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WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CLASSROOM?: HOW SCHOOL CULTURE
INFLUENCES AND IMPACTS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHER
PRACTICE

BY

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Abstract

Schools spend a great deal of time, resources, and money seeking ways to both understand and increase student achievement on state standardized test that scores have become the customary measure of a school's quality and success. Due to this narrow focus on standards and testing becoming more and more central in education, schools and teachers often do not implement the pedagogical strategies that work to increase student learning and thinking (Burke, 2010; Langer, 2001; Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Nystrand, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). In addition to a lack of focus on pedagogical practices, schools often ignore the impact culture has on both student achievement and teacher practice (Deal & Peterson, 2009). This study examines how culture and power structures within a school influence teacher practice.

This year-long qualitative case study sought to answer the following questions: 1) What impact does a school's culture have on teacher practice? 2) In what ways does classroom discourse position teachers and students as creators of knowledge? 3) How are reading and writing implemented to create environments where learning is valued? 4) How does the use of pedagogical labels allow teacher and schools to believe they are implementing effective practices?

Through analysis of field notes and interviews, the research suggests that schools and teachers seeking to improve their educational outcomes examine honestly the practices in place and explore the impact that the school culture has on those practices. Findings suggest that for schools to succeed in improving their academic achievement both school and classroom culture need to value and have learning at the center.

Dedication

To each student who has sat in my classroom and given my work purpose, you challenged me, encouraged me, and demanded I be the best I could be for you and for myself. Each of you left your mark on me and those marks, while invisible on the outside, are the reason that I have made education and education equity my life's work. I owe my future to all of you. Thank you.

To my husband, Bill, without your love and support, none of this would be possible. Thank you for pushing me to be the best I can be. Thank you for understanding the importance of this work and giving me the time and space needed to see this dream through.

To Noah and Zoë, every moment we missed together is etched into these pages. Everything I do, I do for you. Know that dreams do come true and hard work does pay off. Never Give Up. Reach for the stars.

And to my parents, thank you seems inadequate. Thank You.

Acknowledgments

This work began the minute I stepped into my first high school classroom as a student teacher. I remember the fear as I stood in front of the classroom for the very first time. I looked out onto the sea of faces that weren't so certain about me and doubted myself. I looked at my cooperating teacher with her tailored suits and her 20+ years of experience and knew I was not her. I took center stage and I asked a question. The room was quiet as students shuffled papers and looked at their books for the hint of an answer. One student, who had not spoken voluntarily in class before, raised his hand to speak. I was hooked. What pushed him to finally participate? How could I reach even more students?

My early career began in schools where the majority of the student population was both minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged. During this time, I became increasingly aware of the low expectations held by teachers and by the system as a whole for students who were not suburban and white. I pushed myself to be the best teacher I could and I taught with the highest expectations for my students. I refused to give in to the thinking that these students were not capable of hard work. I watched as students started to believe in themselves and I knew that I had to work to ensure that all students were pushed and taught as they deserved to be taught.

In the spring semester of 2008, I took Dr. Bredemeier's class on social justice issues in education. This class changed me as a person and as a teacher. It made me question my own beliefs, stereotypes and motivations. It made me look critically at classroom practice and start to examine the underlying messages my classroom practice

imparted on my students. My experience in this class changed the way I looked at both my practice and my students.

During my education, from bachelor's program through my doctoral studies, I have been challenged and inspired by the many of my professors and classmates. It was Dr. Sheridan Blau that first allowed me the space to explore education and how teachers impact students. For my senior thesis, Dr. Blau gave me access to the reading/writing autobiographies of dozens of South Coast Writing Project participants. It was during this work that I first began to understand the impact that school can have on students and their lives. This powerful moment was the first seed of this dissertation work.

Without Dr. Nancy Singer, none of this would be possible. I was lucky enough to meet her as she was working on her Ph.D. She was a mother to young children and a veteran classroom teacher. It was in her that I saw the possibility of this dream. Being part of her process and having an insight into her own journey gave me the strength and perseverance to take this journey myself. I could not ask for a better advisor.

To the rest of my committee, I could not envision the complexity of this work without the tools you help me begin to understand. I hope to continue this work and I will never forget your influence. It is all of these experiences together that have prepared me to understand this work.

This work is never done alone. No matter how lonely it feels. This work, while my own, is only possible with the help of each professor who took his or her time to encourage and push me. This work is just the beginning my journey. I am lucky to have met and been influenced by so many amazing teachers, colleagues, and students.

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Chapter One: The Reality in the Classroom

The Reality

The classroom is quiet as the printed word is read aloud. The students share the responsibility of reading in round robin, choral fashion, quickly disengaging when it is not their turn to read. The words fill the silent room in an attempt to engage students in the literature, published in 1906. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* was read in these same rooms by the students' parents, their parents' parents, and so on. The pages sit stagnant and gather dust until someone is called on to read and has to be directed to the current page. Heads go down, minds turn off, and words fall on deaf ears. An entire 90 minutes pass and the students are not asked to write anything down nor are they invited to create knowledge or understandings. Questions are asked begging only details to be recalled. Thinking is absent. Analysis does not exist (Field Notes Aug. 12, 2010).

In another classroom, just down the road, student silently line up in halls before they are allowed to enter the room. Once given permission to enter the room, students file in mostly silent, find their seats and begin to write down in their planners the day's objectives, work and homework. The teacher or a selected student then walks the rows putting a stamp in each student's planner as they finish writing down the details. Questions are asked to ensure students are paying attention and listening. Students repeat what the teacher has said, not what they have learned (Field Notes, August 23, 2011; August 25, 2011).

I witnessed these scenes while supervising student teachers and conducting my dissertation research in urban public schools. These scenes drive my research. I present them to illustrate the need for pedagogical reforms and support for teachers to help

incorporate writing, thinking and understanding into the classroom. Students in our urban schools are being undereducated. Many of them move through the educational system unable to write well, think critically, problem solve and create knowledge and understandings. This lack of critical thinking skills is reflective of a school's culture. The majority of our nation's public schools subscribe to pedagogy in what Philip Jackson (1986) has termed the "mimetic tradition" (cited in Kickbusch, 1996). The "mimetic tradition" refers to the dominant transmission model of education that places the teacher as the holder and deliverer of knowledge and students as the receivers and mimics of the delivered knowledge. This tradition of transmission education has also been termed the "Pedagogy of Poverty" by Haberman (1991).

This long-enduring tradition of education has worked against preparing many of our students for the rapidly changing world we live in. The skills expected of workers today are different than they were 50 years ago, yet our educational pedagogy has largely not adapted nor does school culture reflect the societal changes. The standards and back-to-basics movement have worked to solidify that our classrooms and schools continue the current pedagogy that focuses on skills in isolation for the purpose of performance on a standardized test.

Along with this traditional "mimetic tradition," there has been a change in the way school culture is perceived and built. As research explores school reform (Robbins, 2008; Gabbard, 2011) schools have become more militaristic and this militarization has had an impact on the way school culture is developed. As Robbins (2008) claims, this militarization removes students' access to the democratic principles and skills they need to and In turn, school culture impacts the decisions that teachers make and how teacher

and students are positioned (Deal & Peterson, 1999; 2009). Culture also dictates the relationship between content and pedagogy.

Gregory (2001) asserts that curriculum and its effect should not be considered in isolation from the pedagogy that is delivering the curriculum. Teachers often spend an inordinate amount of time understanding and examining curriculum, but focus little on the delivery of the curriculum. Schools need to focus more on the “how” we teach than the “what” we teach. Current pedagogy dictates the “what” making the curriculum more important than the pedagogy. This reminds us that if we want to investigate the failings of a particular curriculum we need to work to examine how the teachers deliver that curriculum. The delivery is as important as the understanding of the curriculum. Teachers often overlook the nuances of the delivery in deference to the curriculum. As we look at school culture and its design, we must also look at pedagogy and understand how pedagogical practice is impacted by both teacher perception and school culture.

The Problem

Sheils’ (1975) fear-inciting *Newsweek* article “Johnny Can’t Write” opens with timeless accusations:

If your children are attending college, the chances are that when they graduate they will be unable to write ordinary expository English with any real degree of structure and lucidity. If they are in high school and planning to attend college, the chances are less than even that they will be able to write English at the minimal college level when they get there. If they are not planning to attend college, their skills in writing English may not even qualify them for secretarial or clerical work. And if they are attending elementary school, they are almost

certainly not being given the kind of required reading material, much less writing instruction, that might make it possible for them eventually to write comprehensible English. (p. 58)

Following closely on the heels of “Johnny Can’t Write,” the National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE] (1983) released “A Nation at Risk.” The report claims, “If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war” (p. 5). The findings outlined in the report cover all areas of the educational system and have a focus on equity in education. The report acknowledges that “regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost (p. 8). The focus of “A Nation at Risk” focuses on the perceived lack of high expectations and the growth in mediocrity as perceived based on curriculum and course offerings.

While the rhetoric of fear is something to scrutinize, the message in both are something that cannot be lost. Many children progress through our educational system with skills that are not developed as they should be. A *New York Times* article published on February 7, 2011, exposes how unprepared entering college students are who graduate from New York City public schools. The problem of under education is paramount in many urban education systems and not just New York (Otterman, 2011). The lack of thinking and ability is not confined to our elementary and secondary schools. Arum and Roksa (2011) explore the lack of academic rigor and expectations at the university level and have found that college students are required to do less homework, less writing, and less thinking in college than students 50 years ago. As we consider the steps needed to

achieve real pedagogical and education reform, we first have to explore what has become the goal of our K-12 public education system, as the goal precipitates culture and pedagogy.

Standards-Based Education

One of the inherent problems in our educational system is a lack of focus on what students should know and be able to do beyond scoring well on standardized tests. To assist administrators and educators in determining what to teach, there are pages and pages of standards and performance indicators that have been seemingly carved in stone as the “essentials” of learning. To complicate things further, each state has its own unique standards and performance indicators. A study by Marzano and Kendall (1996) shows just how complicated the standards are: “They reviewed 160 national and state-level standards documents in various subject areas, synthesized the material to avoid duplication, and identified 255 content standards and 3,968 discrete benchmarks that delineate what student should be able to do” (cited in Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 61). To cover all of these benchmarks would require roughly nine more years of school. This is one example of the root problems in education. We have attempted to create measurable units of learning so that it is explicit to teachers what exactly they should cover and clear to the assessment designers what should be covered/tested (Burke, 2010; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Those who set the standards and make policy want to make it prescriptive to schools and teachers what should be taught (Hillocks, 2002). In this desire to make learning outcomes clear, each indicator has been separated making it too easy to segment skills and tasks that should be done in context with one another into discrete units that no longer make sense to students when taught in isolation.

This focus on standards and testing has de-contextualized learning and teaching (Langer, 2001). More recently, over 43 states eventually adopted the Common Core Standards. These new standards are meant to replace each individual state's standards in a move to create a "national" set of standards. How these new standards will be adopted and actualized in the classroom is not yet known and as issues with tests have been realized, several states have pulled out of their testing consortiums and/or put adopting the standards on hold. In addition to issues with the tests, political agendas, local control, and choice are factors in many states. Regardless, the problem of covering all of the standards still exists. The focus on standards was clear in all the classes I observed during my research. The "what" was at the center of each classroom and the "how" never varied regardless of the need for the skill. This focus on standards creates serious issues of contention, stress and anxiety within the education community. When teachers cannot possibly cover everything the standards "dictate," what is a teacher to do?

The answer to this question is often to teach to the test (both state and district tests) scores. Teachers and students alike have become beholden to the standards. On the surface, the standards appear to be rigorous in nature, but in reality, they have been boiled down to easily tested "knowledge" bits (Hillocks, 2002; Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). As a result, best practice in education, especially in our urban and poor performing schools, has become test preparation and test taking. Teachers are prescribed formulaic answer patterns that they ingrain in their students. This level of prescription has taken the thinking out of education, for both students and teachers. Burke (2010) argues, "too often underachieving students have no opportunity to ask or respond to questions that would connect school to their lives outside; instead, these disaffected students are too

often working to develop skills through a curriculum that offers them no chance to ask the questions they desperately need answers to” (Burke, 2010, p. 8). This lack of questioning and authority provided to students is dictated by school culture.

Administrators and teachers must also understand that teaching the content in isolation or in relation to a high-stakes test is not enough for students to develop the skills students need to be successful students, critical thinkers and knowledge creators. This is an important issue: teachers must learn how to incorporate thinking into their classrooms. This ability to see pedagogy as important and to integrate thinking, writing and questions into the classroom is of particular importance in urban classrooms. Often, it appears that high-poverty kids are tested, while rich kids are taught (Patterson & Speed, 2007; Haberman, 1991). Teachers in public schools are under immense pressure to raise test scores every year, even in districts where test scores are already high.

As schools feel the pressures to focus on test scores, they pass the pressure onto teachers. The “what” of teaching becomes the driving force behind classroom practice, professional development, and curriculum planning. Much of what has driven the “what” of teaching is NCEE (1983) report that focuses many of its findings on the achievement results of students in American schools and the catastrophic results that wait those who do not fully apply themselves to their education, “the people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life” (p. 7). The “what” has become rooted in the standards-based teaching movement and this shift in focus to the “what” has shifted the

responsibility from the school system to the students who in order to reap the benefits “all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself” (p. 8).

The Purpose of Education

The first step, before determining what needs to be taught and how it should be taught is to determine the purpose of education. This process of determining the why and how schools educate the students who come through their doors happens independently at each district and at each individual school. We often see this process playing out independently in each teacher’s classroom as they shift instruction based on class makeup and student needs as demonstrated in formative and summative assessments.

In the current education reform climate, it’s necessary to unpack a clearly defined purpose of education. Upon examining the current climate and rhetoric surrounding education, the current purpose of education appears on the surface to be getting students to perform well on standardized state assessments. Developing an understanding of the purpose of education is important to this work to provide a lens to support the discussion on school culture, the positioning of authority, the need for thoughtful questions, and explore the focus on critical thinking in American education (Wilhelm, 2007).

In 1961, the National Education Association commissioned a report, *The Central Purpose of American Education*. The report concluded rather succinctly that the central purpose of American education was “the development of the ability to think. This is the central purpose to which the school must be oriented if it is to accomplish either its traditional tasks or those newly accentuated by recent changes to the world” (The

Education Policies Commission, 1961, p. 12). For the purpose of this work, I subscribe to this purpose.

If the goal of education is to create students who have the ability to think, then asking them to think should be one of the centerpieces of our curricula. Not only must we ask them to think, we must look at our own teaching practice and school cultures to ensure that the work we are doing demands thinking. Currently, textbooks and standardized tests tend to be at the center of the curriculum in many schools. Teachers are often required to adhere to the pacing guides in their classrooms. While not all schools are rooted in textbooks and pacing guides, the ideas of holding fast to a particular method or instructional practice, as influenced and dictated by the school culture, can have the same limiting impact on a teacher's classroom practice.

Fulfilling the promise of education and developing students as thinkers involves leading students to be able to blend what Aristotle termed their "contemplative life" with their "political lives" (Pinar & Grumet, 2001, p. 51). This idea from ancient Greece shows the desire for a melding of theory (contemplative) into practice (political). Society asks and expects our citizens to meld the two together each day of their life—for example, applying the theories or teachings of religion or spiritual beliefs into everyday actions. Classroom structures and school culture must be set up in a way that allows for this exploration of thinking to take place. Yet in most classrooms, students are rarely asked to apply knowledge within the content or subject matter they are taught. Students are often only expected to receive the information/knowledge from the teacher as opposed to working to create understanding and/or new knowledge and apply that knowledge to real world issues.

Our curriculum, pedagogy and school cultures are not created to instruct students on the transfer of the contemplative into the practical. Curriculum often only asks student to recite what they have been told and not to experience, apply, or contemplate the issues, concepts or facts they have been exposed to. Contemplation is thinking. Pinar & Grumet (2001) assert “contemplation involves scrutiny, active intelligent inquiry into the concrete, looking for abstract forms underneath the details of everyday life” (p. 51). This process of blending thinking with application leads to creating knowledge. It is this process I sought to examine and document.

I started this research seeking to understand how professional development impacts teacher practice as it relates to the teaching of thinking, writing and questioning. These were the original wonderings that brought me to this work. As I analyzed recorded data and sat through dozens of classes, it quickly became very apparent that I would be unable to answer the original questions sufficiently. No matter how I tried to look at the data I was gathering, I could not fit it into categories and codes that would support the answering of my original research questions.

As I looked over my coded data and memos, I began to see some trends. These trends encouraged the formulation of new questions and a re-evaluation of my data resulting in new these questions.

1. What impact does a school’s culture have on teacher practice?
2. In what ways does classroom discourse position teachers and students as creators of knowledge or transfer authority?
3. How are reading and writing implemented to create learning environments where learning is valued?

4. How does the use of pedagogical labels allow teachers and schools to believe they are teaching with effective practices?

Important Concepts (Framework)

The central concepts of this research are important to understand, as well as to unpack how they all fit together. For the purpose of this research, I subscribe to the idea of education outlined in the Education Policies Commission report (1961) that the purpose education is to develop thinkers. With this purpose in mind, it becomes apparent that in order to develop students into thinkers, teachers must engage students in thinking activities on a consistent basis. In order to ensure that thinking is happening in the classroom, teachers must enlist a variety of strategies that allow students to create and explore. One of the practices that encourages thinking is writing. Writing is a mode of learning (Emig, 1977) and in order to write one has to think and process (Cohen & Spencer, 1993).

Writing does not happen in a vacuum. Writing happens in conjunction with inquiry and/or questioning and writing that is metacognitive is the most effective (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkinson, 2004). If the purpose of education is to help develop thinking skills, teachers should be encouraged to consider the use of writing as a way for students to answer questions and create an understanding of what they think and know (Gallagher, 2011; Gallagher, 2015; Kittle, 2008; Burke, 2010; Wilhelm, 2007).

In order to develop students who are able to think and teachers who understand how to bring inquiry into their classrooms, we must also examine the culture of the school to understand what the school values. If the school culture does not value learning and/or thinking, then the pedagogical practice in the school and classrooms will reflect

that. School culture impacts every aspect of the school environment, including how teachers see both their students and the goals of the school. This culture-dictated vision of the school impacts the decisions that teachers make in the classroom as decisions pertain to pedagogical practice and curriculum decisions (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Boundaries and Significance

Students from all areas--urban, rural and suburban--often enter the next phases of their educational lives unprepared to do the work expected of them. This study seeks to examine how school culture, teacher expectations, and collective responsibility impact teacher practice and how culture works with and/or against what teachers believe is in the best interest of their students. To explore culture, expectations and responsibilities, I must examine how the orthodoxies in place inform and influence culture and either support or hinder teacher practice and pedagogical changes. In conjunction with the examination of culture, this study explores how teachers use specific pedagogical practices to foster student thinking and exploration of ideas based in the belief that reading and writing are tools for learning and thinking. I also focus on how teachers use the pedagogical practices to position themselves in relation to the students, the content and the school culture.

Literacy practices and student efficacy play an integral role in the teaching of thinking, as students cannot write without thinking. Writing also encourages student engagement and if used as a way to get students to be metacognitive about their own learning can lead to increased student achievement (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkeson, 2004). Writing is not the only way in which thinking can be encouraged and examined, but the way writing is used and assigned can be a way to measure the level of

engagement and thinking that happens in a classroom. The type of assignments and activities indicate the values of the school culture and the accepted pedagogical beliefs of the teachers.

School culture and the pedagogical beliefs held by a school and its staff determine all curricular instruction. Curricular activities and learning experiences understandably must be grounded in standards and meaningfully designed to ensure students reach deeper understandings and are able to apply their learning. The majority of research to date looks at school culture, writing for learning, the use of questions and inquiry as a teaching strategy, and professional development programs independently of one another. This study examined these aspects jointly. In order to encourage and support change in teaching practice, research must be able to show that examining school culture, supporting systemic change of pedagogy, increased teacher and student inquiry, and sustained professional development when developed together can lead to better teaching and increased student learning and achievement (Milner, Brannon, Brown, Cash, & Pritchard, 2009; Whyte, Lazarte, Thompson, Ellis, Muse, & Talbot, 2007; Singer & Scollay, 2006; Wilhelm, 2007; Deal & Peterson, 1999).

This study was conducted within a mid-sized Midwestern city, and consists of multiple classroom case studies within a larger case study of the school. The classroom case studies focused on middle-grade classrooms over the course of the 2011-2012 school year. A case study design was chosen to help give a broader and more complete picture of how a school's culture is operationalized within classrooms over time (Merriam, 1998). While a school year is a short look at classroom instruction, the use of case study design allows for an in-depth look at specific classrooms and the school as a cultural

whole. Through my work with charter schools in a mid-sized urban district, I have chosen an urban charter school as my research site, not for convenience but because this charter school participated in professional development through the Midwest Writing Project as it looked for ways to increase student learning and achievement. This study provides a look at how school culture, writing, and effective questioning can be implemented in the classroom and can lead to effective changes in teacher practice.

Theoretical Framework

As previously stated, the purpose of education is to develop each student's ability to think. In order to examine how thinking is taught and encouraged in the classroom, I draw upon several different frameworks to provide a multi-dimensional look at the learning and instructional choices and the influence of professional development and school culture on classroom practice.

Writing and Agency

I draw on Emig's (1977) idea that writing is a mode of learning and a way for students to talk on paper and on Prior's (2006) sociocultural theory that writing is dialogic and a social action not tied to one moment. In order for learning to happen, students need the power of agency that will help them develop feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Pajares, 1996). Writing allows and encourages students to both think and to make things happen through their own actions. I take this idea of writing as talk on paper in the purest form and subscribe to the idea that written language can be used as effectively as a discussion tool as spoken language. The use of writing as talk gives students the same agency as spoken discourse and will lead to the same learning gains presented in previous research focused solely on student agency (Nystrand, 1997). While

student agency is important, teachers need to develop their own agency. Participating in professional development targeted at increasing the frequency that writing and inquiry are implemented by teachers in the classroom gives agency to teachers in a way that they may have not taken advantage of before.

Positioning, Questions and Discourse

Building on the theories of learning and agency enacted through writing, I also draw upon positioning theory as defined by van Langenhove & Harré (1999). All interactions require participants to occupy a “position” and this position can be self-assigned or forced upon the participant by another participant or the social context of the interaction. In terms of educational institutions, teachers and students occupy positions defined through their assigned roles and the conversations are often restricted to the discourse functions allowed by the social forces that define and inform each position. The questions that are asked in the classroom also work to position the participants which include the teacher, students and the content. This idea that social context and social force influence how participants are positioned in relation to one another and in relation to the content of the course is central to my research.

In order to learn, students must be positioned and learn to position themselves not only to be students, but also be creators of knowledge. As I examined the data using positioning theory, I drew inspiration from the work of discourse analysis, Fairclough (1989; 2011), Gee (2011), and Kress (2011). I drew upon the theories within their work as inspiration to examine classroom discourse as related to the positions students, teachers and content are placed in, how that positioning takes shape, how it impacts classroom climate, and how it exposes culture.

Culture and Priorities

School culture influences and dictates everything from classroom practice to student behavior. A school's culture defines priorities and offers students, teachers, and staff norms that inform decisions regarding interactions with students, other staff members, and classroom practices. School culture, like any other culture, contains all the traditions, values, and norms of the school system (Deal & Peterson, 2009). All of these elements work together to create an environment where learning and relationships are valued or the school and its structures and orthodoxies are valued.

School culture sets the priorities that radiate through every aspect of a school. While teachers come with their own bias, the school culture sets the tone for what happens in the classroom (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). The classroom is a case where the school culture and the teacher's desired culture merge to reinforce what is valued and privileged.

In the chapters that follow, I explore each of my four research questions jointly. In chapter two, I provide a detailed analysis of the literature as it pertains to the multiple concepts pertinent to the understanding of school and classroom culture: teacher expectations, collective responsibility, effective instruction, orthodoxies, pedagogical practices, and professional development. In chapter three, I provide insight into my perspective as researcher and detail the structure of the study: data collection, participant selection, and data analysis. Chapter four and five present the cases that were the core of this study and examine the classroom practice of Julie, Maria, Cassie, and Kimberly and analysis of the role that school culture plays in pedagogical choices. In chapter six, I discuss the implications and restrictions of culture and discuss the implications of this

work, make recommendations for further study, and discuss how school leaders and teachers could use this work as they seek to improve learning in their classrooms and schools.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

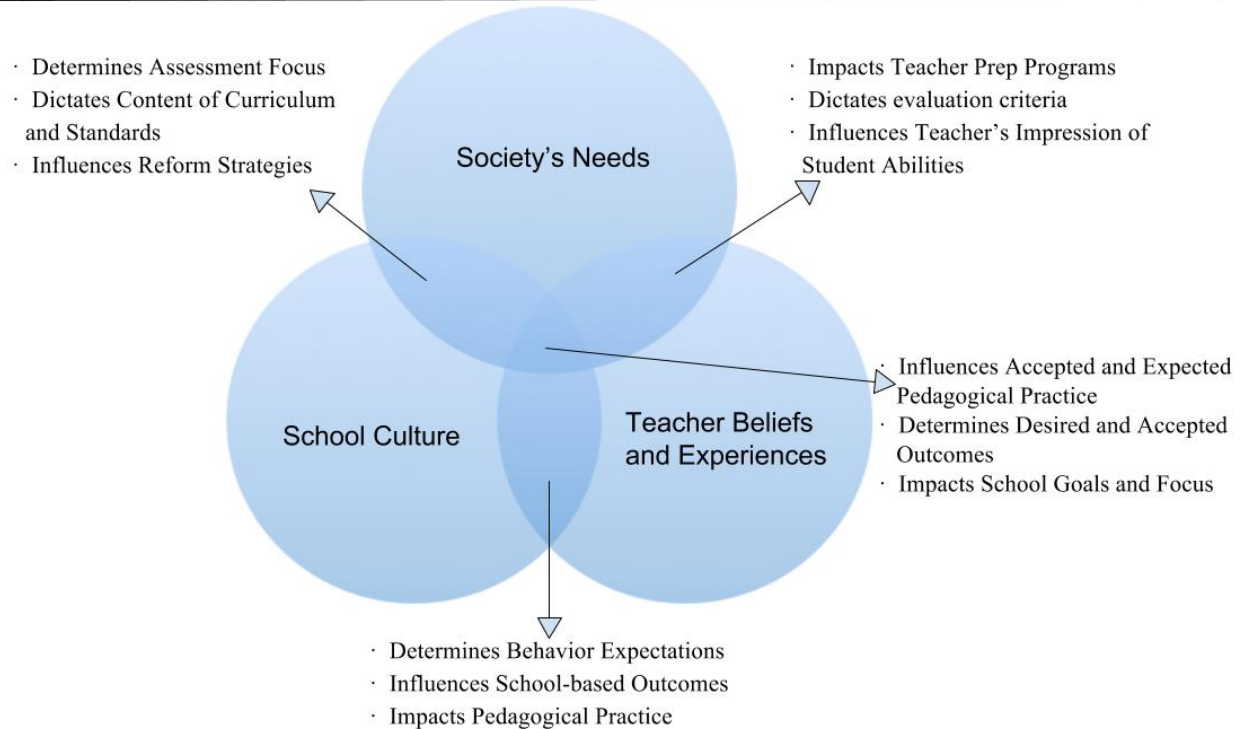
This chapter reviews relevant research pertaining to various facets relevant to understanding the complexity of schools and teaching. Research related to culture begins this chapter as culture, both school and societal, precipitates all interactions and decisions made by administrators and teachers. Culture influences and dictates what practices are implemented and supported. As this study seeks to examine the implementation of pedagogical strategies, the discourse within the classrooms, what messages are conveyed about learning. I have included a review of the literature regarding the pedagogy in place at my research site.

The review also includes a review of effective pedagogy and the culture that supports those pedagogical practices. As illustrated in Figure 1, understanding how to inform and influence teacher practice and school improvement/reform requires and examination of all forces and an understanding of how those forces interact. While this review examines these forces in relative isolation, the study itself examines the intersection of these components.

School Culture in Practice

Our society positions schools as repositories of knowledge. Teachers are seen, treated, and positioned as the gatekeepers of the knowledge. The belief that schools and teachers hold the knowledge automatically positions schools and teachers as the accepted authority. The culture of the school determines the importance put on thinking or knowing, understanding or repeating. The culture of a school dictates the role of the teacher and role of the students. The current movement in urban school reform is one

Figure 1- Relationship Between Concepts



that focuses on creating a school culture that is often inconducive to learning (Robbins, 2008; Gabbard, 2011). The current trend in school culture reform in urban and low-income schools focuses on obedience over exploration, quiet over conversation (Johnson, 2005; Deal & Peterson, 2005). There are silent halls and a lack of freedom for students to control their own movements or choices. These no-excuses cultures force students to “be” a certain way and provide rewards for good (compliant) behavior. These reform models have led to scripted curriculums and behavior controls that create school cultures reminiscent of prisons. These rigid cultural structures develop a belief that students can only learn in controlled environments that require nearly no critical thinking (Delpit & White-Bradly, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 2009; Johnson, 2005).

In many schools, especially in urban, low-income schools, reform efforts seeking to improve scores on state assessments have become focused on a specific type of

behavior (quiet, obedient) and achieving a specific result (compliance) (Robbins, 2008; Gabbard, 2011). While compliance is not new in school classrooms, the current trend of compliance and control reaches beyond the classroom and has become the focus of effective instructional reform. There is little focus or consideration on how the result is achieved; the desired result is a test score and not learning. The test score and growth goals are what drive decision making with very little emphasis, if any, put upon the thinking that students do in the classroom. The culture of the school supersedes pedagogical ideals (Kent & Peterson, 2009; Johnson, 2005). Many studies (Rossman, 1988; Fullan, 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Rutter, 1979) have concluded that culture is a critical component to successfully improving teaching and learning. In schools where a strong mission supports the norms, values, and beliefs of ability and learning, academic achievements of students increase as does the efficacy and belief in student improvement of teachers (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2004). This sense of efficacy allows teachers to fulfill the role that is needed to develop student learning. As Byrk (2015) discusses, teachers need to understand the improvement as well as have both the “will and agency” to participate fully and effectively in the improvement efforts.

The efficacy of teachers needs to supersede their content knowledge if student learning is to be fostered and developed. Gregory (2001) asserts that teachers must befriend students on some level to ensure that students are open to learning. The ethos of teachers is paramount to student success and this ethos is influenced by the school culture. Gregory (2001) explores the criteria that are important to students in their teachers (trustworthiness, competence, commitment to the value of skills being taught,

fairness, and dedication to both their profession and the students as people). These criteria are indicative of a teacher who clearly cares about the development of the student as a person, but who also cares about their overall success. These criteria create a teacher who is capable of stepping outside of the role of teacher as a keeper of knowledge and into the role as learner with her students.

Gregory's (2001) definition of friendship must be explored, as it is central to the argument he makes regarding the role of teacher and the argument I make about the relationship between school culture and classroom practice and teacher's position in relation to the position of students. Gregory (2001) focuses on befriending students as opposed to being friendly with students and defines this befriending as "creating an atmosphere of classroom trust in which the teacher's willingness to call a bad job a bad job is seen by the student as helpful and productive rather than as mean and destructive" (p. 83). Teachers must earn this trust by being genuine people and learners in the classroom with their students. This type of genuine befriending is dependent upon a school culture that encourages and rewards risks as well as a sense of community (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Dilg, 2015).

Culture is defined as a "set of core beliefs, a focused and clear sense of purpose, recognition of staff and students accomplishments, intellectual engagement, and a celebration of success" (Deal & Peterson, 2009 p. 11). These core beliefs are actualized in many ways and are necessary for a school's achievement to improve (Waters, Marzano, McNulty, 2004; Deal & Peterson, 2009; Johnson, 2005). These strong beliefs and sense of purpose are necessary not only for academic improvement, but also to foster

the dedication that makes teachers and staff more likely to consider and implement different and new instructional strategies.

Culture dictates what happens in a school building—in the halls, in the classrooms, in the common spaces. As Dilg (2015) points out, a positive culture is developed and maintained through mutual trust, willingness and expectation to take risks. Yet, often times school cultures are more restrictive and teachers and staff view professional development or evaluations as an obligation as opposed to a possibility to improve (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Gregory, 2001). As Gregory (2001) points out, an inability to separate curriculum from pedagogy allows curriculum to be the focus of all improvement efforts, when in reality, *how* things are taught is more important than the *what* is taught. When the curriculum is the focus of improvement efforts, it may prevent an honest look and evaluation of pedagogy. Schools and teachers must be able and willing to admit deficits and the unwillingness to see and admit deficits—at a school achievement or classroom teacher level—is impacted by the norms created that become an entrenched part of the school climate (Gregory, 2001; Deal & Peterson, 2009; Johnson, 2005; Dilg, 2015).

While school culture is an important factor, the classroom culture is just as important. The school culture sets the foundation for classroom culture, but each teacher brings their own experiences and beliefs into their classroom. As administrators set the tone and assume the role of leader of the school, teachers do the same in their classroom (Dilg, 2015). One of the roles a teacher fulfills is to guide students through the learning process and to assess the students' learning. The ability of students to create knowledge and deep understandings can be assessed and showcased in many ways in the classroom

beyond the traditional end of unit test. Knowledge is created through an active process in which the student seeks to reconcile his or her prior knowledge with the information being studied to create a new knowledge that he or she then works to transfer and apply to a new problem (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). This work happens at both the individual and social level aiding students in creating knowledge and deep understandings (Wilhelm, 2007; Burke, 2010). In order for teachers to know if their students have learned a concept, students must be given the opportunity and be able to “perform.” This idea that performance is the key to illustrating a deep and meaningful understanding of a topic or concept is not a new idea. There are many ways in which students can complete these “performances of understanding” (Perkins & Blythe, 1994).

The ways in which teachers implement instruction and ask students to “show” their learning are confined by the culture that has been built, particularly in the role teachers are expected to play—learner or authority. When teachers focus on what students should learn as opposed to how we teach the content and ask students to show their learning, they are enacting a culture that is encouraged in many school buildings, a culture that put teachers and curricular content at the center (Gregory, 2001).

Deficit-Thinking, Teacher Expectations, Collective Responsibility

The current orthodoxy in education emphasizes a focus on curriculum (the “what” is taught) with very little time spent on the pedagogy (the “how” students are taught). Schools devote much of their time focused on “what” is taught. The “what” is determined by societal needs and school culture. “Exposing students to a well thought-out curriculum is not the same thing as educating them” (Gregory, 2001 p. 69). Overarching school culture, labeled “organizational habits” (Horvat & Antonio, 1993;

Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004) is made up of and influences the responsibility that teachers feel as it relates to student learning and what they determine students are capable of achieving. Teachers determine through experience, personal bias, and organizational culture, what students are capable of achieving and learning. As Byrk's (2015) work supports, a strong sense of collective responsibility for student learning results in teachers who adjust their teaching practices to students' needs. In schools where the school has developed a culture that bears less collective responsibility, students are seen as the issue and not the teaching practices. This deficit-culture develops teachers who are resistant to taking instructional risks (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004).

As NCEE (1983) argues and evidenced through research and personal observations, there exists low expectations in many U.S. schools and a belief that African American students are less capable; this is a troubling trend as Ferguson (1998) posits that the student expectations held by the teacher have a more significant impact on minority students than on white students. Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane (2004) examined teacher perceptions and concluded based on their own review of literature that teachers' collective responsibility for student learning declines in schools as the percentage of low-income African American students rises. They claim that this lowering of expectations and collective responsibility is communicated through the larger organizational culture to both teachers and students.

Positioning through Pedagogy

Effective Instruction and Orthodoxies. Students in middle and high school can develop the skills needed to self-govern, write well and think critically. Yet as Cline (1938) distinguished, a great deal of teaching that happens can be labeled "pseudo-

teaching.” Cline (1938) defines “pseudo-teaching” as “lesson hearing...keeping check on what pupils are succeeding in teaching themselves...dodging the real duty and opportunity of teaching” (p. 258). This concept of “pseudo-teaching” describes what often happens in classrooms. Jackson (1986) called this type of pedagogy the “mimetic tradition.” This pedagogical practice is also more commonly understood as the Initiation-Response-Evaluation/Initiation-Response-Feedback model that places the teacher in the role of authority and limits the students to a role that requires only the right answer (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979; Waring, 2009). Pedagogical practice that teaches students how to learn as opposed to asking them close-ended questions is the most effective and is what teachers should strive for. This “laboratory model” as Cline (1938) labels it is similar to the workshop model as described by Atwell (1998) and further developed and adapted by Kittle (2012; 2008), Gallagher (2011; 2006).

The Workshop Model as defined by Atwell (1998) positions students at the center. Teachers and students are learners in the room together. Atwell describes the workshop classroom as an environment where knowledge guides and informs interactions and not rules. Workshop is developed in the model of the “hand-over phase,” which according to Bruner (1986) is when an adult offers less and less assistance to a learner as the learner becomes more capable.

Atwell’s (1987) original vision of workshop was made up of extremely rigid rules or orthodoxies:

- Minilessons should be between five and even seven minutes long.
- Conferences with individuals are more important than minilessons.
- Attend to conventions at the end of the process.
- Keep conferences short. Get to every writer every day.
- Don’t look at or read students’ writing during conferences.
- Don’t tell writers what they should do or what should be in their writing.

- Don't write on students' writing.
- Don't praise.
- Students must have ownership of their writing.

Atwell (1987) determined that “the problem with orthodoxies is that even the best of them take away initiative from someone. *Rules* [orthodoxies] stand at the center of classroom interactions. Rules limit someone's role—in this case, the teachers” (p. 18).

Atwell realized that it was not her knowledge of her students or their needs that informed her teaching—it was the rules she created. Understanding the rigidity of the new orthodoxies, Atwell (1998) redefined *workshop* and has allowed the needs of the students and her own needs as a teacher to be more organic. Minilessons could still be 10 minutes, but they could also be upwards of 30 minutes if necessary. Atwell (1998) realized, through more experience and reflection, that her expertise as a writer allows her to offer students suggestions when her students get stuck. A workshop classroom is one where “the teacher is as active intellectually as her students” (p. 26). There are clear connections between Atwell's (1998) workshop model and the laboratory studio model described by Cline (1938). Teaching practice has changed very little since Cline's (1938) examination of teaching vs. pseudo-teaching. Orthodoxy remains at the center. Atwell (1998) and Cline (1938) both examine how learning takes place with the teacher as support in the classroom helping students understand how learning happens and encouraging students to understand that they are responsible for their own learning. This responsibility is learned with effective pedagogy that directs learning by having students doing the work in class, while the teacher checks in and conferences with each student to ensure understanding and learning.

Learning is inherent in the practice of thinking, yet often in our schools the focus is on the output or answer and not the process. As Langer (2001) found, middle and high school teachers who were found to be the most successful, as defined by students who were successful in class and on standardized tests, explicitly taught their students ways in which to arrange their ideas and how to develop metacognitive strategies through reflection on learning. This study supports the ideas that much of what is found to be effective teaching is teaching that gives the students opportunities to exhibit agency and work from a position that allows them to explore their own ideas and create knowledge. Teaching thinking strategies improve both student learning and achievement on standardized tests. Too often, schools encourage teachers to focus on skill development at the sacrifice of teaching thinking, when teaching thinking can help with skill learning, skill development, and test scores. Nystrand (2006) found and posits that using more authentic questions, allowing more time for open discussion, and building on students' comments lead to more success for students. Nystrand (2006) argues that classrooms need to be dialogic in order to help build on the skills that students need to be successful in school and beyond.

Applebee, Langer, Nystrand and Gamoran (2003) uncovered that pedagogical practices that highlight discussion-based activities and high expectations lead to increased performance in both middle and high schools. The increased performance tied to discussion and high expectations was consistent across socioeconomic, race and gender lines. It is important for educators to work against the push in our urban schools for more structured learning and test prep and allow for more authentic activities (Patterson & Speed, 2007) that link directly to students' lives. Cooper's (2005) findings that all

students are capable of academic success and the culture and beliefs of the school often determine success are important to this research, as I aim to examine the role culture and orthodoxies play in an urban middle school and on student learning and achievement as perceived by teachers through classroom assessment and student engagement in class.

Rigid adherence to a particular orthodoxy can lead to classrooms that do not give students an opportunity to develop their own ability to think (Delpit & White-Bradly, 2003). This acceptance of a school culture that values order over learning limits the decisions available to teachers and influences their practice. As Delpit & White-Bradley (2003) found, the acceptance of particular orthodoxies position both teachers and students in rigid spaces. Teachers feel limited by the rigid structures and it creates an environment where professionalism is not valued, yet allows teachers to feel successful for remaining consistent to the structures in place.

Questions and Inquiry

A curriculum that focuses on questions as a core teaching strategy can not only help guide students towards critical thinking, but can also help students learn content through inquiry. Research has repeatedly found that students who experience learning through meaningful and effective questioning learn more on average and perform better on standardized assessments than those who experience “learning” through a more traditional transmission model of education (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkinson, 2004; Christenbury & Kelly, 1983; Wilhelm, 2007; Wiggins & McTighe 2005).

For the purpose of this paper, questioning refers to higher order questions that are based in student inquiry. Questions do not refer to simple low-level comprehension questions: *What is an independent clause? Who is the main character? When do we use*

transitions?, etc. Questions, questioning, and inquiry will be used interchangeably through the course of this research.

Using questions to elicit and foster thinking are not new to education; they have been an integral part of our education since Socrates. Teachers ask questions in the classroom every day. Yet, if the research has shown us anything, it is that just asking the question is not enough (Burke, 2010; Wilhelm, 2007; Christenbury & Kelly, 1983). Teachers often use questions to get students to engage in the way the teacher wants the students to engage and think about a particular text, concept, or skill. While this pedagogical approach is popular in many classrooms, it is not an approach that leads students to develop the skill of critical thinking or to develop a deep understanding of the text, concept or skill; “critical thinking is the student’s journey through ideas, not the teacher’s journey, and the student’s destination, not the teacher’s” (Christenbury & Kelly, 1983, p. 7).

It is important to keep in mind that a good question is not simply a question that provokes discussion. While teachers are often pleased with a lesson that gets students actively talking, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of a lesson and the quality of the questions and talk. Good questions, according to Bruner (1986), “are ones that pose dilemmas, subvert obvious or canonical ‘truths’ or force incongruities upon our attention” (as cited in Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 107). Good questions force meaningful debate and lead to transfer and application of prior knowledge and experience to current issues; bringing students to use the “contemplative” and “political” life together (Pinar & Grumet, 2001).

Questions must be thoughtful and must be created in a way that helps students activate their prior knowledge and connect that knowledge to the new line of inquiry. Because it is impossible to cover all content in a particular class or subject, students often carry with them unanswered questions from previous classes and learning experiences. With proper guidance from the teacher, these unanswered or lingering questions can become active lines of inquiry when prior knowledge is reactivated through classroom activities, assignments and questions (Ram, 1991).

Questions are also an important tool in helping students learn content. This exploration of content through questions allows multiple perspectives to be uncovered and allows for students to develop critical skills in supporting their own answers to the questions that are posed, as well as challenging student-held beliefs (Burke 2010).

The questions a teacher asks students play a role in how a student achieves (Redfield & Rousseau, 1981). In studies conducted by Nystrand et al. (1996, 1997) as cited in Wilhelm (2007), it was found that most classrooms contained very little dialogue or inquiry and that most of what teachers claimed to be discussion were really lectures that were hidden under questions that asked students to do little thinking of their own. We cannot expect students to develop the skills to think and ask questions if teachers do not ask them to do so or model this process for students. Teachers cannot be expected to effectively lead students to develop questions until they understand the inquiry and questioning process themselves. As mentioned earlier, professional development provided by the Midwest Writing Project (MWP) following the NWP¹ model, focuses on both teachers as writers and teachers as inquirers. As teachers go through the process of

¹ National Writing Project

² All names have been changed

³ All names and identifying markers have been changed

asking questions and carrying out inquiry in their own teaching and writing, it allows them to develop a framework for instituting that process into their own classrooms.

Writing to Learn

Writing is an activity that positions students at the center and makes them creators of their own knowledge. Proponents of Writing to Learn and Writing Workshop models understand and believe that writing is a tool for learning and creating knowledge. Janet Emig's (1977) seminal piece "Writing as a Mode of Learning" spurred the Writing Across the Curriculum reform movement that has produced a wide range of scholarship, but has led to little change in our secondary schools and is most evident in the use of writing workshop that has sprung up mainly through our elementary schools.

As with Writing to Learn and Writing Workshop, proponents of Teaching for Understanding (TfU) understand that in order to ascertain if a student is developing an understanding of the topic it is necessary to document his or her thinking and make it visible (Perkins & Blythe, 1994). Writing to Learn views writing as a way to explore and realize what we know and believe (Murray 2005). The idea that writing is a tool for learning and that we use writing to discover what we know has spurred a major writing movement that took hold in many universities across the country, yet this movement has not found authentic integration in our country's secondary schools. Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) needs to be defined as it takes many forms and can vary in implementation from institution to institution. WAC, as defined by McLeod and Maimon (2000), is primarily a reform movement designed to arm faculty with an alternative to traditional classroom activities of lecture and multiple choice testing. These traditional teaching methods are also the traditional teaching model of high schools and trickle down

into middle schools. The goal of this reform movement is to make education more student-centered and to implement the use of writing assignments as a catalyst for learning as opposed to an assessment of prescribed learning; moreover, the tenets of WAC ask teachers to be facilitators of exploratory writing instead of judges of technical correctness.

For the purpose of this study, Writing Across the Curriculum calls for the implementation of writing in all classrooms to use writing as a way to create knowledge and explore thinking through writing. This type of writing allows students to create knowledge and explore thinking as well as offering them an opportunity to write from their own perspective of wonder or confusion. As with questioning, school culture and values determine teacher practice.

Professional Development—Writing Project Model

Part of the achievement problem in many of urban schools can be attributed to the types of writing and learning activities used in most public schools. The most common use for writing in public schools, and more importantly in impoverished public schools, is as an assessment tool—a way for teachers to assess what the students learned through instruction or through the textbook reading (Hillocks, 2002). In my experience as department chair, student teacher mentor, and observer, writing is generally used as a tool to complete a task. This practice of writing as assessment serves a purpose, but often this is the only type of writing that is done in classrooms across the country. This minimal implementation of writing is a disservice to students. Students learn to see writing as a way to show a teacher what they know, but not as a way to explore and develop ideas. It

is necessary for teachers to be able to effectively use writing as a tool to help students develop as thinkers (Burke, 2010; Gallagher, 2015; Wilhelm, 2007).

Professional development provided through the Midwest Writing Project (MWP), a National Writing Project (NWP) site, helps teachers learn and develop best practices in literacy education and helps teachers effectively incorporate writing and thinking into their classrooms in all grades and content areas. The NWP was founded at the University of California-Berkley in 1974 and operates from the stance that teachers must themselves write in order to teach effective writing. The NWP provides resources and a network of support for each local site to share ideas and research. Currently there are 200 sites in all 50 states according to the NWP website. Research has found participation in NWP sites to have a positive impact on both teachers and the students of those teachers (Milner, Brannon, Brown, Cash, & Pritchard, 2009; Whyte, Lazarte, Thompson, Ellis, Muse, & Talbot, 2007; Singer & Scollay, 2006).

One of the cornerstone beliefs of the National Writing Project and its affiliated local sites is that teachers are better teachers of writing if they themselves are writers (Singer & Scollay, 2006). Professional development provided through the NWP and affiliated sites focuses on teacher writing and reflection through the writing process as well as teacher inquiry into writing related concerns in their own classroom practice. Teachers who participate in NWP model professional development learn to become writers and learn how to use writing and practice to answer questions about what happens in their classroom and the effects on student and teacher practice as related to writing.

Moving Forward

Fulwiler (1987) writes, “the key to knowing and understanding lies in our ability to internally manipulate information and ideas received whole from external sources and give them verbal shape or *articulation*” (p. 4). It is imperative to educational reform and progress that educators begin to look critically at their teaching practice, how questions and writing are used in the classroom, and to what extent they are utilized to help students create knowledge and understanding. Students must be expected to think and participate to help them develop critical thinking skills. Pedagogy and practice must be based in research and tied to increasing student learning using tools that work. Questioning and writing as ways of getting students to learn are proven to work when used in meaningful and effective ways.

In order for learning to happen, students have to want to learn, “if we can put students into situations in which they want to learn something, they will be better motivated and better able to focus their attention on the relevant information” (Ram, 1981, p. 275). Analyzing the impact of school culture to ensure that the culture provides an environment where teachers can innovate and introduce new pedagogical practices must be part of the equation. If teaching practice is to change in a way that helps students develop an understanding of how to learn, then we must first understand the culture and orthodoxies at work within the school, as they determine what is possible within the classroom (Murray, 2005).

If a school culture and its structures do not value learning, it is difficult for individual classroom teachers to implement a pedagogy that will lead to student learning. As discussed previously, the use of effective questioning, that doesn't singularly focus on

the IRE method, is a clear indicator of a school that values learning and inquiry. It is important to note that just implementing questions and student participation in class is not enough to create a rigorous curriculum that develops thinkers. “These more participatory practices, such as student discussion...or independent research projects, can be constructed without emphasizing deep understanding or meeting high intellectual standards” (Newman, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996, p. 305). Burke (2010) echoes this idea that without guidance and careful planning students can participate in inquiry without drawing any deep meanings and producing a mere summary.

This literature review provided an overview of the need for an examination of school culture, orthodoxies, expectations and pedagogical practice as a whole to determine what a school values. Without a clear understanding of what a school values, effective change cannot be addressed through professional development, leadership practices, or pedagogy. Much of the literature presented is theoretical and focuses on only a piece of the overall puzzle. Schools spend an inordinate amount of money on professional development without considering the limits imposed on the school as a whole by its culture, orthodoxies and beliefs about students learning. This study proposes to draw conclusions about how school leadership can influence school culture and ensure the needs of students and teachers are realized through the learning opportunities offered to the staff.

Chapter Three: Methods

Researcher Perspective

As an English teacher and supervisor of English teachers, I feel strongly about the power of writing and inquiry (thinking) as tools for learning. In the course of my graduate work and research, I found, like other content area teachers, I needed to learn how to use writing as a learning tool as opposed to an assessment tool (Young, 2003). It was not enough to assign a student an essay and say that I was using writing and inquiry effectively. It was not enough to give my students short answer tests as opposed to multiple choice and claim to be using writing as a way to teach thinking.

As a compositionist, I am biased towards the power of writing and that bias will in some ways guide the research I have done and will continue. I feel that all teachers are teachers of reading, writing, and thinking as well as their particular specialized area of study such as, chemistry, math, geometry, biology, etc. I believe that all teachers have an ethical responsibility to their students to use all tools at their disposal to guide students to create knowledge and to learn. I also believe that teachers are not trained effectively to implement the plethora of techniques proven through research to increase student engagement and achievement. This study is important to highlight the possibilities based on best practices, sustained professional development, and school culture. It is important to admit this bias and to look at the data not just as a compositionist, but also as a researcher looking for answers to unending questions. I truly believe in the power of writing. I also believe that when writing is used effectively with reading and inquiry it leads students to learn and to create knowledge which translates to higher achievement and deeper understandings about the content and the ability to apply that knowledge in other situations.

Dual Relationship

As part of my past role at the university, I oversaw the charter school that is my research site. I had the job of attending board meetings and making sure the school complied with all state and federal laws as they applied to charter schools in this particular context. My role of sponsor and oversight manager of the charter school was not part of my research nor was my research used to inform my job as charter school sponsor. The school principal, board chair, and staff were aware of my dual role and understood that my role as researcher was kept separate from my job as sponsor. The charter school was under a 10-year contract and this research did not fall during a time when the school was up for renewal nor were there any decisions that needed to be made in regards to the school's operation. This relationship allowed me to benefit from the strong relationship I had built with the school administration and teachers.

Research Method

This qualitative case study examined the practice of four teachers at one urban K-8 charter school as individual cases tied together within the larger case of the school. Since a case represents a bounded system (Merriam, 1998; 2009), the school qualified as a "bounded system" because ideologies and practices of the school are unique. The school as a whole provided a mission and vision framework for the school's ideology. Each teacher enacts this ideology in a unique manner based on teacher experience, bias, and school culture. The school as a whole was studied to provide the larger cultural context that might influence each of the case classrooms. It was important to examine both the larger system (the school) and the smaller system (the classroom) in order to be able to present a more complete picture of the school culture as it relates to the

implementation of professional development, use of questioning, and how teachers position themselves and their students as learners.

A case study approach was chosen based on the needs of the research questions. The purpose of this research was to get a complete and detailed picture of the influence culture has on teaching practice, teacher beliefs, and power structures within a classroom. To tell the story of a school's culture and teacher practice, qualitative research was important and necessary.

Research Design

An instrumental case study design was used. Stake (1995) states that an instrumental case study design is used when the researcher wants to get a base understanding of a particular issue, program, and technique. While my interest in the research questions is high, the purpose of this research project goes beyond my own intrinsic interest in the answers to the research questions. The case study design has a built-in flexibility that allows a story to be told through the data collected over the course of the study. Telling the story of what happens in the classroom and how school culture and values dictate practice is as important as reporting the results. In order to acquire a full picture of what changes happen in the classroom in an effort to tie learning to practice, a case study provides a look at all elements: practice, learning outcomes, and cultural influences.

Population and Sample

The School

The research site was an urban public charter school that opened for operation in August 2000 and serves grades K-8. The focus of this project was not the entire school but rather grades 5-8. These grades were chosen for this study as subjects are departmentalized (taught independently of one another) and this independence allowed a focus on individual teachers, subject areas, and school culture. The school was diverse serving approximately 900 students each year. At the time of the study, the school demographics according to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) are black (45%), white (42%), Hispanic (8%), Asian (4%), and Indian (1%) with 68.7% qualifying for free/reduced lunch (See table 7 for detailed information). This school was chosen because it agreed to participate in professional development provided by the Midwest Writing Project and serves middle school grades. The school also used a workshop model at for reading and writing instruction and the teachers were reported to be open and willing to try new techniques and strategies. Selecting a research site where participants were willing and open to new instructional strategies is important for the scope and focus on this research.

History

Charter Academy² is a K-8 charter school in a large Midwestern city. The school was founded in 2000 with a special characteristic of complete student individualization. The student individualization would be done on an ongoing basis. The school's founding team envisioned each student would have a file that outlined his or her own

² All names have been changed

individualized goals and progress. These plans would then be used to guide a student's path each year. These plans, while in theory, were an innovative idea at the time, but as teachers confessed, the plans were never fully used or implemented (Field Notes, August 25, 2011). Just the expression of these plans allowed teachers and the school to believe that individual student learning was at the center. In addition to these plans, the school's founding team believed that character education was also important and included a provision for providing character education.

Charter schools are public schools that are governed by an independent self-appointed governing board. Charter schools are meant to provide options and choice to families, often within a district that is underachieving. As the case in the state where this research was conducted, charters were first opened in 2000. Charter Academy was one of the first. Charter schools were limited geographically to the two major urban centers and were provided with achievement expectations that they would outperform the local district on the state standardized test. Evaluation of charter school effectiveness rested solely on scoring higher than the district school, regardless of how much higher the scores were. Early on in the state's history with charter schools the results were mixed and once schools were established, they were hard to close. While this study is not about charter schools, it is important to understand the environment in which this study was conducted. Charter schools are free from traditional district regulations. They choose their own curricula and their own classroom and school structure. Charter schools are meant to be innovative and to provide a higher quality education than the district schools in which they operate (Little, 2007). Charter schools are unique in that they start from a vision and mission as opposed to a district need. They have a purpose beyond the

academic program. Schools were required to illustrate how they were different and how their program would produce success. The first charter schools that opened in this Midwestern city were opened with little regulation and little consideration to their purpose, aside from “not being a district” school. Most had to fight hard to open and had management companies to help with the complexity of school management and design—most of this help was needed to deal with HR and what is generally considered central office issues: food service, supplies, benefits, etc. (Little, 2007).

Charter Academy’s school founder left the school in 2006 to pursue further work within the charter school sector. The current administrative team had been part of the school in some capacity since its founding in 2000. The administrative team was dedicated to the school and proud of the work that they had done around character education, one of their focus points. There has been little change in school’s stated philosophy or operations and the school team—administrators and governing board—appeared happy with the results they achieved, as no new initiatives or outside influence has been sought to increase academic rigor or achievement (Charter Document).

Teachers

Table 1—Teacher Profiles

Teacher	Years of Experience	Years at School	Grade/Subjects Taught	Certification	Endorsements
Cassie	11	4	7 th /Reading	1-6	None
Kimberly	7	4	6 th /Reading	1-6	None
Julie	3	3	7 th /Writing	1-6 6-8	None
Maria	3	3	6 th /Writing Math (2 years)	1-6	None

The case studies were conducted to observe classroom instruction and document how the embedded professional development was incorporated and implemented, along

with questioning techniques, in the participant teachers' classrooms. Teacher interviews (Appendix A) were used to discuss prior and current teaching practice, feelings about the pedagogical ideas presented through professional development, the role of questions in the classroom and what influences teachers' instructional choices. Administrators were also interviewed as part of the larger case study of the school building and culture. All of these data were used to answer the research questions stated earlier. It is important to understand and document what happens in classrooms on a regular basis in order to determine what pedagogical approaches work for each teacher and how implementation can be adapted to each teacher's own style in various content areas and how culture influences these practices. This study sought to understand and make explicit the influence of ongoing professional development on classroom instruction and what impact the teachers believe the professional development had on their instructional decisions and student learning and achievement. The examination of instructional decisions required the examination of school culture.

The sample, which was purposeful, came from the teachers at the research site who participated in the professional development. All teachers in grades 5-8 and who taught a departmentalized core subject were invited to participate in the study. Four literacy teachers, two from sixth and two from seventh grade, agreed to be part of the study (See Table 1). All of the selected participants will participate in the professional development provided through the Midwest Writing Project. The school administration elected to have only literacy teachers participate in the professional development provided by Midwest Writing Project. While four teachers might not appear a deep sample, these four teachers represent two-thirds of middle school reading and writing

teachers and half of the teachers who participated in the professional development. Their classroom cases are sufficient to answer the research questions given because of the time I spent in each teacher's classroom. All participants were given and signed informed consent forms that conformed to university IRB protocol and were made aware of their ability to withdraw themselves from the study at any time.

Procedures

Interviews and Observations. The first measure used was three semi-structured (protocol Appendix A) and informal check-ins with each of the participant teachers as well as a final interview with administrators to clarify observation findings. The semi-structured interviews scheduled with each case study teacher at three points during the study used a modified structure and procedure based on Seidman's (2006) phenomenological interview protocol. I modified the protocol to focus on school and teaching and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes in length. The informal interviews occurred randomly throughout the year as I met with teachers to ask questions about a particular practice, lesson, or class period and were recorded in my field notes.

Observations of each participating teacher happened two days per week, each week for the first 3 months of the school year. Saturation was reached in early November. After consultation with my advisor and another committee member, I cut back on my observations to one time per month through February and then stopped my observations at that point. The observations each lasted one class period. I audio recorded 2 class sessions for each teacher to ensure an accurate record of classroom discourse to validate the data in my field notes. I remained an observer in the classroom and after the first observations, students paid little to no attention to my presence. I

started with the intention of de-briefing with teachers on their lesson structures and activities, yet after the first 6 weeks it became apparent that the teachers had very little freedom in the classroom and instruction did not vary in a way that required conversation. In the early weeks of my research, I debriefed with teachers as they implemented specific activities from the professional development, but aside from those activities there was no variation in teaching practice. I questioned teachers during our interviews about their workshop implementation and teaching practice.

The interviews, which were documented by audio recording, also allowed for member checking, ensuring that what I saw/recorded was accurate based on the teacher's view. The interviews provided opportunities to discuss the professional development and the teacher's own reactions and understandings of the professional development. After each interview, I spoke with the teachers when necessary to clarify any points that needed further exploration and I recorded the information in my field notes.

I attended and took notes at each of the initial professional development sessions as well as several of the sessions that occurred during the school year. As the researcher, I observed each of the professional development sessions to determine what teachers took from the professional development and implemented in their classroom. Observing the professional development also allowed further examination of the school culture and its impact on teacher practice in the classroom. See Table 1 for details data collection information.

Lessons and Assignments. I planned to collect samples of written lesson plans during the study to use as a discussion with participant teachers about how they perceive they implemented the strategies learned through the professional development. During

the first interview, teachers were asked to bring a typical writing assignment and that ended up being the writing prompt used for the pre-assessment. During this interview it was uncovered that teachers did not use formal lesson plans and used an online “curriculum” tool that was not updated on any regular basis. Upon examination, the school’s curriculum was also non-existent as it was really just a printout of the state’s Grade Level Expectations. When asked to see a written unit plan, I was able to procure one unit plan from Julie, the seventh grade writing teacher, and she also produced the summer school plan that would be used. What I found in these plans is similar to if not identical to classes I observed across classrooms.

Table 2—Data Collection Totals

Interview Data			
Participant	Number of Interviews	Total Transcribed Pages	Total Interview Time
Julie	3	19	49 min
Maria	3	20	59 min
Kimberly	3	43	106 min
Cassie	2	15	35 min
Administrators	1	8	30 min
Field Note/Observation Data			
Participant	Number of Observations	Hours of Observation	Pages of Transcripts
Julie	20	18.33 hours	54
Maria	18	16.5 hours	60
Kimberly	20	18.33 hours	51
Cassie	17	15.58 hours	57
Professional Development	5	22 hours	33
Totals			
Total Observations	Total Interview Time	Total Observation Hours	Total Transcribed Pages
70	279 minutes	80 hours	360 pages

Data Analysis

The interviews, field notes, lesson plans and classroom recordings were coded using dedoose.com, a commercial software interface for analysis of qualitative data. All

data were coded using descriptive, process, and in vivo coding. I anticipated themes emerging that dealt with efficacy, critical thinking, revision, question development, positioning, cultural models, teacher resistance, motivation and purpose of lessons.

I started my analysis by separating field notes and interviews by teacher and by date. I decided to focus on one teacher at a time and I started with the first interview of each teacher, even if that interview happened after the first observations. The first interview was an important starting point as it provided context for past and current teaching practice, experiences, and goals for the year. As I read through the first interview I began labeling the data as it related to the elements I was hoping to find: workshop, teacher beliefs, expectations, pedagogical practice, etc. After labeling the first interview, I went through the field notes and labeled corresponding evidence that was connected to the elements labeled in the interview. I then analyzed the second interview and went through the same process of labeling and looking for evidence in the field notes and again used the same process with the third interview.

By the end of the process with all four participants, I uncovered what appeared to be a disconnect between what the teachers stated they believed and practiced and what the data revealed. After wrestling with the disconnect, I went back through the data and analyzed for new themes. As new themes emerged from the second data analysis, data were analyzed again allowing for a fuller and deeper analysis. New themes—pseudo-teaching and culture—emerged as I coded my data and became a more central focus.

Through the coding process, I uncovered how school culture was playing a key role in the teachers' willingness to accept the professional development or even to reflect on their own teaching practice in the classroom and culture. Culture as previously

explained, contains all the traditions, beliefs, values, and norms of the school system (Deal & Peterson, 2009). The code cloud (Figure 2) and code occurrence chart (figure 3) illustrate the patterns in the data and the incidents of the most often occurring codes.

Figure 2—Data Code Cloud



Observations and Interviews. The analysis of classroom discourse was analyzed using positioning theory (van Langenhove & Harré, 1999) and the inspiration that I drew from discourse analysis (Gee, 2011; Fairclough, 2011; Kress, 2011) to examine how language in the classroom was a product of school culture as well as teacher-held beliefs about roles in the classroom. The inspiration from discourse analysis combined with

positioning theory was applied to classroom discourse allowed for themes and conclusions to be drawn regarding how teachers and students were positioned in relation to the content and to each other as well as how school culture can be decoded through language and classroom structures related to classroom discourse. In order to answer my second research question, it was imperative to understand how the classroom discourse of teachers works to place themselves and students in relation to the content and as creators of knowledge.

Figure 3—Code Occurrence

Codes	Codes																				Totals																
	Ability Level	Assessment	Culture	GWP	Positioning	Revolcing	Student as Creator/	Teacher as Creator/	Pseudo-Teaching	Question	Student question	recall	thinking	what do you know	Reading and Writing	adding writing	Skill Focus	Standards	Student Perceptions	Teacher v Student		Teaching Thinking	Workshop	Choice	Conferencing	perceptions	Easy way	deficit thinking	philosophy	Purpose of Education	teacher role	teacher's ed history	teaching history	goals for year	previous practice		
Ability Level		3							1	1							3								1	2	8		1	1						24	
Assessment	3		6	2	7			10	12	1				3	1	2	10	4	1	1	3	1			6	1	3	1		3						82	
Culture		8		9	11			23	7	1	1		1	1	3		4	2	2	5	4	9	2		4	1	2	1		4					104		
GWP		2	9		1					4	1						2	1	1	1	1	4	2		1	4	2		3						37		
Positioning		7	11			1		42	7	11		3	1	10			2	1	1	1	1	4	2		1		2		1	2					110		
Revolcing						1				2	2		2	2																						9	
Student as Creator/										1	1																									5	
Teacher as Creator/		10	23		42	2		9	21		8	3	16	1		5			3		6	2	1	2							2			156			
Pseudo-Teaching	1	12	7	4	7		1	9		2						3				1	1	1	2			3	2		3					63			
Question	1	1	1	1	11	2	1	21	2		3	18	16	37			2			1	3			1	1									123			
Student question											3							1																		4	
recall			1		3			6	1	18			2	7																						38	
thinking					1	2		3	16		2		4	1								1														30	
what do you know		3	1		10	2		16	37		7	4		1		1					1															63	
Reading and Writing		1	3				1	1	1					1	1		2					1	2	1		1	1		2						21		
adding writing										2					2		2						1	1												11	
Skill Focus		3	10	4	2	2		5	3	2				1		2		4		1	4															48	
Standards			4	2		1						1					4		2		2					1	1	1								19	
Student Perceptions		1	2	1	1				1								2			2	2															12	
Teacher v Student		1	5		1			3	1	1				1			1	2		1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1		1						24		
Teaching Thinking		3	3	4	3	1				1	3		1				4	2	2	1		3	1	1	1	5	3	2	2	4					51		
Workshop		1	9	4	4			8	1											2	3		10	4		2	3	2		2						57	
Choice			2		2			1	2	2										1	1	10		1												27	
Conferencing					1			1	1	1										1	4	1														9	
perceptions	1	5	4	4	1			2						1	1	1		2	1							2	4	1		4					35		
Easy way		2	1	1					3	1											5	2			2		2	1	1	4						27	
deficit thinking		3	3	2	2				2								1	3	1		1	3		1	4	2				1						34	
philosophy		1	1		1										2						2	3			1	1			1	3						16	
Purpose of Education	1																				2				1		1	3								8	
teacher role	1	3	4	3	2			2	3					2		1				1	4	2	1		4	4	1	3	3							44	
teacher's ed history																																					
teaching history																							1			1											2
goals for year																																					
previous practice																																					
Totals	24	82	104	37	110	9	5	156	63	123	4	38	30	83	21	11	48	19	12	24	51	57	27	9	35	27	34	16	8	44	2			1			

Interviews and field notes were analyzed a second time to examine how the teachers position themselves in relation to their students, experience with MWP professional development, and the content and curriculum. I define discourse not just as the spoken language of the classroom, but also the setting and behaviors of both teachers and students. I started my analysis of classroom discourse drawing inspiration from Fairclough's (2011) idea of genre (ways of acting) and discourses (ways of representing) to the data to explore how the culture of the classroom, through the teaching, exposes the positioning of authority as well as what is valued in classroom interactions. Fairclough's (2011) semiosis allows for the application of these ideas to spoken words as well as non-spoken communication. While I started with Fairclough (2011), I then used the lens of Gee's (2011) seven tools for discourse analysis. Through this analysis, his ideas of significance, activities, politics, connections, and sign systems provided me with a start on how the discourse of the classroom and school impacted and created the school culture, classroom culture, and learning practices.

Because education is a complex and social process, the ideas of Kress (2011) are also applicable. I could not tease out the multitude of ideas without the inspiration of multiple theories of discourse and its importance in the power dynamic in the classroom. As Kress (2011) points out, "education is a social process. It is embedded in 'the social' and, being social, it is a product of social agents, structures, processes, values, purposes, and constraints" (p. 205). I also applied Kress' theory that meaning making is the work of "social agents." While Kress's work focuses on multimodality, I consider the school culture to be multimodal, as classroom set up is a mode, teacher physical position is a

mode as is spoken language. These are important aspects when examining the impact of pedagogical change on practice and achievement.

Triangulation. The research design and protocols involved triangulation—among the interviews, observations, and field notes. The triangulation among multiple data sources helped to support emerging themes and ideas regarding classroom practice, instructional choices and perceived impact of culture, questioning, and targeted-sustained professional development. During the analysis of data, I reached out to both administrators and participants for clarification. At the time of drafting this dissertation, only one participant teacher remained teaching at the research site.

Ethics. All data was stored in a locked file cabinet and on a password-protected computer. Audio recordings were stored on a password-protected computer and will be deleted after the data has been analyzed and the research project is finished. All names have been changed and identifying markers have been altered to ensure confidentiality of participants.

Limitations

As with any study, there are inherent limitations and problems. With this study, I fully realize that there are some factors that may influence the data that we are not taken into account—for example, student GPA, attendance, grade level, past performance, etc. These factors, while important, are not what this study set out to examine and understand. The purpose of this study is to record and describe the influence of school culture and embedded year-long professional development on the classroom practice and instructional choices of teachers and what teachers perceive as the influence on their students' learning and achievement.

I did not examine the potential impact or relevance of school administration training on the development and influence on school culture. The school leader/principal is the leading force in cultural development, yet administration was outside of the scope of this study. I also did not look at the process of teacher learning and how that might impact the participants' implementation of new pedagogy. While workshop was not new to the teachers during the year of the study, it was relatively new pedagogical practice that was implemented with little training, leaving the teachers to learn on their own how to incorporate elements into their class. This process of teacher learning, while important, was also outside the scope of this study.

While I would have preferred to have teachers across subject areas to have a cross section of the school community and observe the impact of literacy professional development in subjects outside of reading and writing, I was only able to study reading and writing teachers.

The study is also limited to the cases being studied. While some of the findings have the possibility of informing future research in other schools with similar culture and achievement issues, the findings are inherently tied to the case being studied. As a researcher, I admit that after many analyses of the data that there were hints in the classrooms of the writing teachers of attempts to implement pieces of writing workshop into their practice.

Chapter Four: The School

This chapter presents both historical, achievement, and demographic data for Charter Academy³ as the larger case that impacts the cases of each participant teacher’s classroom and the professional development sessions. The school and the participant teacher classrooms are presented in separate chapters because while they have an interdependent relationship, each requires a separate analysis. The school is presented first as it provides the foundation for the analysis of each teacher’s classroom and pedagogical practice. I present the academic data of the school first as it lays the foundation for the initial analysis of data.

Academic Performance

While Charter Academy has scored better than the local district on the state assessment since its founding, it has never scored above the state average and has shown little growth over the last three academic years in Math and has seen erratic fluctuations in Communication Arts. (See table 3).

Table 3—5-year state assessment comparison

Communication Arts					
%Proficient/Advanced					
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Charter Academy (whole school)	26%	34%	26%	39%	41%
Local School District Average	22%	28%	31%	33%	30%
State Average	48%	51%	54%	55%	55%
Math					
%Proficient/Advanced					
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Charter Academy (whole school)	27%	26%	36%	38%	39%
Local School District Average	18%	20%	27%	31%	27%
State Average	47%	48%	53%	54%	55%

³ All names and identifying markers have been changed

The above table illustrates school wide achievement in comparison with K-12 scores for both the local district and the state and is meant only to illustrate the overall performance landscape. More specific grade level data is presented in table 4. There is more current assessment data available for the school, but I have chosen not to include that data as the state assessment program went through a change for the school year starting in 2014.

This data is used to show the academic performance of Charter Academy over time. While scores on state assessments are not always reliable indicators of overall school programs and success, they do offer valuable insight into the potential rigor of a school's academic program. Academic achievement is not a focus of this study, but I feel it is important to examine as part of the school's history to illustrate trends in demographics—we see (in Table 7) a trend of an increase in white students and a decrease in black students and marginal increases in Hispanic and Asian students and a pretty steady rate of students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch. The school shows a steady increase in cohort scores over time and this shows a gradual increase in achievement the longer students are enrolled at Charter Academy. While there is steady increase in progress, the school could continue to improve and bring more students into the proficient and advanced categories.

The data in the following table 4 represents the five years of assessment data. The year of observation is bolded to signify the achievement during the time of this study. This data is included to show the trend of the same group of students over their time at Charter Academy, as well as overall scores across grades. The cohort data is important, insomuch as it shows the growth trend of the same group of students for over a 5-year

period. Charter Academy has a relatively low student turnover rate and on average sees approximately 10 new students per grade level each year; therefore, the data here offers

Table 4—5 year assessment data by grade (cohorts colored)

Communication Arts					
%Proficient/Advanced					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
3 rd Grade	32%	24%	30%	43.4%	43.4%
4 th Grade	28.2%	30.9%	40%	37%	41.3%
5 th Grade	24.1%	33.9%	42.1%	37.7%	42.1%
6 th Grade	32.7%	37.8%	39.6%	46.2%	41%
7 th Grade	40%	38.3%	39.6%	42.3%	47%
8 th Grade	50%	48.9%	45.4%	38.6%	55.6%
Math					
%Proficient/Advanced					
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
3 rd Grade	32%	38%	41%	45.5%	37.4%
4 th Grade	17.3%	27.3%	37.3%	31.8%	33%
5 th Grade	26.1%	27.8%	30.6%	34.9%	35.5%
6 th Grade	42.7%	34.2%	37.8%	37.5%	38.1%
7 th Grade	43.8%	48.6%	38.7%	49.5%	42.6%
8 th Grade	50%	40.2%	38.1%	34.7%	50.5%

a valid look into the growth trend of these groups of students. As previously stated, this study is not focused on academic achievement but upon classroom practice and school culture. This information is presented only to highlight the achievement levels of the school within the landscape of public education in the urban center in which the school is situated. Each cohort is highlighted or easy reading of the table.

I have also included disaggregated data (Table 5 and Table 6) of each cohort to illustrate the trends across groups. All data was taken from the state department of education website and is only presented to provide a context for achievement and to illustrate growth trends and disparities among and between groups. To help further with

understanding the academic context of the school, I have included overall enrollment and demographic data for the years leading up to the year I conducted my study (see Table 7).

Table 5—4-year assessment disaggregated data 6th grade cohort

Communication Arts % Proficient and Advanced							
Grade	Test Year	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Multiracial	Free/Reduced lunch
4 th Grade	2010	24%	38%	18%	No data	No data	30%
5 th Grade	2011	35%	46%	46%	50%	No data	40%
6th Grade	2012	25%	45%	50%	68%	No data	31%
7 th Grade	2013	41%	54%	47%	No data	50%	45%
Math %Proficient/Advanced							
Grade	Test Year	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Multiracial	Free/Reduced lunch
4 th Grade	2010	20%	31%	36%	No data	No data	26%
5 th Grade	2011	22%	38%	46%	34%	No data	26%
6th Grade	2012	32%	40%	46%	No data	No data	35%
7 th Grade	2013	39%	46%	54%	No data	33%	42%
Bold indicates test year of observed classes							

Table 6—4-year assessment data-disaggregated 7th grade cohort

Communication Arts % Proficient and Advanced							
Grade	Test Year	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Multiracial	Free/Reduced lunch
5 th Grade	2010	27%	40%	14%	No data	No data	33%
6 th Grade	2011	43%	33%	33%	67%	No data	37%
7th Grade	2012	43%	39%	17%	67%	No data	42%
8 th Grade	2013	49%	60%	38%	86%	No data	51%
Math %Proficient/Advanced							
Grade	Test Year	Black	White	Hispanic	Asian	Multiracial	Free/Reduced lunch
5 th Grade	2010	21%	35%	14%	34	No data	23%
6 th Grade	2011	42%	33%	22%	85%	No data	36%
7th Grade	2012	49%	46%	33%	100%	No data	49%
8 th Grade	2013	44%	56%	25%	100%	No data	45%
Bold indicates test year of observed classes							

Table 7—Overall enrollment and demographic data

School Enrollment and Demographic Data 2008-2012						
Year	Total Enrolled	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Free/Reduced Lunch
2008	910	40%	51%	No data	No data	66%
2009	910	42%	46%	8%	No data	67%
2010	913	42%	45%	8%	No data	69%
2011	939	43%	42%	8%	No data	69%
2012	957	44%	37%	10%	6%	69%

The Sixth Grade Cohort had Maria and Kimberly as teachers for writing and reading, respectively. The Seventh Grade Cohort had Julie and Cassie as teachers of writing and reading, respectively. Each cohort had the same teachers for each subject. Grade 6 is the first year that the students receive departmentalized instruction and change classes for each subject. All 6th grade students had Maria for writing and Kimberly for reading (55 minutes a day each class) and all 7th grade students had Julie for writing and Cassie for reading (55 minutes a day, each class). Classes at the Charter Academy ran 55 minutes per day and students in sixth and seventh grade took: specialists, writing, reading, math, science, and social studies each day. The assessment data combines reading and writing in communication arts, so there is no way to know if gains made in reading or writing varied. The ability to determine where the gains might have been made is not germane to this study and the data is presented simply to provide context.

Culture

Outside in the hall students rush through their lockers to make sure they get what they need. Teachers call out “shoulder voices,” yet the sounds do not dissipate.

Lockers close and students line up outside of their teachers’ classrooms.

Teachers say loudly “Shoulder voices” in unison and student voices lower to

mumbled sounds as they form single file lines before they are allowed/invited into the classroom (Field Notes August 30, 2011).

I arrived on my first day at 8:30 a.m. to observe the morning routine. Students continue shuffling in wearing khaki pants and blue, grey, or white polo shirts. Students gather in the middle school cafeteria for breakfast and then move on to their morning clubs and activities. The school day starts at 9 a.m., but the school offers some enrichment for those students who need to arrive early. At 9 a.m., students in the middle school (grades 6-8) go to their specialist classes—gym, art, or music. All content teachers are off for planning and preparation from 9-9:55a.m. This time also allows for meetings and is their only prep time during the school day. I often use this off time to sit in the teachers' workroom to observe the preparations for the day. As this is the first week of school, there is a flurry of activity and socializing as teachers prepare for the day. As the year goes on, teachers are working less and less during this time and socializing more. The socializing often involves discussions of students and complaints about administration, rules, parents, etc.

The school reserves the first six weeks of the year to focus on the development and understanding of school culture. Teachers introduced academic work during this period as well, but the teachers were focused almost exclusively on procedures and processes. I was stunned as I watched the students walk from their specialist classes to their content area classes. They were in silent halls—which means no talking. They had 3 minutes to get to their locker and get what they needed for their next class. At this early part of the year, what they needed was limited. The teachers manned their doors and talked loudly to the students reminding them “you need your binder, your planner, your

DEAR book, and your pencil or pen.” The students stood surrounded by an eerie hushed silence. They waited patiently fidgeting and mouthing things to each other, as they stood in very close proximity in the cramped hallway spaces available for their growing bodies. They could not enter the classrooms until the teachers invite them in and then each teacher greeted her students in a myriad of ways—handshakes, fist bumps, high-fives.

Each teacher ran her class in the exact same way following a rigid class format. Part of this routine was the filling out of planners. Students were all given a planner and were expected to write down the day’s work and homework. All teachers then checked the planners and put a stamp in them. There was then some sort of mini-lesson, guided practice, and “talk-time,” finished with independent practice. In all classrooms that I observed, with the exception of Cassie’s, this was the format every day. The students knew what to expect from each class and the teachers were conditioned to not vary from this format, regardless of the needs of the course, topic, or subject matter. The culture did not allow for variation and became the primary driver of instruction as opposed to teacher philosophy or belief.

Professional Development

During the professional development sessions led by external MWP consultants, Carine and Brianna, the six-core reading and writing teachers were all attentive and interested in the information and strategies being presented. There were five other teachers present: three reading specialists, one ELL teacher, and one special education writing teacher. There was some resistance from Gina, the eighth grade writing teacher who did not agree to allow observations in her classroom. She did agree to the documenting of her participation in the professional development. Much of her resistance

was rooted in her belief that the work and activities presented in the professional development were above what their students needed and/or were capable of achieving. In each of the sessions led by the writing project leaders, Gina was often the first to bring up deficiencies of students and bring the focus towards individual skills as opposed to a focus on comprehensive learning that included multiple skills within a task. As the most senior teacher in the group, her views often influenced the mood in the professional development sessions as well as the responses of her colleagues. This influence is part of the culture at the school that places a higher value on those in authority and their ideas; as Gina is viewed as an authority figure, her view is often the one most heard. During a group professional development session, Gina speaks to Cassie “our students aren’t ready for this,” as Brianne leads them through a ratiocination⁴ exercise. This view of students’ ability was echoed by many of the participants in their interviews and pedagogical practice.

All participants eagerly participated in the activities and discussed how the activities might be implemented into their own classrooms. In addition to Gina’s resistance as it related to the ability and needs of her students, there was a clear division in the room between the reading teachers and the writing teachers. The reading teacher participants often seemed hung up on the idea that because the professional development was billed as “writing” professional development that much of what was happening was not applicable in their classrooms. The culture of the school was such that each teacher’s role was fixed and limited to the strictest definition of her subject areas and classroom structure. When asked in a follow-up email about clarification of classroom structuring

⁴ Ratiocination involves color-coding a piece of writing for different aspects (sentence length, prepositional use, sentence starters, etc) and then analyzing choices made to improve the piece of writing. It is a reasoning exercise that requires a deep level of analysis and thinking.

and culture Matt replied, “as far as class periods, teachers have the discretion to use the class period as they see fit, though all teachers use some variation of the workshop model for instruction (introduction and mini-lesson, guided and independent practice, and processing and closure)” (Personal Email, June 5, 2014). This expectation led me to ask if the administration believed teachers felt restricted by the strict adherence to the above mentioned structural requirements and if he believes it prevented teachers from being able to see the full potential of both their students and their teaching. Matt responded:

I wouldn't say restricted. We have done quite a bit of school wide PD⁵ on the model, but at the end of the day teacher really do have the option of using whatever works with their classes. And when we talk about workshop, we are not talking about following on particular model⁶, just that we make sure that in addition to any instruction/presentation of new material, we give students ample opportunity to interact with the material with guidance and independently and that at some point in the instructional process, we ask students to reflect upon what they are learning. (Personal Email, June 5, 2014).

The professional development that the teachers participated in had been offered to the school, regardless of my dissertation research, and was provided at no charge. There were several instances where participants challenged the professional development based on the perceived ability levels of their students and their own school structure, “This is great, but this is above our students,” was a consistent refrain heard in the professional development sessions all year long. The teachers' belief that the engaging and multi-step

⁵ Professional development

⁶ Yet every teacher I observed used the exact same model and had the same class structure for every class period I was present and for every assignment/focus.

pedagogy was above their students' abilities is a product of the school culture that places the students in an inferior position (Field Notes, August 2, 2011; February 29, 2012).

Workshop model

The workshop model, as outlined in Atwell's (1987; 1998) *In the Middle*, is built upon the ideas of student choice, student accountability, and constant teacher interaction/check-ins. At Charter Academy, students are expected to be working on their choice of writing and to complete a particular number of draft pages and a particular number of final product pieces. While workshop is a student-focused, work-based model with students working on their choice of work, the implementation of workshop at Charter Academy did not resemble workshop in any of my observations (Field Notes, August 25, 2011; September 6, 2011; October 18, 2011).

According to the teachers and the school administration, the school used a workshop model. Based on the work of Atwell (1998) the writing workshop consists of a mini-lesson that varies in length depending upon the topic needs to be covered and then a period of time when students are working on their own writing or reading. The teacher uses the class period to conference with students and provides feedback and guidance to the students on their current piece of writing. As pieces develop, the teacher gives guidance on which pieces to publish (Atwell, 1998; Kittle, 2005). The administration did not come to choose the workshop model based on the needs of their students, but rather based on the recommendation of the trainer from the Midwest Reading Initiative. In my exit interview with Matt, the head of the middle school, and Janet, the head of school, I asked them to discuss the curriculum and pedagogy of the content areas and how they came to settle on workshop. It became clear early on in my observations that Charter

Academy’s implementation of workshop was neither authentic nor consistent with the tenants of workshop (Field Notes, September 13, 2011; October 18, 2011; November 8, 2011).

Stanza 2--Disconnect	
<p>24. ma:= Jill I guess 25. And so she really over the two years 26. that we had her, 27. led us through the set up and 28. implementation of the workshop model 29. and pointed us to a number good resources 30. that would continue that development 31. particularly, Nancie Atwell sort of, 32. I mean we try to use that model 33. as much as we possibly can. 34. You know one of our teachers has been 35. to see Nancie at her school. 36. r:= Uh-huh. 37. ma:= ...and do that internship 38. so, um, clearly that's been the emphasis 39. of why that's the way it is 40. and the development has been every year 41. working towards getting our kids to the place 42. where they are more independent readers, 43. more independent thinking, 44. more independent responders 45. to what they are reading. 46. r:= Uh-huh. 47. ma: So we feel like the workshop model is probably the best way to do that 48. because it allow us 49. to give the independent practice 50. on a daily basis and extend it 51. in that kind of practice 52. and in addition to that 53. the all-important feedback, regular feedback 54. as opposed to intermittent feedback 55. that you wouldn't be able to do with 56. workshop models. 57. r:= And so have you seen, 58. have you seen changes in the students,</p>	<p>When asked about workshop—Matt credited Jill (Midwest Reading Initiative consultant)</p> <p>This was not a school initiated decision. It came out of another initiative that focused on reading (Midwest Reading Initiative). “Sort of” indicates they understand they are not implementing workshop.</p> <p>A real disconnect here—as the students did not respond to any reading.</p> <p>That= respond to reading</p> <p>Independent practice is not a workshop term, but it does fit in with the culture of the school</p> <p>Understands importance of conferencing and feedback—but teachers do not regularly conference if at all. In reading, there was no written work to provide feedback on.</p>

<p>59. do you think, I mean just in ...</p> <p>60. ma:= Oh sure.</p> <p>61. r:= ...you know...</p> <p>62. t:= They are readers now,</p> <p>63. I've seen first of all changes</p> <p>64. in their, in measures of their reading proficiency,</p> <p>65. I mean there is no question about that</p> <p>66. and traditionally every year our eighth grade kids</p> <p>67. have the highest MAP scores</p> <p>68. in language arts</p> <p>69. and we feel that's a positive thing</p> <p>70. because essentially that's the trajectory</p> <p>71. that you want to see.</p> <p>72. And that's year after year after year it's been.</p> <p>73. r:= Uh-huh.</p> <p>74. ma:= Um, in addition to that</p> <p>75. anecdotally, our kids are readers.</p> <p>76. They like reading,</p> <p>77. they like books,</p> <p>78. they get mad</p> <p>79. when a book they are looking for</p> <p>80. is not on the shelf.</p> <p>81. They know the names</p> <p>82. of authors that they, you know,</p> <p>83. five years ago,</p> <p>84. they could maybe name three authors</p> <p>85. and now they have favorite authors</p> <p>86. and they have favorite series</p> <p>87. and they favorite genres,</p> <p>88. and at this point</p> <p>89. the real challenge</p> <p>90. is to keep enough titles</p> <p>91. on our shelves</p> <p>92. so that we can keep kids</p> <p>93. in books that are appropriately leveled</p> <p>94. and then in addition to that um,</p> <p>95. pushing them out of there.</p> <p>96. So I guess it's a catch 22,</p> <p>97. they've got this comfort level</p> <p>98. of I'm a this reader,</p> <p>99. I like, you know</p> <p>100. whatever non-fiction</p>	<p>Yet DRA assessment data is unreliable as both Cassie and Kimberly only administer part of the assessment and don't view the data as relevant.</p> <p>8th grade should have the highest scores—but shouldn't each grade levels scores be high based on what they are learning that year?</p> <p>The value is placed on kids liking books as opposed to kids learning. These two ideas seem to be mutually exclusive at Charter Academy</p> <p>Only challenge addressed is with having enough books. No discussion of learning</p>
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<p>101. or I like biographies 102. or whatever, and so, 103. the next challenge 104. for us is to push kids 105. out of their sort of comfort level genres 106. and into others. 107. But the other advantage is 108. Let's us build student proficiencies 109. with writing and responding 110. to what they are reading to.</p>	<p>Only push is out of genre not onto harder books that stretch them as readers</p> <p>Disconnect—no writing is done in response to reading</p>
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The issue with this non-authentic workshop implementation is not one of application, but rather one of pedagogy. The acceptance that workshop can be only partially implemented, or that one can choose the pieces to implement, speaks to the culture of the school that views students (and perhaps teachers) as unable to fully function in a true workshop model. The disconnect that the administration exhibits regarding classroom practice is important to notice. Matt claims that workshop is great for having students respond to reading and developing proficiencies, yet in 20 plus observations I did not once observe students respond to the reading that they were doing. The culture of the school is not one of learning, yet one where superficial aspects are accepted as valid indicators of growth and learning. What Matt labels as independent practice, is labeled workshop by teachers in the classrooms. During this workshop time, students read, filled out worksheets, or worked on an assigned piece of writing. During workshop time, students could ask for a conference, but the teacher did not initiate conferences. This failure of teachers to regularly initiate conferences with students is in direct opposition to the tenets of workshop as outlined by Atwell (1998) and the reasons for workshop as Matt, the middle school principal, outlines them in our interview (Personal Interview, June 5, 2012).

The Charter Academy teachers consistently talked about "workshop" and had created a sense within their own teaching and school that they adhere to a workshop method. What I saw in over my visits in each teacher's room did not resemble workshop (Field Notes). Instead, the lesson design harkened back to Madeline Hunter (1982)—anticipatory set, direct instruction, guided practice, and independent practice. Workshop implies that students have choice over what they are writing about and what they are working on. It is not workshop if everyone is doing the same thing with set expectations. Kimberly admitted in our first interview that even though the school and teachers labeled their pedagogical practice as workshop, it was really a modified workshop due to the number of standards they needed to cover for the benchmark assessments given at regular intervals (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011). The following chapter offers the case studies of each teacher and the analysis of the classroom structure and activities over time.

Chapter Five: Classroom Practice of Participant Teachers

I have chosen to present each participant teacher separately, based on the same common categories. This presentation choice allows for a clear comparison of similarities in the pedagogical practices present in each classroom. The lack of variation shows, regardless of the administration's view, teachers feel that the workshop model is a concrete structure that does not allow for variation. This view is a contradiction to the work of Atwell (1987, 1998). In addition to detailing the classroom practice of each participant teacher, I present her teaching history, philosophy, goals, and physical classroom setup.

Following the presentation of each teacher, I build the claims that develop answers to my research questions. I examine in depth: classroom structure and positioning; workshop implementation; conferences; pedagogical practice; standards, curriculum, outcomes, and assessments; ongoing assessments. These pieces build a complex picture of school culture and illustrate the power of that established culture.

Cassie⁷

Background. I spent the least amount of time observing Cassie. She was out on maternity leave for 12 weeks starting in early December. Cassie is a white female teacher in her late 20's, with seven years of teaching experience. She received her teaching degree in 2000, has an Elementary Education (1-6) teaching certificate, and is not a reading teacher by training. She has taught in both public and private schools and seems to be searching for the right place; most recently she spent 7 years as a permanent sub at a private elementary school before joining the staff of Charter Academy in 2009. She is

⁷ All names have been changed.

currently in her 4th year of teaching at Charter Academy and has not had a consistent teaching assignment. During her first year, she taught in a 6th grade class where she was responsible for all subject areas and students did not change classes. Then Charter Academy moved to partially departmentalize their middle school and Cassie taught reading, social studies, and writing, as separate classes. Then Cassie taught 6th grade writing only. As the middle school became completely departmentalized and in an attempt to get students a double literacy block, Charter Academy created a reading class and a writing class.

With all of the shifting of class configurations over the years, there was little consistency within classrooms and within classroom structures. This shifting of class configurations affected the role of the teacher and the ways in which they were able to develop an understanding of their role and subject matter.

During my research, Cassie taught 7th grade reading—her fourth assignment in as many years—a grade level for which she was not certified to teach. She was eager and excited to teach reading, yet was unsure of the curriculum for the start of the new year. She was unable to articulate educational goals for her students. Her uncertainty about the curriculum and what was expected from her and for her students is not necessarily rooted in her quality as a teacher, but rather in the constant shifting in the school culture that teachers were somewhat interchangeable across subject areas and that class structure was unstable. The constant movement of teachers influenced their ability to view themselves as professionals or to feel confident in their subject and ability as a teacher.

The Classroom. The room was set up in rows: six of four then a space of about two feet to facilitate students entering the room and then 4 rows of 2 desks crammed against the

back wall. On the first day, I asked Cassie where I should sit and she stated that her classes were full and I could stand in the corner using the media cart as a “table.” Her desk was tucked in the back corner of the room and the wall opposite the door was full of short bookshelves full of books. The room was crowded and dim. The only natural light came from small windows at the top of one wall. The student desks faced the whiteboard and a SmartBoard hung in the corner near the whiteboard. The room was very traditional and setup for students to work independently and did not invite collaboration, conversation, or the flexible seating that is often encouraged in a workshop classroom. The classroom setup seemed to be in direct contradiction with the workshop model that Cassie believed she was implementing (Field Notes, August 23, 2011). The classroom setup represented the teacher-centered classroom culture she ascribed to as informed by society’s needs of workforce readiness and compliance (NCEE, 1983). Desks in rows are the traditional seating arrangement in U.S. schools and constrain both the activities and possibilities for pedagogical practice.

Goals and Classroom Practice. Cassie spent valuable class time figuring out reading rates for her students and the only explanation given to the students about needing to know their reading rate was to ensure they knew how much time they would need to complete their chosen book. There was no follow-up activity in the middle or end of the year for students to see if they increased their reading rate over the course of the year. Cassie did not reassess their reading rate nor did she discuss raising the reading goal as part of the yearlong goals (Field Notes, August 23, 2011; November 8, 2011).

In our final interview, Cassie revisited her goals and claimed she met her goals for the year because students procured a library card which was her main goal (Personal

Interview, September 25, 2011; May 21, 2012). While a principled goal and important to encourage students to be readers and to seek out books on their own, this reinforces my observation that she clearly did not set out to create a thought-filled environment but an environment that enforces the culture of the school that values authority and compliance of students. This idea of compliance is one that is consistent with the culture of the school and the regimented structure that dictates how students move through the halls and enter the classrooms (Field Notes, August 23, 2011; August 30, 2011).

Kimberly

Background. Kimberly had been teaching for 7 years. She taught in a small college town for 3 years before moving to Charter Academy, where she has taught for 4 years. The year I observed was Kimberly's second year teaching reading only as the school recently departmentalized classes for 6th-8th grades. Kimberly is a certified elementary teacher and while 6th grade does fall into her certification, she, like Cassie, is not a reading teacher by training. Kimberly sees reading and writing as separate subjects, as that is all she has known as a teacher. She views them separately as she is looking at the skill level of reading as opposed to the thinking part of reading/experiencing a story. Kimberly feels that students still had skills that need to be taught in terms of reading and that those skills were separate from writing, "My goal for my lower level readers is to get them closer to where I'd like them to be. So, everybody obviously I want to grow like a year in their reading level, the lower reading levels I want them to grow a year and a half, two years to really you know to really work. But I also want them to not feel like they're stupid." (Interview August 25, 2011).

Kimberly was traditional and rigid in her role as teacher. She alluded to the idea of workshop and recognized it as an effective way to structure a class, but also stated that while it worked for some students, it did not work for others. Kimberly was tied to the standards she had to teach/cover and admitted to trying to make room for workshop, yet it was clear that she has not bought into the idea of workshop nor its benefits as they pertained to her students. This idea was reinforced by the rigid school structure that dictated each moment of the school day (Interview August 25, 2011).

The Classroom. Kimberly had one of the smallest rooms in the building and the smallest that I observed. The desks were table style with a separate chair. She had the room set up in 6 groups of 4 (2 desks on either side facing each other). The classroom library was in the front of the room and organized as Cassie's was in bins by level and genre. The pods of desks were such that all students could easily see the white board screen where she projected the worksheets and other information. There was a small carpeted area near the library and students were allowed to get comfortable while they read during workshop time, but with the limited space in the room, getting comfortable was not a true option. Cassie's desk was against the windows that were directly opposite of the door and she spent the majority of the time that she was not teaching in front of the classroom sitting at her desk. Just inside the door was a half-moon table shoved tightly into the corner and this is where I sat to observe (Field Notes, August 23, 2011).

There was a wide array of decorations on the wall—posters, student work—but nothing that grabbed the attention or pertained to the focus of her lessons. Kimberly ran her class the same as Cassie, with the same format of planner check, do now, read aloud, questions/discussion of read aloud, mini lesson, then workshop time. During workshop

time students could read, finish their worksheets based on the notes given for that particular day/week using their current book or conference with Kimberly. She, like Cassie, did not instigate the conferences herself, but relied on the students to see her when they had something that they needed to talk about.

Goals and Classroom Practice. Kimberly's main goal was getting students who had not finished a book to finish one. Yet at one point in our first interview she stated that during conferences she focused on the low-level boys who tended to struggle the most and discuss with them the books that they had read during their first conference "a lot of them are like 'I hate reading, I haven't read any books in the last year' which isn't true" (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011). Her assumption that they had read a book is telling about her stance as a teacher. She did not accept the reality that maybe these kids had not read books.

The teachers readily accepted the assumption that the structures in place at the school ensured that students read. Students were given time to read and were expected to have a book, but there were no structures or accountability measures in place to ensure that the students actually read. The impact this assumption had was to take away the voice and authority of the student and place authority with the teacher. Regardless of the truth of the statement "I haven't read any books," when the teacher invalidates a student claim, all authority was stripped from the students sending the message that it was what the teacher thinks that matters and not what the students says (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011).

Kimberly pointed out that one of the school's original curriculum standards was to "develop a lifelong love of reading." While this appeared to be a goal, more than a

quantifiable standard, it was an important goal for a school to have. Reading should be something students learn to love to do, yet in classrooms there should be a balance of reading for enjoyment and a development of the skill required for critical analysis that involves thinking and exploring ideas from the book and applying them to life and real-world situations.

When prompted for her goal, it became clear that Kimberly's focus was not on the specific skills needed to be successful as a learner, but on more generalized goals, like preparing students for 7th and 8th grade, "to push them a little bit harder to really prepare them for 7th and 8th grade. Seventh and eighth grade are really tough...so my rule for those kids are really to be ready for critical thinking of reading to like take it to the next step to really think outside the box which they aren't used to" (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011). This goal stated by Kimberly was echoed by the administration, "the overall goal of the middle school program was to prepare students academically and socially for success in high school and beyond (college or career training). The culture we try to create directly reflects this goal" (personal email, June 6, 2014). The stated goal of middle school was vague and did not provide a specific measurable goal that could easily be operationalized in practice. The vagueness also allowed teachers and administrators to claim success without any real data to support that success (Personal Interview, June 5, 2012; Personal Email, June, 6, 2014).

Kimberly went on to discuss how she would like her students to grow one year in reading level, except for her lower-level readers. She believes that lower-level readers should gain a year and a half or two years, yet she had no clear structures in place to support this gain. The culture in place at Charter Academy worked against pushing

students to get better and focused on the strict adherence to the rules in place for both students and teachers (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011).

As I revisited the goals and look over the events in Kimberly's classroom, there was a clear disconnect between the goals she had for her students and the type of work she assigned. The underlying message in our interviews and in her classroom practice was that reading was a class they had to take and something they had to do. There were few class discussions regarding books; students did not have the opportunity to share the books they were reading and what they liked or didn't like about them. There was little, if any, accountability for students and the expectation was that they were quiet for the class period, completed the worksheet/notes that went with the mini-lesson, and had their planners signed. In each of these activities, the message was sent to the students that the teacher/school was the authority and at the center and they as student were expected to follow the rules and do what they were told (Field Notes, August 30, 2011; September 13, 2011; October 4, 2011; November 15, 2011; December 2, 2011). Within this rigid structure, student voice was neither valued nor heard. This rigid structure sent a message of low expectations informed by the identities the teachers and school had created for themselves and the identities they had created for students based on perceived beliefs regarding the structure of school as well as the relationship between teachers and students.

Julie

Background. Julie was starting her third year of teaching and was certified to teach elementary grades in Iowa. She did a dual major for middle school and was certified in Iowa to teach any subject through eighth grade. She had been teaching writing since she

started at Charter Academy and had a deep passion for her subject area and her students (Personal Interview, September 15, 2011).

The Classroom. Like her colleagues' rooms, Julie's classroom was cramped and crowded. There were 27 desks in 3 rows of varying lengths. The desks were side-by-side to create the impression of a long table. They all faced forward toward the "front" of the room where the SmartBoard/whiteboard was placed. Julie's desk was in the back corner of her narrow room. Along one side were two long tables that held seven computers. Over the course of my observations, the students used the computers one time, and not every student or every computer was used. The room was cluttered and claustrophobic. Julie had a separate workspace set up on the side of the room with a rocking chair, a pretty rug, small bookshelf, floor lamps, a beanbag chair. It was an inviting space, but was used very infrequently during "workshop" time over the course of my observations (Field Notes, August 30, 2011; September 22, 2011; October 4, 2011).

Goals and Classroom Practice. Julie believed the middle school experience should be about "helping kids gain independence." She defined her role "as somebody who opens the door, gives them the tools, but pushes them to use them on their own" (Personal Interview, September 15, 2011). Julie looked to writing as a way for students to get to know themselves and what they thought and because writing was individualized through workshops and conferencing, students were allowed to develop at their own pace without feeling the pressure to keep up with someone else, yet in her classroom students worked on the same writing at the same pace for each unit. Along with her purpose to guide them, she saw the purpose of writing as a way for students to develop an understanding of themselves and the world around them. Julie articulated an understanding that writing

affects “every other class, not math so much, but even there it does. So, it’s like a tool for being successful. A lot like reading, of course” (Personal Interview, September 15, 2011).

While this is Julie’s stated philosophy, the culture of the school did not allow Julie to create the environment she described. She clearly believed that what goes on in her classroom was individualized—yet all students were working on the same pieces, due at the same time and for the same audience. The culture of the school and scheduling dictated the separation of the two subjects—there was no pedagogical or theoretical consideration for the separation of the two subjects. Her belief that workshop allowed for individual development clouded her ability to see the uniformity and rigidity of her classroom structure (Personal Interview, September 15, 2011; February 22, 2012; May 3, 2012).

Julie subscribed to the notion that reading was important to develop as a writer and used “good” model texts and had students read in some form everyday—whether it is someone else’s writing or model texts. Julie struggled with the artificial separation of reading and writing, as Charter Academy was the first place she had ever experienced the teaching of the two subjects separated. Julie had very ambiguous and broad goals for her students. She wanted them “to know themselves better” (Personal Interview, September 15, 2011).

Julie acknowledged that one of her goals for herself was to be more consistent in collecting her students’ writing over the process and giving feedback throughout. There were issues with conferencing and time management—since the classes were only 55 minutes and often had 25 students in each class. Julie wanted to ensure that students got feedback before their writing was graded, but this was not always possible. With only

20-25 minutes allotted for workshop in the rigid schedule, conferencing with students in a quality manner was difficult. During the workshop period, Julie spent more time monitoring than conferencing. Another goal Julie had was to get to a place in her teaching where the students felt like they were getting enough done and were authentically using the writing process and focus on the difference between editing and revising. Writing could not be authentic when the assignments and timelines were dictated and rigid (Personal Interview, September 15, 2011).

Julie hoped that through more conferencing students would begin to learn to take feedback and determine if the feedback fit with their paper. The ability to think critically about feedback was a key component of the revision process and one of Julie's goals was to help her students take ownership over their writing. Feeling ownership over their writing was difficult to achieve as the students were not given a choice over what they wrote or when they turned something in (Field Notes, September 22, 2011; October 11, 2011; November 1, 2011). Working toward ownership of work would require that students had some ownership over what they were writing.

Looking forward to the end of the year, Julie hoped that her students would be able to publish writing they were proud of and wanted to share with an audience. Developing students who were able to work independently and know when they need to conference and how to develop their own ideas was another goal Julie was aiming for by the end of the year. Julie felt that her goals were lofty and a bit ambitious, as "they should know how to write a sentence by now and half of them don't" (Personal Interview, September 15, 2011). Because of this focus and belief, sentence structure had become a central focus of her instruction. So often, I saw this happen: a teacher focuses on a skill in

isolation as opposed to a skill within the context of an authentic assignment. This compartmentalizing of skills is the same as separating reading and writing and teaching each within its own context. The language that Julie and the other teachers used regarding their goals and teaching was often in direct contrast to what the activities in the classroom were reinforcing. When asked about student growth, Julie reflected,

I have [seen growth], it's a little bit difficult to say because the genres are so different. Um, but we are ending with an essay and you can definitely see who, who is thinking more mature than others with an essay. Like you can really see who has grown, um, from what I knew at the beginning of the year, even though they didn't write an essay at the beginning of the year, and their writing assessments were persuasive essays or letters and definitely grew in those from Fall to Spring. (Personal interview, May 3, 2012)

Maria

Background. The job at Charter Academy was Maria's first job. She was in her third year of teaching. She was certified to teach elementary grades 1-6. The previous two years she taught math and this was the first year she taught writing. She had no specific training in departmentalized education nor in the teaching of writing. She claimed to enjoy writing and looked forward to teaching a new subject. Her two years teaching math did not prepare her to tackle writing, but she leaned heavily on her colleagues, especially Julie, to help her develop her lessons (Personal Interview, August 30, 2011).

The Classroom. Maria's room was set up in rows that ran side to side as opposed to front to back. Her desk was placed in the back of the room, and she spent the majority of the class time at the front of the room at the document camera set up. The room was

overcrowded (as were all of the rooms) and there was little space to move around or to allow for movement or any type of teaching and activities that were not teacher centered (Field Notes, August 23, 2011; September 27, 2011; October 11, 2011).

Maria was the only teacher who moved the furniture in her room around. The room was often in different variations depending on the activity—Maria was the only teacher I observed who changed the set-up of the room to facilitate a particular activity. Her room was the biggest of the rooms, yet was still cramped with little space for student movement (Field Notes, August 25, 2011; October 4, 2011).

Goals and Classroom Practice. Maria viewed her role as central to her students' success, and it was clear that she had been strongly influenced by the culture of the school. Her only teaching experience was at Charter Academy and her work and classroom had been influenced and informed by the rigid authoritative culture of the school.

As with her colleagues, Maria followed a strict schedule that was the same every day. During the class periods that I observed, there was no variation from the set structure. Maria spent the majority of the class teaching time at the front of the classroom. During the teaching time of class (approximately 30 minutes every class period) Maria did most of the talking and the majority of the questions she asked were what I refer to as “What do you know” questions. These questions asked the students not just to recall information that the teacher has previously given, but they also asked the students to attempt to read the teacher's mind,

t= “What is pre-writing? This is a part of the writing process. What is pre-writing
s2=Practice writing
t=Okay—[pause]
s3=Thinking of topics
t=Okay—[pause]

s4=Writing before—a draft before publishing
t=It is not a draft—this is just pre-writing, what is pre-writing?
s5=Practicing
t=Practicing but not for a final draft
s6=Find writing ideas from personal experience
t=Great—finding topics (field notes, September 9, 2011)

This type of questioning reinforced Maria's position as the authority in the classroom and the center of knowledge.

As stated earlier, the first six weeks were spent developing community in the classrooms, but this idea of community was insincere if students were never given the opportunity to fully participate in the school. Students need to feel as though they too are part of the classroom and valued. When the teacher is in the authority role all of the time, students begin to view teachers not as an advocate, but as an enemy. While Maria used “what’s up” (students start class by sharing something going on in their world/life) to attempt to build a community, her role as the authority in the classroom put her at odds with the students. While she was the teacher, she and the school had created an environment where students feel powerless and this feeling of powerlessness often led students who rebel in the small ways they have. To exert any type of control over themselves, “[Maria] singles out one student in the back for planner and he tells her it is filled out when it isn’t—she gives him a detention slip and he tosses it to the ground as she walks away” (Field notes, September 13, 2011).

Maria reported growth in student thinking from the beginning of the year. It was unclear what Maria based this belief on. Growth could be attributed to the type of assignment as well as to actual growth in learning. Maria is unable to attribute the growth to anything specific that was part of her classroom or practice (Personal Interview, May 3, 2012).

Much of Maria’s talk in the classroom placed her squarely in the role of authority. Her questions firmly put students in the inferior role of trying to guess what she thought, “if this was one long paragraph, how would you figure out where the line breaks are” (Field Notes, September 27, 2011)? This type of impossible to answer question was representative of the questions Maria asked most frequently in the classroom. This type of questioning—students being led down a particular path--was pervasive throughout all of the classes and teachers I observed. While this type of questioning was more common in classrooms to make it not stand out, it was a product of the culture of the school. Students were not valued for their thoughts or their ability to do more than follow directions.

There were many opportunities where students asked to be able to work ahead or work on some of their editing and they were continually prevented from taking ownership of tasks and instructed to work on what the class was working on. Workshop should guarantee that choice for students, but Charter Academy’s culture of strict student subservience does not allow for students to be working outside of what the teacher has determined was important or necessary.

Workshop infidelity	
SB: So we have to write a poem from this? Maria: No, but I want you to start from here. SG: Can we start editing? Maria: You are going to wait until you have it on draft paper—on Thursday in workshop we are going to transfer them to draft paper (Field Notes, October 11).	Given students a prompt and model poem to spark ideas. Students immediately feel stifled in their “choice.” Pseudo-teaching—workshop is about letting students work with choice and at their own pace.

It became clear that the teachers were often going through the motions of teaching and seemed to lack any clear understanding of what they were teaching and how they might be able to reach the goals more effectively. While many of the teachers described the teaching of thinking and critical skills as important, very little if any of the classroom practices I observed supported this. Because the teachers were not able to see this, they put little effort into receiving the information from the professional development and seeing the new pedagogical practice as useful/applicable nor did they seek out ways to add thinking practice into their daily lessons (Field Notes, September 28, 2011; February 29, 2012; Personal Interview, May 1, 2012; May 3, 2012; May 5, 2015; May 21, 2012).

Classroom Structure and Positioning

Each classroom session I observed (between 20-22 per teacher) followed the exact same format. There was no deviation from the regimented schedule in the teaching. The teaching pattern looked like this:

- Copy down objective and homework in planner
 - In the reading classes, homework was always to read for 30 minutes and self-record reading
 - In the writing classes, homework varied, more often than not no homework was assigned. When homework was assigned, it was often related to their work and was long term, ensuring enough time to complete
- Have planner stamped to ensure information has been copied down
- Do Now activity linked to the daily objective (examples are from each participant)

- *What are some things you should always do when previewing a book?*
(Cassie)
- *Poetry presentations pointers (Kimberly)*
- *Use writing to reflect on project (Julie)*
- *Define writing territories/genres (Maria)*
- Discussion of the “Do Now” and sharing
- Further explanation of the topic of the objective (see table 8 for objectives)
- A guided activity (if applicable)
- Read Aloud⁸
 - Questions from the teachers during the read aloud (majority were simple recall questions or questions that had an obvious answer).
- Workshop time
 - 20-30 minutes of SSR⁹ (Cassie)
 - 20-30 minutes of SSR or worksheet work (Kimberly)
 - 20-30 minutes of writing/rewriting (Julie and Maria)

This structure was a product of the school culture, where control of student movement and behavior was at the center. Students were given edicts and expected to comply with the smallest details—e.g. writing in planner. While on the surface this practice could be explained away as trying to help students develop organizational skills, the implementation of the practice was just one more way that school culture of control was enacted.

⁸ Teachers read from chapter books to the whole class each day and initiated a discussion related to instructional focus.

⁹ SSR=Sustained Silent reading

The strict classroom structure was enacted in all areas of classroom interactions and lesson delivery. Teachers all taught from the front of the room and often demanded, “Show me SLANT because this is what you are going to need to know.” SLANT stands for Sit up, Listen, Ask and answer questions, Nod your head, Track the speaker. Just as the planner expectation, the constant demand for students to subscribe to a detailed classroom behavior did not allow for the students to develop skills necessary for self-monitoring, but instead took away feelings of autonomy and prevented students from developing feelings of self-efficacy that they need to develop to be successful throughout their life.

The minutia of each classroom varied; Kimberly had a practice of spelling reading (r-e-a-d-i-n-g) when students would get too loud during any portion of the class. On most occasions, she would get to the letter “I” before students really quieted down and focused. Maria, allowed “chat time¹⁰” as a transition between mini-lesson and workshop time—but only if students earned it the previous day and during this time she expected students to use shoulder voices only. If students could not keep their voices low, she cut the two minutes short and reminded them of the rules “why did I stop you?/Were you too loud?/Who wants to demonstrate a shoulder voice¹¹?/Great I couldn’t hear, I shouldn’t be able to hear you outside of your circle. So, you lost your chat time for tomorrow but will get in on Thursday” (field notes, August 23, 2011). This exchange was representative of the school culture that ensured students were kept in their place as followers of the rules. This strict control of their behavior both in the classrooms and out did not allow students

¹⁰ chat-time is a 2 minute break in instruction/practice where students were able to socialize and stand up and move around.

¹¹ A shoulder voice was defined by Maria as a voice quiet enough that only the person standing next to your shoulder could hear.

to develop their own ideas nor did it encourage them to think and learn the skills need to operate in a world that will not control their every action.

All of the teachers I observed felt that the prescribed classroom structure could be helpful for students, but Kimberly openly admitted that the structure was confining: “when I want to keep going, um, or you know, when you are almost done with a book and you just want to read the next chapter...we have to stop because we have stuff to do” (Personal Interview, February 2, 2012). This prescribed structure allowed for no individual freedom. Kimberly succumbed easily to the culture of the school that required adherence to the rules and structure and stripped individuals of their ability as professionals to make decisions based on the needs of the students. Teachers clearly accepted the structure and did not try to incorporate any pedagogy that did not fit into a 5-10 minute mini-lesson nor any new strategies that could not be formatted into a mini-lesson. Teachers expressed interest and excitement in the professional development, “I found the sessions before school started immensely valuable. Um, I loved them” (Personal Interview, May 1, 2012) regarding the strategies presented in the professional development, but they were unable to find a way to incorporate them within the strict prescriptive structure created by the culture created by the school, “Throughout the year I didn't get as much out of them, um, I felt that a lot of what they were giving us was above where our students are” (Personal Interview, May 1, 2012).

The strict structure was seen in the dialogue in the classroom. The teachers across the observed classrooms did the majority of the talking—turns and words over the course of my observations. The largest chunk of student talking happened in the writing classrooms when the students shared their writing, which happened infrequently—four

times during my observations of Julie's room and five times in my observation of Maria's room (Field Notes, August 30, 2011; September 27, 2011; October 18, 2011; October 20, 2011; November 1, 2011). This lack of student voice in the classroom built the student identity the school culture subscribed to in which students were there to receive an education as opposed to be participants in learning.

Cassie positioned herself as the authority. She did not move around the classroom, aside from when she herself stamped planners ensuring students copied down the objective. She positioned herself in the front of the room during the review of the Do Now activity and for the read aloud. During the read aloud she always sat in her rolling "teacher" chair. After the read aloud she would direct the students to pull out their genre book (or the DEAR book) and return to her desk for the remainder of the time and work on her computer. During my observations, I saw Cassie conference with 2 students and never saw her read a book during workshop time. She was always in her desk working on her computer.

Cassie's role in the classroom seemed to be less than a guide, although she seemed convinced that she was "teaching" her students what readers do. She believed that because she loved to read that she was qualified to teach reading, "I think because I am a reader and I read all of the time, so it's just like duh (laughter). Um...I don't know. I played sports growing up to and you can't have a coach teach you something if they don't also do it...so like I am reader so I can teach reading. It's just and easy...not transition....you know" (personal interview, September 2011). There was no work individually with students to help move them from one reading level to another. There was no measurement or teacher-created formative assessments that were used to gauge

student progress. There were no quizzes, writing assignments, or work given/collected (Field Notes, September 20, 2011; October 11, 2011). This lack of work or expectation for work was a product of the schools culture of compliance.

Workshop Implementation

Reading/Writing workshop at its core requires teachers to share and even turn over responsibility to their students (Atwell 1987; 1998). Reading/Writing workshop is about students having choices and practicing reading and writing the way real-world readers and writers practice. Reading/Writing workshop looks to change the rules, as rules are used to limit a particular person's role. In traditional classrooms, the student's role is severely limited. Atwell (1987; 1998) points out that in the workshop model, it is the teacher's role that is limited while the students' role is expanded with choice and control over his or her own work. Workshop, as defined by Atwell (1987; 1998), is a knowledge model as opposed to a rule model. The idea is to create a classroom environment and culture rooted in the idea that students will develop independence based in knowledge of how to do as opposed to adherence to rules of what to do.

Before the school moved to a workshop approach two years earlier, the teachers received no formal training or dedicated professional development. The school administration purchased a copy of Atwell's *In the Middle* (1998) and the teachers read most of the book and had a few meetings led by Lisa the Middle School Director of Curriculum. The administration put no support in place to help the teachers develop a plan for the successful implementation of the workshop model in their classrooms.

One of the Communication Arts teachers, Gail, who declined to be part of the study, was able to go to Atwell's Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) in Maine. Gail

reported back to her colleagues about what she was able to observe at CTL. The issues with workshop raised by Kimberly explain the issues with the presentation and implementation of professional development. Kimberly explains, “They call it workshop, but I don’t know much it is. Um, I mean the true definition of what I do is not workshop because I guide them towards something to pick, as opposed to read anything you want. Because I have standards and stuff that needs to get met, and a hundred kids to do it with” (Personal interview, May 1, 2012). This assessment from Kimberly could easily be attributed to the professional development teachers were presented with over the year. Throughout the professional development, the facilitators expressed frustration with the school’s inconsistency in commitment to the professional development:

We didn't meet with Charter Academy in December -- they canceled out on us. We did meet with them January 11 (just this past week). During that session and as per their request, Brianne and I made presentations on sentence expansion via dependent clauses, dictation for sentence modeling and sentence structure, and we had them practice brush strokes from Harry Noden's *Image Grammar* which we had introduced them to in October. We had a shortened session (1:15 - 3:00) since they had to attend a building-wide meeting beginning at 3:00. I have to tell you, it's been a strange experience. They keep moving the target. (Personal Email, January 14, 2012)

Kimberly’s assessment that much of what they do in the classroom “is not workshop” was represented in each of the four classrooms I observed. Each of the teachers described their role as a “guide,” but it became apparent that the teachers were often going through the motions of workshop and seemed to lack an understanding of

what they were implementing and the benefits that the workshop model could have (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011; February 2, 2012; May 1, 2012). While the teachers used “workshop” to name their classroom structure, the thinking and critical skills inherent in a true workshop model were not in evidence. Because the teachers were not able to admit they were not faithful to the workshop model, their belief that what they were doing was backed with research allowed them a sense of accomplishment and gave them the ability to resist the professional development based on what they claimed they were already doing (Personal Interview, May 5, 2011; Field Notes, August 2, 2011; August 25, 2011).

Conferences

Conferences are a central tenant of a workshop classroom. Since the idea behind workshop is that students work independently, conferences are necessary for the teacher to be able to work with each individual student and to keep track and assess student progress. During the initial interviews, each of the four teachers referenced the importance of conferencing and claimed it was a central part of their classroom. What played out in their classrooms did not support their claims about conferencing (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011; August 30, 2011; September 11, 2011; September 22, 2011).

During my observations, Kimberly met with an average of two students per class period. It should be noted that each conference was student initiated. The only time that Kimberly initiated contact with students during workshop time was during the DRA¹² assessment periods. Kimberly did not read during workshop time, but spent her time organizing papers at her desk and on her computer. Kimberly stated in our first interview,

¹² DRA-Development Reading Assessment is a standardized reading assessment administered by teacher to establish a students instructional reading level.

“I’ll do a lot of conferencing” as she explained her role as a teacher and how she ensured that her students were learning, since she used no formative or summative assessments (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011).

Kimberly’s school year started with some potential for getting students to write and make some connections; she assigned students with an end of a book writing assignment and provided students with a book review at the end of the unit. The choices, at the end of another unit, the students were given were all teacher-driven, but the potential was there and the students had to think and show an understanding of the structure they were to be modeling and imitating—book jacket, letter to author or character, etc. Students followed a structure and basically filled in the blanks, yet it was the most writing carried out in a reading classroom. Kimberly accepted that note taking was writing. The view of writing as a tool to capture information as opposed as a tool to create thinking was prevalent among the teachers and a product of the school culture that views the student as a consumer of information as opposed to a producer of knowledge. The use of writing in the Kimberly’s classes was reserved for note taking and was controlled by the teacher and her views and instruction (Field Notes August 25, 2011; September 12, 2011; October 18, 2011).

Kimberly explained that students are given choice and freedom when it came to projects for the end of their books, although these projects were not focused on during class time, nor were they integrated into the curriculum. These projects were treated as separate from the learning and were not generated by the students’ own interests. While there was some choice involved, it was not a choice that required thinking as students often choose that “easiest” project to complete (Personal Interview February 2, 2011).

During my observations, the classroom practices I observed were not consistent with the philosophy that led to the development of the workshop model. Atwell's (1987; 1998) pedagogy from *In the Middle* was lost in Kimberly's classroom aside from her belief that kids should read books they like and should learn to abandon books for a specific reason, as well as the importance put on the read aloud. The idea that we sometimes read a book and then decide we don't like it is okay and it was important to think about why that book no longer was appealing or held the interest of the reader. She uses the read aloud book "to model when we do assignments, um if they are working on visualizing that day, we'll read a little bit; we'll talk about our visualization and I'll model the assignment together with them based upon the book we are reading because it's a book they all heard" (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011). The read aloud activity then led into an independent practice portion of the class—also known as 'workshop' time in both Kimberly and Cassie's classrooms.

There were few class discussions regarding books; students did not have the opportunity to share the books they were reading and what they liked or did not like about them. There was no accountability for students in the forms of either formative or summative assessments. Students simply needed to record the pages they read and that was the end of the accountability and the expectations for achievement in the reading classes. This low level of expectations supported a message that students learning was not what was valued. Students were expected to be quiet for the class period, complete the worksheet/notes that went with the mini-lesson and had their planners signed. In each of these activities, the message was sent to the students that the teacher/school was the authority and at the center and they as students were expected to follow the rules and

comply. Within this rigid structure, student voice was neither valued nor heard (Field Notes, August 30, 2011; September 22, 2011; October 20, 2011).

Much of Kimberly's language represents her deficit beliefs. It is clear that low expectations were in place for those students who were low achievers, not just in Kimberly's classroom but within the culture of the school, "I can promise you if people walked into this room and I was having my low level kids read, *The Devil's Arithmetic*, they would think that's not appropriate for them" (Personal Interview, February 2, 2012). The idea that kids can and should only read books that are easy for them is something that has been simplified from the reading workshop model. Students need to be able to access a book, but it also needs to be a book that pushes them and makes them think. It is the teacher's job to incorporate the opportunities for thinking and that does not happen in a classroom where students complete worksheets (Field Notes, September 22, 2011; October 4, 2011).

As with other classes, workshop time in Julie's classroom referred to as workshop in name only. During my observations, Julie met with an average of three students per class period for a time of less than five minutes per conference. The majority of her time during the "workshop" period was spent monitoring student behavior and work, "SLANT/Sit up/Today I want you to write in your writer's notebook—I want you to just play with words—you are going to write three poems today—I want you to write a couplet" (Field Notes, September 29, 2011). As students worked, Julie moved from her desk, to float around the room and check on two students. Because students were all required to be working on the same pieces, it was easy for her to monitor progress and who was on task. Students had no freedom to move about the room or to work on a

different piece of writing if they wished (Field Notes, September 29, 2011; October 4, 2011; October 20, 2011).

On a single instance during my observations, students were given freedom to sit where they would be most comfortable. Students were asked to write poetry for a school-wide poetry contest. This was the only assignment/instance I observed where students had free choice on what they worked on. Even though they were all writing poetry, there were no parameters on the poetry was about, “kids are lounging on the floor and working—kicking back in chairs and really working—this really looked like writing workshop much more than anything else I have seen this year” (Field Notes, November 15, 2011). Students were engaged with writing poetry for a poetry contest event that the school was participating “everyone in 7th grade will write a poem—any kind of poem you want. As a school—we pick the very best poem—I’ll find top 20—then teachers and admin will narrow to top 5 then students will vote on the winner. That person then represents Charter Academy in the city wide poetry reading” (Field Notes, November 15, 2011). Students were given total freedom and Julie had 5 poetry stations setup around the room to help inspire student. The poetry stations had suggestions and examples for different type of poetry providing students with choice, an important component of workshop (Atwell, 1987; 1998).

In the writing classrooms, there were many more planned activities, but the activities were structured and students were all working on exactly the same thing following a model. There was no choice on what to write or what subject matter was covered and explored. There were opportunities when students asked to be able to work ahead or work on some of their editing and they were continually denied the opportunity

to work on their own schedule and instructed to work on the task everyone else was completing. Workshop should guarantee that choice for them, but Charter Academy's culture of strict student subservience did not allow for students to work outside of what the teacher had determined to be valuable:

S: So we have to write a poem from this?

Maria: No, but I want you to start from here.

S: Can we start editing?

Maria: You are going to wait until you have it on draft paper—on Thursday in workshop we are going to transfer them to draft paper. (Field Notes, October 11, 2011)

Maria's rigidity rejected the tenets of workshop as defined by Atwell (1987, 1998) regarding student choice and working at their own pace. Maria could have allowed students to work through the process at their own pace with little to no impact on other students but Maria held on to the authority constraining students to her own timeline.

Pedagogical Practice

Looking through each of the teacher's objectives, there was no cohesive course of study. The objectives (See table 8) were focused on specific skills that had no clear overarching goal. The objectives seemed to be all over the place with no real connection to a cohesive course of study. Rooted in this disconnection between each day's topics was a product of Cassie's belief that her job is not to teach them anything specific. Cassie believes that her only job was to "get students to read and to enjoy it [reading]" (Personal Interview, September 22, 2011). The belief that to like reading was the only important part of reading was a cop-out on her part as a teacher. While it is important to get

students to enjoy reading, it is also important to teach them how to read and experience what they are reading. During my observations of Cassie’s teaching over the first semester and into the second semester, there were few instances where Cassie challenged her students to think. Cassie positioned herself in the role of authority on a regular basis. She asked questions during the daily read aloud, but the majority of those questions were close-ended questions where it was clear in the asking that she had an answer that she was looking for. The questions she asked were simple recall questions.

<p>How was Tyree feeling? What has he mad about? Explain Tyree to me How do you think he feels?—here is the 22 year old—what are most 22 year olds doing? Who do they have to take care of? What else did we learn in this chapter? Was is Laf’s fault? Why would Charlie do that? Where was Charlie when mom died? How do you think Charlie feels? he didn’t get to see her? –(Field Notes, September 27, 2011)</p>	<p>Questions only ask students to recall specific information from the text. Students offered simple answers.</p>
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During one observation, Julie stopped in to ask Cassie if she had anything to put on the work board (a bulletin board in the hallway that showcased student work). Cassie replied, “No, this is reading we don’t produce any work” (Field Notes, November 8, 2011). This statement was telling of Cassie’s own classroom culture, but also offers insight into the culture of the school that worked to silence the students as opposed to encouraging them to speak and be heard. As previously stated, Cassie’s class had no accountability of expectations for work. Student reading logs determined students’ grades and Cassie did one check of their notebooks for Do Now activities. If students were quietly reading (although it was obvious that several were pseudo-reading, turning pages

at steady intervals) and remembered to bring in their reading logs regularly they received an A (Field Notes, November 8, 2011).

Cassie's workshop model was simply sustained silent reading. Students were expected to have a book (and read) the entire time. There was no work produced based on their reading, just their reading log of how many pages they read. Students were often not engaged in reading and those who appeared to be could only be gauged by the frequency by which they turned pages. Cassie did not assign any work for students aside from the reading and the Do Now activities. Kimberly's workshop implementation did not vary much from Cassie's. Kimberly did incorporate some note taking and worksheets. The worksheets were filled out and never collected and the notes were taken, but students never took a test over the information (Field Notes, September 20, 2011; October 18, 2011; November 1, 2011).

Without formal assessments or assignments of any kind, the only real way that Cassie was able to gauge what the students were learning was through the questions that she asked during the Do Now and the read aloud. This worked to take away the voice of the students and muted them while amplifying the voice and ideas of the teacher.

Cassie did often ask questions of her students during the read aloud and during the do now activity. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the questions were simple concrete questions with relatively obvious answers. While some questions asked students to interpret an event or a character's feelings, few if any asked students to expand their thinking. The questions worked not to deepen student thinking, but to control their voice and what was "allowed" to be considered important or valuable. Students were often reluctant to offer much more than what Cassie was asking for and this reluctance, to ask

questions, was consistent across the 4 classrooms I observed. Students were clearly positioned in an inferior position to the teachers in every interaction that I saw during my observations (Field Notes, August 25, 2011; September 13, 2011; September 22, 2011; October 4, 2011).

While questions are important in any learning environment, just posing the question does not inherently lead to learning. It is in the exploration of the question that the learning happens and there was little exploration in any apparently meaningful way in Cassie's class. Cassie used questions as her objectives—something to cover but not really to learn or for students to create meaning through (See Table 8 for teacher objectives).

Across classrooms, much of the teaching came in the form of direct instruction using questions related to the do now or to the read aloud book. The questions Cassie asked were mostly surface level or recall questions and did not work to elicit real learning opportunities for students. She often led students to where she wanted them to go with her questions and did not probe beyond the simple responses, "Okay. Urban is city right? Poverty. Have you heard poverty Wally?/ Okay, so you think Lafayette may be the main character, so he might be the guy in the middle because he sticks out more? Okay" (Field Notes, September 22, 2011). She did not exhibit expertise in her content. She was not a reading teacher by trade or an English teacher. She appeared to teach her content the way that was easiest for her and the students were not asked to create or explore any meaning-making activities.

Kimberly claimed that students learned by doing and I would agree with that, but they need to have a purpose for their reading in order to actually practice and learn. When

students only had to read to fill in a few recall answers on a worksheet, they were not creating knowledge but simply recalling what they read. Students may create an inference, but if they are not encouraged to go beyond making the inference, they are not learning how to read critically. They are simply learning how to read to answer specific questions or fulfill a particular task. Critical reading is about more than answering questions. There was a clear disconnect between what Kimberly believed the students were doing and what was actually taking place. But what took place fit in with the culture created by the school that students were there to receive the knowledge and to do as little independent thinking as possible (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011; Field Notes, September 6, 2011; September 20, 2011; October 4, 2011; November 1, 2011).

When asked about the role that questions play in her classroom, Kimberly was unable to really articulate how and why she used questions. She stated, “Sometimes we do a lot of unanswerable questions.” This idea of a question that cannot be answered is false in its ability to get students to think deeply about something (Burke, 2010; Wilhelm, 2007). Kimberly is clearly talking about open-ended questions that do not have only one correct answer, but they are questions that can and should be answered, as that is where students have to become critical in their assessment and thinking. She also uses questions during “conferences we question a lot ...for comprehension checks, just to see if they know what is going on” (Personal Interview, August 25, 2011).

As the year wore on, it became clear that Kimberly accepted that some students would not make progress or develop critical thinking skills over the year. When asked if she had seen an increase in critical thinking skills she replied, “those lower level kids not as much. Um still very literal. Um, but they are also, it’s harder because of the books

they are reading don't have much depth in them...so it's hard to make them analyze something that...those lower level ones [students], just have it hard, no grasp of it [thinking/engaging], and it's the material [books] to pull for them that's hard too" (Personal interview, February 2, 2012). Kimberly's language demonstrates her acceptance of the lower-level students' ability level and places blame at the lack of deep material as opposed to placing the responsibility on herself to provide an opportunity for them to develop the thinking skills necessary for them to grow as readers and thinkers.

To encourage students to facilitate and control their discussion more Kimberly assigned them questions to bring in regarding the reading. Her reasoning was that writing questions was a skill and a skill they had to learn. Asking questions is certainly a skill, yet the language Kimberly used was not about student learning but about the acquisition of a skill (Personal Interview, February 2, 2012).

All year students were given the choice in Kimberly's room to read what they wanted in a particular genre. At the time of our second interview, students had started book clubs and this reinforced the idea that without ongoing accountability how can teachers be certain students are doing the reading and learning. Book club groups were assigned based on reading levels and students were given a choice of two or three books to decide on as a group. Kimberly expressed her frustration with the lowest group, "I have one group that it's like pulling teeth and they are just not reading their stuff." There is little discussion about how to get that group to read more because "it's like one out of twenty groups" (Personal interview, February 2, 2012). Kimberly seemed resigned to the fact that some kids just were not going to read and that seemed to give her and her colleagues an excuse for not working harder to engage students. At some level students

were going to make a choice to do the work or not, but schools and teachers need to create a culture where the expectation is that they are doing the work and not one that accepts them not doing the work (Personal Interview, February 2, 2012; May 1, 2012).

The final project, Kimberly assigned, with the book clubs asked students to write the “next chapter in the book.” When pressed to talk about what the assignment entailed, Kimberly explained “so, it’s more like an epilogue. That’s how I’m going to approach it. Not a chapter, because chapters are long. Epilogues are easier” (Personal interview, February 2, 2012). This final assignment was driven by the claim that students always wanted to know more as a story ended. While this assignment certainly leads students to thinking and creating something, there was little scaffolding or preparation provided to the students for the assignment. Students did not keep reader’s notebooks or any personal responses as they read. They read and then talked about the book once per week, with Kimberly as part of the discussion—she asked all the questions and served as the moderator. During book clubs, the student voices were heard during these discussions, but students looked to and relied on Kimberly for guidance and answers, reinforcing the school and classroom culture that what the teacher has to say is more important and valued over the ideas of students (Personal Interview, February 2, 2012).

There was a disconnect between the way the teachers taught and what the students wanted and needed. This was exhibited in Kimberly’s observation “they like reading but they also like doing something with the reading” (Personal Interview, February 2, 2012) This observation was insightful, but illustrated that Kimberly believes that students were doing something with their book when they filled out a worksheet that was related to that day’s mini-lesson. Kimberly did infuse some “doing something with the reading” in her

classroom, but those opportunities were minimal and seemed like time fillers as opposed to expressions of learning (Personal Interview, May 1, 2012; Field Notes, November 8, 2011; November 15, 2011; December 2, 2011). The idea of the middle school's goal towards developing students independence was an underlying foundations that lets teachers take a hand off approach to teaching, as if that benefitted students.

While Julie's philosophy is embedded in her belief that "in middle school in particular, it [role of teacher] has a lot to do with helping kids gain independence," (Personal interview, September 15, 2011) the culture of the school does not allow Julie to create the environment she describes:

t= [students]especially in this grade level are so dependent, more so than any other grade, like year I've had kids. And so as a teacher I see my role as a middle school teacher as somebody who opens the door, gives them tools, but pushes them to use them on their own.

r:= Uh-huh.

t:= Um, so I guess, it's a very individualized process to see where kids are to start with and know what they need, but I need to be able to give them the right tools so they can help themselves.

r:= Uh-huh. And so um, I think this question is like super easy with how does writing play a rule in that?

t:= They get to know themselves. Which is a huge part of that, knowing who you are as a person and what you want for yourself. Um, and writing is so individualized in that we do workshops and conferencing with them (Personal Interview, September 15, 2011).

Julie clearly believed that what went on in her classroom was individualized—yet all students worked on the same pieces, due at same time and for the same audience. The culture of the school and scheduling dictated the separation of the reading and writing—there is no pedagogical or theoretical consideration for the separation of the two subjects or the impact that the separation had on the implementation on a workshop model that infuses the two together (Personal Interview, September 15, 2011). The decisions made for the school and to accommodate a set up schedule, do not always benefit the students.

Julie would have liked to have writing at the center of her curriculum and she worked to incorporate questioning and discussion into the conferencing that she did with her students. As with most classrooms and schools, students and their ability level varies and, Julie admits, “so, some classes are getting a lot of thinking and some are not” (Personal Interview, February 22, 2012). This was evident in the classroom interactions I observed and she claimed that developing thinkers is “a managing thing at this point because they [students] are not trained like they need to be” (Personal interview, September 15, 2011). This view she articulated, that students needed to be trained, was a counter narrative to the idea of developing thinkers who were writing to know/learn themselves. Her discourse regarding their training implied that there were inherent deficiencies in her students that prevented them from developing the efficacy they needed to be successful. It also carried on the accepted narrative that their students were not capable of higher-level work.

Nearly all of the questions that Julie asked were recall questions based on the mini lesson to check that students could recall a grammar rule or some small detail. The questions had a specific answer that Julie was looking for and students did not have an opportunity to create any knowledge for themselves, as they were expected to recall the info they had been previously given. This type of recall questioning did not foster student learning, but instead put the ideas of the teacher at the center of the classroom. Making the knowledge/facts that the teacher had most important reinforces, for students, that the teachers’ knowledge was more important than their own and was ultimately what mattered and was valued (Field Notes, August 23, 2011; September 6, 2011; September 22, 2011; October 11, 2011).

Maria spent the majority of the class teaching time at the front of the classroom. During the teaching time (approximately 30 minutes every class period), Maria did most of the talking and the majority of the questions she asked were what I call “What do you know” questions. These questions asked the students not just to recall information that the teacher has previously given, but they also ask the students to attempt to read the teacher’s mind. They reinforced Maria’s position as the authority in the classroom and the center of knowledge. This type of questioning reinforces for students that there is an accepted set of knowledge they should have and creates a singular accepted knowledge base (Field Notes, August 25, 2011; September 6, 2011; September 27, 2011; October 11, 2011; November 8, 2011). This social structure works against the students who have a different perspective or different experience than the teachers. This social structure is created and enforced through the school culture the places students in an inferior position during every interaction.

Much of Maria’s talk in the classroom placed her squarely in the role of authority. The teaching practice across classrooms firmly put students in the inferior role of trying to guess what the teacher thought or what was already predetermined as correct. For instance, Maria took poetry and put it into prose form for the students and asked the students to put in the line breaks. This was difficult for students, as they know there was only one right way as predetermined by the poem itself (Field Notes, September 27, 2011).

Maria attempted to hand over creativity—but it seems after the fact and unauthentic and worked to communicate to students their inferior role. She instructed students, “if this was one long paragraph, how would you figure out where the line breaks

are” (Field Notes, September 27)? This type of impossible to answer question was representative of the questions Maria asks most frequently in the classroom. This type of questioning was pervasive throughout all of the classes I observed. Teachers used questions to lead students down a particular path to the answer the teacher wanted the students take. This type of questioning was a product of the school culture. Students were not valued for their thoughts or their ability to do more than follow directions and perform tasks that seem impossible.

Standards, Curriculum, Outcomes, Assessment

As with all public schools, the administration at Charter Academy focused on state test assessment data. This focus on state assessment data was seen in each classroom through the focus on individual standards. The teachers were required to write the day’s objective on the board as well as the daily activities and homework. I recorded each objective that was listed on the teachers’ board (see Table 8). The objectives from each teacher were varied and offer an overall snapshot of the limited development of rigorous standards. The objectives often only encapsulated a single activity.

Table 8—Teacher Objectives

<p>Cassie’s Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• (no objectives written on the board until 9/13—one month into school) DRA/Reflect on text• Make connections• Previewing• What is realistic fiction• What makes a story—identify setting• What makes a story—setting• What makes a story• What makes a story—character• What is book genre• Why does an author use hyperbole
--

- How does a character's actions affect the story

Kimberly's Objectives

- Figurative language, personification, and onomatopoeia
- Finish DRA
- Poetry presentations pointers
- Reading around the room
- Instructional books
- Predictions
- Predictions
- Point of view
- Story map
- Reflection
- Project work time
- Specific setting
- Character overview
- Questioning
- Review, homework and get minutes done (verbal objective, not written on the board)

Julie's Objectives

- Goal setting
- Share writing with an audience
- Use writing to reflect on project
- Use prewriting to draft at least three stanzas in two class periods
- Draft a poem of at least four stanzas
- Writing assessment: write letter or essay on given topic
- Use webs, discussion and graphic organizers as pre-writing tools
- Students will be able to recognize and write different forms of poetry
- Student will draft a poem with sensory details
- Student will use hyperbole in poem
- Students will publish poems that reflect full writing process student will use strong presentation skills to read poetry
- Students will correctly write compound sentences
- Students will play with the elements of stories
- Students will be using sensory details to develop setting for narratives
- Talk about movie day tomorrow
- Revise narratives for clarity

Maria's Objectives

- Define writing territories/genres
- Find writing ideas from personal
- Complete draft 2-edit poem draft 2

- Save typed work S drive/begin final draft
- Writing assessment
- Immersion in Poetry/finish assessment
- List rhyming words—10 rhyme patterns
- Read poem—purpose or theme?
- Brainstorm topic—poetry project
- Use sensory details w/in poetry
- Revise by cutting and adding words to define purpose
- Use dictionary to spell words correctly/homonyms
- Develop characters in your narrative
- Direct your reader in dialogue

Upon examination and analysis of the objectives of each teacher, one conclusion that can be drawn is that teachers are focused on singular skills as opposed to ongoing learning objectives. The focus on skills implied that teachers were focused on the deficits that the students were perceived to have. The objectives also illustrated a lack of pedagogical understanding and development of complex objectives that would challenge and engage students. The school culture's focused on compliance was apparent upon an examination of the daily objectives. The objectives themselves did not lead to clear paths of assessment for teachers to be able to effectively measure student progress and growth.

Julie, like her colleagues, had a difficult time clearly articulating how she measures if the students are learning what she wanted them to learn. When asked about student learning, she responded "in conferences I can kind of see that ah-ha moments and the point where they can start writing on their own" (Personal interview, September 15, 2011). Many of their struggles are attributed to them being "stuck." Julie used questions to help them talk about their writing and focusing as they focus on particular writing skills. Her hopes were that the questions help students learn to apply the skills on their own and that she can see it in every assignment to reinforce the learning and ability to

apply a particular skill. Yet the assignments were formulaic writings with students following a strict outline/design (Field Notes, August 30, 2011; September 13, 2011; September 27, 2011; October 11, 2011).

There was a lot of discussion surrounding standards and what was to be taught. Kimberly looked at the standards for her class as cyclical, “the language arts curriculum is so, I don’t teach one thing at a time. It repeats itself so much...And the way that our standards are written, like you do everything pretty much in fiction and non-fiction” (Personal interview, February 2, 2012). Kimberly’s view was interesting and contradicted how she taught as each mini-lesson was focused on one concept—point of view, conflict, character, etc. and there is no connection to what was previously learned. The idea that these were not lessons learned and then forgotten, “like we did point of view at the beginning of the year and they seem to have it really well and they had a benchmark on it right after winter break and they did awful on it because they didn’t revisit it in the week’s time” (Personal interview, February 2, 2012). The assumption here was that mastery was shown once. Kimberly assumed because students seemed to know the skill in the context of her classroom, where they only took notes and filled out a worksheet, that they had learned point of view. The standards were presented in an isolated manner and not taught within the context of a larger learning goal. This reiterated the school culture that the learning was not a key value.

Ongoing Assessments

In the reading classes, Charter Academy uses the DRA assessment to keep track of student reading levels and at the end of the year, Cassie administered a “post” DRA, but when asked if she saw the growth she was expected, she stated that she didn’t put a

lot of credence into the DRA scores and so the scores did not matter. She also did not share the pre- and post-test scores with me. This fits with her declared goal of getting students reading more. Her only goal as a teacher was to have kids read and she was confident that she accomplished that without test scores and without any summative or formative assessments (Personal Interview, May 21, 2011):

Rejection of evidence	
13. r:=	So did you see, how was the,
14. r:=	I mean did you see the amount of growth that you wanted to see?
15. t:=	Um, no, not reflected from DRAs.
16. r:=	Uh-huh.
17. t:=	But um, I don't know, I don't think DRAs are very valid.
18. r:=	Uh-huh.
19. t:=	So that doesn't bother me that I didn't see that.
20. r:=	Uh-huh. So did you see that in other ways?
21. t:=	Um, yes, just in,/ in seeing the kids actually read.
Cassie admits no growth was evident in her end of year DRA assessments, but allows herself to claim them invalid (to nullify her poor results). She would not share the data with me, since she did not see growth and felt the data was not reliable.	
She claims she saw growth because students read. She has constructed an identity that allows her to define success in a way that benefits her and ignores her students.	

Reading teachers use the DRA assessment to determine student reading levels.

The teachers do not administer them in a way that could be used with statistical integrity. The validity of this assessment was compromised based on the amount of time Kimberly and Cassie decided to dedicate to the process and based on their perceived notion of what was required for each student. For example, Kimberly only administered a portion of the assessment to her students who were on grade level, yet gave more of the assessment to the students who tested 2-years behind or those who were above grade-level. The validity was also compromised based on her view as the administrator of the test, “I can almost grade them without thinking about it. I’ve done it for at least twice a year for

seven years. I really do know all of the books” (Personal interview, February 2, 2012). The comfort level Kimberly had developed with the test could lead to her varying her scores based on a variety of factors that lie outside of the intended answers.

In our final interview, Kimberly expressed her belief that 75-80% of her students (who were not TLC¹³ students) ended the year at grade level, based on the DRA scores. These scores are varied in reliability based on Kimberly’s attention to them; “I have them pretty much memorized, so they are easy to grade” (Personal Interview, May 1, 2012). As we discussed the progress students made, I asked Kimberly if she believed the achievement was due to the students and where they started or would she attribute the growth to what she did in class. Kimberly believed the growth was due to “probably a combination. Matt [the middle school principal] seems to think it’s stuff that I did because we did the book clubs earlier and they were awesome” (Personal interview, May 1, 2012). The fact that the teachers and the administrators were unable to articulate what led to growth and achievement is problematic and reflects the cultural importance placed on student behavior as opposed to pedagogical practice and understanding factors that impact achievement.

In the writing classes, teachers gave a writing prompt at the beginning of the year and they scaffolded this prompt with days of prewriting, drafting, revising, and a final product. At the end of the year, teachers administered another writing prompt and provided time for the previously scaffolded activities, but they did not lead the students through them step by step, as they did in the beginning of the year. Teachers evaluated their own students’ essays based on the rubric used for the particular assessment. The

¹³ TLC students are students who have IEP and need extra educational support services

writing prompts were not the same, nor did they represent the same form of writing (i.e. first one was a persuasive letter to parents and the second was an explanation prompt) (Field Notes, September 28, 2011; Personal Interview, May 5, 2012).

Both Julie and Maria reported seeing growth, yet that growth on the writing sample can be challenged since the prompts are different and the teacher's bias of students ability and performance play a role. Teachers admitted in an professional development session to wanting to not evaluate their own student papers, but that this never came to fruition as the barriers seemed too difficult to overcome—norming, multiple readers, consensus building (Field Notes, September 28, 2011; February 29, 2012).

While the school administration felt the assessments used were sufficient to evaluate student growth, they appeared to be products of what Charter Academy had accepted as part of a schools identity (Personal Interview, June 5, 2012). The data became a means to an end in that they could claim to collect data on the surface to fit with their identity as an effective school, yet there was little critical analysis of the data and its validity.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Implications

When I started this research, I hoped to analyze how teachers were influenced by yearlong professional development. This professional development, as noted previously, was developed in conjunction with the curriculum coordinator at Charter Academy to ensure that the topics covered were of relevance to the school and the participating teachers. When it became clear early in my observations that the professional development was not being implemented, I began examining what was getting in the way. I looked to the data to provide insight and answers.

I started this research with the idea that each teacher would be an individually bound case, but through observations it became clear that the rigid structure of the school did not allow each teacher to be seen as individual cases, but rather as cases within the larger case of the school. The story cannot be told through each teacher alone; it can only be told through the culture of the school that impacts and influences every decision that is made.

As I began analyzing the data, I started focusing on categories and themes that might offer insight into the structures, practices, and/or beliefs that might impede development of pedagogy. The categories developed in interesting paths focusing on the teacher as the creator of knowledge and the authority in the classroom, culture, pedagogical practices, pseudo teaching, and perceptions. My research has led me to realize that school culture and identity are of paramount importance to the development of pedagogy.

School Identity

How a school defines itself determines the decision model in place and defines the roles of each stakeholder. In some schools, these roles are fluid and organic moving and changing with each situation. At Charter Academy, the roles never changed. Teachers were always the authority in the classroom and maintained a strict environment where rules, structure, and compliance were at the center and learning was something ancillary that happened through direction as opposed to exploration. Students were required and expected to follow each rule in place and were neither encouraged nor rewarded for independence. This structure is in direct contrast to what Charter Academy claims to stand for on paper.

Charter Academy's mission statement read: *Charter Academy will provide the children of the City of _____ an individualized education rich in academics and character, so the children we serve today can be the leaders of tomorrow.* Their charter document also claims "the approach that the school uses with respect to curriculum and instruction is to give the students what they need in order for them to be successful in high school and beyond. In building independent thinkers, problem solvers and leaders, it is essential that the curriculum grow and change as the standards set by the state and federal government change" (charter p. 6). The mission statement, as well as the claims of curriculum purpose, was not operationalized in the sixth and seventh grade reading and writing classes or within the school's culture.

The school culture does not support the mission of the school nor does the classroom practice support the claim to create "independent thinkers, learners and leaders." These values reside on paper alone. Students are not encouraged nor are they

expected to be leaders or thinkers. As Graves (1984) points out orthodoxies can lead to “imprisoned children.” While his focus is on the strict adherence to a particular pedagogical practice, this idea of imprisoning children with rules becomes part of the culture. The rules and structures in place in a school exist just as the pedagogy exists in the classroom. Upon further examination, the culture of the school determines the rules and structures and the rules and structures dictate what is able to happen in the classroom.

School Administration

It is important to understand that the school leader/principal plays a key role in the development of a school’s culture. Because of this role, it is necessary that research look closely at higher education training programs and what structures and classes are in place to educate administrators on both the importance and the development of a school culture that privileges learning and teacher efficacy.

Schools of higher education administration should examine their course paths to ensure that they are offering support to hopeful administrators in the development of a positive school culture.

Influence of Culture

Culture affects everything. The culture at Charter Academy is rigid and concrete. Students walk in silent halls and are constantly monitored and corrected with no freedom to make an independent decision. This management of their non-academic behaviors carried over into the classrooms, where teachers hold all of the authority as it relates to student choice and behavior. This rigidity prevented teachers from actually being able to build workshop classrooms as detailed by Atwell (1998).

The school rewards and acknowledges students for their compliance and not for their thinking, further reinforcing the role of the students as receivers of knowledge and thoughts as opposed to creators and teachers as the dispensers of knowledge. Everything in the school reinforced the message and expectation that students were to be compliant and in-line with the rules and expectations. This is not inherently bad for students, but when the culture is not one that fosters thoughtful environments, but subservient environments where student have little control or input, it does not set students up to be successful or risk takers. It does not develop the confidence nor the self-efficacy students need to achieve at high levels, as shown in the school's overall test scores on the state assessment. In addition to stagnant middle-of-the road achievement scores on state assessments, the students show little engagement and a lack of initiative in the classroom. Over the years at the school, students have learned their role and most play it dutifully.

While structure is both necessary and important, administrators and teachers must consider what the overall impact of a structure with no choice does over the life of students as opposed to the immediate impact it has within the classroom and school community. When choice is completely taken and only pseudo-choice given (read any book you would like in the horror/mystery genre) students develop dependence on the structure and not on their own ability and knowledge. These same structures that create an environment that works for administration, also creates a culture that demands compliance and expects little excellence from students and teachers and hinders growth.

The culture of Charter Academy is one that gives teachers the ability to do minimal work with minimal reward. Teachers are given the illusion of freedom within a structure that implies work and effective practice is in place, but teaching practice can

only be effective if students are learning and progressing. Before a school can move towards a change in teaching practice and the implementation of new pedagogy, a school must first examine its culture to see what orthodoxies are in place. The school and staff must be able to realize these orthodoxies and the way they influence practice. If the orthodoxies do not support the pedagogical change, then the change cannot take place.

Recognizing orthodoxies is necessary if teaching practice and school culture are going to change. Rigid rules are put in place to keep order without the consideration that these same rules that provide order and structure interfere with the classroom teacher's use of her own knowledge. Orthodoxies, while seemingly necessary and innocuous, are influenced not by what is in the best interest of students, but by what the culture needs to survive (Atwell, 1998; Graves, 1984). An inability to realize these orthodoxies, leads administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders to have a false sense regarding what is taking place in the classrooms.

The administration must be able to conduct an honest assessment of what is happening in the classrooms so that they can help teachers develop the tools to implement effective teaching practices. All schools must evaluate leadership perceptions. If building leadership becomes complacent with the progress that the school is making, leaders will not seek to put into place positive changes that could increase student achievement. Administrative views are integral to setting the culture of the school and when there is a clear disconnect between what the administration thinks is happening in the classroom and what is actually happening, the culture erodes.

Pseudo-Teaching

The idea that one is teaching and that students are learning is the central idea to teaching and one that the teachers and administration at Charter Academy believe is important as defined in their charter document. The concept of pseudo-teaching as explored by Cline (1938) relates the idea the learning is “a difficult feat and needs direction” (258). Pseudo-teaching presumes that learning happens without help from the teacher beyond assigning the task. Learning is a skill that needs to be mastered by students as part of their education and this learning happens in the classroom. Learning that is taught in the classroom should be able to be carried beyond the individual assignment and applied in numerous situations. Cline’s (1938) idea of pseudo-teaching helps explain some of what I observed during my time at Charter Academy, but there are more conclusions to be drawn than can be explained in Cline’s (1938) examination of teaching practice and the laboratory school model.

This idea of pseudo-teaching can also be applied to the culture of the school as a whole. The belief that if the correct structures are in place learning happens is an underlying issue at Charter Academy. The rhetoric of learning is far more prevalent than actual learning and more value is placed on compliance than risk taking. Schools looking to improve their students learning (as often measured through test scores) must be able to honestly examine both practice and rhetoric to effectively see areas of disconnect that might prevent authentic learning from happening.

Teacher as Sole Authority

The teachers all described their role as “guides” in some variation. All four participants assumed the role of the traditional teacher and assigned students work that

was not about creating learning, but about executing a certain pre-determined skill. This narrative of their role as “guides” is something that the teachers buy into completely and believe. This narrative allows a blind belief to exist and prevents teachers from objectively understanding their real role. Teachers always conducted class from the front of the room reinforcing their role as the authority figure.

When they were not directing learning, they were often at their desks working on their computers and seemingly unengaged and unaware of what was happening in the classroom and with students, waiting for students to request their assistance as opposed to following the guidelines of workshop that suggest frequent conferences for teachers to keep abreast of how students are progressing. While the talk of a workshop model was part of every conversation, the teachers’ adherence to their role as authority in the room, prevented them from being able to let go of the rigid classroom structure.

Each day was predictable and the school and teachers clearly valued and relied on the routine to create a space that allowed for complete control. The routine was the focus of the first six weeks of school and reinforced each day and every new school year. The constant reinforcement of the structure and rules was at the center of all interactions and it took thinking away from the students and constricted the pedagogical options available in the classroom. Consideration was not given to the school structure in the delivery or structure of the professional development.

Pedagogical Practice

A restrictive culture restricts options. The pedagogy at Charter Academy did fit more in line with a classical pedagogy. The heart of the classical pedagogy required that students translate the content and not think. As public education, including Charter

Academy, moves towards stricter “no excuse” cultures in our schools that manage every moment of every day for students, we are asking students only to translate and not to think. The standards movement and a centralized focus on testing and rigid structures are taking the thinking out of the school and replacing it with compliance and test taking. The classrooms I observed were windows into a school that values rules over learning.

Gregory (2001) described the classical pedagogy as a pedagogy that focuses on forms [worksheets] and rules [silent halls] with the only end being the doing as opposed to a focus on value. This idea of doing something just for the sake of doing it is something prevalent at Charter Academy. As Graves (1984) expressed, orthodoxies can take on a life of their own and become the focus as opposed to the learning. Schools must consider what influences the pedagogy in the classrooms and one of the main influences are the rules or orthodoxies in place.

As schools look to improve student achievement, administration and teachers must authentically examine the pedagogical practices in the classroom and the structures that influence the practices. Often, the only concrete academic goal set in schools looking to improve is to raise test scores. Often this focus on test scores is committed to without a purpose beyond immediate results. This goal creates a singular focus that puts the output (test scores) at the center and has administrators and teachers chasing scores on one test as opposed to creating authentic learning events. This focus often hinders students’ learning, as there is little for the students to gain from the strict focus on test scores.

Pedagogy is a direct result of school culture and accepted orthodoxies.

Curriculum is the result of standards and society. A school has less influence over the

accepted curriculum and standards. Pedagogy is where change happens. Pedagogy is where a school's culture resides.

Professional Development

Professional development must be relevant and applicable. The teachers and the administration at Charter Academy viewed professional development as something that needed to be applicable immediately in class and not about growth and altering practice over time. Because the structure of the classrooms was so rigid, there was no room in the teachers' pedagogical practice for innovation and risk. The expectation for the professional development was that teachers wanted a lesson or an approach delivered for each skill they wanted to focus on.

While this activity of the moment approach was what Charter Academy wanted, the professional development offered did not fit this. Administrators need to be thoughtful when accepting and choosing professional development. The type of professional development presented must fit with the structure and culture of the school if there is to be a benefit to the staff and the students. The administration at Charter Academy, in their end of year interview, spoke candidly about the professional development and how the mini-lessons were great and were used by teachers but admitted that the professional development did not support or fit their needs. Each instance of professional development must be aligned to the structures in place; otherwise the professional development cannot be effectively implemented.

Those who are delivering the professional development cannot overlook the power of culture during the planning of professional learning. The professional development leaders have a responsibility to ensure that their sessions and protocols are

aligned with the structures in place in the school. While professional learning should look to expand and help develop teaching pedagogy and help schools and teachers develop and hone their craft, it must fall into the realm of possibility for the rules and culture in place. A collaboration between the school leadership and professional development providers would work to help ensure that the agenda and scope of the professional development are beneficial to the staff.

A school that has learning at its core is a school that values thinking over assessment scores and this is a direct product of the school's culture (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Culture is the driving factor in all decisions that happen inside and outside of the classroom. There is an underlying current present in the school that the students are incapable of many things and teachers and administration must make the rules at the center. This belief informs all teaching decisions and any professional development that does not fit or support this belief cannot be successful or implemented into the teachers' classrooms.

Teacher Learning

As addressed in the limitations of this study, the teacher learning process and how professional development supports and works against this process need to be further examined, especially by school administrators developing professional development programs to be implemented. When looking at the success of a particular professional development strategy, the learning process of teachers needs to be considered (Borko, 2004). While, I did not explore the process of teacher learning for this study, it should be noted that future studies looking at professional develop and pedagogical practice would be made stronger by examining this process.

The viewpoint of the teachers should also be considered during the professional development process as teachers are major stakeholders and have a different perspective on the learning process than administrators might. The intersection of teacher learning and the implementation of professional develop should be examined further (Borko, 2004).

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol-3 Interview Structure (Seidman, 2006)

Interview 1—focuses life history to establish context

Starting question—

What has your classroom, lessons, and practices been like before this year?

Probing follow-up questions based on answers

Interview 2—central interview-lived experience

What is it like to integrate new techniques into class?

Probing follow-up questions focused on writing, questions, etc.

Interview 3—reflection interview

What does it mean to be integrating more thinking and writing into the classroom?

Probing follow-up questions focused on writing, questions, etc.

Possible questions to add to interviews (semi-structured and informal):

- Did the lesson go as you had envisioned/planned
- What was the purpose of the lesson? What it achieved?
- How does your classroom curriculum support the learning needs of ALL students?
- What instructional strategies do you use in the classroom to support the learning needs of ALL students? Provide an example.
- How do you know that your students are learning?
- What assessments do you use in your classroom? How are assessments used to modify and improve instruction? Give an example.
- Did you see a way to include more writing in the lesson? What benefit might it have had?
- If you have questions about teaching and learning whom do you ask?
- What is the role of the teacher/student/content in the classroom?
- What is the goal of education? How is this exhibited in your class/instruction/lessons?
- What type of learning do your students benefit the most from? How do you now?
- What is the purpose of asking questions?
- What role do writing and inquiry play in your classroom?