The Effects of Parent Partnerships on Participating Adults From Cooperative Charter Schools

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of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

By

Linda Delgado-Pelton

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From Cooperative Charter Schools

By

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APPROVED FOR THE
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Abstract

This qualitative study looked at the effects of cooperative charter school participation on adults. Research questions included: “How do parents who have identified personal changes as an outcome of their participation in a cooperative charter school understand and describe the changes?” and “What events or experiences do they perceive as having contributed to these changes?” The literature review focused on three areas: Charter Schools, Parent Partnerships, and Adult Learning.

The constructivist epistemology was the appropriate fit to study the effect of engagement in two cooperative charter schools, as the questions focus on constructed meaning. I employed surveys to gather participants who named change as an outcome of their experience, then conducted semi-structured interviews to elicit rich descriptions. Transcripts were coded, and themes emerged that combined to construct the following grounded theory: *The Elements of a cooperative charter school that appear to be most central to the experience of change and development of adaptive skills for adults are: a) a supportive, mentor-rich environment oriented toward a common goal; b) a diverse, collaborative community, and c) opportunities to engage in high-level leadership afforded through the cooperative model.*

Critical factors that enabled participants to challenge tacit assumptions included a common goal, and a sense of security stemming from the mentor rich environment. Four grand theories were compared to this grounded theory. They included Kegan’s constructive development theory (1994), Mezirow’s transformational learning theory (2000), Daloz’s conditions that may promote

transformative learning (1996), and Heifetz's technical and adaptive learning theory (1994).

Each are congruent with the findings of this study.

Abstract

The Effects of Parent Partnerships on Participating Adults
From Cooperative Charter Schools

By
Linda Delgado-Pelton
Doctorate in Educational Leadership
Saint Mary's College of California, 2014
Kathleen Taylor, Chair

Dedication

To Douglas, Antonio and Lucinda with love.

Acknowledgements

Kathleen Taylor generously stayed the course and provided excellent guidance over the many years required for this thesis. Among other fine professors, Dean Elias set my feet on the path that wound through the most exasperating and resonating research that influenced this work. My dissertation committee members gave insight through questions and support. Aleenah Mehta provided excellent editing suggestions with a kind, light, and thoughtful touch.

I lovingly acknowledge my mother who was fierce, determined, and courageous. This study would not have been possible without the support of my husband, Douglas, my dearest inspiration, love, and companion or our now-adult children, Tony and Lu, who experienced life from a seat in my classroom while I learned how to teach. They have each grown into intelligent, funny, and compassionate young people, and I am so proud of them. I gratefully acknowledge my sister Dolores, guide and teacher, and my brother Scott who cares with a heart as big as himself. I acknowledge my dear father who steadfastly supported me and provided pertinent articles. I acknowledge with appreciation my sister, Rainy, and her husband, Jeff, who kept the conviction that this would be done.

This study would not have been possible without the community of parents who attended and partnered in these schools. They were thoughtful and generous with their time and insight. Of particular note is the team with whom I founded one cooperative charter school still in happy existence. This team included Mary, Mike, Frans and Laura.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the teachers, parents, and the students who have and continue to move through my life. They inspire me.

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Preamble

Seventeen years ago, my children attended a kinder through 5th grade non-profit, independent cooperative school—an option better suited to my family's needs. The coop offered parents the opportunity to serve in classrooms and on the board in trade for a discount on admission fees. All families were required to perform two school cleanings each year, attend twice yearly work parties, and participate in monthly meetings. Parents were invited to join the board of directors, and in time I was persuaded to join. I worked with other members from whom I learned skills ranging from correct photocopying (straight, no visible borders or edges) to how to listen closely, engage in discourse, and appreciate the value of different perspectives in decision-making.

When the time came to explore options for middle school, one parent from among the community introduced our cooperative group to the charter school movement, then in its infancy. Our prior experience with the private cooperative and school management, cheerful ignorance, and rigorous naiveté led us to expect success, as the school from which we hailed had been a thriving, cooperative school for more than 20 years. Among the many things for which we did not account were the adaptations, both large and small, based on the combined thinking and skills of several generations of parent participants that had enabled our independent cooperative to thrive.

When we began meeting to develop the cooperative charter school, my role evolved from cockeyed optimist to project manager, grant writer, and founding board member. This initial group included others with legitimate expertise, including an attorney, a lead research biologist, a professional organizer, and a non-traditional student working toward her Ph.D. Once the charter petition was accepted, I moved into the role of teacher during the fourth month of our

first academic year and continued to hold a board position. I served the school for nine more years, during which time I obtained a teaching credential, master's degree, administrative credential and began work on a doctorate in Educational Leadership. This study is the culmination of that journey.

CHAPTER I

Introduction to Study

Parent participation is a widely acknowledged, potentially powerful strategy to improve education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1995; Senge, 2000). School reform advocates, educational leaders, and parents have sought to encourage participation policy and practice, and elements of the "No Child Left Behind" act stipulate that funding for schools shall be tied to identification and elimination of barriers to participation (NCLB, section 1118 (e)(2)). To date, however, many agree that progress is insufficient (Anderson, 1998; Gonzales-DeHass & Willems, 2003). Further, researchers and practitioners have not agreed on the most efficacious leverage points for the work of parents in education. At present, educators and parents may offer opposing perspectives and conflicting aims (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2008; Hess, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Researchers continue to seek the most beneficial strategies for parental involvement (Cotton & Wilkelund, 2001; Gay & Place, 2000; Hill & Tyson, 2009), exploring the effects of the degree and type of involvement, which may range from the organization of bake-sales to leadership in school governance (Epstein, 2005; Hill & Chao, 2009; Salinas & Van Vooris, 2001; Seginer, 2006). Student outcomes related to these different forms of participation are reviewed in chapter two of this study (Bifulco & Ladd, 2005; Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Flauger, 2006; McMillan, 1999; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1996).

Leaving aside the question of parent involvement strategies and outcomes, educational leaders, teachers, and researchers question whether parents are prepared to respond to the issues that may arise in higher-level school leadership opportunities, which are provided to parents in some school settings. Among many values-based decisions are questions: What is the purpose of

student discipline: punishment or guidance? Do students need consequences, or compassion? Further, how might a community of diverse participants untangle contradictory philosophies of effective teaching, such as Socratic questioning and hands-on discovery? Foundational issues such as these are complex and disorienting for parents and educational practitioners alike, and controversy reigns (Lareau, 2000; Weininger & Lareau, 2003).

At present, much of the research on parent participation focuses on student learning outcomes (Epstein, 2005b; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hill & Chao, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009), and rare are the studies that focus on the effect of participation on parents. Yet compelling questions arise; for example, what might happen to parents when actively engaged in their child's education, particularly at the complex levels required by school leadership and governance? By exploring the experience of parents in cooperative charter schools that offer decision-making and governance opportunities, this study seeks to provide greater understanding of the effects of school involvement for parents. While benefits are known to follow parent participation in student learning, the principal aim of this study is to expand the understanding of the contexts in which adults learn and the factors that support their learning. To make sense of the intersection of the three overlapping influences that form the surround of this study, I provide a background on these three areas, each the purview of many other studies, yet rarely combined and potentially confusing without the following overview. These focus areas of exploration are charter schools, parent participation, and adult learning and development.

Overview

Three strands are introduced here and more thoroughly examined in chapters two and five: charter schools, parent participation in schools, and adult learning. Charter schools are included, because they are the setting of this study. Within the realm of free, public access schools,

charters, like the cooperative, offer governance structures that allow parents leadership and governance opportunities. Next, I introduce issues related to parent participation in schools, because it is useful to understand the central aims and frames of participation. Finally, I briefly describe current theory on adult learning, with a focus on transformative learning theory.

Charter schools. Charter schools are free public schools organized and bounded by a charter document or contract and granted either through the local school board, a state agency, such as the State School Board, or, more recently, a granting university (Annual Survey of America's Charter Schools, 2008). Charter documents must address 16 key elements of school design and philosophy, answering such questions as: "What does it mean to be an educated person?" and "How does education best occur?" They must also describe the proposed student and program assessment schedule and governance structure and provide a business plan. While most charter schools are non-profit organizations started and run by educators, parents, or community groups, approximately 20 % are operated by "for profit" corporations. As the sites within this study are not of that realm, no further discussion of these is included.

The Charter school movement was intended to improve education by a variety of means, particularly by allowing for freedom from burdensome regulations that is balanced by higher accountability, as charter schools can more easily be closed for failure to perform than traditional public schools (US Charterschools, 2009, National Education Association, accessed 10-1-11). Charter school proponents envisioned these schools facilitating education reform by developing innovative teaching, governance, and business management methods better suited to individual student and community needs. While debate continues regarding the goals and efficacy of the charter school movement (Green, Forster, & Winters, 2003; Raymond, 2003; Zimmer, et al., 2009), proponents argue that charter schools are meeting goals of improving education (Center

for Educational Reform, 2008) and providing innovative organizational structures (Gay & Place, 2000; Lubienski, 2003; US Chamber of Commerce, 2008). Opponents, on the other hand, contend that charter schools “skim” off better qualified, brighter students with more attentive families, avoid students with special needs, and serve families of higher socio-economic status (Green, Forster, & Winters, 2003; Zimmer, 2003).

Parents have developed some of these charter schools, and describe seeking an alternative education for their children. Within their charter documents, they hint at wider aims, for example in one mission statement they proclaim: “through active family involvement” participants build a “safe, challenging, nurturing and diverse educational community.” A second mission statement suggests that a “high quality education” is created through “parent participation” – among other influences – from which a “community of life-long learners, responsible world citizens” emerges. Each proposes that the best education must occur with parent involvement. Many charter schools such as these allow for, or in some instances, *require* family participation through policies and contracts (Fine, 1993; USCharterschools.org, 2004). As founding parents often author these contracts, we might suppose one of their goals is manifest, suggesting the notion of engagement is desirable to parents.

Participation opportunities in these schools may include cleaning toilets, filing paperwork, working with students, or leadership service, such as membership on a governance board. Elements of participation in schools that allow for a high degree of parental involvement – for example, in governance – can prove challenging for parents. Such participation requires parents to engage in values-based decision-making, communicate their convictions and understanding effectively, and perform this work in a collaborative, ideally diverse environment – a high level of expectation for most adults in any context (Hall, 1994; Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 2000).

Parent participation. Much of the research on the role of parent participation is framed in terms of student learning benefits (Bifulco & Ladd, 2005; Cotton & Wikelund 2001; Epstein, 2009; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1996). As a result of research on improvement in student learning outcomes stemming from parent participation, lawmakers have enacted policy changes (NCLB, Department of Education, 2001), and education professionals have implemented myriad approaches designed to garner greater parental involvement (Epstein et al., 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1995; Senge, 2000). One such approach may be found in the realm of charter schools that have created innovative governance and organizational structures that embrace, and indeed rely upon, parent participants for tasks from janitorial work to board service (Allen & Consoletti, 2008; Manzy.org, 2009). This should sound familiar, as this is one of the first overlaps suggested in the introduction of this study, where parent participation and charter schools converge.

While holding a seat at the board table, parents may be called upon to untangle knotty, values-based questions ranging from the determination of effective emotional support for students and appropriate discipline plans to the allocation of resources that directly and indirectly drive school programs. Furthermore, participating adults may find themselves grappling with foundational questions of educational philosophy concerning the purpose and goal of education or how learning best happens. Each is specifically required in submission of a Charter School Authorizing Application (US Charterschools, 2009) and certainly foundational to effective school governance (Epstein, 2009; Senge et al., 2000).

Researchers have explored the challenges in communication and power sharing between parent participants and educational professionals, (Bauch & Goldring, 2000; Cooper & Christie, 2005; Fine, 1993; McCaslin & Infanti, 1998), and some have asserted that disparate power

between educators and parents in schools is to blame for poor outcomes in underserved communities (Delpit, 1995; Fine, 1993). Effective communication, understanding, empathy, and willingness to share power all require skills, training, or capacities that parents or educators may lack. As a result, efforts to involve parents in meaningful ways toward enhancing student learning may ultimately depend on the degree to which adult participants can learn and grow. This dissertation is focused on whether opportunities for meaningful, equitable partnerships in schools may provide experiences that expand and enhance the understanding – indeed the *learning* – of all participants (Lewis & Forman, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Adult learning. Adults may take courses, attend trainings, or engage in formal or informal self-study in order to gain information or practical skills (Cranton, 2006). Researchers agree that adults learn in many environments, including the home, workplace, and community (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000). Adults may, for example, learn through planning a fundraiser or working with other adults in school or community service. After focusing on adult learning stemming from the demands of parenting, Marienau and Segal suggest adults are "continuous learners whose critical reflections on their experiences with parenting can help their ongoing growth and development and better equip them for parenting tasks" (2006, p. 768). The authors suggest that the demands of parenting may spur growth, learning and development in adults who are so engaged.

Mezirow and associates have studied the process by which adults learn, using the term "transformational." They describe transformative learning as: "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (2000, p. 162). In essence, this kind of adult learning involves a recognizable, fairly consistent, and sequenced set of steps precipitating a change in how one

understands a particular issue or situation, thus leading to a reframing. The process they have outlined may lead to a more nuanced understanding, resulting in the adoption of action based on that new perspective. Such movement from one way of seeing to a more complex perspective involves a substantive shift in one's world-view, changing not just what is known but how it is known. This can lead to a change in the knower him/herself. While Mezirow and colleagues have explored the road between stages of adult development with an emphasis on the process by which our perspectives shift, Kegan focused on the capabilities humans possess in each of five possible developmental stages.

Kegan (1982, 1994) suggests that learning involves changing not just *what* we know or can do, but also *how* we know, and, consequently, how we make meaning. In each successive stage our perspective shifts in such a way that what was once a distant capability—what was "object," becomes internalized, becomes "subject." Kegan (1994) asserts that as modern life becomes increasingly complex and demands pile ever higher, the ability to learn our way toward greater development merits exploration. Others, such as the futurist Korten (2006), suggest that our survival as a species may depend upon it. Furthermore, if we understand how complex learning occurs, it may increase our understanding of how to help others develop toward complex understanding (Heifetz, 1994; Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000; Vaill, 1996; Wheatley, 2006).

Returning to Transformative Learning theory, Ed Taylor (2000) encouraged research on "in-depth component analysis," looking at the role factors may play in learning, including among other things the "context in shaping the transformative experience" (2000, p. 288). Daloz (2000) suggests that development occurs in relationship to an environment, an assertion that was confirmed and more deeply explained in his and his colleague's study *Common Fire* (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996). They describe factors that appeared to be instrumental in the

development of socially responsible individuals, using the word "commons" to describe the environment in which a person may develop, making clear the connection between a community-focused context and adult development. The central questions in this study examine the potential effects of one such context or "commons": cooperative charter schools, which by definition require high degrees of parent participation.

Problem Statement

Most parent participation research focuses on either of two issues: (a) student outcomes derived from participation (Bifulco & Ladd, 2005; Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Epstein, 2009; Flauger, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1996) or (b) the debate on questions of access, power differentials, and challenges to substantive, meaningful parent participation (Cooper & Christie, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Ehley, 2005). Little research has explored how active engagement in the education of one's child, particularly in collaborative decision-making and high-level involvement in school governance, affects *parents*.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experience of adults who have identified personal growth and change as an outcome of their engagement with a cooperative charter school environment. Based on the results of this exploration, I will construct a grounded, substantive theory to describe the conditions conducive to change for participating parents.

Research Questions

- How do parents who have associated personal changes with their participation in a cooperative charter school understand and describe the changes?
- What events or experiences do they perceive as having contributed to these changes?

Summary of Methods

A qualitative approach is best suited to describe the experience of participants and to "build rich descriptions of complex circumstances that are unexplored in the literature" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 33). Initially, my intention was to build a descriptive study, yet during the process of analysis the data suggested a Grounded Theory study. Grounded Theory construction entails the systematic comparison of data during the inquiry through which a substantive theory may emerge (Charmaz, 2008). Grounded theorists ask questions, such as: (a) What is happening in this data? (b) What is this data a study of? (c) What theoretical category does this datum suggest or pronounce? (d) From whose point of view (Charmaz, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978)? Constructivist grounded theory acknowledges multiple realities and perspectives and takes a "reflexive" approach (Charmaz, 2008).

To select participants, I began by emailing a survey to 81 contacts known to me from my association throughout the last 17 years with two cooperative charter schools. A colleague collected the email responses, removed names, assigned numeric codes to create anonymity, and forwarded the responses to me. In reviewing these survey responses, I had two goals: first, to identify information-rich respondents, and, second, to use survey responses to further refine planned interview questions.

I then conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 participants in a variety of settings dependent on each participant's convenience and preference. Interviews lasted from 55 minutes to nearly four hours, all interviews were audio recorded, and I chose to transcribe these myself. During the process of interview transcription, recursive analysis began, including coding, memo construction, and I began the search for contradiction, pattern, and meaning.

Significance

This study is significant in three areas: adult learning theory, school leadership practice, and policy. First, many agree that adult learning and development are desirable in our complex, demanding world (Cranton, 2006; Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 2000; K. Taylor et al., 2000; Vaill, 1996). Ed Taylor (2000) suggests the field of Adult Learning would benefit from component analysis, which considers the context in which learning occurs. This study contributes to theoretical understandings about how the context of a cooperative charter school may influence learning in adults, perhaps through Transformative Learning. It also accords with Daloz's (2000) findings of specific influences that appear to be key to growth and development in individuals who became change agents in their communities.

As suggested previously, numerous studies have shown student-learning benefits follow parent participation, yet school leaders and teachers may resist parental involvement (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Gordon & Nocon, 2008; Laureau & Hovat, 1999). While close parent participation poses leadership challenges, possibly accounting for some of the demonstrated resistance, this study adds adult learning benefits to the well-documented, positive student learning outcomes. Further, by widening the frame of participation beneficiaries to include adults, this study confirms constructivist leadership principals: the lives of children and adults are entwined; shared purpose enables new possibilities for growth; relationships built in community promote more effective educational institutions, and diversity and multiple perspectives promote learning (Lambert et al., 2002). This study demonstrates that schools-as-communities are possible (Jeynes, 2010; Lambert et al., 2002) and can be rich environments that provide support and challenge for adults leading potentially to growth.

Finally, this study encourages expansion and clarification of existing policy calling for close parent involvement by supplying information about the effects, benefits and challenges on parents through participation. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, Section 1118, subsection 2c) stipulates that schools must "build parental capacity for strong parent involvement," and suggests that educational leaders must seek to "identify barriers" (subsection 2e), such as unwelcoming school environments or nonexistent translation for non-English speaking parents. This study suggests parents are capable of a great deal more than many schools allow, and that participation can be beneficial to parents, leading to enhanced adult learning.

Assumptions

Miles and Huberman (p.17, 1994) suggest that:

> As researchers we do have background knowledge. We see and decipher details, complexities, and subtleties that would elude a less knowledgeable observer. We know some questions to ask, which incidents to attend to closely, and how our theoretical interests are embodied in the field.

I was a founder, parent, teacher, director, board and community member of a cooperative charter school. These experiences changed me. Combined with coursework for a School Administration Credential, a Master's Degree in School Leadership, and finally a Doctorate, I had many opportunities for structured reflection. These factors afforded a deep questioning of my experience and ultimately caused me to wonder if others had changed in similar ways. I felt that I had observed change in other parents, particularly those who actively participated in the process of school leadership in cooperative schools. Further, I wondered specifically what factors encouraged personal change. I wanted to understand how the process of collaborative parent participation as structured by the requirements of a cooperative charter school might effect

change in the parents. This study is an exploratory response to that question and represents a process of discovery about education, about others, and about myself.

Concerning bias, certainly possible in so personally close a topic, I sought to avoid over-directing outcomes through several strategies. In constructing the interview protocol, the Human Research Institutional Review Board (IRB) made several suggestions that I adopted to help protect anonymity, which served also to separate my initial interactions with potential participants. Throughout the process of envisioning, researching, and writing this dissertation, I benefited from frequent discussions with my colleague and Dissertation Chair. In these discussions, my assumptions were revealed and explored, always toward improving the outcome by requiring explanations rather than suppositions. Colleagues from the field provided challenge to areas of the dissertation that appeared leading.

Delimitations

1. This study focuses on effects to participating parents and does not explore the experience of or possible benefits to students through having their parents participate.
2. This study is not intended to explore the experience of other adult participants, such as teachers or administrators.
3. Research will be confined to two cooperative charter schools in California.

Limitations

1. The participants who answered requests for interviews were nearly all Caucasian and well-educated and most engaged at one point in high-level participation (e.g., board members) at the schools. In many cases, the board service was their first such experience.

2. As a founder, former parent, and long time former employee of one of these institutions, my existing connections may have affected the responses of the parent participant interviewees. However, this contextual knowledge can also produce rich insights (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).
3. This study is limited by the small quantity of parents interviewed, although smaller samples are common in qualitative studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Definitions of Terms and Phrases

Adult Development. This term refers to "process of qualitative change in attitudes, values, and understandings that adults experience as a result of ongoing transactions with the social environment, occurring over time but not strictly as a result of time" (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000, p. 10).

Adult Learning. This particular type of learning results in a "change in behavior, a gain in knowledge or skills, and an alteration or restructuring of prior knowledge; such learning can also mean a positive change in self understanding or in the development of personal qualities such as coping mechanisms" (Hoare, 2006, p. 11).

Cooperative. Such legal entities are jointly owned and run by its members (Webster's, 2011).

Charter School. A public charter school is a publicly funded school that, in accordance with an enabling state statute, has been granted a charter exempting it from selected state or local rules and regulations (http://nationsreportcard.gov/glossary.asp).

Constructive Developmental Theory. This theory draws from "philosophy, psychology and science" (Walker, 2002, p. 7) and is focused upon the evolution of the act of meaning

making. It includes an examination of the changing ways we understand and the ways we change our forms of knowing (Kegan, 1982 & 1994; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Trule, 1986). This is explored further in Chapter 2.

Disorienting Dilemma. These experiences cause a person's current understandings and frames of reference to come into question (Mezirow, 2000).

Reflective Discourse. This "specialized use of dialogue [is] devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief. This involves assessing reasons advanced by weighing the supporting evidence and arguments and by examining alternative perspectives. Reflective discourse involves a critical assessment of assumptions. It leads toward a clearer understanding by tapping collective experience to arrive at a tentative best judgment" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 10-11).

Transformation Theory. This theory addresses the role of Transformative Learning in creating "understandings for participatory democracy by developing capacities of critical reflection on taken-for-granted assumptions that support contested points of view and participation in discourse that reduces fractional threats to rights and pluralism, conflict, and the use of power, and foster autonomy, self-development, and self-governance—the values that rights and freedoms presumably are designed to protect" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 28).

Transformative Learning. This type of learning "refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 7).

Qualitative Change. This term “refers to alterations in human functioning and in ways of seeing and interpreting oneself in the world. Such changes move toward complexity” (Hoare, 2006, p. 9).

Summary

This chapter included a preamble that described my experience in a cooperative elementary school that my children attended, and from which, ultimately, sprang this dissertation. Following that are brief introductions of three entwined topics that will serve several functions. The section on charter schools will provide background necessary to understand the setting. The section on parent partnerships follows, introduced as it is most frequently explored in literature –as a means of enhancing student learning. The frame is then widened to discuss equity issues and potential effects on parents. This segues into the final introductory section: adult learning.

The problem statement for this dissertation is repeated here: “Most parent participation research focuses on one of two issues: (a) student outcomes derived from participation (Bifulco & Ladd, 2005; Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Epstein, 2009; Flauger, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1996) or (b) the debate on questions of access, power differentials, and challenges to authentic parent participation (Cooper & Christie, 2005; Delpit, 1995; Ehley, 2005). Little research has explored how active engagement in the education of one’s child, particularly in collaborative decision-making and high-level involvement in school governance affects *parents*.” The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experience of adults who have described personal growth and change as an outcome of their engagement with a cooperative charter school environment. Using the results, I will construct a grounded, substantive theory to describe the conditions conducive to change for participating adults.”

Guiding questions include:

- How do parents who have identified personal changes as an outcome of their participation in a cooperative charter school understand and describe the changes?
- What events or experiences do they perceive as having contributed to these changes?

This constructivist, qualitative study will explore the meaning adults make of their experience, using surveys and in-depth interviews and to construct a substantive theory to explain findings. Questions were devised to explore *what* changes parents experienced, and *how* the changes were enabled. The significance rests in expanding the understanding of context and conditions that may promote learning for adults, offering guidance. This study is intended to offer information for educational leadership and policy makers, toward promotion of these conditions. Finally, delimitations, limitations, and definition of terms were explained.

The following chapter provides a review of the literature on charter schools, including foundational information on charter schools. I next review literature focused on the purposes of charter schools, combined and synthesized to discuss issues of equity that merit consideration. I then review literature on parent partnerships and participation, and again, broaden the introductory frame, as I seek to explore relationships sketched by previous researchers, and then create a new view considering the possible benefits to students. Finally, the literature review includes a brief review of adult learning, touching on the process of transformational learning—important to understand the experience of participants in this study. The disparate topics introduced combine to form the basis by which the grounded theory in this paper emerged, and includes charter schools, parent partnerships and adult learning.

CHAPTER II

Review of Related Literature

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experience of adults who have described change as an outcome of their engagement within a cooperative charter school environment. Research questions are: How do parents who described personal change as an outcome of their participation in a cooperative charter school understand and describe the changes, and what events, experiences or relationships do they perceive as having contributed to these changes?

Grounded Theory studies may or may not include a literature review prior to contact with participants (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2004). However, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest, a literature review can provide "theoretical constructs, categories, and properties" useful to organize data (p. 47). Accordingly, the three sections in this introductory literature review are charter schools, parent partnerships, and adult learning. I begin by defining charter schools and proceed to explain the unique characteristics of cooperative charter schools in order to provide information about the site in which this study takes place. The second section of this literature review explores different framings of parent partnerships and participation in schools, as the participants were tasked with this form of engagement. The last section explores the literature of adult learning, including transformational learning, the heart of this study that participants explored during the interviews.

Literature Search Procedures

Education databases were used to locate research including: ERIC, Education FT, Social Services Abstracts, Academic OneFile. Descriptors alone and in combination included: parent participation, parent involvement, parent volunteers, cooperative schools, charter schools, and

parent-cooperatives. As this study covers both parent participation and issues of adult learning, I also searched PsycInfo and PsycArticles, and Journals such as Sage Premier, Project MUSE, and JSTOR.

Charter Schools

Overview. Charter schools are tuition-free, public schools funded by tax dollars and open to open to all students (www.calcharters.org, 2012). Charters are accountable to their constituents: the students and families they serve, and the district or entity that grants them their charter. Charter schools renew their charter agreement with the hosting entity at agreed upon intervals ranging from one to five years, and if they fail to perform in student learning growth or break agreements stated in their charter or Memorandum of Understanding they may be closed. The first US charter school opened in 1992, and there are now more than 4000 charter schools in 40 states (www.uscharterschools.org).

Individuals interested in starting a charter school craft mission and vision statements, then construct a charter petition comprising sixteen elements. Elements include clear and compelling descriptions of the educational program, measurable student outcomes, assessment plans, school governance structure and more (for further information, please see www.calcharters.org/starting/petition). A charter is granted or denied after each of the elements are reviewed by district, county office of education, or university personnel serving as evaluators using a review process guided by law. Evaluators must be prepared to explain and defend approval or denial decisions, and appeals are possible.

Studies have found that with enhanced opportunities for innovation in operations (Stenvall, 2002), curriculum and instructional strategies (Knowles & Payne,2009) and governance (Gay and Place, 2000; Lubienski, 2003) charter schools may provide solutions to

challenges experienced in traditional education settings (Allen, Consoletti & Kerwin, 2008; ICW, 2008: Zimmer, et. al, 2009). For example, while all public schools are required by law to involve families in the education of their children (NCLB), charters schools are unique in that parents may start them, for example founders may feel that a governance structure that includes parents in meaningful leadership roles will result in better student outcomes. Accordingly some charters allow for, or demand high degrees of parent partnership (Brock, 2006; Fuller, 2003; Manzy.org; US charter schools, 2010). This may take myriad forms ranging from school maintenance or cleaning, to classroom volunteering, or service on a school's governance board.

Charter schools operate with freedom from certain constraints of local school districts, such as: how funds are allocated, leadership structure, staffing or calendar restrictions, and charters do not have the burden of adherence to some district and state mandates (Knowles, 2009). It is hypothesized that with enhanced opportunities for innovation in operations, curriculum, instructional strategies, and governance charter schools may provide solutions to challenges experienced in traditional education settings (Allen, Consoletti & Kerwin, 2008; ICW, 2008: Zimmer, et. al, 2009).

Cooperative charter schools. One such innovative concept is the cooperative charter school, where parents are required to volunteer and are allowed to lead through service on a governance board or leadership of an individual committee. A recent search reveals five such schools, but compared to current estimates of charter schools in the US, it appears that cooperatives are rare. A review of some of these schools shows allusion to benefits to parents: "Our school provides the opportunity for this learning experience for parents and children alike" (http://srecschool.org/about_srec). A second cooperative school proclaims: "In order to provide high quality educational services, we have built a supportive, cooperative community - a true

collaboration of children, families, and school staff, where we embrace diversity and honor the unique contributions of each individual" (www.sdccs.org). Schools that self describe as "a family cooperative" rely on collaboration between the school's parents and families to ensure the needs of the community are met on a daily basis (manzy.org).

Equity concerns. As equity must always be a central concern for the field of educational leadership, and as the diverse community surround for one of the schools in this study appeared important to results, I include several studies on this issue next. A number of researchers have explored issues of equity in charter schools. Some propose that charter schools "skim" the best and brightest students or those with the most involved families, which has been proven to increase student-learning results and is further explored in the parent partnership section of this study. From the early days of the charter school movement, concerns were expressed that charters would create a two-tiered system of education that accommodates privileged groups and challenges democratic ideals of a free and excellent education for all citizens (Knowles & Payne, 2009; Lubienski, 2001; Wells, Slayton, & Scott, 2002; Zimmer, et. al, 2009).

Researchers have found that compared to traditional public schools charter schools provide more support for children and their families from lower socio-economic statuses (Allen, Consoletti & Kerwin, 2008). These forms of support may include health, social services, and extended day or school year than the traditional public schools. Furthermore, in several recent research studies, charters show higher gains for minority students than do traditional public schools (Brown-Olivieri, et. al, 2012; Finnigan, et al. 2004; Raymond, M. 2003; Slovacek, Kunnan, Jae-Jin, 2002).

RAND education foundation, a nonprofit research organization with a mission to provide analysis of challenges and solutions in the domain of education, performed a study that looked at

four factors across several geographic locations (authors were: Zimmer, Gill, Booker, Lavertu, Sass & Witte, 2009). For the purposes of the equity criticism, the first question posed is most pertinent: "What are the characteristics of students transferring to charter schools?" Researchers in the RAND study found that charter schools are not "skimming"-- a commonly used term that refers to this tactic. Rather researchers at RAND reported that charter schools serve proportionally more at-risk, minority and poor students than do traditional public schools—a finding similarly confirmed in other research (see Allen & Consoletti, 2008; Slovacek, Kunnan & Kim, 2002).

Following the RAND study, and using some of the same data, the CREDO institute, a Stanford University-sponsored research group dedicated to the education reform enhancement of education decision-making through program evaluation and empirical research to guide reform, published an expansive report focused on evaluation of charter schools (2009). Research questions included: "What is the overall impact of charter schools?" "Do the impacts of charter schools differ by school type?" "What are the impacts of charter schools for different student subgroups?" "Does longer enrollment in charter schools affect student learning?" And "what are the impacts of charter school policies on student results?"

The study was designed to learn about charter school performance on two related fronts. First, researchers intended to consolidate student-level data from a variety of states such that data could be analyzed using a common approach. Second, researchers sought to develop a way to compare data from charter schools versus the closest and most demographically comparable Traditional Public School (TPS). Their approach represented an attempt to compare "apples to apples," a challenge cited in other studies that compared charter and traditional public schools (Greene, 2004; Lubienski, 2003, Wells, Stuart, Slayton, Scott, 2002).

Using a pooled data set from the RAND study discussed above, researchers analyzed the national effect of charter schools on student learning and growth. The states included in the study represent more than half the charter school students in the US, providing what researchers described as a “macro” level look at results (p.19). A common challenge in reviewing student test scores lies in the fact that some students start out much higher masking growth over time, and the CREDO group endeavored to ameliorate the problem by using a “value added” method of analysis measuring growth rather than simply the end point represented by a student’s test score.

More than 1.7 million records from over 3,400 charter schools were included in the analysis. Researchers used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. Reading and math were each examined separately, and various controls for student characteristics were used—specifically, starting scores for standardized tests (as mentioned above), ethnicity, participation in the school lunch program (a measure of students living in poverty), special education participation, and English Language Learner levels. These charter students were compared with students who attended TPSs in three ways: first, in terms of overall student learning growth, and second student test scores were disaggregated by state to illustrate variations across states in order to understand specific policy factors in those state by state results. Finally, charter student scores were compared against demographically matched “twins” attending a TPS in what would have been the charter students’ community schools.

Findings showed that charter students trailed the academic growth of TPS students by .01 standard deviation in reading, and by .03 standard deviations in math. However, charter schools were found more effective for certain demographic groups—specifically, students living in poverty and English Language Learners. These findings provide evidence that charter schools

are not educating only wealthy white students—a common, if unfounded criticism by educators and researchers (Knowles & Payne, 2009; Rothstein, 2004; Zimmer et al., 2009). Also implicit is evidence to suggest that the charter movement's goal of increasing innovation to meet the needs of underserved students is achieving results in closing the achievement gap. Policies such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act exist as proof of the problem, as does a cursory internet search on the key words "Achievement Gap" (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Williamson, 2004).

Other important findings for this study include information concerning the effects of charter policy. Researchers suggested that data reveal that multiple authorizers, or caps limiting the growth of charter schools, harm student learning in charter schools. They theorize that multiple authorizers may allow poorly designed schools to open, as once a group submits a charter to one authorizer and is denied, they may simply seek authorization from a second or third authorizing entity.

There is, however, another explanation for the apparent drop in overall charter school quality that may be correlated with multiple authorizers. Oversight of charters is complex, and in the view of many school districts, burdensome (Shumway, L. in response to State Auditors report, p. 63, 2010; Office of Inspector General Audit Report, 2012). It requires expertise in charter law, provision for a school site and curricular materials, plus, significantly, oversight. As districts across the country were experiencing drastic budgetary cuts resulting from the economic downturn and challenges in meeting mandatory program costs that are at times, unfunded, districts must endeavor to do more with less (Loeb, Bryk & Hanushek , 2007). If a school district, an organization specifically built to look after K-12 education struggles to keep pace with charter oversight (Kennedy, 2001), it is reasonable to hypothesize an institution not focused

on K-12 education might be ill-prepared for oversight—and would not make the best authorizer, resulting in lower quality charter schools.

Returning to issues of equity and charter schools, I next turn to one practice of equity represented by ideals of Democracy. In the study "Defining Democracy in the Neoliberal Age: Charter School Reform and Educational Consumption" (2002), authors Wells, Slayton, and Scott argue that framing the discussion of charter schools as an issue of "choice" and deregulation suggests a neoliberal foundation, a paradigm that borrows language from the market and may shift responsibility from governments to individuals (Ong, Aihwa, 2006). Wells et al. recall the dichotomous relationship espoused by authors such as Lindbloom (1997) and to his ideas I will add those of James O'Toole, Rhodes Scholar, Professor of Business Ethics and Legal studies and Executive Vice President of the Aspen Institute for four years. He offered a helpful visual adapted and added below as Figure 1.

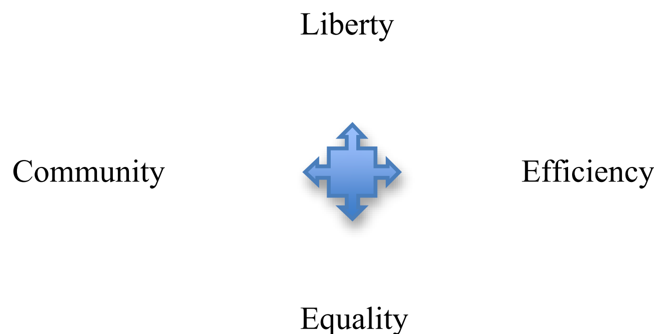

Figure 1: Oppositional relationships between the four ideals. This figure shows how each ideal exists on a spectrum in relation to its opposition. It is adapted from the work of James O'Toole, 1993.

The illustration in Figure 1 sets the four ideals of Community, Liberty, Efficiency, and Equality on each of four points in opposition, and it's useful to recall that each end point exists

on a continuum rather than only in opposition. Lindbloom (1997) and O'Toole (1993) each suggest that successful organizations, democracies, and perhaps schools belong toward the center of each axis. O'Toole suggests that institutions with too keen a focus on one endpoint, for example on *liberty,* impose potentially negative consequences upon commitments to or achievement of *equality*.

Returning to the study under discussion, Wells, Slayton, and Scott (2002) use one axis in "Defining Democracy" and focus on the opposition between liberty and equality to support concerns that charter schools do not support democratic ideals concerning *equality* in the provision of education—a point I will return to in subsequent paragraphs and research. Wells et al. provide a central critique of the charter movement, noting charter school advocates sometimes embrace neoliberal mores and language, embodied in one axis on the compass toward *liberty.* They note proponents of charter schools incautiously use terminology such as "freedom to chose" and therefore elevate the role of consumerism. Indeed other researchers do use neoliberal arguments to advocate for charter schools (see Chaakrabarti & Roy, 2009: Greene & Winters, 2004). Wells et al. pose concerns that these arguments and at minimum, this vocabulary, leaves out issues of *equality* and a free, public education for all, particularly those without the resources or knowledge to build charter schools for themselves.

A critical review requires returning to the points of the compass mentioned above. Considering the second axis, note the balancing forces of *community* and *efficiency*. Contentious relationships exist between charter schools and hosting districts (Wells, Slayton, & Scott, p. 346), in part because charters take potential district funds, short-circuiting economies of scale built by district mechanisms toward *efficiency.* Conversely, this district benefit is acknowledged in research to provide significant challenges to charter schools who lack these economies of scale

and struggle to do more with less (Allen, Consoletti, & Fuller, 2003; Kerwin, 2009; Green & Winters, 2004; Swanson, 2008).

Briefly, and without too wide a detour through the Byzantine funding mechanisms that determine school or district budgets, understand that for every student in a desk on any given school day, the school or district gathers funding, known as the Average Daily Attendance (ADA). Enrollment and attendance directly impact a school or district's budget. When students enroll in a charter school, although that school may pay an oversight fee to the granting district, the district loses the ADA dollars that every charter student would have brought to the district. Again, districts are built upon economies of scale, resulting in large unified school districts envisioned to reduce costs, embracing *efficiency* on the compass axis opposite *community* that is important in reviewing the next study and in understanding this study's results in each of chapters 4 and 5.

Bruce Fuller provides a thoughtful argument to the concerns voiced by the previous study in an article published in Education Researcher: "Education Policy Under Cultural Pluralism" (2003). Fuller, Professor of Education and Public Policy at UC Berkeley and Co-Director of Policy Analysis for California Education, suggests that other, yet closely related factors are at work beyond economic forces or liberty versus equality. While he does not refer to the compass concept, the reader will find familiar terminology, focused now upon the axis end of *community*. He begins by unpacking the perspective of neoliberalists and presents the history that provided the foundation for the common school theory: American immigrants were flowing in from all points, and policy makers felt these individuals needed to be formed into a cohesive whole, with common values and goals. Weberian thinking with its focus on positivism, efficiency, and the factory model also guided thinking in education and the creation of our current system.

Fuller asserts more recently policy makers have acknowledged that "monolithic" educational institutions are not working and have advocated market-based dynamics to disrupt rigid, bureaucratic Behemoths (Chubb & Moe, 1990 in Fuller, 2003). This assessment aligns with concerns voiced by Wells et al., but he expands the frame to encompass a second key group with rather different goals, values, and ideals. While providing this expansion of the movement's motivation and impetus of an equally representative group of charter supporters, Fuller's assessment may also extend insight into the specific institutions that are explored in this study. Fuller notes that juxtaposed to neoliberals are a pluralistic group including "inventive educators, ethnic networks (including affluent Whites), and CBOs [Community Based Organizations]" (p. 2) who find common ground in a desire for community. He suggests: "They [charter founders] opt for small public squares, displaying little interest in the modern state's struggle to advance a larger, more inclusive common ground" (p. 2). Furthermore, he asserts contrary to the concerns of some researchers, groups are interested in the *unmodern* (beyond post modern) concept of community rather than the neoliberal agenda suggested elsewhere.

Fuller suggests that adherents to the new cultural pluralism, defined as smaller groups within a larger society, may prefer to maintain their cultural identities and not seek to assimilate, and consequently the accompanying values and practices are absorbed by the larger culture. Cultures are considered to include religious groups, ethnic groups striving to maintain a dual identity, and individuals who maintain that children learn best in certain environments that are not often found in Traditional Public Schools. Without using the terminology from constructivism that suggest children learn best in small and close knit communities, and it appears that Fuller's thinking is in alignment with constructivist ideals.

These concepts have appeared in other research and literature on education. Consider the work of Lambert et al. in *The Constructivist Leader* (2002), asserting the need for educators to "acknowledge cultural histories and processes of learning" (Lambert et al., 2002, p. xvi)—or the idea that children of diverse ethnicities learn best within communities consisting of people with whom they hold common values or heritage (Delpit, 1995) but certainly in partnership with the community from which they spring (see also Senge et al., 2000; Wheatley, 2006). Fuller describes learning as "situated" in a culture that may include ethnicity, a specific values system, or religion but that acknowledgment of the legitimacy of these different settings is postmodern, thorny, and the current reality remains negotiable.

Finally Fuller closes with this admonition:

> The organization of schooling under conditions of cultural pluralism must speak to the new imperatives-- situating learning in particular communities, thinking small, enriching networks of human-scale organizations, and addressing inequities through locally crafted remedies. (p. 22)

Fuller describes charter schools as serving to expand the dialog and provide options. These themes appear with some emphasis in chapters four and five. As charter schools may be situated in the realm of cultural pluralism, an idea redolent of the partnership, respectful of the choices of parents, and acknowledging the likelihood of the capacities of families to demonstrate technical wherewithal to reshape schools (Fuller, 2003), we move next to the second theme: parent partnerships.

Parent Partnerships

Reviews on studies that explore parent partnerships are included for two reasons. First, I wanted to look at the body of research on parent partnerships to gather a broader understanding of the field. Second, I wanted to see if others had explored the effects of partnerships and

participation on parents. I discovered that few, if any studies looked in any depth at effects on the parents beyond the enticing suggestion that *perhaps* benefits to parents would accrue (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009; Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Epstein et al., 2008). Next I found that the potential benefit to parents was reflected only in a tangential manner, and that was in the examination and subsequent framing of benefits for students. Accordingly, this section will begin with an exploration of ways researchers and educators define, examine, and frame parent partnerships. The next section reviews research on issues of power balance between parents and educators, examining conflicting ideas and perspectives. Finally, this section reviews the few studies that have researched potential benefits to parent partnerships stemming from participation. First, I will review and describe research focused on definitions and terminology.

Definition and terminology. Cotton and Wikelund (2001) use the term *Parent Involvement* to describe a parent's ability to meet such obligations as attendance at parent-teacher conferences or home-based supports, which include study time and space and tutoring children at home. They suggest 'Parent Involvement' may extend to a parent's role as an advocate, volunteering for school activities or within the classroom. Finally they assert that parents can take a role in school governance and decision-making.

Dr. Joyce Epstein, is the Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and the National Network of Partnerships Schools (NNPS). She is the author of over 100 publications on family involvement, and was named a Fellow for the American Educational Research Association (AERA). In her seminal book, "School Family and Community Partnerships: Your handbook for Action" (3rd Edition, 2009), Epstein, uses the term *Parent Partnerships*, explaining that *partnership* suggests a leveling of the field, giving families equal power in the school and family relationship that other researchers (Cooper & Christie,

2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Fine, 1993; McCaslin & Infanti, 1998; Miretzky, 2004) suggest may tip advantage toward school institutions. Epstein explains: “All programs of school, family, and community partnerships are about equity” (2009, p. 2). For the purpose of this study, I will use the terminology offered by each researcher, deferring to author’s choice and usage within the various studies reviewed. Once again options include: parent involvement, parent participation and parent partnerships.

Framing parent partnerships and participation. As discussed earlier in this study, researchers have made useful distinctions in framing the forms that participation may take typically toward discovering the most efficacious for student learning. For example, researchers have found greater gains for students in *active* versus *passive* engagement: for example, parent service in school activities and field trips, as opposed to merely asking if homework is finished (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1996).

A second framing looks at home-based participation in education--called *individualistic*, and broader participation, called *collective* (Bifulco & Ladd, 2005; Flauger, 2006; McMillan 1999). The *individualistic* form includes actions such as helping one’s child with homework, attending parent teacher conferences, and monitoring student progress. This form benefits the individual child, while the other form—*collective*—may also benefit other children at the school. *Collective* participation includes actions such as volunteering at the school, and participating in school governance or management teams (Bifulco & Ladd, 2005).

The final frame, and most effective in promoting student achievement is called *academic socialization,* defined as the“[communication of] parental expectations for education and its value or utility, linking schoolwork to current events, fostering educational and occupational aspirations, discussing learning strategies with children, and making preparations and plans for

the future” (Hill & Tyson, 2009, p. 742). In their meta-analysis using over 50 empirical studies of participation in middle school families, researchers Hill and Tyson sought to describe the strength of the relation between student achievement and parent involvement during the middle school years. They reviewed studies that focused on a variety of frames for participation, with the goal of determining the most efficacious. They found three major frames, listed here and ranging from the most to the least helpful in student learning: (1) academic socialization; (2) school-based involvement; (3) help with homework and tutoring by parents. They suggest that help with homework offers fewer benefits particularly with middle school students as needs for differentiation from home and parent are a key developmental task of adolescence. They theorized that solving problems independently proves most helpful to middle school students. Also, Hill and Tyson suggest that a parent’s skill in teaching and explaining is likely to vary from one family to the next, and this may play a role.

Through *academic socialization*, parents provide a connection between their child’s learning to current events and career goals, apparently providing the larger perspective that young people lack. Parents can serve as guide and conduit to the larger world, making explicit connections of value for the child. While this category may appear to suggest an individualistic approach, it needn’t. A supervising parent partner may share these concepts with children from the wider community in the process of serving the school as volunteer. The variety of options and relationships are displayed in the following table.

Table 1

Parent Participation Activities: Individualistic, Collective, and Academic Socialization

	Individualistic	Collective
Active	• Tutoring one's child • Attending Parent-Teacher conferences • Instigating contact w/ school personnel or teachers	• Providing after school tutoring to students in need • Serving as volunteer in classroom • Serving in school governance (site council)
Passive	• Monitoring academic progress • Asking if homework is finished • Responding to contact from school or teachers	• Supporting school fund events, with activities such as baking baked goods for school events
Academic Socialization	• Communicating expectations on educational importance, value and utility • Providing books and learning materials in the home • Modeling academic behaviors such as reading • Providing learning opportunities such as museum and zoo visits • Connecting academic learning to "real life" • Making plans and preparations for extended education • Discussing learning strategies • Fostering educational and occupational aspirations in child	

Note: Academic socialization may be considered to span the two categories of individualistic and collective, plus claims both active and passive elements, as is suggested by its placement in the table.

This table is synthesized from the work of Bifulco and Ladd, 2005; Hill and Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey and Sander, 1996.

Jeynes also confirms the significance of academic socialization in his meta-analysis of parent involvement studies. Jeynes is a graduate of Harvard and the University of Chicago, and now serves as Professor of Education at Californian State Long Beach. His study, *The Salience of the Subtle Aspects of Parental Involvement and Encouraging That Involvement: Implications*

for School-Based Programs (2010), expands academic socialization to include positive communication between adult and child and between educators and adult family members. He points to an ever increasing body of research (Mapp, Johnson, Strickland, & Meza, 2010; Sheldon, 2005) that demonstrates how teachers, principals and school staff influence positive approaches in parents by engaging in positive, encouraging, and loving communication with parent partners.

Jeynes used the work of Bandura and Walters (1963) that found parenting styles are more important than all other factors in the promotion of healthy psychological development in children. Bandura and Walters suggested that children are much more sensitive and responsive to what parents do than what they say. Thus if parents model pro-academic behavior, children are more likely to internalize these values. This ties directly to the cooperative charter school model, as parents are demonstrating commitment to education, and children are able to witness and internalize these values. Jeynes recommends that parents be brought close, treated with respect, and communicated with in positive ways to improve student learning.

Expanding focus from children and their families to that of educators, Bauch and Goldring (2000) studied the experience of teachers at school sites with greater or lesser parent and teacher empowerment. They found that with increased empowerment for teacher and parent groups, each feels more comfortable and able to collaborate with the other and are more open to involvement. They stressed that autonomy and power are not limited in quantity, such that if one group enjoys more another must have less. Rather as schools allow more influence for one group, so can they extend these to the other, and that ideal is a balance between all groups on a school campus: parents, teachers, and school leaders.

Epstein further provides a framing possibility that alludes to webs of relationships:

> The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. (2009, p. 7)

In this shift Epstein suggests we include "overlapping spheres of influence with each other stakeholder, each with children in the center of conjoined circles" (p. 5) and she asserts that "When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work" (p. 9). Take note of the word "community," as it will resurface in chapter 5. This more open and inclusive perspective encourages an expanded view from the individual—the child—to include the family and educators.

Cotton and Wikelund (2001) conducted a literature review, *Parent Involvement in Education*, in which they examined 41 studies on various aspects of parent involvement. As some of the studies explored were reviews and summaries of research, many more studies were examined and discussed. Of these, 25 were research studies, 8 were program descriptions, and others were research-based guidelines for the creation of participation programs. The researchers reviewed various kinds of involvement including studies that explored behavioral and attitudinal outcomes for students with differing degrees of parent participation and involvement. Cotton and Wikelund assert: "The research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parents' involvement in children's learning is positively related to achievement" (p. 3). According to their investigation, the benefits grow with participation intensity of all types and ages of students.

Other researchers have found similar results. Sheldon (2007) discovered partnerships tend to improve attendance, create higher achievement, result in more course credits earned, and

help students become more responsible in their preparation for high school. Epstein et al. (2009) point out that partnerships improve school climate, give service and support to families, and connect families to one another. Domina (2005) and Sheldon & Epstein (2003) found that trips to the principal, suspensions, and expulsions decline with close family and school communication.

Minority gains. Cotton and Wikelund (2001) stress that participation is key for all families, perhaps particularly for the disadvantaged. They suggest that schools must make families feel welcomed and eschew the notions that disadvantaged families and communities are deficient and "have little to offer" (p. 6). They warn that this "deficit model" of low income or ethnic neighborhoods has pernicious effects on educator's attitudes toward students— to say nothing of educators' relationships with the parents, their putative partners in an ideal world.

Lisa Delpit, Executive Director for the Center for Urban Education, MacArthur genius award winning author and graduate of Harvard School of Education has explored issues surrounding multicultural participation throughout her career. Among other themes focused on equity in education, she insisted that true equity in our culture is based in part on access and involvement (1995). She stated: "appropriate education for poor children and children of color can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture. Black parents, teachers of color, and members of poor communities must be allowed to participate fully in the discussion of what kind of instruction is in their children's best interest" (1995, p. 45). Other researchers confirm these ideas, such as Dearing, Kreider, Simpkis, & Weiss (2006) who found the gap between the standardized test results from poor or minority and middle or wealthy students narrows with parent participation. The benefits of parent partnerships to minority students are clear.

Adult Learning

As indicated previously, researchers suggest that parent and school partnerships may affect adults (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001, Epstein et al. 2008). Parent participants interviewed in this study were selected from candidates who associated change with their school participation. I (and others, see K. Taylor, 2000) suggest that self-described change is potentially a marker of learning, so I next provide an overview of adult learning theories. Of particular use in this study are theories that suggest links between experiences stemming from parent participation and developing capacities in adults as learners, but first, a definition of adult learning.

Definition. Hoare defines adult learning as "a change in behavior, a gain in knowledge or skills, and an alteration or restructuring of prior knowledge; such learning can also mean a positive change in self-understanding or in the development of personal qualities such as coping mechanisms" (2006, p. 11). Merriam and Clark suggest that adult learning may occur formally or informally and affirm Dewey's assertion that learning and experience are entwined, and therefore experiential: "all genuine education comes from experience" (1938. p. 15), a concept embraced in the field of adult learning (Cranton, 2006; Hoare, 2006; Merriam & Clark, 2006; Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000; Mezirow, 2000). Dewey further suggested that adult learning is often practical in nature, as adults have real problems that needed solving. Further, Dewey observed that adults want to learn relevant things, possibly those focused on work, family life, or community—a concept confirmed by other researchers such as Taylor, Marienau, and Fiddler (2000).

Transformative learning. Within the realm of adult learning, Mezirow posits a specific kind of learning, called *transformative learning*. He suggests that in transformative learning, humans gain increasing capabilities to transform taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning

perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (2000, pp. 7-8)

This learning may occur each time humans reexamine their *frame of reference*—the primary structure—constructed from "conscious or unconscious interpretations of experience" (Lamoreaux, 2005). Proponents of this theory suggest that humans internalize paradigms, or ways of thinking from our culture, described by Mezirow as collectively held frames of reference. These various frames of reference are generally unconscious but may be brought into relief through critical reflection; a questioning of tacit assumptions. While some researchers and theorists suggest transformative learning happens in an apocryphal manner, others, such as Cranton (2006) prefer the idea that "both rational and extrarational transformation can occur suddenly and dramatically, gradually over time, or as a developmental process" (p. 77).

Taylor (2000) provided dimensions of development from the learner's perspective. Pertinent to this study are "Knowing as a dialogical Process," whereby participants respond to and inquire into the perspectives of others toward discovery of an objective truth. Conceivably this might occur in a cooperative school, as regular meetings offer such opportunities. Taylor and others (Belenky et al., 1997) have implicated the process of working with others engaged in a collective endeavor as supportive to adult learning. Daloz (1999) found that for individuals who have made significant contributions, one key aspect of their experience was the importance of the "other," meaning working at an important, collective effort with others who are not like one's self and engaging in dialog as a process of learning and acting.

Summary

This chapter explored and analyzed literature concerning three main themes: charter schools, parent participation or partnership, and adult learning. The charter school section included a definition, and a review of general literature toward the construction of a basic understanding of the charter school model, which is particularly significant as this study was situated in two charter schools. Within this section a brief overview of cooperative charter schools is offered—brief because very few of these schools exist and few studies had been conducted on these sites. As stated, there has been no effort to review the prodigious number of studies that focus on charter school efficacy, as this study's intent lies in an attempt to understand the experience of parents as they grapple with complex issues within a cooperative charter school context.

The charter section explores equity concerns, an area of focus for many studies as researchers grapple with questions such as equal access to charter schools, the negative effect on overall school performance that results from pulling the potentially most engaged families and children from traditional public schools (TPS), and the efficacy of charters in meeting the needs of students who may have been underserved in TPS. This section also includes a wider frame of equity, including reviews of studies focused on democratic ideals represented through charter schools. This included studies that described the potential for "unmodern" ideals of "community" that allow for, or even embrace the maintenance of cultural identities rather than assimilation into the established local or national culture. These suggest that charter schools can provide environments where children learn in places that are closely aligned with constructivist ideals. These ideas had resonance with the grounded theory that emerged from the experience of participants in this study, described in the following chapters.

In the next section of this literature review, I explored parent partnerships and provided a definition. I reviewed studies concerning learning gains for both non-minority and minority students and compared essential aspects in parent partnership effects toward building a synthesis of how researchers had understood the act of participation in schools. Categories included: active versus passive (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1996), individual versus collective (Bifulco & Ladd, 2005; Flauger, 2006; McMillan 1999), home-based versus school-based, academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009) and student centered versus emphasis on the whole child (Epstein, 2009). From this review it appeared that when focused on maximum efficacy defined by student gains in learning, the active, collective, and academic socialization methods proved most productive. It appears that in keeping with old wisdom, children are most responsive to what parents do rather than what they say, and actions speak volumes.

Several studies that touched on issues of power sharing and differentials were included, as these address critical issues of equity. Findings showed that when power, autonomy, and "voice" are allowed to all stakeholders including parents, teachers, and school leaders, all experience greater job satisfaction and perceive more positive outcomes for students. Several researchers focused entirely on equity, asserting that parent partnerships are often overlooked and critical to student success. Some pointed at "deficit model" thinking whereby educators hold the perspective that parents have little to offer, coming as they may from impoverished or immigrant backgrounds. The result is a firewall between communities and schools to the detriment of all, but particularly children.

The parent partnership section also included a review of the relatively few studies that focused upon gains to parents from participation. These included results that pointed to an increase in skills and confidence, and occasionally improved job opportunities for parents

stemming from experience in school participation (Christie, 2005; Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Epstein, 2008) leading to the next section: adult learning.

The adult learning section provided a definition of transformative learning including defining characteristics and foundational thinking that supports the theory. Experience is implicated as "cause" in adult learning, an understanding that is traceable as far back as the writings of John Dewey (1938). Change is often a marker of learning in adults. Modern researchers have found that learning and development can be ongoing throughout an adult life, contrary to the previously held notion that we are "complete" at young adulthood. Adults can continue to learn throughout their lives, limited only by experience and critical reflection. This was included as it offered a conceptual framework through which the experience of parent participants in this study may be understood.

Several theorists have called for an exploration of factors, contexts, or environments that may affect transformational growth in adults (Taylor, in Mezirow & Asso, 2000). Transformative learning has been implicated as a powerful process through which adults may transform not simply what they know, but how they know. Researchers use the term "disorienting dilemma" to describe an idea or experience that contradicts one's previously constructed understanding of the world. Existing paradigms are suddenly inadequate, and, following a potentially uncomfortable process, adults may emerge with deepened capabilities, better able to understand complexity, and appreciate difference. Such shifts may happen in response to encountering differing perspectives in a community of others who may be engaged in collective enterprise.

CHAPTER III

Methods

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of adult family members who have participated in a cooperative charter school. Specific research questions are: For parents who identify change as an outcome of participation in cooperative charter school settings, how are changes experienced? What events or experiences contributed to change? These questions intentionally focus on the rarely studied effects on adults that report personal change stemming from participation in their children's schools, rather than the well-researched effects of their participation on student outcomes.

The sections of this chapter include: (a) epistemological assumptions; (b) setting; (c) research design; (d) sample selection; (e) data collection strategy; (f) data analysis procedures; (g) trustworthiness and transferability; (h) the role of the researcher; (i) ethical considerations; (j) the summary.

Epistemological Assumptions

As this study is based on constructivist assumptions a cursory overview of the theory's tenants may be helpful. Michael Mahoney (2003), transformational psychologist and author, suggests there are five basic themes that comprise constructivism. First, humans possess active agency, rather than existing at the whim of larger forces. This runs counter to the idea that God or an irresistible, all-powerful construct, such as fate, controls our actions. Second, humans create order to make sense of our experiences by largely unexamined, tacit processes that may use emotion as much as reason to make sense of our reality. Third, Mahoney suggests we learn through the medium of our senses from which we build our reality, and our realities use the self

as a scaffold. The fourth theme concerns reality as self-created, and that this process takes place under the influence of others. By these precepts it follows that humans cannot be understood outside of their "embeddedness" in a social system. Finally, he posits the fifth theme of constructivist thinking: we grow and change in response to "dynamic dialectical tensions." We move in and out of order and disorder, seeking a balance that is never achieved.

I chose the constructivist paradigm for this study, as the cooperative charter school governance structure required that the participants work together to manage the school. The cooperative charter school environments into which this study was set align closely to the paradigm, acknowledging the centrality of co-creation, cooperation, and collaboration. When Creswell describes the constructivist paradigm, he might have been describing a cooperative school: "participants must construct the meanings of a situation, and do so through discussion or interaction with other persons" (p. 60). Interconnectedness of meaning-making and the role others play in our understanding are clear. Taking a further, logical step in this reasoning, Mezirow (2000), transformational theorist and researcher, declares: "As there are no fixed truths or totally definitive knowledge, and because circumstances change, the human condition may be best understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings" (p. 3). The constructivist paradigm is ideally suited for this study, as the purpose is to explore the constructed reality, or experience, of the participants as they negotiate understandings in a web of relationships made possible, even required, in navigation of the cooperative school structure.

Constructivist assumptions fit within the qualitative research genre. Qualitative research occurs in a natural setting and uses the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative research explores multiple realities, rather than asserting one reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988) and is

considered ideal for a deeper exploration and understanding of the lived experience of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The description of transformative learning theory provided in chapter two is based on a constructivist view (Cranton, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This paradigm is considered a good fit for "research that gathers and examines multiple realities constructed by participants" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Guba, 1985). The realities constructed are described in detail in participants' words. While participants may have shared an experience, their summations can and do vary from person to person. This is made manifest through the coding suggested in the study, as exhibited in the positive and negative reflections on several aspects of the cooperative charter participant experience. Finally, the qualitative genre is considered a good fit for "research on little known phenomena or innovative systems" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53). This study is situated in one such innovative system: the cooperative charter school.

Setting

By way of describing the intended benefits and goal of innovation from within the charter school movement, the US Charter school organization states: "Chartering is a radical educational innovation that is moving states beyond reforming existing schools to creating something entirely new" (USCharterschools.org). Further:

> The basic concept of charter schools is that they exercise increased autonomy in return for…accountability. Charter schools are accountable for academic results and fiscal practices to several groups: the sponsor that grants them, the parents who choose them, the students they educate, and the public that funds them. (USCharter.org, Accessed 5-23-10)

The increased autonomy allows charter school leadership to adopt curricula and pedagogical approaches best suited to their demographic and to create new leadership models (Gay & Place,

2000). One such example is the parent-led cooperative schools that provided the settings for this study.

Within the charter school movement, the cooperative approach is unusual; a recent search showed fewer than 8 cooperatives among over 3000 charter schools that currently exist in the United States (2010, USCharterschools.org). Cooperative schools allow parents and teachers to more equally share power and decision-making responsibilities. This study is set in two different cooperative charter schools, each governed by a board of directors comprised of parents, with a voting seat for at least one educator. Of the two settings, one is located in a large, urban district. This school educates approximately 150 middle school students who are representative of the surrounding socio-economically and ethnically diverse district. The second school is located in a rural school district with limited diversity at the school itself, not reflective of the surrounding area. That setting offers an education to students from pre-school through middle school and serves approximately 400 students.

Research Design

This study used the Grounded Theory (GT) research method, created by Strauss and Glaser in 1967, with modifications explained later in this section, originally used in the social sciences and currently used in a wide variety of other disciplines. Strauss and Glaser's method begins with data collection through interviews with participants. Next, researchers use line-by-line coding, identifying and assigning codes to wording and ideas that appear to be important, or perhaps confirming ideas read in other transcripts. Conversely, when participants provided unique information or ideas these are also coded. Coding enabled identification of concepts, which are next grouped and sorted into categories. By analyzing the relationships between categories, a theory may emerge, grounded in data. Glaser and Strauss's method followed inductive reasoning,

where general propositions are derived from specific examples, represented by the codes in the data. They also use deductive reasoning, where examples may emerge from general propositions.

This study will use an adapted constructivist version of GT pioneered by Charmaz (2006, 2009) that incorporates aspects of previous GT approaches. The constructivist approach embraces the post-positive acknowledgement that there are multiple realities and standpoints for both researcher and participants. This method is described by Charmaz as "an inductive, comparative, and interactive approach to inquiry that offers several open-ended strategies for conducting emergent inquiry" (2008). This differs from the Strauss and Glasser method by allowing greater plasticity, affording researchers the opportunity to move freely from one element of research to the next, or "reflexiveness" (Charmaz, 2008). For example, one may simultaneously collect data, move to analysis, and then return to assignment of codes or categories from data. This differs from the more closely sequenced, and some might argue, proscribed and linear method pioneered by Strauss and Glasser.

In the constructivist approach described by Charmaz (2009), researchers use a 'constant comparative' method where memos are drafted throughout a recursive analysis, and the researcher is allowed flexibility in changing the order of the process, perhaps returning to data numerous times. Codes can change in response to new information or thinking, and questions may adapt in response to emergent ideas. This method allows analysis to occur at all points in the study. Analysis takes the form of notes called *memos* that focus on emergent patterns, researcher questions, or ideas that appear to be important in the data. Coding continues until categories are saturated and ideas in memo making and analysis begin to repeat (Charmaz, 2006; Cresswell, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the process of analysis, ideas may begin to suggest ties with theory and research outside the realm initially studied. By connecting differing ideas, it is

possible to generate substantive theory. In this study, theory and research on adult learning and transformative learning in other environments combine with parent participation in the surround of a parent cooperative charter school to create a substantive, tentative theory.

Typically, the literature review is completed after the study, although for this study, elements of the larger contextual situation—parent partnerships, charter schools, and adult learning—were explored in the literature review to support the reader's understanding of parent partnerships and charter schools. Additionally, although construction of a literature review is uncommon in a Grounded Theory study, Creswell suggests that a "researcher can use concepts from her conceptual framework and citations from her literature review to suggest possible categories or themes for data analysis (2006, p. 59). This possibility was certainly manifest in this study, as I discovered key theories that provided structures for coding, themes, categories and relationships among data, and combined with this research to form the Grounded Theory offered in this study.

Sample Selection

Sample selection is purposeful in the execution of the Grounded Theory method (Charmaz, 2006; Cresswell, 2009; Kuzel, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first purposeful choice was in the decision to use participants from *cooperative* charter school sites. Based on my practical knowledge from having worked closely with these schools, I knew that the cooperative structure provides parents an opportunity to participate in school leadership. I knew that cooperatives require discourse in a community of others in order to make key decisions and that cooperatives offered this to participants.

I sought to gather respondents through a survey probing for individuals who described "change" associated with their participation in a cooperative charter school. The survey was

useful to select individuals who were articulate, descriptive, and perceptive (Creswell, 2007). The word “change” was important; as it has been suggested that “change” may be a marker of adult learning (Taylor, 2000). Further, this wording choice minimized the chance that interviews would surface information unrelated to the area of interest. Further, the survey enabled me to gather preliminary information about the experience of participants. Some survey results were used for analysis and coding, and many yielded useful, richly descriptive data.

Twelve individuals were selected for in-depth interviews using the schedule attached as Appendix A. This sample selection method was intended to provide candidates suited to “intensity” sampling, whereby individuals offer cases that manifest the phenomena of change in a rich, intense, but not extreme manner (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It is important to note that in Grounded Theory, sampling targets theory construction, not population representativeness (Charmaz, 2006). I added two individuals to this sample by approaching participants to serve in a pilot study, bringing the total sample size to 14.

Data Collection Strategy

Once surveys were read many times, they provided the basis from which to select candidates for semi-structured interviews. Interviews took place in a variety of settings, always honoring participant request. Some chose to visit my home, others took place in libraries or in one case, the participant’s office. Interviews lasted from one to three and a half hours. A recording device was used in each case. During interviews, close observations were made to gather non-verbal information, such as gestures, voice inflection, body language and visible suggestions of manifested emotion (Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). When these seemed important, they were added to the narrative to provide the reader with information. These observations were kept as detailed field notes, with attention directed at the collection of

“nonjudgmental, concrete descriptions of what has been observed” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 98). These notes were drafted post-interview.

Two pilot interviews were conducted to test the efficacy of the interview protocol, which changed in response to original findings. I approached two individuals known to possess experience in cooperative charter schools and asked them to participate, and they agreed. Their interview responses were deemed useful by my committee chair and myself and were included in the final study. The experience of interviewing suggested small changes and informed my arrangements of the process: for example, when one participant broke off mid-interview to perform a short errand I found the process disruptive and subsequently asked participants to clear their calendar for several hours for each interview.

Data Analysis Procedures

To initiate a Grounded Theory study, a researcher may begin by identifying a substantive area of interest (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Marshall & Rossman, 1998; Merriam, 1988). Next, observation data are collected, including, among other possibilities, surveys and in-depth interviews. Transcripts and field notes are read and re-read; coding begins immediately, and memos are written to initiate the recognition or development of themes. "The qualitative analyst's effort at uncovering patterns, themes, and categories is a creative process that requires making carefully considered judgments about what is really significant and meaningful in the data” (Patton, 1990, p. 406). A return to the literature proved essential, as the developing theory suggested further questions. In particular, I discovered a need to learn more about adults engaged in processes that may lead to growth and learning. Selective coding continued until saturation occurred: “the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data” (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Next, memos were sorted and patterns reviewed and explored through

research, dialogue, and discussion with my chair and colleagues. Finally, data were integrated with literature, and a grounded theory was drafted (Cresswell, 2009).

I chose to transcribe the interviews myself, rather than hire a more proficient typist based on a hunch that the process would prove useful to my analytical process. This was markedly so, as I struggle with auditory understanding, and find that repeated passes over auditory information are helpful. My strengths as a learner lie in kinesthetic and visual opportunities, and the process of translating spoken word via the kinesthetic process of typing invited a deeper familiarity with and analysis of participant experience. Further, the many decisions that arise concerning the effects of punctuation to reflect meaning, well known to writers of fiction, and these opportunities invite analysis. By listening carefully to interviews and seeking to capture the meaning conveyed in a voice, including key elements of communication, such as pauses and emphasis, I feel the process of transcription improved my understanding, and ultimately, my analysis.

Trustworthiness and Transferability

Several strategies are built into the design of this study to encourage trustworthiness and transferability, such as triangulation with multiple sources of data including interviews, surveys, and real-time observations made during the interview process and recorded in my notes (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additionally, ample opportunities to examine my thinking, communication, assumptions, and assertions through multiple readings and critiques were provided by my dissertation chair and committee, as well as my colleagues in my doctoral cohort. Trustworthiness was further built through the observations shared in dialog with two colleagues engaged in founding, running, and serving charter schools. These dialogues were productive in testing and developing ideas and points of query in constructing questions for the

interviews. In sum, substantive theory benefited from critique by the many reviewers listed above.

The results of this study may transfer to other fields, as researchers take the elements and influences that were important to participants in promoting learning and conduct research to test for effects in other environments. In the following chapters I seek to transfer the theories of others to this environment, adapting work by researchers in adult learning, parent and school partnerships, and transformational learning. It is possible that this work may transfer back, as it includes information on how adults make meaning and how they transform their understanding within the context of parent and school partnerships in a cooperative school. While transferability refers to the how applicable or transferable the results of this study may be to others, the responsibility for insuring transferability lies with the person who makes the transfer. In so doing, they seek to illustrate how sensible the transfer is (Trochim, 2000).

Role of Researcher

My experience working in cooperative schools for over a decade, initially as a parent participant and ultimately as an educational leader in two charter schools with high parent involvement, proved transformative. Thorny issues arose, and collaborative decisions needed to be made. As I discovered and developed my capacity to engage in a process of dialectic discussion, I grew ever more appreciative of the opportunity to work with of others of differing backgrounds or value systems toward mutual understanding and the best possible decisions. I found that while the initial tendency was to see issues as either black and white or a variation ("either/ or"), there were myriad middle paths that made a deal more sense. Entirely new ideas, perspectives, and approaches existed, often introduced by others. These other paths and ideas were nearly always discovered during discussion.

Though I expect my experience will be useful in eliciting meaningful descriptive information from participants, I am aware of the importance of not over-directing the outcomes. As suggested in the introduction of this study, using one's experience in qualitative research is seen as a strength, so long as the "researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 182). Again, colleagues and peers in the doctoral program provided opportunities for frequent, reflective discourse, enabling me to remain vigilant.

Ethical Considerations

Care must always be taken in working with human subjects, and steps were taken to insure the wellbeing and safety of participants, and, accordingly, several safeguards were used in this study. First, the college's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the study proposal and interview protocol, and the requested changes were made to better insure participant safety. Second, participants received written and verbal acknowledgement of their right to refuse and were assured that non-participation would not adversely affect them or their children—potentially important as this study focused upon participants with school-aged children. All individuals signed a consent form. Measures to insure the privacy of participants included the use of pseudonyms once transcriptions were made (Cresswell, 1998), and characteristics judged to be insignificant were changed. Further, all study materials were stored in a locked cabinet. Audio transcriptions were stored on a back-up computer storage device, and the computer holding study materials was password protected.

Summary

This chapter began with a review of the study's purpose and key questions. Next, it outlined the study's methods, beginning with epistemological assumptions and then connecting

the constructivist outlook to the study's purpose. These include the notions of co-creation of reality and opportunities to create meaning through dialogue, all within the web of interconnectedness that a cooperative school is. The setting for this study, two cooperative charter schools were accordingly important. These environments were described, bridging concepts explained, and reasons were provided why these sites are unique and important to the study's intent and methodology.

The qualitative paradigm was chosen as it best met the need to explore participants' experience and to delve deeply into the innovative system of cooperative charter schools. I chose the Grounded Theory method created by Strauss and Glaser and adapted by Charmaz, affording greater flexibility. I used a survey to gather and focus my sample selection to avoid an overly broad pool. The survey asked for participants who identified "change" as an outcome of their experience at a cooperative charter school, providing an opportunity to explain. To practice interviewing and tune semi-structured interview questions, I conducted two pilot interviews. After minor interview adaptations, I continued with twelve other participants.

Moving flexibly among typing transcripts, re-reading interviews, coding, the constant comparison method, and memo drafting a substantive, a grounded theory emerged—described in detail in chapter 5. I explained my reasoning for constructing a literature review prior *and* in response to findings, based on the knowledge that the three themes were divergent enough that many readers would be unlikely to have experience in or knowledge of all three major categories: adult learning, charter schools, and parent partnerships.

Next, I discussed steps taken to promote trustworthiness and transferability. To explain transferability, I connected the three themes in the literature review listed above and suggest that this study might provide information concerning factors that support growth in adults and efficacy

for parents and students in schools. As I mentioned in the preamble concerning my role as researcher, I have been much enmeshed in one of the sites in this study as a parent, founder, teacher, and director. Those experiences have doubtless influenced this work, as does my current role of overseeing and supporting a large urban district's charter schools. It would be impossible to tease these influences apart from this research, but with support by my dissertation chair I hope that these experiences have contributed as much as endangered the results. Trustworthiness was also improved by the generous and frank participants, who offered enlightening observations if I headed off into indefensible territory. In the coming chapter I discuss the results.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experience of adults who have described personal growth and change as an outcome of their engagement in a cooperative charter school environment. Questions included: “How do parents who have identified personal changes as an outcome of their participation in a cooperative charter school understand and describe these changes?” And “what events or experiences do they perceive as having contributed to these changes?”

As described in chapter 3 on Methods, an initial written survey was used to find information-rich respondents for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The survey question was: “Did you experience any personal change(s) stemming from your participation at the cooperative charter school? Please describe these changes.” Twelve parents answered the survey, and two others were directly approached and asked to participate. They agreed, and their pilot interviews were included in the results. Participant surveys were analyzed, and codes emerged that guided initial analysis and coding of participant transcripts discussed later in section two.

Overview

The first section of this chapter includes participant profiles, initial survey codes, and audit information revealing subsequent coding changes. Next, new codes and survey excerpts that serve as examples are provided. Surveys were used to identify participants and to help craft or adapt questions for the interviews, which comprise the most significant element of this study. Surveys were, as described in chapter 3, intended first to help select participants who were suited to the interview process by virtue of having identified and then described significant change as an outcome of their experience in a cooperative charter school. Secondary purposes include helping

form interview questions, and to offer initial coding and analysis. Analysis of these is distributed throughout the sections with raw data, and with a wider lens through the survey summary section. Section two provides an introduction to the interview transcripts and codes, plus rationale for two major themes that offer organizing principles for coding. The first theme is: “Increased Participant Capacities.” The second theme, “Context of Community,” refers to the milieu and other environmental factors that contribute to the participant experience in a cooperative charter school. Within each of the two themes coding examples from transcripts are presented. A summary closes the chapter.

Participant profiles. The participant profiles provide the following information: (a) gender; (b) approximate age; (c) ethnicity; (d) marital status; (e) number of children; (f) education level; (g) early educative experiences with diversity; (h) profession. This background was included as these characteristics create a more complete understanding of the participants and their circumstances. Marital status was included as it may affect the degree of logistical challenge stemming from school volunteer demands, resulting in a more significant effect on participants. Knowing the respondents’ number of children may be useful, as it impacts the duration of the parents’ participation, for example if a participant has three children the length of time in the school might be as many as nine years, as opposed to a parent with a single child who might spend only three. Providing this potentially useful background information was balanced with the need to properly shield participants from identification as numbers of children may point toward a specific person. Toward compromise, I have used the descriptor “several” rather than specific numbers for children. Participant’s professions are included as several asserted that their work was affected by their involvement in a cooperative charter school. All names are pseudonyms. A chart follows these descriptions with a synopsis of the information.

Abby. Abby is an African American woman in her late 40s. She is divorced and has several children. She acquired a bachelor's degree in college and later continued her studies, gaining certification in early childhood education. She now runs a successful business working with children. Abby was a frequent volunteer at each of her children's schools and served on two cooperative school governance boards.

Bertha. Bertha, a Caucasian immigrant from Europe in her early 50s, is married with children. She has a university degree and works in the health-care field providing services to students and faculty. Bertha was a regular school volunteer at one of the schools included in this study and frequently worked with student groups at the schools her children attended. Prior to her involvement in the cooperative charter school, she was very active in a private cooperative school volunteering in classrooms and serving on the school's governance board.

Clara. Clara is Caucasian female in her early 50s. She is married and has several children. She is a semi-retired artist and writer. Prior to her experience in a cooperative charter school, she worked closely with volunteers in community and faith-based organizations. Clara did several projects with students at each of her children's schools and served on the governance board at one of the cooperative charter schools in this study, as did her husband.

Debra. Debra is a Caucasian female in her late 40s. She is divorced and shares custody with her former husband—who is also very involved in the cooperative charter school. She is a mental health care provider, working predominately with adults. She continued her education to the level of a doctorate. She attended local, diverse, urban schools growing up. She credits this experience with her decision to send her child to one of the schools in this study. One of her children was born with differences of a physical nature and had delayed speech—all since resolved, but influential in Debra's decision in choosing a small school. Debra has a lengthy

record of experience in cooperative schools, as her children attended coops from preschool through middle school. She was a weekly volunteer at the charter middle school in this study and facilitated groups of students for three years.

Eliza. Eliza is a Caucasian female in her late 40s, married with several children. Eliza is a professional and has a bachelor's degree. Both she and her husband were frequent volunteers at the cooperative charter school and undertook a number of projects ranging from overnight field trip supervision to organization and implementation of annual fundraising events. She had extensive experience with cooperative schools, as her children were enrolled in cooperatives from preschool through middle school.

Frida. Frida is a Caucasian woman in her early 50s, married with several children. Frida works as a health educator and has a bachelor's degree, plus other certifications, attesting to extended education in her field. Her three children attended a private cooperative school during their elementary school years, where her service included a variety of roles requiring expanding responsibility beginning with classroom volunteer, then committee member, and finally to the role of board chair. She helped to develop one of the schools in this study.

Gertrude. Gertrude is a Caucasian woman in her early 50s. She is married with several children. She began her engagement with her school as a parent volunteer in the classroom of a cooperative preschool and was encouraged to go into teaching. She earned teaching and school administrative credentials, plus a master's degree in education. She has served her cooperative charter school in many capacities ranging from parent volunteer to teacher, and is currently a director for one of the schools in this study.

Hillary. Hillary is a Caucasian single mother in her early 50s with one child. She has a college degree and works as an executive in the health care sector. She previously served on the

board of the middle school described in this study and gathered experience in supervising and interacting with students. Most of her responsibilities, however, involved working with adult staff and parent volunteers. This was her first experience with a cooperative school, as her previous work required long hours and frequent travel.

Ivana. Ivana is a Caucasian woman in her early 50s and is married with several children. She splits her time between professional work and running a household. She has extensive experience in cooperative schools, from the private Elementary cooperative her children attended through service as a key founder and board member for one of the schools in this study. After serving on the founding board, she continued her work for the school, serving as the office manager for the school's first two years. After that experience, she returned to college to earn a master's degree.

Jessica. Jessica is an ethnic minority in her early 50s. She divorced just prior to enrolling her eldest of several children in a cooperative school. She now serves as academic human resources analyst for a large, local university. While her children were enrolled in one of the schools within this study, she moved through a succession of roles with ever-expanding leadership, culminating in the role of board president.

Karl. Karl is a Caucasian man in his early 50s, and is married with one child. He is a professional and works in the field of technology support at a local university while building a new career in the financial services field. He had extensive experience working with a variety of cooperatives dating back to his college years. Karl and his wife most often served as supervisors for students at one charter school and collaborated with other staff and parent partners to implement several fundraising events.

Larry. Larry is a Caucasian male in his early 50s who is married with two children. His wife is a high level executive with a demanding career. During their family's time at the cooperative school, she served on the board for two years. Larry volunteered writing grants for one of the schools in this study. He also served on a site committee and facilitated strategic planning workshops for the school. He has a bachelor's degree with numerous certificates for advanced education in his field and currently works in technology. Larry suffered a significant health challenge about 10 years ago and describes himself as "handicapped."

Marta. Marta is a Caucasian woman in her middle 40s. She has two children and shares custody with her former husband. She works in management for an international company and has a high school diploma. Her record cooperative charter school involvement shows an increase in responsibility ranging from her initiation in performing required school maintenance to committee work and finally, engaged in service on the school's governance board. Prior to her current school service, she had no cooperative involvement.

Nate. Nate is a Caucasian man in his early 50s. He is retired because of medical challenges stemming from an auto accident. He is a recently divorced father of two and grandfather of one. During his son's attendance at one of the schools in this study, he and his former wife served as frequent student supervisors. Nate also joined the board in the role of parent liaison for two years. He holds a bachelor's degree.

The following table provides a graphic representation of participant's demographic characteristics including gender (Female/Male), ethnicity (AA: African American, C: Caucasian, PI: Pacific Islander), marital status (M: Married, D: Divorced, S: Single), education level, previous cooperative experience (yes or no: Y/ N) and board experience (Y/N). Participants are represented using the first initial of their pseudonym on the horizontal axis.

Table 2

Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	**Participants A-N**													
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**	**G**	**H**	**I**	**J**	**K**	**L**	**M**	**N**
Gender	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	F	M
Ethnicity	AA	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	PI	C	C	C	C
Marital Status	D	M	M	D	M	M	M	M	M	S	M	D	M	D
Education	BA	MA	PhD	PhD	BA	BA	MA	BA	BA	BA	BA	BS	HS	BA
Coop Experience (Y/N)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N
Board Experience (Y/N)	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y

Overview. Eleven of the participants are female, three are male, one is African American, one is a Pacific Islander, and 12 are Caucasian. Nine are married, four are divorced, and one is single. Thirteen of the participants have, at minimum, a four-year college degree, and many have acquired post-graduate degrees or certificates, including two individuals with doctoral degrees. Nine participants had cooperative experience prior to their child's enrollment in the schools that comprise this study. Of the 14 participants, 10 served on the board of directors at cooperative schools, suggesting high levels of involvement may be associated with the results of this study. It is also true, however, that the majority of these respondents served for the first time on governing boards in service of a cooperative school board.

Section One: Surveys

Audit information. As described, surveys were used to find participants who self-identified significant change stemming from their experience in a cooperative charter school. All survey responses were collected and read. From surveys, initial codes emerged. Upon reflection I found that my previous experience in founding and working in one of the schools in this study influenced my analysis, leading me to delimitate overly restrictive codes. Initial codes did not allow for the participants' nuanced and rich recounting of their experience. Repeated review of the surveys, time spent in reflection, and productive discourse with colleagues enabled me to redefine the initial codes from actual rather than anticipated results. The following table provides an audit trail detailing coding changes from initial versus subsequent and final codes, and provides the rationale for each change.

Table 3

Survey Code Changes With Rationale

Proposed Survey Codes →	**Final Code**	**Rationale for Change**
Personal Growth; Change in Attitude or Behavior.	Deleted	Too broad and not specifically descriptive of the experience of participants.
Self Awareness; Questioning Assumptions; Growth in Awareness of the Experience of Others; Awareness of One's Own Perspective; Awareness of the Perspective of Others.	Growth in the Awareness of Perspective	The new code was more specifically descriptive of change in capacity and acknowledges awareness shift encompassing the spectra of related changes.
Growth in Empathy and Compassion	Growth in Empathy & Compassion	Unchanged.

Participant Focus on the Greater Good of Others	Experience of being in Community	This code reflects the apparent cause of participant change—rather than Greater Good (their stated goal), to the condition that enabled change: Being in Community.
Growth in Skills	Growth in Skills	Unchanged.
Empowerment	Growth in Confidence	Focus upon outcome, and closer agreement with participant's description.
Diversity	Experience with Working in Diversity	More specific and descriptive of experience, and tied to action and a common goal.

Describing and illustrating survey codes. The final codes are: (a) Growth in the Awareness of Perspective, (b) Growth in Empathy and Compassion, (c) Experience of Being in Community, (d) Growth in Skills, (e) Growth in Confidence, and (f) Experience with Working in Diversity. Following the lead of participants, I have re-sequenced the explanation and discussion of these final codes to indicate the relationships and connections between codes. Foundational to all other codes, the Experience of Being in Community, will be discussed first. Next, I offer codes and brief analysis for Growth in Skills, and Growth in Confidence, as these two are frequently referenced in connection with the other, according to participants. Next, I explore Growth in the Awareness of Perspective, Experience with working in Diversity, and Growth in Compassion and Empathy, again a structure suggested from the words and connections drawn from participants either directly or indirectly. Examples and rationale follow in each section.

To support understanding of the next sections, I have provided an illustration that is intended to make graphic the relationships that exist between the following codes. Interrelationships run horizontally, and a hierarchy is implied to be explained after each code if reviewed.

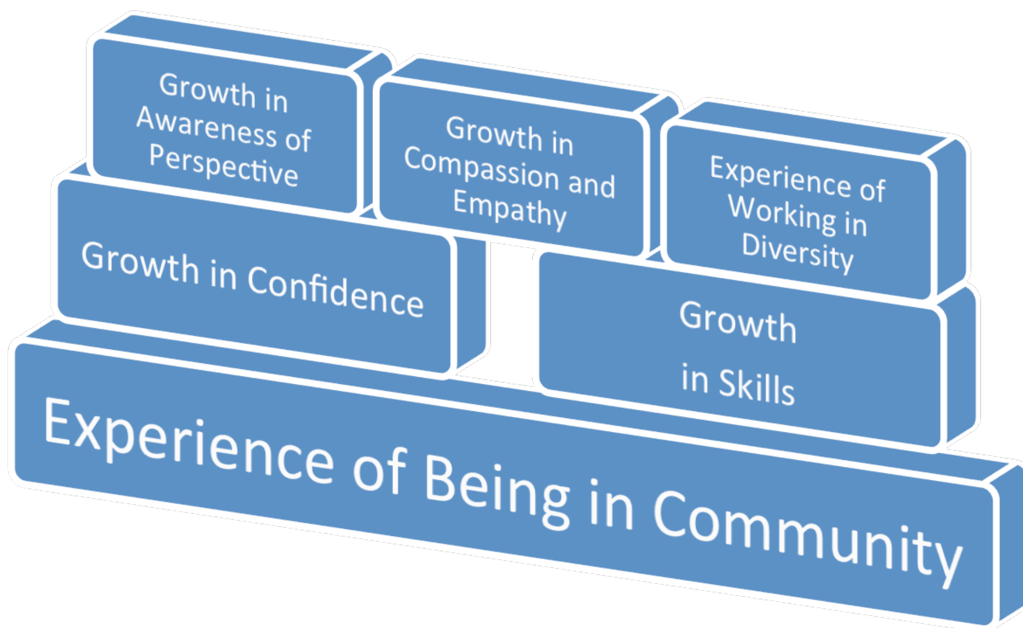

Figure 2: Survey Codes and Relationships. Codes suggest a relationship when combined.

Experience of being in community. Nearly every respondent commented on the meaningful experience of working with other adults. As much of modern life is compartmentalized, and work—never mind meaningful work--and family-focused activity rarely appear in the same sphere it is not surprising that people are hungry for the experience of being in community. Bertha described her experience of community as: "Working with other parents…on a common goal to provide the best education for the children in a safe environment." By way of illustrating through contrast, Clara, Gertrude, and Frida each reported feelings of "isolation" prior to the experience of community that they found in a cooperative charter school. Frida made the connection particularly clear: "I feel that being part of a community is important to all humans. I think in our current culture of parenting we are particularly isolated and even more in need of

community." The supportive, potentially mentor-rich surround of community was cited by each survey respondent. Several made reference to "Community" in close connection with their growth in the next code category, "Growth in skills," which pointed the way to deeper exploration and questioning in interviews.

Growth in skills. Built on a foundation of the supportive community, participants suggested that the cooperative school environment offered opportunities to try new roles, which for some, resulted in a growth in skills. The environment of a cooperative requires that participants step up and into roles that may be new in order to accomplish the work required to maintain and build a successful school. Examples include serving on the Board, arranging a school-wide work party, or envisioning and implementing a fundraiser. Some participants took on increasing levels of responsibility typified by Jessica's experience: "The first year I served on the Personnel Committee, the second year I was the Personnel Chair…I chaired this committee for three years then became the Board Chair for my remaining two years." Marta, Gertrude, and several others alluded to recalled her early process of "observing" opportunities for action, pondering the skills needed to accomplished tasks, and the increase in skills that followed. Again, we see the surround of community experience as a foundation, on which are built new skills, and resulting in the next code, Growth in confidence.

Growth in confidence. Confidence is a powerful capacity, as it encourages individuals to speak up, and to take on challenges. Parents said that they learned new skills supported by the community, which lead to increases in confidence. Several parents offered examples of an increase in confidence when discussing issues with teachers and "authorities." Eliza said her participation "gave me more self-confidence when … working with people in 'authority.' If I had concerns, I felt my voice would be heard and that I deserved [to be]". Bertha echoed these

sentiments: “frequent discussions with the teacher…gave me confidence later as they [her children] went to high school to advocate for their needs and discuss their academic progress with teachers and counselors.” This was particularly important for her as one of her children had learning differences. She asserted that the ability to advocate for him, and to model advocacy to her son proved important for his ultimate educational success in acquiring a college degree despite significant learning differences.

Participants described a range of feelings from enthusiasm to reluctance, fear and stress yet many made the connection between challenge and growth. Ivana described growth in her confidence gained through overcoming a “stressful” degree of challenge that stemmed from her role in managing the office of one of the charter schools in this study. Evidently proud of her growth, she nonetheless frequently returned to the difficulty of the work, describing it as unpleasant and frightening. Others, such as Eliza, Bertha and Larry appeared less threatened, and more interested. From this array of responses, it was clear that while reactions to the challenge varied, the growth in confidence followed for many.

The next several codes: growth in awareness of perspective, growth in empathy and compassion, and experience with diversity appeared to influence each other, and are placed on the diagram accordingly. Surveys implied entwined relationships, pointing the way to questions in interviews. Each is explored in the following paragraphs.

Growth in awareness of perspective. Assuming perspective to be the lens through which one makes sense of the world, awareness of perspective requires an ability to abstract and observe the process of thought as opposed to just thinking. Participants alluded to growth in their awareness of both their own perspective and awareness of the perspective of others as distinct from their own. Bertha and Eliza each wrote about an appreciation for this, and in Bertha’s

words: “[the experience of a cooperative charter school] made me aware of all the different points of view.” This code created excitement, as according to Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) an awareness of perspective is a marker of a more developed adult, an idea more fully explored in Chapter Five of this study and sufficiently important to “bookmark” here. On the loosely sequential adult development spectrum, the ability be aware of one’s perspective may be followed by abilities to critically examine one’s perspective.

Several parents found conversations with teachers or other community members focused on parenting and learning changed their perspective when working with their own children. One recalled: “Sometimes another parent or teacher will have a perspective that allows you to better support or understand your child and their needs—educational and otherwise.” Marta provided a similar observation, asserting she had gained “a more enlightened/ informed view of the beings my children truly are” as a result of interactions with other participants from the cooperative school environment.

While the growth described above is profound on a personal level, Debra was explicit in describing changes she experienced focused on a wider perspective concerning equity and racism. She was a frequent volunteer and regular attendee of community meetings. She eloquently described a sea change in her assumptions and perspective that had previously been formed along: “cultural, racial, and socioeconomic lines.” She concluded her survey:

> My experience in this charter school allowed me to see areas in which I was still holding on to beliefs that perhaps not racist, were at least stereotypic in nature. I came away from [the school experience] with a great respect for the values of all the parents whose greatest desire was to support their children’s education.

It appears that her experience in a cooperative charter school provided the opportunity to examine her tacit assumptions, particularly as they pertain to race. This particular finding was

instrumental in developing questions for the survey as it suggested a significant change with important results, and formed the basis for interview questions concerning the effects of experience of diversity—a theme that proved particularly significant to both participants and this researcher. While ideas of parent involvement supporting student learning are important, more compelling still are the suggestion that working shoulder to shoulder with diverse others can change and develop an adult on one of the more important social issues of our time. It appeared that Debra was able to examine her assumptions concerning race, and exchange her limited perspective for one more aligned with principals of understanding, unacknowledged racism, and equity.

Adding to the code just explored, *growth in awareness of perspective,* I introduce the next two somewhat overlapping codes*, growth in empathy and compassion, and experience with diversity*. As suggested by Debra's survey, these three proved difficult to disentangle, as several examples straddled more than one category, and surveys contained reference to multiple codes in relation to one another. I purposefully choose, however, to code them in their distinct differences, as the ideas represented by each code are sufficiently important to analyze individually. Examples are provided within each of the following sections.

Growth in empathy and compassion. While each of the respondents from the previous code category alluded to changes stemming from experience with diversity, Ivana and Jessica were specific about the result of examining their perspective, calling out changes in how they felt, understood, and were changed by learning about the experience of others. Although Ivana possesses a background of living and working within diverse communities, she credited her participation as providing an "increase in empathy of the difficulties many families face in poorer inner city areas." Jessica explained that prior to her school experience she "had less

empathy for families who are truly struggling financially…and [were] ethnically [diverse].” These examples provide a compelling suggestion of important personal changes, and because of its significance, I included a category for this concept. Once again these examples directly impacted my question design for the interviews that follow, proving a fruitful line of inquiry.

Experience of working in diversity. Several respondents were explicit in crediting their experience with diversity as a driver of personal change. The examples that follow provided compelling examples of individuals who were moved to reexamine their perspectives, challenge their assumptions, and developed greater appreciation for the learning possible within a diverse environment. First, Ivana suggested her life was “broadened and enriched by having contact with and getting to know…adults and children from very diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds”--a simple but compelling appreciation. Frida spoke directly to both the challenges and benefits of the experience in this diverse community endeavor: “It would be easier in a more homogeneous group, but not as valuable I think.”

Summary and Final Analysis of Surveys

Returning to Figure 2, *being in community* was instrumental in providing a safe, supportive, mentor-rich milieu in which respondents were supported in the growth in skills and resultant growth in confidence—which for some participants may have created a feedback loop: as skills grew, so did confidence, enabling participants to take on new challenges providing a further growth in skills and so on. Skills and confidence are good to have, but more compelling and challenging still are opportunities to discover and acknowledge one’s perspective brought about, according to participants, by the experience of working with a diverse group. This in turn helped facilitate growth in compassion and empathy. These are represented as bricks that combine to construct new understandings, with each building block interdependent with others.

The three, interdependent codes at the top of the edifice merit further exploration, since the capacities they reference are important in the field of adult learning. Theorists such as Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) hold that adults may or may not be aware that the truth they hold is a perspective. Experience with the perspective of others, in this case, diverse others, can cause a shift in understanding. What may follow is a reexamination of one's perspective, opening the way to a more flexible and inclusive understanding. Such a shift in perspective may enable growth in compassion and empathy (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Compassion and empathy are capacities that support appreciation for equity. Examples from Debra's survey illustrate this idea.

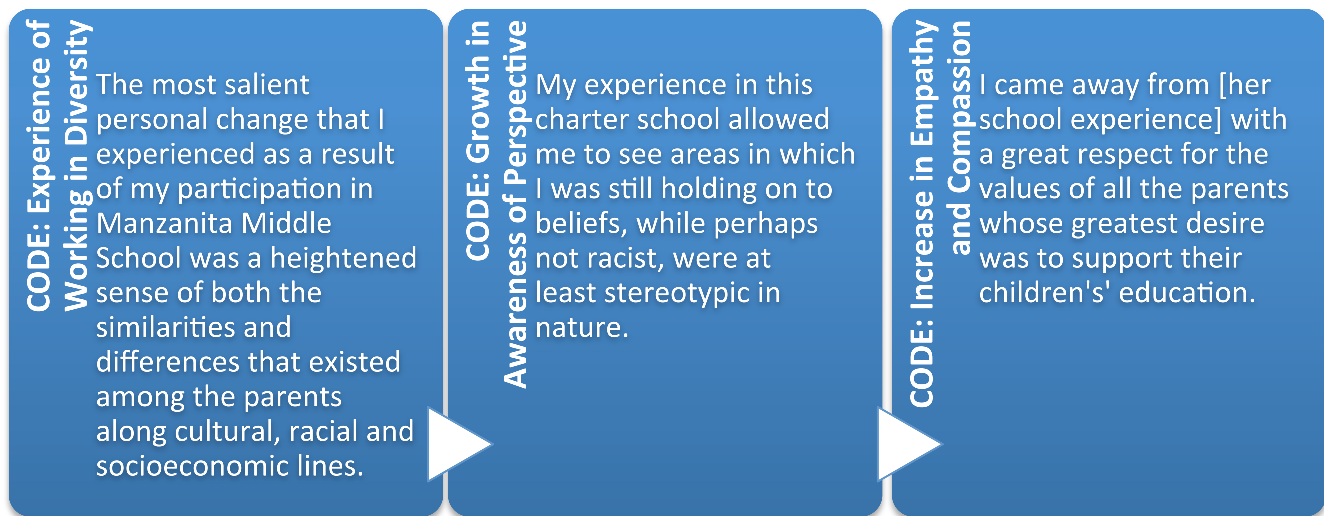

*Figure 3:*The Influence of Diversity on Participants and Resultant Change. Debra's described experience shows how working in a diverse environment caused an awareness and examination of her perspective, resulting in change.

Returning to the description of this study's design, surveys were intended to aid in selection of interview candidates who showed markers of change that participants felt had stemmed from their involvement in a cooperative charter school. They were useful for that end, yet I was surprised to find once the study had been completed the most significant concepts

revealed during interviews were introduced within the surveys. While they tended toward brevity, the particular example offered above presented a compelling hint that powerful change had occurred, and pointed to the factors that contributed. Further, the analysis performed on the surveys was critical in the drafting of questions for interviews essentially providing a map to follow.

Section Two: Interviews

Interview introduction. As detailed in the Methods section, interview candidates were selected from among survey respondents. In addition, two candidates were directly approached and agreed to provide interviews for a pilot study. Their transcripts are included in the analysis presented in this chapter, as each participant's interviews illustrated key ideas and important experiences, offering greater depth and nuance to this study. Interviews were conducted, and transcripts were read and studied. From initial survey codes, new codes emerged from the more richly descriptive, detailed participant experiences. Analysis suggested that codes could be sorted into two main themes that encompassed participant experience and the meaning individuals made. The two main themes include: Increased Capacities, and Experience of Being in Community. Each theme encompasses codes that define and explain central ideas, as shown in the tables that follow.

Table 4

Theme 1: Increased Capacities

Codes:	Growth in Skills	Growth in Confidence	Seeing Others in New Ways	Growth in Awareness of Perspective	Growth in Compassion and Empathy

Table 5 *Theme 2: Experience of Being in Community*				
Codes:	Benefits and Challenges: • Impact on family life • Lack of expertise in volunteer pool • Meetings	Experience of Being in Community	Experience of Diversity	Access to Power Sharing with Staff

Theme One: Increased Capacities

The first theme, Increased Capacities, was often associated with responses focused on the research question: "How do parents who have identified personal changes as an outcome of their participation in a cooperative charter school understand and describe the changes?" Working from the theories of Kegan (1995), Mezirow (2000), and others, I define "Capacity" as enhanced abilities to work with complexity in ideas and experience, or to understand more deeply. It is a broad theme but will be divided then explored in depth through five codes: (a) Growth in Skills; (b) Growth in Confidence; (c) Seeing People in New Ways; (d) Growth in Abilities to Identify Perspective; (e) Growth in Compassion and Empathy. Of these codes, "Growth in Abilities to See People in New Ways" has been added to initial coding from surveys in response to participant comments that reference and describe that experience.

Opportunities to learn new skills. Many participants spoke of opportunities to learn new skills from their participation in cooperative charter schools. This section will review the participant's declarations of learning, and their thoughts on what made learning possible, beginning with Ivana who offered a long list of new skills that needed to be mastered. She was clear in outlining her reluctance to become so deeply involved, then revealed her motivation to

stay at the work: “I just started getting a little involved, then more and more involved. Yet I remember I didn’t really want to work there. But I wanted it to work out.” In discussing new skills she declared: “I did a lot of things I’d never done before…most of it was stuff I hadn’t done!” She described conflicting emotions recalling the challenge and stress attached: “It was extremely hard for me”, “It was a huge challenge”, and moving toward the result for her: “it was very good for me in that like ‘Wow, I can do a lot more that I think I can do.” Her “wow” points the way to the next code category—confidence.

Eliza described the establishment of new skills through running fundraising events. She credited a “sense of belonging.”, and continued “you feel like you can effect the changes…if something wasn’t working or you were having a problem [you] could fix it.” This sentiment was echoed by several others, including Nate, who proudly recalled keeping a can of “Fixall” in his car, ever prepared to work at facilities challenges. Nate had served as Facilities chair, and knew the skills and strengths of the community upon which he could call for various needs. Laughingly, he told of a burst pipe in the history classroom and how he was able to resolve the flooding in a matter of an hour.

Marta shared her experience in attending her schools mandatory meetings focused on their skill of working effectively with children, using a technique called “positive discipline”. Parents who volunteer in the classroom or the playground were required to attend training meetings to learn the process, and Marta worked hard to master the concepts. She relayed summoning her courage to reach out to a teacher for help in applying these principles with her daughter, with whom she was negotiating adolescence. She tearfully recalled her growth resulting from this training and the mentoring others provided:

> my daughter and I 'started in again' [arguing], and *for the first time* I found myself *actually saying* the words from the positive discipline [program]. I'd said [these words] before but it was like this time, *I got it*. I could hold my spirit and I could also allow my daughter to have her whole spirit. It wasn't like there was not enough--[rather] there was plenty--there was abundance. And it felt wonderful.

While this story and Marta's growth in skill is placed in this code, it hints at a much greater change in Marta, as the mentoring, and supportive surround provided by her community enabled a reframing of her relationship with her daughter, and herself.

Larry answered questions concerning his learning of new skills at the school by recalling a chance he had to practice the skill of facilitation. He was "volunteered" by his wife, the board chair, to lead the schools leadership in a SWOT analysis (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats). Larry recalled the period was a pivotal time in the school's development, as significant decisions concerning changes in the leadership structure needed resolution. He found the facilitation work gave him a new appreciation of his skills, which ignited significant changes in his life. He recalled his dawning awareness during that time:

> This stuff I'd learned [in order to] to serve this big ugly [oil] corporation has applications in the non-profit and public world, and to the greater good. I'm old enough now that that's what I care about…it's about legacy and making the world a better place. It's about the human condition, and wanting to engage in ways that have lasting influence.

He recalled his agony stemming from his work for a corporation that was in direct and painful contradiction to his core conservation and "green" values. He credited his facilitation work for profound personal change, asserting that it had: "reintegrated my personality". A phrase he explained had come from the work of Jung and Freud concerning the compartmentalization of one's life. He explained:

> the way I was consciously and rationally partitioning my life at work and the real me when I worked at a place I found distasteful-- started to break down over time. I was consciously and rationally partitioning my life at work and the real me …it took me a long time because of that firewall between personal life and professional life because I was so

> consciously, and more than I ever realized, deeply *unconsciously* in the wrong place. This began as I started getting greater and greater alignment, and places like M [the school] grew to be more central to who I really am. And one of the things—one of the gifts of facilitating that committee at M was that it reintegrated my personality.

Larry said he realized that meaningful work is not always done for money, but rather toward integrity of mind, purpose and action. He related that stemming from his work at the school he left the organization he abhorred, and now serves as a volunteer for his community working to “green” the infrastructure. He is considering adding a Master’s degree in Sustainable Leadership to his other academic accomplishments.

Growth in confidence. Confidence is understood to be a feeling of self-assurance, stemming from appreciation of one’s abilities, skills, or qualities. In many instances participants used the word “confidence” directly, and in other cases they described emotions associated with confidence. I provide examples of the direct references first.

Ivana repeatedly contrasted “stress” and “confidence” in an opposing relationship. She frequently returned to this relationship, uncomfortable with the apparent dichotomy. “It [the work] was a huge challenge, *but* I still feel like it was one of the more important things I’ve done in my life.” Describing one outcome of the work she said: “it gave me more self-confidence.” By way of providing an example that she felt to be an outcome of her growth in confidence, she recounted her recent successful negotiation with a large bank in behalf of a family business.

Other examples include Bertha, who described a trajectory of growth, stating that initially “I was… nervous being part of a classroom.” She recalled that she was “intimidated” by the students and concerned that the teacher might judge her as inadequate. Over time, however, she found that her participation helped her become an “informed parent, less insecure about my abilities and better at my parenting skills because of the peer support [within the] community.”

Bertha articulated what proved to be a recurrent and central idea: the cooperative community provided critical support. Support and mentoring enabled growth in confidence. Growth in confidence was a factor that led to a willingness to take on new challenges such as the discovery of her creative side. She relayed: "I never did that [both art and craft] before…I never thought I was creative…[engaging in art and craft] was always intimidating, but it was fun. And it was like 'Oh! I can do this! I'm actually pretty handy at this!" She summed the experience by asserting: "That's something I have, and not everybody can do it… I'm pretty creative in my own way."

Several parents found that opportunities to discuss and debate nurtured confidence in expressing themselves, or in Bertha's words: "speaking up." She recalled the school membership meetings, where groups of parents and teachers consisting of anywhere from sixty to over a hundred parents or guardians would meet, discuss, and vote on various school decisions. She said: "I started to express myself a little bit more and better. If I had something I wanted to address I felt I could speak up…and [this participation in the school meetings] made me more comfortable speaking in a group." A second participant, Eliza, found the cooperative experience "made me more aware of the power I had in participating in my children education, [and] gave me more self-confidence when I was working with people in…authority." These participants had opportunity, support, and practice in gaining their voice.

Debra suggested that her weekly school participation experience with teenaged students had impacted her professional work as a therapist:

> I am an adult therapist, and I'm happy to work with little kids but I've always felt that I couldn't work with teens. I felt I didn't have what it takes. [Now] I kind of enjoy working with teens. I have to do a lot of hospital consultations and I get the suicidal teens. I think [volunteering] gave me more confidence in working with that age group.

Debra vividly recounted working with disgruntled teens, "dragged in" to therapy by their parents. Mimicking the teens, she vigorously folded her arms across her chest with a "hrumph," slumped down in her chair, and glowered. She described how previously, when faced with this display from an adolescent she worked hard-- possibly too hard--at gaining the child's engagement, and she smiled at recalling that she had tried to "act cool." Debra felt that as a result of her weekly work with teens at the cooperative charter, she found: "I've gotten more comfortable with that [attitude]—I've got more confidence". She no longer felt the need to "act," a comment she offered with a look of pride at her achievement.

Seeing others in new ways. This code represents participant explanations of experiences that are *prior to,* and perhaps an impetus to Growth in the Awareness of Perspective—the code examined in the following section. In many schools access to students is limited, and parents are rarely given opportunities to interact with students. One significant difference between traditional public schools and cooperative charters is this access, which proved important for participants.

The participants who provided evidence for this code had positive stories to tell, where their worst fears or assumptions about students were challenged and changed. For example, Abby recalled an experience with an "intimidating" young man, skilled in the posturing required in tough neighborhoods. To understand the context that may have informed her fear of the young man, recall that the school was located in a challenged part of town racked with violence stemming from poverty. Crime statistics placed this city in the national top ten for murders. Further, the students were in middle school—a span of three years where they may enter as child sized and leave nearly adult-sized. She recalled this particular student weighed 200 pounds, and was taller than she. With obvious (and expressed) affection for this child, she laughingly recalled:

> I remember him 'getting in my face'. I [was] scared of him. He would be bullying kids and trying to puff himself up. One day his grandmother came on campus and all of a sudden he was a respectful little grandson. Seeing how he interacted with her made me see he wasn't this big scary guy that he was trying to emulate.

In a traditional school where parents and visitors are stopped at the gate, and research underscores the degree of discomfort adults may feel on campus, opportunities for getting to know a child's family may be few. Several respondents appreciated opportunities to know a child in the context of their family, such as Nate who recalled working with grandfathers, younger siblings and students to put chairs away at the end of a meeting. One respondent recalled chaperoning a waling field trip and observing one young man in sagging jeans, gold chains and baseball cap carry a classmate's three-year old brother on his shoulders when the child tired.

Frequent volunteer activities to work with the students in meaningful ways offered other opportunities to see students in new ways. Every week, one of the schools in this study engaged in enrichment activities that sometimes used the skills and knowledge of parent volunteers. Debra and Bertha had each served in the capacity of facilitators, and as a consequence had regular, lengthy contact with students. Debra recalled several times that her negative assumptions about students had been challenged, and changed. For example her surprise that middle school students would be kind and "gracious" to students with special needs, such as students on the autism spectrum.

Debra reflected that working with other children through weekly volunteer opportunities had the effect of "normalizing" her daughter. She saw her daughter's behavior, actions, and development were reassuringly similar to other middle school kids. Clearly moved by the experience of working directly with students, she continued to describe her astonishment at the students who regularly "helped out" in particular a young man named Jose. "He would always

clean up," she recalled, and by way of explaining her surprise at this, continued with evident affection:

> This is sort of sexist, but mostly because he was a boy. And I saw him as being one of the well-liked and popular boys, and the other well-liked and popular boys were really in the cooking academy to flirt with girls. And that wasn't why he wanted to be in there—he kind of wanted to be a chef, and he was into food, and he was just different.

Hillary described her perspective shift with a different student, a boy she described as a "tough, acting out kind of dude" who was frequently in trouble with teachers and peers. She set the stage for the experience: "[he had been sent out of class, and he was] sitting and talking to me and was…just…in…tears. And I couldn't get him to tell me what was wrong, and it broke my heart." Tearing up, she continued:

> part of me felt good that he even felt safe enough to even be there crying in front of me 'cause I figured that was something he probably couldn't do very often… that was not his normal persona by any means. So I just tried to leave the door open and let him know I cared, and other people cared and if he wanted to come back…and ask for help he should do that.

Later in the interview Hillary cycled back to the subject, returning to her concerns for that particular child. She theorized that he was being pressured to join a gang, or help deal drugs. She was still working at making sense of the situation, and was clear that experience of engaging with him and his pain had changed her. To explain and support this idea, she described how she had gone to visit a friend who lived in an idyllic environment, very different from the school's neighborhood. Her friend was fond of a popular television show where young, black men and boys were being inducted into drug sales. She told her friend:

> I don't want to watch this 'cause this is like I live around people who this is their real life and this is not entertainment for me.
>
> I remember it really upset me. This is not fun--it's disturbing to me 'cause I feel like I know kids and that's their life when they go home and I didn't want to watch it.

Her very real experience with this child made impossible the distancing, impersonal viewer location required for titillating entertainment. The theoretical had become personal.

Growth in awareness of perspective. Several respondents found that working with others in the cooperative afforded opportunities to notice and critically reflect on their own perspective suddenly made clear through juxtaposition with the ideas, and values of other school volunteers. While some participants described using these opportunities to clarify their thinking, others recounted a more dramatic shift, a change. Debra provides one example as she described having formed a broader, more inclusive conceptualization. In the following excerpt, her mind changes from value of following rules above all, to envisioning and understanding potential reasons for the contrary. She then struggles to incorporate her new, more open and flexible thinking.

> I'm such a wimp…not a wimp. I have an issue about following rules and there was this rule that you could not bring your child to the meeting. And so I would have this thing that I was not supposed to bring Lisa [her daughter]. In 6th grade I wasn't comfortable enough leaving her alone so I'd figure out something to do with Lisa and I'd get there and *there'd be a million kids* [her emphasis, fully exasperated].

The first sentence reveals evidence of her continued ambivalence, followed by the second sentence that suggests a tentative reframing wherein she accepts responsibility that following rules might be her perspective about the key issue—children should not be at school meetings. Next, she described a broadened, more inclusive understanding that included an alternate perspective—that having children present might be the best option:

> These other families can't make accommodations and would bring their kids, so there'd be a piece of me that would be annoyed and a piece that would feel like 'so what? They've got to bring their kids. They are being responsible parents; they aren't going to leave their kids alone.'

Debra was a person in the process of adopting a new perspective, but not fully having arrived revealed in the phrase: “piece of me,” suggestive of ambivalence. Debra went on to describe how this change of perspective felt once she engaged with the frustration, examined her assumptions that these other parents were simply being thoughtless and breaking the rules. With probing, Debra explained the resultant feelings from her reframe of the dilemma:

> It feels good in a way, but considering myself a liberal when I realize I have held this stereotype and that I didn’t even know that I had it… it feels like ‘growth.’ Like I just got stretched here and I needed to be stretched and I learned something.

Martha provided a second remarkably similar process beginning with an assumption (perspective), followed by an uncomfortable process of examination of that perspective, and resulting with a choice to change. In providing the background, Martha recounted that at her school, funds were allocated to teachers upon request. Teachers and parents had come to realize that this process was unfair, as the more popular or demanding teachers would get better resources than others. She and a committee were tasked with creating the policy and process to ameliorate the inequity. She recalled walking late and flustered into a board meeting, having abandoned some catastrophe at the office. As she recalled and told the story, her conflicted feelings were still evident: a high pressure job, a pending disaster, and the tug of obligation to fulfill a competing demand by attending the school board meeting. During the description that follows, Marta’s narrative slowed, her head tipped to one side, and her focus shifted inward. She struggled to explain her change of perspective.

> I walked in to the board meeting and sat down, and immediately I can hear that we’re talking about the new [policy and] process, and that someone was not following what they needed to do. One of the teachers…was not doing it right.
>
> I was so frustrated…but I decided that instead of jumping in I’m going to just observe and wait until I understood more, and the person next to me said something that Just. Changed. Everything.

She found herself challenged in her assumption that breaking the rule was intentional and wrong. She examined her perspective and relayed how it felt to release her frustration: “I just felt like this whole weight and yuckiness shifted off and out of me…like I understood what the problem was, and it was different than I’d thought and I could just let it go.” Marta became aware of her assumption and perspective: that one should never break policies and rules. She discovered however, that there are times when rules might justifiably be broken, and seemingly simple issues are not always actually simple. Further, she found the feelings associated with a broadened perspective satisfying. Marta returned to her discovery of the usefulness in observation and listening for understanding several times during the interview.

Several more participants related experiences of discovery that occurred wrestling with thorny and complex challenges that they confronted in working with others, and the resultant need to examine what had been a tacit assumption, from which stemmed a shift in perspective. Frida explained: “I have had to really see things from another parent or teachers’ point of view—one very different from my own and that is always a healthy and helpful exercise…not easy, but important!” Bertha suggested that when working in a cooperative, it is essential to hear and consider opposing perspectives, as this enhances options for reframing and action. She said: “It’s like there’s not one answer to a problem and being able to listen to what other people have to offer and say yes, that would fit my style” proved helpful.

Hillary laughingly recalled working with: “[participants from] different backgrounds coming at things with *really* different perspectives. But it wasn’t always comfortable.” As with the other participants, she underscored that while useful, these processes are seldom easy. Jessica felt that her experience as a parent among other similarly empowered parents was helpful in guiding her work on the board. She said “I think once we heard a problem…[we] could look at it

from both sides and the other person can look at it from both sides and [realize] that [the problem] isn't cut and dried, yes and no…" She described examining her perspective: "I had to say to myself, now wait, step back and ask… [was] I was reacting [like this] because that's how I was raised?"

Nate also noted the need to recognize multiple perspectives. Regarding his service on the board of directors, he said: "I learned that… no issue is black and white. Once you get three or four people involved there are that many reasons for every decision. [Emphatically, and with laughter] And usually there are more reasons than there are people." Recalling one particular board discussion that impacted a child and his parent, Nate wondered how the child would be made to understand that his mom was right within their family structure, but the board had to make a decision that went counter to the parent's wish—her "rightness". Nate shook his head and asked: "How do you tell a kid we're both right and we're both wrong?"

It was remarkable to note how for many parents, a similar process unfolded: each encountered an uncomfortable situation, examined a tacit assumption they had formed, realized that an assumption was a perspective rather than "truth", and decided to change. Each acted upon that decision with concrete action.

Growth in compassion and empathy. This code exists in close relation to the code above, Growth in Awareness of Perspective. Working from reference to an online dictionary (http://dictionary.cambridge.org) compassion is defined as a feeling of pity and concern for the sufferings of others, and empathy as the ability to feel the feelings of others. Both are built upon an awareness of self-compared-to-other, and hint at awareness of one's initial perspective, and resultant change toward a more compassionate and empathic perspective. Jessica recalls her change, and the factor—possibly proximately to diverse others, explored later in this chapter as

the difference that enabled it. Ties to these next observations are also found in "context of community" code description.

Jessica said:

> I think I learned compassion. Before [the coop school experience], I was more quick to judge people. Not that I'd say anything but…I had certain stereotypes…a lot of that was dispelled at [the coop]. [I had] the opportunity to work with so many people from different backgrounds, and different walks of life...different socioeconomic levels.

Ivana's comments explicitly describe the change. She began with her initial frustration about parent participants failing to fulfill their volunteer requirements, then paused. Her voice mirroring her shock, she shook her head, recalling: "A lot of [parents or guardians] had difficult lives: work full time, don't have enough money and now [they're] supposed to volunteer? *Besides* [emphasis hers]?" She continued: "I remember one student whose mom's boyfriend pulled a knife [on her], and when you hear about this going on in the house? And the mom is going to think, 'oh yeah, I was supposed to do some *Xeroxing* at the *school'*?" Dismay at the girl's circumstances still stung.

Nate recalled an experience where he took an opportunity to right an injustice. He recalled a boy named Devon [not his real name]. Devon's mother, Tricia [not her real name] had described herself as "retarded"—not in a misguided, joking sense, but actually. Nate fondly recalled Tricia's somewhat disconnected conversational style and sweet personality. He explained that he and she were frequent yard supervisors, and he had gathered the story of her life through conversations over many lunch breaks. She and Devon lived in a small apartment complex with loud neighbors who came and went all night long, and Tricia hypothesized that they dealt drugs. While the boy was just eleven years old, it appeared to Nate that in important ways, Devon undertook the role of parent in their small family. One morning while dropping his

son at school, Nate paused as he often did to talk with students and parents. He noticed Devon arrive looking upset:

> You see kids who had lost their best friend? He'd looked like that—it was his bike [it had been stolen and Devon's mother was certain that the neighbors took it]. I asked Devon to describe which bike he had so if I saw someone on it I could tell the police.
>
> So I [bought the bike, and] just…dropped it off to his house and told him to make sure he rode safely. The teacher who had him came up and gave me a big hug and said 'his attitude has improved so much.'

While Nate was a frequent school volunteer, he also routinely loaded up his minivan with kids, arranged and paid for outings such as bowling and pizza after school. In some cases other families reciprocated, but measures of low socio-economic status for this school show approximately 65% were at or below the poverty level, and many families were not able to afford luxuries such as these. Nate recalled his memories of the outings without a hint of rancor, and spoke as if he enjoyed the excursions as much as the children. It may be that Nate was an individual who brought a developed sense of compassion and feelings of empathy to the schools, rather than undergoing this change—yet the stories he told throughout his interview revealed a remarkably generous nature that combined with opportunity at the cooperative charter school to make much more than the sum of either part.

Theme Two: Being in Community

This theme focuses on respondent's revelations concerning the second study question: "What events or experiences do they [participants] perceive as having contributed to these changes?" Overlap occurred between this and the prior central theme, such as the previously recounted experiences of both Nate and Hillary. I have, however, made every effort to parse experiences as finely as possible so that the experiences represented by the following codes focus on context more closely. Codes emerging from transcripts include: (a) Challenges Within the

Cooperative Experience, including subcategories for impact on family life, lack of expertise, and meetings (b) Community, (c) Experience with Diversity, and (d) Access to and Equal Power With Teachers.

Challenges within the cooperative experience. On reviewing the parent responses to the survey question, I grew concerned, as very few negative responses appeared. In reflection and discussion with colleagues, possible explanations emerged. The respondent group may have been self-selecting, in that those who did not find meaning, or may have had negative experiences did not respond to the survey. The wording of the survey question may have steered parents toward more positive responses concerning their participation. Interestingly, one multi-year cooperative parent participant framed her responses as "pro" and "con". Following her lead, I added a code for "Challenges" and attached that possibility to all individual codes that follow. In reviewing responses, several subcategories emerged including: Impact on family life, Lack of expertise of volunteers, Challenges in working with a volunteer pool, and Meetings.

Impact on family life. Many participants complained that volunteer work impacted family life, taking time away from that which they could spend with their children. In reference to the school volunteer demands on he and his wife, Larry's succinctly commented that it was "Sucking us dry." He explained that they both had "big jobs," defined later as demanding professional work requiring long hours. He used the telling word "sacrifice" to explain their decision to send their child to the school, referring to the volunteer requirements placed on families. He followed with the explanation that time spent in volunteering was time away from family.

Other respondents mentioned similar challenges, and each focused on the time it took to attend meetings and attend to other school related responsibilities. Ironically, the commitments to "family" that the volunteers were determined to hold took time away from their families and in

these several examples created internal conflict. First, Frida described her involvement as "consuming and intense." She reflected that she felt "so busy 'being there' for my kids that I was not truly there for them." Jessica, too, recounted demands that were acute for her as a single mother of three, but acknowledged benefit as well. She suggested that her participation and the school requirements enabled her to demonstrate her values to her children, including a commitment to education:

> Sometimes I'd feel bad because I'd have to leave the kids to go to board meetings, but [my children] understood that. I would explain that I'm not doing this for me, I'm doing it so I can make sure [they were] going to a good school and are safe.

Lack of expertise. Frida voiced concerns about parents making decisions that may have been better made by professionals with training, such as in the field of Human Resources. Many respondents commented on the want of educational expertise in cooperative charter school board leadership. Frida reflected: "Having parents in charge of personnel issues—there's some potential conflict of interest, and I don't think the teachers need to be beholden to parents' ideas of what should happen in the kids' education"--an opinion mirrored by Bertha. Frida suggested the cooperative would have benefited from a formal administration, a model that had not yet developed during her tenure at one of the schools. She felt that in addition to providing expertise a school leader might have helped to "keep the continuity from year to year and for the staff and training to keep the coherence in vision."

As one of the school's founding parents, Frida recalled challenges stemming from the myriad development requirements including: "infrastructure for ongoing aspects for everything from record keeping to admissions to hiring and personnel to curriculum…so many layers of things that needed to be established." She lamented with a sigh that she and her founding partners "did not have the experience in that realm to know how to do that most effectively." While these

voids of expertise must have been formidable, it was into these spaces that volunteers treaded—sometimes with trepidation, sometimes with curiosity and enthusiasm. Clearly, if experts were in place the opportunities would not have been.

Ivana stood out as one example more closely self-identified with the trepidation camp. She had prior experience in leadership roles, but said that her work at the school was sometimes a struggle. She recalled: I'd always had much, much less responsibility," Her former work had been more clear, and directive, or working under direction of others. In her words: "here, this is what you do exactly with this payroll stuff'…or "'this is how you fill out these forms.'" She contrasted her work at the school, asserting many times in different wording that her work was overly challenging. She invented a new phrase for her experience as a founding board member: "starting-something-newness," linking the work with the words "creative" and "creating".

She said a lot of her work involved "things I'd never done before." Her list included "writing or proofing grants…managing paperwork as we went along… organizing and supervising volunteers…and constant phone calling [to acquire information]." In describing how the responsibility felt, she said: "It was extremely hard for me. I felt very stressed the whole two years I worked there and some toward the end of creating it." When asked why, she declared a strong preference for keeping order and creating systems for organization. She lamented that she "couldn't really have it that way." She recalled that the stakes were high, as failure to correctly complete and submit forms to the department of education resulted in significant consequences: "they don't pay you for that month"—meaning the school would not receive money to meet payroll and rent, and myriad other demands in school operation. In effect, failure to make the right move may have caused the entire enterprise to fail—quite a burden for her and one that she had not foreseen.

Working with a volunteer pool. Ivana was in a position to organize and disseminate work to volunteers. She described the struggle: "teachers you hire, and parents, you get what you get". While some parents were professionals such as plumbers or attorneys, others were recent immigrants, uneducated or inexperienced in work outside the home. She recalled asking herself "what kind of work can we give [this person]? The windows are dirty…it was hard to match [appropriate work with volunteers]." She winced in embarrassment when she recalled working with a volunteer to whom she had given a task that required basic literacy, yet she found to her surprise that the woman could not read. She recalled that while she "felt bad about [assigning this task]…I had a pile of scratch paper that we could use the other side of [and I] gave her the task of putting a line across the side we weren't going to use."

Ivana's internal conflict between two opposing possibilities: a need to have critical work carefully completed in opposition with her growing empathy about the challenges families suffered. She recounted several recollections that expanded her understanding of the circumstances families struggled under, including violence, poverty, and substance addiction. While these all stand as examples of the difficulty in using volunteer labor, they also provide examples of the potential of working with diverse others, in this case defined as those with very different life experience. The recollection of this experience and the manner in which it was relayed suggested a growth in empathy resulting from this participants' awareness of another's experience—quite different from her own life--and referenced previously in this study.

Karl, a participant with experience working in the cooperative structure spanning many years, complained that comments in meetings revealed ignorance about the concept of participation. He suggested that the complexities and responsibilities associated with cooperative structure merited attention. He wondered if training ought to be required for incoming parents,

stressing the importance of thinking about the good of the whole, rather than just one's self and one's child. He added appreciative comments regarding the structure, echoing the thoughts of others who noted aspects of the cooperative school structure, like "community", a concept that turned up so frequently it earned a code and will be explored in a subsequent section.

Meetings. As suggested in the table above, mandatory meetings were referenced in the transcripts of seven participants, in both positive and negative recollections. This section begins with an exploration of negative aspects as reported by participants, and then reviews positive comments. Comments included the challenge of attending one monthly meeting for all members, and two or more monthly meetings for board members—a group well represented among the participants in this study. Five of the participants recalled meetings with wincing trepidation, if not cheerful hostility. Hillary, coming from an executive business background recalled: "it was…painful to go through the process of helping people understand things like [the importance of] precedent." She continued to explain:

> You know there was an upside and a downside of all those parents having a voice. [laughing]… They have a voice; ***and*** they have a voice [more laughter]…you had a lot of people who wanted to be engaged and who had an opinion, so you had to find the middle ground. Sometimes you just wanted people to shut up and make a damned *decision* [more laughter]! I don't want to go to another damn board meeting that will last two hours!

Abby contrasted the cost and benefit balance of meetings. When asked to describe challenges in cooperative participation she immediately said: "process," and continued to describe meetings: "It's a two edged sword because that was what I liked about it was process. But I got a little frustrated with process, we had to talk about it and talk about it [in a gesture of impatience with both palms up, she slapped the back of one hand with the palm of the other, laughed and finished] I just want to *do* this!" She bemoaned "everybody has got to get their two cents in on it--and their opinion."

Clara recollected that at the school the meetings were: “complaint, complaint, complaint. Yes we want to hear you, but I never thought to use the whole meeting of people standing up and saying this is what is wrong with the school.” Based on her experience working with volunteers in non-profit institutions, she felt that meetings should be an opportunity “to announce…[and] share what has been done, but not [to] turn it into a gripe fest in front of the group.” She felt that much of the work should have been done in committee and then shared out. Conversely, although Eliza wondered about a more efficient meeting approach, she had a generally positive recollection of the meetings, and said: “we ran a pretty tight ship.” Karl expressed further frustration that some parents did not see the benefit in coming to meetings. He acknowledged that meetings were sometimes long, and various points may have been “belabored”; nevertheless, he maintained a conviction that participation was important.

While the frustration came up for some respondents as described above, meetings comprise one key aspect of a cooperative school, and many respondents had favorable descriptions. This section will explore positive impressions, and what these might suggest about the context of a cooperative charter school. Nate described an image comprised of sight and sound that he recalled from the monthly, mandatory all-school meetings. His thoughts are suggestive of an intangible, possibly inadvertent, and unexplored benefit to meetings:

> It all took place on a basketball court, with folding chairs and the acoustics that go with that. One of the things I remember fondly, was at the end of one of these meetings—we had 150 students so we had roughly 150—300 people get up and put away their chairs. It was like an ant colony: everything was working. And there would be grandpas or kids helping push the [chair-carrying] carts around—but all the chairs got put back and all the people smiled and said ‘oh hi, you’re so-and-sos mom’ and they all felt like they were doing something good for the school. It was a win. And more than anything it was the emotions that came out of it, not the results.

Nate was clear that putting away chairs may not immediately surface when one considers running a school or engaging in any important task. Yet as he so eloquently said, this small act was representative of much more, embodying life in a community, a sense of shared purpose, and belonging.

Ivana referenced the required aspect of the meetings, and acknowledged the challenge. She summed what may prove a humble, yet important ingredient to the apparently desired, life sustaining experience that is "community." She said: "Even being *forced* to go to a monthly parent meeting, I mean you see [all] the people and some of them are talking and you get to know them a little bit." Hillary, began with expressions of frustration concerning the length of meetings, and upon reflection, she included:

> but still recognizing these were all people who chose to put their children in a school that required a degree of involvement… they really wanted their kids to be in a good safe place where they were going to learn. In the end that was the thing we all had in common and that was the place you had to try to figure out how to get past all the differences.

Again, a participant recounts a sense of shared purpose, and adds the experience or opportunity to be with potentially different others.

Abby spoke of her experience in two different cooperative schools and recalled a participant who "would just filibuster." She laughed and recounted how eventually she learned to appreciate his input: "he was intelligent, and he would make sense, and he would cite things that I thought were true and relevant—but it would be like –'it's 10:30 at night, and I want to go home! Can't we just DO this thing?'" Abby continued, affirming her "respect for all those different people—having respect and like--'I hadn't thought of it that way'". She appreciated "…this community—this movement, whatever you want to call it. They [participants] weren't taking it

lightly, they weren't just letting someone else do the work; they weren't just letting the vote go unchallenged."

While each of the examples above carry overtones of appreciation for the process of the meetings, two participants clearly articulated support for a degree of inefficiency in meetings—suggesting perhaps that the *process* rather than *outcome* was important to these participants. Abby recounted how recently participants at one cooperative school had endeavored to make meetings efficient, succeeding with unforeseen--and in her view--unfortunate consequences. An alternative meeting model advocated by Clara earlier in this section calls for committees to gather information, debate ideas, and present to the wider community for an up or down vote. However, according to Abby, the efficient process resulted in "[the participants losing] our voice." Returning to her comment about a "double edged sword" in reference to benefits and challenges that come with cooperative participation, her comments and the observations of the participants above suggest an inverse relationship between efficiency and community.

These notions are affirmed and explored in great detail by organizational theorists and authors such as O'Toole (1993). He locates the values of efficiency and community on opposing ends of a compass, suggesting that a balance is vastly preferable to dominance of value over the other. Meg Wheatley, an organizational theorist argues persuasively about the human needs for productivity and community, drawing parallels between the new science of quantum physics, and chaos theory as a means of understanding the role of relationships, and our interconnections. She draws insights on non-linear networks and self-organizing systems—and speaks of the human need for community in every realm of life.

Experience of being in community. "Community" was frequently referenced and described directly and indirectly. I offer a working definition that emerged from participant

interviews: engagement with others in work toward a common goal. Webster's dictionary mirrors those concepts and elaborates: "a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals", also: "joint ownership or liability" placing these ideas "in the context of social values and responsibilities." The desire for community accounted for comments during interviews from nearly every respondent, and appeared to weave through many of the individual codes. Abby stated: "I liked being involved in my children's lives—I like community, you know? I was a stay-at-home mom during that time. I liked being a part of the community." She said she continues to enjoy friendships established from her cooperative school experience—an assertion echoed by many other respondents.

Clara suggested that in addition to establishing two close friends at the school during her participation, she networked with other volunteers enabling her to further develop her career. She recounted: "Of course you grow through relationships and working with people." Clara summed her assessment: "So that's what can happen when you work for a place like [the school] that's not just focused on your own job—that's community!" In reference to the shared goals that define community, Eliza said: "everybody pulled an oar…it was really a community effort."

Gertrude served as a Director of one of the schools in this study. She began her involvement as a parent, describing her living situation as "isolated" prior to enrolling her child. Her story underscored this assessment, as she had moved across the country with her husband and small child, leaving friends and family. Her young family had relocated to a very rural setting, and her husband needed to use the car they shared to get to work. Out of necessity she and her child were left with limited public transportation. Gertrude visited a cooperative preschool, and found the environment so inviting for both her child and herself that she was willing to pack up her child and ride a bus for 45 minutes each direction, arriving 30 minutes

before to the school opened. She and her child sat in a coffee shop prior to start of each school day.

Gertrude was a self-described introvert; a trait she said mirrored her physical isolation in their new rural home. It was a difficult time for her, and might have been intolerable if not for the lifeline the school offered. She felt that her cooperative experience had quite literally changed her life, setting her feet on a path that would become, with support, her vocation of educational leader. Connecting her experience with that of a struggling parent she had just described she gratefully recalled:

> co-op people recognize those who simply need more assistance and tend to fill that void, support and lift them up, and that's where you see the transformation come up. I [was] certainly in that space, though probably in a little higher functioning level, but —timid, self-reserved—certainly not meeting my full potential and with the support of other parents found myself. And I've seen it time and time again...where these kind of fragile, needy parents find their path.

From the perspective of a leader within such an organization Gertrude provided a thoughtful examination of the differences in leading a coop versus work in a Traditional Public School. She stated: "A cooperative by its virtue has to have buy-in and cooperation in terms of making decisions. I see myself more as a support person of the organization rather than someone who drives the organization." Returning to her own trajectory from parent volunteer to school leader she described her path:

> The more I engaged with people I didn't know well the easier it became and then it kind of spread, and I gained self-confidence because I was doing things that I didn't think I could do before. I would get feedback that 'oh, you're doing a great job'.

As was the case with others, the success and support lead to an increase in confidence, and a willingness to take on other challenges. She cited the support within her community as critical

for her growth, assured that if she were "knocked down, somebody's going to be there to scoop [her] back up if."

> This work has definitely been a growth experience. I was reserved, introverted, and inclined to do whatever I needed to do, but then be really closed. This cooperative piece--where if you do it whole heartedly you become part of a much bigger family, and it's definitely a family with not necessarily really good boundaries [laughing]--they are *not* going to let you keep to yourself. They are going to ask you places, ask things of you, and keep you going. They are going to believe in you.

Every parent in this study made positive reference to the experience of being in community, and most often implicated it as central to the benefits of a cooperative school. Further, many expressed a desire for their children to have a sense of community at their school and these parents said this was key in selecting the school from the outset. While several parents spoke of their trepidation in signing on for the many commitments cooperative schools require, they tended to share a desire for a community feel for their children, citing this characteristic as important in their choice. Parents were surprised to find that the cooperative offered a community-feel for the parents as well, managing to support their family's needs for a sense of belonging. Marta's words stand as illumination in the following passage.

> So in the beginning I said that the school was for my kids? Well it's not. It's also for *me.* I like to know that I belong, and that I can feel [it]. When I volunteer, go to meetings and spend my time doing things for the school it's like I feel belonging. It's not like I lose something…I gain.

Experience of diversity. Participants found that working with diverse others stood out as central to their experience, and became a critical influence from which other changes and growth sprang. Most of those who discussed their experience in diversity claimed a background that included long experience in attending diverse schools as youngsters, and working in the diverse environment that comprises the charter school's location. Yet for many participants, the experience of diversity in the service of a common goal with diverse others proved important

providing a spring board from which other codes emerged such as “Growth in awareness of perspective,” or “Growth in compassion and empathy.”

Eliza relayed the memory of her participation in making tamales with a group of Latino women for a series of school fundraising efforts. Her interview for this study took place four years later, yet she returned to the story several times, speaking thoughtfully, and working hard at articulating the meaning she gleaned from the experience. She recalled the day’s work was like a party as opposed to an onerous chore with participants happily engaged in the laborious and time-consuming process. After describing her pleasure in the experience of making tamales with the group, she contrasted her own family framing conceptions with that of the families she had come to know at the school:

> my family isn’t from around here and Dan’s is, but the closeness of the family [compared to the Latino community with whom she was engaged in this project] isn’t the same. Aunts and uncles aren’t involved in raising my children. So [our family is] kind of an independent unit [whereas] other people [the Latinos with whom she’d worked] had a much broader base of what they would consider family.

This experience of working with others from diverse backgrounds appeared to cause Eliza to consider her framing of “family.” She took this opportunity to explore her expectations, definitions and boundaries as a construct, rather than a truth. This may have lead to a “growth in understanding of perspective.” The evident pleasure and new understandings from the experience had stayed with her. Eliza contrasted this experience with volunteering at her children’s previous traditional public school where work often took place in smaller, more ethically and socioeconomically homogeneous groups engaged in leadership. She explained: “It was the same seven people who did everything.” Her experience at the cooperative charter was different, and she contrasted one result of this difference: leadership opportunities for a variety of individuals for “pitching in”:

> this [cooperative charter] was a different environment where everybody had to pitch in. There were required hours, but it seemed everybody was more open to it—they weren't afraid of taking leadership roles or helping out any way they could--that was very different.

Following and underscoring Eliza's observation, this cooperative school appeared to offer leadership opportunities to all stakeholders, including the group of Latina women who envisioned, organized and implemented this fundraising activity.

Several participants recalled a desire for their children to experience ethnic, cultural and economic diversity at their school. For example Debra said: "I saw C [her daughter's former school] as a kind of insular community and I wanted her to have [an] experience at a school that was more diverse." Describing the result from the experience for her daughter, she continued: "It was really eye-opening for her to have that exposure". Although Debra was one of several parents with extensive experience and appreciation for diverse environments prior to enrolling her daughter in the school, it became clear that the experience was beneficial for Debra. Reflecting on the experience of attending meetings, she described her appreciation for the diverse others with whom she worked:

> [The Latino families] …seemed to be more committed and invested than the Caucasian families were. That was not all, but in general. There were a lot of families who would skate by, but with [Latino] families there was a commitment to their child's education.

With minimal prompting, Debra continued, explored and owned her assumptions:

> I think I probably had an underlying archetype or stereotype that there wasn't that much commitment to education in the Hispanic community. I don't know where I came up with that, but it was one of those weird beliefs that I had. And I think it was really eye-opening to me.

When asked to describe how it felt to have the experience of noticing her thinking and reflecting on it, she replied:

> It feels good in a way, but considering myself a liberal, when I realize I have held this stereotype and that I didn't even know that I had it, and to have it right in front of my face it feels like…growth. Like I just got stretched here and I needed to be stretched…I learned something.

Ivana described a major shift in her compassion and empathy as stemming from her work at one cooperative charter school. As a founder, employee and key support for the school she had daily experience with students and families in the school. Recall the story relayed in the section under "Growth in Compassion and Empathy", where Ivana traced a possible relationship between a mother's failure to complete a volunteer requirement (Xeroxing) with circumstances (boyfriend chasing mother with a knife). I would like to be clear that diversity is used to describe others from different backgrounds—not ethnicity alone, and this story in no way encapsulates the experience of all others. As the recollections of both Eliza and Debra make plain, participants grew from positive experiences with diversity.

Access to and equal power with teachers. Several respondents said that access to, and equality with teachers was an important benefit of a cooperative charter school. Eliza said:

> Because of the school's structure and philosophy, it made it easier to approach and work with teachers and administration. There was a sense of collaboration between staff and parents. We were part of the process of education, instead of looking in from the outside.

Bertha echoed this sentiment, discussing benefits that lasted beyond her family's time in a cooperative school. She said: "The coop allowed for frequent discussions with teachers about my children and direct involvement in academic achievements. This gave me confidence later as they went to high school to advocate for their needs and discuss their academic progress with the teachers and counselors". She reflected on the importance of this ability for her first child in particular, as he had special needs.

From a practical perspective, Eliza acknowledged that cooperative participation was beneficial in keeping close track of her children's teachers. She began with an appreciative comment about teachers in the cooperative charter school said:

> I think the teachers are a huge part of the cooperative school—more so than even in a regular school because they really have a leadership role much more so than in another school, because they are sort of the administration too, so the quality teachers makes a huge difference. You could tell the good ones from the bad ones much easier because they weren't kind of sheltered by the administration.

As is suggested in Eliza's remarks, in a cooperative charter school parents have an immediate, real-time view of just how effective teachers actually are. Eliza continued to discuss this opportunity, and recalled one particular teacher from that school who she did not care for. Her comments revealed these close observations on the abilities and challenges the teacher possessed. A second participant, Karl, shared his experience from working closely with teachers, and spoke appreciatively of a different benefit from this access: "personal relationships with teachers, and parents." He expressed this difference as an important distinction between a cooperative school and a traditional public school. Returning again to the perspective of a school founder, parent, and employee, Ivana voiced a similar appreciation for the cooperative school model:

> the fact that those of us starting the school could chose how to run it, and that we could by-pass a fair amount of the bureaucracy and red tape that's in the public schools was very important to me. And being able to [hire] our own teachers is huge, because the teachers are what make the school, and teachers are what make or break any school.

Summary

This chapter began with the participant profiles. Included were demographic information for the fourteen participants, such as gender, approximate age, ethnicity, and marital status. I

provided my reasoning for including the particular data presented, as in some cases this may have been obscure. For example including the number of children provides information on the span of time a family may have spent in the cooperative school, or the level of demand on that household's time. Either factor may have influenced the participant's experience.

Next I connected the method used to the results. As suggested in the Method chapter, the Charmaz method for conducting a Grounded Theory study encourages a fluid and recursive process, making changes to initial coding likely as researchers respond to new material. Coding changes in this study predictably followed, including the elimination of overly broad codes, and the clarification of others in response to continued coding, reflection and productive discussion with colleagues. Final coding included the foundational piece: "Experience of Being in Community", upon which were build "Growth in Confidence" and "Growth in Skills." On each of these building blocks were the most specific and complex: "Growth in Awareness of Perspective", "Growth in Compassion and Empathy", and "Experience of Working in Diversity." Final survey codes were described, and examples from surveys provided. This section concluded with an analysis and summary reiterated here: it appeared that participants may have experienced elements of adult learning in that they grew in awareness of their perspective, changed in response to working with diverse others, and described growth in compassion and empathy.

The survey purpose was two-fold: to gather respondents who were likely to have pertinent experience aligned to the research questions, and to prepare general, tentative codes that would guide analysis in the more in-depth interviews that followed. Such was the intent, and that structure proved helpful. Yet interviews, some as long as 4 hours in length, provided much more detail necessitating the addition of several codes and a scheme to sort codes into two, overarching themes: Increased Capacities and Experience of Being in Community. The

“Increased Capacities” theme included: Growth in Skills, Growth in Confidence, Seeing Others in New Ways, Growth in Awareness of Perspective, and Growth in Compassion and Empathy. The second theme, “Experience of Being in Community” included codes for the Benefits and Challenges of: Impact on Family, Lack of Expertise in the Volunteer Pool, and Meetings. Also included here were Experience of Being in Community, which merited its own code to highlight importance and provide adequate detail, Experience of Diversity, and Access to and Power Sharing with Staff.

Transcript excerpts accompanied each code and provided information for analysis. The first theme’s codes ranged from the simple: learning how to organize events, to the complex: reintegration of a participant’s personality based on the conflict between his career and deeply held, opposing convictions. Many examples for each code were offered, and many followed the spectrum outlined from simple to complex. While learning new skills may translate to attaining better employment—no doubt beneficial—the evidence pointed to significant, important changes that indicate growth and learning, and may signal adult development. These possibilities will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

Discussion and Conclusions

It is widely acknowledged that parent participation is among key educational strategies that support student learning (Senge et al., 2000). Researchers endeavor—without consensus—to illuminate the most effective practices (Epstein, 2005; Hill & Chao, 2009). Meanwhile, educators, parents, and policy makers disagree regarding efficacious approaches, or even the goal (Delpit, 1999; Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2008). Following the broad assumption that parent participation is critical—if misunderstood— what might we learn by looking at the effects of participation on parents? Might an understanding of the factors that supported their growth aide in constructing school models that furthered the learning of all? The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experience of adults who described change as an outcome of their engagement in a cooperative charter school environment. Two questions were explored: “How do parents who have identified personal changes as an outcome of their participation in a cooperative charter school understand and describe the changes?” And “What events or experiences do they perceive as having contributed to these changes?”

Overview

In this chapter, I provide key background, beginning with a review of site and participant selection and then explain the process used to gather data. I next offer a brief review of the grounded theory method, and present a substantive, *local* theory grounded in this study’s data. This grounded theory is specific to location and circumstances particular to the study’s site and participants, in contrast to a Grand Theory that would be more generally applicable. Findings of this study are then explained and explored within the grounded theory. Finally, I discuss the

grand theories with which my grounded theory is most aligned. Working from the broad to the specific these theories include: Kegan's "Orders of Consciousness" model, Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, Daloz's description of four contextual conditions that promote transformative learning in adults, and, finally, Heiftetz's exploration of "adaptive" as opposed to "technical" learning. Finally, I offer conclusions for the field of school leadership and suggest policies for social justice that emerged from this study's findings. I close with a description of my experience with conducting this study.

Background

Site selection. I made a purposeful decision to situate this study in two cooperative charter schools with the awareness that these sites offered unique influences that caused me to wonder what effects these influences might have on participants. Influences included access to high-level decision-making in the company of others from a variety of backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and varied ethnicities. Cooperatives require that participants volunteer, and in so doing they are regularly put into contact with one another: at student drop off and pick up times, membership, committee and board meetings, work parties and social events, offering repeated opportunities to interact with diverse others while focused on a common goal. I was curious about the result and how these volunteers felt about their experience, and what, if anything, they learned.

Participant selection. I used a survey to identify participants who indicated they had experienced "change," looking for examples of personal changes that might suggest challenge and that may have resulted in growth. Survey responses were used to determine which respondents to interview based upon the nature of their described changes. For example, if candidates felt their changes appeared unrelated to participation, they may not have been

selected. Further, survey responses were also used to craft interview questions with the goal of probing for significant change as an outcome of specific individual or, in several instances, common experiences described in surveys.

From among those who responded, twelve participants were selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Two other former parents from one of the cooperative charter schools, but who had not responded to the survey, were asked to participate in a pilot study so that I might gain experience in the interviewing process and insure reliability of the interview protocol. These interviews proved informative and fruitful and were included in this study, bringing the total of participants to 14. Final coding from surveys is detailed in chapter 4 and listed here: a) growth in the awareness of perspective; b) deeper experience of being in community; c) growth in skills; d) growth in empathy and compassion; e) growth in confidence; f) experience working in a diverse community.

Interviews. I conducted 14 semi-structured interviews and gathered over 100 pages of transcripts. Analysis of interview transcripts required the addition of new codes to those used for surveys in order to capture far richer data. Through constant comparison analysis, I sorted codes into two overarching themes. “Increased Capacities” included changes within the individual: a) growth in confidence; b) growth in compassion and empathy; c) seeing others in new ways; d) growth in awareness of perspective; e) growth in skills. The second theme was: “Community,” which encompassed interactions with the surroundings: a) challenges in a cooperative environment; b) experience of being in community; c) experience of diversity; d) access to and power sharing with staff; d) opportunities to develop new skills.

Methods: Development of a Grounded Theory

Creswell (2009) described grounded theory as a means of creating a "general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants" (p. 13). He explained that a substantive, grounded theory emerges from the sampling of groups or individuals toward revealing differences and similarities in the experience of participants. This method employs purposeful choices on site and participant selection; multiple stages of data collection; constant comparison and coding of data; and the drafting of memos, wherein a researcher takes notes concerning the meaning she makes as concepts, relationships, similarities or differences are revealed. Throughout this process, she refines ideas and relationships among codes. Next, codes are developed into themes as ideas become clear. Codes and themes are examined, and a grounded theory may emerge. The substantive, grounded theory that emerged from this study's findings follows, and then findings are reviewed and examined in comparison to Grand Theories that include the work of Kegan, Mezirow, Daloz, and Heifetz.

Substantive, Grounded Theory

The findings discussed in this section suggest that when parent volunteers engage in the higher-level requirements of a cooperative charter school they describe changes that the literature of adult development and learning has identified as "transformative." These changes include increased capacity to examine one's assumptions and honor multiple perspectives, a growth in empathy and compassion, and a deeper understanding of, and capacity for functioning in a diverse environment. Other important changes also accrued for some participants, such as increased self-confidence and learning required to address technical and adaptive problems (Heifetz, 1994). Simple, technical learning may include organizing an event, while complex

adaptive learning may involve leadership, advocacy, or the adoption of greater professional breadth.

The changes described above combine to suggest evidence of the following critical elements comprising a milieu that supported transformation in some participants:

1. Opportunities for support and mentoring from participants oriented toward an important common goal;
2. Opportunities to: interact with diverse others, test assumptions, and examine perspectives resulting in an expansion of compassion and *possibly* increased development;
3. Opportunities to learn skills in response to both technical and adaptive problems, in the service of the community.

The first element above includes access to and interactions with other parents, teachers, and school support staff in ways that are markedly different from most traditional public schools. A cooperative model at minimum invites, and often requires, active volunteering at many levels of engagement, ranging from janitorial service to board leadership. As new parents enter the school they are trained informally and formally to take on new roles and are given mentoring in both acquisition of new skills and, either directly or indirectly, in parenting. The connection between deeply held *values* surrounding parenting and education and doing useful work in the company of others appeared to be critical. The second component, opportunities to interact with diverse others, offered parents a chance to examine tacit assumptions, a factor that appeared to be essential in expanding their awareness of perspective. The third component was embodied by attendance and participation in meetings that included discourse in service of a common value or

goal, an important ingredient. An active commitment to education is assumed, as participation is mandatory in cooperatives.

Written as a statement, the substantive theory that emerged in this study follows: *Elements of a cooperative charter school that appear to be most central to experience of change and development of adaptive skills for adults are: a) a supportive, mentor-rich environment oriented toward a common goal; b) a diverse, collaborative community; c) opportunities to engage in high-level leadership afforded through the cooperative model.*

To elaborate, a sense of unity stemming from the "common goal" and emotional security stemming from the "mentor-rich" environment appeared to allow participants to acknowledge and challenge tacit assumptions that being in a diverse environment may surface. High-level leadership poses significant challenges, yet, when faced from a surround of unity and security, growth in adaptive capacities and technical skills may follow.

Findings

Challenges in coop participation were associated with *increase in compassion and empathy*, as those from privileged backgrounds came into contact with others who had experienced significant life challenges, including illiteracy, poverty, or family violence. Each of these factors also offered opportunities to *see others in new ways*—illuminating potential reasons for previously unfathomable behavior, such as failure to meet an obligation for serving volunteer hours. When a participant learned that violence in the home caused this behavior, the new understanding led to a *shift in perspective* and an *increase in compassion.* In some cases, seeing others in new ways took the form of a growth in appreciation for a commitment to education and a more inclusive understanding of what "family values" might include. For example, participants shared observations concerning their growth in awareness of deep commitment by those of

differing ethnic backgrounds to the value of education. A *lack of expertise in volunteer pool* provided an opportunity to learn, and some extended their *skills* by filling those needs in a way that one participant reported as being more comfortable, since efforts were voluntary. She described her sense that other volunteers and staff were less likely to be critical of her volunteer efforts than if she were on salary. She suggested that this freed her to try new challenges that she may have been reluctant to take had the work been for personal gain.

The relationship between *challenges* and *community* was linked for several participants, as the impact on family life vied with desires to be amongst the *community* rather than the isolation several parents reported feeling when enmeshed in the childrearing role. *Community* was also reported to offer benefits, as participants appreciated collaborative work toward a common goal, *mentoring* and supportive relationships that included peers, and teaching staff. *Awareness of perspective*, and *seeing others in new ways* appeared to support an increase in *compassion and empathy*. *Increase in skills* was most often associated with the code *Community*, again deriving from supportive or mentoring relationships and a common goal.

Participants claimed a *growth in self-confidence*. Several participants described mentoring from teachers and other adults on cooperative school campuses as supportive of increases in confidence. Individuals used this confidence to take action as they continued to advocate for their children throughout high school. Some participants asserted that increases in confidence served as a spring-board to further their careers, and others chose to advance their formal education as a result of their work in the school environment.

Some participants referred to a *growth in skills*. Participants' descriptions of skill changes appeared as a spectrum that ranged from "technical learning," such as how to organize a fundraiser to more complex learning suggestive of the "adaptive learning" described by Heifetz

(1994). He suggested a distinction between “adaptive” and “technical” problems that require different kinds of learning. Technical problems require learning to solve “routine problems” (1994, p. 8) as opposed to learning that demands innovation, labeled “adaptive learning.” Heifetz defined this as: “learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for the and the reality they face” (p. 22, 1994). Heifetz stressed that adaptive work must result in a change in beliefs, behaviors, and values. Kegan and Lahey (2011) associate Heifetz’s adaptive work with transformative learning and developmental growth.

Many participants described the struggle and effort adaptive work required. One such example was Marta, who recounted her learning regarding the value in observing and listening prior to assuming full understanding. Developing these learning strategies enabled her to understand the reasons for another’s previously unfathomable failure to follow a policy that she had crafted. In choosing to observe and listen, she found that one of her values— fair distribution of resources underscored by good policy— could coexist with good reasons for someone’s failure to follow that policy. Further, she expressed a sense of pleasure at realizing that her assumptions were wrong. A second participant described a sense of release in discovering her assumptions about diverse others were incorrect. Many parents reflected upon the beneficial learning stemming from contact with other perspectives, such as Frida who recalled: “I have had to really see things from another parent or teacher’s point of view—one very different from my own. That is always a healthy and helpful exercise, not easy but important!”

Introduction to Grand Theories

I will compare the findings from this study with four grand theories, including: Kegan’s theory of adult development, Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning, Daloz’s theory on

transformative learning within the context of social responsibility, and, finally, Heifetz's theories on adaptive and technical skills and capacities. Working from the most broad and encompassing, I start with Kegan, then move to Mezirow to explain the process of transformational learning, then to Daloz to explore the experience of participants through a lens of growth in a community. I conclude with Heifetz to explore the kinds of changes described, as particular to adaptive versus technical skills.

Kegan: Constructive Developmental Theory

Background. Robert Kegan (1994) proposed a series of five increasingly complex stages during which a person's meaning-making evolves from simple to complex. To understand Kegan's theory, I find it helpful to put his terminology of Subject and Object in concrete terms. Subject is *here*—close, immediate, unseen as separate-from-self; and object is over *there*—external to the self and observable. Kegan declares: "we 'have' object; we 'are' subject" (p. 53, 2000). To shift from one developmental level to the next, we must first be able to take that to which we were most recently "subject" and examine it; in doing so, it has shifted to "object" at which point we have awareness of it. Kegan theorized that change from one level to the next happens in response to both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. This, Kegan suggests, is a process of developing qualitatively different and more effective ways of being in the world.

He argues that these changes appear to have discernable plateaus with common characteristics. Changes are not continuous, but they are sequential, and each level contains specific capacities. When, or if, a person develops in this way, she will incorporate new, more flexible and comprehensive ways of knowing. Kegan describes this shift as a qualitative shift from subject to object. One's prior "knowing" is subsumed into a broader, more complex

"knowing." The most prominent developmental change for adults in Western society is from the Socialized, third level, to the fourth level, the Self-Authoring Mind (Kegan 1994).

Internalizing others' definitions, expectations, and values shapes the socialized mind. Alignment and personal definitions spring from that with which the self is identified. Becoming Socialized is *the* developmental challenge of the adolescent and is understood as achieving adulthood. By contrast, the Self-authoring mind is able to take perspective on the social imperatives and make independent decisions and choices using an internally-generated value system. This developmental plateau includes individuals who are capable of personal authority, self-direction, and the creation and regulation of personally set boundaries— a set of capacities associated with Modernism.

Kegan's fifth stage is called the Self-transforming mind and includes abilities to reflect on one's ideology and personal authority with distance, aware of its partiality and open to contradiction and dialectic. Empirical studies (Kegan, 1994) have demonstrated that few individuals reach this state, and it will not be further examined in this study. Rather I will illuminate the experiences and self-descriptions of participants that appear to align with Kegan's theories concerning an adult's developmental movement between the Socialized mind and the Self-authoring mind.

Evidence. Examples from transcripts illustrate the learning that participants experienced within the cooperative charter school. The more profound illustrations include experiences and meaning made by Debra, Ivana, and Marta. The table below uses evidence from chapter 4, used here to illustrate. Participants are identified by initials; D for Debra, I for Ivana, and M for Marta. The first row includes Kegan's developmental level and definition, and each lower level provides examples of what may represent participants' movement from one level to the next.

Table 6

Examples of Evidence Suggestive of Developmental Shift From Three Participants.

Socialized mind → *Played by rules.* *Defined by relationships.* *Understood different points of view may exist, but held her perspective as "correct."*	***Learning →***	***Self-authoring mind*** *Able to have multiple roles and relationships.* *Able to self-regulate and chose from among values and ideals.* *Self-direct, and self-reflective in that she reflecting on her thinking, and changing her mind.*
D.: Secured childcare for her child to obey rule to leave kids at home during meetings—experienced frustration toward parents who didn't "play by rules."	Struggled to make sense of her feelings, interpretations, and understandings of both her own perspective and possible reasons for the actions of others.	Realizes that Latino parents are behaving as "good" parents, as they could not afford childcare choosing not to leave their children at home alone. M. sets her own frame, and finds it more inclusive, complex, and functional.
I.: Experienced frustration with families who didn't fulfill volunteering requirement—who did not follow the rules, and did not fulfill the ideal.	Discovered more about the life experience of community members from different backgrounds. Learned of recent traumatic experiences in the home might explain lack of attention to mundane volunteer task. Reflects on her limited thinking and compassion, and changes her mind.	Changes her evaluation of the situation, recognizes conflicts between ideals (getting work done) and values (surviving, continuing to send child to school) Becomes more empathic and compassionate upon learning about the experience of others.
M.: Frustrated with those who did not follow carefully developed policy regarding requests for classroom expenditures.	Sought to direct her understanding of the situation by observing, listening, and gathering information. Described initial frustration, and subsequent release as her understanding expanded.	Performed an evaluation of the situation, realized that her subjective understanding could expand to understand that of another.

While there were other examples from participants, these stood out as the most persuasive. Their initial thinking appeared rooted in the Socialized mind in column one; their learning is described in column two, and resolution providing compelling evidence of a broader understanding having been reached in column three. The third column provides examples that are consistent with the Self-authoring mind. Reading the table from left to right, examples show participants describing an unexamined subjective perspective as the starting place—firmly in keeping with Kegan's third order Socialized mind. Other characteristics from the third order include an inability to weigh opposing perspectives and chose from among values and ideals and a firm commitment to following rules as defined by the social surround. Participants moved toward a learning phase, where they found sufficiently compelling challenges to their perspective. Next, they described a tentative reframing, where they directed their own understanding of the encountered situation. Outcomes included a broader understanding, demonstrating the ability to widen a conceptual frame and to understand events, people, and actions in a qualitatively different way.

I will compare Kegan's Grand Theory with the grounded theory that emerged from this study, using only the first example presented above in the interest of brevity. This experience suggests that the shift, or change was from the Socializing toward the Self-Authorizing mind, within the surround of a cooperative charter school.

Table 7

A Possible Shift From Kegan's Third to Fourth Order.

Initial Understanding	**Learning & Questioning**	**Reframing**
D.: Secured childcare for her child to obey rule to leave kids at home during meetings—experienced frustration toward parents who didn't "play by rules." Evident embrace of the primacy of rules.	Struggles to make sense of her feelings, interpretations, and understandings of both her own perspective and possible reasons for the actions of others. Seeks to resolve what she observed with what she assumed.	Realized that Latino parents were being "good" parents, as they could not afford childcare and chose not to leave their children at home alone. M. re-set her frame, and found it more inclusive, complex, and functional.

Debra experienced her awareness of her rule-preferenced perspective, a challenge in her thinking brought about by contact with the diverse others and supported by her appreciation for a supportive community oriented toward a common goal. She appeared to have navigated territory between the third and fourth order of consciousness. Returning now to this study's grounded theory: *Elements of a cooperative charter school that appear to be most central to experience of change and development of adaptive skills for adults are: a) a supportive, mentor-rich environment oriented toward a common goal; b) a diverse, collaborative community, and c) opportunities to engage in high-level leadership afforded through the cooperative model.*

Debra appears to have experienced growth in adaptive capacities as illustrated by the example above. She reframed the issue, broadened her perspective, and opted for a self-directed understanding reflective of her values over those provided by the social surround. These are traits that are congruent with Kegan's theory, and this example offers an inside glimpse of the participant's experience of engagement in the process that signals a shift from the third order to that of the fourth. It appears that the grounded theory offered in this study and Kegan's theories are congruent.

Mezirow: Transformational Learning Theory

Background. Mezirow and others (2000) focused on the process of change itself, using the term *transformative learning,* which he defined as the:

> Process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (Pp. 7- 8)

He contends that a meaning structure is a person's frame of reference, derived from conscious and examined or unconscious, tacit interpretations of experience. He suggests that our point of view and understanding determine what we see and, importantly, how we see it. He contends that most often, our point of view and understanding are unconscious, making real change difficult. He and his colleagues offer, however, that following a "disorienting dilemma" (explained below) some individuals may reflect upon conscious or unconscious assumptions by questioning tacit assumptions from which spring beliefs, values, and understandings. This may lead to change, or growth of a special nature that Mezirow and others called "transformative learning." The disorienting dilemma sequence may feel apocalyptic, yet it may also happen quietly, over time (Cranton, 2006).

Evidence. To illustrate the sequence and provide evidence of possible congruency with my grounded theory, I offer Mezirow's steps, interspersed and illustrated by transcript quotes from Larry's interview.

1) A disorienting dilemma:

   "The psychic dissonance of working for an oil company at the same time as my environmental awareness continued to increase and my awareness of the hypocrisy of this company."

2) Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame:

   “I was more than I realized embarrassed by my work for [oil company]. "So I got so disillusioned"... "Disenchanted with the bad fit"

3) A critical assessment of assumptions:

   "Damn, it was like the stuff you did at work is stuff you can do in the community, and the things you are skillful at and the things you can be valued for don’t have to be things that you find distasteful. It doesn’t have to be just for money."

4) Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared:

   "You have something to give, and if you just want to be a volunteer, that’s going to make a difference." “I was realizing because I was contributing, that my skills were—that I learned in a place I didn’t love—that those skills were transferrable and applicable and worth having.”

5) Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions:

   Asks himself: "When’s the last time I really cared about what I was doing? at [school], I was facilitating a meeting but it mattered to me that I was facilitating a meeting of people who wanted to save a charter school. It mattered."

6) Planning a course of action:

   “you have to pick an organization and make it better…”[he changed his home] to be greener. “The next time I had to do it, I had to keep stretching myself--I had to be a leader.”

7) Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans:

   “So I’m working on these Environmental certificates… I’m thinking that maybe not the next time I change jobs or the time after that I’ll be working for a non-profit organization, or after I retire I’ll be fully committed to working for an organization that I believe in. I’m probably [going to finish in] summer or fall term I’ll end up with 2 certificates or professional sequences at B, each in environmental sciences.”

8) Provisional trying of new roles:

   “I went to the [city] council committee after doing a little net-working, and found a guy on the committee who was a man my wife had worked with and I told him that I needed to go to a public meeting and present. So I went to the committee and proposed solar panels ---spoke to the committee— and that was a direct outgrowth of the path I started walking at [the cooperative charter school].”

9) Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships:

   "I'm up for the challenge because I crossed the threshold as [Joseph] Campbell would say from being a volunteer, to being an activist and I crossed it at [the cooperative charter school]."

10) A reintegration into one' life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (Mezirow, p. 22, 2000):

   "You know how Jung talks about and Freud talks about compartmentalizing aspects of your personality to the point where it becomes diagnosable, it becomes schizophrenia? It happens to people in sub-acute ways and I think the way I was consciously and rationally partitioning my life at work and the real me when I worked at a place I found distasteful-- that started to break down over time. And one of the things—one of the gifts of doing that facilitating that committee at [the cooperative charter school] was it reintegrated my personality."

His disorienting dilemma stemmed from the juxtaposition of performing volunteer facilitation work to help craft a path through some difficult changes at one of the cooperative schools, then returning to his career in an industry that he found repugnant to his values. He compared his feelings stemming from each experience and discovered confusion, anger, guilt, and shame derived from the work for the oil company. Through his work for the school, he felt satisfaction, discovering new roles. He took action. He described his growth in confidence and a dawning awareness that his skills could be beneficial in service of a career that was in harmony with his values. He passionately recalled the "reintegration" of his personality through joining his values with productive action. He credited these challenges and changes to the opportunity presented through the cooperative charter school.

Debra experienced a similar trajectory, beginning with a repeated, if somewhat quietly frustrating, series of disorienting dilemmas brought about by Latino parents who broke the rules by bringing their children to evening meetings. Within the environment of these school community meetings, she examined this disconnect between her commitment to follow rules

with the behavior of other families who apparently had no such commitment and accordingly did not adhere to rules. Over time, however, she realized that these families had an equally significant, value-based commitment to take good care of their children and attend the meetings as required. This encouraged a critical evaluation of her assumption that others were scofflaws and a resultant change in her understanding and appreciation for the "other."

Further examples include Marta, Ivana, Bertha, Jessica, and Eliza; each of whom recalled their experience of change to be focused on experience with diversity, which leads to Daloz's conditions that include experience in working with diverse others, the theory that will be reviewed next. In summation, the grounded theory put forth in this study is consistent with Mezirow's learning-as-transformation in that parents described transformational learning experiences that appeared to follow the steps laid out by Mezirow.

Daloz: Four Conditions that May Promote Transformative Learning

Background. Daloz (et al., 1996) wondered about the intersections between a sense of social responsibility associated with a commitment to the common good and transformative learning. To better understand, he and his colleagues undertook a study of the lives of socially responsible people such as Nelson Mandela, some of who had made significant contributions to the world, and others within their communities. Daloz found that four conditions were present in the lives of each of these individuals. Listed first, then defined below, the conditions included: 1) "the presence of the other"; 2) "reflective discourse"; 3) "a mentoring community"; 4) "opportunities for committed action" (p. 113).

"The presence of the other" was found to be persons from a different socio-economic level, background, or of differing ethnicities from one's own. He described "Reflective Discourse" as important, defining this act as "conscious, critical reflection on our early

assumptions about how life is" (p. 113). Immediately evident is the connection between diversity and reflective discourse. From this apparent dialectic he explained that reflective discourse most productively occurs in a "community of understanding that involves shared commitments" (In Mezirow & Associates, 2000). He offered further findings that point to the benefit in a "Mentoring Community" comprised of "significant others" including "older adults, teachers, [and others who] encouraged a deeper sense of purpose" (p. 115). Finally, "Opportunities for Committed Action" was defined as "the opportunity to act on one's evolving commitments, [and] to test and ground one's growing convictions in action" (p. 117).

Evidence. The following series of tables link each of Daloz's criteria, with one table for each coding category from this study. I have supplied selected pertinent examples of participant experience taken from surveys, but include mostly excerpts from the more richly descriptive interview transcripts. While not all examples are provided, care was taken to use those most illustrative.

Table 8

Daloz's Conditions: The Presence of Diverse Others
(Those from different backgrounds, ethnicities, or socio-economic status)

Coding Category	Selected Participant Examples
Seeing others in new ways	"The most salient personal change that I experienced as a result of my participation…was a heightened sense of the similarities and differences that existed among the parents along cultural, racial and socioeconomic lines." On working with a helpful young student: "This is sort of sexist, but [she was surprised he helped clean up] because he was a boy," and "one of the popular boys." Explaining her change in understanding of a parent who failed to do her volunteer requirements: "one student whose mom's boyfriend pulled a knife [on her]."
Experience of diversity	"I regularly worked beside parents who I normally wouldn't socialize with when went putting in my service hours at school." "[My] life was…broadened and enriched by having contact with and getting to know adults and children from very diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. [It] would be easier in a more homogeneous group but not as valuable I think." "[Our] aunts and uncles aren't involved in raising my children. So we were kind of an independent unit and other people [Latino parents] had a much broader base of what they would consider family." Prior to involvement in school community: "I probably had an underlying archetype or stereotype that there wasn't that much commitment to education in the Hispanic community."
Growth in awareness of perspective	"My experience in this charter school allowed me to see areas in which I was still holding on to beliefs that perhaps not racist, were at least stereotypic in nature." "[Working with others from] different socioeconomic [backgrounds] coming at things with different perspectives." Upon hearing, and understanding 'opposing perspectives': "I hadn't thought of it like that." "I have an issue about following rules…these other families can't make accommodations …[so they] bring their kids [and] are being responsible parents" "I felt like this whole weight …shifted off of me and out of me…I understood what the problem was, and it was different than I'd thought and I could just let it go" "Those people are different than me, and to get over the idea that I can't walk down that path" "There's not one answer to a problem."

Table 9

Daloz's Conditions: Reflective Discourse

Coding Category	**Selected Participant Examples**
Meetings	"The coop allowed for frequent discussions [during meetings]." "I started to express myself ...more and better. If I had something to address I felt I could speak up…and [this] made me more comfortable speaking in a group." "[In meetings] I have had to really see things from another parent or teachers' point of view—one very different from my own and that is always a healthy and helpful exercise…not easy but important!" "[Discourse in meetings]…wasn't always comfortable." "Even being *forced* to go to a monthly parent meeting, I mean you see [all] the people and some of them are talking and you get to know them a little bit." "They weren't taking it lightly, they weren't just letting someone else do the work, they weren't just letting the vote go unchallenged."

Table 10

Daloz's Conditions: Mentoring Community

Coding Category	**Selected Participant Examples**
Community	"I feel that being part of a community is important to all humans. I think in our current culture of parenting we are particularly isolated and even more in need of community…" "Co-op people recognize those who simply need more assistance and tend to fill that void, support and lift them up, and that's where you see the transformation come up.[In a coop others will] "ask things of you, and believe in you. [I've] got support so [I] can take some risks and [I am] not going to get knocked down, somebody's going to be there to scoop [me] back up." [She claimed to be a] "more informed parent, less insecure about my abilities and better at my parenting skills because of the peer support [within the] community". "I said that the school was for my kids? Well it's not. It's for *me.* I like to know that I belong, and that I can feel [it]."
Access to power and power sharing with staff	"Sometimes another parent or teacher will have a perspective that allows you to better support or understand your child and their needs—educational and otherwise". [A coop made] "…it easier to approach and work with teachers and administration." [A breakthrough in communication with her daughter] "…was thanks to those meetings and all that watching of other parents and one teacher who took time with me."

Table 11

Daloz's Conditions: Opportunities for Committed Action

Coding Category	Selected Participant Examples
Cooperative participation as a form of committed action, particularly leadership	"Working with other parents…on a common goal to provide the best education for the children in a safe environment…" "This cooperative piece--where if you do it whole heartedly you become part of a much bigger family". [Taking an]...opportunity to "confront some of [my] long-held assumptions and stereotypes". "You see everybody pitching in and doing what they can and making the school run and people take pride in that." [He was enabled to] "…Walk my talk rather than just understanding things", subsequently causing personal change that he described as… "reintegrating my personality". In eschewing a television show focused on the drug culture as entertainment, "because [now] I know [those] kids and that's their life." These depictions were no longer "entertaining" for her, but difficult experience had been made real.

Daloz found that most often the four conditions above combined to create what he called "the commons," defined as a place a community could come together and work through differences for the good of all—toward a "shared sense of participation and responsibility" (Daloz et al., 1996). The Commons may have provided what Kegan and Heifetz call a holding environment, which each element implicated as supportive of the challenging, potentially growth-inducing challenges that can surface in the commons.

While I do not argue that *all* participants experienced change as a result of Daloz's conditions, it appears that each of Daloz's criteria for the promotion of transformative learning was available to and accessed by *some* participants from this study. Further, the coding categories that emerged from the experience of some participants are consistent with Daloz's theory concerning conditions that may promote transformative learning. Returning to this study's

grounded theory for the purpose of making explicit the congruent themes, I first provide the theory for reference: *Elements of a cooperative charter school that appear to be most central to experience of change and development of adaptive skills for adults are: a) a supportive, mentor-rich environment oriented toward a common goal; b) a diverse, collaborative community, and c) opportunities to engage in high-level leadership afforded through the cooperative model.*

Daloz's Four Conditions of Transformation include: a) the Presence of the Other; b) Reflective Discourse; c) A Mentoring Community; d) Opportunities for Committed Action, as compared and connected to participant experience in the table above. The diagram below proposes alignment between the grounded theory constructed from this study with Daloz's conditions.

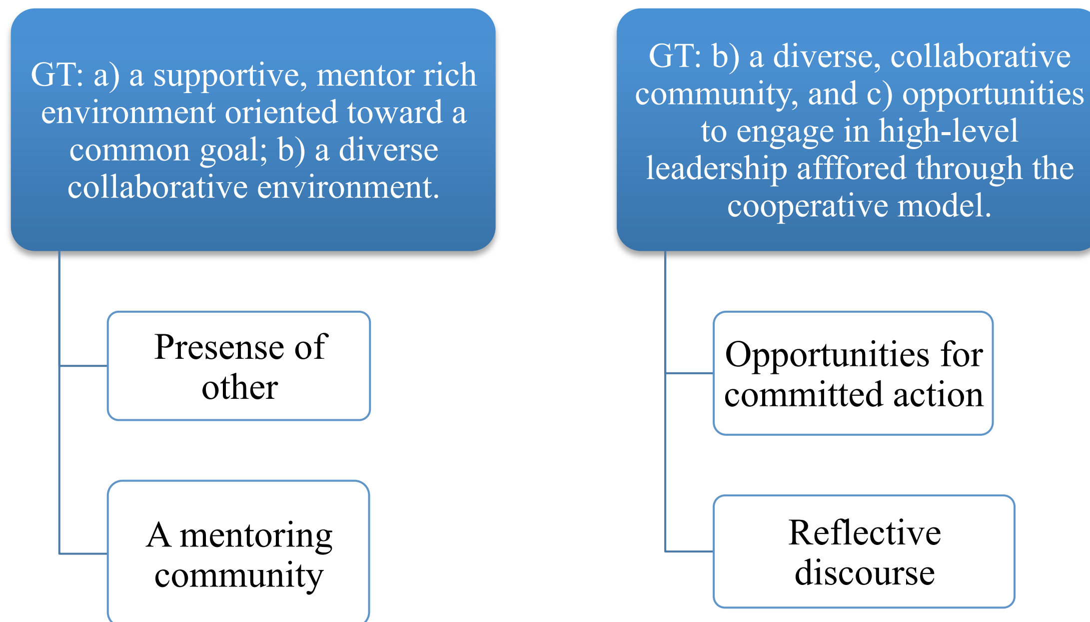

Figure 4: Daloz and This Study's Grounded Theory. A Comparison of Daloz's Conditions That Promote Growth With This Study's Grounded Theory.

This alignment suggests the experience of some of the participants in this study is consistent with Daloz's theory concerning the conditions that can support transformational

learning and social responsibility. The implications of this particular section will be discussed in the Implications for Leadership section.

Heifetz: Technical and Adaptive Learning

Background. Heifetz (1994) wrote about leadership, authority, and types of learning required in addressing challenges. He described two very different challenges and the learning required to address them, using the terms “technical” and “adaptive.” Technical challenges and the learning they required are oriented toward “routine problems,” where “the necessary knowledge about [the problem] already has been digested and put in the form of a legitimized set of known organizational procedures (1994, p. 8).” Examples of technical learning challenges from this study are provided in the following diagram.

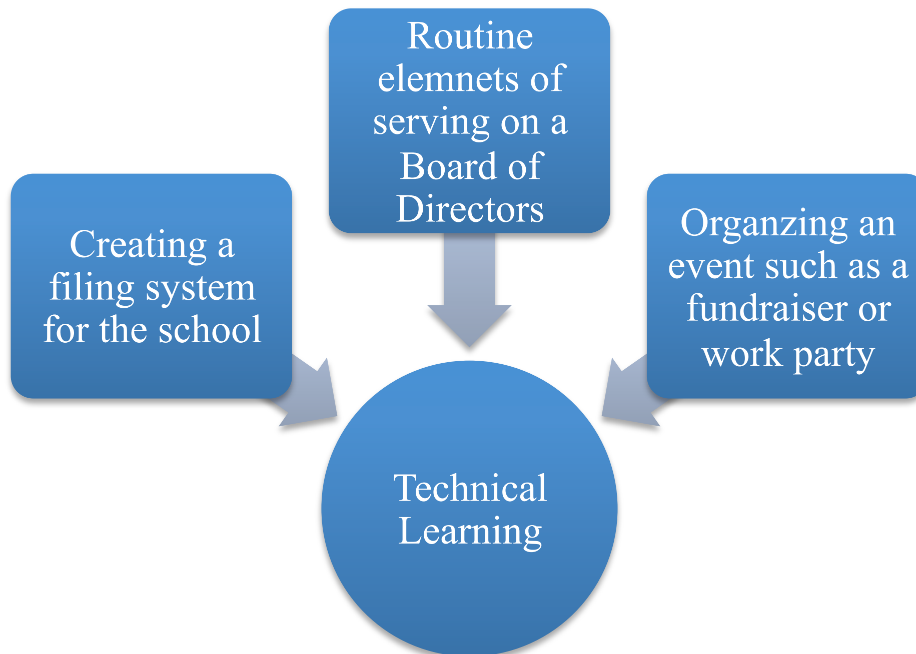

Figure 5: Technical Learning in A Cooperative Charter. This figure provides examples of experience that are likely to provide Technical Learning to this study’s participants.

Benefits of learning required to solve technical problems must not be undersold, since the development of skills can translate to the accomplishment of necessary tasks and, possibly, to career benefits, as was the case for some of this study's participants. This concept found resonance in the research of Cotton and Wikelund (2001) who found that parent and school partnerships might lead to an increase in skills and confidence for parents, potentially leading to enhanced job skills or furthering parents educational goals. Several of the participants in this study served on a governance board, and examples of technical learning included learning procedures such as Robert's Rules of Order or the legislative requirements for boards that spend public dollars.

Heifetz described a second type of learning challenge called "adaptive." Adaptive learning requires a very different and qualitatively more difficult type of learning that, carefully managed, can create increased capacities in adults.

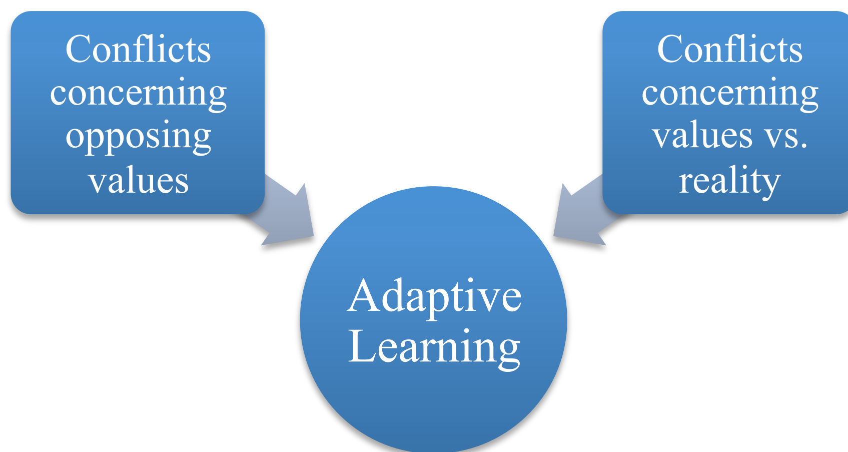

Figure 6: Adaptive Learning in a Cooperative Charter School. These examples are potential Adaptive Learning opportunities from the experience of this study's participants.

Heifetz defined adaptive learning as that which is “required to address conflicts in the values people hold or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face” (p. 22, 1994). Adaptive problems demand innovation from the learner and must result in a change in beliefs, behaviors, and values. Tied to the work of Kegan, adaptive learning requires a qualitative shift in *how* the learner knows. While service on a Cooperative Governance Board is listed under technical challenges, there are elements of such service that span both technical and adaptive learning. The service becomes an adaptive challenge when members endeavor to address conflicts that pit values against values, or values against the reality encountered. An example of this is provided in the Evidence section.

Evidence. Nate recalled a board debate and eventual decision focused on the parent volunteer requirement. He recalled a situation where a family was on the verge of losing their enrollment status for the coming year, as the parents—recent immigrants—were fully occupied opening and operating several shops in town. The middle school-aged students wanted to fulfill their parents’ volunteer hour requirement. Nate argued in support of flexibility in applying policy that would have allowed the students to serve the volunteer hour requirement. Nate described his discomfort with the eventual decision: “[the issue] bugged me because I felt it ought to be a family commitment, not just adult members of the families.” Others argued that rules were rules. He was troubled by the memory, looking pensive he said: “It was a time that what the parent wanted and what [some members of the board] wanted were different. And how do you tell a kid we’re both right and we’re both wrong?” Nate’s values tended toward inclusivity and community. The board members collectively represented the reality of that moment and opted for rules and policy-based thinking. The result is that the two students from this family were disallowed to enroll the following year for the family’s failure to complete the required hours. In

this example it appears that at least Nate was able to make the adaptive challenge, but a majority of other board members did not make the adaptive leap, rather maintaining a simplified perspective.

Frida, too, explored a similar issue of her values versus the values of others and alluded to the effect of diversity on the conflict: “What the parents expected from their school experience for their kids was VERY different than what I was looking for, and trying to meet all those expectations was hard.” Also revealed in her remarks are her personal commitment to trying to meet all expectations in her community—a potentially wrenching experience—particularly when the resolution of opposites cannot be managed, no “middle path” created, and perhaps no agreement on fundamental values can collectively be achieved.

Several other participants discussed examples of situations where they held a value that went contrary to that of others in the community, and yet several alluded to the potential for growth stemming from such an experience. This concept speaks to Kegan’s grand theory concerning the ability to appreciate multiple perspectives discussed earlier in this chapter. One participant stated: “once we heard a problem…[we] could look at it from both sides, and the other person can look at it from both sides, and [acknowledge] that [the problem] isn’t cut and dried, yes and no…” A second participant echoed this experience: “I learned from the board meeting that no issue is black and white. Once you get three or four people involved there are that many reasons for every decision.” Many participants describe grappling with opposing values, the adaptive learning that Heifetz described as the greatest of challenges. For participants, such as those described in this section, some level of disorientation and awareness of multiple perspectives is evident. In the case of several participants transformative learning and growth may have been the result.

As transformative learning may lead to development in adults, unquestionably valuable in our increasingly complex and demanding world (Kegan, 1996; Korten, 2006, Taylor, 2000), the suggestion of transformation stemming from parent participation offers a compelling idea to consider as we move next section of this chapter. If adult learning through participation in schools can occur, what opportunities and demands are implied for school leaders, policy makers, parents, and teachers? Is there potential for ameliorating challenges that educators face in working closely with parents?

Implications and Recommendations for Educational Leaders

Abundant evidence demonstrates that parent and school partnerships lead to student learning (Epstein, 2005; Hill & Chao, 2009; Salinas & Van Vooris, 2001; Seginer, 2006). This study demonstrates that parents, too, can benefit from these partnerships. Participants described growth in empathy, compassion, and enhanced abilities to understand multiple perspectives among other important changes. Factors that proved helpful included a supportive, diverse community with opportunities for mentoring, dialogue, shared goals, and access to both similar and opposing values. Parent partnerships clearly work for parents and students, yet if partnerships were simple, all schools would do it. Rather, researchers have found that parents, teachers, and school leaders are often at odds (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Delpit, 1995; Ferraralyn, 2009). In this section I will present recommendations for solutions that follow from this study's results, but first a review of the theories that were most useful in understanding the experience of participants.

The grand theories used in this study include Adult Learning, Developmental Psychology, and Organizational Theory. Educational leadership programs include information about these three territories, yet the framing and directionality of action merits attention.

Typically, the person taking action, the actor, is the Educational Leader; the audience for influence is teachers, who have different roles, motivations and needs than parent partners. I propose that we widen the frame to include parents and allow influence directionality to move in each direction. Currently, administrative degrees do include suggested processes and policies helpful in building parent partnerships, yet we must have a deeper understanding of the elements that create a beneficial environment for students, families, and educators, as well as the factors that will bring challenge in partnerships. Toward these goals, this study offers the following recommendations to school and district leaders, and the Administrator programs that train them. Recommendations include:

1. All parents must be brought closer to real leadership and decision-making in schools and districts. The benefits that accrue for students are clear, and to these we add benefits to parents. Close attention should be paid to inclusion of the underrepresented and minorities, including targeted outreach, translation services for all meetings, and written documents and policies that encourage a diverse leadership group. Schools may consider the use of a diversity monitoring chairperson and committee to implement parent surveys and other measures of inclusion, evaluate data, and make recommendations to see that all groups are represented.
2. Many of the parents from this study expressed the desire for and appreciation of community, describing the experience as foundational by providing a safe and supportive milieu from which to take action and risks in developing new skills and competencies. Some described gains included enhanced understanding, empathy, and compassion for diverse others. From this finding flows the recommendation for school district leadership to re-imagine schools as community hubs. This concept

offers a bevy of potential benefits explored and described in this study, such as those listed immediately above, plus more efficient use of resources and space. Schools could become places where both children and families come to learn, including acquisition of the English language, nutrition, or bookkeeping—in short, any courses now offered by adult education. Further, by including adult education on the campuses, schools and districts may help erode well-researched barriers or feelings of intimidation for parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Delpit, 1995; Ferraralyn, 2009).

3. Leaders must actively and intentionally seek to describe, build, and protect the four essential conditions into schools, including: 1) the presence of other; 2) reflective discourse; 3) a mentoring community; 4) opportunities for committed action (Daloz, et al. 1999). These conditions were at the heart of this dissertation, implicated by most participants as essential to their perceptions of personal growth and satisfaction in working within the cooperative charter school model. Leadership programs may include guidance on fostering these conditions, as they are likely to support a positive culture in any school— charter, cooperative, or traditional public.
4. Leaders must be able to manage challenges that derive from collaborative decision-making. This will include instances where conflict occurs as differences in deeply held stakeholder values, divergent goals and—where parenting is concerned—extraordinary passions will flash forth. Further, leaders must do so with less authority than within a traditional public school, where authority is ceded through the institution of the district, rather than given by the parents in the organization. This distinction is significant and requires a great deal of political savvy.

5. Familiarity with the well-researched and accepted process of transformation may help educational leaders support teachers *and* parents, who are engaged in the messy work transformation requires (Mezirow, 1999). Awareness of this process can help leaders to model a sense of calm in the face of what may feel and look like mayhem, but is in fact a journey that can lead to tremendous gains in personal growth.
6. Participants from this study reported challenges in working within the cooperative structure. While individuals connected these challenges with growth, some found the experience difficult. Accordingly it makes sense for school leaders to attend to methods for ameliorating these difficulties by providing a "holding space," described by both Kegan (1996) and Heifetz, (1994). Recalling the definition, this includes protected time, space, and tailored support to teachers *and* parents who must process the challenges and struggles that surface. Invoking and reminding participants of a clear, shared vision and mission will help.
7. Leaders must maintain urgency, keeping attention on the adaptive learning required to face challenges, yet carefully monitor the quantity and pacing of challenges for followers including teachers *and* parent partners. Social networks, trustworthy structures and institutions, and the intentional construction of shared, orienting values support both school leaders and followers, including teachers and parents (Heifetz, 1994).
8. Within the cooperative structure lies the opportunity to intentionally and transparently connect values for education with process. Parents working for a school provide a compelling example for children and may further a focus on education far beyond the parental assertion. Children do what we do, not what we say. This recommendation

stems from the literature review and from personal experience from participating as parent, teacher, and leader of a cooperative charter school.

Some efficiency may be conferred in the work of creating these optimal conditions. Parents bring real value to the education equation, including a variety of experiences, skills, intelligences, and energy. A school where parents, grandparents, and guardians are fully engaged, shoulder-to-shoulder with educators is the sort of place you want to be.

In conclusion, one stated aim of the charter movement is that these schools function as laboratories, leading the way toward innovative practices and new models. The cooperative charter is one such laboratory from which emerged this study's findings. It is my hope that the findings from this study expand the conversation about inclusion, community, diversity, and understanding in the complex territory between parents and educational partners to enhance learning for all participants and that traditional public schools expand their sphere to include adults.

Implications for social justice. Researchers have discussed the barriers to partnership reported by minorities (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Gordon & Nocon, 2008), citing challenges such as acquiring tacit knowledge and social capital, each the domain of the dominant group (Addi-Raccah, 2009; Delpit, 1995). Researchers including Jeynes (2010) and Price-Mitchell (2009) propose that when teachers and parents know, trust, and respect one another a greater likelihood exists that they will work together productively, leading to student gains and parents' growth and empowerment. This study confirms the importance of these relationships from the perspective of learning, support, and mentoring reported by participants. It also offers methods by which the disempowered might make gains if this goal is approached in a systematic, intentional way as laid out in the recommendations.

As noted earlier in this study, most of the participants for this study are well-educated Caucasians from middle or upper income brackets. Yet for the majority, board service was first undertaken at these schools. If this was so for these participants, it is reasonable to aim for systematically targeting such gains for participants from less privileged backgrounds. Necessary would be for school leadership to create and maintain processes and policies that focus on inclusion and diversity as stated in recommendations. Approaching all aspects of school leadership with an orientation toward social justice and equity are critical as abundant evidence exists of disenfranchisement suffered by minority parents in traditional public schools.

At the risk of painting a misleading picture of a perfect model, I will clearly acknowledge the possibility of corruption in the cooperative charter school model. Without policies and structures to guard against it, participants may take opportunities to advocate for their children at the expense of other children. For example, cooperative charter schools allow for boards to make budgetary decisions determining the allocation of funds, a major driver of an institution's focus. In setting a budget, boards may distribute higher dollar amounts for science over art or music or fail to budget for field trips—considering them fluff rather than experiential learning opportunities. Each of these examples represent an orientation and an ordering of values that are certainly contested. Other examples of corruption include taking opportunities to hand-select a teacher or to cause a teacher harm through unfair review processes.

Suggestions for Further Research

As was made clear throughout this study, there was thin representation from diverse participants. Of particular interest for following studies might include English Language Learners and those from impoverished or challenged backgrounds. It would be important to keep all assumptions in check, as it is possible, even probable, that the experience held different

benefits and challenges for other families. Questions may include lines of inquiry concerning equity and feelings of inclusion, empowerment, and learning focused on bridging cultural differences. It would be useful to district leadership to know what supports are helpful and to gather ideas and feedback on ways to improve.

The Researcher's Experience

Fifteen years ago my husband and I climbed Mt. Whitney, the highest summit in the contiguous United States. We accomplished the 22 mile round trip hike to an elevation of over 14,000 feet and back down again in a single day, leaving before dawn and descending by the moon's light. While this climb requires no special gear or training, it is arduous and potentially dangerous, as there is little that can be done if something goes wrong. One might think that such an accomplishment would bestow a sense of triumph and achievement. Rather, I was left introspective and humbled. Ancient piles of granite beneath the feet of a vulnerable human engaged in a folly of effort can instruct. The act is a good cocktail party tale, yet while it may impress (or baffle) others when I look inward, I know the truth. I made the climb by luck, chance, and no particular skill beyond putting one foot in front of the next for 16 hours. The experience of writing this dissertation has been remarkably similar. And as for a sense of accomplishment? More than anything I am humbled.

The climb resembled constructing this dissertation in another respect. Yes, perseverance mattered in each case. But as to why the "minor" changes to so long post-approval hearing, I believe there to be a metaphor with my Whitney experience. Hiking in high altitude gets exponentially harder the higher you go. The oxygen thins to apparently nothing, and progress between the stony, imperceptibly sloped landscape and gaping sky is slow. Each three steps require a gasping rest. Minor gains require extraordinary effort, and in exasperating imbalance,

these gains are minuscule. It was precisely the same for me, to finish this dissertation. As I left the company of fellow researchers, and the familiar confines of accepted theory, my pace slowed. The ideas and attendant words require a great deal more effort, and the effort resulted in measured, possibly more reliable gains. It will be nice to be back on level ground for a time.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Question: Did you experience any personal change(s) stemming from your participation at the cooperative charter school? Please describe these changes.

If you choose to respond, use ***one*** of the following methods:

1. Send me an email saying you'd prefer to respond using paper and the US post. I will send you a stamped, addressed envelope with my dissertation chair's address (listed below) to the address you specify.
2. If you wish to answer the question below via email, please send your response to the questions above to: ktaylorphd@sbcglobal.net. It's important to put **"Delgado's Survey"** into the subject line, and add all the information below.

Name ____

Street address ____

City ____ Zip _________________________

Phone (   ) ___________________________E-mail ____________________________

Participation is completely voluntary, and all responses will be kept strictly confidential. If you are selected for an interview, I will ask you to sign a consent form and record our conversation. Again, you may choose not to participate, or to withdraw from this study at any time with no penalty.

Thank you for your consideration. Please don't hesitate to call for more information, I'd be happy to talk with you.

Linda Delgado-Pelton

Appendix B

BEFORE INTERVIEW, HAVE CANDIDATE SIGN PERMISSION TO RECORD SHEET AND **PUT PHONE ON AIRLINE MODE.**

SAY: *"I am going to ask you some questions about yourself, and your experience at X Charter School. I will record our conversation so that I get your words down correctly. In the completed dissertation characteristics of your identity will be changed, and in this way I will protect your confidentiality.*

- *Apparent repeats [they may occur due to open ended nature of questions—respondent may choose how to respond to repeats]*
- *Follow-ups ok? [can I contact you if I have a question that comes up after the interview]*
- *Focus is on **YOU** and **YOUR EXPERIENCE** [RESPONDENTS—NOT THE SCHOOL].*
- *Specificity please: examples and details.*
- *Name changes—identities will be disguised.*

Please know that you may choose to "pass" on any question for any reason, and if you'd like to end the interview at any time for any reason you are free to do so without any penalty. Do you have any questions?"

1. Please describe yourself—tell me basic demographics you feel comfortable sharing.
2. Is/are your child(ren) still attending X school? About how long were they there?
3. Looking back, can you tell me why you chose this school?
4. Did the school being a charter school impact your decision? Did the school being a cooperative impact your decision? WHY?
5. What did you think the school would be like for your child? (gather specifics for next question)

6. How did that [what they described above] turn out for your child? Was it as you thought it would be?
7. How about for you--what did you think the participation part would be like for you?"

    If expectations were different from experience: Did it turn out that way? *Followed by:* Can you tell me more about that?

8. What sorts of volunteer work did you undertake? [change in skills?]
9. How did that go? Does anything associated with your volunteer work stand out for you? [CBA—COULD BE ANYTHING]

    If so: Can you tell me about that? [change in skills?]

10. Did you undertake any sorts of work you had not previously done? Example?
11. How did that feel to do that? [confidence?]
12. In the survey to which you responded you were asked if your participation at a cooperative charter school changed you, and you said: *(refer specifically to each person's survey with a quote or paraphrase).* Can you tell me more about that?
13. How did working with other adults at X school go for you? Does any positive experience in working with another adult stand out for you?
14. How about any negative or challenging experiences working with other adults? Can you tell me about that?
15. Have you had any experience in having to negotiate, or engage in a disagreement with another adult at the school? [Productive disagreement/empowering/awareness of own and differing perspectives?]
16. Did you experience any change between your initial take on the other adults at the school and your impressions after you'd been at school X for a while?

If so: Can you tell me about that? **<u>Do you have any stories that illustrate this?</u>**

[awareness of own and differing perspectives?]

17. Did you ever have a situation at school in supervising students when something happened, and you weren't sure what the right thing to do was? awareness of own and differing perspectives?]

    If so: Can you tell me the story/ what happened?

18. How did your decision pan out for you? Can you tell me about that?
19. Thinking back to that situation, do you feel the same about it now? [Personal growth]
20. In looking back at your experiences at the school, did they look differently to you at the time from how they look now? If so: how? Or: did your feelings about your experience at M school change from when you left until now?

    If yes: Can you describe this for me? [Personal growth]

21. What were or are the most challenging parts of participating in a cooperative charter school? Can you give me an example that demonstrates that? [CBA—COULD BE ANYTHING]
22. What were the most rewarding aspects of participating in a cooperative charter school? Can you give me an example that illustrates that? [Community/ CBA—COULD BE ANYTHING]
23. What else would you like to tell me about your experiences at the cooperative charter school?