratifying criteria.

3.1.2 Data Collection

Data were obtained from both teachers and students in the sampled

schools in 2004-5. Student achievement and demographic data were collected

from the state department of education and the collective efficacy measure was

collected from the teachers. Schools were instructed to administer the survey

during regularly scheduled faculty meetings. Teachers responded to one of two

versions of a survey (form A or form B) which contained the collective efficacy

items and other questions about school climate, the results of which are not

reported here. When the surveys were sent to the schools, the forms were

shuffled such that the surveys were alternatively form A and B. Therefore, it was

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[4] The weights were computed as the inverse of the estimated response propensities from a logistic regression, using the stratification variables as controls. Two of the seventy-eight schools had excessively large weights, and after acknowledging negligible effects on point estimates for survey variables, the two outlier school weights were trimmed down to the next highest school weight. Construction of the collective efficacy measure and all quantitative analyses were performed using these weights.

random to which survey a teacher responded. Teachers responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale (from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree).

3.1.3 Measures

3.1.3.1 Student Level Variables.

Student level information regarding gender, minority status (defined here as African-American, Hispanic, Native American or Other), poverty status (using free or reduced price lunch as a proxy), special education status, and if a child was an English language learner (ELL)[5] were provided by the state. This study employed two waves of student achievement data. The first wave was 4th grade Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) in reading and mathematics, in the prior school year (2003-4), aggregated to the school-level; prior achievement scores were standardized to a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 for this multilevel analysis. The second wave includes those students who took the reading and mathematics MEAP in the same year that the teachers completed the collective efficacy survey (2004-5). The second wave of student achievement data provided the dichotomous outcome measure employed by this study, representing whether or not the students passed or failed the MEAP. This dichotomous measure is a fair approximation of current accountability policies as the systems focus on the proportion of students passing state assessments as opposed to measuring student growth.

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[5] The reader should note that Michigan Department of Education uses the term Limited English Proficient, but I use the more resource orientated term, English language learner throughout this document.

3.1.3.2 Teacher Level Variables.

A total of 1,310 teachers completed the surveys and 665 teachers completed the survey for the collective efficacy items. More than 99% of the surveys that were completed were usable. Because the surveys were anonymous, it was impossible to link the teachers to the students they served. Therefore, the primary variable of interest, collective efficacy, was aggregated to the school-level (and is discussed in further detail below).

3.1.3.3 School Level Variables.

Data on school SES (the proportion of students receiving subsidized lunch), school size (total enrollment), minority status (the proportion of minorities in each school), MSA (if school was in a metropolitan statistical area[6] or not), and student achievement were collected from the Michigan Department of Education. The proportion of students passing the fourth grade mathematics and reading assessments one year earlier served as prior achievement controls. Thus, although students were not tracked longitudinally, the prior achievement scores do reflect previous levels of achievement in the sampled schools. To facilitate interpretation of the results, with the exception of MSA, all variables employed in the analyses were standardized (M = 0, SD = 1).

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[6] According to the US Census, a metropolitan statistical area is defined as "a core urban area of 50,000 or more population, and a micro area contains an urban core of at least 10,000 (but less than 50,000) population. www.census.gov.

3.1.3.4 Collective Efficacy.

The item scale employed to measure collective efficacy is consistent with the conceptual framework of Bandura, (1993, 1997) and was developed by Goddard (2001, 2002) based on measures developed to study teacher efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). This study considers how the collective staff estimates their ability to enhance student learning. It is important to note that the measure here is not individual teacher efficacy aggregated to the school-level. Teachers' collective responses were used to create a measure of collective efficacy characterizing the school. A sample item from the scale is "Teachers in this school really believe every child can learn" (see table 3.1 for all items). In order to combine the collective efficacy items for statistical analysis, I conducted an exploratory factor analysis.

3.1.4 Multilevel Analysis

The primary quantitative question addressed in this study is whether or not collective efficacy is related to a student's odds of achieving proficiency on the MEAP. Because student achievement occurs at an individual level, and collective efficacy is an emergent organizational property, I had to account for the multilevel nature of these data. To analyze these data at one level would compromise the results leading to aggregation bias, imprecise estimation of standard errors, and heterogeneity of regression among groups (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In addition, the student-level outcome is a dichotomous variable: a child either passes or fails the MEAP. In order to take advantage of the nested nature of the data, to avoid bias by aggregating all measures to the school-level,

and to account for the dichotomous outcome variable, I employed Hierarchical Generalized Linear Modeling (HGLM) (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) as the primary analytic method.

3.1.4.1 Within-School Model.

The within school model included dummy variables for each of the controls discussed above: gender (female = 1), race (minority = 1, here defined as African-American, Hispanic, or "Other"), educational provisions (special education = 1, English Language Learner = 1), and poverty (receipt of a subsidized lunch = 1). These variables were grand-mean centered in order make comparisons across the sample.

3.1.4.2 Between-School Model.

At the school-level, collective efficacy and the other demographic variables described above were entered into the model. School level variables included: proportion of minority students, proportion of students who receive free or reduced price lunch, proportion of students who passed the previous year's assessment, proportion of female students, school size (student enrollment), and if the school was in a metropolitan statistical area or not.

3.1.4.3 Full Model.

When employing HGLM, researchers must decide upon unit-specific or population-average results. Because the primary research question in this study involves student achievement among schools related to collective efficacy, the unit-specific results were selected (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In contrast, the

population-average results are chosen when research questions suggest learning

about how a change in a level two variable would affect the overall population

mean. See figure 3.1 for the fully conditional model.

3.2 Qualitative Method & Analysis

As described earlier, I sought to answer the following research question

with a qualitative investigation: *How does collective efficacy operate to affect*

student achievement? In order to answer such a question, I posed several

analytical questions based on the literature, to help guide my analysis:

In two low-income schools situated in the same district with different levels of
collective efficacy:

> *(a) How do teachers describe their students, families, and communities?*
>   *How do these descriptions compare and contrast?*
> *(b) How do teachers describe their beliefs about teaching?*
> *(c) How do teachers describe their work with students, families, and*
>   *colleagues? How does the work differ between the two schools?*
> *(d) What might be the origins for these differences?*
> *(e) What are the implications of faculty work, beliefs, and attitudes for*
>   *student achievement?*
> *(f) How do the differences in collective efficacy beliefs between the two*
>   *schools explain the departures observed in (a)-(e)?*

The central premise of this study is that teachers' perceptions of collective

efficacy make a difference to educational outcomes, an idea that has support in

the literature and will be tested in chapter four (quantitative results). Despite the

robust quantitative scholarship on collective efficacy, little work offers an

explanatory framework, specific to education, about how collective efficacy

operates to impact student achievement. The qualitative component provides rich,

case-based data to illuminate teachers' underlying rationales for their actions as

attributed to levels of collective efficacy in the school. The qualitative

investigation was iterative; I initially surveyed and interviewed teachers in the case schools. Based upon the results of the data collection, I also participated in naturalistic observations of teachers' school-based work. Therefore the primary sites of study were classroom instruction and teachers/staff collaboration.

3.2.1 Data Collection

3.2.1.1 Sample.

Criterion sampling was utilized to select school cases (Patton, 2002). I examined the 78 schools within the quantitative sample for schools that were: (1) in the same district, (2) had high levels of student poverty (captured by free and reduced price lunch), (3) differentiated by the level of collective efficacy as measured on the 2004-5 survey, and (4) were making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)[7]. Selecting schools in the same district prevented any uncontrolled district effects such as hiring practices, pay scales, financial resources, curriculum, and more. I also wanted to examine schools that were making AYP. The reason for this decision was to find more nuanced differences than simply comparing a high and low efficacy school. Thus, studying a school that was doing well by state standards, but not necessarily "beating the odds" seemed like a more fruitful exploration. This purposeful sampling will illustrate how levels of collective efficacy have implications for educational outcomes in low-income schools (Patton, 2002).

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[7] Under NCLB, all schools are required to demonstrate that they are making AYP on state assessments in the areas of reading/language arts and mathematics as measured by standardized tests. If a school is not making AYP for two years in a row, they are designated as "in need of improvement" and are subjected to consequences under state law.

I selected two schools in Springfield, Michigan[8] that not only served low-income students but served large proportions of ELLs. Relative to the 2004-5 sample, Barcliff Elementary School[9] had above average levels of student achievement (0.25 SD in reading & 1.85 SD in math), and above average collective efficacy (0.24 SD). Likewise, Meadows Elementary School[10] had average levels of student achievement (-0.01 SD in math, -0.02 SD in reading) and below average levels of collective efficacy (-0.49 SD). See figure 3.2, the scatterplot utilized for school selection.

This arrangement provided interesting points of comparison. Past research illustrates that higher levels of collective efficacy are found in schools with low rates of poverty; likewise one would expect to find lower levels of collective efficacy in schools with high poverty (Goddard, 2001). In this design, there is one school that follows this general pattern and is a "typical case" (Patton, 2002). However, there is also a "deviant case" a school which demonstrates a different pattern (Patton, 2002). Barcliff is positively deviant (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) as student achievement is higher than one might predict given poverty levels. At least half of a standard deviation separates these schools on student achievement[11] and collective efficacy. See table 3.2 for key case study school measures.

As described below, I employed multiple data collection methods as a way to triangulate data. Triangulation essentially supports a finding by showing that

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[8] Name has been changed.
[9] Name has been changed.
[10] Name has been changed.
[11] The schools were roughly .25 SD apart in reading, but more than 1.5 SD apart in mathematics.

independent measures agree or at least do not contradict one another (Miles &

Huberman, 1984). In addition, using multiple research methods avoids biases that

may occur from only using a one data collection method and concurrently bolsters

validity.

3.2.1.2 Survey Method.

Because the data for the quantitative portion of this work were collected in

2004-5, I re-administered surveys to the two case study schools to gauge their

current level of collective efficacy (see Appendix B for survey). Similar to the

initial quantitative data collection, I personally administered the survey during a

regularly scheduled staff meeting. I also used the opportunity to recruit teachers

for initial interviews. Teachers indicated on their survey if they were willing to

participate in a one-on-one interview. Teachers provided their email address for

contact. They were also notified that they would receive $25 for their time.

There were several reasons why collecting the collective efficacy measure

was important. First, a considerable amount of time passed since the 2004-5

survey. Recollecting the data allowed me to situate the case study schools'

current level of collective efficacy in comparison to the 2004-5 sample of

Michigan schools. For example the collective efficacy mean score for Meadows

was unchanged. Teachers' collective efficacy average across items was 3.66

which translated to -0.49 SD[12]. In contrast, Barcliff's collective efficacy score

increased; in 2004-5 it was 3.9 (SD = 0.24) and in 2009-10 it was 4.22 (SD =

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[12] Using the 2004-5 collective efficacy measures and corresponding zscores, I compared the 2009-10 scores and corresponding zscore.

1.19). While the selection criteria were for schools to be at least half a standard deviation apart on collective efficacy, when resurveyed, the schools were actually more than 1.5 SDs apart. Second, because I planned on individual interviews, it was helpful to have an individual survey from each teacher. I studied each person's survey response as well as comparing their scores to the school wide averages for all collective efficacy items. I found this to be a great advantage because I was able to prepare specific probes for each interviewee based upon their survey responses.

3.2.1.3 Interviews.

I arranged individual interviews with teachers, coaches, interventionists, and principals. Primarily using email, I scheduled interviews with teachers at convenient times and places for the interviewees. In the vast majority of cases, we met at school, in the teacher's classroom or office. In a few isolated cases, the interview was conducted off campus (for example, in a coffee shop). Generally I met with teachers before or after school, but also during teacher preparation periods. All but one interview[13] was recorded, transcribed, and cleaned for accuracy.

During the interview, I asked participants two types of questions. First, I asked general open ended questions about their experience at their current school, questions about the school environment, teacher relationships, the students, families served and more (See Appendix B for the full interview protocol). This

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[13] In this instance, I took notes during the interview. Immediately following the interview, I audio recorded my recollections of the interview using the notes I took. This audio recording was later transcribed and used for analysis.

portion of the interview provided an opportunity to learn about other features of the school which the literature suggests could influence collective efficacy: perceptions of the students and families, professional relationships, instructional coherence, professional development, perceptions of leadership, and the like. Second, I asked the original collective efficacy survey questions, rephrased allowing them to be open-ended. Where relevant, I disclosed the teacher's rating (for example, if a teacher scored one item particularly high or low relative to their answers or the responses of their peers) to specifically probe about their particular response. In the majority of the cases however, I simply allowed the teacher to respond to the question without referencing her survey response. Key to the entire interview was asking teachers to reflect on the entire community rather than their own personal practices. I consistently probed on this issue, for example "would your colleagues agree with that statement" to gain the teacher's perspective on her view of collective beliefs.

I interviewed the principal and other school leaders (for example, coaches, intervention teachers, teacher leaders, etc.) as part of this study. The school leader interview was similar to the teacher interview, except I probed about the leader's role, about a typical day in her job, and how her role is related to teacher work. I also asked about specific behaviors or routines in which the school leader engaged teachers, and how these practices relate to school culture in general, and to collective efficacy specifically.

The initial interviews provided me with an understanding of the school environment, teachers' perceptions of students and families, teacher collaboration,

and instructional techniques employed. However, the interviews did not provide a window into any of these processes. To this end, I decided that a naturalistic observation of such school processes. In order to gain a more robust sense of teachers' work and school operations, I observed school operations for a week in each building. I consulted with the principal to see if it was a possibility (in both cases it was) and to set up the process.

3.2.1.4 Observations.

I selected a week of observation that was mutually convenient and "typical." I ensured that a staff meeting occurred during the week I visited in order to have at least one opportunity to observe the entire staff interact. Generally, there were not any disruptions such as large scale assessment or field trips during the observation time; however at Barcliff there was a staff development that pulled out half the teachers on a Wednesday during the observation week. Fortunately, I was able to attend the professional development session in order to understand how the teachers approached professional learning and to witness their interactions with one another and with professionals from other schools.

The focus of observations was K-1 and 4-5. I learned during the initial interviews that both schools poured a tremendous amount of energy and resources into the early years of education. For example, both schools provided full-day kindergarten and had reading "intervention" which targeted first graders. Therefore, studying K-1 made sense to learn about the instructional techniques used and how the children were responding. The reason for the focus on 4-5 was

two-fold, first the quantitative data was focused on fourth grade, so it made some sense to provide that consistency between the data sets. Second, this point in time marks an interesting place in child development because fourth grade achievement slips as compare to the beginning of elementary school. This is the first time that students are "reading to learn" rather than "learning to read" (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). When possible, observations occurred in literacy and mathematics in K-1 and 4-5. While my observations were not exclusive to these grade levels, I focused my attention on these grades. I also tried to observe teachers that I had interviewed. When possible, I scheduled individual interviews with teachers to follow-up what I observed in their classroom or had informal conversations with them.

The observation process was open. Rather than constructing a rigid observation schedule, I allowed events to unfold at each school. I began with teachers I had interviewed, or had a relationship with, and also introduced myself to others while passing in the hallway, eating lunch in the teachers' lounge, or whenever an opportunity arose. For example, the Meadows principal invited me to attend a "mom and muffins" workshop for fifth grade girls and their mothers. As I walked in the hallway with the fifth grade teacher responsible for the workshop, we ran into the music teacher who started a drumming ensemble. This passing in the hallway led to an invitation to observe morning drumming practice, a music class, and a formal interview. The week pretty much unfolded in the same way in both schools – I had very little scheduled, and floated from room to

room. Teachers were generally open to observation; there was only one teacher I approached at Barcliff that denied my request for observation[14].

While observing I took "jottings" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). I tried to capture teacher and student interactions, the work that assigned to the children, teachers' classroom management, teachers' classroom organization and more. In an effort to be as unobtrusive as possible, I took jottings in a notebook rather than using a laptop. In addition, I kept an "audio journal." At the end of the each day, I would flip through my jottings and recount the day's events. These reflections were audio recorded and transcribed; eventually these transcriptions were triangulated with my field notes to produce classroom observation accounts. I also had many informal conversations throughout the week that I did not audio record as they transpired. However, I would often find a quiet, private, unoccupied space in the building space to quickly audio record my recollections of the conversation. In these situations, I did my best to recreate the conversations through notes and recordings.

3.2.1.5 Problem of Practice.

One complication of interviewing individual teachers is that respondents give examples from their own teaching which provides a window into their experience but it does not easily allow for comparison across classrooms. In an effort to create a situation that both collective staffs would respond to for consistency, I created a problem of practice (See Appendix B for the problem of

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[14] Incidentally, this same teacher opted not to fill out a survey. This teacher was the only person in both schools who refused all participation in this study.

practice exercise) to be discussed in a focus group setting. Using the Jim Colbert

case (Silverman, Welty & Lyon, 1996), I adapted the teaching situation and

context to the Springfield school system using what I had learned in the individual

interviews. My goal was to present teachers with an authentic problem of practice

to learn how they would approach it (to learn about shared practices, processes,

routines). I also thought it was important to have a consistent and collective

group exercise to allow for comparisons across sites to learn about shared

knowledge, approaches to difficult teaching situations, and group dynamics.

All teachers were invited to a focus group on Friday morning before

school. Both schools had a tradition of Friday morning breakfast – so I

capitalized on this ritual to hold the focus group. I offered $50 to each teacher for

participating and allowing me to video and audio record the conversation. I held

the focus group the week following my observation because I wanted to

participate in and observe their Friday morning breakfast to ensure it was a

suitable time to conduct the focus group.

Teachers were given the problem of practice accompanied by 4 questions.

(See Appendix B for the questions). I gave each group approximately 10 minutes

to read the case and reflect and take notes. I later collected these individual

responses and compared them to the full group responses. Teachers were given

four guiding questions to focus their responses and later scaffold the group

conversation: First, diagnosis: *What is going on here and how do you know?*

What are the main issues you see? Second, concerns: *What excited you about this*

situation? Third, response: *How would you respond, and how did you know to*

respond that way? And fourth, a prediction: *What is likely to happen next?* After this 10 minute reflection, I facilitated the discussion. Generally, I did not interrupt the flow of discussion. On occasion I would ask for clarification or ask a silent participant for their input, but primarily my role was to flow through the four guiding questions and keep time in mind.

Both the individual written responses and the focus group audio files were complied, transcribed, and coded. The video recording merely provided evidence of who was speaking to back-up the audio recording; it was primarily used for transcription cleaning.

3.2.2 Analysis

In order to analyze data collected in a variety of ways, I used a process of analytic induction (Miles & Huberman, 1984), allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing a theoretical framework on the data. I began my data analysis by open coding the focus group transcripts. Given that I had representation from several teachers and both school administrators, I rationalized that these data might provide direction for analyzing individual interviews. I then scrutinized individual interview transcripts from Meadows and Barcliff for theoretical categories I saw within the text, refining my coding scheme (Strauss, 1987). I began with deductive coding, allowing codes to emerge from the data. Indeed, I developed several deductive codes. Some examples follow:

- *Teachers' Work* – Teachers' descriptions of their work including assessment, instruction, classroom management, professional development
- *Student Motivation* – Teachers' descriptions of students' goals, work ethic and engagement

- *School Structure* – Teachers' descriptions of how the school was organized to advance teacher and student learning, or constrain such opportunities

However, given I also had a priori theory (social cognitive theory) I coded the transcripts a second time, administering a set of inductive codes. Since collective efficacy was the guiding framework of my dissertation, I noted its influence during my coding process. As such, the initial categories of codes were reflective of the following broad thematic categories identified in the literature as salient to the formation of collective efficacy beliefs:

- *Perceptions of Families* – Teachers' characterizations of families such as education, level, values, involvement
- *Perceptions of Community* – Teachers' descriptions of the community external to the school
- *Teacher-Teacher Relationships* – Teachers' descriptions of personal and professional relationships with colleagues

After data were coded, I went through all data within a code to develop subcodes. During this process, I used memos to help me conceptualize and develop theories about the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Given that writing is a mean-making process, memos were iterative and shared with my co-chair. We met regularly to discuss the various phenomena that occurred within each category. For example, when writing about school structure, I found it helpful to create working diagrams to represent the various responsibilities teachers and leaders held within each organization (these are shared in chapters seven and eight).

I primarily used the classroom observations as a source for data triangulation, given the limited nature of the slices of instruction. Schools' and

teachers' names have been changed and the quotes have been edited for length; no

additional changes have been made to the interview excerpts.

Chapter 4

Quantitative Results

The results presented here begin to address my quantitative research question, if collective efficacy is related to student achievement across a sample of schools representative of a state population. Tables 4.1-4.4 display the descriptive analyses, which began the quantitative investigation of the student and school-level variables.

4.1 Student Level Results

The sample has over 5,000 fourth grade students who took the MEAP in 2005 (see table 4.1 for descriptive statistics). Consistent with the state of Michigan fourth grade population (see table 4.2 for a state comparison),[15] a third of the sample received a free/reduced priced lunch, about 20% are minority students, slightly more than 10% of students are designated as special education, and less than 5% are classified as ELLs. With regard to student achievement, about 75% and 85% of students passed the mathematics and reading MEAP respectively.

Table 4.3 displays the student-level correlations. There are several interesting patterns that are illustrated through these analyses. Special education students were more likely to be male, the recipient of a free/reduced priced lunch,

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[15] The state wide demographic data was obtained from a report-maker on: https://oeaa.state.mi.us/meap/Index.asp, retrieved April 22, 2008.

and were less likely to pass either the mathematics or reading assessments. ELL status had a positive and significant relationship with receiving free/reduced-priced lunch. There is also a mild, positive, and significant correlation between minority status and receiving a free/reduced priced lunch (r = .21). Finally, passing the math assessment had a moderate, positive and significant correlation with passing the reading assessment.

4.2 Psychometric Analysis of Scores on the Collective Efficacy Scale

In order to combine the items into one measure, all items on the collective efficacy scale were entered into a principal-axis factor analysis. The results of the factor analysis indicated that all items loaded into a single factor with an eigenvalue of 6.08, explaining 50.66% of the total item variance. The factor loadings ranged from 0.54 to a 0.85, and the internal consistency for the 12 items was strong (α=0.90). The high reliability of scores on the scale and the single-item loadings (refer to table 3.1) suggested that the scale did operationalize the latent construct of collective efficacy.

4.3 School Level Results

There was variability in the sampled schools on all of the demographic measures; for example, at an average school, 40% of students received free/reduced priced lunch (SD = 0.26) and 23% of the students were minorities (SD = 0.39). The smallest school in the sample had 82 students whereas the largest had 676 (M = 377 students). In terms of student achievement, on average 77% of students in each school passed the math MEAP and about 80% passed the reading MEAP. Notably, the collective efficacy scores (not standardized) range

from a low of 2.85 to a high of 4.35 suggesting variability in collective efficacy

across the sample (SD = 0.35). In sum, the schools in the sample represented the

state of Michigan and illustrate variability on a range of measures.

Table 4.4 displays the school level correlations. At the school-level,

generally the correlations have stronger coefficients (closer to 1 or -1) as

compared to the student-level correlations. Perhaps the most noteworthy findings

are the strong negative correlations between collective efficacy and measures of

social disadvantage. For example, there is a significant negative correlation

between collective efficacy and proportion minority students (r = -0.66), and

collective efficacy and proportion of students receiving free/reduced lunch (r = -

0.74). These strong correlations illustrate that collective efficacy, as it is

measured in this dissertation, is more likely found in schools with lower

proportions of minority students and students living in poverty. Collective

efficacy also had a strong, positive, and significant correlation with student

achievement at the school-level (r = 0.59 in math, r = 0.57 in reading).

This is an important issue to address – as the correlation between

collective efficacy and achievement is stronger than the correlation between social

disadvantage and achievement. This suggests that the measure for collective

efficacy captures something that while similar, differs importantly from the

measures of social disadvantage. This piece of evidence provides a strong

rationale for the qualitative component of this dissertation. Certainly, it is

possible that teachers are, on average, are less efficacious as a collective group

when students face social disadvantage. There is variability that remains

unexplained between collective efficacy and disadvantage, and the strength

between these measures requires more exploration. It is possible that one

outcome of my work could be improvement in the collective efficacy measure,

such that it is not so highly correlated with social disadvantage. Furthermore, this

supports the logic of studying collective efficacy in schools that serve low-income

students.

4.4 Multilevel Analysis

To determine the extent of variation between schools in students' odds of passing the MEAP, I estimated two fully unconditional models (one for reading and one for mathematics). These initial estimates provided the basis for determining the proportion of between-school variation explained by the full model. Table 4.5 illustrates these results. The chi-square statistics indicated students' odds of passing both the reading and mathematics assessment did vary significantly among schools. Therefore, I proceeded to the multilevel analysis to test whether collective efficacy predicted this variation.

The full models contained student-level demographic information and prior achievement controls. At level 2, I included the school-level variables that might be related to collective efficacy and achievement – school size, school demographic information, if the school is located in a MSA or not, and prior achievement.

At the student-level, all variables in both models were significantly related to students' achievement scores in reading and mathematics. Since the models only differed according to subject matter, I present the results of both models together; the math results can be found in table 4.6, and the reading results in table 4.7. I report all results as the change in odds for a particular group of students, ceteris paribus (other things being equal).

Both models concur with past research documenting the achievement gap across socio-demographic characteristics in the state of Michigan. On average, special education students were 76% and 84% less likely to pass the MEAP in

mathematics and reading respectively, as compared to students who did not have a special education designation. Students who received free or reduced lunch were 39% and 36% less likely to pass the MEAP in mathematics and reading respectively, as compared to their more advantaged counterparts. Minority students were 51% and 45% less likely to pass the MEAP in mathematics and reading respectively as compared to their non-minority peers. While the patterns were similar in both models for special education students, minorities and students in poverty, there were two inconsistent patterns for females and ELLs present in the two models. Females were 18% less likely to pass the mathematics MEAP, but 30% more likely to pass the reading MEAP compared to males. Finally, ELLs were 65% less likely to pass the reading MEAP compared to native English speaking peers in reading; however ELLs did not perform significantly different in mathematics as compared to native English speakers. This might reflect that after accounting for SES, minority status, and special education, ELL did not add anything to a child's odds of passing[16]. It is also plausible reading skills are not as critical to success on the mathematics section of the MEAP. In sum, these results concur with past research as several different achievement gaps were surfaced: gender, racial, linguistic, class, and special education.

This analysis concurs with past findings: there is a relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement in mathematics and reading.

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[16] While it might seem that male, ELLs who are neither minorities nor receive free and reduced priced lunch are rare, this small group was represented in this study. This generally describes males who were more advantaged in the Springfield School District as will be elaborated in Chapter 5. Students in the case study schools were predominately Middle Eastern, which is classified as Caucasian, and nearly all were ELLs.

Specifically, at the school-level, after controlling for other variables, a 1 SD increase in collective efficacy was associated with a 35% increase in odds that students passed the mathematics MEAP and 42% increase in the odds of passing the reading MEAP. To further probe this relationship, the qualitative of this study is positioned to provide insight as to how and why collective efficacy has a student achievement effect, through deliberately seeking cases with different configurations of poverty and levels of collective efficacy as elaborated in chapters six through eight.

Chapter 5

Qualitative Context

We are getting a lot of kids that are...coming from war torn countries like Iraq and Lebanon and Palestine and all of these. And they've never been in school.

[Ms. Asmar, Meadows teacher]

As described in chapter two, teachers' assessment of collective efficacy is heavily influenced by context. The set of circumstances that surround teaching experiences contributes to the level of collective efficacy found in a particular school. For example, when teachers read their students as academically capable, teachers might feel enabled to produce learning and therefore feel more efficacious. Teachers might perceive high achieving students to be well-organized, well-behaved, and more likely to participate in class; therefore, teachers might feel like they are able to accomplish educational goals when they are working with high achievers. Teachers' perceptions of students are critical in the formation of efficacy beliefs.

Given that contextual circumstances are important for the formation and development of collective efficacy, I argue for the need to situate my qualitative study in particular contexts. First, it was critical to study high poverty schools. As pointed out in the introduction, poor children are generally underserved by our nation's schools as their achievement lags behind their more advantaged peers (NAEP, 2009). In order to learn about more effective ways to serve low-income

students, it was essential to situate my study in such a context. Second, I wanted to ensure that both schools were working with students from similar levels of poverty, but variant levels of collective efficacy and student achievement. Finally, I sought to position this study in two schools located within the same district. Choosing schools in the same district eases the case comparison as teachers work within a similar policy environment, with similar resources, and equivalent pay.

When I turned to the quantitative data for school selection, serendipitously two schools met the former criteria. However, these two schools were not necessarily typical Michigan elementary schools. Both schools served predominately low income Middle Eastern populations primarily consisting of children from Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq. Given this unique population, in this chapter I provide historical and socio-cultural context for the Springfield community and the case study schools, Barcliff and Meadows. I also consider claims teachers made about how students were ill-equipped for school by investigating educational statistics from these students' home countries. Finally, I illustrate the remarkable similarities between the case study schools.

5.1 Springfield Community

The qualitative investigation took place in Springfield[17], an urban, Southeastern Michigan city. Springfield is home to a large, diverse community of approximately 200,000 Arab immigrants and their descendants. While most Arab

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[17] Name has been changed.

Americans[18] residing in Michigan are dispersed throughout Metropolitan Detroit, the community I describe is somewhat of an anomaly as it serves a large concentration of Middle Eastern Americans in the United States. Roughly 35% of Springfield's residents are Arab American, and the vast majority of these residents report speaking Arabic. Springfield is one of the 25 largest[19] cities in Michigan (2000 US Census) with a population around 100,000 occupying roughly 30 square miles[20]. As of the 2000 Census, 87% of the Springfield population was white (Middle Easterners are classified as Caucasian) and approximately 16% of the population lived below the poverty line.

5.2 Population Changes in Springfield

Considering the waves of immigration which occurred in Springfield provides a key backdrop in understanding the local school context. Though Arab Americans are often painted as a new immigrant group, they began venturing to the United States in the late 19th century. Among the first Arabs to immigrate to the United States were Syrians and Lebanese[21] in the 1870s; they came in small groups seeking political refuge and stability (Naff, 1985). Typically single men, the first immigrants traveled from Midwestern town to town, selling dry goods (Naff, 1985). Those who were more prosperous moved to Chicago and Detroit and helped sponsor the immigration of others from their villages. As the

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[18] Throughout this dissertation I interchangeably use the term Arab American and Middle Eastern.
[19] Listing the exact number would jeopardize the anonymity of the district.
[20] Please note that at the time this chapter was written, 2010 Census data for Michigan were not available. These numbers are approximate to protect district anonymity.
[21] I use the term Lebanese as a modern distinction, as those it was the people from Mount Lebanon that emigrated to the United States. This area was termed Lebanon in 1920 (Naff, 1985).

Lebanese became more established, they opened stores and sent for their families to join them.

Racist hiring policies tended to exclude African-Americans from working in the auto plants; this meant plentiful jobs for new immigrants from Europe and the Middle East (Abraham & Shryock, 2000). Arab Americans originally settled near jobs – primarily the auto industry in Detroit. Almost all of the immigrant neighborhoods were on Springfield's east side near the auto plants.

Despite the importance of the auto industry to the Arab community, Springfield developed a cultural importance independent of this business due to the large numbers of immigrants who settled in this area. With more Lebanese arriving with the onset of World War I, Springfield began to emerge as a center for Arab migration. Political unrest was responsible for the different ethnic compositions of the Arab community, as turmoil led many to seek refuge in the United States. For example, after the creation of Israel (1948) Palestinians arrived in greater numbers; in the late 1960s Iraqi and Yemeni immigration swelled as their homelands became increasingly unstable; however, the most significant immigrant wave occurred in response to the Lebanese Civil War beginning in 1975. Since 2003, many new Iraqi immigrants have arrived as refugees from the continued war in their homeland. Given current volatility in the Middle East and North Africa[22] one could project that the Springfield population will become even

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[22] At the time this dissertation was written, there was considerable unrest in the Middle East called the "Arab Spring" or a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that began in the Winter of 2011. Tunisia had wide-ranging protests to remove President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. On January 14, 2011 Ben Ali stepped down. On February 11, 2011 Hosni Mubarak the president of Egypt resigned after 18 days of protest. Revolt began in Libya began in February, 2011 in an

more diverse in the near future. With a long history of working with the children

of immigrants and in some cases refugees, the Springfield School system has a

particularly important role in this community.

5.3 Springfield Schools

The first Springfield school was a simple one-room log cabin which was

built in the early 1800s[23]. Now, Springfield has at least 25[24] neighborhood

elementary, middle, and high schools across the city. The district is one of the

largest in the state with an enrollment well over 15,000 students[25]. Similar to all

school districts in Michigan, Springfield Public Schools has faced financial

troubles due to state funding reductions. During the 2009-2010 school year,

nearly 150 teachers were laid off district wide in an effort to reduce the budget by

about $12 million[26].

Mirroring the city's population, more than 60% of students in Springfield

Public Schools are of Middle Eastern descent (Baker, 2009). Given this

exceptional population, there are several accommodations the district made to

better serve the needs of the students. First, the district had some control over the

school calendar. Michigan law mandated schools to begin after Labor Day and

required a common calendar for all districts within a county. However, the

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attempt to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi. Civil War broke out in Libya, and at the time this
dissertation was written, the US was involved with crisis management. There have also been civil
uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, and major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and
Oman.

[23] This information was gathered from the school district's website, but listing the website would
jeopardize anonymity.

[24] The numbers are approximate to provide district anonymity.

[25] Same as above

[26] This information was gathered from a local newspaper, but listing the source would jeopardize
anonymity.

common calendar served as a guide as individual districts could have additional days off to meet community needs. This flexibility allowed the Springfield school system to provide days off of school in accordance with important Islamic holidays in which numerous students participate, such as Eid al-Fitr (which is the Festival of Breaking the Fast – or the last night of Ramadan).   Second, the district served a "halal" menu for those students who complied with Islamic dietary laws. Halal is an Arabic word meaning permissible; one might liken the practice of eating halal foods to the Judaic practice of keeping Kosher. For example, there is a particular way to properly slaughter animals in order to keep within the halal requirements. These are merely two examples that illustrate how the Springfield District was responsive to the population served.

5.4 A Shifting Population Impacts the School System

Teachers working in Barcliff and Meadows schools suggested that there was a shift in the local population over the past decade. Students were coming from different countries in the Middle East and were often leaving dire situations. Teachers perceived that their current students were less prepared for school as compared to students they had taught in previous years. This section investigates these claims. As suggested above, the Arab community in Springfield had become more diverse especially since the Iraq War. While the Lebanese were among the first immigrant groups to inhabit Springfield, immigrants from other countries have also settled in the area. Two knowledgeable teachers from Springfield explained the cycle,

> [Springfield has] always been [home to new immigrants] it went through its phases - Italian, Polish, and now Middle Eastern. And now it's changed.

68

Like our school has changed from predominately, there's more of a mix. Lebanese and now they have transitioning more, so like Iraqis and Yemeni, as the neighborhood changes with that.

[Ms. Penny, Meadows teacher]

Saba: I think [the shift in population] has a lot to do with the refugees that have come and settled in the area and a lot of the Lebanese families that were concentrated in the east end of the city have kind of started to filter their way to the west of the city as the new refugees have come in and I think that plays a part.

Serena: Ok, so this is the new side of town and the west end is the more established immigrants?

Saba: Yes…because if you look at …the south end down by the plant over there, I don't think there is a set of immigrants be it Romania, Italian, whatever it was, they all started there next to the [auto company] plant where the fathers were working and come out, and kind that's how it all cycled.

[Ms. Saba, Barcliff teacher]

Both teachers' comments illustrate some level of convergence over the idea that

the east end of Springfield is generally home to the newest immigrants of all

backgrounds. As demonstrated in the Ms. Saba's comments, as immigrant groups

gained more prosperity, they moved further and further to the west of Springfield.

This implies that the east end tends to be more impoverished and is home to

newer immigrants. These immigrant shifts impacted the local schools as teachers,

many who have served this community for a decade or more, reported a

fluctuation in student population. As reported by the majority of teachers in both

schools, this community used to be entirely Lebanese, but recently there was an

influx of Iraqi and Yemeni students. Indeed, the majority of teachers, and the

principals in both schools were keen observers of the change in student ethnicity

over the past decade. In the words of Ms. Foster,

Foster: When I first started, primarily it was Lebanese, was the population. That's certainly changed over the years. Now it's

more and more the families that we're getting are Yemeni or Iraqis.

Serena: What kind of conditions are they...

Foster: Well you know what, you can see the...I'm certainly not an expert on Middle Eastern politics but it seemed like the Lebanese have maybe a stronger educational system in that country. They were fluent in French. And the kids that we're getting from Yemen or Iraq, they're coming out of some pretty terrible situations where it's really was just about survival. So the parents, it's no fault of their own, but their parents don't have the educational background.

[Ms. Foster, Meadows teacher]

The observation that students have less of an educational foundation as compared to students in years past was a sentiment echoed by teachers and principals alike in both schools. Given that some of these families sought refuge in the United States due to political instability in their homeland, this was not a surprising remark. To further substantiate the teachers' observations and to gain a better understanding of the conditions from which these students came, I gathered some basic education, health, and economic statistics from the World Bank (see table 5.1). Although I do not know the circumstances of each child or family, this information provides a general appreciation for the children served by these two schools. Both schools report students coming to their schools primarily from Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq.

According to the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook Report (January, 2011) all three countries are considered emerging and developing economies. The World Bank considered Yemen and Iraq to be lower

middle income countries with GNIs[27] between \$976-\$3855, compared to Lebanon

which has an upper middle income (GNI between \$3855-\$11,905) (see table 5.1).

In stark contrast, the United States is considered a high income economy (GNI

more than \$11,906) with a GNI that is 45 times that of Yemen, 23 times that of

Iraq and at least six times that of Lebanon. It appeared that the Lebanese, on

average, were leaving a more economically prosperous country, irrespective of

personal wealth, in comparison to those from Iraq and Yemen.

As a proxy for education, I examined the literacy rates, enrollment to

tertiary education, and mean years of schooling for the primary countries of origin

for the students served by Barcliff and Meadows. The literacy rate was measured

by the proportion of the population over 15 years of age that were able to read

simple text. While the United States boasts a literacy rate over 99%, that pattern

does not hold for most other countries particularly the home countries of students

in this study. For example, Lebanon has a 90% literacy rate compared to 78%

and 59% in Iraq and Yemen respectively. What is more, the average Yemeni had

less than three years of formal schooling, compared to less than six years for an

average Iraqi. Interestingly, an average person from Lebanon had completed one

more year of more formal education as compared to an average American. Of

course it is likely that the experiences of students in these countries are

qualitatively different from one another, but Ms. Foster's conjecture that the

educational experiences of students and families from Yemen and Iraq were slim

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[27] GNI per capita (formerly GNP per capita) is the gross national income, converted to U.S. dollars using the World Bank Atlas method, divided by the midyear population. GNI is the sum value added by all resident producers plus any product taxes not included in the valuation of output plus net receipts of primary income.

compared to those from Lebanon based simply on educational opportunity and outcomes seems reasonable.

Not only do education opportunities vary in the different countries but measures of health and wellness suggest that the general circumstances by which families and children are coming to the US may differ. One gauge of this is an examination of the GDP, GDP per capita, and GNI per capita. All of these measures refer to the value of products and services in a country generally, and approximated per person. All three measures may be considered rough measures of a nation's prosperity and these statistics indicate that all three Arabic countries are considered developing countries – due to a low level of material well-being. Yemen, however, is considered the poorest country in the Middle East as implied by its low GDP and particularly dire per capita GDP. Moreover, levels of intergenerational poverty combined with low indicators of health and education suggest that students from Yemen in particular are coming from very impoverished backgrounds.

According to the range of measures I have selected, Yemen struggled more with health and education as compared to Iraq and Lebanon. Yemen had the lowest life expectancy, the highest rate of infant mortality and child malnutrition, and the least access to a fresh water source. The education statistics do suggest the average Yemeni has a qualitatively different experience compared to a citizen of Iraq or Lebanon, considering that almost 60% of the population has a basic level of literacy, only 10% of the country enrolls in tertiary education, and the mean number of formal years of school for a Yemeni is two-and-a-half. To

72

reiterate, I do not know the conditions of the particular families attending the case

study schools, but there is reason to believe that the reported immigrant

fluctuation that teachers observe is true. These statistics suggest that as the

population flux in Springfield has left the schools with students that might be less

prepared for school as compared to students in the past. To capture their

responses, in the next section, I describe teachers' perceptions of the local

community.

5.5 Teachers' Perceptions of the Local Community

Teachers at both schools described the general economic decay their

community faced. Such declines led to increased foreclosures, rental properties,

and therefore more student transience. In one teachers' words,

> I've seen this sort of thing going on in our neighborhood, about the high
> rental...this year has been amazing, in terms of kids in and out, in and out.
> We've had so many rentals and foreclosures...this year, alone. And so that
> has been a big [thing] that's affected them [teachers]. Once we work with
> a kid and they leave, we've had a lot of new enrollees. And we really pride
> ourselves on the program we have in place. If the kids is with us from
> kindergarten, we will see progress.
>
> [Ms. Illian, Meadows teacher]

The resource teacher focused on student and family transience and how that

affected the school. She mentioned that Meadows made progress with students

when they enter and remained in the building from kindergarten. However,

implied by this statement is a lack of student progress when students start at a

later time point. This may indicate a general inefficacy when working with

newcomers.

Though the community was seen generally as impoverished and financial

resources were limited, teachers also described the community by using the words

73

"tight-knight" and "close". Indeed, the area was known as an ethnic enclave and all interviewed teachers who were asked about the community felt it was safe and neither drugs nor alcohol presented a problem. In part, this might be explained by the strong cultural values imbued in this community – though families are from several different countries, the community is predominately Muslim. In Islam, alcohol and drugs are considered "haraam" or forbidden (opposite of halal). Thus, if this type of activity takes place, it is very much against the cultural norms of the community, and is likely hidden. To orient the reader to the case study schools featured in this dissertation, in the next section I provide demographic sketches of both schools.

5.6 The Case Study Schools

As part of the Springfield school district, the schools in this study were within two miles from one another, both situated on the east end of town. In fact both schools were roughly two blocks off of the same commercial street. The east side of town was of lower SES compared to the west; as suggested above, the east end was populated by the newest immigrants. Illustrating this point, one teacher explained, "Usually when those people move into that area [west end] from the east end, that means they moved up the ladder" (Ms. Bahu, Barcliff teacher).

The local community was described as an ethnic enclave, as most of the businesses on the east end of Springfield were Arab owned. Indeed, I took a walking tour of the local community and noted many businesses with both English and Arabic signs. In fact, there were many specialized grocery stores, restaurants, and shops that carried items from the homeland, including Arabic

food, desserts and pastries, halal meats, books, clothing, and more. The

commercial streets in proximity to both schools were lined with businesses.

However, both Barcliff and Meadows were neighborhood schools, and they were

nestled between rows of brick homes, occupied by their students.

As described below, Meadows and Barcliff shared many elements

including student demographics, teachers' experience, principals' commitment to

students and families, and the principals' belief in the capacity of students. In the

next sections I describe the common ground between Meadows and Barcliff.

5.6.1 Meadows Elementary School

During the 2009-10 school year, Meadows Elementary School served over

600 students in grades K-5. Meadows' served the neighborhood in which it was

embedded, consisting primarily of first and second generation[28] Arab immigrants

and their descendants. Over 80% of students were recipients of free and reduced

priced lunch – this proportion increased since quantitative data were collected in

2004-5[29] when the poverty rate was 77% (1.38 SD compared to the state of

Michigan) (See table 5.2). At that time, Meadows' student achievement was

considered relatively average in the state of Michigan. When data were initially

collected for this school in 2004-5, 83% (SD = -0.02[30]) of fourth graders passed

the reading MEAP and 73% (SD = -0.01) passed the mathematics MEAP.

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[28] First generation has two meanings – (1) a citizen of a country who is a naturalized immigrant, and (2) a citizen whose parents are naturalized immigrants. Here, I am using the former definition.

[29] The reader may recall that the initial survey data were collected in 2004-5 which is why I use this as a referent point.

[30] I provide various statistics and also standardized scores for Meadows School. The standardized scores are referencing the 2004-5 data that were collected. The reader should recall that the mean of standardized scores is 0 with a standard deviation of 1.

However, when the survey was re-administered in the 2009-2010 school year, fourth grade student performance had changed. Sixty-three percent (-2.22 SD compared to 2004-5) of fourth graders passed the reading MEAP compared to 92% (1.32 SD on compared to 2004-5) of students in mathematics. Comparing data from two time points, five years apart, Meadows fourth graders slipped in reading but improved in mathematics. In 2009-10, Meadows fourth graders were more than two standard deviations below their peers in reading (using 2004-5 as a referent point) but over a standard deviation above their peers in math.

Twenty-six teachers[31] completed the survey administered in the winter of 2010. At that time, the average Meadows teacher had taught for slightly more than 12 years (M = 12.7, SD = 5.1), the vast majority of said experience was at Meadows (M = 9.5 years teaching at this school, SD = 4.7). Indeed, teachers had taught their current grade level for about 7 years (M = 6.9, SD = 5.1). Overall, Meadows had a highly educated group of teachers, as all but one had attained a master's degree[32]. Teachers' ages ranged from 22 to 54 but the average teacher was 39 years old (M = 39.0, SD = 7.7). Most teachers were female (88.5%) and Caucasian (91.7%), however one teacher reported a Native American background, and one teacher reported a Middle Eastern background.[33] While only one teacher explicitly identified herself as Middle Eastern on the survey, observational work

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[31] At the staff meeting where the survey was administered, 26 individuals filled out the survey. However up to 33 teachers could have responded – because they were part of the regular staff meeting attendance: 24 classroom teachers (2 teachers were half time and shared coaching responsibilities), 4 coaches (2 of these individuals were half time teachers), 3 specialty teachers (art, music, PE), 4 RTI (2 social workers, psychologist, speech pathologist)
[32] One teacher left education blank.
[33] The survey was open ended for Race/Ethnicity (See Appendix B). Therefore, teachers decided how they wanted to fill in race/ethnicity rather than selecting from predetermined choices.

and interviews revealed that at least four staff members had Lebanese

backgrounds. While identity is far too complicated a notion to take up here, what

is most relevant is the relatively small proportion of Meadows teachers who

shared similar (but not necessarily the same) backgrounds as the children they

taught.

When the schools were asked to be part of the original quantitative study

in 2004-5, they filled out the collective efficacy survey. The likert scale asked

teachers to what degree they agreed or disagreed with each statement. Teachers

could choose from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Each teacher

received an average collective efficacy score which was aggregated to the school

level. The mean collective efficacy score at Meadows was 3.66 in 2004-5. Given

that the original survey was administered five years prior, part of the qualitative

data collection involved resurveying the teachers. Unchanged from 2004-5, the

2010 survey revealed that Meadows had an average collective efficacy score of

3.66. In comparison to the state sample from 2004-5, 3.66 was half a standard

deviation below the state mean in collective efficacy.

In chapter two, I questioned how leadership plays a role in the

development and maintenance of collective efficacy. To consider this issue, I had

formal and informal conversations with the official leader of Meadows

Elementary School, Principal Novara.[34] Ms. Novara was in her mid-fifties and

had served in the public school system for over twenty years. I found Principal

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[34] Novara is a pseudonym for the Meadows principal. I use this name throughout the dissertation.

Novara enthusiastic and hard-working, routinely the first to arrive and last to leave school. She was very welcoming and receptive of my work.

A prominent quality was her compassion for the students and families of Meadows School. Principal Novara spoke to the economic issues facing the state of Michigan and the local community Meadows served. She emphasized how committed her families were to their children. In her words,

> Well, the economic issues of the time are state, but it hits particularly hard here. On the other hand some of them [Meadows families] do get employed by their relative with the restaurant, the store, the gas station - so they work pretty hard to support each other. They are also really careful about what they do with their kids. They will skip food for themselves to have the new backpack, the nice shoes, so that I can't look at a classroom and tell you who's on and off free lunch because most of my kids look pretty good. The girls have their hair brushed and combed. Boys will have haircuts. When its picture day they look so cutie cute! And then they take a lot of pride in their children and so that's a top priority. I don't have too many ragamuffin little guys where you go, "oh dear, where did you sleep last night."
>
> [Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

Through her words, Principal Novara acknowledged the difficult economic issues in Springfield and how it impacted the families in her school community. However, despite the tumultuous economy, Principal Novara expressed that families were devoted to their children, putting their children's needs before their own. This admiration for families is key to understanding Ms. Novara's general disposition. Principal Novara believed in the community in which she served. She felt that families did everything they could for the next generation to better themselves. Beyond respect for families and how they treated their children, Principal Novara expressed a deep appreciation for the Middle Eastern culture.

I love this culture. I wouldn't want to be in a WASP-y [sic] school because what's the biggest hot button? I feel like – Middle Eastern culture is not understood well. And to have the opportunity to work with this population that in Springfield where they are very comfortable, and happy here, and we know that when they leave this little community they are not always treated well. And that trust that we establish with them, that they are happy and secure here just like anyplace else.

[Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

Principal Novara saw working with Middle Eastern families and children as an opportunity to understand a unique culture – a particularly misunderstood culture. This illustrates her affinity for those Meadows served and her general disposition as a constant learner.

Above all else, Principal Novara was committed to the children and families served. She believed in her students' capacity to achieve. Part of this belief stemmed from the strong foundation she perceived families instilled in their children. Throughout her interview, Principal Novara made it very clear that she believed that families valued education. For example,

They [families] support education. And as I said, I get nothing but support. They are happy and they really want their kids to achieve and do well. They came here for a reason and if its second generation that hasn't changed either… I think the families instill the importance of "you are going to school for education." And I've never met a parent when we are talking about you're here because you support your child's work would say, no I don't really care. Never never never. That is what they convey to their kids.

[Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

While Ms. Novara believed that Meadows families valued education, she also recognized that the way they approached school differed from other populations. She explained,

I think my experience is that the [families'] view of teachers is very different. They [families] will help you as much as you ask for, but they're not so pushy like asking you tons of questions, asking those things. They

have respect for you. A lot of times, I'll get asked, "He's not eating at home. He's not doing something at home, can you talk to him?" So there's that different view of teaching back and forth. So that's a little bit different, I think.

[Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

As will be explained more fully in chapter six, few families volunteered at Meadows. Instead of viewing the lack of involvement as disengagement, Ms. Novara interpreted families' approach to school as respectful. Rather than families questioning teacher authority and decisions, as occurs in middle class schools (Lareau, 1987), Meadows families put a lot of trust into the school and did not overstep their boundaries. These demarcations were cultural as numerous interviewees from both schools explained that home and school borders were not crossed in the Middle East. This value is in stark contrast to the norms which are held for parents in the United States. It is almost a given that families are expected to formally participate in schooling.

Though Principal Novara believed that the community she served had limitless potential, these sentiments were not necessarily shared by her staff. As will be elaborated in chapter six, teachers often blamed both children and families for low student achievement rather than teachers taking responsibility for student learning. Principal Novara called this disposition "soft bigotry."

Serena: I wonder if you feel like teachers in Meadows really believe that all children can learn? Is that a mantra of the school?

Novara: I think that's just like the other question in terms of my gut feeling is yes. But that soft bigotry there's a small percentage with some kids that it's a bit of that give up like I don't get it. They would sort of verbalize, I don't get this kid that just not really – I can't say that we can embrace that at 100%. I think we are like 95%. I think they do think all children will learn but then they'll be an exception or two and I will say that only because there can be kind of negative talk about kids. And I

know it's a frustration because when you've tried your best, your best, and you're not getting results, what's going on? Instead of really taking it on – then my gosh look what we have to do. Because this kid needs that support, all children do learn. So I would say – I would give that like a 98%. We are close, but I can't say we are totally totally there.

[Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

Here the principal used the term soft bigotry, suggesting that teachers at times have low expectations for students. Though Ms. Novara believed that Meadows teachers thought all students could learn – she also acknowledged that teachers made exceptions to that rule. Illustrating this point, she suggested "when you've tried your best, your best, and you're not getting results, what's going on?" This statement insinuates Novara's perception that her teachers felt that their best was enough. For example, if a teacher taught a lesson, her students should master the content. Rather than interrogating their own teaching practice to learn how to enhance student learning, teachers were quick to blame the children for their shortcomings. These statements illustrate that Principal Novara was aware of the schism that existed between herself and her teachers, as they had different viewpoints about the families and students.

5.6.2 Barcliff Elementary School

Barcliff was also a neighborhood school serving nearly 300 students from grades K-5. Similar to Meadows, students were also first and second generation immigrants primarily from Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. Approximately 85% of students received free and reduced priced lunch, a proportion that increased since data were collected in 2004-5 from 80% (SD = 1.49 compared to the state of Michigan) (See table 5.2).

When data were initially collected at Barcliff in 2004-5, 86% (SD = 0.25[35]) passed the reading MEAP and 100% (SD = 1.85) passed the mathematics MEAP in fourth grade. More or less, students were above average in reading and nearly two standard deviations above their peers in mathematics. When the survey was re-administered in the 2009-2010 school year, fourth grade student performance was relatively stable. Eighty-four percent (.11 SD compared to 2004-5) of fourth graders passed the reading MEAP compared to 98% (1.7 SD on compared to 2004-5) of students in mathematics. Moreover, Barcliff fourth graders were slightly above average in reading but nearly two standard deviations above their peers in mathematics (using 2004-5 as a referent point).

Thirteen teachers[36] completed the survey administered in December 2009. The average Barcliff teacher had taught for slightly more than 15 years (M = 15.3, SD = 6.8), more than half of their tenure was spent at Barcliff (M = 8.2 years teaching at this school, SD = 4.3), and most had taught their current grade for about six years (M = 6.1, SD = 3.9). Overall, Barcliff had a highly educated group of teachers. One teacher had a BA, 62% had master's degrees and 31% had an Education Specialist degree. All but one teacher had an English as a Second Language endorsement.[37] Teachers' ages ranged from 29 to 59 years old but the average teacher was 45 (M = 44.8, SD = 9.8). Most teachers were female

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[35] I provide various statistics and also standardized scores for Meadows School. The standardized scores are referencing the 2004-5 data that were collected. The reader should recall that the mean of standardized scores is 0 with a standard deviation of 1.

[36] At the staff meeting where the survey was administered, 13 individuals filled out the survey. However up to 23 teachers could have responded – because they were part of the regular staff meeting attendance: 12 classroom teachers, 3 coaches/interventionists, 4 specialty teachers (art, music, PE, media center), 3 RTI (social work, psychologist, speech pathologist)

[37] I was not given access to this information for Meadows teachers.

(92.3%) and Caucasian (58%), though five teachers reported a Middle Eastern

background (42%).[38] While only five teachers explicitly identified as Middle

Eastern on the survey, I know from further ethnographic work that all but four

staff members shared similar ethnic and/or religious backgrounds as their

students.

In 2004-5, Barcliff had a collective efficacy score of 3.9 – which was .24

SD above the mean. This collective efficacy mean increased to 4.22 when the

survey was re-administered in 2009, which was roughly equivalent to 1.2 standard

deviations above the mean in 2004-2005. This suggests that the collective

efficacy at Barcliff increased since the original survey administration while

collective efficacy at Meadows remained unchanged.

I also had a chance to speak with the Barcliff leader, Principal Fakouri.[39]

Similar to Principal Novara, I found her very interested in and supportive of my

work. Like Principal Novara, she was very committed to the children of Barcliff.

She worked incredibly hard, routinely arriving before her teachers, staying late,

and taking work home with her during the week and over the weekends. Principal

Fakouri read the student population as full of potential and recognized the

strengths they brought with them to school. For example, she attributed much of

the success Barcliff had to the teaching of Arabic. She explained,

> We teach Arabic too, and we've always taught Arabic, since I started.
> Because I believe in it, and I really I think that's part of why we are
> successful with kids. We recognize their native language we try to
> strengthen it and build it, and build on what they have. We don't subtract

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[38] The survey was open ended for Race/Ethnicity (See Appendix B). Therefore, teachers decided how they wanted to fill in Race Ethnicity rather than selecting from predetermined choices.
[39] Name has been changed.

we add, that's my philosophy. The staff support that, and works with that and the parents love it.

[Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

The principal's comments were reminiscent of Valenzuela's work on subtractive schooling (1999). Valenzuela argued that immigrant students (in this case Mexican) were subjected to subtle, negative messages that undermined the worth of their culture. In traditional settings, school curriculum fails to build on students' skills, knowledge, and cultural backgrounds. Barcliff instead took an additive perspective, through offering Arabic and strengthening this skill.

Principal Fakouri also found the student population motivated to learn. In the event that students were not inspired, she explained that it was the school's responsibility to figure out how to motivate students.

> I would say most kids are motivated to learn. Now even the ones who aren't motivated, it's not like they don't have any motivation feeling, it's there but the right opportunity did not present its self to them. You know what I mean. Maybe they are interested in something that we have not offered yet. Sometimes you'll see a child get hooked on something really simple and silly and you'll say, "Oh wow. That's what really motivates them." Just finding that little thing that gets them going… I think all kids want to learn, really all kids want to learn and succeed but there are obstacles in the way sometimes.

[Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

The principal clearly illustrated how Barcliff took responsibility for student motivation. Like most Barcliff teachers, the principal believed that students innately were motivated but in some cases schools did not capitalize well on student interest. This reflects her belief that teachers have the ability to motivate students, as it is not an immutable child characteristic.

The principal also was concerned with building relationships with families. Principal Fakouri described her responsibility in relation to serving families in the Barcliff community,

> Bringing parents on board is another one of my responsibilities. I invite them to the classroom, invite them for meetings, we schedule topics where I think my parents can benefit from, so it has to fit their needs as well. Trying to provide them with a lot of support and help from the office. It's very difficult sometimes, but trying to hire people who can speak the language. You are faced with a challenge when you try to do that too, one way you are considered prejudice because you are trying to get your people in, but if you look at it from – if you look at how things are logically, you can't force the parents to speak English. You can encourage them, you can offer them help and support but when they call the school your main objective is to communicate with them regardless of what language they communicate in. Your job is not to reprimand them and tell them to learn English. So you have to have somebody who speaks the language. So I make sure the staff fits for this community, if it was Spanish I would do the same thing, if it was French I would do the same thing. The main goal is to communicate with parents. It's very important otherwise we will not reach our goal with students.
>
> <div align="right">[Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]</div>

Apparent in her comments is the tension in communicating with parents in their native language which leads to exclusionary hiring practices. The central take-away is her belief in the importance of communicating with parents in their native language to order to facilitate learning for students. Barcliff's goal was to support families and therefore the staff had to be equipped to communicate well with the families. This choice of hiring and approach to communicating with parents illustrates a commitment to students above anything else. Principal Fakouri recognized the importance of making families feel comfortable and allowing school to be a place where families were welcomed. This action exemplified her dedication to the population and their best interest.

Despite such efforts, Fakouri found it difficult to get parents to volunteer,

similar to teachers' accounts at Meadows. She explained,

> It's hard to get the parents to volunteer. Parents sometimes they don't
> drive or sometimes they have little ones at home. Or sometimes because
> they don't speak the language they limit themselves, even though we
> encourage them a lot. We don't get the same motivation… So when it
> comes to volunteering its hard, so we have to rely on the resources that we
> have. Like I said the parents are very nice and supportive when it comes
> to talking to their children but setting aside time to volunteer for school is
> hard for them… I think the school, in our culture [Principal shares
> cultural background of community], the school is responsible to do
> whatever they need to do, this is not my area, this is the teachers' area or
> the principal's area. I prefer to do my job and you do your job. If you
> have a problem call me, other than that I won't bother you. And we are
> trying to move them away from that mentality.
>
> [Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

While the Meadows principal talked about parental interaction with school as

respectful, there was a more critical tone in Fakouri's response. She recognized

the cultural difference in how families thought about their role in their child's

education in the Middle East as compared to the United States. Fakouri expressed

some level of disappointment that parents did not volunteer more often and was

committed to changing such parental dispositions. In spite of the lack of parental

volunteers, Fakouri acknowledged that Barcliff had to rely on the resources it had

because family formal involvement was inconsistent.

5.7 Comparisons

Indeed, this chapter illustrated Barcliff and Meadows Elementary Schools

share many commonalities. Both schools were embedded in the Springfield

School District. This means that they had access to similar policies, politics,

teacher compensation, and financial resources. What is more, Barcliff and

Meadows were located two miles apart from one another off the same commercial street. Essentially these schools were part of the same community, situated in the east end of Springfield.

Teachers in both schools described the general economic downturn in the community. Springfield had many jobs linked to the auto industry which negatively impacted residents. The neighborhoods that surrounded both buildings were marked with foreclosed homes resulting in increased levels of student transience. Both schools served a unique population – one that continues to diversify with the flux of the economy and political instability in the Middle East. Students were predominately Muslim and Middle Eastern. Children and families were immigrants and descendants of those primarily from Lebanon, Iraq, and Yemen. This configuration of students was unique to Springfield as other Middle Eastern children were scattered throughout metropolitan Detroit, but the density of such an ethnic population was unusual.

Teachers in both schools were predominately female and had comparable levels of experience and education. Virtually all teachers at Barcliff and Meadows had a master's degree and post-master's training. Teachers had similar levels of teaching experience and spent comparable time at their particular building. This demonstrates that teachers in both schools worked together for a very long time, which might have implications for their relationships.

Principal Novara and Principal Fakouri also shared similar commitments. Both leaders maintained a positive orientation about the community in which they served and felt that their students were capable amidst similar challenges such as

families who rarely formally participated in school, similar configurations of poverty, and parental education.

Barcliff and Meadows students had characteristics that situated them as "hard to serve", as the population was primarily composed of ELLs who came from impoverished backgrounds. In addition, many children left war-torn countries and experienced trauma. Based on national student achievement patterns (NAEP, 2009), we might expect little in the way of student achievement at Barcliff and Meadows. Despite this configuration, Barcliff is considered a model school with MEAP scores among the best in the state. By comparison, Meadows made AYP but generally still struggled with student achievement – in fact Meadows student achievement was the lowest in the Springfield District.

The purpose of the qualitative investigation is to learn more about what distinguishes two schools with similar demographics, teachers, and principal commitments, but such different outcomes. Collective efficacy is an interesting departure between the schools. As the reader will recall from chapters three and four, the survey items that tap collective efficacy have two parts – task analysis and group competence. Task analysis questions are contextual – inquiring about the students, families, and wider community served. Barcliff and Meadows teachers were working in the same community but had distinct interpretations of students, families, and the community as expressed in the survey. Given that half of the collective efficacy items referred to task analysis, the measure itself is heavily dependent on teachers' impressions of the families and community and

88

whether or not they view such elements are resources or constraints for their work.

In the next chapter, I unpack differences between Barcliff and Meadows in the beliefs their teachers hold about students and families. I offer insights into how and why these differences manifest, suggesting that teachers' beliefs about students and families are an articulation of collective efficacy beliefs.

Chapter 6

Teachers' Beliefs

In the previous chapter, I provided contextual information for the Springfield community and both case schools documented in this study. Given that my purpose is to understand how collective efficacy *may* leverage student achievement, an exploration of teachers' individual and collective beliefs is now warranted. In this chapter, I propose that one key difference between Barcliff and Meadows Elementary Schools were the beliefs teachers and teacher leaders[40] held about the students and families they served (the reader will recall that an account of principal beliefs about students and families was offered in the previous chapter). As elaborated in chapter three, half of the collective efficacy survey items measured how teachers conceived of the population they served (task analysis). Questions captured teachers' perceptions of families, the wider community, and the students themselves as resources or barriers to learning. In general, teachers bring their own interpretations to bear on the students and families they serve. Teachers respond to prevailing cultural interpretations and might envision students' knowledge as bridges fostering further learning or they can view their students as destined to fail in spite of teacher actions (Valencia, 2010). In this chapter, using qualitative methods, I analyze how teachers make

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[40] Teacher leaders in this study include those who hold out-of-classroom positions such as coaches, interventionists (who work with children who are struggling academically), and resource teachers. Please note that neither school had an assistant principal.

sense of their ability to influence student learning given their beliefs about their students and their families. Some questions I address in this chapter are: (1) How do teachers describe their students, families, and communities? (2) How do teachers describe their beliefs about teaching? (3) How do descriptions in questions one and two compare and contrast?

As this chapter will show, there were two main categories of beliefs which these teachers espoused: teachers were more likely to believe in their capability to *expand* students' already pre-existing skills, or those who questioned their ability to *compensate* for their students' *lack* of skills. In the former case, teachers believed students' knowledge could be extended and as such, felt some level of control and responsibility over students' learning. In the latter case, teachers assumed that students had little or deficient knowledge and whether teachers would be able to produce gains in achievement was questionable. These teachers felt impotent to affect positive change on the students they categorized as most deficient, blaming external factors for their limited potential to enhance student success. As revealed in this chapter, the dissimilarity is striking between the Meadows and Barcliff teacher belief systems, though teachers worked with essentially the same student population.

In this chapter I will demonstrate that Meadows teachers held compensatory notions about students which compromised their pedagogical efforts, whereas Barcliff teachers' beliefs about students were expansionary and an asset for instruction. I argue that these beliefs provide indirect indices of teachers' collective efficacy or lack thereof, as such stances reflect both individual

and collective views of teacher capability. In this chapter, I compare and contrast teacher beliefs at Meadows and Barcliff, and discuss the implications this has for teachers' work.

6.1 Meadows Teachers' Beliefs

6.1.1 Meadows Teachers' Perceptions of Families' Educational Values

As established in chapter five, students and families served by Meadows were economically disadvantaged where the vast majority of students were registered for free and reduced priced lunch, a proxy for low SES. Most Meadows teachers believed that as a consequence of these economic circumstances, families and students did not value education. In the words of one teacher,

> I feel like the culture that I teach, not many of them think education is a priority when they go home. I've seen it – I've been in home visits. They don't do homework they play their video games.
>
> [Ms. Cook[41], Meadows teacher]

Meadows teachers' beliefs about students and families were consistent with the widely critiqued "culture of poverty" argument (Lewis, 1959; Payne, 2005). Such a perspective refers to a cycle whereby those in poverty are socialized into behaviors and attitudes that propagate their inability to elevate themselves beyond the situation their SES dictates. In other words, the poor create their own problems. Many Meadows teachers expressed a viewpoint that echoed this reasoning, as most believed familial attitudes were incompatible with

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[41] All teachers' names in this document have been changed to protect their anonymity. For this reason, I do not disclose their grade level or position unless it is relevant. Furthermore, all teachers will be referred to as female to protect their identity.

the goals of schooling. Here, Ms. Miller explained her general impression of

students and families served by Title I[42] schools.

> I think anywhere you have a Title I area, I just don't think they [families] value education because they don't have a taste of it. We know what education can bring - success. I'm not even saying money, I'm just saying knowledge. Knowledge is power. I don't think they have a taste of that. I don't think they understand that... I don't feel like they encourage their kids to "come on, I want you to know more than me. I don't want you to..." I don't feel like they do that.
>
> [Ms. Miller, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Miller expressed a point that not only encapsulated her view on Meadows

families, but all poor families in general. In this statement she made the

assumption that Meadows families—as a result of their impoverished

backgrounds— did not understand the connection between education and future

success. Beyond this view, Ms. Miller concurred with Ms. Cook, that the low-

income families of Meadows did not encourage their children to excel in school.

These sentiments illustrate the culture of poverty argument, where teachers

believed that families socialized their children to devalue education, and as such,

these students will continue to promulgate such ideas to future generations.

Unfortunately, Ms. Cook and Ms. Miller were not alone in their thinking;

another teacher, Ms. Brown, explained how students' school dispositions were

created at home and how this "cycle" continued. In her words,

> Serena: And where do you think this disposition [of your students'] comes from – school matters or doesn't matter.
> Brown: I think it comes from the home. I think it's a cycle.

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[42] Teachers casually use the term Title I as a short hand for schools that serve a large proportion of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Schools that have such populations receive Title I funding from the federal government to provide additional services to disadvantaged children.

Serena: Say more about the cycle.

Brown: For instance my daughter has a friend whose mom has been on welfare, doesn't really hold good jobs. It's like that. And my daughter and her friend had a conversation one day and the friend said, "well my mom said, 'it doesn't matter what job I get because I can get on welfare and they'll pay for everything.'" So mom wasn't encouraging the child to better herself. And so if it's a cycle, this is how my parents did it, this is how I'm doing it, now my children are gonna do it. It worked for me, so it will work for you.

[Ms. Brown, Meadows teacher]

These comments suggest that Ms. Brown not only believed that poor families' devalue education but that such familial dispositions were enduring. Her position, as articulated above, was that families fostered their children's lack of interest in school. In her view, Meadows families did not encourage their offspring to aspire for more. Instead, Ms. Brown conveyed the culture of poverty argument through her analogy to welfare. This comparison illustrated Brown's belief that the impoverished raise children who follow directly in their footsteps. This sort of belief system would essentially render a teacher's actions null as her efforts would not compete with the values imbued at home.

As another example of the culture of poverty argument, Ms. Richards explained how student behavior was associated with low SES.

It seems like sometimes, most of the time, the lower the poverty level, the worse the behavior, the more challenging. Not always. Mostly with boys. The girls are just quiet and withdrawn. Some of the girls with behavior problems, they're the ones that I find out have a step mom or step dad. So there's a mixed family. So they're kind of bounced around, and that's very rare around in the community. So I don't know if that has anything to do with it. But I do notice a challenge with that, or definitely a relation with that.

[Ms. Richards, Meadows teachers]

Richards alleged a relationship between poverty level and mischievous behavior suggesting that students from the most impoverished backgrounds also had the worst classroom behavior. Another reason Richards professed for poor student behavior was sticky family dynamics such as divorce. Implicit in Richards's thinking was her emphasis on external factors over which she had no control. Inherent in such an idea is that Richards need not accept responsibility for student behavior, because it was an artifact of poverty and home life – factors which she could not change.

In sum, Meadows teachers made a connection between poverty and a lack of educational values, suggesting that students and families who were the most financially downtrodden were the least likely to value school. Such sentiments were reminiscent of the culture of poverty argument, whereby the poor are blamed for their circumstances (Lewis, 1959; Payne, 2005). Teachers' collective efficacy was likely impacted by "blame the victim" beliefs about Meadows families because teachers viewed family attitudes toward school as enduring. What is more, Meadows teachers believed that they could not compensate for familial beliefs nor teach students to value education. If a teacher does not believe she has the power to change a students' educational value – she may not try very hard. In other words, the belief that a teacher's actions are null might negatively augment the amount of energy one puts forth into her work.

6.1.2 Family Participation at Meadows

There was teacher consensus that Meadows families rarely participated formally in school. Whenever families were brought up in the interviews,

teachers described the lack of parent volunteers in the building. Teachers posed several reasons why families were not involved in school suggesting busy work schedules, and families' lack of English skill. In the words of one Meadows teacher,

> My experience is that some of the parents may be intimidated because of the language factor or they're working parents.
>
> [Ms. Vedder, Meadows teacher]

As described in chapter five, both schools served Middle Eastern children and families. Despite issues of communication or incompatible work schedules, the most commonly cited reason for a lack of formal participation was a difference in American versus Arabic standards for school involvement. Over time, American schools have increased the expectations for familial formal participation in school (Lareau, 1987). Meadows teachers described families taking a "hands-off" approach to education due to the cultural norms around school in their home countries.

> So the other thing too that I've heard a lot from our para-pros and our parents is that over in the Middle East...the schools apparently manage everything, from behavior to manners to...they do everything. The parents are not responsible for stuff like that.
>
> [Ms. Cook, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Penny brought up a similar point when I asked if students' home lives presented them with disadvantages. Penny interpreted this hands-off approach (that Ms. Cook also described) as a disadvantage.

> Serena: Are there many disadvantages that are associated with it [students' home lives]?

96

Penny: I think the view that learning happens at school. It's the teachers' responsibility, it's the school's responsibility. Discipline and schooling happens at school. It's more of a hands-off approach.

[Ms. Penny, Meadows teacher]

Not only did Meadows teachers conceive of this approach to schooling as a hindrance, but they also saw this lack of formal involvement as a source of frustration. The majority of Meadows teachers mentioned the struggle they had with getting attendance at formal school events such as conferences, parties, Parent Teacher Association (PTA), volunteers for "homeroom mom", and meetings. One described who she felt were the hardest parents to reach:

I know it's frustrating sometimes because I think they [teachers] want more support from home… Usually the kids that are the most challenging, the parents are the ones that are the hardest to get a hold of, are the ones that don't come to conferences. So that is frustrating.

[Ms. Richards, Meadows teacher]

Similarly, Ms. Vedder shared her disappointment in not having the opportunity to meet all her students' families throughout their first year in school:

I would say in my classroom, there's probably maybe 15 or 20% that I...some of the parents, the sad statistic is that I don't ever even get to meet all of my parents in a whole school year, which I find shocking as a parent and as a teacher that parents don't even make the time to come in and introduce themselves. We allow for conferences. We pretty much have an open-door policy for special events, parties, what-have-you, and we don't always get parents. We even offer a parent meeting once a month as part of that Title I money, where we offer the kids a game or a book, or some kind of manipulative to take home that complements what we're doing in the classroom. So even at that, I'm disappointed sometimes that even a parent meeting, 15-20 minutes, they don't show up.

[Ms. Vedder, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Vedder revealed some of the norms she expected for parental participation as she found it "shocking" and "sad" that she did not meet all of her students'

families. She continued explaining that this lack of involvement forced the school

to "make up for home." In her words,

> Serena: When you say make up for home, what does that mean?
> Vedder: Well, like I spoke to you before, there's kids...I just did a
>   DRA[43], which is a reading kind of exam, and one of the first
>   questions is "Who reads to you at home?" And probably,
>   maybe 12, 13 of my kids say "Nobody reads to me at home."
> Serena: In either language?
> Vedder: No. And I ask, "Even in Arabic. Do you have books?" "We
>   don't even have books." And "Do you read books yourself?"
>   "We don't have books." So that's kind of what I'm referring to.
>   I have to instill a love for books because for the first five years,
>   they should have been sitting with books since they could sit
>   up. They should have been chewing on them in their crib, and
>   they're not.
>
>   [Ms. Vedder, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Vedder expressed a position that suggested that Meadows had to

"make-up" for limited parenting skills. In her viewpoint there were particular

things that families should do to prepare their students for school – in this case,

she referred to students chewing on books in their crib insinuating that children

should be read to from infancy on. Since families did not provide these

experiences to their students, Ms. Vedder endorsed a compensatory approach to

schooling. This approach is consistent with deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997,

2010), the feeling that families do not have valuable skills to offer their children;

instead, children come to school with little and the school has to compensate for

their lack of skills. Meadows teachers felt that their actions were not as powerful

as values imbued in the home. Therefore, teachers who subscribed to such deficit

points of view may have viewed challenges as insurmountable thus resulting in a

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[43] DRA is a developmental reading assessment. It is an assessment administered one-on-one that measures reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

reduced sense of personal efficacy. Teachers with lower efficacy beliefs may not persist in failure situations with students (Allinder, 1995).

In sum, Meadows teachers generally expressed a viewpoint about parental involvement that was not neutral; schools are laden with social and cultural expectations for parental participation in school (Lareau, 1987). The above comments suggest that despite the recognition of cultural differences, Meadows teachers expected family participation and experienced frustration in the face of limited familial involvement. Meadows teachers read their families as apathetic.

6.1.3 Meadows Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Language

Given that most students at Meadows were immigrants or the children of immigrants, not only were educational values a topic of conversation but student language was discussed throughout interviews, likely because of the challenge in not only teaching children the curriculum but also academic language. In general, Meadows teachers' privileged English, and generally situated Arabic as deficient. For example, Ms. Cook suggested that Meadows teachers broadly held a negative perspective about families speaking Arabic at home. In her words,

> Some teachers think "these kids, their parents don't speak a lick of English. They speak Arabic, they should be speaking English."
> [Ms. Cook, Meadows teacher]

Instead of discussing collective teacher beliefs, Ms. Wilson gave her viewpoint on bilingualism. Though she said that bilingualism was an asset, in the end she accorded advantage to only knowing English.

> It's an advantage if children are bilingual, but it is a disservice if children were born in US and they don't speak English…I mean, if they're bilingual, that's awesome. You know, so families that are bilingual, that's a

great advantage. I've had in the past and I do now kids that speak some French, English, and Arabic. That's awesome! But I don't think it's an advantage if they're only speaking Arabic at home and like we have kids who come in from - I don't know if you talked to any kindergarten teachers - they don't speak English. They were born here but they don't speak English until they come to kindergarten. I don't, I think that's just a disservice. I don't know how to remedy it.

[Ms. Wilson, Meadows teacher]

In this statement, Ms. Wilson claimed that bilingualism was an advantage but complicated her viewpoint when she mentioned that that only speaking Arabic at home is a "disservice" for students. However, Ms. Wilson's viewpoint contravenes the findings of existing research. Scholars have shown that it is in fact better for children to speak their first language well before transfering skills to another language (Cummins, 1993, 2000; Krashen, 1981, 1982). In other words, if Meadows families have more proficiency in Arabic than English, it is far better for children to first learn the language in which their family has the greatest fluency. However, Ms. Wilson implied in her statement that children would have enhanced English skills if it was spoken at home, with little regard for the quality of such language. This chasm is important as it reveals her limited knowledge of second language acquisition and the bias she has towards speaking English.

Such beliefs about student language are related to collective efficacy. Meadows teachers believed that their students entered school with deficient language and notions about language acquisition that were inconsistent with the research on learning a second language. This might be illustrative of the fact that teachers find such students hard to teach and such a perception would reduce teachers' efficacy. Second, it is apparent that Meadows teachers were not well

trained to support ELLs, as they do not possess basic knowledge about second

language acquisition. Not understanding best practices in working with ELLs

might lessen collective efficacy.

6.1.4 Meadows Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Prior Knowledge

In addition to deficit thinking about student language, Meadows teachers

also perceived that their students had limited prior knowledge. As described in

chapter three, 10 individuals from Meadows (including the principal, a literacy

coach, the speech pathologist, and teachers) participated in a focus group

interview (see Appendix B) which featured a problem of practice. The problem

of practice was adapted to resemble the Springfield context. The case study took

place in a school that was situated in a declining economy and the neighborhood

where the school served an influx of immigrants, many of whom were second

language learners. The central dilemma featured a third grade student who could

decode fluently, but had limited comprehension skills. The teacher in the case,

Katie Smith, struggled with how to handle this problem of practice.[44]

Generally Meadows teachers discussed the lack of prior knowledge and

experience as the central problem in the case, contributing to the student's limited

comprehension. At least six teachers made reference to this point throughout the

conversation. For example,

> It's sometimes a matter of background knowledge or experience. I find
> that a lot with my kindergarteners. I put out a topic and say, let's write
> about… We had a little book the other day, and it was about going to the
> zoo and just matter of fact, I said write about a time you've been to the

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[44] This tends to be a relatively common problem for any child (ELL or not), particularly when
phonics and decoding are privileged over comprehension.

zoo, and probably six of the seven in my group said, I've never been to the zoo. So that I think plays a part into all of this too. If you don't have that experience, it's hard to have those emotions about feeling happy, about seeing a panda, because you've never seen one, so.

[Ms. Vedder, Meadows teacher]

While Ms. Vedder pointed out a lack of background knowledge or experience, she did not necessarily judge the economic circumstances from which her students came. In contrast, during the focus group another teacher pointed out,

I think background knowledge is key here. It doesn't matter which language. It's just experience… Because it will eventually translate into English.

[Ms. Kent, Meadows teacher]

Here, Ms. Kent implied that if a child did not have background knowledge or experiences they would never develop competency in English. The lack of background experience was attributed to limited SES. Interestingly, Ms. Wilson, a teacher leader, expressed frustration with the student population in relation to background knowledge. She was particularly skeptical about her ability (and the feasibility) to provide students background knowledge. Wilson asked, "How do you give experience to a child in a classroom with thirty people? I mean that's what is so frustrating." Through this comment, Ms. Wilson suggested it was impossible to provide experiences to students that would build their background knowledge. It is curious that a teacher leader, whose position required that she modeled strong instructional practice, would make such a statement. Wilson insinuated the belief that schools cannot foster such cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) begs the question about the beliefs she fostered in her work with both students and teachers.

Indeed, the discussion of students having limited prior knowledge was also apparent in individual Meadows interviews. Several Meadows teachers brought up students' lack of prior knowledge by suggesting that their students "don't know anything" (Ms. Kent, Meadows teacher) and have "no background knowledge to build on" (Ms. Miller, Meadows teacher). Ms. Illian, also a teacher leader, discussed how student background knowledge deteriorated with the change in population.

> It's changed over the years. We've got a higher, I think, number of the immigrant population has changed. Our students have come...I hate to say this, but background knowledge has decreased over the years. I think our kids are coming having less and less experiences to draw back on.
> [Ms. Illian, Meadows teacher]

This is a perplexing point because even teacher leaders who were supposed to model instruction for teachers and assist with developing their colleagues' skills had a deficit viewpoint on the students' background knowledge. Instead of suggesting that such knowledge was different, or that teachers needed to learn how to activate students' existing prior knowledge, even teacher leaders expressed frustration. This deficit viewpoint would likely compromise teachers' notions of their own effectiveness with students.

Interestingly, there was an evident divergence in what the leadership of the school and the staff believed about students' prior knowledge. This schism was apparent when Principal Novara raised the point that teachers needed to learn about students' vocabulary and prior knowledge to be effective in their positions.

> Sometimes I think our staff has to work extra hard about vocabulary and prior knowledge, to not make assumptions that they have an understanding of what that is. Our kids are city kids and so an awareness to make sure and the kids will talk about going to the park as a walk in the forest, when

we are talking about a wooded area kind of thing. And they might think that when you drive out of the country it's a little bit, going to pick Apples, there might be bears, but no we don't have bears in lower Michigan – that kind of thing. Then we have other kids that do have more experiences. And a lot of our kids do get to go overseas at times, which I see as such an important experience for them.

[Principal Novara, Meadows]

The principal clearly believed that her students did have valuable prior knowledge and experience. She also expressed that teachers needed to understand what students were unaware of, in order to make content knowledge available to students. However, there was a disconnect as Meadows teachers did not seem to possess the same beliefs; unlike Novara's convictions, Meadows teachers did not frame students' prior knowledge or experiences as valuable.

6.1.5 Meadows Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Motivation and Behavior

In addition to commenting on student knowledge and language, teachers also shared observations of student motivation and behavior. When asking teachers about students, I explicitly inquired about general levels of student motivation, as it was part of the collective efficacy scale. Meadows teachers generally found their students motivated. One explained,

Serena: Do you find that the kids are pretty motivated to learn?
Wilson: Yeah, of course. In general, yes. I believe that every child wants to learn. I mean, every kid comes to school and they want to learn.

[Ms. Wilson, Meadows teacher]

Though Meadows teachers generally found their students motivated, what was more salient were their beliefs about the origination of student motivation and if teachers had the ability and/or responsibility to cultivate student motivation.

For example, Ms. Mikels attributed children's lack of motivation to home

language. She believed that this led to students inability to get help with

homework.

> If they're learning, if they're supported at home and encouraged, if they're seeing that work ethic at home, you can see it in them here. And if you ask, some of the kids, some of my kids who are the least motivated, I'll ask them, "do you have someone at home who speaks English?" "No." "Do you have someone at home, older brother, older sister who could help you with homework?" "No, my mom doesn't understand this." "When you go home do..." "No, my mom doesn't really ask, she doesn't really ask about school."
>
> [Ms. Mikels, Meadows teacher]

In this statement, Ms. Mikels conveyed the belief that her least motivated students

came from homes where English was not spoken. She equated speaking only

Arabic with a lack of motivation in school. In her view, not speaking English

rendered families unable to support their children, which led students to exhibit

less motivation. Ms. Richards concurred with this idea when she suggested that if

children were not supported at home, they would not take school seriously.

> I think maybe nobody is asking them about their day. Nobody is, they might look at it but...I have them sign all of their tests and surprisingly, kids who fail, I would think I would hear from the parents or they'd write me a note like, "What can I do? What can we do?" But they just sign it - most of them. But, so they just, it's not taken seriously maybe at home. And I know they're only in 4th grade but it becomes a habit and a way of living so I think that it just, maybe if nobody really cares at home, or they care but they let it go, why would they be motivated?
>
> [Ms. Richards, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Richards speculated that if families do not inquire about school and do not

express interest in their child's improvement, then there would be little reason for

the child to be motivated. Again, this view concurs with the culture of poverty

argument where Ms. Richards felt that values around school are a product of the value system within which a child is raised. Unlike Ms. Richards, however, another Meadows teacher, Ms. Vedder, felt empowered to motivate her students to learn. However, she explicitly described compensatory notions in her statement.

> Serena: I'm wondering if you feel like the students are motivated to learn in this building.
>
> Teacher: I think so. I think that's again, a little bit of parent and I think that's a lot of us. When they're here with us, we have to kind of shut out the outside world. We can't excuse what's happening at home and we can't make excuses for that. We have to make up for it. So those seven or eight hours that they're here, I have to just put myself into motivation mode and get them excited and hope they take it home with them.
>
> [Ms. Vedder, Meadows teacher]

While Ms. Vedder believed that she had the potential to impact her students' level of motivation it did not change the fact that she viewed families as deficit, that she needed to "make-up" for home. Such beliefs blame children for their circumstances rather than considering other structural barriers that could impede student motivation. Though it might be true that Meadows students did not have adequate skills for school success, throughout her commentary Vedder insinuated that students had little knowledge upon which to build. Teachers may act in ways that subtly convey such ideas, leaving students to perceive that teachers do not value their experiences.

Taken together, these comments suggest that Meadows teachers believed that dispositions such as motivation and valuing education originated from home. By this same logic, teachers did not believe in their power to influence motivation

because of their perception that it was a fixed trait. Believing such values are permanent certainly could impact an individual's efficacy, as if teachers believed they could not alter student levels of motivation, it could potentially influence the amount of effort one would put forth into their work.

Though I did not ask a specific question about children's behavior, several teachers at Meadows brought this point up when discussing students. One stressed the importance of procedures, and establishing clear routines to minimize behavioral issues, therefore placing responsibility for student behavior on teachers.

> The students need to know what to do. When they know what to do, you don't have behavior problems. And one of the great things about our literacy model is it's procedure, procedure, procedure. You really, really have to work on those procedures, so that they know what to do because they're working in small groups. So you have ¾ of the class not with you. So you have to really make sure that they know what their job is, what their role is when they're in a corner, or at their desk working at independent work, or whatever it is. So no, I think that classroom discipline, classroom management is something that quite a few teachers here need to work on that.
>
> [Ms. Foster, Meadows teacher leader]

As suggested above, Ms. Foster believed that classroom management was a skill set that several teachers needed to develop. This illustrates her perspective that student behavior was an artifact of teachers' management. This opinion also illuminates the fact that Ms. Foster did not seem to believe that the teachers at Meadows had the strongest management skills. In contrast to this viewpoint, many Meadows teachers discussed student behavior and placed blame for behavior purely on their students. As described by Ms. Asmar and Ms. Miller,

> I felt that they took all of the kids that were low, all of the kids that spoke Arabic, and dumped them into my classroom. I don't think there was a

107

difference. I don't think they were...how do I want to say it? I don't think they were evenly dispersed. I do have some high kids, don't get me wrong. But I think if some of these kids were in a different classroom, with higher kids, sometimes kids learn better off of each other. No matter how much I talk, or [parapro], or we teach, sometimes kids pick up on each other. But putting low with low, they're really not...like some of my kids… are falling behind because we're so busy with behavior problems because...their behavior is not bad because they're bad kids. It's because they're bored. We're so busy focused on getting those bunch of kids moved up, that we give these kids work, but they already know how to do it, so they fly through it. And by the time we get to them, it's like their behavior is awful.

[Ms. Asmar, Meadows teacher]

I mean they're behavior is worse, too. But I'm going to tell you my philosophy about their behavior. I think their behavior is worse because the curriculum is too far above their heads. I think they're bored. I think they're schooled to death. I think the fun is gone. I think the connections are gone. I think the interests are gone. And down comes the behavior. The behavior is way worse than when I first started.

[Ms. Miller, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Asmar equated being "low" with speaking Arabic and blamed student behavior on poor school structure whereas Ms. Miller suggested her students' behavior had declined over time due to a difficult curriculum. What is common between these educators is attributing negative student behavior to outside factors over which they had little control. Miller and Asmar placed blame on school structure, how children were divided among classrooms, and the nature of the curriculum. This pattern held true for the staff as none of the teachers who brought up behavior assumed responsibility or thought about ways to improve their own practice to minimize such difficulty. This contributes to a reduced sense of efficacy as classroom management is an integral part of teaching. It is impossible to set and achieve ambitious goals for students in the absence of a productive learning environment.

6.1.6 Meadows Teachers' Perceptions of MEAP

Student assessment has been a vital feature of educational policy for at

least the last decade which is why it is highlighted throughout this dissertation. I

utilized the MEAP as an outcome measure in chapter four and as one criterion for

selecting case study schools. However to learn more about how teachers thought

about such testing and how assessment potentially contributes to efficacy beliefs,

or is the outcome of efficacy beliefs, I made sure to discuss standardized tests in

my conversations with teachers.

There was nearly a universal negative reaction at Meadows when I spoke

with teachers about the MEAP. All but one teacher used words such as

"depressing," "horrible," "low," and "disheartening" to describe Meadows student

achievement. In the words of Ms. Mikels,

> One of the hard things about it is if you were to just look at the newspaper
> at strictly MEAP scores, we would look like we were a terrible school.
> And we have an awesome staff, a very well trained, hardworking staff.
> And we have some great families. We also have some very challenging
> families. There's a lot of transient students. A lot of second language
> learners.
>
> [Ms. Mikels, Meadows teacher]

Mikels believed that outsiders viewed their school as a "terrible" due to their

MEAP scores. However, MEAP scores were not attributed to poor instruction, as

she also established a strong sense of teacher competence. Instead of blaming

limited student achievement on teachers, or even programmatic holes, Ms. Mikels

located the problem within the Meadows students and families because of

transience and their lack of English proficiency. These ideas resonated with the

majority of Meadows teachers' sentiments.

Ms. Miller described the increased scrutiny she felt from the Springfield district as a result of poor MEAP performance.

> The difficult thing is our district, because our scores are lower, we're held accountable for everything that we do. Everything that we do. I mean, if we spend a dime, we have to [explain]...why? Why are we doing this? And the fifth grade did not do very well on the MEAP at all. In fact, we have the lowest scores in our district, the entire Springfield district, which in one way, makes me very sad because most of us work our tail ends off in that building to get these kids to achieve something. But on the flip side, that group of kids, I don't know what it was about them, but when I had them in second grade... It's a very difficult year of students.
>
> [Ms. Miller, Meadows teacher]

It is clear how much pressure Ms. Miller internalized about testing. She perceived that poor student performance – the lowest in the district – had not been met with additional resources or support but instead, increased accountability, which amplified the anxiety at Meadows. Her comments also reflected her belief that teachers had done everything they could to help their students, but to no avail. In these remarks she placed blame on the students as opposed to considering school and teacher responsibility for such achievement. While there was acknowledgement that different cohorts of children performed differently, this teacher exhibited "blame the victim" mentality. However, several teachers made reference to the fifth grade cohort's poor MEAP scores by explaining that they were not only a tough group to manage but they had low achievement as well.

Ms. Cook echoed the point about the poor performance of the fifth grade students, but also revealed some of her instructional challenges.

> Serena: I know test scores are really important at this point. So, what's that discussion like at the school?
> Cook: Depressing.

Serena: Really?

Cook: Yeah it's really hard. They put up over MEAP scores at our last staff meeting and our fifth graders did horrible. You know, then you see the second graders, the former second graders that are third graders did awesome. Then like the fourth graders, my fourth graders, did ok but I know I have so many low kids in my room. I mean I have non-readers that come to fourth grade. I just look at 35 kids I'm like – really how am I going to get this kid to read? Do I focus on that one or do I get the ones who can make it.

[Ms. Cook, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Cook's comments illustrate her personal struggle with allocating limited resources (her time) in order to maximize student performance, despite a large class size. Given those constraints, Cook's personal efficacy for bolstering achievement was not particularly high, but she did acknowledge that how she spent her time had consequences for student achievement. Noteworthy about such commentary is that Ms. Cook painted the picture of MEAP testing as an individual teacher endeavor as opposed to thinking about testing as a result of collective teacher efforts.

Meadows teachers generally responded in these ways, suggesting that MEAP performance was subpar and few, if any, teachers accepting responsibility for such scores. When asked about why students were not doing well on the MEAP, many factors were discussed such as the difficulty of the test, how the test changes from year to year, student transience, amongst others. Cook and Richards explained,

And the test changes so often, there are so many factors. And is the third grade test completely different than the fourth grade test – yes its totally easier compared to the fourth grade test and the fifth grade test is even harder. So, I don't know. People don't look – other people that aren't in education or that don't see things like we do as teachers, there are a lot of

111

factors involved besides just this one test. Like the transient rate. We have kids coming and going out of this district constantly. Kids will show up and leave a month later. Kids will show up in May – it's just insane, tracking those kids if you see the scores are gonna be effected.

[Ms. Cook, Meadows teacher]

The MEAP. It's, we try. I just think it's so, that I just think is not fair because we all try. We all work together. We all work on a program at the beginning of the year. At different times of the year to get them ready for the MEAP. That's what it's mostly all about. So I don't know if all that they've learned is truly reflected, especially because they take it at the beginning of the year now in October. So there is a whole summer gone. And we send home packets for them to do a practice MEAP and a lot of mine did it last summer, but I don't think it's a true reflection of what we do.

[Ms. Richards, Meadows teacher]

While Ms. Cook attributed transience to part of the problem with the MEAP, a coach remarked that Meadows retained 80% of their students but also stated that students who had been at Meadows throughout their elementary experience still had test scores that did not illustrate progress. Ms. Richards reported that the test was unfair, given that teachers exerted a lot of effort. Salient in her comment is that she did not believe the MEAP to be an accurate reflection of teacher effort. Again, this illustrates how teachers did not believe in their efficacy to affect student progress at Meadows.

Some teachers did not blame the students for the lack of progress but instead attributed progress to unreliable tests.   As explained by Ms. Penny,

Serena: I feel that one thing I didn't ask you about that I meant to is the MEAP scores and how that's, how you guys think about them.
Penny: I think there is a sense that some formal assessments do not take into account the growth patterns of children. They're not looking at baseline data. So there is a lot of frustration of being compared across the board, when you have a child coming from a different situation and different circumstances and a

112

different background, so I think when that's not recognized, it's very frustrating. We don't like it.

Serena: Do you guys feel like you're doing well or is it…

Penny: We do, and I think unfortunately it's not showing on the MEAP. So there is a frustration of not, that's not translating. It's not coming out in the numbers. So as a coaching point, I always looked at it as who is doing the most work? When I met with a teacher, "are you doing the most work? Or is the child doing the most work? How are you creating opportunities for them to learn?" or "are they really following what they set out to plan? Are you just trying to convey information, or is there really that opportunity to uncover information?"

[Ms. Penny, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Penny, a former coach, described how standardized assessments were insufficient accounts of student progress because they captured student performance at a single time point and did not illustrate growth. However, she also insinuated that Meadows teachers might not be instructing in the most effective ways. Ms. Penny believed that elementary pedagogy should be more discovery-based, i.e. children should have an opportunity to "do the work" themselves. Penny believed that children should be exhibiting more effort in the classroom than the teachers. In light of these beliefs, Penny questioned if such instruction occurred at Meadows.

Ms. Wilson also found fault with instruction as she suggested a reason why students were underperforming was due to teachers watering down the curriculum. It is important to note that both of these critics were coaches or former coaches. Their perspectives on such issues are valuable because as part of their job, they had the opportunity to observe classroom instruction more systematically than full time teachers.

So they do great on these [school assessments], but then they take a MEAP, well the MEAP is not standardized but you know, they take

something like that, where everybody is taking it, an entire state, of course it's harder. I mean, we try to teach like that. We try to give them questions like that, but I mean it's not fair to our limited English kids. I don't really know what they know if I give them like paper and pencil tests. But that's the only way they're tested is with paper and pencil, you know? It's like a no-win situation. But yeah, I don't think, we say..."Oh, we can't. We can't dumb it down. We have to...they have high standards." But there's lots of times I think, "really, that's what we're doing. I think we're dumbing it down."

[Ms. Wilson, Meadows teacher]

Though Wilson admitted that the state test was hard and the standards were set high for all students, she questioned if it was fair to hold ELLs to the same standards. In order to cope with teaching such high standards to children that were simultaneously learning English, Wilson claimed that teachers "dumbed down" the curriculum – only pushing students so far. This suggests that Meadows teachers did not believe in their own abilities to influence student learning nor in students' ability to meet high expectations.

It would seem therefore, that Meadows teachers generally did not feel proud of their MEAP scores, nor did they accept responsibility for them. The two teachers above blamed low test scores on subpar teaching practice and insinuated that instruction was not as rigorous as it could be at Meadows. These two critical teachers felt that learning was rote and the curriculum was "dumbed down" because of the English proficiency of students.

The belief system at Meadows was reminiscent of paradigm that Richard Valencia described in his book, *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking* (Valencia, 1997). Such a perspective is used as an explanatory framework for school failure among students of color and those from low-income families.

The deficit thinking paradigm, as a whole, posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive

114

and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the youngster- such as familial deficient and dysfunctions…The popular "at-risk" construct, now entrenched in educational circles, views poor and working class children and their families (typically of color) as predominately responsible for school failure (p. xi)

The Meadows evidence resonates with deficit thinking – teachers attributed failures to student and family dysfunctions. Meadows teachers devalued Arabic, did not take responsibility for student behavior or motivation, and generally felt that their students lacked experience and prior knowledge. Teachers viewed students as coming to school with deficient prior knowledge, skills, language and behavior. Moreover, Meadows teachers believed that home life provided poor skills to students. Meadows teachers generally conceived of their role in their students' education as compensatory. It was not that teachers were wholly inattentive to deficits other than cultural deficiencies but that their attention to institutionalized, sociological, political, or historical factors devolved into discussions of deficiency.

Such a perspective was not shared at Barcliff, whereby teachers held expansionary notions of schooling and believed that they were responsible for student learning. In the next section I describe and compare the belief systems at Barcliff.

6.2 Barcliff Teachers' Beliefs

6.2.1 Barcliff Teachers' Perceptions of Families' Educational Values

Like Meadows, Barcliff served an economically disadvantaged population. However, what set the two schools apart was unlike the teachers at Meadows, Barcliff teachers believed that families appreciated education; Barcliff

teachers also differed from their counterparts in that they did not associate such

values with SES. As described by Ms. Harris, a teacher at Barcliff,

> I find that education and teachers are considered to be somewhat
> important and they are to be respected and that it is a job that has some
> sort of honor to it which in some communities and some cultures you
> don't have that. I feel so much support from the parents, even though I
> don't speak Arabic, I've never had any problem with any families as far as
> being able to communicate the fact that I am looking out for the best
> interest of their child. And I know no matter how difficult it might be for
> them to help their child, they want their child to do the best they can. And
> there is a tremendous amount of family support.
>
> <div align="right">[Ms. Harris, Barcliff teacher]</div>

Ms. Harris believed that the families she worked with were supportive of their

children's educational goals. Unlike Meadows, poverty status was not used as an

excuse for lack of performance as a few Barcliff teachers observed that emphasis

on education was more important than a family's financial standing.   Ms. Saba

explained,

> Emphasis of education at home, I think plays a bigger factor than poverty
> because a lot of these kids are on the same economic standing. Some of
> the wealthier ones are not as bright as some of my poorer ones. So I
> would really hesitate to say that [that poverty and achievement are
> related], I'm looking around my room going he sits here, he comes from
> this kind of family. I've had some kids come from really really low
> economic situations and just excel – top of the class. I think it's the
> emphasis that's put on education at home that really or makes or breaks it.
> At the same time I have some children who come from very wealthy
> families who are semi-educated or successful business people or
> something, and they are the lowest of the low in my class. I wouldn't feel
> comfortable stating that as a concrete idea.
>
> <div align="right">[Ms. Saba, Barcliff teacher]</div>

In both schools teachers acknowledged that some families did not value

education. However, illuminated in Saba's statement is the belief that Barcliff

teachers did not view poverty and educational values as correlates. As explained

by Ms. Harris, Barcliff teachers believed that families valued education and respected teachers. Ms. Saba's statement built on this idea and illustrated that Barcliff teachers perceived families who do not value education as anomalies. More importantly, Barcliff teachers believed that families' lack of educational value could not be predicted by a demographic variable such as poverty. This is in contrast to Meadows where teachers made a firm connection between poverty and lack of educational values whereby teachers believed that families did not value education as a norm. Expounding upon this idea, in the focus group Ms. Bahu made the point to consider *how* a family values education rather than *if* they value education or not. In her words,

> Even though she [Katie Smith – case study teacher] says that she's been in that neighborhood, she could not herself understand the fast declining and the poverty of the neighborhood, that's affecting the child there. Is there accessibility to books? With kids and parents' needs, you talk about basic needs, education seems to be secondary. It is our main focus here in a school building, but when you try to reach out to parents who are…that don't have anything, we kind of think that education is primary to them, but it's not. Attending to their daily lives. This might be affecting the child in a way that we don't understand, because we are really focusing on education. Is there a library in that neighborhood? Is there accessibility to books? Like Ms. Barker [Barcliff teacher] said, are they proficient in their own language? You have to know the level of education of the parents, to see the effect that can have on the child, and that kind of also creates a gap with the communication with the teacher. If we don't fully recognize how they value, because we don't want to be thinking that they don't value education when they do. However, they look at it from a different perspective.
>
> [Ms. Bahu, Barcliff teacher]

Ms. Bahu was careful to raise many questions about Ms. Smith's situation – suggesting that teachers needed to understand the circumstances of a child before reaching conclusions. Both Ms. Saba and Ms. Bahu were hesitant to make

judgments about poverty and how families valued education. This lack of

judgment was consistent across Barcliff teachers, where it seemed important to

analyze data carefully before reaching conclusions. For example, a teacher leader

described how Barcliff teachers provided early intervention to bolster students'

skills. Using data, this teacher described the success of their approach to early

intervention. In her words,

> Most of our kids are on free lunch. I really at the school haven't noticed it
> [poor performance associated with poverty] because we are high on
> attacking them in kindergarten and first grade. Getting those early literacy
> skills built. And, we are big on interventions here... we have to worry
> about what we can do here. What can we do after school, what can we do
> during school with these interventions? So our kids that are impoverished
> seem to be moving at the same rate as kids who are not.
>   [Ms. Al Daher-Nasir, Barcliff teacher]

Such attention to struggling learners in the early grades not only mitigated

achievement gaps, it illustrated the collective belief that dedicating resources to

students can make a difference to their learning. Evident in this statement is the

control and responsibility that Barcliff took on to promote the acceleration of

student learning. This is in direct contrast to Meadows, where teachers subscribed

to the culture of poverty argument and did not believe they had much power to

affect change. Instead, Barcliff teachers focused their attention on what could be

accomplished in school rather than wasting their energy bemoaning outside

conditions. One such example was family involvement.

6.2.2 Family Participation at Barcliff

Similar to Meadows, Barcliff educators had a difficult time getting

parental volunteers. However, Barcliff teachers perceived the reasons for lack of

participation differently than Meadows teachers. Both schools acknowledged the different norms around family involvement in the Middle East. As described by one,

> I'd say they care and some of them you know they care but they don't know how to show they care because they, back home, they trust the teacher blindly. That the teacher is the teacher, they have respect for the teacher, whatever the teacher says, you know. So I think the really leave it up to the teacher, the school should, the school should...We have such a hard time bringing them in.
>
> [Ms. Kishek, Barcliff teacher]

As Ms. Kishek described, Barcliff families typically did not volunteer at school due to the difference in norms around family involvement in the Middle East. As compared to the United States, in the Middle East there were clear cut boundaries between home and school which were not crossed. This line has blurred in the United States as teachers expect formal family participation and often interpret it as a sign that families care (Lareau, 1987). Meadows teachers construed the lack of involvement as a sign of disengagement. However, Ms. Kishek's statement illustrated a different pattern at Barcliff. Teachers acknowledged this cultural difference. Though this difference did not prevent teachers from working with families, they also did not waste much energy focusing on factors beyond their control. Instead, they utilized the resources they had, as described by the principal.

> Fakouri: So when it comes to volunteering its hard, so we have to rely on the resources that we have. Like I said the parents are very nice and supportive when it comes to talking to their children but setting aside time to volunteer for school is hard for them… I think the school, in our culture the school is responsible to do whatever they need to do, this is not my area, this is the teachers' area or the principal's area. I prefer to do my job and

you do your job. If you have a problem call me, other than that
I won't bother you. And we are trying to move them away
from that mentality.

<div align="right">[Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]</div>

Ms. Fakouri's viewpoint concurred with those at Meadows – that there was a

division of labor when it came to education in the Middle East. While she

underscored Barcliff's efforts to continue to encourage families to participate, Ms.

Fakouri also acknowledged this cultural difference. It is important to also point

out that Ms. Fakouri did not interpret parents' lack of volunteering as a lack of

caring, but simply a difference in culture. Critical in her statement was the

reliance on other resources. Rather than create an environment that depended on

family volunteers, Barcliff teachers relied on the resources they had in order to

best serve students. This again illustrates how Barcliff teachers did not fret over

what they could not control whereas Meadows teachers fixated over such

circumstances.

6.2.3 Barcliff Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Language

One such issue Barcliff teachers felt they could control was student

language development. An interesting entrée into the positioning of language is

apparent in a comparison of the schools' mission statements:

> Meadows Elementary School will collaborate with families and the
> community to educate each child to their fullest academic, social and
> personal potential within a safe and stimulating environment.
> <div align="right">[Meadows Mission Statement]</div>

> Barcliff Elementary School, in partnership with parents and community, is
> to provide a variety of intellectual, emotional, social, and physical
> experiences that will produce educated, motivated, responsible bi-literate
> citizens who will experience personal growth, respect individual
> differences, and function successfully in a growing diverse world.

Both statements communicate a collaborative approach to education with families and community, though both schools also acknowledged the difficulty they had in maintaining true partnerships with families. However a key departure is Barcliff's explicit intention to produce bi-literate citizens enabled to negotiate diversity. As established in this chapter, Meadows teachers privileged English, and generally situated Arabic as deficient. This perspective was not shared at Barcliff.

Barcliff taught Arabic as a *special*[45], so it is possible that the school attracted different teachers due to the school's commitment to bilingualism. It is equally plausible that working in a school environment that valued the speaking of multiple languages influenced teachers' perspectives on such matters. Barcliff teachers were not only committed to students speaking and understanding Arabic, but to students development of academic proficiency in reading and writing.

Given that the majority of the Barcliff staff spoke Arabic themselves, there was recognition that it was important to not only learn the language but also have academic proficiency in it. In fact Ms. Mansour highlighted in the focus group that she was "fortunate to speak the Arabic language" illustrating the value she placed on it. This belief was made clear not only through the Barcliff school mission but through the commitment to offer students Arabic. Ms. Litz, who did

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[45]Colloquially, "specials" refer to nonacademic classes that are often taught by different teachers in elementary school such as art, physical education, or music. This allows the elementary teacher a break for planning time and students access to a well-rounded curriculum.

not speak Arabic, described the value Barcliff placed on maintaining student language.

> Litz: I think it's an advantage to have culture, that in their life...I think it's a big advantage. It's an advantage and a disadvantage. Yeah, it's low-income or whatever but...that's a great thing to have in your life. Your heritage, the language, those experiences.
>
> Serena: So another thing I think of, it seems like even with having Arabic language taught here, even kind of smaller things like halal meats for example, it seems like…
>
> Litz: Its value! The culture's valued. It is, cause if it wasn't they wouldn't have those things.
>
> Serena: It's not like that everywhere [in Springfield] though, right?
>
> Litz: Arabic? No! Barcliff has been the only school that I've been to, or subbed at, that I know has Arabic extra. It's through a grant.

Ms. Litz characterized student culture as an advantage though she felt that poverty status was a disadvantage. Illustrated by Ms. Litz's comments, the Barcliff staff went to extra lengths to teach Arabic. In fact, through my ethnographic work I learned that the grant that supported Arabic had ceased and Principal Fakouri found other means to support the program, displaying Barcliff's commitment to the teaching of Arabic.

6.2.4 Barcliff Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Prior Knowledge

Similar to Meadows, teachers often tied language to prior knowledge. Barcliff teachers were aware that students came to school with different prior knowledge, but not necessarily inferior prior knowledge as insinuated by Meadows teachers. For example, Ms. Harris explained how she thought about background knowledge amongst her students and how to approach it pedagogically.

122

Well certainly you can apply, their prior knowledge. Anytime you come from a different culture or different background or different country, your prior knowledge is going to be a little different. I've had to over the years, recognize that sometimes they do not know the things that I would assume everyone would know. For instance, and I'll use this example, last year I discovered they did not know what a lap was. Now for me, in my culture it was, "come here, sit on mommy's lap, I'm going to read you a story." But at home, perhaps they are using the Arabic word for lap or sit with me, I don't know. But when we were talking about something, for some reason I asked them what is a lap and they didn't know. So I have become extremely aware of what I don't know that they don't know. And sometimes I hit it right on the head and sometimes I don't. So I've had to be really conscious about trying to figure that out. The best thing to do in a situation like that is to make them feel totally at ease, in making a guess or taking a risk. I want them to feel like there is not any big deal about taking a risk in here.

[Ms. Harris, Barcliff teacher]

Ms. Harris explained how she worked to really understand her students' prior knowledge as she was "extremely aware of what I don't know that they don't know." Also critical in Harris's comments was ensuring that students were "at ease" in the classroom which researchers have found accelerates second language acquisition (Krashen, 1981, 1982).

Similarly, in the focus group a teacher also referred to teachers' consideration of a child's prior knowledge and how to build upon such experiences. Ms. Jamal echoed these sentiments in responding to the case study. Jamal suggested that the student was unfamiliar with describing her feelings.

Yeah, maybe she [Katie Smith – case study teacher] could like, just like was mentioned earlier, scaffold, or do things or give her [student] examples. Maybe when she told her, "how does, why does this child smiling, how is she feeling?" Maybe it's not in her [student's] prior knowledge. Nobody asked her about feelings before. She doesn't know what it means, you know? So maybe give her examples. Is she happy? Is she sad? Why do you think? So go deeper within the conversation with her, and little by little, do more of that.

[Ms. Jamal, Barcliff teacher]

Ms. Jamal illustrated how teachers need to attend to prior knowledge in order to bolster comprehension. Here she described pedagogical techniques one could employ in order to assist a student in understanding the meaning of text. This process was different than that of Meadows teachers who expressed frustration around limited prior knowledge. A key distinction which surfaced during the focus groups was that Barcliff teachers took responsibility to learn about children's knowledge and devise techniques to assist in learning. Whereas at Meadows, teachers did not offer pedagogical solutions but instead complained about limited student knowledge or skills. Once again this illustrates the compensatory versus expansionary thinking evident in each school.

6.2.5 Barcliff Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Motivation and Behavior

Another important distinction between Barcliff and Meadows teachers was their perception of student attitudes and behavior. Both schools generally found their students motivated to learn. Ms. Franke explained,

> Yes, they're motivated, they're eager. When I walk into the building they run up to me and "what are we doing today, what are we doing today?" They want to know what we are going to do in gym, or they want to be picked for a game.

[Ms. Franke, Barcliff teacher]

Differentiating teachers at Barcliff and Meadows was not the perception of student motivation but from where the motivation stemmed, and whether or not teachers had the power to influence such attitudes. As illustrated in chapter five, Ms. Fakouri believed that Barcliff teachers needed to learn what motivated their students because schools do not necessarily capitalize well on student interest. This again reflects the Barcliff belief that teachers have the ability to motivate

students, as it is not an immutable characteristic. Further explained by Ms.

Kishek,

> Serena: Do you find a lot of the children are motivated to learn?
> Kishek: The children? It all depends on the teacher. Depends on the teacher, it is a reflection of the teacher, if the teacher is organized, and the teacher is prepared, you know, it effects those kids. You know it's like parenting skills, teaching skills. Those kids are going to adopt those skills.
> Serena: So do you think that one supersedes the other? Like do you think that?
> Kishek: It's funny, I can see it in their writing, I could see it in their behavior, I could see it in, you know in the organization of their desks.
> Serena: Right.
> Kishek: Actually I'm picturing in my head a couple of different teachers, and the kids, and the behavior, the structure, the organization all that.
> Serena: Of the teacher? So usually a good teacher makes a huge difference.
> Kishek: If the [teacher is] good, then the kids are really good.
> [Ms. Kishek, Barcliff teacher]

Ms. Saba also agreed with these sentiments and explicitly detailed how

motivation could be taught.

> Serena: I wonder if you feel like the students here generally are motivated to learn.
> Saba: It has to be taught.
> Serena: It being motivation?
> Saba: Motivation has to be taught. They are very extrinsically motivated. I can get them to do anything if I promise a party or a reward or anything else. But if I take that away, learning for the sake of learning, it has to be taught and it's carefully built because you have to start out by earning their respect and your opinion of them has to matter. And then once you foster that relationship, you kind of use it to your advantage and then instead of the material motivation, you can say, "Well I'm disappointed in you because I expected more," and then those words mean something and they try to push for.
> [Ms. Saba, Barcliff teacher]

Ms. Saba illustrated how she believed that her relationship with students was critical to their levels of motivation. While she did not express that most of her students were motivated to learn for the sake of learning like most of her Barcliff colleagues, she believed that teachers had a great deal of power in impacting student dispositions.

Noticeably missing from the Barcliff interviews was a discussion of student behavior. While at Meadows teachers described challenging student behavior but did not take responsibility for such behavior, this was not mentioned in the Barcliff interviews. Instead, teachers observed that the principal was freed from student behavior problems to manage other important issues such as instruction. A coach explained the principals' high standards for behavior management.

> But when I came here, I was actually very pleased to find that they [teachers] all have good behavior management. I don't know how they affected this over time, but they really have perfected it. I'll go in sometimes and I'll see and I know the kid that can be a real trouble maker and they just perfected that behavior management. One of my jobs is for the new teachers, to help them to perfect the same. Or you could say it softly or you don't have to be disciplining them every two minutes. They're behavior management here is really good. Part of that too, is our principal, she was my assistant at my previous school. She didn't like to get the behavior problems in the office. So she'll tell them, unless its major, don't be sending them down. So they kind of learned through that. So if she has a meeting or something, and I'm in charge - like now, I don't want to be interrupted by five kids. "What did you do?" "I didn't do my homework" "Well tell your teacher to deal with it." You know, that sort of thing we would send back immediately. "What were you doing?" "I was fighting." "Ok, then you are in trouble – you stay with me." So I think it is kind of a culture here. But they have very good management.
> [Barcliff coach]

Though discipline was not considered a controversial topic at Barcliff, it is essential to recognize that this was not because students were all perfectly

126

behaved; any issues with student behavior did not disrupt teaching and learning as described by Ms. Bahu,

> Bahu: Discipline. That's big – that bad d. I really – I don't see it being an issue in our staff meetings. And just working with a small group myself, it just I don't see it… What I hear from the teachers – we do have disruptions and we do have kids who are a problem to all of us. It's like they go from one grade level to the other. And it just – whoever walks in and talks, you are talking about this family. We can tell – it's a very low percentage. I mean something that is manageable. Not the way that it would disrupt learning and teaching.
> Serena: So the teachers do a good job managing it usually if there is a problem, for the most part?
> Bahu: I would say so. I would say so. Because I don't see a lot of people down here. And Ms. Fakouri is being freed to do other things. You can tell it's being dealt with in the classrooms.
> [Ms. Bahu, Barcliff teacher]

Ms. Bahu brought up a few salient points. There were cases of students that had behavioral problems throughout the years they spent at Barcliff, yet these challenges did not disrupt student learning. It is vital to recognize that Barcliff was not necessarily a student management utopia; students presented challenges but teachers were able to manage such issues. Though the Principal Fakouri mentioned that discipline was one of her main responsibilities, teachers did not mention that discipline was a challenge in the building, likely because teachers had the skills and were enabled to manage student discipline problems. As illustrated above, discipline was primarily handled in the classroom as evidenced by the principal's ability to do other work than manage student behavior.

6.2.6 Barcliff Teachers' Perceptions of MEAP

Barcliff teachers felt differently about the MEAP than their counterparts at Meadows. Barcliff teachers felt responsible for high test scores and were proud

of such achievements. For example, teachers used phrases like, "don't mean to brag," "we're the best" and "this is something I'm proud of" when they described MEAP scores. Ms. Mansour elaborated about how pleased she was with her students' performance and how she took credit for her hard work.

> Serena: Do you feel like student learning is well reflected in the MEAP scores?
>
> Mansour: [nods] We're the best! [laughter]
>
> Serena: So I hear. I know that your MEAP scores are quite high.
>
> Mansour: Yes.
>
> Serena: What do you think explains that?
>
> Mansour: My kids got 100% on reading and I think – writing, math. I think math or something...
>
> Serena: How incredible. What explains that?
>
> Mansour: Like I said, I care. I really want to give it my best, and I want to give them all I can. I care. And that reflects on me, and like I said – these parents trusted me with their kids and I don't want to betray that trust. I'm here to do my job, and I want to feel, even though the money is not the greatest, but I really – this is something I'm proud of. I am not – I don't have to feel ashamed or feel like, ashamed to toot my own horn. Ask the principal, anyone, I really really give it my all. I love teaching.
>
>   [Ms. Mansour, Barcliff teacher]

Mansour took responsibility for student achievement, claiming that it resulted from her hard work, and not wanting to let the families down. Though there was pressure on the Barcliff staff to produce high MEAP scores, several individuals commented that the MEAP is "only one assessment." This illustrated that while recognizing that the MEAP was important, teachers realized that all forms of assessment were vital and helped determine instructional strategy.

     While hard work is certainly one component of high achievement, it is not the only piece of the equation; rather, it is working hard with techniques that are effective for a particular population. Barcliff's high student achievement across grade levels may in part be attributed to a clearly articulated curriculum from

grade to grade, careful analysis of student data, and intervention with students that were not achieving well. These ideas will be elaborated in chapter eight when I describe how instruction was managed and coordinated at Barcliff.

Another potential important reason for MEAP success was the careful attention paid to data. Not only did Barcliff disaggregate data by poverty status, race, special education status, and language proficiency as required by NCLB, they analyzed their own data and learned that they had a gender gap in achievement. Gender was not an NCLB specified subgroup. The fact that they went above and beyond is illustrative of Barcliff leaders' and teachers' motivation and desire to serve students equitably. Here a teacher explained the gender gap that was unique to Barcliff and the steps the school was taking to diminish the difference.

> We have a big gender gap on our MEAP scores between boys and girls. We've had it the past two years. Ms. Kishek and I just went to a training last week…The training was not greatly informative and we were talking today about pulling out the pieces that were – and trying to make – because our boys are doing much worse than girls. Like a 20 point achievement gap. It's not so at the state level, it's not at the district level. Somehow it's for our boys. So we need to find a way to be motivating our boys to do all of this. To be – some of the things choosing our books more carefully like sports, graphic novels, humor, type things. She gave us a lot of different books that we can use in different grade levels. So we are making the commitment to buy those books. Then we were talking to one of the teachers today that the achievement gap did show in her class on the MEAP and we said that you have to start doing more of these things to motivate these boys. Maybe the books that you are choosing or that the Houghton Mifflin program has, are interesting to the girls, but not to the boys. We have to find a way to get to those boys as well. That was something that was kind of interesting. Ms. Kishek is our data queen. So she disaggregates all this data for us and she finds that out.
>
> [Ms. Al Daher-Nasir, Barcliff teacher]

Apparent in these comments is that the Barcliff staff was not afraid to confront difficult issues. Ms. Al Daher-Nasir freely admitted that Barcliff struggled with a gender achievement gap. Instead of being complicit in the fact that the vast majority of students were passing the MEAP, they strived for more. This teacher illustrated how Barcliff teachers analyzed and interpreted data and then acted upon their findings. Here Barcliff teachers' attributed the gender gap to the school's failure to motivate boys and illustrated steps they were taking to remedy the situation. Al Daher-Nasir's comments demonstrate that the Barcliff staff took responsibility for student learning and tried to improve instruction and curricular materials. Ms. Saba concurred with these ideas as she said that, "passing is not enough." In her comments she revealed evidence of open dialogue around achievement and careful planning to mitigate such gaps.

Saba: We've recognized a gender gap. Our girls are definitely outperforming our boys on MEAP tests and other tests. We do extensive assessment and analyzing of assessment to group our kids according to ability level as well. So we do, if a student is far behind, we do not just recognize that there is an achievement gap, but classifying, qualify it, in every single way possible. Look at it from every vantage point, and then kind of figure out what interventions we have to put in place for that child to bring them up to grade level. Nobody's under the illusion that every student is where they need to be academically. And, nobody is shy about admitting or talking about having a dialogue about the fact that there's a student in my class that's not where they're supposed to be. Because I think we work in a school environment where there's no teacher that's going to be blamed for that. So it's freely admitted that there's this kid and I'm going to pull my hair out, and I don't know what to do. We have the intervention support and the resource support and all of those things to do that. So, you know. I think analyzing the data is one way and actually not being afraid to define it, and not being afraid to say there is an achievement gap, what are we going to do about it?

Serena: I guess just kind of moving off that point, I'm wondering with gender, where do you think that comes from, why do you think the girls are doing better?

Saba: Hmmmm. I think part of it is age. Honestly, we are a K-5 building, I think part of it is the age group that we are seeing. And, I don't know. I don't know if it's the learning styles because we fight to make sure that we are including activities that touch all learning styles. So we provide the hands-on stuff for the boys and the abstract stuff and that sort of thing. Now, it's not to say that our boys are not performing well, because based on the preliminary scores that they gave us for this year's MEAPs, I can say personally 100% of my students passed those tests. The girls may have passed them with higher scores than the boys, but the boys still passed.

Serena: So passing is not enough, people are obviously recognizing the fact that?

Saba: No passing is not enough here.

Serena: Is there ever an enough here?

Saba: No. Because if I had a class full of high achievers, it's ok. How am I going to get you to take this to the next level so that they are always challenged.

[Ms. Saba, Barcliff teacher]

Ms. Saba made it clear that Barcliff had open communication around student achievement and that the environment was one where teachers were not blamed for poor student performance. Instead, they collaboratively determined what supports to institute for children in order to foster continual growth.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the differences in teacher beliefs at Meadows and Barcliff. As presented throughout the preceding examples, there were two main categories of beliefs to which teachers subscribed: teachers were likely to doubt in their facility to *compensate* for student deficits or teachers tended to believe in their capability to *expand* students' knowledge. Generally, Meadows teachers fit the former pattern and Barcliff teachers the latter.

Meadows teachers were agnostic as to if they could effect change – either positive or negative – in their students. Their skepticism stemmed from a lack of control over student learning. In fact, throughout this chapter, the evidence illustrated that Meadows teachers believed that home life predominately influenced students. Problematic in this notion is if the purpose of teaching is improvement of the human condition (Cohen, 1988), and if an educator does not have confidence that they can improve student learning, it calls into question the entire endeavor. Yet this skepticism allows us to understand, in part, low levels of collective efficacy present at Meadows. As I explain below, if teachers do not view themselves as change agents, nor view students as capable, low collective efficacy flows from such beliefs.

Simply put, Meadows teachers did not believe that families valued education. Teachers formed this viewpoint from several different sources such as families' lack of formal participation in school, their inability to speak English, and their absence at school meetings and events, among others. Teachers read these actions (or inactions) as disinterest and devalue. What is more, Meadows teachers believed that family values influenced students more than school. This was problematic for Meadows teachers for at least two reasons. First, Meadows teachers viewed families with a culture of poverty lens. This controversial viewpoint professes that social advancement is limited for those of lower SES because the values they hold are inconsistent with those of the dominant culture (Lewis, 1959; Payne, 2005). The culture of poverty argument suggests that such values are imbued into children, allowing them to continue problematic behaviors.

This position ignores structural barriers to advancement; for example, while Meadows teachers mentioned some of the challenges families faced, they failed to appreciate the challenge of immigrating to the United States, such as the difficulty in learning a new language, providing for a family, and the struggle to find work in a new country.

Second, given that Meadows teachers repeatedly professed that families were more influential than schools, teachers did not believe that their role was particularly powerful. For example, though teachers found students to generally be motivated to learn, Meadows teachers believed that it was a product of their upbringing. Therefore, teachers did not feel that they caused high levels of motivation, nor did they believe there was much they could do to compensate for low levels of motivation. In essence, teachers' actions were null. This lack of power was proclaimed across several attributes of children – their language, prior knowledge, and behavior. Important in such stances is that teachers did not believe they had any control to influence the former attributes. As Principal Novara admitted herself, many Meadows' teachers viewed their students with "soft bigotry." Primarily because students were poor, ethnic minorities, teachers perceived them as having limited capacity to perform. In other words, teachers did little to challenge the status quo. Teachers exercise of agency – both individually and collectively – was strongly influenced by their collective efficacy beliefs.

Contrasting with Meadows, teachers at Barcliff felt capable of bringing about change within their students. Though Barcliff teachers felt that home was a

very important influence over students, teachers concurrently believed that *they* were an important stimulus over student learning. Given that the teachers believed they were able to make change, they had systematically higher levels of collective efficacy. Barcliff teachers' articulated the extent to which they had control over their students' learning by accepting responsibility for improving student's academic dispositions.   In this way, they were agentive, as they believed they could impact student learning.

Barcliff teachers believed that families valued school. Similar to Meadows, Barcliff families did not formally participate in school, but different from Meadows was how teachers interpreted such inaction. Barcliff teachers understood the culture from which their families came and did not interpret lack of participation as devaluing school. Many teachers shared similar ethnic and religious identities with their students and understood that the norms in the Middle East were different, as families had a more hands-off relationship with schools. Barcliff teachers also realized that families might be intimidated by school, given that they were also ELLs. To facilitate communication with families, the principal made sure that Barcliff hired individuals both in the office and in the classrooms who fluently spoke Arabic.

Dissimilar from Meadows, Barcliff teachers felt that they had the power to influence students. Teachers took responsibility for both student motivation and student behavior, as most remarked that such dispositions were a reflection of the teacher. Barcliff teachers described how the school had power in constructing student attitudes toward school, the process for explicitly teaching motivation, and

teachers' responsibility in learning what motivates their students. Rather than think about Arabic as a deficit, Barcliff teachers believed that Arabic skills were valuable, and should be developed. In contrast, students' (and families') proficiency with English invoked frustration within the Meadows teachers. Barcliff had a school commitment towards developing bilingual students, through teaching Arabic as a "special". Though Barcliff lost their federal funding for the Arabic program, the principal found resources to sustain the program, illustrating her belief in students' capability to develop two languages.

6.4 Emergent Theory

The former accounts of teacher beliefs at Meadows and Barcliff are the basis for my emergent theory about how teacher beliefs about student capability are foundational to collective efficacy. Figure 6.1 illustrates the linked relationships between each of the former constructs.

6.4.1 Teacher Beliefs

Essential to figure 6.1 is the question of whether teachers think students are capable. Teachers' perceptions of students' capability captures if teachers believe that students are able to perform particular actions. In an educational context, I refer to students' ability to reach benchmark on state standardized assessments. However, this does not refer to students' actual abilities, but rather teachers' interpretations of such skills.

The data reveal many considerations a teacher might weigh in order to determine if they view students as capable or not. Generally, such considerations are primarily focused on demography – such as families' SES and background. If

teachers characterize families as problematic and such troubles are enduring,

teachers might have a lowered interpretation of their own efficacy. In contrast, if

teachers view families as complex – but in spite of this, schools can make a

difference – this enhances their efficacy beliefs.

Teachers must also make sense of students' prior knowledge and language

which are often linked. As illustrated here, teachers could perceive that a child

does not have prior knowledge, and liken their students to empty vessels to be

filled. Conversely, teachers have the option to view prior knowledge as different

from the dominant culture, but valuable nevertheless. Teachers' perspective on

language is similar to prior knowledge – teachers might value a child's ability to

speak a second language or teachers could profess that students do not have

English skills. As illustrated throughout this chapter, student capability is a

product of how teachers' read students' language, motivation, prior knowledge

and families – specifically if families value education and if they support school.

All of these determinants come together to inform a teacher's view of student

capability and in turn their sense of self and collective efficacy.

6.4.2 Judgment

A teachers' interpretation of student capability is influential in judging her

own and the staff's capability and responsibility toward fostering student learning.

A teacher considers factors that she deems make students capable. The teacher

then views such factors as opportunities or constraints. Teachers also must weigh

if they are able to impact student learning, given their viewpoint on student

136

capability in relation to teachers' skills. If a teacher does not think a child is capable of learning or learning at high levels, said teacher might doubt her capability to bring change to this child. However, the same teacher might work with a child from a different population, where she reads the children as capable. In this way, teachers' viewpoints on student capability hinge on their views of student knowledge and assets.

In judging one's teaching capability and responsibility, a teacher weighs her own capability in relation to student skills. The interaction of these two components leads to judgments about self-efficacy for the teaching task at hand. As depicted in figure 6.1, teachers' determination of their responsibility in promoting student learning is also related to how they interpret the capability of the teaching staff as well as students' capability. If teachers collectively do not feel able to bring about change in their students, it is unlikely they will take responsibility for said change.

For example, when weighing a child's motivation in school, a teacher must determine if she is able to change motivation levels. As illustrated here, it depends from where a teacher believes motivation originates. If she believes motivation is formed at home, then there is little room for a teacher to impact student motivation. On the other hand, if a teacher believes that motivation is a confluence of home and school, then she might view herself as able of impacting change.

6.4.3 Affect

Importantly, how one judges the students with whom they work influences their affect or actions. As described in the literature review, teacher efficacy beliefs matter because they inform teacher choice and actions (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). If a teacher has fixed beliefs about student learning, and does not believe that her students are capable, her affect is impacted. If a teacher subscribed to such entity beliefs, she is unlikely to work as hard towards unlocking students' potential because she lacks the will and skill to improve student learning. Whereas, if a teacher believes that her students have unlimited possibilities, she might work harder to mold such raw talent because she believes she has both the will and skill. Teachers' beliefs are transferred through their affect such as their words, actions, expectations, interactions with students. In other words, teachers' judgments about student capability weighed against collective staff ability and responsibility, impact teacher actions – both implicit and explicit forms of communication.

A key question is how the institution interacts with such belief systems. Certainly, if a teacher believes in her students' abilities and her own abilities, she may be able to effect change, but such change is more likely if she is supported by organizational infrastructure. It is plausible that when teachers feel more supported in their work, their viewpoints on student capability might differ. In other words, supportive leadership and organizational designs have the potential to influence collective efficacy. If a teacher perceives that she has strong colleagues, a supportive administrator, expertise abound, she may feel more successful in working with a variety of students and ability levels. I posit that the

different way that teachers talk about students and families is related to how supported they are in their work with students and families. Furthermore, it is possible that organizational designs contribute to collective efficacy.

Indeed, subsequent chapters will illustrate the organizational structure at Barcliff and Meadows and how such structures interact with teacher beliefs and collective efficacy. Teacher success with students is not simply the result of one teacher, but the accumulation of a child's educational experiences throughout schooling. Because we are asking teachers to execute increasingly complex work, schools need to be set up such that teachers understand the interdependent nature of their work. For this reason, an exploration of how teachers are supported in their work with students is examined in the following two chapters.

Chapter 7

The Organization of Meadows Teachers' Work

I think teaching is so different than when I started 12 years ago… the evolution of teaching it's so much more complex. We were looking at MEAP scores today, they track a particular student throughout the years. They can tell whether math scores have gone up, why did a particular item on the MEAP give him trouble in fifth grade when he did well in third and fourth grade. Everything is - it's so detailed now. When I was in school, teachers always taught to the middle. And the kids at the top got bored, the kids at the bottom, their needs were never met. It's just so different now. It's breaking kids up into like ability groups and that targeted instruction. I think a lot of teachers have trouble with that because it is so complex. You have to know your students and make decisions on the fly, especially in literacy it is extremely technical and complex. So anyway, I think some teachers have trouble with that.

[Ms. Foster, Meadows teacher]

As explained above by Ms. Foster, instruction post NCLB was intricate as new standards for student achievement and the disaggregation of student data discouraged teachers to teach to the middle. Instead, to promote higher outcomes for all, teachers needed to ensure that instruction was responsive to student needs in order to mitigate achievement gaps. As Ms. Foster expounded, this new approach to instruction was increasingly complicated which insinuated the need for advanced teacher skill. To enable such technical instruction, innovative approaches to professional development are a necessary buttress for teachers. Whereas teachers used to work individually and autonomously, teachers are now encouraged to collaborate with colleagues. A relatively new organizing philosophy that fosters such teamwork is professional learning communities

(PLC).[46] Indeed, the term PLC was evoked when I asked Meadows teachers about how they worked together. While there is not a universally agreed upon definition of PLC, a local definition offered by Ms. Wilson was, *the teachers continue to learn. The teachers learn together. They plan together. We learn from each other.*

In this chapter, I consider how teachers' work was structured at Meadows Elementary School through investigating their PLC. I conjecture that the organization and support of teachers' work at Meadows was informed by collective efficacy. I propose that Meadows Elementary School, which was selected for study due to its below average collective efficacy and average student achievement, did not have a flourishing PLC. Some elements of a productive PLC were in place - Meadows teachers had strong relationships with one another and their work was structured so they had allotted time to work collaboratively. However, there was little evidence that Meadows teachers systematically learned from practice and took action based on such learning. Weakening the languid Meadows PLC was a schism between teachers and the principal. As illustrated in chapters five and six, the principal and teachers had fundamentally different beliefs about students and families whereby the former viewed them as capable and the later viewed them as less than. Teachers and the school leadership adhered to different philosophies on student discipline leading to incongruent expectations about consequences for behavior infractions; Meadows teachers also were frustrated by their principal's management style. I suggest that the

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[46] Another common term to refer to PLCs is "professional community of learners."

principal's role as manager and subsequent decisions about school organizational structure and instructional improvement did not build the capacity of the staff nor did it maximize collective efficacy. In this chapter I will discuss the relational aspects of PLC and how teachers' work was organized at Meadows.

7.1 Relational Aspects of PLC

Similar to Ms. Wilson's local definition of the Meadows PLC, scholars have defined the term suggesting that in such a community, teachers and administrators continuously seek and share learning, then act on what they learn (Astuto, Clark , Read, McGree, & Fernandez, 1993). In a PLC teachers engage in constant learning with the explicit purpose to improve teacher capacity and effectiveness. Flowing from such development would be enhanced student achievement. Inherent in this definition is the belief that teacher actions are related to student learning – whereby teachers take responsibility for student results (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

In practice, scholars have suggested that PLCs have three parts, (1) reflective dialogue, (2) deprivitization of practice, and (3) joint problem solving (Bryk, Camburn, & Seashore, 1999). By reflective dialogue, teachers engage in conversations where they are reflexive about their practice as well as the practice of colleagues (Schön, 1983). Teachers may use data in these discussions, drawing on observation notes, student work, formative and summative evaluation among others. The goal of such interaction is that teachers learn from each other's practice. By deprivatization of practice, teachers make their instruction available to colleagues by observing one another. Indeed one of the greatest barriers to

school improvement is a lack of an agreed-upon definition of what high quality instruction looks like (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). Without some common understanding of what instruction at a particular school actually looks like, it is impossible to have thoughtful discussions about what needs to be tweaked or even overhauled to improve student learning. Finally, through joint problem solving teachers take action based upon what they have learned. Teachers might plan instruction together to focus on a particular student need, or devise student intervention. In this way teachers are learning in and from practice.

PLCs are quite different compared to traditional school models where a teacher had total autonomy, planned alone, and closed the door to her classroom; such an approach created silos and fragmentation. The intention of teacher collaboration is to counter isolation, improve teacher practice and student learning, build a common vision for schooling and foster collective action (Achinstein, 2002). Given that PLCs are collaborative, teachers must have professional relationships with their colleagues, and open communication around student needs. Through such communication channels teachers may tweak curriculum, assessment, and instruction to accelerate learning.

7.1.1 Teacher-Teacher Relationships

Foundational to a thriving work community is the quality of the connections between individuals (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). When relationships are stronger such connections facilitate the exchange of knowledge between individuals. Yet the inverse is also true, if connections between colleagues are

weak, it stifles knowledge exchange between individuals and overall

organizational health. The quality of relationships between teachers serves as

foundational to the PLC which emphasizes cooperative teacher work in the

interest of maximizing student learning.

Indeed, Meadows teachers had strong relationships; teachers regarded

each other as more than colleagues - they were friends. In the words of one,

> Serena: I wonder if we could talk a little about the school atmosphere here. Just how you find the relationships between teachers?
>
> Cook: The relationships between teachers are outstanding. I feel if it wasn't for the people I work with I would probably go somewhere else. We are all close outside of work and inside of work. We established our relationships over the years because most of us started at the same time. There was like a big hiring when I came.
>
> Serena: That was about 10 years ago.
>
> Cook: Yes 10 years ago. So I find that the teaching relationships are great. We collaborate, we work together, there are always people sharing ideas, giving ideas and stuff. When we are stressed we go to each other or feel comfortable, or when we are having a good day too. I actually think it's great – the relationships with everybody.
>
> [Ms. Cook, Meadows teacher]

As described by Ms. Cook, the former Meadows principal hired a cadre of new

teachers roughly a decade prior to this study. The teachers who were hired

together were of similar age and the majority remained at Meadows. By all

accounts, Meadow's teachers got along well. Several anecdotes were given by

teachers about social activities ranging from biweekly breakfasts both in and out

of school, social gatherings after school, celebrations around life events such as

weddings and babies, and weekend trips. Though collaboration was mentioned,

teachers seemed to discuss personal friendships at Meadows more than collegial

exchanges. Ms. Wilson explained,

> The staff I feel is very close. We're practically, a lot of us, most of us are like sisters. And we talk, we go out, we do things. So we have good camaraderie and morale. And I mean, do we bitch about the kids? Yes, of course. But I think, in general, we really enjoy these kids and we enjoy our jobs…I've heard...some buildings are crazy just with how the staff is fighting and splintering off and crazy stuff like that. And we don't have that.
>
> <div align="right">[Ms. Wilson, Meadows teacher]</div>

Ms. Wilson pointed out the close nature of the staff – and how teachers relied on

one another for moral support. Wilson illustrated the connections between

teachers as she compared them to sisters. Simultaneously, Wilson admitted that

there were negative discussions about children – providing evidence of pejorative

talk about students – which illustrated Meadows teachers having the space to vent

to one another about the trials and tribulations of their work. Ms. Wilson also

suggested staff unity as she contrasted Meadows to schools with more hostile

environments.

Principal Novara concurred that the teacher-teacher relationships were

strong calling the teachers a "family."

> [I use] the words Meadows family because that's what we call ourselves as a staff. And so there's a lot of comradery. These gals they've all been here – well the bulk of them more than seven years. They're good friends in and out of school, which is most of the time good, but it can give you a little bit of a downside too – when people are just too comfortable. But they do work really well together – yeah.
>
> <div align="right">[Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]</div>

Ms. Novara concurred that Meadows teachers were friends both inside and

outside of school. Important is understanding that Principal Novara had been in

<div align="center">145</div>

her current position for the past five years. Therefore, when she took over as principal, Meadows teachers had firmly established friendships. This may in part inform Novara's reference to the "downside" of such relationships. She suggested in her commentary that working together for a long time allowed teachers to become "too comfortable." Principal Novara's remarks exhibited some of the tension that existed at Meadows. The teachers generally were cohesive in their beliefs about children and such viewpoints were in direct opposition with their administrator's.

7.1.2 Principal's Management of Teachers

Meadows had a top-down organizational structure, with Principal Novara situated as the primary leader over her staff. When asked about how she saw her role, Ms. Novara responded,

> Well I am a major manager of everything. Of course, we love to call ourselves instructional leaders but I spend most of my time managing...How do I see myself? I spend a lot of time managing. It's just because I don't have an assistant principal so it's all of the above. Working with families and kids – I have 605 children and I feel like that having a smooth running building is top. And so I just have to devote all the time to the nuts and the bolts… Working with parents to help them with their kids and that's what's grabbing my time, most of the time. Then the rest is to keep the school organized for school improvement plan, our rules and regulations, Title I, budgeting, expenditures, staffing.
> [Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

Calling herself a major manager was key in the principal's description of her position. As Principal Novara recounted her core responsibilities, she mentioned a smooth running building, the school improvement plan, compliance, budgeting and managing staff. Yet, she also suggested that what was "grabbing" most of her

time was working with parents, though she did not mention in what capacity she

worked with families. As I learned through my ethnographic work, there were

many discipline issues with students[47] during the time of the interviews, so it is

plausible that she was working on resolving such conflicts. Noticeably missing

from her description of responsibilities was monitoring classroom instruction, so I

asked if she spent time in classrooms.

> Serena: Do you get into classrooms very much?
> Novara: Not enough. As much as I possibly can. Often I'm in there looking at kids not at instruction as much. So I do, I rely on coaches to spend lengthy time to really get into how are they presenting this and that, so that they can give an – they've got the time for the follow-up with. This is what I see, this is what needs to shift. And I'm here for the backup if we need to do that, so that our coach and I and a teacher will meet to take a look at what things need to be changed.
>
> [Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

Indeed, Ms. Novara admitted that though she was very interested in instruction,

when she spent time in classrooms it was generally to observe students for

behavioral problems or special education referrals rather than monitoring the

quality of the teaching and learning environment.

Having been an administrator for the past decade, Ms. Novara felt that her

teaching experience had lapsed. The principal explained that teachers, not her,

were the experts when it came to instruction. Therefore she felt that professional

development should be a more domestic process where teachers learned from one

another.

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[47] As mentioned in chapter five, during the time of interviews, there were dramatic budget cuts in Springfield. The cuts required the consolidation of classrooms requiring shuffling of teaching positions. Meadows was particularly impacted by this change, and the principal attributed some discipline problems to such changes in personnel.

I believe so much in professional learning communities. I knew that approach before I came in and if it hadn't existed I wouldn't have done it... I've been around 20 years if you think I know how to instruct these days, no. The teachers are the experts – they are the ones who get the in-service, they are the ones who are doing it day in and day out. When I look back and when did I teach second grade it's already been 12 years. Things have changed. And better instruction and what we know now, I didn't have reading recovery instruction and so people that have are the ones who really understand, how do you help young kids learn how to read.

[Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

Given that the principal had many administrative responsibilities to attend to, and the length of time she had spent as an administrator, she did not designate herself to have a large role in instructional supervision. Instead she positioned the teachers as expert. However as a consequence of this choice, Ms. Novara was not, in any way, focused on instruction; that which was at the center of her practice was management. She was particularly focused on the "nuts and bolts" of running a building. Ironic about such actions was that the elements she privileged in her practice created frustration for teachers, and reduced not only teacher authority but collective efficacy.

In numerous conversations with teachers, (both casual and formal interviews) when asked about Ms. Novara, most complained about her micromanagement of people.

But she's [principal] very much a control...she'll delegate something to you but then the next day, she'll say, "Can you call this person and set up an assembly?" "What? When do you want it?" "Oh, sometime in April would be good." "Fabulous. Any certain time of day? How about afternoon? How about grades two and three?" So I call, make...exactly what she says. So I come the next day and she's like, "Well, it's just too close to lunch. I was thinking that maybe we should do it at the beginning of May." She micromanages. She's very much in control. Not all of us

take to that real well because we all feel like she is the captain and we respect that. But we all have a valuable position on that ship, and we're not really encouraged to express our opinions.

[Ms. Miller, Meadows teacher]

As described by Ms. Miller, Principal Novara was the captain of the ship, but she did not distribute leadership amongst her staff (Spillane, 2001, 2005). Instead, teachers felt that their principal oversaw work on all committees and had difficulty delegating responsibility. Implicit in Ms. Novara's actions was her reading teachers as incapable of leading committee work. Not only did such acts compromise authority but they also conveyed the message to teachers that Ms. Novara did not believe in their leadership abilities or capacity.

Often teachers juxtaposed Ms. Novara's style with that of their old principal – who they perceived as delegating responsibility. As described below, several teachers felt that Principal Novara's inability to let teachers make decisions or run committees felt like mistrust. In Ms. Penny's words,

> He [former principal] was definitely into delegating, like "you're gonna work on this. You're gonna work on this, and I trust in you." Where I think Ms. Novara has more of a sense of, delegate but still be a part of it. So there's that sense of, I think teachers feel like there's that lack of trust. Like, "okay, you asked us to make a decision, yet you still want to change it at the end and make it your own." So that's my sense. Like he wasn't on every committee. She'll literally be on every committee. And so he [former principal] would let us do our work and was more hands off. So it wasn't the old school principal like that, but it was that empowering. I did a leadership thing, he was that leader within. He was "You're the leader of your classroom."

[Ms. Penny, Meadows teacher]

As captured by Ms. Penny's remarks, teachers' ability to take on leadership roles in their classroom and school wide was empowering for Meadows teachers. Ms.

149

Penny alluded in her final remarks that her old principal was more hands-off. By this, teachers were enabled to do their work without distraction. This type of management style gave teachers an opportunity to develop their skills while illustrating that their former principal believed in their capability. Teachers' ability to have decision making power at their school is likely to facilitate collective efficacy (Goddard, 2002). Providing teachers with the opportunity to take leadership roles offers needed confidence and vicarious experience to enhance their efficacy beliefs. Such experiences support teachers' collective efficacy as they see themselves as a group able to achieve a particular goal. Yet at Meadows the opposite pattern was apparent, teachers read the principal's actions as compromising their authority and promoting mistrust. Unfortunately, tension around teacher management was not the only disagreement present at Meadows school. Teachers also were opposed to the principal's management of students.

7.1.3 Principal's Management of Students

When questioned about the principal during teacher interviews, in addition

to describing micromanagement, many responded by discussing student

discipline. There was consensus among teachers that, *discipline is a touchy*

subject in the building (Ms. Cook, Meadows teacher) and *we're not on the same*

page (Ms. Kent, Meadows teacher). Several teachers felt that the way Ms.

Novara handled discipline was problematic. Meadows did not adhere to a school-

wide policy or consistent consequences for student behavioral infractions. Rather,

the principal used a "love and logic"[48] approach to managing students. In

Principal Novara's words,

> Serena: How do you see yourself as a disciplinarian here, I know that's a big part of the job?
>
> Novara: Well that's a word I never use. I don't like the word discipline – it means too many things to too many people and it's very negative for the most part. So I talk about management of students and that's what we need to do. We have to create an environment and help the children and after learning lessons again and again and again, and that's my approach with kids…I use a love and logic approach. I give kids time to cool down so they get out of that emotional brain so they get to the thinking brain and we can talk about. Then consequences are pretty straight forward – you can't handle class, you're going to have some time out here. Talking with the parents, and then they get the warning when we've done too much talking. I'll say, "you know there's not much more I can say, we've gone over this." Then, if there are additional problems then your choice will be that you'll have to spend time at home. I think it's worked, it's taken me years to sort of get it there, but I think kids understand that they are really cared for and loved for and that's what the staff also gives back to children.
>
> [Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

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[48] Love and Logic is an approach used for both parenting and teaching that promotes positive reinforcement. See for example, Fay, J. & Funk, D. (1995). *Teaching with love and logic: Taking control of the classroom*. The Love and Logic Press, Golden, CO.

This take on student discipline was controversial. It was not that teachers

did not agree with the love and logic approach per se. Instead, the main

complaint about Ms. Novara's management style was a lack of consequences or

ineffective consequences for disciplinary infractions. Ms. Kent explained,

> She has the kids' interest in mind, but I just don't think that her approach
> is effective. I'm not saying that we should be mean to the kids, that's not
> the idea. But there are consequences of their deeds, consequences not
> punishment. Consequences…That's my idea. That's what I think…I don't
> see consequences, just privileges and rewards.
>
> [Ms. Kent, Meadows teacher]

Others agreed that there was a lack of consequences and when penalties were

issued, they were not severe enough. Specifically, teachers were concerned that

suspension was not utilized as an appropriate consequence. As Cook and Miller

elaborated,

> I don't know what her deal is. I don't get it. Kids do things like – one kid
> threw a pencil at another teacher and he didn't get suspended. She doesn't
> believe in suspension. And I feel like with older kids fourth and fifth
> graders – I feel like she doesn't make parents accountable as much as she
> should.
>
> [Ms. Cook, Meadows teacher]

Miller:	We had a fifth grader last Monday who basically was escorted out in cuffs by the police. Okay? She lets him back.
Serena:	What happened?
Miller:	I wasn't there. So I don't know the details, but he brought something to school apparently, that he wasn't supposed to have. And then when he was being confronted, he was resisting. He just escalated and got nastier and nastier, then he pushed our principal, who's a female. The two male teachers that were trying to kind of keep him in place, he was resisting them. I don't know if he said anything. I don't know if he threatened anybody, but they did call the police. But...she lets him back in the building. He's in the office because her philosophy is if we let them stay home, they're staying home in

the worse conditions. They have parents that either aren't there, don't care, whatever. So we might as well let them come to school, to a safe place, and let them be here all day.

Serena: Is it like an in-school suspension or are they actually in their classrooms?

Miller: Usually they go back to their classrooms.

[Ms. Miller, Meadows teacher]

As described above, Meadows teachers perceived that the principal was reluctant to suspend children because they potentially faced worse conditions at home. However, as Ms. Miller discussed, students were not subjected to an in-school suspension but were instead allowed to return to their classrooms. Teachers felt that such an approach did not send a message to students and families that their behavior was unacceptable. Instead of suspension, Principal Novara asked children to write about their infraction as detailed by Ms. Cook. She explained that such an approach resulted in children who were not afraid of being sent to the principal. Ms. Cook elaborated,

> She makes them write about it. And we had two kids sent down from art and there were in the office for like two hours. They were writing. "What were you writing for two hours?" "We had to do a plan." Ok, then you come back in the room and you are still being bad. How many times is it going to take? I'm not going – when you are sent to the principal's office that is like huge usually. They don't care. They go and they don't care. This is not working, you should have a little bit of fear. You know what I'm saying? It's like a big deal. You are going the principal's office, your parents might get called, there is none of that going on. No fear.
>
> [Ms. Cook, Meadows teacher]

While the vast majority of teachers I interviewed found Principal Novara's approach to managing student behavior problematic, Ms. Penny and Ms. Wilson agreed with the principal's philosophy. Despite this alignment, both teachers

concurred with their colleagues and expressed tension around student discipline at

Meadows,

> Penny: She has a definite philosophy based on love and logic… It's a more positive approach to discipline of really helping kids take ownership of their actions. And love based, obviously. So more of that positive philosophy instead of a disciplinarian kind of like punishment. It's away from that. It's more of a natural consequence effect.
>
> Serena: So you said that you're sort of on board with the philosophy?
>
> Penny: I am.
>
> Serena: Are others?
>
> Penny: Some. I would not say all.
>
> Serena: Not all? Is that just in relation to love and logic or does this extend larger than that?
>
> Penny: I think there's definitely different philosophies as far as discipline goes and behavior and management.
>
> [Ms. Penny, Meadows teacher]

> A lot of the teachers here don't like the fact that there's not a school wide policy. They don't think it's strict enough. I lean more toward the way our principal is. Would I suspend more than her? Maybe, I don't know. But I lean more towards how she feels. And so I'm not so upset about it. But if I was the other way, then I think I would be more upset.
>
> [Ms. Wilson, Meadows teacher]

Teachers were concerned that students would not take disciplinary measures

seriously if suspension was not a consequence or if students only wrote about

their infractions. This schism was sticky because teachers did not feel that Ms.

Novara supported their decisions about student behavior. Meadows teachers

wanted to discipline students as they saw appropriate and have administrative

backing. This is merely another example of Principal Novara's practice, for better

or for worse, that infringed upon teacher efficacy. Meadows teachers felt that

they were the leader of their classroom and their judgment, when it came to

student discipline, should not be questioned. Meadows teachers interpreted Ms.

Novara's approach to discipline as compromising their authority and their efficacy.

Though the majority of Novara's time was allocated towards meeting with families and building management, most teachers felt that Principal Novara's management was not particularly effective. Novara did not convey confidence in her teachers' ability to manage committee work through her micromanagement of such projects. What is more, Novara's actions were read by her teachers as compromising their authority as she did not support teachers' with student discipline. These actions likely did not enhance teachers' collective efficacy as they felt frustrated with their principal. Yet, the most important part of schooling – student learning – was primarily managed by two coaches and other specialists.

7.2 Key Actors in Meadows' Professional Learning Community

Principal Novara employed two coaches to primarily oversee instruction across the grade levels. Meadows had three full time[49], specialist positions: two half time coaches, a full time resource teacher, and two half time interventionists. On occasion, the principal pulled in specialists other than the coaches to observe teachers and provide professional development to teachers.

Principal Novara believed that changing classroom instruction was a key charge of the coaches. She explained,

> Serena: You were saying you were working on changing classroom instruction – to meet the needs of all your students. So how does one actually change classroom instruction?

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[49] Though there are three full time specialist positions, they were occupied by four different people. Two individuals job-shared a fifth grade classroom and also had a specialist position.

Novara: Well the focus of a coach is to really help with that. I would say, I mean there is a ton of stuff we could talk about, but here's what I think is the biggest shift for teachers. We've been doing DRA reading scores and running records. You can have to collect your data, look at your numbers but if it's not really driving instruction, so do what differently tomorrow? The instructor that I've got right now coaching is having everybody take a much deeper look at that. So that every quarter we're putting our kids on a chart, rather than looking at numbers, we are looking at how many are at the beginning level. Who's moved up, who's approaching, who's meeting, who's succeeding and how does that shift go during the year. And when you see, the scores need to be improving, and when we go in first grade that we had eight kids at the beginning and now we got 14 at beginning – that tells us some stuff about instruction. So she is trying to be more specific with them about the small group work. Leveled readers, very specific strategies, that kind of thing. And she is one that can really get in the class and help with what teachers need to do.

[Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

Rather than continually monitoring student progress, Ms. Novara reported that Meadows teachers monitored student progress quarterly through the use of running records. However, the success of such an approach hinges on fidelity of implementing running records and knowing how to interpret and act on the data once it is gathered (Ross, 2004). As will be described subsequently, neither of these skills were well developed amongst the Meadows staff.

Given that Ms. Novara's purpose in hiring coaches was to change classroom instruction, coaching was primarily targeted to struggling teachers. If a teacher was not making the type of progress with students that she should, the coaches and/or specialists were contacted for support. Principal Novara explained how teachers were identified to be in need of coaching.

Serena: How are these two individuals identified as being the ones – is it just based on?

Novara: By observations, the coaches observations, yeah. Unfortunately the one that got shifted from third grade to fifth grade, kids let me know instantly. When kids are having a hard time in a classroom it's not just about them, it's about the structure. So, yeah –

Serena: I wasn't sure if it was related at all to the student outcomes. If that was a big way that you determine-

Novara: They have to move on it even so much faster than outcomes, when you make changes at the semester. And the other teacher – her scores will blend right in. But I've had a coach say I've worked with her on this and this, literacy and we need to see more of this and this. And with that teacher its interesting – they are both fifth grade teachers – you can hide them a little bit more. A first grade teacher that is not really an expert, it's too evident.

[Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

Rather than using evidence of student learning or lack thereof to determine teacher effectiveness, Ms. Novara relied upon anecdotal accounts of teacher struggle from both coaches and Meadows students. A key indication to Novara that a teacher needed support was if children were "having a hard time in the classroom." The principal believed it was a teachers' responsibility to create and maintain classroom structure – which is a key component of classroom management. Though Ms. Novara did not explicitly say this, I perceived that she determined the extent to which a teacher struggled based primarily upon classroom management skill. Also implicit in Ms. Novara's statement was the strategic decision to place the least effective teachers in the fifth grade. In this way, aggregate test scores would be less impacted by poor performance in students' final year of elementary school. This was due to the calculation of

AYP, as MEAP assessment reflecting fifth grade material would actually factor into the middle school's AYP[50] as opposed to Meadows.

Given the principal's reliance on coaches to identify and support struggling teachers, I was unsure how closely Novara monitored instruction. In order to gain a sense of her understanding of teacher skill, I asked if there were teachers she was particularly worried about. Principal Novara replied,

> I have two right now, ask me at the end of the year. For both of them I will say yes, because they were the kind of teachers that if they didn't make a change they go on to our plan three, which if that doesn't work then termination is the way to go. So, I see teachers – both of them are – working earnestly to change instruction, working with the coach, then that's what I need to see. Will it be everything I'd like it to be, of course not. But that's life. But to see them motivated and making changes and we'll just kind of keep at it, keep at it, and keep at it.
>
> [Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

Principal Novara was concerned about the two fifth grade teachers referenced earlier. Novara had one coach work with these teachers intensely to change their instruction. However, she also questioned if it would be "everything I'd like it to be" and replied "of course not." Through such statements she suggested that she knew that these struggling teachers would not necessarily be transformed into extraordinary teachers, but seeing signs of teacher motivation was edifying and prevented her for pursuing teacher termination.

Confirming the principal's use of coaching resources, I asked a coach[51] how she structured her work, and she explained that her efforts were prescribed

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[50] The reader might recall that the MEAP is administered in the fall. Therefore the content of the assessment is based upon learning the year prior as opposed to the current grade level. For example, 5th grade students are actually tested on 4th grade material when they take the MEAP in October.

by the principal – she worked with teachers that were "lower functioning." Here she explained her role.

> Serena: So you work with a lot of teachers then when you're doing the coaching in the afternoons.
>
> Coach: Yeah.
>
> Serena: How many people do you see?
>
> Coach: Oh no, it's not...I don't whip around every day. Like right now, I do, I'm going into two classrooms because like it's an hour and a half, hour and a half.
>
> Serena: Oh okay.
>
> Coach: And then I'll rotate but right now I'm working with that new...
>
> Serena: Fifth grade teacher?
>
> Coach: And she was new in third grade, so I like followed her up here. So she...I've been with her since the beginning of the year and then like we have grade level release. We have meetings with everybody in the grade level and we talk about literacy. And I run those. So I, you know, I give advice. I run those. I do stuff like that. So I do, I don't like run around to everybody's classroom...
>
> Serena: I see. How, is it...I mean, are you quote on quote, assigned to work with that teacher? Does she request your help?
>
> Coach: Right now, I'm assigned to two of the teachers.
>
> Serena: Have they been open to that? Like how...
>
> Coach: Yeah, I mean...I'm assigned to two teachers because they're lower functioning teachers.
>
> [Meadows coach]

While the coach did not define what she meant by "lower functioning," as insinuated above by Principal Novara, it was likely due to poor classroom structure, as described by Principal Novara – an important component of classroom management. Indeed, I had the opportunity to observe these two ineffective teachers and both appeared to struggle with structure and management as evidenced by lack of student engagement and difficulty for teachers to capture

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[51] Given the small number of coaches and specialists, I use their job title as opposed to a pseudonym in this section to protect their identity. In general, teacher leaders are just referred to as teachers with a pseudonym throughout this document.

student attention (Field Notes, 4/19/10). As the coach recounted below, one

teacher worked amidst "insanity" in her room which alluded to a lack of student

management.

An important question is the value of this work. When resources such as

coaches are distributed primarily to underperforming teachers, it begs the question

if this is the most effective strategy for resource allocation. A literacy coach

discussed the limited growth she witnessed in a teacher she invested much time,

> Coach: I've seen growth. The one teacher has been here a while and I've seen really nice growth. I mean, she's been resistant and she's had other people in there. But I see changes. So that's good. I mean, is it gonna start a fire? Is it great? No. But definitely...but from what I hear, and this is only my first year coaching. I did intervention before and then...I've had coaches, so I know how the process goes. And it's when I leave, does it continue? That's the thing.
>
> Serena: That's the question.
>
> Coach: The other teacher, she is...but right now with all of that insanity in her room, it's hard to know. She's trying to make it through every day. And the fact that she's been absent a lot, and she's been having stomach aches. I don't blame her. It's terrible. And I see changes in her, too. And I don't know. I'm a new coach. How much is personality? What can I say? Won't you be like me? You know what I mean? Like that's...although we've talked about it, the coaches...like, I know! Personality, some people just aren't animated. They aren't gonna do that, ever. So what do you do? I don't know.
>
> [Meadows coach]

While the coach proposed some development with the two teachers she worked

with, she also questioned their effectiveness. In her mind, despite some measure

of improvement, coaching poor teachers to great teachers had not occurred under

her supervision. This resonates with the principal's point about how their

teaching was not "everything she'd like it to be."

Limited progress exhibited by these teachers is interesting in light of the coach's point about personality. She suggested that teaching was an innate capacity – teachers either have the right personality or not. Given this stance on teaching, one could question whether the coach believed struggling teachers could acquire the skills necessary to be effective beyond having the right personality. Though coaching might bolster skills to a point, what remains unclear (and is beyond the scope of this study) is if coaching could turn a struggling teacher into an effective teacher?

Coaches also described tensions with the PLC model. As described in the beginning of this chapter, PLC depends upon teachers taking responsibility for student learning. Chapter six described how Meadows teachers generally attributed limited student of progress to outside factors rather than accepting responsibility for student learning. A coach also described teachers who demonstrated little student growth; the coach suggested such teachers did not make the connection between their instructional strategies and student progress. As explained by one coach,

> I had mentioned before in some of the classes where you don't see that growth, I certainly wouldn't say that they're lazy teachers or that they're not trying, it's just what they're doing is not the best strategies, or the best instruction for their particular classroom. And getting them to see that is the hard part. But there's certainly, it's certainly not for a lack of effort.
> [Meadows coach]

Through this comment, the coach illustrated her perception that teachers did not understand that their actions as having consequences for student learning. Taking such a stance illustrated teachers' inefficacy in their ability to impact student

achievement. For example, if a teacher believed that her actions were inconsequential to student achievement, then she might not put forth a great deal of effort into planning. The coach illustrated her struggle with bolstering teacher efficacy as she had difficulty getting teachers to make the connection between instruction and student achievement.

Not only were coaches supporting struggling teachers, Principal Novara also engaged other specialists in this effort. The Meadows intervention position was aimed at providing direct service to students that were behind academically (but not necessarily in special education). During a conversation I had with an interventionist, she mentioned that the principal asked her to work with a struggling teacher in mathematics. The interventionist explained,

Serena: Do people know, in this teacher's classroom, she's not making the type of progress that this teacher is making or vice versa?

Teacher: Well that's where intervention teachers and especially the coaches come in because if there is something that's noticed, the principal will have us intervene and kind of step in. Like [coach] is helping out a teacher who is new to fifth grade and helping out another teacher who might be struggling in a certain area. I've been asked to help out a…teacher in math, which has just kind of come up. So we haven't really connected...she teaches math in the afternoon, and I do intervention in the morning. But she has been gone on what's that called, she's on leave, raising her kids, and she just came back this year and isn't familiar with our new math curriculum. So she was pinpointed as kind of having a little bit of difficulties with the math. So that's where we kind of come in and scoop up and help.

[Meadows intervention teacher]

The intervention teacher illustrated that the principal invested many resources into working with struggling teachers. The intervention teacher "scooped up" to help

162

teachers is merely another example of triage, where supports were provided to teachers who have less capacity. What is more, Principal Novara made the decision to have her specialist staff working almost exclusively with ineffective teachers. The unbalanced distribution of coaching was further evidenced by a teacher who worked at Meadows for more than 12 years and had never received coaching,

> I've never been formally coached - never been formally coached. I've never had a coach in my room. In fact [coach] came in our room this year, "Where are your magnetic letters?" And I would go like this, "I don't have any." "What do you mean you don't have any?" "I don't have any." "Where are your...?" "I don't have any." "You don't have any?" "No." And I'm not a whiner or a complainer, but don't come in my room expecting me to do stuff when you haven't offered me the same as other people.
> [Ms. Miller, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Miller illustrated that not having access to formal coaching was problematic as she received neither the intellectual nor physical resources to which other teachers had access. Ms. Miller protested unfair expectations, "don't come into my room expecting me to do stuff when you haven't offered me the same as other people" which illustrated Miller's objection to being held to the same standard as teachers who were coached. As depicted here, offering inconsistent coaching support to teachers leads to a difference in teachers' efficacy because of the support or lack of support they feel.

An additional challenge faced by the specialist teachers were the split responsibilities due to the structure of their appointments. One individual was both a coach and an intervention teacher, but her attention was divided as she also held administrative responsibilities. She explained her inattention to intervention due to her position as the "fake vice principal."

163

I honestly have to say the intervention, I have not seen as many kids with intervention this year as I have in the past. One of the other things too, I'm not the assistant principal even though I'm in this office. This would be the assistant principal's office, through budget constraints and things like that, [principal] has lost the assistant principal. We have over 600 students now. She can't do this by herself so I'm, I call it the fake assistant principal, I take some of those duties. I'm outside doing lunch, behavior, sometimes I'll get a call a particular student is having trouble in a so-and-so's classrooms, I'll bring a child down here and try to resolve the situation. My day is not just coaching and intervention it's also some of those things as well.

[Meadows coach]

The resource teacher supported this coach's account of having additional responsibility. She also explained how she wore multiple hats – and how resources for her position continued to diminish. Here she explained her responsibilities,

Well I am a resource teacher. When I first was hired into the building, we had three resource teachers, Title 1, and bilingual. So we were very focused in terms of...my role was focusing in on our LEP, the ELL population, our new comers, supporting staff in that way, and how to work with those kids, pulling groups. With downsizing over the years, we went from three to two, to now just the one. And now so pretty much it's my responsibility to help K-5. That same thing, plus a lot more has gotten added on over the years…I go in and model a lot of times. Materials - what do I use with these kids? How do I? So I'm also...a big chunk of what I do is ordering the materials for the staff, for our kids, our kindergarteners coming in...they'll be getting different materials. That sort of thing…. I do a lot with scheduling. Their schedules, my own. I help [principal] a lot with building schedules.

[Meadows resource teacher]

As evidenced above, specialist positions were continually cut over the years requiring those who remained in these positions to assume more responsibility. In addition, those in specialist positions had their attention pulled in multiple directions due to the lack of human capital. An additional challenge with splitting such responsibilities was the different skill set for coaching as compared to

164

intervention. One might be a successful teacher, or effective in bolstering student progress, but it does not necessitate that she will be an effective coach. Both of the current coaches were successful classroom teachers, but neither discussed their training in coaching or professional development (which does not mean they did not receive training). It is important to recognize that simply having coaching positions is not enough to improve instruction; those who embody such roles need proper training and support to be effective in their position.

Principal Novara created a structure to support teachers through utilizing coaches, resource teachers, and interventionists to monitor instruction. While the principal did not provide this direct service, she asked her specialists to work with teachers that were struggling, whereby teachers who were perceived as "good" did not receive intensive support in their classrooms. In this way the coaches were not using their expertise to increase capacity of the total staff. Instead, coaches were engaging in triage support because they were assigned to work with teachers most in need of assistance. Since coaching was allocated to struggling teachers, those that were perceived as thriving were almost punished by not receiving coaching and materials that accompanied coaching.

Given limited human capital resources, the Principal Novara made decisions about how to allocate such assets. Principal Novara's choice to invest much of coaches' time into working with lower functioning teachers, had consequences. Through targeting their time, the skills of the coaches were not distributed among the staff. In this way, there was not systematic attention paid to teacher learning across Meadows. Instead, the Meadows approach was to

delegate resources to the teachers that were having the most difficulty. This merely reiterates findings that the PLC at Meadows was languishing as there was not systematic attention paid to teacher learning, and using such new knowledge to drive change in classrooms.

Though coaches did not deliver individual support to all teachers, they were responsible for developing and maintaining the PLC. As will be described, the Meadows coaches led regular grade level meetings. The next section examines teachers' work in the PLC, the articulation of curriculum within and across grade levels, and the use of data to drive instruction.

7.3 Meadows Teachers' Work in the PLC

7.3.1 Horizontal & Vertical Planning and Communication

As described in the introduction to this chapter, key to a PLC is a collaborative work environment. In order to have teachers learn from one another, their time needs to be structured in such a way that they are enabled to communicate, plan, problem solve, analyze student data and more. In order to learn about how time was structured at Meadows, I asked all interviewees *if* they worked together on instruction and if so, *how* they worked together. The Meadows PLC had clear structures which allotted for teacher collaboration. Primarily this occurred in 40 minute bimonthly grade level release meetings led by a coach. As explained by Principal Novara,

> Serena: I wonder how the teachers here work together on instruction, if they do?
> Novara: Oh my goodness all the time. So what we have done, we are supposed to, we have staff meetings and I try to keep general meetings as short as possible to have team meetings so they can work on instruction more. We build in, we are supposed to

have more professional development by the district this year and they came up with a mess so we haven't. What I have to do is provide every other week professional learning community time with the building coach.

Serena: So when you say professional learning community – I feel like I don't have a clear understanding of what that means. It means a lot of different things to a lot of people. What does that mean to you?

Novara: Well, each grade level team is a PLC. So they have their grade level release time, they are the ones that work together all the time.

Serena: So they are relatively autonomous – does anyone come in? Does the literacy coach come in?

Novara: Yeah. So the release day time meetings I arrange, the coach meets with them.

[Ms. Novara, Meadows Principal]

Principal Novara's conception of a PLC was defined as teachers having common planning time. However, a PLC is far more than scheduling collaborative work time, it is about what teachers *do* with their time. Essential to a flourishing PLC is teachers' constant learning from their practice, from one another, and then acting on new knowledge. These sort of ideals were absent at Meadows. As the evidence will demonstrate, though Meadows teachers called themselves a PLC, they did not act in ways that were consistent with this organizing philosophy.

Teachers reported that literacy and mathematics were the primary focus of these meetings. In addition to bimonthly meetings, roughly four to five times a year, Meadows teachers were given a two hour block for grade level planning. Teachers used this time for general planning, sharing ideas, and creating student assessments. Though teachers were responsible for their grade level meetings, their coach offered support in such meetings. Here a coach explained her facilitation role in these meetings and the content teachers discussed.

167

Coach: One of the jobs of the coach every other week I do have what is
           called grade level release where I'll meet with grade levels at a
           time and we'll work on literacy stuff. We'll look at
           assessments, we have an assessment wall that has data cards
           and we'll update those data cards, we move those data cards so
           we have a visual representation of where the children are at in
           reading in writing. Our principal also affords us with two hour
           release times where grade levels can get together. That's not
           always strictly literacy it could be working on math
           assessments and things like that. So we have quite a bit of
           opportunity to work together…

Serena: So when teachers actually are together you mentioned one
           thing they do is they may look at assessments and you have this
           wall, what other things do they do, do they plan actual lessons
           or?

Coach: They could, yeah. Writing – they could work on a writing unit,
           they could plan out a whole five, six, seven week writing unit.

Serena: Ok.

Coach: It could be math. Right now we are updating our unit
           assessments. We use Everyday Math and that was great when
           we first got it. But the assessments in there no longer match
           state GLCEs[52] and report cards. So then the teachers have to
           get together and create these new assessments that match those
           two, the GLCEs and the report card. That's a time consuming
           process when you are building assessments for 15 units and
           things like that. So primarily literacy and math probably eat up
           85-90% of those opportunities.

                                              [Meadows coach]

Evident in the coach's comments was that the Meadows teachers worked together,

but the purpose of this collaborative work was left undefined. Teachers created

assessments in these meetings, but it was unclear if they used the data to drive

their discussions, if the substance of such conversations promoted further teacher

learning, and if teachers took action on such learning.

   Some Meadows teachers were critical that their instructional efforts were

uncoordinated across grade levels in spite of PLC communication. Here Ms.

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[52] GLCE – grade level content expectation, or the Michigan Standards.

Asmar suggested that despite having a PLC, Meadows teachers were not on the same page.

> Let me just give you an example. If I was to be absent today, I mean tomorrow, and I called one of my teammates and said, "Oh my God, please throw some lesson plans together. My daughter, God forbid, did this," she would have no clue what's going on in my room. Not because of lack of communication, but because we're all on a different page, whereas my friend, if she was to call her co-worker and say, "Hey, Shirley. Oh my God, I had this..." they're all on the same page. They know what's going on. They don't...the kids that, there's a structure there. So it's not that we're all on the same page. If I was to have an emergency and have to leave, and somebody was to come teach my class from another, from like Ms. Vedder or something, she would have no clue.
>
> [Ms. Asmar, Meadows teacher]

Though teachers communicated on a regular basis, their planning efforts were often uncoordinated. Ms. Asmar, who was new to Meadows, described a discrepancy she noticed between Meadows and her friend's grade level team at a different Springfield school (a Reading First school). Asmar claimed that instruction at her friends' school was more synchronized due to the structures that were put into place. At Meadows, teachers used similar curricular materials but did not co-plan lessons to strengthen instruction nor insure that all students had similar access to the curriculum.

Another drawback of the Meadows approach to PLC was the limited allocation of time given to cross grade level discussion and planning. Ms. Novara did not set aside extra time for such meetings. On rare occasions, vertical planning occurred during staff meetings. At least yearly, teachers created school improvement goals based on MEAP scores. Though planning around MEAP results occurred, it was something discussed in isolation and done annually

instead of something that teachers were consistently revisiting. Ms. Richards

explained,

> Serena: How are the MEAP scores used here? Do people talk about
> them?
> Richards: Oh yeah. In fact, that's on the agenda for Monday's meeting,
> too--to look at third, fourth, and fifth grade MEAP scores. We
> try to use it to base our instruction on. Like, "okay, they overall
> did really poorly in number solving, so we need to work on
> that." So a lot of times, our goal is on that yellow sheet over
> there, that it comes from the MEAP. It comes from what, as a
> school, we need help with. So that's what we try to focus on for
> the year. That becomes our goal for reading, writing, math.
>
>   [Ms. Richards, Meadows teacher]

However, most staff meetings tended to be "agenda-driven" as explained

by the Meadows principal. She made this point during the focus group, when

teachers were discussing strategies for working ELLs in response to the problem

of practice (Appendix B). In her words,

> What I'm hearing is a real creative exchange of just problem solving, fun
> ideas. Often staff meetings and team meetings are very, you know, agenda
> driven, we have tasks to accomplish, and it's not too often that we sit and
> talk about, so how are we doing with English language learners. What are
> some of those great ideas that have maybe fallen off the table, or how do
> we put them back on?
>
>   [Ms. Novara, Meadows principal]

The principal was reflexive in the focus group as she listened to her colleagues

describe instructional strategies they had used to work with ELLs. Given all of

the demands on teachers, many Meadows teachers lamented that they were unable

to instruct in powerful ways for ELLs. Similarly, Ms. Novara realized that an

exchange of ideas and problem solving was not something that was built into staff

meetings. Generally, staff meetings were agenda-oriented and teachers worked

on particular tasks.[53] This again illustrates a weak PLC as key purpose in collaborating is for teachers to take action based upon their learning from their own and others' experiences.

Another use of staff meeting time was for a book club. A few teachers mentioned that the staff was reading a book, *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (Marzano, 2001). Said one teacher, "The building is, they are all reading a book and I can't tell you the title of it right now. So we discuss like different chapters out of the book" (Ms. Brown, Meadows teacher). In reference to spending staff meetings by reading a common book, Ms. Phillips commented that it was a waste of time because the book was "common sensical" [sic].

Rather than simply allocate time for teachers to work together, it is also critical to consider how teachers spend their time in meetings with one another to create and maintain a vibrant PLC. Though communication occurred at each Meadows grade level, there was little evidence of constant learning. Also murky was how teachers learned from data and how their actions were informed by such analysis. Teacher communication and the coordination of instruction has the potential to enhance collective efficacy because collaborating in the interest of student needs might render teachers to feel more capable of meeting school goals, hence improving efficacy.

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[53] While I observed a staff meeting, I saw an example of a meeting "task." Teachers looked at MEAP scores and highlighted content areas where less than 75% of their students were proficient (Field Notes, 4/19/2010)

Teachers did utilize some of their collaborative time to work through curricular issues. In the next section I describe the literacy curriculum adopted at Meadows and how the specific programmatic choice contributed to fragmentation in the PLC.

7.3.2 Meadows Literacy Curriculum

Springfield did not require utilization of a single literacy curriculum across all elementary schools in the district. For this reason, Meadows used a literacy curriculum developed at the University of Arkansas by Dr. Linda Dorn. The premise of this curriculum was to teach literacy through apprenticeship. A coach explained,

> My job as a coach… is to work with the teachers to help institute the model, the literacy model. I model if they need certain aspects of the literacy model. You know, I go in the room they'll watch me teach the lesson and then they'll take on some of the parts of the lesson and I'll monitor them and give them feedback. It's a communication back and forth. The model itself is the apprenticeship. Where the teacher is the mentor and the children are the ones that watch what the teacher does and the teacher teaches them sub skills, and then they practice those sub skills and I'm doing the same thing with the teachers.
>
> [Meadows coach]

Because this model had a more developmental intention, it was not prescriptive. Teachers had a great deal of flexibility in how to work with their students and were encouraged to use different instructional techniques to meet student needs. For example, the Dorn model emphasized the importance of guided reading (see, for example, Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2001). However, teachers who had not worked with the model previously, especially those that

were coming from other Springfield schools, had concerns about the lack of

structure in the Dorn model. Ms. Brown shared her insights,

> Brown: I've only done what I would call scripted programs, I was in a Reading First school. The other building I was in we did Avenues.
>
> Serena: I'm not familiar with that.
>
> Brown: It's like, it's similar to the Reading First in that it's a scripted, you have a book and you kind of turn the page and it says do this, do this. Coming here, we do Linda Dorn. And so everything is completely different. So I've needed a mentor, like for reading groups – our reading groups with Reading First, it was here is the book, here are the books that go with the book this is what the kids read. And everything was there. Where here I have to read the book on my own, develop the questions, develop the vocabulary and all of that. It's all on my own.
>
> [Ms. Brown, Meadows teacher]

Ms. Brown exuded little confidence in her ability to facilitate a coherent program

for her students using the Dorn model. She explained that she had worked with

previous curricula that were "scripted" in nature. Her complaint about the Dorn

program was that she needed to develop all of the materials, whereas when she

worked with a scripted curricula, lessons were already specified. Her comments

suggested that she appreciated a tighter curriculum where she did not have to be

the developer of such materials but instead was a user of such materials. This

illustrates that Ms. Brown viewed curricular materials as a crutch rather than a

tool for teaching. In addition, her request for more specification displayed her

general inefficacy for teaching literacy.

Ms. Asmar was not necessarily skeptical of the Dorn program; rather she

was critical of the lack of structure created by Meadows to institute the literacy

program. She described how other Springfield schools (which happened to be

Reading First Schools) organized their instruction.

> If you're going to talk about [School name] or Barcliff[54], the way their things are run, the way things are run over there is completely different than here...when I do literacy before, we used to have time. You had to have a 90 minute literacy block, uninterrupted. I don't care if the house next door was on fire. Unless you're bleeding, dying, nobody can walk in and out. You can't even answer your phone. I have the office sending parents to my room and I'm like, "NO, you can't do this!" I have to send them... That 90 minutes of literacy should be uninterrupted, and it's not here. Parents are walking in and out. They're putting phone calls through to me. And the parents don't talk to you for five, like two seconds. Even other teachers...
>
> [Ms. Asmar, Meadows teacher]

The criticism that Meadows did not have an uninterrupted reading block

suggested that teachers had the freedom to decide when to teach literacy.

However, both Asmar and Brown illustrated their inefficacy given the autonomy

to decide what to teach and how to teach it. Asmar in particular shared how she

took a scripted program from another school and used it instead of the Dorn

curriculum approved by Meadows.

> The programs that they have...they have a program called Linda Dorn here that I don't know if anybody still uses it, other than this school. Most schools do Houghton Mifflin. Where Linda Dorn is pretty much up in the air, it's up to the teacher. Whereas others are reading, not even just Houghton Mifflin, there's a program called Treasures, where it's a book. It's...I'll tell you a secret, I went and stole it from my friend because I needed a guide. So this is the Houghton Mifflin, where it teaches them by theme. It starts off...it's pretty much sets them up for the next grade. And it breaks it down. Like, here is day one. Day one, this is...you don't do all of it, you pick and choose. But it's like you do the calendar, you do the daily messages. These are the words that they should know. It gives you read aloud. It gives you big books. These kids do have those, don't get me wrong. It's not that I'm saying that they don't have it. I have a million big books, but it's not structured.

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[54] The reader should note that this interviewee brought up the other case study school when describing Reading First.

Ms. Asmar suggested that the curricular materials were partially to blame for the lack of coordination from classroom to classroom. Whereas other schools followed a tight curriculum, the Dorn program positioned teachers to have more autonomy. Similar to Ms. Brown, Asmar also suggested that an advantage of a scripted curriculum was the ability to have the materials and activities created for the instructor. These examples illustrate the stance that some teachers had about such teaching tools; rather than appreciating the flexibility and autonomy that the Dorn program permitted, these teachers viewed curricular materials as the framework and seemed uninterested in exercising their own professional judgment. Likewise this could also illustrate implicit inefficacy as they wanted a scripted curriculum because they did not believe in their own capability to develop robust programming for students. Given that the curricular materials allotted flexibility for the teacher, communication between and across classrooms was important to insure a coherent academic program for students.

7.3.3 Data use in PLC

Given the complexity of teaching, and the emphasis on teacher accountability and individualized instruction, using data to inform instruction has become an increasingly important feature of teaching practice post NCLB. Due to the prominence of using data to guide teaching, I asked a coach if she noticed a difference in student outcomes by teacher.

> Serena: Do certain classes learn more than others?
> Coach: Yes. The teachers that are, like if I'm using for instance, literacy, the teachers that are receptive to our literacy model,

that institute the components of the model, who do the daily running records, who are looking at those formal assessments all the time and readjusting what they're teaching, using those assessments to guide the instruction, their students are more successful. And one of the, we're in the middle of the year. We always do our big reading assessments, beginning, middle, and end. So we've just done our middle assessments and you can see the classes that, where those things are happening, they've moved those children. Even those children that had at the beginning of the year that were below expectations, they've been able to move them and sometimes considerably. In the classrooms where that's not always the case, they become stagnant. Or even, you have some that are, at the beginning of the year, meeting expectations, have even slipped down to below or approaching.

[Meadows coach]

Part of the Dorn model was to administer weekly running records for each child, but the coach's comments above insinuated that teachers were not always implementing the Dorn model with fidelity.

The lack of running record data for students illustrated one limitation that Meadows teachers had when considering how to create instruction to meet student needs. The coach described other data teachers were supposed to use to drive their instruction. In her mind, these data were public.

Serena: Do people, obviously you look at your own classroom data, but do people have the opportunity to look at other teachers' or is that...you know what I mean?

Coach: I mean, I think more grade level, perhaps. Certainly grade level because like I said we have the assessment wall. So one of the things we're going to do is take our reading scores and they're going to adjust those data cards based on those scores. So grade level wise, it's all out in the open. You know. You know where it's at. There's not hiding. And then of course, we see the MEAP data. That's entire staff at staff meetings that we kind of look at that kind of stuff. So there is opportunity to kind of see.

[Meadows coach]

176

The coach described an assessment wall that occupied a vacant classroom, dubbed the "teacher work room." Using large pocket charts that spanned an entire chalkboard, students test scores were placed along a continuum representing their reading level. The approach that the literacy coaches took was to represent each student on an index card, which contained data from key assessments. The cards were moved along the continuum to mirror student progress. While the coach suggested that the assessment wall made the data public, when I viewed the data wall, it was unclear from a grand sense to ascertain which students belonged to which teachers. Because all students were represented on the wall, one could get an aggregate sense of the reading levels of Meadows' students, but it seemed impossible from such a snapshot to understand how each teacher's students were performing relative to one another.

It also was apparent that student movement along the continuum was not particularly important to all teachers. Below, a coach described her priorities regarding reading levels.

> Coach: In the lower grades, I mean those kids move! You have to know. In fifth grade, if I get a child to move a grade level, I'm so happy! Well they usually do, but when they're low, they move a grade level so they're still low. It's frustrating. Unless like, [student] and a couple of the really newer kids, I can move them a ton. But yeah, a lot of that is just whatever. Like anything, you have to pick your priorities and that is not one of them, moving those cards...because it has nothing to do with what we do with kids every day. It doesn't.
>
> Serena: What are your priorities, would you say, with your kids?
>
> Coach: Um, making sure they learn every single day. You know, like the objective. We have objectives every day. Did you do this? Did you learn this? That's my priority and making them feel successful.
>
> [Meadows coach]

Here a literacy coach explained how moving children up grade levels in reading was not her main concern. Instead, she described her priorities as making sure students learned and felt successful. Given that this individual was a coach, her values were likely projected on teachers with whom she worked. Since this coach did not believe that student progressing in reading levels was of the utmost importance, it is unlikely that other teachers placed indices of achievement at center stage.

A crucial data point was the MEAP. The state of Michigan required MEAP administration at the beginning of the year[55] with the purpose being that teachers could use the results to inform their instruction. At Meadows, two teachers explained that MEAP scores were primarily used to gain a sense of current students in the classroom, but not used as an outcome measure of teaching. Results were aggregated and MEAP scores were reported to the staff by grade level. Ms. Kent explained that Principal Novara did not want to "hurt feelings" by comparing outcomes. By not having access to all MEAP scores, Meadows teachers were shielded from the data. They generally had access to data for their current students, but teachers were not encouraged to consider the previous year's data as an outcome of their instruction. Instead, data was generally presented as a grade-level, masking individual classroom variation. Such limited access to data was prohibitive of teacher learning that is required of a PLC. Such practices may have led Meadows teachers to have stifled

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[55] This practice began during the 2005-6 school year. Prior to this time, the MEAP was administered in the spring.

conversations around test scores because teachers did not have a robust sense of their colleague's performance.

I had the opportunity to observe a staff meeting where teachers were discussing MEAP scores (Field Notes, 4/19/2010). In this meeting, teachers met with their grade levels to analyze MEAP data for the purpose of tweaking their school improvement plan. Teachers were instructed to look at aggregate scores and find skills where 75% or less of the students did not hit bench mark. As the teachers were highlighting these bench marks, there was extensive discussion about limited student progress. Said one, "I teach, I teach, I teach and they still don't get it" which placed all of the blame for lack of student performance on children. In another's words, "They hold us responsible, but they should hold the kids and families responsible!" Another proclaimed, "Last year I didn't like my kids, this year I don't like the profession." This teacher continued by stating that she was terrified of merit pay.[56]

Such remarks illustrate a lack of efficacy at Meadows around MEAP scores in particular. When presented with an opportunity to analyze test scores and determine areas in which teachers could learn from one another and improve instruction, instead Meadows teachers complained. During the entire hour and a half that I observed not a single teacher took responsibility for poor student performance. However, Ms. Kent asked a teacher who was presiding over the meeting if she could think about the data in a different way.

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[56] Merit pay is an approach where teacher compensation is in part tied to student achievement. Such an approach is endorsed by the Obama Administration.

During the meeting all student achievement scores were presented in the aggregate. Teachers were instructed to use the test scores as a measure of the students in their current class. Yet, they were not encouraged to consider test scores from the previous year as an outcome of teacher work. Ms. Kent wanted to see the scores from her previous year's class in order to evaluate her teaching. I had a chance to discuss this issue with Ms. Kent in a subsequent interview.

Kent: In fifth grade they do this [take MEAP] in early October. So basically they are tested on fourth grade material.

Serena: Right.

Kent: So I'd like to know what I taught last year, what I did last year, how did those kids do? Isn't that what I am supposed to do? So then I know this year what to cover more, what to emphasize more because these kids will be tested on fourth grade material that I am teaching right now. You know? So I would like to know that. I thought that's what we been doing. I don't know why we were looking at fourth grade scores this year. I have no idea because...okay we can just tell the third graders what we noticed. But it's more effective if I look at it its measure of my work, too.

Serena: Right. Do you…I mean is there...[resource teacher] made a point to say that "We weren't looking classroom to classroom we were looking at their grade."

Kent: Yeah.

Serena: So people don't...how do I say this?

Kent: They're not being evaluated by that. We really try not to do that.

Serena: Okay.

Kent: Yeah. I think a couple times maybe we just got our class list and they looked at it. But everybody was kind of afraid. It's like "oh my gosh. So does it say I'm terrible?" I think [principal] is really trying not to hurt feelings or anything, so let's just look at the grade as a whole and if you wanna know your kids' grade, that's different. Then you can still ask [resource teacher] to segregate that.

                                         [Ms. Kent, Meadows teacher]

As illustrated by Ms. Kent's statements, a feature of the Meadows school climate was protecting teachers' feelings around student achievement. Ms. Kent was

somewhat of an anomaly, as she was the only person in the staff meeting who asked about the MEAP scores from her previous students. While she wanted to use the MEAP as a measure of her teaching, the way that data were received at Meadows made that difficult. Clear, is that Meadows teachers were not evaluated by their students' MEAP performance. But the other side of the coin is that teachers did not understand the data or learn how to improve their instruction based on such test scores due to lack of experience. Kent's words "does it say I'm terrible" when she referred to how teachers read MEAP data illustrates that teachers were not particularly skilled at analyzing or interpreting their students' data. Nor did they use data to drive future instruction, either formative or summative.

Confirming the use of aggregate MEAP data, Ms. Richards discussed how she thought about MEAP scores.

> Serena: Do people break out the scores by teacher? Like is it clear who may be doing better or worse with their students?
> Richards: No. We try not to do that. It's more just by grade. I mean, I get my scores, but really I've only had them a month and I don't even look at, based on who they had before that, I know as a student because most of the time it's pretty consistent through the years. And they just started taking it in third grade.
> [Ms. Richards, Meadows teacher]

Not only did Ms. Richards concur that scores were presented by grade level, but that teachers used MEAP as an evaluation only of their students. Teachers did not receive the scores of the students they had the previous year to utilize such data as an outcome of their work.

The danger in not granting access to all staff members to see all student performance data was the missing connection of student learning to teacher

practice. The way that assessments were construed at Meadows, MEAP data was a total reflection of the child, not the teachers. This did not allow teachers to thoroughly examine teacher practice in relation to student achievement. If Meadows had a culture that was more open about student data, a teacher could easily figure out areas where student performance was weak, identify a colleague who had better student performance, and share strategies. Teachers who were having more trouble with a particular area could observe colleagues who were more successful. It is this open communication that is vital to a flourishing PLC, and while teachers at Meadows discussed instructional issues, they were not particularly transparent about teacher and student performance.

7.3.4 Instruction for Test Preparation

Meadows instruction appeared to be reactive to outside pressure. In an effort to do well on tests, Meadows classroom instruction was geared towards assessment. Rather than focusing on skill building consistently throughout the year, and utilizing both district and state mandated assessments as benchmarks, instruction was shaped by such events. The mode of operation at Meadows was to engage in deep test preparation, then engage in regular instruction later. As an example, a fifth grade teacher described the devotion of beginning of the year as test preparation for MEAP.

> The beginning of our school year is because the MEAP has been moved to, it's in October now. So the beginning of our school year is all MEAP preparation until October. And we do get into, we start our science. We start our math. But language arts, they hit it really hard. All of the prep with writing and I mean, we do review. We review math. We review science as much as we can.
>
> [Ms. Mikels, Meadows teacher]

Of course, some test preparation is expected given the pressure placed upon such assessments. However, this was not simply the mode of operation for MEAP but a general approach to assessment. This might be indicative of a lack of collective efficacy because Meadows teachers may perceive that students would not gain necessary skills to pass the MEAP through typical instruction.

Teacher leaders supported teachers in instructional triage in these instances. As an example, Springfield administered a writing assessment to all students in the district in June. Anticipating the June assessment, Meadows teacher leaders planned for instruction to shift across the building. There was not adequate time in the day for teachers to teach both reading and writing, so teachers were instructed to forgo reading and focus on writing (Field Notes, 4/19/10). I had an opportunity to talk to the resource teacher about this decision. In her words,

Illian:	And so I have to come in and say, "Well I'm going to play the bad guy. You guys have to stop. This is what your focus has to be…"
Serena:	So the plan was, if I understand correctly, people are going to focus on the writing because there's the district prompt that's coming up.
Illian:	They've got a district prompt and in fourth grade, those fourth graders will have to take the state test.
Serena:	And they take that immediately, [when they start school] right? In October?
Illian:	In October, right. In October.
Serena:	And that's why instruction has to be geared toward that.
Illian:	It's gotta be geared now. I know, I've been in those rooms. I know they're not doing it. So that's a part of my job. So I went to [principal]. I go, "Hey, this is what I'm thinking. I've already talked to [coach]. She's their coach. She's backing me up on this. We're going to go in there. Am I okay?" And she's like, "By all means, do what you need to do." So that's...working with her makes it so easy because she'll be like, "what do you need me to do? Go ahead and do it."

As insinuated in the resource teacher's comments, teachers were to sacrifice typical literacy instruction and all resources (coaches' and resource teacher's time) were directed towards preparation for the district writing prompt. Such an approach was illustrative of triage at Meadows. Instead of fostering writing across the curriculum and throughout the year, teachers had to change their approach to meet testing demands. Rather than planning instruction and utilizing outside measures as benchmarks, instruction was based on outside assessments.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of instructional support at Meadows. The purpose of this investigation was to respond to my second research question, *How does collective efficacy operate to affect student achievement?* I argue that one way collective efficacy is articulated in a school is evidenced through the PLC. In order to better understand the architecture of support at Meadows, I offer figure 7.1 which is my interpretation of the Meadows PLC.

Principal. At the top of figure 7.1 is the principal who was the primary leader at Meadows. Ms. Novara created a hierarchical organizational structure, where she held most of the authority and power. Ms. Novara referred to herself as a "major manager" and attended primarily to personnel and budgeting. The Meadows principal did not describe any routines she developed around instructional support with teachers. Given that Principal Novara had not been a classroom teacher for over a decade, she sought instructional expertise through

hiring coaches to support teachers. She situated herself as a reinforcement agent –
but really saw her coaches as on the frontline of instructional support.

Contributing to the partition between teachers and principal were the
differences in opinion over the delegation of authority both in and out of the
classroom. Such divisions had implications for collective efficacy. For example,
Principal Novara and Meadows teachers held different convictions in how they
viewed student management. Due to the principal's limited use of behavioral
consequences - particularly suspension - teachers were disgruntled. As a result of
the principal's inaction, teachers reported feeling a lack of support when
administering consequences to students.

Contributing to such fissure, the teachers also perceived Principal Novara
as a micromanager which disempowered them. Meadows teachers reported that
they were unable to lead committees or make decisions because the principal
controlled most opportunities. Teachers did not mention turning to the principal
for instructional advice, but instead complained about her management style,
which was an artifact of how she spent her time and developed expertise. Overall,
Novara's style of management stifled collective efficacy as her actions
underscored her lack of faith in teacher capability. If the principal believed that
her teachers were able, she would give them autonomy to run committees,
exercise their professional discretion about student management, and work to
build the knowledge and skills of all teachers. Unfortunately, the principal's
actions sent a very clear message to teachers about their lack of capability,
undermining collective efficacy.

Almost ironic, given the perception that the principal was a micromanager, was the delegation of authority around instruction to her coaching staff. Rather than monitor instruction herself, Principal Novara abdicated herself of the most important aspect of schooling – teaching and learning.

Coaches. In figure 7.1 the principal directly supervised the work of both coaches. The principal divided their responsibilities evenly, as each coach is depicted as overseeing activity in three grade levels: one focused on grades K-2 while the other worked with grades 3-5. The principal was responsible for sculpting the coaches' work, requiring them to primarily work with low-functioning teachers. To this end, figure 7.1 delineates a red arrow to the grade levels which required the most attention due to ineffective teaching – first and fifth grade. Both coaches spent extensive time with struggling teachers at these particular grade levels. Given limited time and autonomy, the coaches served classrooms and grades inequitably due to Principal Novara's directive of primarily supporting struggling teachers; therefore, the coaches' expertise primarily was utilized by a few teachers. Impinging on the coaches' time were additional administrative responsibilities thrust upon the coaches apart from managing classroom instruction, which is not depicted in figure 7.1.

Teachers. Figure 7.1 portrays the 24 classrooms which are represented by a distinct triangle. Each Meadows grade level is encapsulated by a circle, illustrating communication within grade levels, but little communication across grade levels. Despite high levels of communication within grade levels, the triangles are depicted in disarray. Such misalignment stemmed from a lack of

coordination across classrooms in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The Meadows PLC time was set aside for grade level meetings, although the purpose of these meetings aside from fostering communication was not apparent. There was little evidence of teachers observing one another, learning from one another's practice, nor solving problems of practice. Though Meadows teachers were friends, these friendships did not necessarily facilitate work on instructional improvement through observation of one another, or through sustained coaching.

This insinuates that teachers with strong relationships, by their own accord, may not interact with one another in the most productive ways for a PLC to thrive. Instead, teachers may require institutional support and scaffolding to establish and maintain a productive PLC. A vision for a PLC was never communicated to me – apart from Principal Novara describing PLC as a time for grade levels to meet. The lack of cross grade level meetings did not enhance the interdependent nature of teachers' work. While each teacher might understand her role, there was not the careful attention paid to the structure of her work, and how each person contributed to ensuring a seamless curriculum and uniform student access to said curriculum. Key to a thriving PLC is learning from practice and taking action based on such learning. Such a cycle of instructional improvement was not evident in the Meadows structure.

Collective efficacy could certainly be augmented by such a structure. The PLC at Meadows was hindered, in part, by the actions of the coaches. As proposed in chapter six, collective efficacy is informed by teachers' beliefs about their students, their responsibility to students, and teachers' view point of their

own capability. The coaches' role in the PLC did not extend the capability of all teachers, as it was targeted only towards those who struggled.   Rather than the coaches enhancing the knowledge and skills of all teachers, such resources were relegated to ineffective teachers. This left more effective teachers frustrated by the lack of support they received. Given that not all teachers were coached on a regular basis, such a lack of support might not facilitate their ability to serve all students well.

In great contrast to the floundering PLC at Meadows, the next chapter examines a more prosperous PLC at Barcliff.

Chapter 8

The Organization of Barcliff Teachers' Work

You have to work hard, really hard. You have to have a willingness for change. Because, we are constantly going in and asking them [teachers] to think about things in a different way. How could we do this better? You know, in our state visit – we got the report back and it said nothing to work on. And Ms. Fakouri and I were upset – and we said something to them [state auditors]. They said, "But you are a model[57] school – why are you upset?" The reason we were upset is because we want the next step to work on? What is our next step? We are doing all of these things well but nobody's perfect. So what is our next step? They sent us a new report for a couple of suggestions of things that we can work on.

[Barcliff coach]

Above, the coach described what it took to be a good Barcliff teacher.

The emphasis on hard work and openness to change were the key elements

identified. Yet her statement also signaled something larger than hard work; her

words captured the essence of Barcliff – a culture of constant improvement.

Though the state department did not find fault in their visit, the Barcliff leadership

wanted suggestions for improvement. This illustrated the administration's

commitment to learning. While explicitly not stated above, Barcliff teachers held

the belief that with improved adult learning, enhanced student learning would

follow.

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[57] According to Barcliff's website the school has been selected one of the top five schools in Michigan as a high performing school in spite of all the challenges.

In an effort to learn more about such engagement, in this chapter I describe the PLC at Barcliff. This chapter mirrors the structure of chapter seven; I posit that the way that teachers' work was organized and the ways in which teachers were supported to do their work was potentially related to levels of collective efficacy. I propose that Barcliff, which was selected for study due to its above average collective efficacy and strong student achievement, had a thriving PLC. Not only were elements of the PLC in place at Barcliff but the true purpose of a PLC was carried out. There is evidence that teachers had strong relationships with one another and had their work structured so they were enabled to meet collaboratively. However teachers were often observing one another, learning from such observations, and planning instruction based upon such learning. Enhancing the Barcliff PLC was the unity between the principal and the staff. As documented in chapter six, the Barcliff principal had high regard for the families and students served. These beliefs were mirrored by the teaching staff – students were seen as individuals with valuable prior knowledge and skills upon which to build. Further, I propose that the principal's role as an "instructional leader" and subsequent decisions about school organizational structure and instructional improvement built the capacity of the staff and contributed to high levels of collective efficacy. The Barcliff principal carefully created architecture to support instruction, such that the school operated efficiently. Teachers understood the interdependency of their work and the school leadership had strong involvement with the technical core – teaching and learning. In this

chapter I will discuss the relational aspects of PLC and how teachers' work was

organized at Barcliff.

8.1 Relational Aspects of PLC

As established in the previous chapter, PLCs are a relatively new

perspective on professional development. While there is no agreed upon

definition of PLC, it generally refers to teachers sharing and critically

interrogating practice in an ongoing, reflective, and collaborative way (Mitchell &

Sackney, 2000; Toole & Louis, 2002). In this section, I will begin by discussing

the philosophy behind PLCs and providing a description of the relational aspects

of the Barcliff community.

Essential to a PLC is the belief that teachers' skills can be extended. The

assumption is that teachers are capable learners and that they can learn from one

another through peer guidance, coaching, meetings and other supports. In

Barcliff's PLC, teachers critically reflected upon practice and teacher learning

guided such practice. The Barcliff coach elaborated on this point,

> When they [teachers] are lacking in skills we try to provide them. Part of
> my job – that's why I don't have a typical day. Some teachers need a lot
> more modeling than other teachers. Some may need a lot of help in
> teaching guided reading. Some may need to know how to teach the whole
> group effectively. Some may need help in how to do writing or do rubrics
> or assessment. So it's different every time I go into a classroom. When I
> worked in second grade, my last rotation, one teacher I was working with
> her on how to do whole group. She switched grade levels and she was not
> sure how to effectively teach the whole group with a new curriculum –
> everything. So I went in there are did that for several weeks. The other
> teacher has been in that grade level for a long time. What she wanted me
> to do was small groups of interventions and appropriate ways to intervene
> with kids in specific skill areas that they needed. Every teacher has their
> strong and their weak points. Even me.
>
> <div align="right">[Barcliff coach]</div>

The coach's comments illustrated her belief in her ability to work with teachers to improve their instruction. Highlighted in her response was that teachers' needed different guidance. Similar to a teacher individualizing her instruction for students, the coach needed to differentiate her coaching strategies and content based upon teachers' needs. The coach also said "what she wanted me to do was small groups of interventions…" Implied in this statement, was that coaching was in part determined by the teacher. In other words, teachers were in control of their own professional learning and were reflexive about their practice, an attribute that was not exemplified at Meadows. The coach also pointed out that all teachers had strengths and weaknesses, and she included herself in such a statement. This illustrates her belief that all teachers have potential for growth and improvement which is consistent with the idea of constant learning as an essential piece of a PLC.

As another demonstration of the commitment to constant learning, Barcliff's staff was involved with an optional professional development with a local university. During the week I observed at Barcliff, I attended a professional development session with the teachers (Field Notes, 5/12/10). The specific work in which they engaged was around making language more comprehensible for ELLs.[58] Teachers scaffolded their students' learning with very specific techniques to deconstruct language and extract meaning from text. For example, a first grade focus was studying "doing words" (or verbs) which described characters' actions. Teachers might create lists of "doing words" with their

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[58] For the sake of anonymity, I will not mention the researcher's name, university, or instructional technique.

students and analyze how such words functioned in text, how to identify them, and more. The coach explained the skills Barcliff teachers developed through this optional work,

> Like with [researcher's] work, I have three teachers in the building that have been trained on it for two years. Oh my gosh the stuff they can do in their classrooms is far and above things that I used to do because I never had this kind of training to think about text in this way. But when I go in and model I can sure do it now. Being open to that, being able to do that – a lot of teachers, or I know a lot of teachers in other buildings who didn't want to do that. Mine really, luckily really embraced that. At first they were like, "they can't do this, they are too young, they can't really analyze text this way." I was with them thinking "maybe they can't" but saying "yes they can!" I'm their cheerleader and then we went in and found out yes they could. This year we are trying it with first [grade], and its working so...
>
> <div align="right">[Barcliff coach]</div>

The coach was impressed by the increased skills that her teachers gained through participation in the research study. Though the coach attributed the teachers' commitment to the project to luck, it is likely not as serendipitous as she proclaimed. Barcliff had a culture that was committed to constant learning and teachers' evolving their practice. As an indicator of collective efficacy, the literacy coach revealed in her comments that she was unsure if the first grade students would be able to understand the concepts teachers learned through this research – but irrespective of doubts – she pushed her teachers to try. First grade teachers were enabled to participate in the professional development provided to Barcliff, and through their attendance, teachers figured out how to transform research-based knowledge into usable strategies for their students. Though the coach admitted she was skeptical of young students working with such strategies, she kept cheering on her teachers – providing teachers with verbal persuasion and

mastery experience (both sources of collective efficacy).   The teachers assisted their students in finding success with the strategies, and I had the privilege to read some of the first grade writing that came from this project.[59]

Indeed the coach also mentioned that her teachers embraced this opportunity to learn whereas other local schools were not as open. This engagement was an indicator of Barcliff's collective efficacy. Nearly all ten teachers who participated in the professional development session asked questions of the facilitator, shared their students' work or in some other way participated in front of their peers. In addition, when I was walking into the session, I had a chance to speak with at teacher from a neighboring school.   When I told her I was doing research at Barcliff she remarked, "they are really into it [professional development]" (Field Notes, 5/12/10). This small interaction illustrated to me the perception that outsiders had of Barcliff's engagement in such work.

8.1.1 Teacher-Teacher Relationships

As described in chapter seven, strong teacher relationships is an essential piece of a productive PLC. However, high quality connections are merely one component of a flourishing PLC. For example, Meadows teachers maintained close friendships but they did not necessarily have a thriving PLC.   However, collegial relationships characterized by respect and trust are essential and foundational to a successful PLC. Teachers suggested that the Barcliff staff did

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[59] I was unable to obtain copies of student work. However, even children that were considered low achieving were able to write a complete paragraph at the end of first grade – which is on grade level according to the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations. For more information see http://michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-28753_33232---,00.html

not have cliques and teachers got along well with one another, as illustrated by the

comments below.

> The staff is great, they're very close with the children. So in the beginning, it's a little intimidating, obviously—just moving to a school in the middle of the year. But everyone was very helpful, extra helpful, going out of their way to be helpful. Very welcoming, they have given me...anything that I wanted to do they've let me try, materials I needed they've gotten for me… And everyone gets along here pretty well. It's not like some of the schools I know, where you've got this clique, this clique, and this clique, but it's not like that. Everyone's just friends with everybody, and if I needed something from one of the fifth grade teachers, they'd be more than willing to help me, so, it's a great school.
>
> [Ms. Litz, Barcliff teacher]

> Serena: That's great. I wonder also, how would you characterize the relationships between the teachers at this school?
> Saba: Pretty good overall. Yeah... I know a lot of them kind of see each other outside of the school as well. Some of them have very personal relationships or friendships that extend beyond the work place. But you know, when we are together as a group, we still have that mutual respect for each other if not more.
>
> [Ms. Saba, Barcliff teacher]

> You know what – Barcliff is very unique. I mean I've been in two buildings in the Springfield District but I've been in other buildings as you know, I was a sub…it's a very special place –we're like a family here. We all like treat each other with respect, you know…People will get into little arguments now and then, but they always seem to be easy to be resolved. We kind of back each other up. Some staffs they tend to – like they'll separate into cliques in some buildings and we don't have that here. We don't have that at all. It's really a nice place to work.
>
> [Ms. Mitchell, Barcliff teacher]

> First of all, I think that there is a culture among the staff of cooperation and helpfulness. It's not, "I'm going to close my door and keep all the secrets to myself" which is what you will find in some schools. If something is working for me, "well I'm not going to share with anybody" is the attitude that sometimes you see. I think there is a lot of collaboration and helpfulness among the staff. If you go in the teachers' lounge and you say "Man, I'm having a hard time with student xyz" they'll say "Oh – I had him last year, here is what I tried, this is what worked, this didn't work."
>
> [Ms. Harris, Barcliff teacher]

Illustrated through such commentary were teachers' perceptions of a helpful and collaborative environment. Ms. Litz was new to the building the second semester. Her perspective was particularly interesting as she had experience at several other Springfield schools as a substitute, and she was able to compare and contrast the Barcliff culture to other schools. Litz also had the experience of recently experiencing the Barcliff culture as an outsider and may have actively thought about such issues as compared to the other interviewees. Clear in Ms. Litz's description is how Barcliff teachers welcomed her into the community and provided mentorship.

Harris, Saba, and Mitchell also provided evidence that of the mutual trust and respect that the staff had for one another. Though it did not appear that all teachers had relationships that extended beyond school, what mattered most was the ability to have productive relationships within school. Meadows and Barcliff were similar places in terms of teachers having fruitful relationships with one another. However, I might point out that it appeared there were more personal and out of school relationships present at Meadows as compared to Barcliff. The evidence suggests that Barcliff teachers' leveraged their relationships for learning and instruction, as the relational aspect of their PLC was utilized toward professional growth and building a culture of academic emphasis (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993).

8.1.2 Principal's Management of Teachers

Like Principal Novara, Principal Fakouri played a critical role at Barcliff managing facility operations, management of personnel (teachers, staff, and students), and the facilitation of relationships with interested parties outside of the school (families, local businesses and organizations). Traditionally, principals are responsible for the budget, maintaining supplies, and making sure that the "nuts and bolts" are in place. However, Ms. Fakouri's role evolved post NCLB. As she explained, merely having a functioning school was not enough; she needed to take action to promote student learning.

> It's management, like I said before the principals' job used to be just building management you didn't do too much with instruction because there wasn't such a high demand before No Child Left Behind and MEAP. Now I go to the classrooms, I see what's going on, I talk about instruction and student data.
>
> [Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

Indeed, the Barcliff principal not only believed in this evolved role, she lived it. Though principals traditionally work in their office attending to the budget and human resources, the Barcliff principal departed from this model. Ms. Fakouri structured leadership roles around instruction. Unlike Ms. Novara, Ms. Fakouri referred to herself as an instructional leader – in her words,

> I call myself an instructional leader because I do attend to the needs of the teachers, monitor instruction. I keep myself updated as much as possible on the latest research that effects…how kids learn best, and how to accelerate students' reading. Literacy is really the bulk of what [I do] – literacy and numeracy.
>
> [Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

Indeed, Fakouri made it a point to observe classrooms daily. It was her goal to see each of her teachers twice weekly – she arranged her own work to have a

197

strong understanding of instruction in her building. The principal described how she structured these observations.

> Fakouri: Sometimes if I go around and they [teachers] have an issue, they step out into the hallway and talk to me, immediate feedback. Sometimes they do it via email. I do take the time, I try at least to take the time as much as possible to visit the classrooms, meaning sitting in or walking through so I'm monitoring instruction. Do the kids seem to know what they are doing? Does the teacher – you can tell if the teacher has planned well for the day, well prepared for the day. You can tell if the kids are engaged, what is going on in the classroom and sometimes indirectly, I try to be very polite about it. I'm not there to be punitive but I am here to evaluate you and tell you if you are doing a good job. I try to talk to the kids, and see what's going on. Kids like that, that type of engagement. They like to show me their work, they want to show off their work, they want to read to me sometimes. So it's a small building, its do-able. In bigger buildings I'm sure it's very challenging for principals to do that, I can do it a couple times a week if I'm lucky.
> Serena: You can get to everybody a couple times?
> Fakouri: Oh definitely, a couple times a week. I shouldn't say if I'm lucky. A couple times a week should be the case. If I don't do it twice a week than I'm behind because I plan for doing it at least twice a week.
>
> [Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

Though the building was small, key here was that the principal organized her work such that instruction was at the center of her daily routine. Barcliff had 12 classroom teachers, and the principal's goal was to visit each classroom at least twice a week. In this way, Principal Fakouri understood the nature of instruction her teachers provided to students, which better equipped her to support teachers' professional growth.

8.1.3 Principal's Management of Students

One of many reasons why teachers turn to their principal is for discipline reinforcement with students. Interestingly, unlike Meadows, this issue was rarely discussed during teacher interviews at Barcliff. The principal recognized her important role relative to the management of students and while talking about her multitude of responsibilities. In her words,

> Respect for students and parents, that's expected. Even when parents are angry, even when students are misbehaving, yes we discipline and we have to be firm, but we always remind that we can still love and be firm and use positive reinforcement. I do sometimes have to resort to suspension for students, depending on what the problem is. I try not to, that's the last resort, we talk to the kids a lot. We give them a lot of opportunities, we take away privileges, the last resort would be to send them home. But that's a lesson to be learned to the parents, it changes the behavior, usually. Usually it does.
>
> [Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

Similar to Meadows, above everything else, respect for the students and families served at Barcliff was Ms. Fakouri's mantra. While there was no discussion of a formal policy around student discipline, the principal expected that the teachers handled most of their management issues within their classroom. The Barcliff principal explained how handling discipline internally maximized teacher authority.

> I don't end up with 20 kids in the office every minute waiting to see the principal because the minute you start sending kids to the office as a teacher you lose a lot of authority, you have to work with your kids as much as possible. If you have to, you have to, but you know what I'm saying, you don't make a habit of it. So teachers have I think, have good, they establish themselves well in the classroom. They've been doing it for a long time. Like I said most of them, I have one new teacher the rest are veteran teachers. Classroom management is not a problem, it's not an issue. They know how to handle discipline problems.
>
> [Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

The idea that classroom management was not painted as problematic was echoed by teachers and teacher leaders alike. As exhibited in chapter six, one of the coaches supported the principal's position in her interview by discussing the strong management skills teachers exhibited and the principals' high standards for behavior management. Unlike Meadows, discipline was not considered a controversial topic at Barcliff. However, it is essential to recognize that it was not because students were all perfectly behaved. As described by a coach, one of her responsibilities was to help new teachers with behavior management. In this way, teachers new to Barcliff were socialized into the norms around student behavior as soon as they joined the Barcliff PLC. For example, both a coach and the principal revealed that it was expected that teachers handle discipline in their classroom as opposed to sending a child to the office. The coach explained different ways to handle misbehavior such as changing voice tone, proximity, and redirection among other strategies. In part, this might have helped develop skills because new teachers were expected to handle management as soon as they began their position and they were quickly socialized into the Barcliff norms.

Any issues with student behavior did not disrupt teaching and learning at Barcliff as elaborated by Ms. Bahu in chapter six. This contrasts with Meadows where tension existed between the teachers and the principal regarding student discipline. In addition, at Barcliff management did not seem to be problematic whereas at Meadows several teachers struggled with managing their classrooms in productive ways.

8.2 Key Actors in Barcliff's Professional Learning Community

8.2.1 Coaches' Instructional Management

Ms. Fakouri employed two coaches to manage instruction across the grade

levels. Barcliff had three full time, specialist positions; one and a half coaches[60],

a half time resource teacher, and a full time interventionist. The principal

employed these individuals to build the professional capacity of her teachers.

However, she relied most strongly on the coach provided by Reading First. The

principal explained,

> My coach is…paid from a federal grant…her focus is professional
> development, coaching and supporting classrooms teachers. She's like my
> right hand when it comes to really strengthening teachers and giving them
> the power to do what they have to do. So through her, grade level
> meetings and the resource teacher also helps out. So I divide their
> responsibility. Coach is mainly for K-3 and the resource teacher works
> closely with fourth and fifth and I oversee the whole process.
>
> <div align="right">[Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]</div>

Salient in Ms. Fakouri's comments was that coaching was to develop all teachers

professionally at Barcliff. This is in contrast to Meadows where the coaching

staff was primarily used to intervene with ineffective teachers.

One Barcliff coach[61] was from the Reading First[62] program. She had

extensive training over the five years the program was instituted, not only in

scientifically-based reading instruction, but also in coaching, mentoring teachers

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[60]Though there are two and a half specialist positions, they were occupied by three different
people. One person was a full time coach, one person was a half-time coach and a half-time
resource teacher, one person was a half time interventionist and also taught a special.

[61]For the sake of anonymity, when I quote the coaches and their position is obvious through their
statements, I do not use their pseudonym. Because there were so few teacher leaders at Barcliff, I
do not want to jeopardize their identity in anyway.

[62]Reading First was a federal education program which was part of NCLB. Reading First focused
on utilizing proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. See
http://www2.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html for further information.

and presenting professional development. The coach explained the support she

received from Reading First,

> I had a lot of PD through Reading First. That year before I even started
> here, in the summer I was committed to going. I went that summer 11 full
> days training on just how to present PD, certain pieces of PD, what was
> good scientifically-based reading research, that sort of thing. It also
> helped that I taught in a Reading First school for three years prior. I know
> the expectations that we had to work with the five core components of
> reading – different things. This training really helped me. Then
> throughout the year, they pulled us, I'll say once a month for full day
> training in Lansing. That continued for the past four years. This year, no.
> But the past four years we've had training, extensive training. In how part
> of the training, that 11 days, was how to work with teachers.
>
> <div align="right">[Barcliff coach]</div>

The coach's main responsibilities were twofold: (1) she led professional

development meetings for teachers – grade level meetings, cross grade level

meetings, and staff meetings, (2) she modeled and observed instruction.

Coaching was a highly individualized process, as the coach molded her support to

teachers in whatever ways were most helpful.   The coach provided specific

examples of the work in which she engaged. Initially, Reading First required that

teachers were trained in the foundations of reading which was facilitated by the

coach. The foundational training was targeted toward all teachers; Barcliff also

included paraprofessionals in this training to bolster their skills. The coach

explained the training she offered to both her teachers and paraprofessionals,

> For Reading First, the first four years were required to do something
> called foundations training. So we had 11 of these books that we literally
> had to go through and train them. This was a three hour training session
> and it's on everything from fluency to comprehension, phonemic
> awareness. And, I actually bought books like this to do training with my
> para-pros. My para-pros love it. I'm just about through the last section of
> comprehension. It's a lot of theory and then a couple of activities…The
> first two years we did theory and for the new teachers we still did the
> theory. One's that have been here we do the activity based.

In this way, the coach was systematically working with teachers (and

paraprofessionals) to develop their content knowledge around reading – making

sure that all teachers understood how children learn to read and write,

understanding how to assess children, pinpoint their individual needs, as well as

providing interventional support inside and outside of the classroom. Her actions

were building the capacity of the entire staff and providing a base of shared

knowledge.

However, a substantial part of the work that the Reading First coach

engaged in was individualized professional development. The coach explained

some work she did with a Barcliff teacher,

> There will be days where I go and observe and then I give them
> suggestions, and I have to give them both positive and we never call it
> negative – we say suggestions I have for you. Maybe you are correcting
> the children too many times. One teacher last week, I told her, in a five
> minute period, I counted you – disciplined 10 times. What do you think
> happened to the flow of your lesson? She came to the realization that she
> didn't realize I did that, and you are right the flow of my lesson was
> getting lost. The second time I observed, her – WOW. It was a flip
> around. She was more cognizant and disciplining only those behaviors
> that were really serious. You know, if a kid is getting up and running
> around, obviously you got to stop them. If a kid takes two kleenexes [sic]
> instead of one, you don't really need to stop your lesson.
>
> [Barcliff coach]

A key part of this work was the debriefing. In order to have honest, frank, and

sometimes difficult conversations with teachers, the coach had to work very hard

on rapport. Here she remarked,

> So it was like a co-teaching thing, we were learning together. Which I like
> that. And I like that when we are done, we can talk about – and I'll say
> "what went well? Ok what didn't go well." We have enough rapport now

where they can say, "well I think you gave them too long to work on this."
"Yeah, maybe I did. How long did you give them, did you notice?"
"Well five minutes?" "What do you think would have been better?"
"Maybe three?" Many times I try to goof up with something during the
lesson. Nothing that would impact the kids so – something so they can
say you should have done this or you should have done that… Because
that has helped us have some rapport because when I was first doing this
"It's great – everything you do is great, great, great." Well that's not what
I want to hear. I want us to have good dialogue on what would help the
students.

[Barcliff coach]

Essential to a productive coach/mentee relationship is open communication. The

Barcliff coach worked very hard for her teachers to see her as a human who made

mistakes. This allowed the teachers the opportunity to provide constructive

feedback to the coach. This in turn, enabled the coach to provide constructive

feedback to her teachers. The Barcliff PLC was characterized by such open

communication and eagerness to constantly improve classroom instruction.

Teachers felt supported by the coach. One strong example was Ms. Litz, a

teacher new to Barcliff due to the financial crisis in Springfield and the shuffling

of positions. Ms. Litz described the support she received from the coach,

[Coach is] a life-saver…Anything I don't understand, "Should I do this or
should I do this?" she is like right there. When I started centers in my
room...in the morning we do reading groups and two of the groups go to
centers, she was like totally, "here are some resources for you." And she
came in the room for a good week or two, just to observe and make sure
that they were using the centers correctly. So I wasn't at my reading group
and getting up. So she was so supportive, took her time to help me to
settled and get everything set up in the room. I love her! She's great! A
great support and she's got tons of materials and resources and ideas. I
can't say enough good things about her.

[Ms. Litz, Barcliff teacher]

8.2.2 Principal's Instructional Management

Not only were coaches instrumental in instructional management,

Principal Fakouri was very involved with instruction. This is in contrast to

instructional management at Meadows where the coaches and specialists assumed

responsibility for instructional improvement and Principal Novara attended to

other issues.

Ms. Fakouri engaged in a key instructional routine with her teachers.

Quarterly, she met with each teacher individually to provide professional support

to teachers. This meeting was called "instructional dialogue" as explained by the

principal,

> What I try to do is at least four times a year, spread throughout the year, I
> meet with teachers one on one. Where we talk about students mainly,
> their professional needs, so I get an idea from walk throughs maybe I
> make sure that this teacher gets more professional development in
> classroom management or whatever. So I identify an area for that teacher,
> so I try to work with the coach to see how we can provide that extra
> support for her.
>
> [Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

In addition to providing necessary support to teachers, another purpose of the

meeting was to closely monitor student progress. Ms. Mitchell explained,

> Ms. Fakouri has instructional dialogues with us and we have to give our
> data and we go over it and we identify who the kids are that are struggling.
> We put them in intervention groups and we have some intervention
> teachers that are, that are working in groups of three or less kids – and
> they are focusing on what their needs are.
>
> [Ms. Mitchell, Barcliff teacher]

A primary purpose of instructional dialogue was to make sure students did not fall

through the cracks and received necessary support. Early intervention was a

critical component of the model. Instructional dialogue was an important part of

the principal's practice and was well-received by teachers. Here Ms. Mansour shared her opinion of the routine,

> I love her instructional dialogue. She always gives you a chance to meet with her individually – so you can share concerns to share anything, any achievement, anything you are proud of, anything you are afraid of, anything.
>
> [Ms. Mansour, Barcliff teacher]

A secondary purpose of instructional dialogue was for teachers' professional development. During my week of observation, I had the opportunity to witness an instructional dialogue with Ms. Barker. Ms. Fakouri maintained a binder of student data. I noticed that each classroom had a separate tab with individual student data and anecdotal notes for academic subjects. The principal flagged particular children she had concerns about, in order to learn from the teacher what specific interventions were put into place for any struggling child. In this way, Ms. Fakouri was not only personally monitoring student progress but also ensuring that teachers were delivering necessary services to accelerate learning for those that struggled. Principal Fakouri made her teachers accountable. Here is an excerpt from my field notes:

May 20, 2010 – 9:55 am

I walked into the principal's office with Ms. Barker – a veteran kindergarten teacher. Both Ms. Barker and Principal Fakouri brought binders to this meeting. The principal opened her monitoring book, I noticed 12 tabs – one for each classroom. The principal looked at Barker's class and she noted the four reading groups. Fakouri asked "Is anyone struggling? Do you recommend anyone for retention?" Barker recommended one student (Fadi) who was new to Barcliff for services but said that all others were on benchmark which was DRA level three.

Principal Fakouri asked, "What level are they reading?" Barker showed her that on PM level books she had four groups: four, six, eight, and nine.[63]

Ms. Fakouri asked about students that Ms. Barker had previously identified for intervention. Ms. Barker no longer thought they needed attention. The principal asked if Ms. Barker recommended anyone for summer school. Fakouri mentioned that Barcliff did not have the resources to send all children to summer school, and wanted to make sure that families were informed about all the possibilities for summer support that existed in the Springfield community.

Ms. Barker and the principal continued to talk about Fadi as a candidate for summer school. Ms. Barker mentioned that Fadi's older brother, Rami, was struggling and the family was approached by Rami's teacher for summer school services. Ms. Barker explained that it would make it more likely that Fadi could obtain services. Principal Fakouri asked if there were other students Ms. Barker would recommend for summer school – and Ms. Barker did not have additional suggestions.

The principal asked if there were any students that needed to be separated in first grade. She told Ms. Barker to specify that on the cards[64] they were assembling in the staff meeting that afternoon to group students for next year.

Principal Fakouri asked Ms. Barker if she had "writing samples for the fourth group?" Ms. Barker demonstrated student growth with samples of writing from two different time points. The principal looked at the samples as Ms. Barker highlighted a particular student. Ms. Barker said, "I thought she might qualify for special education, but she got benchmark." The principal responded, "She has lots of sounds. Are you concerned?" Ms. Barker responded that she had talked to parents. Fakouri encouraged Barker to continue putting pressure on family and to recommend retention if she was low. The principal then asked about Raja. Ms. Barker remarked that he was a "wonderful" student. Though he was born premature and was developmentally behind, he was able to read and write. Ms. Barker pointed out that all the "low low" students had moved up. The principal continued looking at student work and commented that a student had periods, capitals, and spaces between words. Fakouri said, "She is going to do fine."
The principal asked if there were any other issues with language. Then she asked if anyone was struggling in math. Ms. Barker responded that there were four or five that were not doing too well. The principal asked if they needed summer support because the next parent meeting was devoted to locating summer support

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[63] It was unclear to me how the PM Dawn leveled books corresponded to the DRA assessment.
[64] At Barcliff, each child was represented by a data note card for the purpose of creating class lists for the following year. The cards contained academic and social information about each Barcliff student in order to make the classrooms as balanced as possible between males, females, test scores, behavior and the like (Field Notes, 5/20/10).

in the community. Given this, she wanted to ensure that Ms. Barker would make sure that the families of struggling learners would come. Ms. Barker mentioned that one family was moving, Ms. Fakouri responded, "even if they are moving they should attend."

After talking about the progress of students, the conversation shifted to talk about Ms. Barker's professional development. The principal asked "are you interested in summer PD?" Ms. Barker mentioned that she was not eligible for a professional development program that other Barcliff teachers were attending because it was for grades one through three. The principal said, "if you are interested you should be able to attend. First through third is the priority, but I'll talk to the literacy coach."

The principal wanted Ms. Barker to begin providing professional development to others, "I think you'd be really great at that." Ms. Barker mentioned that she did a presentation at the local preschool but had not received any feedback. The principal said she'd look into it to make Ms. Barker would receive feedback.

They returned to discuss instruction. Principal Fakouri inquired, "who is working with the lowest readers?" Ms. Barker responded that she was. The principal asked if students were getting a "double dose."[65] Barker said she was working with the highest and the lowest. The parapros were working with the two middle groups. Fakouri brought up a new strategy they were using next year to organize reading, the daily five, which is not teacher reliant. The principal mentioned that this approach did not have structured centers, but rather was a time for practicing literacy skills. Students were supposed to read to themselves at a center, at another they might write. The principal continued by saying that the Barcliff model was working well and the MEAP data were good, but it was important to take advantage of other learning opportunities. Ms. Barker knew someone who had taught with the daily five and thought it was quite a successful approach.

Finally, they talked about kindergarten round up (which took place later that day). They were expecting about 30 children to be split between the two kindergarten classrooms. The principal asked what the plan was, Ms. Barker responded that each preschool child would be paired with two kindergartners; the current kindergarteners would orient new students to the classroom by showing the incoming students the different areas of the classroom. Then all students would have free choice, and the current kindergartners would work with the students they escorted. Ms. Barker remarked, "I thought it would be nice for them to get simple books, or literacy bags." The principal suggested there were extra supplies in the office cabinet, and to see if there was something that could

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[65] One strategy that Barcliff used for the lowest readers was to make sure they read with a teacher twice a day, as opposed to once.

work. Ms. Barker located crayons and books for each child. Ms. Barker left with the supplies to begin her reading groups and prepare for kindergarten round up.

Perhaps the most important part of this interaction was the emphasis on teacher accountability. Principal Fakouri was very organized and knew about every child's performance. Through the principal's close monitoring of student growth and intervention, teachers were held responsible for student performance. Teachers had to answer to the principal if children were not making progress, but in addition, unlike Principal Novara, Principal Fakouri provided support to teachers personally – as she had accrued a wealth of knowledge from her own experience, staying up-to-date with research – as well as utilizing the resources of coaching and intervention. The fact that the principal was closely monitored student growth required teachers to not only deliver services but take responsibility for student progress.

In addition to ensuring that teachers were held accountable, Principal Fakouri made sure that families had access to educational resources. During instructional dialogue, Ms. Barker mentioned that one of her students was moving, implying that the child should not be sent to summer school. However, the principal did not buy into that logic. Instead, Principal Fakouri made it clear that Barcliff teachers worked with all students irrespective of circumstance.

Instructional dialogue was also an opportunity for the principal to make sure that each teacher was continuing to grow and develop professionally. Principal Fakouri wanted to ensure that teachers were keeping up with professional development over the summer and pushing each to continue to learn. The instructional dialogue with Ms. Barker illustrated that the principal wanted to

push the teacher towards another step in her professional growth: presenting to others. Fakouri also wanted to make sure that the experience was helpful to Ms. Barker, as illustrated by making sure Ms. Barker received feedback about her presentation.

Teachers really appreciated the opportunity to discuss their instruction with their principal and felt that she was a tremendous resource for their work. As explained by Ms. Harris,

> Harris: Principal Fakouri would never ask us to do anything that she's not already doing herself. And I think you have to respect a leader who leads like that. And I think that's why she gets such great performance from her teachers, because we know, if she's asking us to do it, she's already doing it, or she will do it.
> Serena: Can you give me an example?
> Harris: As far as, maybe monitoring students – she asks us to keep a book of students who struggle, what are we doing to help them, what particular things have we tried? What's our success rate? Well if you she would have one about this thick, of every student in this building who she's worried about. And she would have anecdotal notes in there about what the teachers are doing, what kinds of meetings we had about the student. So, she's doing it. It's not just something that she gives lip service to. Everybody should do this, no – she's doing it as well.
>   [Ms. Harris, Barcliff teacher]

This supported the idea that progress monitoring was something that was expected of all staff members. In sum, Principal Fakouri's management style was well received as teachers felt that she was a strong, organized leader who led through example. She was committed to teaching and learning and insured that both students and teachers received the proper supports to thrive. The Barcliff principal was particularly successful at utilizing resources, as she also relied on coaches to build the capacity of her teaching staff.

As demonstrated in this section, both the coaches and the principal

provided support to teachers. The coach facilitated communication within and

across grade levels. Her role was crucial to the professional community

established in the school as described below. The principal put instruction in the

center of her practice and was viewed as a resource by her teachers. This is in

comparison to Meadows which had a much weaker PLC due to the emphasis on

triage instead of systematically improving teacher learning. In the next section, I

discuss teachers' work within the PLC including planning, curriculum, and use of

data.

8.3 Barcliff Teachers' Work in the PLC

8.3.1 Horizontal & Vertical Planning and Communication

Part of a PLC is teacher communication and collaboration around

instruction. At Barcliff there were structures built into the regular schedule that

granted teachers the opportunity to work together. The principal explained the

time she allotted for collaboration,

> I provide the time for teachers to work together on a monthly basis. In
> those meetings I could be involved but not necessarily, I could be involved
> indirectly. I see that we need to pay more attention to social studies so
> could you please meet to do the following, they [teachers] also contribute
> to the agenda. But mandatory through the coach they have to meet with
> the coach on a weekly basis...Grade level meetings I could attend them, I
> do attend some of them but not all of them. I try to attend some…But the
> topics, you know what goes on at those grade level meetings, they do have
> to turn in agendas and topics so there is accountability, even if I'm not
> attending, I know what is going on.
>
> <div align="right">[Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]</div>

Teachers were given time work together in grade level teams and across grade levels to discuss student data, instruction or whatever was necessary. While the principal would contribute to the meeting, she made sure teachers were accountable through the use of agendas. The grade level teams met alongside the coach so there was additional expertise available.

Unlike Meadows, also included in the Barcliff PLC structure was time for vertical planning. There was time allotted for such planning during the school day as explained by Ms. Bahu,

> I was telling you about PLC model – professional learning community. And I think it just - this is some sort of a grant that pays for substitutes. This morning the first, second, and third grade teachers, usually do a lot of this with the lower el because with the lower el, the high needs and the dependency of kids on [the teacher] is much greater, so is the need for communicating between sending and receiving teacher. Like the first grade teacher want to hear from the second grade teacher what she expects from her kids. Ok and so on, and so forth the second with the third and then they share these concerns. So that's why they call it professional learning communities. They sat this morning together, it's part of professional development, but it's becoming more domestic… Before they looked at professional development, its sending teachers to a seminar where they – 500 teachers and sit and listen to someone.
>
> <div align="right">[Ms. Bahu, Barcliff teacher]</div>

As illustrated in these comments, communication across grade levels was essential for teachers to understand fully what happened in the grade level prior to theirs and what they need to do to prepare their students for the following grade level. Ms. Bahu highlighted the essence of a PLC, calling it more domestic. Implied by this statement, is that teachers learn from one another rather than participate in lecture-style professional development where they "sit and listen to someone."

Ms. Fakouri indicated that cross-grade level planning also occurred at the regular staff meetings.

> If I, if we have a staff meeting, of course I facilitate that meeting, it's done twice a month – every second and fourth Monday of each month. Those are for about an hour. They could be grade level meetings or cross grade level meetings, as I said most of them are also professional development…
>
> [Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

Rather than use staff meetings to discuss logistics and upcoming events, the time was dedicated for staff development. Indeed, I had the opportunity to attend such a meeting and teachers were sharing about appropriate and inappropriate uses of running records (Field Notes, 12/14/09). Below the coach explained how she approached professional development during staff meetings.

> What I like to do in my PDs is give them time at the end to actually do something. If we are doing work stations, one of the things was, one of the things I gave them recently a planning sheet, I gave them a worksheet – here are the five core components – check it off. What is your learning objective? What materials are you going to need, what is your accountability measure, what are some things to consider? So plan out a work station and then I'm expecting in the next week, I'll come into your room and I'm going to see it implemented. I'll set up at the beginning – I'll give them an hour sometimes I'll give them an hour and a half. It just depends how much time we have. I'll say, at the end of this, this is what I'm expecting. Then when we come in the classrooms, we are expecting to see this. So they know the expectation is there. So usually, they work very hard and I stay with them. Its funny, we usually work in the media center and they call me...because they want my input on how to do different things.
>
> [Barcliff coach]

The evidence here illustrated the Barcliff teachers had a variety of communication avenues available to them to collaborate with their grade level partners, and to talk with those outside of their grade levels. Also clear is that Barcliff teachers were accountable for the content of their meetings as this

213

principal either attended or looked at the agenda. A key topic discussed in such

meetings was the curriculum.

8.3.2 Barcliff Literacy Curriculum

As noted in chapter seven, Springfield School District did not specify a

particular elementary literacy program across schools. Instead, schools had the

flexibility to choose a curriculum. Barcliff elected to be part of Reading First

where they had the chose a scientifically-based literacy program. The coach some

of the program requirements explained,

> Reading First grant, so there is certain obligations and things that I have to
> make sure are done here. So we have a 90 minute uninterrupted reading
> block, for everybody kindergarten through third. So my main job is to
> work with kindergarten through third grade teachers. The past two years I
> have been doing PD with fourth and fifth as well and trying to...
> Mornings I'm really committed to being in K-3 classrooms. Afternoons, I
> have a little bit of flexibility so I can do some PD with the fourth and fifth
> grade teachers and do some meetings and things with them. So one of my
> responsibilities is to have a weekly grade level meeting with each grade
> level. So I have kindergarten, we'll do it before school one day a week.
> First through third they do it during a joint prep during the week and it's a
> half an hour to 40 minutes. And we just talk about, mainly this year our
> focus has been on interventions and how to help those struggling students.
> But we also do PD and some things like that when we do grade level
> meetings. Yesterday, I am responsible for doing a large majority of the
> staff meetings as well, so yesterday I did the staff meeting on how to do an
> effective reading block without parapro support because we are losing
> some of our parapros and having larger class size and things like that.
> [Barcliff coach]

Certainly coaching was one component of Reading First, but also included in the

program was the 90 minute literacy block where teachers utilized scientifically

based curriculum. The Barcliff coach illustrated in her comments how she used

grade level meeting time with teachers. She made such meetings relevant by

learning about issues with which teachers struggled and provided opportunities to

214

improve practice around such issues. As an example Barcliff teachers, like teachers across the state of Michigan, were dealing with large class size due to budget cuts. Rather than griping about such a change, the coach led a meeting to help the teachers determine how to productively conduct reading groups without the support of a paraprofessional.

As explained by the first grade teacher and principal below, some of the curricula that were state-approved for Reading First were heavily scripted. One could view this as impinging upon teacher autonomy or providing consistency across classrooms. In some districts and schools teachers were mandated to follow the script verbatim. This was not the case at Barcliff. Teachers were encouraged to supplement and make sure that lessons fit the needs of their students illustrating the principal's belief in the professional judgment of her staff.

> Serena: Do you think that your colleagues would agree that a good teacher is one that is listening and is not one who is reading a script and that sort of thing?
> Mitchell: Definitely.
> Serena: I wonder how you make sense of that in relation to the fact – if you're a Reading First school – aren't a lot of those curriculums heavily scripted?
> Mitchell: Our manuals – if you read verbatim, you can survive. You can, you know. But half the time I'm looking at what's in my manual and I'm saying – what? I'm always making notes in there and changing it or I might just get an idea and do my own lesson based on what it said.
> Serena: I see.
> Mitchell: We use the Houghton Mifflin program, and I wouldn't say it's scripted – but it does put in italics what you are supposed to say. And I don't follow that verbatim.
> Serena: Ok. Are people encouraged to follow that verbatim?
> Mitchell: No. Not here.
> [Ms. Mitchell, Barcliff teacher]

> We follow the state's guidelines in terms of grade level expectations. I make sure that the teachers are sticking to a curriculum that is approved by

the district. We supplement a lot. We want to make sure we are not basing our instruction on the text books. I provide time for the teachers to look at the texts that they have, look at the grade level expectations by the state, and try to align our curriculum to those GLCEs. And if we are missing any resources, we need to provide those resources so the teacher is well equipped to teach her curriculum or his curriculum.

[Ms. Fakouri, Barcliff principal]

These comments show the flexibility that Barcliff teachers had with their curriculum. Though several Meadows teachers desired scripted curricula as a demonstration of their inefficacy, this was untrue at Barcliff. Instead, Barcliff teachers recognized their unique population and used the Houghton Mifflin materials as tools rather than as the total structure of their literacy program. One strength of using such a program was the vertical alignment across grade levels.

You know I think Reading First really helps because even in I'm gonna say, I think Reading First goes through third grade. So fourth and fifth grade teachers they use the Houghton Mifflin materials even though they don't have to – it's not required by the grant. It's like seamless – if a kid starts in kindergarten and goes all the way to fifth grade here, it's like one curriculum. We are all on the same page.

[Ms. Mitchell, Barcliff teacher]

Despite the fact that Reading First targeted K-3, Barcliff utilized the materials, strategies and coach's knowledge to extend the capacity of children and teachers alike from K-5.

8.3.3 Data use in PLC

Noteworthy were the interactions that Barcliff teachers had around data with their literacy coach. In particular, I had the opportunity to observe a first grade level team meeting where two teachers met with the literacy coach about Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) among other

assessments. The DIBELS[66] report provided a break down for children's proficiency with phonemes, segmenting and fluency (PSF), non-sense word fluency (NWF-CLS), oral reading fluency (ORF) and provided an instructional recommendation. The report included data for the entire first grade and each classroom. Therefore, when the teachers reviewed the data, they were able to compare scores for each class. In this instance, one teacher's students were out-performing the other class. For example, the teacher with better test scores did not have a single child who was in the lowest category across assessments (deficit, at risk or intensive) and had a larger proportion of students who were established or at low risk in their reading development. In comparison the lower performing class had between 14% and 32% of students designated at risk or had some risk on the various assessments.

Though there was never a direct conversation comparing one classroom to the other, both teachers were aware of their student performance relative to the grade level as a whole and in contrast to their partner teacher. I informally discussed this comparison of test results with the coach after the meeting. It was clear that student assessment data was all out in the open and teachers were aware of their students' performance relative to others.

Noteworthy about this interaction, especially in comparison to Meadows, was the open nature of data and how the coach was not afraid to disaggregate data and even compare teachers' scores. Crucial to this type of interaction is knowing what to do when scores are different as they were in this circumstance. In a PLC

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[66] Part of Reading First is student progress monitoring with the DIBELS.

key is learning from practice and then acting on new learning. In this case, the coach was a change agent in teachers' instruction. She observed teachers, in some cases alongside their grade mate, and then the three would have a discussion.

> I am working with first grade right now. I'll walk you through a day I've done with them. Let's do Friday. I did an hour and a half I went into the first teacher's classroom. I modeled, probably a good hour and 15 out of that hour and a half, the teacher maybe helped me co-teach for about 15 minutes. And I did a similar lesson in the teachers' across the hallway. Then in the afternoon we debriefed and said what went well with the lesson, what didn't go well. What are some things we could do differently next time?
>
> [Barcliff coach]

These comments demonstrate that regular observation of other teachers, followed by debriefing with the literacy coach, were regular routines instituted at Barcliff. Required to have thoughtful discussions about teaching, is for teachers and coaches to have a common understanding of instruction at their school (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). In order for teachers to have common understandings they need time to observe and be observed by their colleagues. Such knowledge is essential to a thriving PLC.

8.3.4 Instruction for Test Preparation

Barcliff considered assessments to be benchmarks and though there was pressure on such assessments, teachers recognized that such tests were merely one way to gauge student learning – not the only way. This was explained by Ms. Kishek.

> Kishek: Yeah, but you know this challenge, you have to challenge yourself. How to I make kids better? How do I not stay constant? How do I make it easy for the kids?

218

Serena: And is that part of how things are done here?

Kishek: Yeah. For this year we did it this way, way you know I think as we challenge ourselves we become a little bit, you know, a little bit better. And we challenge ourselves, now we are here, we can see things, and you know let's move on to the next level and see what we can do.

Serena: So just having high MEAP scores is not enough? You keep pushing.

Kishek: No MEAP is just one assessment.

Serena: Of course it just seems like there is so much pressure placed upon on it.

Kishek: There is so much pressure. From the district to the principal to the tax payers, to us to the teachers to the students. So there is pressure.

[Ms. Kishek, Barcliff teacher]

Ms. Basu picked up on this point, explaining how Barcliff received recognition from the state due to such high performance. She noted that a reason for such high performance was the school's attention to the changing needs of the community and anticipating such needs.

Serena: How much did the test scores change in order to get that kind of recognition [award from the state]?

Basu: So far, it hasn't. But we're very very alert and aware of the fact because the needs are changing. And this is what makes us a little unique. We are aware of the problem before it exists. That's why we like to attack it. And that's why we kept. This year we were very weary of weak scores. But then we scores the other day and they said we did very well.

Serena: Oh good! That's great!

Basu: Yeah. So compared to the district we are very very good because in the district there is a west end and east end division. Our population is different. Like I told you, people who are well-to-do, the issue of money with the status with the household, higher education, more exposure, different parenting, and those are the criteria that you need for kids to be prepared for school…now it's with the No Child Left Behind and I think that preparation of teachers to be aware of the low and average students and preparing them better, ok. We're trying to close the gap a little. You see what I'm saying. Because our needs are different. Our populations are different, but due to the fact that we are aware of that, we try to single out the needs. See what they need and deliver it.

Indeed, consistent with the goals of Reading First, a primary need was literacy skills in the early grades. Even Ms. Franke, the physical education teacher, who was not responsible for academic content, was very aware of the emphasis on early literacy skills. This illustrates what an important focus this was school-wide.

> Franke: Yes, the minute that a child steps in the door in kindergarten, Principal Fakouri's big push is on kindergarten. [Kindergarten Teacher] lives breathes this is her job, this is her life. Those kindergarteners will be reading by the end of the year. Every kindergartener – if it kills her, is going to be reading by the end of the year. So their big push on reading for the kindergartners. So yes – they will, they know the research shows, they know that the critical time between K-3 is that critical learning time. The brain is developing and if they can get certain skills in there, it's gonna really help them later.
>
> Serena: Sure.
>
> Franke: Especially with reading and writing.

[Ms. Franke, Barcliff teacher]

Barcliff had an emphasis on anticipating children's needs and delivering them. Though assessments were important and exerted pressure, they were used as one measure of learning and not the only measure.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the PLC at Barcliff and the instructional support to which teachers had access. The purpose of this investigation was to respond to my second research question, *How does collective efficacy operate to affect student achievement?* As I argued in chapter seven, one way collective efficacy is articulated is through the PLC. In order to better

220

understand the architecture of support at Barcliff, I offer figure 8.1 which is my interpretation of the Barcliff PLC.

Principal. Different than Meadows, as depicted in figure 8.1, Barcliff had a flat organizational structure where instructional leadership was distributed between the principal and two teacher leaders (Spillane, 2001, 2005). As Principal Fakouri explained, merely having a functioning school was not enough; she needed to take action to promote student learning. Therefore, the principal was an active participant in the PLC calling herself an "instructional leader." In the center of this venn diagram are the Barcliff classrooms which represents the principal's and teacher leaders' focus on instruction.

Principal Fakouri kept herself apprised of the latest research to accelerate student learning. She very much focused on instruction – as she made it a part of her daily routine to at least walk through classrooms if not spend lengthy time observing. Through organizing her work around teachers' work, she understood what instruction looked like in her building. This knowledge enabled her to help develop teachers' capacity.

In addition to regular observation of instruction, the Barcliff principal held her teachers accountable for student learning through her routine of instructional dialogue. As described in this chapter, the principal met with teachers quarterly to discuss both student and teacher needs. At these meetings the principal brought an anecdotal notebook with key data for all students in the building. Using such data, she could probe each teacher to ensure that the needs of all students were met. As revealed in the instructional dialogue excerpt in this chapter, the

principal had a great deal of knowledge not only about the students, but also

pedagogy. Through positioning herself as a knowledgeable resource, Principal

Fakouri was received in that way by her teachers.

Principal Fakouri's role had consequences for collective efficacy. Ms.

Fakouri's disposition and actions were met with only positive feedback from her

staff. Teachers had a great deal of admiration and respect for their leader.

Because teachers and the principal were aligned in their viewpoints not only about

students and families, but also about management and instruction, teachers felt

truly supported. Fakouri was very involved with instruction in the building,

frequently observing teachers and also engaging in instructional dialogue

quarterly with her teachers. These practices kept the principal in tune with

teaching and learning in the building, as well providing perspective on both

teacher and student needs. This deep understanding of instruction allowed the

principal to leverage resources in appropriate ways to develop the capacity of the

entire staff. A primary way she achieved this was through coaching.

Coaches. As figure 8.1 depicts, the principal shared leadership around

instruction with her two coaches. Instruction was the focus at Barcliff as the

principal, coaches, and resource teacher all served to buttress teachers. The

coaches focused on instructional improvement. In particular the Reading First

coach worked to individualize the support she provided to teachers. She led

extensive professional development, engaged in grade-level meetings with her

teachers, observed teachers, and provided feedback. As the evidence illustrates,

the coach believed in her capability to foster collegiality, support teachers, and

ensure that students had access to high standards of learning. Through the constant progress monitoring of student data and administering interventional supports, teachers were enabled to serve their students well.

Teachers. Figure 8.1 contains 12 triangles representing each of the K-5 classrooms. The triangles are aligned both between grades and within grades illustrating coordination due to constant communication in the school and structured materials. In this graphic, the classrooms were not organized into grade-level pods as they were at Meadows, illustrated by figure 7.1. Instead, there was free flowing communication both horizontally (across grades) and vertically (within grades).

Principal Fakouri carefully created architecture to support teachers in their work. The PLC at Barcliff was running smoothly as there were clear communications both within and across grade levels. Through such open channels of communication, Barcliff teachers understood the interdependency of their work. In addition, teachers were very critical of their instruction and focused on improving their practice. They viewed their curriculum as a tool, and made adaptions where they saw fit using professional judgment.

Collective efficacy was enhanced by such a structure. It is likely that in a supportive environment such as this, teachers felt more efficacious. Teachers had the tools, knowledge, and resources to work with students in a productive manner. When they worked with struggling learners, they had a variety of expertise and resources upon which to draw. Barcliff leaders read teachers as capable, as they delegated responsibility to their teachers. Similar to Meadows, if a teacher

needed assistance, resources were disseminated to ensure that teacher's success. What is more, unlike Meadows, the Barcliff principal was committed to the professional growth of all her teachers through coaching. As illustrated through instructional dialogue, when a teacher was seen as thriving, her expertise was shared within and outside of the Barcliff community. Also evident was teachers' cognizance of their own professional needs, rather than the coach determining teachers' professional needs. Barcliff teachers felt confident that they would be able to reach their students due to the extensive resources they had at their disposal, including their peers.

Chapter 9

Emergent Theory

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an emergent explanatory framework for my qualitative and quantitative findings. In essence, my goal in this chapter is to understand how the former constructs of teachers' beliefs, collective efficacy, and professional learning communities operate to effect student performance. As evidenced throughout the qualitative data, collective efficacy, professional learning communities and student learning are mutually reinforcing constructs, and as a system they all contribute to school culture.

9.1 Collective Efficacy

One of the purposes of my work is to examine the operation of collective efficacy in a school context, and to extend social cognitive theory. As theorized by Bandura, collective efficacy is a "group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). In other words, does an organization have both the will and skill to achieve a particular goal? Collective efficacy, as laid out by Bandura, applies generally to organizations. Yet, schools are distinct from other types of organizations in the public and private sector, as schools educate the next generation of citizens. Such a distinctive purpose requires different organizational strategies, as the underlying intent of a school is

to promote student learning. Leveraging data collected for this project, this chapter will provide educational specificity that is currently underdeveloped in social cognitive theory.

Missing from current understandings of the formation of collective efficacy beliefs in an educational context is an analysis of the influence of teachers' perceptions of their students and families. A conspicuous distinction between Barcliff and Meadows was captured by teachers' view of students. Indeed, these differences were apparent throughout the qualitative evidence and could be gleaned from teacher beliefs about students and families. Meadows teachers had a deficit viewpoint on students whereby they blamed students for limitations in their skills. Teachers explicitly tied poverty status to a deficient value system whereby students did not value education, were not motivated, exhibited poor behavior, had poor language skills, and scored poorly on the MEAP. Consequently, Meadows teachers accepted little responsibility for student outcomes and felt impotent to make productive changes with their students. Meadows teachers did not exhibit high levels of collective efficacy as they saw contextual variables such as students and families as barriers to education. What is more, Meadows teachers did not recognize skill sets that students brought to school but instead focused on all of their limitations.

Barcliff teachers and administrators had an optimistic perspective on the children and families they served. Teachers did not question if families valued education, though they acknowledged the lack of formal family involvement with school. Barcliff teachers understood the cultural nuances of the families they

assisted and did not interpret a lack of action as a lack of educational values. Given that many of the staff members were from similar backgrounds of the students and families they served, Barcliff teachers valued the culture and language. Teachers had an understanding of the circumstances from which their students came and as a result, they did not make quick judgments about children or families. Barcliff teachers focused on what they were able to control through their work.

A symbolic distinction between the schools was their view of native language. At Meadows, having a native language other than English was seen as a liability because teachers generally positioned Arabic as less valuable than English. Meadows teachers felt that not speaking English as a first language was a disadvantage to students, and speaking Arabic at home interfered with the learning of English. Such ideas run counter to the research base (Krashen, 1981, 1982) which suggests that it is important to establish native language fluency first before learning a second language. In juxtaposition, Barcliff not only endorsed Arabic, but taught it. Students had Arabic as a special with the goal of academic proficiency in both languages by the time they reached fifth grade. While not officially offering a bilingual program, the commitment to securing grants to fund the Arabic Program and making the promise to carry it through illustrated Barcliff's value of their students' native language.

These actions towards Arabic were emblematic of the larger patterns taken by teachers in both schools. Rather than focusing on student limitations, Barcliff teachers had expansionary notions of schooling where they concentrated on what

they could accomplish with their students during school. In other words, teachers were attentive to what they were able to control, and let go what they could not. This was in opposition to Meadows teachers' approach where teachers focused on elements they could not control which led to frustration. These ideas are fundamental to collective efficacy, as teachers' viewpoint on families and students is integral to the formation of their efficacy judgments.

9.2 Professional Learning Communities

Though high quality instruction is dependent on the attitudes and competence of individual teachers, instructional capacity at the organizational level is reliant on how such skills are organized as a collective enterprise. That is, social resources must be fostered toward a PLC. I argue that school capacity – or the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of staff members (King & Newmann, 2001) is dependent on the quality of the PLC. In addition, the PLC is influenced by collective efficacy levels in the building, but collective efficacy is also a product of the PLC.

As discussed in chapters seven and eight, Barcliff and Meadows used PLCs as a domestic process to improve teacher learning. Teachers in both buildings referred to themselves as a PLC, both schools had coaches that were working with teachers, and both schools had time allocated for collaboration. However, as illustrated in chapters seven and eight, merely scheduling collaborative time was not enough to promote a PLC; rather the intention to promote teacher learning was a crucial component.

The administrators in both schools endorsed PLCs but maintained different roles within each respective community. At Barcliff, the principal was an active participant in the PLC calling herself an "instructional leader." Principal Fakouri kept herself apprised of the latest research to accelerate student learning. She very much focused on instruction – as she made it a part of her daily routine to at least walk through classrooms if not spend lengthy time observing. Through organizing her work around teachers' work, she understood what instruction looked like in her building and was enabled to help develop teacher capacity.

In addition to regular observation of instruction, the Barcliff principal held her teachers accountable for student learning through her routine of instructional dialogue. As described in chapter eight, the principal met with teachers quarterly to discuss both student and teacher needs. The substance of discussions was based upon student data, as the principal probed the development of each student to ensure their needs were met. As revealed in the instructional dialogue excerpt in chapter eight, the principal had a great deal of knowledge not only about the students, but also pedagogy. Through positioning herself as a knowledgeable resource, the principal was received in that way.

At Meadows, the principal assumed a very different role when it came to instructional support. Principal Novara positioned the teachers in her school as the instructional experts – not her. Given that she had not been a classroom teacher for over a decade, she sought instructional expertise through hiring coaches to support teachers. She situated herself as a reinforcement agent – but

really saw her coaches as on the frontline of instructional support. The Meadows principal did not describe any routines she developed around instructional support with teachers. It appeared that she abdicated that part of her work and instead concentrated on managing the building, staff, and students – as she described herself as a "major manager."

The concept of PLCs embeds professional development into routine practice. In other words, teachers share and critically reflect on their teaching practice in an ongoing and collaborative manner (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Toole & Louis, 2002). In order to facilitate such community norms, Meadows and Barcliff both employed coaches to assist teachers with instruction and planning. However, what was divergent was how the administrators in both buildings shaped the work of these coaches – the degree to which the principal gave the coaches autonomy. As a consequence of principal direction, coaches in both buildings spent their time in very different ways.

The Barcliff principal granted her coaches a great deal of autonomy, as they supported all teachers. At certain moments, their efforts were channeled – for example, a new teacher joined their staff midyear, and the literacy coach devoted two weeks of her time with this teacher to make sure she instituted routines to support their literacy program and guided reading. However, the coaches delegated their time more equitably, working with all teachers and individualizing the support she gave based upon teacher need. The coaches spent time in classrooms modeling, observing and also debriefing with her teachers. In

this way, Barcliff resources were more equitably distributed across her staff in order to provide support to all teachers.

The key difference in the work of the Meadows literacy coaches was how their work was shaped by Ms. Novara. At Meadows, the principal gave the directive to work with struggling teachers. Indeed, the literacy coaches did not work systematically with all of the teachers to develop their instructional techniques. Instead, their time was allocated to work with those who were in need of improvement. The Meadows modus operandi was triage or the process of determining a course of action based on the severity of a condition. In other words, the Meadows principal allocated resources to least effective teachers. Specifically, she leveraged the time, effort, and knowledge of her literacy coaches to bolster the skills of her least competent teachers.

When considering the structure of both PLCs, it is clear that both schools had essentially the same parts (time to work, teachers, principals, coaching staff), but chose a different organization and focus. At Barcliff the PLC supported teacher learning generally whereas at Meadows the PLC primarily supported those who struggled. Critical distinctions emerged at the two schools in the impetus for PLC and one critical result of the PLCs – resource creation. I argue that these two components of PLC are vital, as there are considerable distinctions between the intent and production of resources in each system.

9.2.1 Intention

Perhaps the most important component of a PLC is the intention. There must be a purpose for teachers working together as opposed to meeting just to

meet. As described by key scholars in the field, the intention of a PLC is to promote teacher learning and taking action based upon such learning (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Toole & Louis, 2002). This dissertation paints a picture of two very different PLCs: one school has structure without intent, while the other has structure and intention.

The way that the Meadows teachers and principal talked about the PLC in their building was often simplistic – as the purpose of the PLC was for teachers to work together. The principal created structure in her building to form the PLC – and regular time was set aside for such interaction to take place. Notably missing was the intention of enhancing teacher learning and knowledge as a result of such meetings. Because PLC gatherings were instead viewed as planning, the time was not capitalized upon to promote change. For example, in a school where the professionals are all committed to constant learning, the structures in place might be dynamic, as they evolve and change to promote teacher learning. There was little evidence of evolving structures at Meadows as teachers met for the sake of meeting, not for the purpose of learning to and from practice, and translating such learning into good instruction to benefit students.

In contrast to the Meadows model, Barcliff had the clear and explicit purpose of extending teacher capability present through all PLC activities. Teachers, coaches, and the principal all described the purpose of a PLC to improve teaching learning and accelerate student learning. To this end, meeting time was considered invaluable, and the time was allocated for professional development opportunities, rather than the principal describing general business

items. In addition, the professional development that was provided to teachers was targeted and specific as it responded to teachers' changing needs. Teachers were aware of their own needs, perhaps in part attributed to the principal's instructional dialogue with each teacher. Such a routine not only produced teacher accountability but it was also a mechanism for teacher reflection. Perhaps a result of such actions, the principal, coaches and teachers were incredibly attuned to their next steps for professional development as individuals but also as a group.

9.2.2 Resource Creation

In an effort towards enhancing teacher learning, a PLC must be structured to create endogenous resources. The resources to which I refer are primarily relational and intellectual. A flourishing PLC facilitates communication both within and across grade levels. Such interaction naturally brings together a variety of skill sets and commitments to teaching. In any group of teachers, some will have stronger proficiencies in particular content areas and teaching particular grade levels. The beauty of a PLC is bringing diverse skills together and allowing shared knowledge to emerge from such relationships. In a flourishing PLC teachers not only meet by grade level, or across grade level, they interact with school leaders (in this case coaches and principal) around improving their practice. Such interaction creates resources such as relationships, ideas, lessons that result in learning opportunities for teachers.

A key resource developed through PLCs is collective efficacy. Teachers learn about the capabilities of their colleagues, motivational attributes, and more

through interaction. As a result, teachers are able to make judgments about their staff capability to foster student learning in a context that heavily shapes that capability. Thus, the degree to which PLCs function effectively constitutes direct enactive experience that informs teachers' collective efficacy beliefs. In addition, the degree to which leaders (principals and instructional coaches) participate authentically in the PLCs provides not only additional positive enactive experience but also social persuasion in the form of a message that says the work of a school PLC is of paramount importance. In contrast, lack of leader participation can send the opposite message and serve to undermine the capacity and efficacy-belief building potential of a PLC. In sum, together, through enactive experience and social persuasion, PLCs can influence collective efficacy beliefs in schools. Such interface also provides opportunities for teachers to share dispositions about teaching through their commentary and how they work together. An individual teacher can be impacted by the motivation levels of her colleagues, as it is difficult to maintain a positive attitude when others are negative, just as it is difficult to remain negative when colleagues are hopeful. Likewise, collective efficacy impacts PLCs, as it contributes to the communication, attitudes and beliefs of the community.

9.3 Bringing the Pieces Together

There is much discussion of teacher empowerment as a vehicle to improve student learning. However, empowerment is not something bequeathed to teachers. Instead, teachers become empowered through the development of self and collective efficacy, enabling them to take advantage of opportunities and to

remove constraints towards goal attainment. High levels of collective efficacy, or the belief that the group can produce valued effects by collective action, can only be reached by providing teachers the supports necessary to engage them as a group. As illustrated in this dissertation, one way support is provided to teachers is through the professional learning community.

9.3.1 Collective Efficacy and PLC

As established by administrators, formal structures, such as professional learning communities are certainly one key piece to school improvement. Principals set the conditions for PLC and collective efficacy, but the processes are carried out by the teachers and coaches themselves. Having structures to support and extend teachers' skills is an essential way to improve student learning. However, without the accompanying informal structures to support the formal, resulting student achievement may suffer. Here, informal structures to which I refer are collective beliefs.

As I argued in this dissertation, the way that teachers' work was structured at the case study schools was creates and maintains collective efficacy. When teachers were more enabled to teach – due to the support they had within their grade level team, with other colleagues across the building, while having expertise from both a coaching staff and a principal – it is more likely they felt empowered to successfully execute their responsibilities. Whereas, if the community is not structured in ways to provide shared knowledge among teachers, she might not feel as capable in meeting student needs, and not feel as

efficacious. It appears that the structures and focus taken on at each building creates collective efficacy as a resource to the PLC.

Professional relationships are also impacted by collective efficacy. If teachers believe that their colleagues are capable of bringing about changes in student achievement, they are likely to think of each other as resources. Whereas, if a teacher feels that her colleagues are not productive, she is unlikely to turn to them for support. Collective efficacy and PLCs are mutually supportive structures, as collective efficacy also effects student achievement through PLCs.

9.3.2 PLCs and Student Achievement

An important purpose of PLCs is the creation of endogenous resources for teachers. First a PLC requires teachers to work collaboratively and learn from one another. Such a mode of operation naturally extends teacher relationships. If teachers work together with the intention of helping all students – rather than viewing themselves as isolates – it improves the quality of the instruction offered to students because the best ideas and lessons are shared.

Second, working together provides efficiency. Teachers may save time by leaning on their colleagues. For example, teachers might create lessons together and divvy responsibilities. Beyond efficiency, working collaboratively could improve the quality of instruction. Teachers bring different skill sets and experiences to bear on instruction. Teacher collaboration has been shown to have a positive impact on student learning (Goddard, Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, 2007) likely because instruction improves as a result of mutual efforts.

Third, teachers also provide one another material support – they are able to lend and borrow books, and other relevant teaching materials if they are in communication about content. In this way, individuals might offer such supports to one another to improve student learning. Finally, teachers also get emotional support from one another. Teaching is an incredibly demanding professional – intellectually, physically, and emotionally. Working with students and families day in and day out is bound to invoke emotional responses from teachers. Collaborating enhances relationships and enables teachers to share and reflect upon such experiences working with students and families.

9.3.3 Student Achievement and Collective Efficacy

The inspiration for this dissertation was to endorse the relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement. As described in chapters three and four, I confirmed that collective efficacy has an association with fourth grade students' odds of passing the MEAP in both reading and mathematics. In other words, schools that are characterized by higher levels of collective efficacy tend to have more students pass the MEAP. The main contribution of the quantitative analysis was replicating the relationship between collective efficacy and student achievement using a more robust sampling procedure than prior research. Such methodology allows the results to reliably extrapolate to states with contexts similar to Michigan. This analysis illustrates that the school environment, shaped by the adults in the building, has consequences for student learning.

Former quantitative findings imply that collective efficacy has a direct relationship with student achievement; by simply increasing the collective efficacy, higher levels of student achievement will result. The qualitative findings from this dissertation complicate this relatively simplistic notion. Collective efficacy potentially operates through a productive professional learning community to bolster student achievement.

9.4 Conclusion

This chapter brought together all empirical findings. In essence, what has been made explicit is that teachers' beliefs about students and families influences teachers' view of their own capability and responsibility – or their collective efficacy. Collective efficacy has been shown to have a link to achievement because when teachers are more efficacious they are likely more resilient in failure situations. However, this dissertation has also illustrated that in schools with higher levels of collective efficacy, such beliefs are a resource for their professional learning community. Professional learning communities also enhance collective efficacy when they operate efficiently, as teachers feel enabled to do their job well when they have the appropriate support structures in place.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have tried to express some of the complexity in understanding the operation of collective efficacy in two low-income schools. I have shown that in order to fully understand the phenomenon, we must consider both how teacher beliefs about students and families inform collective efficacy, and the interplay between collective efficacy and professional learning communities, in an effort to understand how collective efficacy impacts student learning. In writing the preceding chapters, I have been continuously struck by the clear distinctions between Barcliff and Meadows. Although I cannot make bold generalizations about the operation collective efficacy, I have confirmed the significance of collective efficacy beliefs for student achievement and illustrated a possible explanation for its importance. At the same time, this study allows me to shed some light on factors that relate to collective efficacy. Consistent with the literature, this investigation illustrates the reciprocal nature of efficacy beliefs. In this concluding chapter, I return to crucial ideas in the literature as established in chapter two such as the associations between collective efficacy and: student achievement, context, leadership, school structure, and teachers' work.

10.1 Collective Efficacy and Student Achievement

A powerful predictor of school effectiveness, collective efficacy is associated with student achievement across grade levels and content areas (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Goddard, 2001; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Goddard, LoGerfo, & Hoy, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). In Bandura's (1993) formative study, collective efficacy was positively and significantly related to differences among schools in student achievement in both mathematics and reading. Amazingly, the study further revealed that collective efficacy explained student achievement beyond SES.

Though the collective efficacy literature is powerful, there are at least two limitations of this body of work. Several of the studies on collective efficacy were conducted at the school-level rather than taking the multilevel nature of date into consideration. Aggregating student achievement to the organizational level introduces bias to quantitative models (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) and misestimates relationships. In addition, studies of collective efficacy are usually conducted with convenience samples, limiting generalizability.

In order to compensate for these limitations and to more fully understand if collective efficacy is a robust predictor of student achievement, in this dissertation, I tested collective efficacy's predictive value with a sample that generalizes to an entire state's population using multilevel data. The positive relationship I found between collective efficacy and students' chances to pass the MEAP reiterates the importance of collective efficacy and the continued attention it deserves in both research and practice.

10.2 School Context

The teacher efficacy literature illustrated a relationship between self-efficacy and school context. Analyses demonstrate that teacher efficacy is substantially greater in when teachers serve students of a higher SES (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). While this general pattern might be apparent, it is certainly not a rule. Through this project, I located two schools in the same district with similar levels of poverty but distinct levels of collective efficacy. It appears one key reason teachers at Meadows and Barcliff differed in their level of collective efficacy can be attributed to how teachers' viewed their students and families. This study illustrated that teachers exhibiting deficit thinking about their local community and clientele simultaneously had lower levels of collective efficacy. Certainly serving a more impoverished community presents challenges that might threaten collective efficacy beliefs, but there are examples in practice where teachers exhibit high levels of efficacy in challenging contexts. Learning about such institutions will continue to help us understand how to improve levels of collective efficacy in underserved schools.

10.3 Leadership

Principal leadership matters a great deal to the functioning of a school. However, there is little specification about how leadership impacts collective efficacy in social cognitive theory. The teacher efficacy literature has a relevant examples linking teacher efficacy to leadership, whereas such investigations are scant in the collective efficacy literature.

Strong principal leadership is related to teacher efficacy, specifically delegating responsibility (Lee et al., 1991). Such practices are associated with teacher autonomy and professional judgment as delegating authority means providing more leadership roles to teachers. For example, Moore and Esselman (1992) found that an influence of school based decision making was significantly related to a stronger sense of teacher efficacy. Providing structures that allow teachers to take on leadership roles enhances efficacy as it provides an opportunity for teachers to extend their skill sets.

Indeed this dissertation suggests an important relationship between collective efficacy and leadership. The leaders of Barcliff and Meadows had two different styles that are reminiscent of the themes within the teacher efficacy literature base. The Barcliff principal provided autonomy to her teachers through the delegation of authority. Such practices illustrated her belief in the capability of her teachers – which enhanced both teachers' individual and collective efficacy. In contrast the Meadows principal impinged upon teachers' efficacy through her micromanagement style whereby she demonstrated that she did not trust her faculty with leadership roles. Not only is principal leadership important to collective efficacy beliefs, but so are the structures that she institutes.

10.4 School Structure

A large focus of my work was considering how school structure is related to collective efficacy, a topic that has remained largely unaddressed in research. One teacher efficacy study illustrated that teacher efficacy is somewhat lower in large schools (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988). This finding is not surprising, as it is

likely that in a smaller setting teachers might know more students personally, and are empowered to provide better instruction. Certainly Barcliff and Meadows also illustrate this generalization, as Meadows was roughly twice the size of Barcliff and had lower levels of efficacy. However, evidence abounds that school size is not the entire story here. There were systematically different practices taking place at both schools that contributed to the levels of collective efficacy.

My dissertation illustrates the association between collective efficacy and professional learning community. This relationship is reciprocal, as when people believe in their collective capability to achieve goals, this is likely to influence their professional relationships and collaborative patterns. Likewise, professional learning communities create resources for teachers such as collective efficacy. As expressed throughout this dissertation, the intention of a PLC is to improve teacher knowledge and skills which improves instructional practice and extends student learning.

Both Meadows and Barcliff contained teachers with strong relationships, an important aspect of PLC. However, the literature suggests that teacher efficacy is a consequence of meeting instrumental needs and is unrelated to expressive relationships among teachers and administrators (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). In other words, it is not simply a result of adults being nice to one another that impacts efficacy, rather it is a climate characterized by academic emphasis (setting high expectations for students) that is related to teacher efficacy. Such belief systems were evident at Barcliff as the administrators and teachers set high expectations for students, and provided resources and support to make sure goals

were attained. The same level of academic emphasis was not present at Meadows as teachers did not believe in student capacity to learn at particularly high levels.

10.5 Professional Learning Community & Instruction

The teacher efficacy literature suggests that instruction – a key component of teachers' work – differs according to teachers' level of efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Teachers with higher levels of efficacy tend to be more resilient in failure situations (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) and more determined (Allinder, 1995). However, I did not systematically investigate instruction at Barcliff and Meadows such that I could accurately characterize instruction in either building. In spite of this limitation, the conditions were distinct around teachers' work, such that the school with higher levels of collective efficacy had the conditions for teachers' work to be more productive. The difference in the way that the PLCs were carried out is one example, as Barcliff had total focus on instructional improvement, whereas the intention behind the Meadows PLC was less defined.

We do see more innovation at Barcliff and more ambition when it came to teachers' work. For example, Barcliff worked with a local university on comprehension strategies for ELLs. This work was optional, and teachers participated across the board in such work illustrating their value of innovation which is related to teacher efficacy (Cousins & Walker, 2000). In addition, the topic of such professional development was relevant to their population which built shared knowledge.

10.6 Conclusion

The issues raised in my dissertation resonate with past and present educational concerns. Since Horace Mann's famous lines, "Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men -- the balance-wheel of the social machinery," schools have been tasked with providing as equal an education as possible to all children so that they may produce equally high educational outcomes. Despite the intentions of the public school system, there is a measurable difference in achievement between dominant and subordinate groups (see e.g., Fischer, *et al*., 1996; Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Holding true to Mann's ideals, extenuating the achievement gap has been the explicit focus off recent federal education reform efforts – namely NCLB and ARRA. The purpose of this dissertation was to contribute useful knowledge towards improving education reform. To this end, I have focused on what schools can *do* in order to promote better student outcomes. I acknowledge that it is important to study how schools exacerbate or ameliorate existing social inequalities as evidenced through educational outcomes. Using a mixed-methods approach, my dissertation was designed to build on social cognitive theory and specifically, collective efficacy. Through this project, I sought not only to confirm the correlation between collective efficacy and achievement, but also to understand how this relationship operates. This dissertation provides compelling evidence to inform both research questions.

10.6.1 Implications for Theory

This dissertation illustrates that a group's sense of collective efficacy is a key dimension of its work climate (Bandura, 1997). Yet, we also know that leaders make a difference to organizational climate (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). Even so, social cognitive theory does not specify a direct link between leadership and a group's sense of collective efficacy (Goddard & Salloum, 2011). This dissertation makes a contribution to social cognitive theory through the explicit consideration of leaders' roles in collective efficacy.

As illustrated by Barcliff and Meadows, one clear way in which leaders may influence collective efficacy beliefs is by directly sharing efficacy belief-shaping information. Indeed, this dissertation illustrates that leaders at Barcliff and Meadows influenced collective efficacy beliefs for better or worse, by communicating socially persuasive expectations that affected teachers' sense of conjoint capability to achieve their goals. Principals' actions also shaped teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Through Novara's micromanagement, she conveyed the message to teachers that they were incapable of assuming such leadership, which would certainly undermine their efficacy beliefs. This is in contrast to Fakouri's style which enabled teachers to exercise their autonomy.

Another important way in which leaders may influence collective efficacy beliefs in groups is by establishing organizational structures and designs that enable groups to make the most of their skills. Both principals established different organizational structures that emphasized different elements. Whereas at Barcliff, Principal Fakouri stressed the importance of instruction, engaging in key

routines that impacted teacher practice, compared to Principal Novara who

concentrated her efforts on general management and building operations. This

echoes work by Adams and Forsyth (2006) who examined the relationship

between collective efficacy beliefs and organizational structure, which they

conceptualized to range from enabling to hindering. The researchers found that

the more an organization's structure promotes policies, regulations, and

procedures that are helpful and conducive to problem solving, the greater their

sense of collective efficacy. In other words, the more leaders emphasize

structures that are characterized as flexible and enabling, the greater the collective

efficacy beliefs characterizing their workgroups. Evident here is that Fakouri

instituted a more enabling model, building capacity of her teachers, whereas

Novara's model had policies that were not conducive to problem solving. In

particular, her approach to student management was read as barriers by Meadows

teachers.

10.6.2 Implications for Research

My dissertation supports and contributes to the research base on the

influence of collective efficacy. However, like most research, it has produced

results that necessitate further investigation. While I was able to notice difference

in teacher's belief systems, as well as organizing structures, one element of

schooling that I was unable to systematically capture was instruction. While I

conducted observations for about a week in each school, I am unable to draw

conclusions from such data. Future researchers might consider if there is a

systematic difference in instruction between schools with high and low collective

efficacy, given individual differences in instruction as related to self-efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

Researchers also might pay close attention to contextual variables and ensure they situate their study in settings that would be productive from which to learn. The continued study of collective efficacy in settings with large proportions of ELLs and/or minority students would be of particular interest, especially to learn if teachers make use of students' cultural funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Negg, & Gonzalez, 1992), utilize culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and create productive relationships with students.

10.6.3 Implications for Policy & Practice

Public policy makers may also find this work of use. This dissertation suggests that school climate is an important aspect of school, which is related to student achievement. Given the pressure on schools to bolster student performance, these findings are promising. The question is how can such work be translated into solid public policy? On a local level, school districts need to consider the support they provide to schools for professional learning communities. This does not simply mean providing school structure, but making sure that teachers have adequate training to think about how they might learn from one another. Local districts might also facilitate vicarious learning experiences whereby school staffs visit one another and learn from each other's practice.

There are several implications for practice from the results of this study. School leaders might consider the four sources of collective efficacy beliefs as

suggested by social cognitive theory. Coaches can ensure that teachers' have

mastery experience, or successful instructional experiences. School leaders can

make certain teachers' work within their area of expertise, and provide supports

(in the form of coaching, material resources, collaboration, etc.) in order to ensure

success. Collective efficacy also can be bolstered through vicarious experience,

such as learning from other successful schools and other teachers. An important

way to gain vicarious experience is through observation of successful teachers'

classrooms in addition to visiting schools that have measurable progress with their

students. Schools are responsible for social persuasion which is conveyed not

only through words, but through actions. Principals' attitudes are conveyed

through all communication with teachers – as the official school leader has the

ability to convey different emotions through such interactions. Setting up

effective channels for collaboration and professional learning community is a key

part of social persuasion. Finally, schools have affective states, as they react to

outside pressures. It is the principal's job to filter and shape such states, which

impacts teacher morale.

Apart from the sources of collective efficacy that are specified by social

cognitive theory, my dissertation contributes to some organizing principles that

might enhance collective efficacy. The principal needs to work hard at building

consensus among teachers. This means giving teachers decision making power

about relevant decisions in the school such as setting policies, selecting curricular

materials, school improvement planning and more. Providing such experiences to

teachers enhances collective efficacy as they see themselves as capable through such mastery experiences.

Another important role for school leadership is combatting deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010). Though this dissertation has focused on deficit thinking about students, the paradigm has two sides (Weiner, 2006). The first from has been extensively described here – student and family deficits as the cause of low student achievement. This is a particularly appealing paradigm for teachers because it places responsibility for student learning outside of the classroom. However, the second variation of deficit thinking places all responsibility on teachers as the only factor that matters in student learning. This explanation is appealing to parents and legislators because it also implies a quick solution – fix teachers or hire new and better individuals. Neither viewpoint is productive for schools as both viewpoints place blame but neither viewpoint emphasizes solutions.

Teachers need support to be successful with students. The task of teaching post NCLB is complicated as the stakes have increased but are not always met with resources. Such a predicament requires creative leadership to work with given resources to build teacher knowledge through professional learning communities. The emphasis on learning about student and families can be carried through to the school, as such learning is shared and teachers think of ways their instructional practice can benefit from learning about students' home lives.

Appendix A: Figures and Tables

Figure 2.1: Tschannen-Moran and colleagues' Integrated Model of Teacher Efficacy
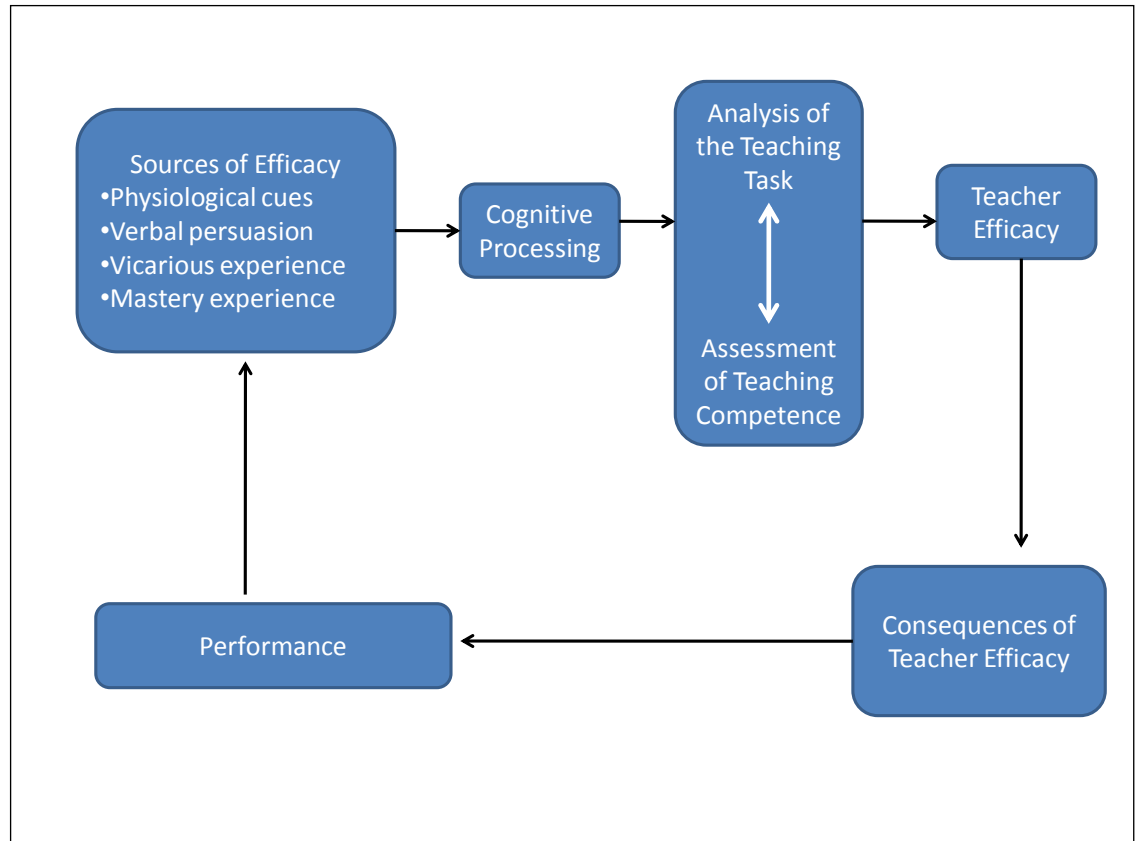
Table 3.1: Factor Analysis Item Loadings

Items	Factor Loading
Our students come to school ready to learn	.850
The opportunities in this community help ensure that our students will learn	.790
Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students	.784
REVERSED Students here just aren't motivated to learn	744
Home life provides so many advantages the students here are bound to learn	.723
REVERSED Drug and alcohol abuse in the community make learning difficult for students here	.705
Teachers in this school are able to get through to difficult students	.700
REVERSED Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety	.686
REVERSED If a child doesn't want to learn, teachers here give up on him or her	.679
REVERSED Teachers in this school do not have the skills to deal with student disciplinary problems	.654
Teachers in this school really believe every child can learn	.633
REVERSED Teachers here don't have the skills needed to produce meaningful student learning	.540

Note: The collective efficacy factor has an eigenvalue of 6.08, explains 50.66% of the total item variance, and has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.901.

Figure 3.1: Fully Conditional Model

Level-1 Model

     $\text{Prob(Achievement=1}|\beta) = \varphi$

     $\log[\varphi /(1- \varphi)] = \eta$

     $\eta = \beta_0 + \beta_{1\ \text{Spec Ed}} + \beta_{2\ \text{ELL}} + \beta_{3\ \text{FRL}} + \beta_{4\ \text{Minority}} + \beta_{5\ \text{Female}}$

Level-2 Model

     $\beta_0 = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01\ \text{Collective Efficacy}} + \gamma_{02\ \text{Past Achievement}} + \gamma_{03\ \text{Sch Size}} + \gamma_{04\ \%\text{Female}} +$
     $\gamma_{05\ \%\text{Minority}} + \gamma_{06\ \%\text{FRL}} + \gamma_{07\ \text{MSA or Not}} + \mu_0$

          $\beta_1 = \gamma_{10}$
          $\beta_2 = \gamma_{20}$
          $\beta_3 = \gamma_{30}$
          $\beta_4 = \gamma_{40}$
          $\beta_5 = \gamma_{50}$

Figure 3.2: Scatter Plot of Poverty Status and Collective Efficacy used for School Selection
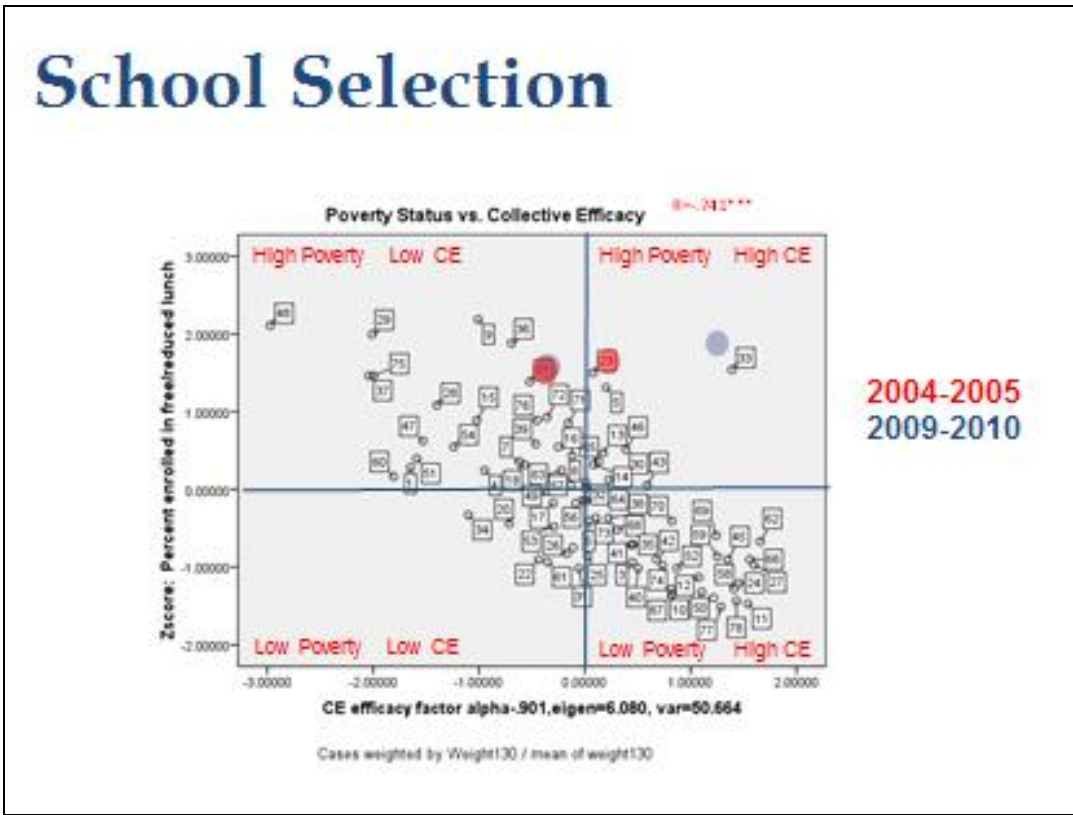
Table 3.2: Key Data for Case Study Schools

	Barcliff	Meadows
School Report Cards –		
Aggregate Reading		
(Grades 3-5):	69.05%	77.97%
2007	82.14%	60.24%
2008	85.37%	65.88%
2009		
School Report Cards –		
Aggregate Math		79.66%
(Grades 3-5):	92.86%	62.65%
2007	100%	90.59%
2008	95.12%	
2009		
4th Reading:		
2004	77%	70%
2005	86%	83%
2006	91%	76%
2007	94%	68%
2008	67%	65%
2009-2010	84.1%	62.6%
4th Math:		
2004	82%	67%
2005	100%	73%
2006	94%	86%
2007	100%	71%
2008	93%	79%
2009-2010	97.8%	92%
Collective Efficacy:		
2004	3.90 (0.24 SD)	3.66 (-0.49 SD)
2009	4.220(1.19 SD)*	3.66 (-0.49 SD)*
Proportion of FRL Students:		
2004	80% (1.49 SD)	77% (1.38 SD)
2008	85% (1.70 SD)*	81% (1.54 SD)*

*Standard deviation units derived from using the 2004-5 sample.
Test Score Data Retrieved: http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx/q/page=hm

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics (n=5031 Students, 78 Schools)

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Student Level:				
Special Education	0	1	.11	.31
ELL	0	1	.04	.20
Minority	0	1	.19	.39
Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)	0	1	.34	.47
Female	0	1	.50	.50
2005 Math Pass	0	1	.75	.43
2005 Read Pass	0	1	.85	.36
School Level:				
Collective Efficacy	2.85	4.39	3.79	.35
School Location (MSA or not)	0	1	.77	.42
% FRL Students	1	98	40.7	.26
% Minority Students	0	100	22.8	.30
% Female	42	53	48	.02
School Size (K-6)	82	676	377	115
2004 Math Pass Rate	23.4	100	76.8	14.5
2004 Read Pass Rate	43.8	100	81.1	12.3

Table 4.2: 4th Grade Sample compared to Michigan's 4th Grade Population

	2004-2005 4th Grade Sample	2004-2005 4th Grade Michigan Population
N	5031	119,607
Female	50%	49%
Free/Reduced Lunch	34%	37%
Minorities	19%	26%
Special Education	11%	10%
Limited English Proficient	4%	4%
Pass Math	75%	72%
Pass Reading	85%	82%

Table 4.3: Student Correlations (N=5031 Students)

Variable	Special Education	Limited English Proficiency	Free/Reduced Lunch	Minority	Female	Math Pass
ELL	-.039**					
FRL	.063***	.208***				
Minority	-.019	.028*	.255***			
Female	-.102***	-.022	-.009	.001		
Math Pass	-.208***	-.030*	-.174***	-.168***	-.016	
Reading Pass	-.263***	-.071***	-.154***	-.133***	.067***	.443***

Table 4.4: School Correlations (N=78 Schools)

Variable	Collective Efficacy	School Size	% Min.	% FRL	%Female	MSA or not	Past Math
School Size	-.105						
%Minority	-.656***	-.003					
%Free/Reduced	-.741***	-.159	.573***				
% Female	.029	.032	-.003	.126			
MSA or not	.059	.282*	.240*	-.074	-.108		
Past Math	.594***	.091	-.383***	-.444***	.024	-.044	
Past Read	.565***	.061	-.431***	-.578***	-.025	-.107	.789***

Table 4.5: Unconditional Model Characteristics: Variation Between Schools in Students' Odds of Passing Reading and Mathematics Assessment (n=5,031 students in 78 schools)

Characteristic	Reading	Mathematics
Intercept (school average)	5.64 (odds ratio)	3.00 (odds ratio)
	.15 (probability)	.25 (probability)
Coefficient	1.73	1.10
Between-school parameter variance (tau)	.39[a]	.48[b]
HLM reliability estimate for intercepts	.72	.81

Note that intercepts reported here are odds ratios calculated from HGLM beta coefficients.
[a] $\chi^2 = 19.95$, df = 77, p<.001
[b] $\chi^2 = 11.83$, df = 77, p<.001

Table 4.6: HGLM Analysis of the Relationship of Student and School Characteristics to Students' Odds of Passing the 2005 4th grade Mathematics Assessment

	B	Robust SE	T-ratio	Odds Ratio	% Change in Odds
Studen Level:					
Intercept	1.326***	0.182	7.553	3.767	n/a
Special Education	-1.430***	0.139	-10.332	0.239	-76.1%
Minority	-0.705***	0.104	-6.794	0.494	-50.6%
Female	-0.202***	0.059	-3.416	0.817	-18.3%
Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)	-0.491***	0.078	-6.253	0.612	-38.8%
ELL	-0.443	0.291	-1.520	0.642	-35.8%
School Level:					
% FRL Students[a]	0.164	0.112	1.455	1.178	17.8%
% Minority Students[a]	0.076	0.094	0.814	1.079	7.9%
% Female	-0.111	0.050	-2.200	0.895	-10.5%
School Size (K-6)[a]	0.050	0.074	0.677	1.052	5.2%
MSA or Not	-0.096	0.204	-0.470	0.909	-9.1%
2004 Math Pass Rate[a]	0.332***	0.076	4.400	1.394	39.4%
Collective Efficacy[a]	0.299*	0.119	2.517	1.348	34.8%

a. Variable standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Note: All student-level variables are grand mean centered, and all school-level variables are uncentered except collective efficacy, and prior achievement which are grand mean centered, for ease of interpreting the intercept.

~ $p \leq .10$, *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$

Table 4.7: HGLM Analysis of the Relationship of Student and School Characteristics to Students' Odds of Passing the 2005 4th grade Reading Assessment

	B	Robust SE	T-ratio	Odds Ratio	% Change in Odds
Student Level:					
Intercept	2.111***	0.213	9.929	8.257	n/a
Special Education	-1.845***	0.109	-16.992	0.158	-84.2%
Minority	-0.594***	0.150	-3.946	0.552	-44.8%
Female	0.266***	0.102	2.616	1.305	30.5%
Free/Reduced Lunch (FRL)	-0.438***	0.124	-3.527	0.645	-35.5%
ELL	-1.041	0.287	-3.629	0.353	-64.7%
School Level:					
% FRL Students[a]	0.228	0.141	0.615	1.256	25.6%
% Minority Students[a]	0.099	0.115	0.858	1.104	10.4%
% Female	-0.227	0.065	-3.486	0.797	-20.3%
School Size (K-6)[a]	0.121	0.086	1.409	1.129	12.9%
MSA or Not	-0.145	0.232	-0.623	0.865	-13.5%
2004 Reading Pass Rate[a]	0.306***	0.082	3.725	1.359	35.9%
Collective Efficacy[a]	0.353**	0.128	2.758	1.424	42.4%

a. Variable standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Note: All student-level variables are grand mean centered, and all school-level variables are uncentered except collective efficacy, and prior achievement which are grand mean centered, for ease of interpreting the intercept.

~ $p \leq .10$, *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$

Table 5.1: Key Statistics for Primary Countries of Student Origin

	Lebanon	Yemen	Iraq	US
Population (million)	4.2	22.9	30.7	307.0
Education Indicators				
Literacy Rate, adult total (% of people aged 15 and above)	90	59	78	99
School enrollment %, tertiary[67]	54	10	--	83
Mean Years of Schooling (UNDP)	13.5	2.5	5.6	12.4
Health Indicators				
Female life expectancy at birth[68], total (years) (2008)	74	65	72	81
Male life expectancy at birth[3], total (years) (2008)	70	61	64	76
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	12	53	36	6
Child malnutrition (% of children under 5)[69]	4	43	7	--
Access to an improved water source	100	66	77	--
Economic Indicators				
2009 GDP[70] (US $ billions)	34.5	26.3	65.8	14,119
2009 GDP per capita[71] (World Bank)	8,175	1,118	2,090	45,989
2009 GNI per capita nominal values (Atlas Method) (US dollars)	8,060	1,060	2,210	46,360

*Adapted from the World Bank Statistics

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[67] **School enrollment, tertiary** – gross enrollment ration is the ratio of the total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown. Tertiary education, whether or not to an advanced research qualification normally requires, as a minimum condition of admission, the successful completion of education at the secondary level.

[68] **Life expectancy at birth** indicates the number of years a newborn infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of its birth were to stay the same throughout its life.

[69] **Malnutrition prevalence, weight for age** (% of children under 5) percentage of children under age 5 whose weight for age is more than two standard deviations below the median for the international reference population ages 0-59 months. The data are based on the WHO's new child growth standards released in 2006.

[70] **GDP**: at purchasers' prices is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products.

[71] **GDP per capita**: GDP per person

Figure 6.1: Theoretical Model of Collective Efficacy
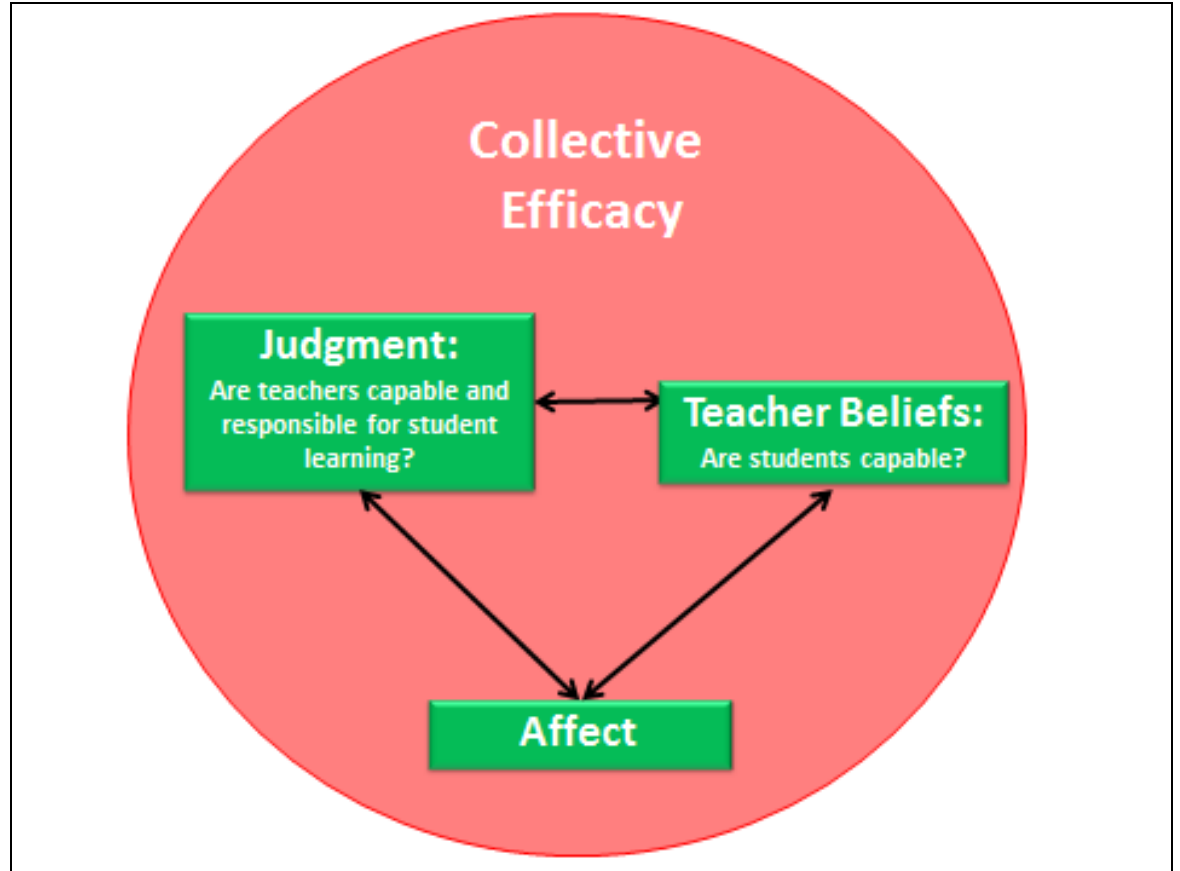
Figure 7.1: The Professional Learning Community at Meadows[72]

Figure 8.1: The Professional Learning Community at Barcliff[73]
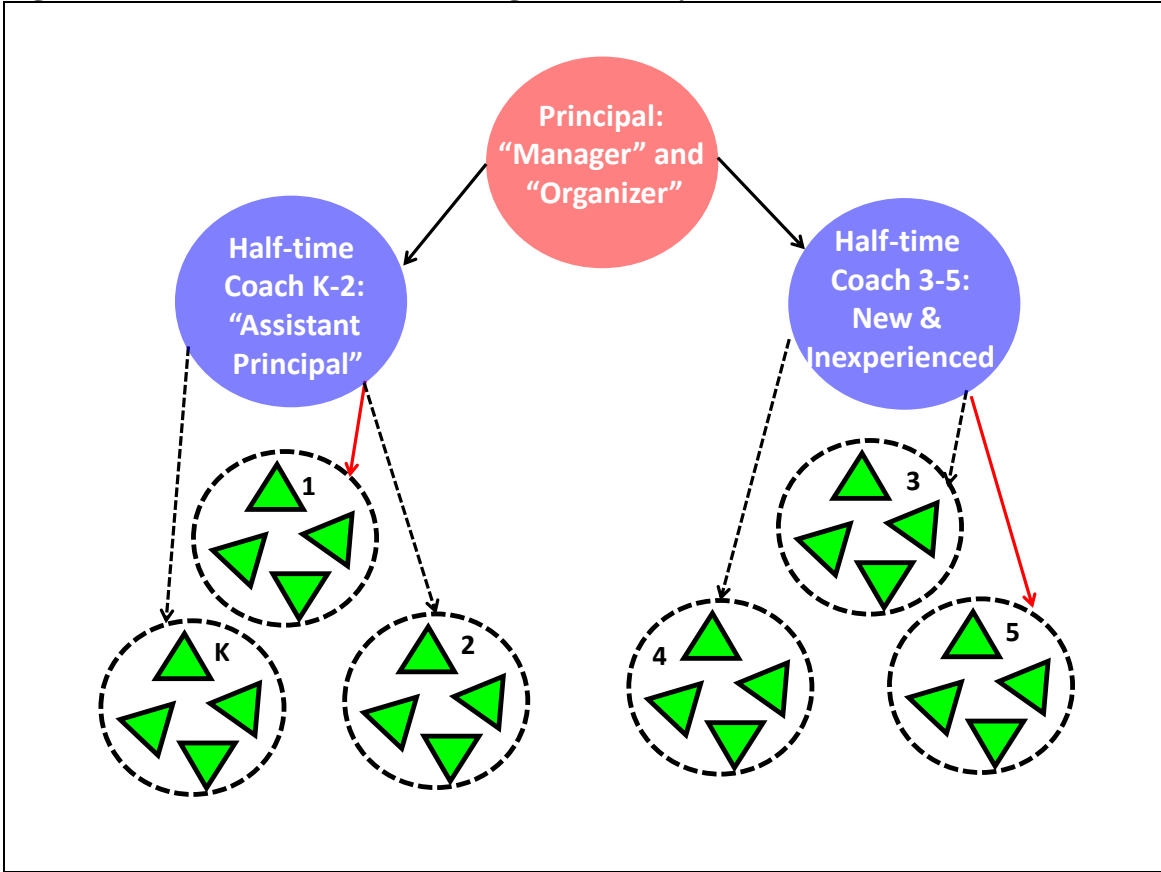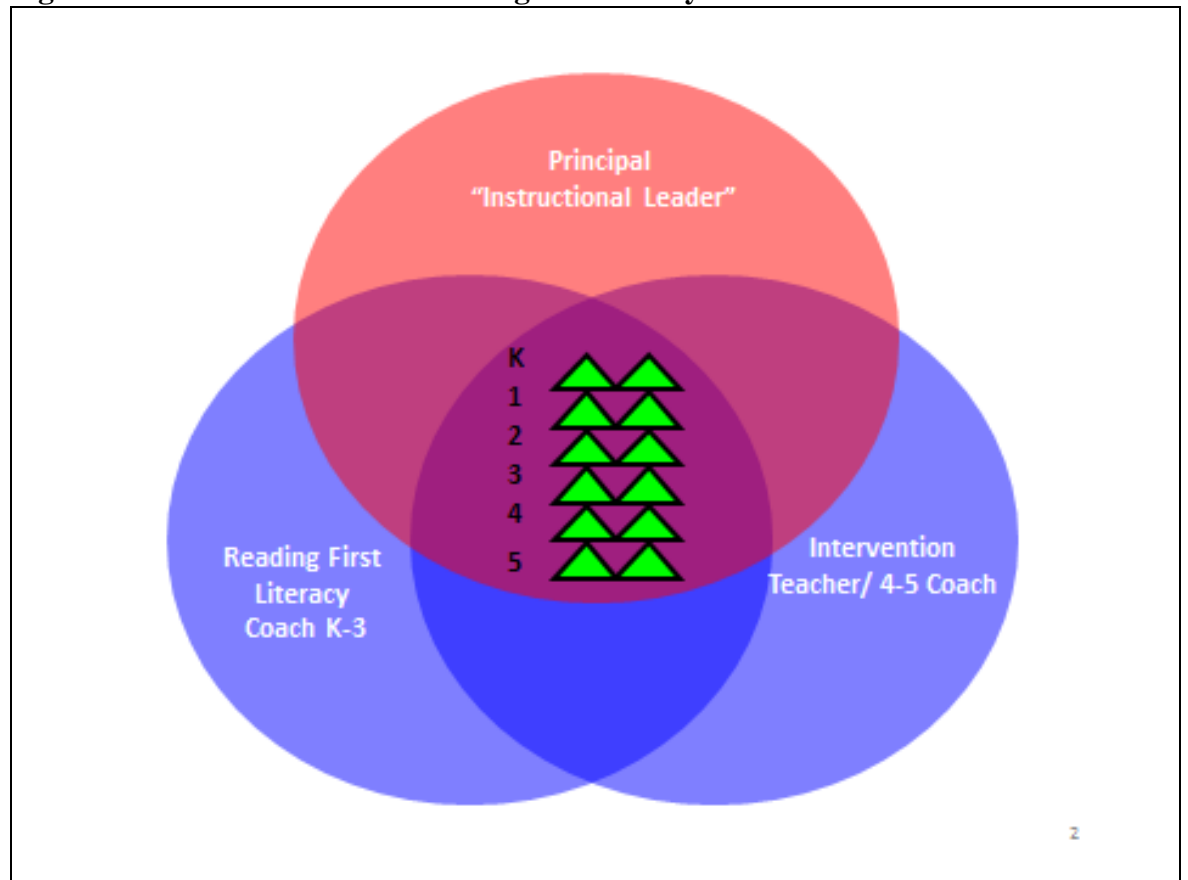
[73] I created this model of the Barcliff organizational structure based upon interviews with teachers and leaders as well as observational accounts.

Appendix B: Instruments

Teacher Survey

Age: _____ Total years taught: _____

Gender: _____ Years at this school: _____

Race/**Ethnicity**: _____ Years in this grade: _____

Highest Degree: _____ University attended: _____

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Teachers in this school make special efforts to recognize all students' individual progress, including the low achievers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school collaborate informally to improve academic outcomes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students in this school can be counted on to do their work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers think most of the parents do a good job.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are caring toward one another.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students here just aren't motivated to learn.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school plan collaboratively to prepare students for standardized tests.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school trust their students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The students in this school talk freely about their lives outside of school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parents in this school are reliable in their commitments.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The opportunities in this community help ensure that our students will learn.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school trust the parents to support them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school really believe every child can learn.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school work in grade level teams.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students in this school are reliable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers here believe students are competent learners.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers in this school are able to get through to difficult students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Faculty in this school work together to help students learn.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school often provide several different activities in class so that students can choose from among them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school have frequent contact with parents.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers here don't have the skills needed to produce meaningful student learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parents of students in this school encourage good habits of schooling.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
If a child doesn't want to learn, teachers here give up on him or her.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parent involvement supports learning here.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our students come to school ready to learn.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school collaborate formally to improve academic outcomes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers can count on the parents in this school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community involvement facilitates learning here.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Home life provides so many advantages the students here are bound to learn.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school believe what students say.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The students in this school have to be closely supervised.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Drug and alcohol abuse in the community make learning difficult for students here.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school have common planning time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The students in this school cheat if they have the chance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school do not have the skills to deal with student disciplinary problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers can believe what parents tell them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school observe each other.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in this school offer a wide range of assignments, matched to students' needs and skill level.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Interview Protocol for Teachers

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me, (name). As you may recall, I administered a survey to the staff before break, but as you know, survey items only give so much information which is why I wanted to talk [school name] teachers further. I'd like to learn more about how your beliefs about [school name] and your experience teaching. I wanted to let you know that the information collected from this interview will be used in my dissertation and you and your school will remain confidential/anonymous.

I'm looking forward to learning from your ideas, but if I ask any question that you would prefer not to answer for any reason, just let me know and we'll move on to the next question. Do you have any questions for me? Let's get started...

Background/Introduction:

1. **Tell me briefly about why you chose teaching as a profession?**

2. **I see that you have X and X degree from X college/university. Did your educational background prepare you well for teaching at [school name]?**
   - What would you have liked to learn?

3. **What made you decide to teach at this school?**
   - What makes your school unique (special)? Do you think your school is similar or different to others in the district?

4. **Can you describe the school atmosphere? (relationships in school)**
   - How do the teachers relate to the principal and students?
   - What explains this orientation?
   - Has it always been like this? When did it change? Why do you think it changed?

5. **Describe the student population of [school name].**
   - Do all students learn in the same ways?
   - Tell me a little about student demographics, poverty, where students live, special needs, test scores
   - Do students perform differently based on poverty levels?

6. **What have you learned about *your* students' backgrounds? Is the information useful in your work with students? How?**
   - Do your students come from backgrounds that are similar to yours? Is this true for the staff?
   - How do you work with those similarities or differences? What are the challenges/benefits? (capability)

7. **What does it mean to be a good teacher at [school name]?**
- Would your colleagues agree? Would your administration/principal agree?

8. **Do [school name] teachers work together on instruction? If so, how?**
- Do teachers work together formally – staff meetings, grade level meetings? Example?
- Do teachers work together informally? Example?
- What are the relationships like between the teachers?
- Do all teachers here feel this way?

9. **In general, how would you describe the attitude of teachers in this school toward their students?**
- Would your colleagues agree with your description?

10. **What can teachers in your school do to make a difference in what students learn?**
- Does the faculty talk about the achievement gap here? Who is performing better/worse? What can the staff do for those students?

Community/Home Life:

Let's talk through some of the questions from the survey you filled out. I asked several questions that focused on the community and home lives of students.

11. **Do students come to school ready to learn?**
- What can you do for students who are not ready to learn?
- Do your colleagues approach this in the same way?

> **Mid Point**

12. **Are there opportunities in this community that contribute to student learning?**
- What are the opportunities?
- Do these opportunities influence the way you teach your students? How about your colleagues?
- Was this always the case? When did it change?

13. **Do you think home life provides advantages for student learning? Disadvantages?**
- What kind of advantages or disadvantages?
- Would your colleagues agree with your perspective?
- Was this always the case? When did it change?
- How do these conditions influence your teaching? How about others?

14. **Are students worried about their safety? Does this impact learning?**
    - *Listen for:* school, homes, community
    - What do they worry about?
    - Would your colleagues agree with your perspective?

15. **Does drug or alcohol abuse in the community make learning difficult for students here?**
    - What is done for children who face these issues?
    - Was this always the case? When did it change?

Motivation:

The survey also had some items asked about motivation.

16. **Are students here motivated to learn?**
    - Why are they motivated/unmotivated? What explains their motivation?
    - Would your colleagues agree with your perspective?
    - Was this always the case? When did it change?

17. **Are teachers confident they will be able to motivate their students?**
    - How do teachers motivation their students? What happens if a teacher can't motivate his or her students?
    - What explains teachers' confidence?

Teacher Skill:

There were a couple survey questions that focused on teacher skills.

19. **Do you think that teachers have the skills to produce meaningful student learning? Can you explain (if needed)?**
    - What kind of skills do teachers need to successfully produce student learning at [school name]?
    - What happens if a teacher does not have the skills to produce learning?
    - What are common teaching strategies utilized in this school?
    - Is student learning reflected in MEAP scores?

20. **Do you think teachers have the skills to deal with student disciplinary problems?**
    - How is discipline managed in this school?
    - What sort of skills do teachers at [school name] need?
    - Is student behavior related to learning here?
    - Would your colleagues agree with you?

I also asked about teacher persistence.

21.   If a child doesn't want to learn, do teachers give up on him or her?
- What strategies are used by you, or other teachers in this school? Are they coordinated in any way?
- What explains this orientation? Would your colleagues agree with you?
- Has it always been this way? When did it change?
- Example?

22.   Are teachers are able to get through to difficult students? How?
- What are the strategies that the school uses?
- Has it always been this way? When did it change?
- Would your colleagues agree with you?

23.   Do teachers in this school really believe that all children can learn?
- What explains this orientation? How do you know? Example?
- Has it always been this way? When did it change?
- Would your colleagues agree with you?

Other Topics (If not addressed): Instruction, families, collaboration, principal, community

I really appreciate your time today – that is the end of my formal questions. Do you have anything else you would like to add about the culture/climate of your school? Would it be ok if I follow up with you if I have additional questions?

Focus Group Problem of Practice

Katie Smith

A third-grade teacher in an urban school is trying her best to teach language arts using a district required curriculum. She is especially worried about one English Language Learner who appears to want to learn, but who speaks English only at school.

Katie Smith drove down Seventh Avenue towards Kingsley Street, appreciating the peace of the early October morning at 7:00 am. As Katie drove through the PS 52 neighborhood, she noticed more and more signs for rent. "Amazing" Katie said to herself. "I can't believe how quickly the neighborhood is changing."

Katie had been teaching at PS 52 in Metropolitan, a large Midwestern city, for ten years. When she began teaching at PS 52, the community consisted of immigrants who were relatively poor but stable. She noticed that as the economy declined, her students grew more impoverished and less prepared for school.

Katie walked up a flight of stairs and entered her third grade classroom. Her room was impeccably neat, student work adorned the walls and hung from the ceilings. Katie started reading and tweaking her lesson plans in preparation for the day. She thought very carefully about her literacy block because her school was under a lot of pressure to raise student achievement scores.

The bell rang at 8:00 am, and the morning routine began. Like clockwork, students handed in their homework, quietly took their seats, and began to work on daily oral language, while Katie attended to the lunch count. After taking attendance, Katie began the reading block, starting first with whole group instruction, using the district required series anthology and then transitioning into guided reading groups. While Katie led guided reading groups, her other students worked in centers. Each child knew where to go and responded well to the hand-clap Katie taught them to signal the next transition.

Katie was particularly worried about Samar, who didn't seem to be making progress. Katie observed that Samar was able to read the anthology but she did not understand what she read. In an effort to improve Samar's progress, she added her to her lowest reading group. Children were reading at least 1 year below grade level in this group. It was Samar's turn to read "A Trip to the Zoo." She turned the page and she read fluently, "Mary was smiling as she walked by the panda."

"Why was Mary smiling?" Katie asked.

Samar paused, "Because she walked by the panda." she said tentatively.

"That's correct, Samar. How do you think she is feeling?" Katie probed.

Samar said nothing and shrugged her shoulders. "Does anyone want to guess how Mary is feeling?"

"Oh, I know!" called out Ali.

"Ok, Ali, what do you think?"

"I think she really likes pandas, so when she walked by she was happy."

"Terrific!" Katie responded. She continued the lesson but was frustrated; she did not know how to improve Samar's comprehension skills. Since the first day of school, Katie observed that Samar could read anything put in front of her.

Samar could answer questions that required the reader to recall simple detail in the text however, Samar was unable to comprehend at a deeper level. Katie suspected that this problem was related to Samar being an English Language Learner, but in 10 years of teaching, she had never dealt with a child that had such mismatched skills with decoding and comprehension.

Later that morning, Katie called Samar to her desk. "Samar, I'm really pleased with how well you are coming along with the work we've been doing in class. However, I'm worried that you don't understand what you are reading. Do you think you could get some help at home?"

"I don't think so. My parents don't read in English."

"Does anyone in your family speak English?"

"Sometimes my sister, when she visits she speaks English to me."

"What about your friends?"

"Everyone, they speak Arabic. I only speak English in school."

Katie decided that she needed some help with this situation, so at lunch that day she talked to Paul Touran, another third grade teacher. "I'm worried about Samar, Paul. Her decoding is good, but her comprehension and writing are so far behind."

"Too bad," Paul said. "Last year you could have sent her to reading recovery, but with the budget cuts they don't offer it anymore. Have you tried to reach her parents?"

"Yes." Katie said. "They don't seem to care. I haven't been able to get in touch with anyone over the phone. I've sent notes but they have not responded."

"That's a tough one. Maybe you could talk to the principal?"

(1) What is going on here and how do you know? What are the main issues you see?

(2) What concerns you about this situation? What excites you about this situation?

(3) How would you respond if you were Katie? How did you know to respond that way?

(4) What is likely to happen next?

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