Fall 1997

Sharing reality: The construction of professional knowledge in a middle school team setting

Carol Walker Mulligan
University of New Hampshire, Durham

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SHARING REALITY:  
THE CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE  
IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEAM SETTING

BY

CAROL WALKER MULLIGAN

B.A., University of New Hampshire, 1968  
M.A.T., University of New Hampshire, 1971  

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Education

September, 1997
This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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June 20, 1997
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all of the teachers who long to be understood, who struggle to communicate clearly with their students and their colleagues, who seek the support of others to carry out their ideas, who feel the need to have their ideas validated, and who value the enriched knowledge that comes through relationship.

Teaching is an awesome profession. Classroom teachers usually don’t see the long-term effects of their work. The desire to touch others with knowledge, to stimulate others to learn sometimes seems impossible. The work is frustrating, overwhelming, and rewarding when there is evidence that one’s efforts have succeeded. Reflective teachers—those who review their classroom practices and adjust their methods in relation to the reactions of their students—are self-critical and doubtful as they think about the effects of their work. Through relationship with other practitioners, I learn that I am not alone in this reality. Conversations help me to sort out what teaching means, validate assumptions about teaching and learning, build new knowledge about teaching and learning, find support to carry out new ideas.

This dissertation is a way to communicate that reality with others. By inviting others to view team meetings the way I view them, by explaining the meeting process as a process of knowledge sharing and building, perhaps others will view collaboration in a new way. Team meetings, and teacher meetings in general, are settings for oral reflection, and collaborative reflection. This dissertation is meant to encourage educators to approach their meetings with a new lense: that of a learner.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The long journey of this dissertation was accomplished with the interest and support of many people—my teachers, colleagues, and friends. The work itself is a social construction, achieved through my own interaction with theory, practice, and people. I name a few of the key people in my journey, and many more hover in the background of my words.

There are many ways in which the members of my dissertation committee helped me to bridge the gap between practical and theoretical voices in the world of education. Most importantly, they welcomed me into the academic community as a colleague.

Ellen Corcoran, my dissertation director, was a mentor to me in the field of teacher education long before I took up this latest challenge. Her model of patient encouragement of teacher voice has influenced my work as a teacher and a teacher educator. She helped me to develop my own best ways of learning, thinking, and writing. I am grateful for her careful perusal of draft upon draft of chapter upon chapter of this dissertation, a task that I found impossible when the work became too familiar.

The friendship and encouragement of Susan Franzosa kept me going during the most frustrating times in the dissertation process. It was through her curriculum course that I made my first connections with the works of theorists who brought meaning to my practical middle school world, and with whom I could connect my emerging research questions. By inviting me to participate in professional conferences, she encouraged and validated my work. I am
grateful for the skills she brought to my committee, as a thinker, listener, and writer.

Joe Onosko continually challenged my practical knowledge with alternative points of view and encouraged me to take a deeper look at the middle school world. Through our conversations, he helped me discover what is interesting about aspects of a teaching world that I took for granted. My course work with him greatly enlarged my knowledge of curriculum and helped me to view my experience in a broader context.

When Bruce Mallory came onto my dissertation committee late in the process, he graciously agreed to read large segments of my work and provide prompt responses. His detailed and thoughtful feedback helped me to clarify my theoretical framework. He provided just the right balance of warm encouragement and critical analysis that I needed to bring my dissertation into sharper focus.

Nona Lyons has been a mentor from afar, providing wisdom and encouragement over the telephone for over two years. Her interest in my work and experience in teacher education and professional knowledge helped me to find meaning in my data and communicate meaning with others. She has always been a skillful listener, pointing the way to key resources in my development of the dissertation.

I greatly appreciate the many faculty members who have facilitated my work over the years. Through coursework and conversations, they have opened doors to my own spiraling knowledge—about teaching, learning, and research. They have listened patiently to my stories of school and helped me make connections between the academic world and the everyday world of teaching. Among them are: Mike Andrew, Charlie Ashley, Grant Cioffi, Ann Diller, Barbara Houston, Georgia Kems, Nodie Oja, and Pearl Rosenberg.
I wish also to acknowledge the support of others in the department, who helped me to find people and means to start, sustain, and finish this project: Micki Canfield, Gerry Crocker, Kay Munson, and Kit Nardello.

The group of peers in our educational doctoral programs have been an essential community with whom to commiserate, try out our own new theories, and create comic relief. Val Aubry, Bette Chamberlain, Cindy Cohen, Tom Carroll, Judy Day, Dave Hodgdon, Jerry Kelly, Loren Johnson, Karen Laba, Marcia Makris, Mary Jane Moran, JoAnn Portalupi, Mimi Struck, Carol Wilcox, and Susan Wykoff have all kept the conversations going that stimulated and supported this work.

My family and friends have been more than understanding through years of my neglect and preoccupation. I cannot express enough appreciation for their love, support, and encouragement.

Most of all, my husband Tom has been my mainstay. His pride in my work has kept me going during the most difficult times. His love and companionship are the essentials for my renewal as a researcher and writer. Tom, along with our dog Jack Tar, have been a quiet, supportive presence throughout this long and lonely endeavor.
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ABSTRACT

SHARING REALITY:
THE CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE
IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEAM SETTING

by Carol Walker Mulligan
University of New Hampshire, September, 1997

In this case study of a middle school team of teachers, I describe and interpret daily meeting conversations among one group of practitioners over the course of one school year. Through the lens of the social construction of reality, I examine processes of sharing and co-constructing aspects of professional knowledge in this setting.

To conduct the study, I collected data from the regularly scheduled daily team meetings of my own interdisciplinary middle school team. The result is an insider view of the conversations of a group of practitioners who share the same population of students. For purposes of elaboration and triangulation, I conducted individual interviews with the members of the team, and other professionals in the school context. An important aspect of the study is the effect of my presence on the team as a researcher, and my own constructions of professional knowledge that occurred as a result of working on the team as both a researcher and a teacher.

Through narrative description, I develop the story of our interaction. The story begins as we establish tasks and roles. After the school year begins, the focus of our meetings is the students whom we share. Our shared commitment to the success of our students leads to the unveiling of our various conceptualizations of effective teaching practices, and the continual struggle to
co-construct team practices. Large segments of verbatim data invite the reader
to participate in our conversations and to experience the difficulties and rewards
of teaming with us. The chapters of the dissertation are developed around
important themes of the middle school team structure: implementing aspects of
school organization, following the progress of students, coordinating classroom
strategies to meet individual student needs, and developing interdisciplinary
curricular projects related to the middle school concept.

Critical analysis of the data aims to demonstrate how a team functions as
a subreality of a school and how a team co-constructs that reality. I present team
meetings as a context that encourages collaborative reflective practice. The
data demonstrate ways in which members of a team may support and challenge
one another in their daily teaching world. Team meetings illustrate how groups
of teachers reflect on their practice through conversation. While the team story
points to ways to improve and facilitate team processes, it also suggests the
place of teacher groups in implementing school policies and teaching theories
contextually, and the place of this and similar structure for implementing
effective and responsive school change.
DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

THE REALITY OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEAM

Teaching is a socially constructed pursuit. It evolves as people refine and redefine which knowledge, attitudes, and skills are important to future generations.

Alan Tom, 1984, p.96.

The Nature of the Inquiry

This dissertation examines one social setting—a middle school teaching team—through the lens of the social construction of reality. By following the progress of my own middle school team through a year of meetings, I describe how a group of practitioners shares individual teaching realities and constructs and reconstructs aspects of professional knowledge in the process.

The study provides an important longitudinal view of a group of practitioners working together for an entire school year. The story of the team unfolds naturally, from pre-planning before the year begins through months of getting to know students to constructing and implementing strategies responsive to the needs of middle school students.

This dissertation is written for teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and others who are interested in continuing teacher development. I view the team primarily through the lens of the social construction of reality in order to shed light on the place of middle school teams in interpreting school policies and teaching theories. Through this view, I set out to illustrate the place of a team in constructing contextual applications of
professional knowledge, and suggest the relationship of this and similar structures to school effectiveness and change.

**My Reality of a Middle School Team**

The camaraderie of sharing a planning period improves the quality of the place in which I work. As a member of interdisciplinary teaching teams for almost 20 years, I am familiar with both its dilemmas and its benefits. In listening to my colleagues and sharing my own typifications—of children, of teaching, and of teaming—I learn more about my work. I clarify my own assumptions and weave together new interpretations of the middle school world.

Interdisciplinary teaching teams are a structure that can be the kind of "safe place" described by Clandinin and Connelly (1995) where teachers can tell and retell their classroom stories, where they can collaboratively explore solutions to their daily teaching dilemmas. The authors distinguish between the safety of one's own classroom, and more collaborative settings where teachers can safely retell their stories. While the classroom is "generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice" (1995, p. 13), it is also an isolated place, where generation of working knowledge is hidden, and where teachers have little opportunity to retell and relive their stories, or to imagine broader applications for their practical knowledge. An interdisciplinary teaching team is one setting that holds the potential to be a safe place for the retelling of classroom stories in relationship with other practitioners, one that holds the "possibility for awakenings and transformations " (1995, p. 13) that the isolation of the classroom does not. This is a reality that I have experienced, and have examined closely in this dissertation.

I examine the Coyotes team story critically, to discover ways that taken-for-granted assumptions about what middle school teams play out in one
setting. While it is often taken for granted that teams are more responsive to the developmental needs of their middle school students, for instance, we have little knowledge about how this happens. Through examination of this "slice of life" middle school team, I illustrate how we develop contextual applications of working knowledge, and rethink our teaching practices through reflective conversations.

**Introduction to the Coyotes Team**

The focus of the dissertation is the Coyotes teachers, one of four sixth grade interdisciplinary teams at Central Falls Middle School, located in a small city in southern New Hampshire. Central Falls Middle School is divided into 12 grade level "teams", groups of approximately 110 students in grade 6, 7, or 8. The structure is a common configuration for schools that term themselves "middle schools" (Lipsitz, 1984; Lounsbury, 1984; Stevenson, 1990). In the literature, and in my own experience, team organization makes it easier for teachers to keep track of student progress, to individualize instruction, and to create a responsive environment for their students' learning.

Before they come to middle school, students attend elementary schools scattered throughout the neighborhoods of Central Falls. The city is a patchwork of contrasts. Once a typical New England mill town, the factories have long since moved out. In recent years, a few high technology industries have increased demand for skilled workers. A large portion of the unskilled workforce commutes to neighboring locales. The diversification of the population is evident in its neighborhoods. There are new, upscale developments on the outskirts of town, in fields where dairy cattle once grazed. In contrast, there are rows of modest single family houses on carefully laid out streets and pockets of old tenement buildings located closer to the center of town.
Central Falls has social problems often associated with larger cities—unemployment, homelessness, alcoholism, neglected and abused children. A measure of the difficulties of children who live there is the fact that the middle school assistant principal spends about one day a week in court, to testify in truancy cases or participate in court-ordered probation hearings. At the same time, the school district is typical of many tax-stressed locales in New Hampshire. There is a history of tax rebellions, times when teachers work without a contract for several years in succession, school budget cuts and corresponding program cuts.

At the time of this study, Central Falls Middle School was less than five years old and the concept of middle school was still new to the community. The school infused new hope among its teachers. Teachers at the Middle School were in general enthusiastic, highly committed to forming schools within a school, and creative in devising whole-team activities responsive to the developmental needs and changes of their students.

The teaching teams at Central Falls consist of four subject discipline teachers who are sometimes self-selected but often grouped and re-grouped from year to year according to teacher attrition and staffing needs. The shared commitment to middle school concept among most of the teachers and staff at the school lays a foundation for their collaboration. My team, the "Coyotes," is a sixth grade team. At the time of the study we are starting our second year of working together. What follows are brief descriptions of the teachers on the team. In chapter 3, I describe our histories in greater detail.

George Labranch is a veteran Math teacher. He has taught grades 6, 7, and 8 in both junior high and middle school settings. He participated in the transition years of the middle school, while it was still in the old junior high
building. George is one of the school's union representatives, and he reflects both insider knowledge and cynicism about the political workings of the town.

Harry Porter is the Language Arts teacher on the team. Harry taught upper elementary (grades 5 and 6) in three different elementary schools in the district before he moved to the new middle school, in all nearly 20 years. At the time the study begins, Harry is still having difficulty adjusting to middle school teaching, and he is somewhat ambivalent about the philosophy and activities embodied by "middle school concept."

Jill Kilburn is the Science teacher on the team. At the time of the study, she is in her fourth year of teaching and second year at the school. Jill is originally from Central Falls and is enthusiastic about contributing to her home town by coming back as a teacher. She relishes opportunities for independence and creativity that are possible in the team setting at Central Falls.

Carol Mulligan is the Social Studies teacher on the team. At the time of the study, I am in my second year at Central Falls. I am a veteran middle school teacher. I taught for 17 years in two other middle schools and participated in the transition from junior high to middle school in both of them. My leadership experience in professional organizations for social studies and as a teacher educator position me as an "expert" on the team in some ways, but in terms of this community, I am the newcomer.

Organizational Notes

Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical framework of the social construction of reality as a structure for viewing the team. I continue introductory work by describing my research methodology in Chapter 2, and the context of school and team members in Chapter 3. Chapters 4 through 6 are data chapters, which follow the course of team meetings through the first
half of the school year, and establish background for the work that we do together: organizing the team, following student progress, and adjusting the academic program of our students to meet their needs. Chapters 7 and 8 examine the process of sharing subjective realities to build a team "nomos" (Berger and Kellner, 1967). Those chapters illustrate the relationship of sharing norms to team effectiveness. Chapters 9 and 10 focus on the co-construction of responsive curriculum and instruction, with extensive data from the planning of an interdisciplinary thematic "Oceans" unit during the final months of the school year.

In each chapter, I describe and reproduce segments of our team meetings, set apart in italics. My thinking about the dialogue appears in conventional print. My comments are in terms of the theoretical framework described in the next chapter and in terms of aspects of working professional knowledge being shared, constructed, or reconstructed through our conversation. I draw in additional theoretical voices in each chapter, pertinent to our team discussion and the natural progress of our work through a school year. Quotations from some of the key theoretical voices introduce each chapter.

I draw conclusions in all of the data chapters, to critically assess the extent to which we share our teaching realities, co-construct aspects of a team reality, or exhibit dilemmas related to the teaming process. I state those conclusions in terms of the social construction of reality and the team tasks and knowledge realms outlined in Chapter 1. Finally, Chapter 11 summarizes my conclusions and explores implications for further research.
CHAPTER ONE

SHARING REALITY: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*Insofar as all human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man (sic) in the street.*

*Berger and Luckman, 1966, p.3.*

The world of a middle school team is one realm of "taken-for-granted reality," the center of which is a given population of students. In this chapter, I explain my understanding of the social construction of reality as it applies to a middle school team. Our conversations give us opportunities to share and affirm our professional knowledge. Our voices form the reality of our team. At the same time, there are opportunities for us to co-construct applications of professional knowledge to thus construct a shared reality. I create a framework for viewing this context by categorizing aspects of working professional knowledge directly related to the middle school concept. Throughout the
dissertation, I interpret team meeting conversations in terms of the same categories.

The reality of a middle school team meeting is the center of every day professional life for many middle schools. As such, it holds a powerful place on the professional knowledge landscape. At Central Falls Middle School, teachers have two planning periods: one for the team and one for individuals. Team meeting time provides a "safe" atmosphere within which we can let off steam, and at the same time publicize and crystallize our observations, dilemmas, and possible solutions related to our daily work. In this way, the evolving nature of professional knowledge comes to be established as reality for the teachers who participate.

The Sociology of Knowledge

The middle school team can be viewed as a subsystem, within which, say Berger and Luckman, knowledge is legitimated. As a subsystem, a team establishes its own subreality of the institution of the school, as it constructs a highly contextualized interpretation of the middle school concept.

Berger and Luckman term the process of establishing knowledge as a reality "objectification." As we converse with our team colleagues, we make public our subjective working knowledge of our students, and are likely to adjust that knowledge in the light of the new information that our colleagues bring to the conversation. We may challenge or validate one another's perceptions, and often, we extend our own working knowledge of our students in the process. When we extend our subjective realities of the students with whom we work in this way, we begin to construct a team reality. In chapter 5, I elaborate on the process of "interiorizing the particulars" (Polanyi, 1983, pp. 17-21) of our students, and describe how the team conversation facilitates that process.
Berger and Luckman describe the importance of the *intersubjective world* in establishing knowledge as reality. While our primary relationships (such as the family) frame our initial and underlying perceptions of reality, the school and a team are *secondary institutions*, with specialized functions in the distribution of knowledge. For teachers, the intersubjective world of the classroom is a place where we establish our own teaching reality, where we put theory into practice. In middle schools, the team is an extension of the intersubjective classroom world, where we discuss our classroom realities in relation to the wider context of our colleagues' classrooms. A middle school team occupies a special place as a subreality or secondary institution within a school, when we share the same group of students. The realities of our classrooms and our colleagues' classrooms overlap when we converse about them.

Berger and Luckman term the reality of such an institution a *subuniverse*, where meanings related to middle school teaching are crystallized. The routines that we establish together help enforce and reinforce the expectations of our role as middle school teachers. In Chapter 4, I describe how my team establishes routines around the middle school concept. (Team Organization). *Crystallization and stabilization* of various aspects of that concept occur through our meeting conversations.

In the same way, we extend our knowledge of students when we converse about them. Illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6, the team begins to describe our students in the same language. We develop and agree to use some of the same strategies to help them learn, such as reminding them of their assignments in a variety of ways (orally, written on the board, and written in their agenda books), and implementing a folder system for organization.

"The most important vehicle of reality maintenance is conversation", say Berger and Luckman (1966, p.152). The conversation of team meetings gives
us opportunities to check up on individual perceptions of reality, as we establish a team reality. Berger and Luckman say that "conversation gives firm contours to items previously apprehended in a fleeting or unclear manner." The language of a middle school team is related to aspects of middle school concept. The meaning behind our words is objectivated through our conversations about individual and group applications of practical knowledge.

The middle school concept (also referred to as "middle school philosophy") encompasses aspects of school organization, adolescent psychology, pedagogy, and even curriculum. It advocates a variety of strategies meant to attend to a central assumption about young adolescents—that children between the approximate ages of ten to fourteen have particular overlapping developmental needs, in the intellectual, somatic, introspective, familial, and communal domains (Lipsitz, 1980; Stevenson, 1992), and that developmentally responsive pedagogy should be the goal of schools that educate children in this age range (Carnegie Task Force, 1989; Beane, 1990; Stevenson, 1992). Middle school teaming evolved in response to that goal, and teaming carries with it the expectation that an interdisciplinary group of teachers knows best how to respond to the individual needs of its shared population of students. That assumption helps to legitimate the position of a team in formulating working knowledge in relation to the learning of its students.

The process of socialization for a middle school team—that is, how it comes to view itself as an entity—centers around its development of agreed to interpretations of "middle school concept." Our conversations enlarge our subjective realities at the same time we try to agree upon a shared reality. Our subjective professional knowledge about students, and other aspects of middle school teaching, is thus made objective.
Teams facilitate the process of institutionalization of assumptions about middle school learners and learning within a school. The social group works to interpret and crystallize meanings, whether they be administrative edicts or broad aspects of middle school concept. In the case of the Coyotes team, it is important to note that one teacher's meanings are not always collaborative meanings. Confrontations about our differences sometimes come as a shock, jarring our taken-for-granted realities. Through conversation, we probe meanings that are shared and ones that are not. We attempt to reconstruct particular meanings that are embedded in our routines and in our language, in order to reach agreed upon meanings. In the case of the Coyotes, it is interesting to note movement in understanding, even when there is no movement in how we intend to implement some of our plans. In some cases, it may be "too much work" to change, as one of the Coyotes team teachers notes in relation to attempting team co-constructions of curriculum. In other cases, we may develop enriched understandings of how our team colleagues think and work, but be unwilling to change individual practices to accommodate our colleagues needs and preferences.

Berger and Luckman note that "the validity of everyday knowledge is taken for granted until further notice" (1966, p. 44). As evidenced through the team meeting conversation of the Coyotes, we sometimes enforce and reinforce professional knowledge, but at other times challenge the taken-for-granted aspects of our teaching. Team meetings are apt to precipitate questions about our automatic answers. Team meetings give us the opportunity to pause and examine institutionalized knowledge. In this way, team meetings encourage reflection about what we do.

The subjective realities of individual self-contained classroom teachers become social realities to a team, constructs that can benefit from their social
construction. The opportunity to discuss our perceptions, and to work together to establish meanings about professional knowledge fosters voice. In the Coyotes team example, one teacher in particular illustrates this point. Harry, a former elementary school teacher, taught at the middle school for several years without developing an understanding of or commitment to the middle school concept. Finally, after his second year on the Coyotes, a team that he felt more comfortable with, he began to gain confidence, to air his concerns and realizations. By the end of the year, he was trying out aspects of middle school pedagogy that he previously feared, and could articulate changes in his own knowledge about middle school learners as a result.

Harry's example suggests the role that a team can play in the evolution of professional knowledge. Teaming requires an added degree of flexibility on the part of the teachers who work together, a willingness to compromise, and a willingness to revisit aspects of our own professional knowledge. When we agree to team, we tacitly agree to participate in the evolution of practical professional knowledge.

Berger and Luckman note that, "the internalization of an institutional subworld has normative, affective, and cognitive aspects" (1966, page 138). Though I focus on the social and socializing aspects of knowledge sharing and forming in the context of a middle school team, there are normative, affective, and cognitive considerations within that analysis. In the chapters of the dissertation, I turn to other theorists who shed light on these aspects of the team reality.

The Institutional World: Middle School Concept

The basis for a middle school team reality comes from outside the school, originating in widely accepted middle school theory (Lounsbury, 1978; Carnegie
At Central Falls, the basic tenets of middle school concept are embedded in our mission statement:

The purpose of Central Falls Middle School is to transform elementary school youngsters into students who are prepared to meet the challenges of high school. In order to accomplish this transition, these conditions are met:

- We must recognize and work with the unique social and emotional needs of early adolescents.
- The middle school environment shall foster growth and development, mutual respect, individual and group responsibility and self-discipline in order to achieve maximum potential.
- The middle school should be an exciting and rewarding environment, offering a wide range of enriching activities.

(excerpt from the Central Falls Middle School Teacher Handbook)

The middle school concept, which I also refer to as middle school philosophy, takes up the progressive tradition in the United States and applies it to a particular developmental time, that of early adolescence. In the past, progressive education has been synonymous with child-centered education and that is what middle school education purports to be. Within the tradition of middle schools, early adolescents are approximately ages 11 and 14, and are identified as a distinct group with distinct developmental needs. The organization, curriculum, and instruction that goes on in middle schools are meant to answer those distinct needs. Chris Stevenson, at the University of Vermont, uses a broad conceptualization of the developmental changes of the general age group of students, formulated from his knowledge of developmental psychology and years of experience with early adolescent learners. Both Stevenson (1992) and Lipsitz (1980) name "centers of similarity"—domains of change for early adolescents. For Stevenson they are the introspective domain (the self), the somatic domain (the body), the intellectual domain, the familial domain (one's primary relationships), and the communal domain (relations in the greater world, of school and friends, for
instance). He notes that changes in one domain interact with changes in the others (1992, pp.78-108). Middle school structures acknowledge the developmental realities of early adolescents, and build a pedagogy around them.

Just as David Purpel starts with "a dialogue of meaning" to formulate curriculum (1989), so does the middle school theorist James Beane. To Beane, adolescents are naturally preoccupied with "developing personal identity, exploring moral and ethical questions in immediate and distant social relationships, finding a place in the peer group, and developing commitments to people and causes" (1990, p.37). According to Beane, responsiveness to moral and spiritual issues and the development of a moral self should underlie the structure and content of middle school learning. In order to do so, he advocates using broad themes as the center of middle school curriculum, within which the knowledge of the disciplines are interwoven.

The middle school tradition does not stand alone in its attention to the broad spectrum of needs of children. The underlying philosophy and structures of the Coalition of Essential Schools (Sizer, 1992) have commonalities with several aspects of the middle school concept. A prominent example is the restructuring of Thayer High School in Winchester, NH, under the leadership of Dennis Litky. In Litky's words, the 7-12 school was restructured around the key factors of "caring and respect" (in Stevens and Wood, 1992, p.372). Key structures of the restructuring effort were an advisory system, a personal future planning course, team teaching, and various efforts to integrate curricula.

Lipsitz's 1980-81 study examines four middle grade schools that were identified as successful. Questionnaire data from nearly 100 experts--researchers and practitioners in fields relating to early adolescent development and education--helped her to formulate standards for judging the success of
schools in meeting the educational needs of early adolescents. The schools identified as successful were examined for purposes, goals and definitions, school climate, organization, curriculum, instructional practices, leadership, and community context. From her data, Lipsitz concluded that "the most striking feature (of the four 'successful' schools that she observed) was the willingness and ability to adapt all school practices to the individual differences in intellectual, biological and social maturation of their students" (1984, p.167).

Good middle schools attend to individual needs in a great variety of ways, prominent among them being the team format. The team format provides a setting in which educators can assess the individual needs of students and implement programs that are responsive to them. The team structure requires a smaller than usual (for today's norm) student-teacher ratio. Typical teams consist of four teachers, experts in the four traditional disciplines (English, math, science and social studies) who share from 80 to 100 students. The best of schedules for teams assigns them students for large blocks of time, within which teachers schedule academic learning time, enrichment courses, and large group activities. During a part of each day, team students are taught by someone else—usually "specials" such as art, music, computer, physical education, technology education (industrial arts), home economics, health, and/or library skills. During that time, team teachers are able to come together to reflect together about students and program, while sharing the team tasks that are assigned to them (such as progress reporting, enrichment planning, and whole team behavior management).

Schools employ a variety of strategies to foster productive team planning time. Often, team teachers choose particular roles to fulfill, such as scheduling or generating minutes for meetings or serving as liaison between the team and other groups in the school. Some schools require teams to generate and follow
an agenda each week, which they turn in to the administration at the beginning of each week. Schools with teams often set aside a workshop day for team self-evaluation. Administrative intervention varies from school to school. Some administrators attend team meetings regularly, while others do so only when asked. Many schools include other specialists at team meetings, at particular intervals, such as a special education director or counselor. In many schools, the model of assigning a special educator or counselor to each team helps address the need for support for inclusion of students with various special learning needs.

Schools with teams often employ strategies to alleviate the isolation of teams from one another. A faculty council, a monthly whole-school newsletter, and grade level meetings for schools with several teams of one grade are a few effective strategies. At Thayer, teacher meetings were held before and after school for whole school and interdisciplinary planning. The school day for students was compressed to 5 1/2 hours to accommodate teacher planning time. Students came for extra help during a 45 minute block before school and teachers stayed and met every day for an hour after school (Stevens and Wood, 1992, pp.370-371).

To accomplish the perceived benefits of schools within a school, community building strategies are a key component of large middle schools. Within teams or houses (physical subdivisions of a large building), students may have regular activities to foster community spirit (such as assemblies or social events). Advisory groups can foster community identity and attention to "the whole child." Advisory programs usually assign a group of about 10 students to an adult in the school who meets with them regularly (at least once a week). The advisor may help students set goals and check up on their progress verbally. Often, community service projects are undertaken by advisory groups.
Finally, the small group of peers (which may be of a single grade or multi-grade), is encouraged to become a support group for one another through their shared projects. The students in the group are apt to develop a sense of loyalty and caring for one another.

In *The school and society*, Dewey advocates that schools be organized as small communities, "saturating each with a spirit of service, providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction" (1990, p. 29) by actively involving children in projects and social reform endeavors. The middle school movement in the United States incorporates community service and involvement as one of its goals. Through such projects, students are not only co-learners, but co-workers (to Dewey, the two are inseparable). The service component of middle school structure (which overlaps with curriculum and instruction) can be achieved in a variety of ways, from a class adopting a nursing home or day care center, to simply working with reading buddies in a third grade class in elementary school down the street. The key is to encourage participation in the world, thereby fostering a sense of agency. When service projects are a cooperative effort, we encourage group responsibility and a sense of the interdependence of people in the world.

In general, the middle school concept encourages schools to be more collaborative places. Research on restructuring suggests the importance of empowering teachers as co-planners and implementers of school change, in order for change to be systemic. Lightfoot's "good schools" show "high regard for teachers and their work (1983, p. 333) and foster "collective authority" (p.329). She found these qualities in schools with various team structures that increase choice and responsibility for both students and their teachers.

Rosenholz identifies successful schools as those that are "high consensus" -- ones in which there are norms of collaboration, and in which
teachers share the technical decision-making (1989). Johnson names characteristics of school organization—the distribution of authority, workload specialization, autonomy, interdependence, and interaction—as key workplace variables that determine school effectiveness (1990, p.22). While these variables are not solely related to middle schools nor to teaming, they are often benefits of the organizational substructure of middle school teams. To Johnson, additional benefits of middle school teams are "holistic attention to students . . . the curricular insights that interdisciplinatory work offer . . . the ability to deal with student problems . . . the support structure (it) provides for teachers" (1990, pp.122-123).

While the structural components of middle schools are meant to encourage and allow teachers to address the developmental needs of early adolescents, curriculum is the missing piece according to several middle school theorists. Lipsitz concludes that the most difficult area for translating middle school philosophy into practice is in the category of curriculum. She describes "brilliant moments" such as a fifties week, environmental camp, and artists-in-residence, but all of them are outside the regular curriculum. They "lent variety to otherwise uninspired, standard fare" (1984, p.189), she laments. At the same time, she finds "the quality of discourse in the classroom (to be) characterized by a surprising lack of intellectual rigor" (p.190).

Lounsbury's study of three sixth grades finds middle schools devoting most of their time to the "big four subjects: English, math, social studies and science, plus reading" (1988, p.12). There is heavy reliance on textbook and teacher directed learning, with little opportunity for exploring problems close to the lives of students, either personally or in the current world. Exploratory subjects, ones that allow student choice and hands on experience, are usually an addendum to a student's schedule.
Lounsbury is not the only researcher who has found "exploratory" time to be the best learning time for middle school students. Lipsitz (1984), Beane (1990), and Stevenson and Carr (1993) report similar findings. In middle schools that I have observed and worked in, it is the hands-on courses (tech prep, computers, drama, and physical education, for instance) which encourage student involvement and activity, and challenge them to solve problems creatively and holistically. The Coalition of Essential Schools addresses the enormity of the problem of restructuring to provide challenging, authentic, and responsive curricula. While general curricular issues are not the focus of this dissertation, I describe our team's attempts to formulate responsive curricula in chapters 9 and 10.

Professional Working Knowledge in a Team Setting

The middle school concept forms a hub to which a group of practitioners on a middle school team connect their subjective knowledge about teaching and from which they construct working knowledge related to school and team context. For purposes of analysis, I divide aspects of professional knowledge into categories related to the middle school concept. Within each category, I list examples of working knowledge that are important to middle school teachers.

The various points of view of the teachers who come together on a middle school team continually present us with alternative ways of doing things (in terms of working knowledge). At the same time, sharing our realities and constructing a team reality encourages us to create composite ways of doing things. Both models are part of a team reality—the alternative viewpoints and the composite. I attend to these options in each of the data chapters of the dissertation by revisiting the categories of knowledge I outline below. In this way, I assess the extent to which we share, construct, and reconstruct aspects of working knowledge.
Knowledge of students. The basis for middle school philosophy is the conceptualization of developmental needs of early adolescents. Knowledge of students includes:

- Developmental needs of each of our students, in the realms of intellectual, physical, social and emotional development.
- Interaction of realms of development in individuals.
- Interaction of a student's personal life with his or her school life.

Knowledge of pedagogy. Middle school pedagogy is directly tied to knowledge of developmental needs of students. Middle school pedagogy is meant to be responsive to those needs. Working knowledge of middle school pedagogy includes:

- Methods that engage students in their own learning.
- Methods that attend to and foster development in the realms of:
  - Intellectual development - activities that cross the traditional curricular disciplines, such as study skills or critical thinking skills.
  - Social development - such as cooperative learning and service learning
  - Emotional development - esteem building activities, including individualized instruction, team and community projects.
  - Physical development - active learning and out of seat activities, during both academic and enrichment times.

Curricular knowledge. Although the members of this middle school team represent the four major academic disciplines, and are usually expected to follow curricular guidelines as dictated by the school in which we work, there are aspects of curricular knowledge that may be co-constructed within our setting:

- Integration of themes among the disciplines.
- Integration of cross-curricular activities throughout the disciplines.
• Reinforcement of skills and knowledge across the disciplines.
• Whole team activities to address particular curricula.

Knowledge of school organization. Because middle school teams are often "schools within a school," teachers on teams are expected to share and build working knowledge related to school organization to greater degree than are teachers whose realm is limited to their own classroom. Important aspects of school organization that are the realm of teams at Central Falls are:
• Scheduling academic and enrichment time for a given population of students.
• Mixing and arranging students for academic, enrichment, and other school time (i.e. recess).
• Attending to behavioral issues and problems, related to individual students and to the team of students as a whole.
• Communication with the rest of the school community, parents, and the wider community outside of the school.

Knowledge of effective collaboration. While collaboration and collaborative learning are taken-for-granted aspects of the middle school concept, they are seldom named as a separate realm. Both in terms of the group of students and the teachers who are responsible for them, collaboration is a key to sharing a team reality. Aspects of collaboration that impact team effectiveness are:
• Strategies to increase cohesiveness, for students and for teachers.
• Ways to accommodate different voices in the meeting conversation, in our planning, and in our implementation of plans.
• The effects of cohesiveness and accommodation on a team's ability to carry out other middle school goals (that is, on our effectiveness).
• The effects of collaboration on our individual professional effectiveness and growth.
With Berger and Luckman's theory of the social construction of reality in mind, and the categories of working professional knowledge established as a framework for critically viewing the team, I continue introductory work in the next chapter with a description of the research methods that guided my inquiry.
CHAPTER TWO

AN INTERACTIVE METHODOLOGY

The moment you turn to the ordinary and examine it, it becomes something else... What was background to the important movement of our lives becomes on second look, on re-search to be quite wonder-ful. Having a sense of wonder about the ordinary events of life is a natural consequence of taking them seriously, of examining them.

Barritt, Bleecker, Beekman and Mulderij, 1985, p.25.

In this study, I re-search a setting that was ordinary to me—my own middle school teaching team. Through interactive methods—between the setting and theory of the social construction of reality—I take a second look at the middle school teaching world.

In the methodology employed here, I am the primary instrument of research, collecting data in the social setting of which I am a part, interpreting it through my own subjective reality of "teaming." Data analysis and interpretation are on-going, facilitated and complicated by my interaction in the setting, shaped by my continual reflection over theory. In this chapter, I describe the ongoing and interactive processes of data collection, analysis, and interpretation that guided my setting down the Coyotes team meeting process as I have.
After describing the nature of the study, and my process of entering into it, I explore the delicate balance of being both a team member and researcher in the same setting. The issues I discuss are of balancing roles, staying alert, and being objective.

Then I describe the key strategies of research methodology I employed over the course of the study: data collection, triangulation, and the concept of "key actor" (Fetterman, 1989).

Finally, I explain the process of sifting through data and making meaning of it. I apply Geertz's concept of "thick description," in terms of interpreting and writing up the data to portray meanings I discern through the data.

**Focus of the Study: Coyotes Team Meetings**

Stake describes a case study as "a bounded system... in its own habitat" (1988, p.256). At Central Falls Middle School, teams are "bounded systems," each a distinct subdivision in the student and teacher population, each with a high degree of autonomy. The Coyotes, my own sixth grade teaching team, is the subject of this study, and our team meeting time is the primary focus. Middle schools like Central Falls are somewhat unique, in that teams are expected to spend at least 45 minutes each day meeting and talking about team students and programs. In order to focus on the shared reflective time of a team, most of the data that I collected is from our regular meetings. My purpose was to listen closely to our conversations in order to better understand the processes and implications of such settings for the professionals who participate in them. I view the oral interaction of our meetings as a shared reflective process, and in conducting research, I perused the data for evidence of sharing, construction, and reconstruction of our working professional knowledge.
Gaining Entry, Granting Permission

Deyhle, Hess and Lecompte suggest that reciprocity between researcher and setting is an important way to mediate the researcher/subject relationship (1992, p. 629). Over the course of my first year as a teacher in this setting, I began to mediate my research position with my colleagues. When I was hired, the principal assumed that my past experience (nearly twenty years of teaming coupled with professional development experience) would bring extra benefits to the team, as well as to the students whom I would teach. I was doubly conscious of that expectation once I formally began my study. My heightened awareness and the heightened burden of responsibility to the team were bound to affect our team process.

I was hired to teach sixth grade social studies as a member of the Coyotes interdisciplinary team in August, 1993. I was also immersed in my second year of doctoral studies. As a result of my studies, I experienced new realizations about teaming, related to the social construction of reality. Aspects of my work, related to my own knowledge of teaching and the effect of conversations with my colleagues on my work, now came to consciousness. Concepts of co-constructing working knowledge of our students, for instance, played out in the day to day reality of our team work. At that point, I began to discuss with my colleagues the possibility of conducting my doctoral research with them.

The nature and structure of my inquiry emerged gradually, in conjunction with my continued studies and discussions with my team colleagues. The "nugget" for research was the idea that the team is a setting for the social construction of professional knowledge. It seemed that when we shared stories of our teaching day, we shared our individual realities, as well as built a shared
reality, that is, a team reality. When we debated best ways to motivate students, for instance, we sometimes challenged, sometimes validated each other's assumptions. In our daily work, we co-constructed a team reality. My team was interested from the start. They were flattered by my interest, and energized by the discussion. In the final months of school, I outlined the process of data collection I planned for the following year and gained their verbal support. Then, at the beginning of the new year (1994-95), I met with each of my colleagues to outline my planned process and intent, and to gain formal permission. I explained that I would tape approximately one meeting per week and conduct interviews with each of them at the beginning and end of the year. I projected how I would use transcripts of team meetings in the written dissertation, and explained that I would preserve the anonymity of both school and team with pseudonyms in the final written work.

One team member, Harry, expressed reservations about my expectations. He was concerned about additional demands on his time. I reassured him that I would require two personal interviews of him, and that most of the data would be from taping our regular meetings. He seemed satisfied, and I continued to check back with him and the others for their understanding of my intent. I shared transcript data and several reflection pieces with them, to allow them to see our words in print, and to invite them into my interpretive process.

By focusing my researcher's lens on this team, I afforded them a level of respect that they had seldom been granted. My heightened attention to the team seemed to heighten the degree of reflectiveness this team was capable of. Others have analyzed the effects of teacher research on teachers (Yonemura, 1982; Oja and Smulyan, 1989; Corcoran Smith and Lytle, 1993; Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, and Kennard, editors, 1993), and though this is not a study of
teacher research, the effect of my research stance is an important factor to consider. I continue to consider this at appropriate times in the dissertation.

**Balancing Roles: Teacher and Researcher**

In the Fall of 1994, I began the school year as a member of the Coyotes Sixth Grade Team, and as a teacher-researcher. Lytle and Corcoran Smith suggest that teacher research is, almost by definition, case study research, because of the uniqueness of every classroom and every learner. Through insider description, they argue, teachers "ask questions that other researchers may not ask . . . and see patterns that others may not see" (1993, p. 58). While being an insider on the team provides me certain advantages as a researcher, at the same time it carries risks. I know about working on a team, I live concepts of the social construction of reality every day. I hear and experience what an outside observer would not.

At the same time, insider description carries with it significant ethical dilemmas about presenting the data accurately and interpreting it fairly. From the start, I viewed the team as a setting for growth and change, because that is what teaming has been for me. This is a bias of my research and part of the role I play on teams. In order to mediate this bias, I describe my own subjective reality as such in the write-up. My place is one of four subjective realities that are brought together in the team reality described.

Throughout the research year, as I collected and interpreted data, I mediated my bias with my team by making my personal agenda clear. I discussed my emerging questions about teaming with my colleagues along the way. With their responses and feedback, my colleagues helped me to develop the themes of study, as they appear in the data chapters. Through the course of discussion, I was able to engage my team members in the on-going dilemmas
of my research, and my own reflective effort. In doing so, I was bound to effect their professional evolution, as they did my own.

Although this research is not meant to be action research in the developmental sense that Oja and Smulyan use it (1989), my position on the Coyotes team was bound to introduce a higher degree of reflexivity than middle school teams usually exhibit. That stance encouraged my team to evaluate its team practice and our own middle school teaching in terms of our effectiveness in a specific context--Central Falls Middle School. I attend to the possibilities of this stance as the Coyotes team story unfolds, and address the issue again in Chapter 11, Implications.

**Staying Alert**

At all stages in my research, there was a danger that my involvement as a team member would restrict my ability to see events, because I was so completely involved in them. Marjorie Spindler, who was once a classroom teacher, describes her position as an observer in a classroom where the familiar was too familiar, causing her to overlook seemingly ordinary events. "I came near to quitting fieldwork . . . I sat in classes for days wondering what there was to observe" (Spindler and Spindler, p. 23). But Spindler says she was eventually "able to see the teacher and pupils as 'natives,' engaging in rituals, interaction, selective perception, and so-on. . . ."(p. 24).

Like Spindler, my data were often too familiar. As I transcribed tapes in the evenings, I would sometimes fight with myself to even listen. Sometimes as I sat at the computer, with a finger on the button of my tape recorder, I would protest that "having lived through this once is enough." There was a danger that I would become so involved with the tasks of teaming that I would not be able to see what was happening beyond the details of debating student progress or planning a team assembly. At team meetings, my tape recorder served as
witness to our work, doing my work for me when I became so involved. I would
forget about it, just as my colleagues did. The low hum became a normal part of
our background, the electronic witness to our work.

But how would I face my pile of tapes when it came time to transcribe? During the times when the strange became so familiar that it was a matter of
course, the "problem" which was the center of my inquiry was no longer a
problem. If my questions about knowledge dropped into the background, I
shared in our team constructions on the same level as my colleagues. But
when I relived those meetings, the act of transcribing helped me to look beyond
the ordinary of our conversation. As I reviewed meeting upon meeting, I began
to develop a history, and began to develop my own insider knowledge. The
dynamic relationship between scribing for the team and transcribing for my
research had positive effects on both my teamwork and my understanding of the
meaning our meetings. Once a week, as I formulated our new team meeting
agenda, my insider knowledge crept into the annotated agenda I produced for
my team. Our work was facilitated, and became more focused as a result.

Keeping the work fresh has been a problem from the start. As a team
member, it was sometimes difficult to continue to ask, or to reformulate my
questions about the team as a setting for reflection and professional growth,
especially when I was frustrated with our progress through our day to day tasks.
But the work of transcribing forced me to step back from the action of the
moment (our team meetings) to reflect, to interact with theory and to go back to
our team meetings with fresh energy and resolve to make the most of our daily
work. In this way, the research brought new dynamism to my daily work. When
I began to write short reflection pieces, interim interpretations of the meeting
data, not only was I able to focus my research, but I became a better team
member: more patient and knowledgeable about how we could work together more effectively.

For any researcher whose intent is to study a setting of which she or he is a part, these are factors to weigh and consider carefully. The complexity of a dual role brings to question the validity of our reporting events and makes critical analysis more difficult. I arrived at the meanings presented in this dissertation through numerous siftings and resiftings of the data and through continual consideration and reconsideration of theory (of the social construction of reality, reflective practice, middle school concept, and construction of working professional knowledge in group settings). The process of mediating my position with theory is made explicit throughout the dissertation.

**Constructing a Dual Role**

Perhaps the more difficult task for me at the beginning of my research year was how to become a cultural observer of my team, while continuing to work effectively as a team member. In his article, "The Stranger" (1964), Schutz aptly describes the dynamic and evolving point of view of a cultural observer. Schutz says that "The actor within the social world experiences it primarily as a field of his actual and possible acts and only secondarily as an object of his thinking" (p. 32). On my team, I was one of the actors, an active participant involved in decision-making who wielded her own powers of persuasion to convince the team to support her own pet projects. But as a researcher, perhaps in spite of my years of experience, I did not know what I would see as I stepped back to observe and critically analyze my own team's conversation.

Schutz says that the cultural pattern of group life is not clear to its participants, that it is "incoherent, only partially clear, and not at all free from contradictions" (p. 33). A researcher is a stranger to that cultural pattern. He is
apt to unwittingly use the "interpretive scheme" of his home group to view a new culture. But the actions of a new group may be incomprehensible according to the researcher's cultural scheme. The rituals of the new group may not be apparent to him.

As both teaching team member and researcher, the "interpretative scheme" of a middle school team was clear to me. I had worked on this team and in this school for a year, ample time to adjust to the cultural pattern of Central Falls Middle School. I was just as affected by the general school climate as my colleagues were, frustrated by the lack of material support in the school, overwhelmed by the numbers of students with special learning problems, or insulted by the condescending attitude of our colleagues at the high school toward us. However, because of my new stance as researcher, "the cultural pattern" of this group and this school became "not a shelter but a field of adventure, not a matter of course but a questionable topic of investigation . . . a problematic situation" (p. 37). Rather than accept my home culture as it was, or fight against it, I began to observe it with interest.

At the same time, my place in the culture was endangered. I stood with one foot in each world, as insider and outsider. My objective stance gave me "doubtful loyalty" to the group, in that I no longer accepted "the total of its cultural pattern as the natural and appropriate way of life" (p. 37). While doors were open to me that would not be open to other researchers, and the unspoken patterns which we use to understand our teaching world were already part of my own problem-solving repertoire, I was no longer really one of them. The absurdities of our position as teachers in the overall school culture stood out

1 This is Schutz's term for the framework from which a member of a cultural group acts in a particular cultural world.

2 An example is the tacit understanding of middle school teachers that the physical and emotional developmental issues of early adolescents will affect their ability to attend to academic work.
clearly to me, and I no longer took them to heart. My developing knowledge of
the culture, and my long hours of reflection on it, freed me to take on a more
experimental stance toward my work than my colleagues were able to have.

Keeping Honest

Being the Coyotes team scribe afforded me a position of power, a
position that was underlined by my research work. While the position of scribe
was less overtly powerful than that of team chairperson might be, it allowed me
to prod the meeting process along through the annotated agenda I produced for
our meetings. In taking notes and creating an agenda, I committed our words
to the written page. When I recycled our unfinished business into the next
agenda, I was bound to filter bits of processed transcriptions into it as well. The
enriched history of our meetings that I was building, through listening and
reflecting, put me a step ahead of my colleagues in my knowledge of our team
work.

Rosenberg's work with her own students (The empowerment educator as
disguised ruler, 1989) describes the dual relationship that a teacher-researcher
plays when analyzing her own work. The focus of her study was a college
classroom in which she turned over key decisions about learning to her own
students. Rosenberg documented not only the means for empowering students,
but their resistance to the process, and the ways in which she attempted to
mediate her own position.

My own dual position on this team gave me power in different ways than
Rosenberg experienced as teacher of college students. The members of my
team held greater positions of power in the culture of Central Falls than I did.
While George, Harry and I were all close to one another in years of teaching
experience, they had been in the system far longer than I had. George held the
greatest insider role, having participated in the transition to middle school, and
being one of our school union representatives. At the same time, the context of Central Falls Middle School mediated power relationships. Decision-making was dispersed through team roles, which were viewed as being non-hierarchical. Administrators seldom attended team meetings nor interfered with our interpretation of team tasks, so we were free to establish our own subuniverse in relation to teacher strengths and weaknesses, preferences and needs.

Still, as I suggest above, my involvement with the team meeting data provided me with an additional lens that my colleagues were not equipped with. My attitude toward teaching and teaming was different. My research stance encouraged me to view my work experimentally, so I was more willing to take risks. Therefore, I tried to balance my unique position by engaging my colleagues from time to time in the analysis of our team work. Just as Rosenberg engaged her students in a reflective process by asking them to listen and respond to audio tapes of their classes, I shared meeting tapes and transcripts with my team colleagues. I probed their ideas about teaming through conversations about the transcripts, and through interviews. Their responses are one method for triangulation of my data about teaming.

Collecting and Analyzing Data

To Guba and Lincoln, the key element of naturalistic methodology is the human filter of the setting being analyzed: "Other forms of instrumentation may be used in later phases of an inquiry, but the human is the initial and continuing mainstay" (1985, p. 236). In this section, I describe how I selected data and attributed meaning to it, gradually shaping this story of a year in the life of the Coyotes team.

During the year of data-collecting (1994-95), I audio taped our Coyotes team meetings approximately once a week, from October through June. I
began with our Monday meetings, because on Mondays we formulated our plans for the week. Our first meeting of the week was usually haphazard, covering the gamut of issues that the team dealt with together. Thus, we generated agenda items to address for the rest of the week. Gradually, my taping schedule changed. As I began to review our meetings by transcribing tapes, I became aware of recurring themes in our work. I began to name sections of transcript and organize the themes on a data base. Then, I began to choose meetings to tape based on those recurring themes. Sometimes I would tape several meetings in a week, while at other times I would skip weeks. My team colleagues helped me choose meetings to tape that were illustrative of our work. I would run to get my tape recorder when our conversation began to cover new ground. Other team members would suggest mid-meeting, "Hey, you ought to tape this!"

I was able to discern themes and the general shape of our work from the written records of our meetings, as well. We generated our own paper trail through team letters to parents and memos to other professionals in the school, written team policy such as the "Coyotes Paw Behavior Expectations," and the meeting agenda and notes that I recorded as team scribe. The annotated meeting agenda that I handed out to my colleagues once or twice a week was an interactive document. We began on Monday by generating items to attend to over the next week. I kept the agenda, complete with scribblings, in a team binder (example, figure 2-1), and gave my team colleagues copies whenever I readjusted it (figure 2-2).

The interactive agenda kept our meetings focused, and the paper record reveals "team themes" - the issues that we returned to again and again, and which became the richest settings for our collaboration. The agenda also moved the team process and task completion forward. When I questioned my
Several students were discussed. Mr. joined team meeting to gather and give information.

Agenda for the week's meetings:

1. Update on schedules
   - who is handscheduled and how?
   - Fred B. has "World of Work" during Social Studies time
   - any further conflicts?
   - Carol's phone conversation with one parent was productive

2. Team letter to send home Friday:
   - general greeting and words to allay confusion (both their's and ours!)
   - reading time and reading list
   - is there an upcoming field trip?

3. Core group activities - project agenda for next two weeks
   Reading on Tues, Thurs, Friday to include kids Rich has for study skills?
   Which days for getting to know you activities?
   Which activities?
   How long will it take to read the novels?

4. Lunch duty:
   Does it include recess? Is there a recess?
   Can we avoid keeping kids in to make up work and save a team period day for that instead?

5. Homeroom/Pride activity ideas

6. Homework Policy

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Team Minutes and Weekly Agenda 9/19/94

1. Field trip forms and money were collected 1st period. Teachers check off students on class list for permission slip and/or money. Money goes to Mrs. K. and list of students is transferred to Mrs. M's master list.

Phil called central office to gain permission for out of state trip. Usually this needs to go to the school board enough in advance for their approval.

2. 6th grade guidance visited the team for immediate concerns for individuals. The following were referred to his attention:
   - R. F. tardy Friday and out Monday. Is this a recurrent problem?
   - A.B. already expelled, needs lots of support to prevent another bad year for him
   - T. P. is a retainee: can he move to 7th grade after a probationary period? Should this include some sort of competency math test?
   - Parent conference should be set up with C.M.

3. Feedback on new student for referral, J.P. We all agreed it was early to give sufficient feedback as is asked for by the forms. One solution is to wait until Thursday to fill out the forms and to indicate those areas that we feel we can't address for lack of data.

4. Strategies for Team period novel reading:
   - build vocabulary lists with definitions together, write in journal books (start from the back with the front for response writing?)
   - Write journal responses based on the novel chapters, for instance, how would you feel if you were in Kit's shoes (The Witch of Bb Pond)
   - At the end of a novel, have every member of the class write a book report for that book, to model the procedure that Mr. Porter will ask for with individual reading.
   - This week: read Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
     Rick will meet with study skills class during Team Period on Wed

5. Agenda items left from last week:
   A. Behavior in halls, locker procedures, etc.
   B. Lunchroom behavior - take our 4th period classes in on Wednesday morning to sit down and go through the motions of lunch. Starting Tuesday, sit at tables by 4th period class. Back 2 tables: Mrs. M., next 2 from back, Mr. P., next to the top, Mr. L., top 2 tables, Mrs. K.
   C. Homework Policy
   D. Revisit getting to know you activities to use in team periods.
colleagues about the research year, after the year was over, they each mentioned the importance of our annotated agenda for recording our accomplishments and facilitating our progress.

**Interviewing**

Fetterman's guide *Ethnography step by step* shaped my process of collecting interview data. He suggests that "being natural is the best protection" (1989, p. 56) to preserve the quality of interviews. Because I was a member of the Coyotes team, it was easy for me to gain access to the group, to feel comfortable with my colleagues and they with me. More crucial were the ways in which I presented their words. I continually attended to confidentiality and interpreting conversation in a non-judgmental way.

I interviewed each of my team colleagues twice, at the beginning and end of the research year. I conducted initial interviews several months into the year, after we were used to my taping schedule and I had begun to discuss emerging interpretations of the data with them. The interviews focused on their personal histories of teaching and teaming, as well as their opinions of the pros cons of working on a team. The guiding questions for the initial interviews were:

- What was your own school history like?
- How and why did you become a teacher?
- What is your teaching history?
- What are ways in which you have enriched your teaching?
- Considering your own experience on teams, what do you think are the pros and cons of teaming?
- After spending a year together, what do you think are the strengths of this team?
Depending on the history of the individual with whom I was speaking, I followed up on particular questions. Jill, for instance, had been a classroom teacher for just three years. Her student teaching was in an elementary setting. We spent a large portion of the interview discussing the pros and cons of elementary and middle school settings for sixth graders.

Harry, like Jill, was new to middle school teaching, though he had been in the Central Falls system for about fifteen years. He looked at his own work with a critical eye, and continually measured his middle school experience against his work in a self-contained classroom.

George's history was more like my own than my other two colleagues, so our interview became more of a conversation. Both of us had taught young adolescents for most of our long careers. Both of us had been involved in schools making the transition from junior high to middle school. George, who had been in on the planning and development of Central Falls Middle School from the start, spoke with authority about the school's history, both from the point of view of a teacher and a union member.

I interviewed the Central Falls principal, Phil Bolton, several times to develop the contextual backdrop for this study. Phil provided valuable insight about the transition of Central Falls from a junior high to a middle school, and how teams were formed there. As school principal, he was the voice of the school philosophy and goals. He saw the big picture and measured the work of individual teams against middle school goals.

Informal conversation—comments from my team colleagues and other teachers and administrators in the school—enriched my own description and analysis, and helped to verify my emerging conclusions. My initial interviews with the Coyotes invited them to comment on our team work. Throughout the year, individuals provided asides to me about how or what the team was doing.
They too were engaged in an on-going process of analysis about how we were doing as a team.

The second interviews with each of my colleagues, conducted in June of 1995, provided additional data about their subjective meanings related to teaming. We had two opportunities to co-construct broader meanings related to our teamwork. The first was an after school meeting to process the week long thematic unit (detailed in Chapter 10). The second, and last meeting the Coyotes would have together, occurred in October of the following school year. As Coyotes teachers, we had split up, Jill and I to take other positions in other settings, Harry and George to work with two new Coyotes team colleagues. During that meeting, we were able to reflect back on our two years together, especially in terms of the effects of the research project on the team. The meeting gave us a chance to "decompress" as we had not done the previous June, because we didn't know at the time that we would split up.

**Triangulation**

Fetterman says that "triangulation is . . . at the heart of ethnographic validity, testing one source against another to strip away alternative explanations and prove a hypothesis" (1989, p. 89). In this study, I view the team through the lens of Berger and Luckman's conceptualization of the social construction of reality, and measure our work against aspects of working professional knowledge. In order to clarify my emerging assumptions, I included my colleagues in conversations about teaming and the middle school concept, related to the practical work we were involved in together. By talking to them about perspectives of teaching and teaming, which played out in our team meetings and collaborative ventures, I was able to reconstruct more accurately the meaning of our work.
At several points during the research year, I shared written transcripts and a few reflection pieces with my colleagues, to involve them at a more formal level. I attended closely to their reactions and took note of their comments. I was interested in their interpretation of events, as well as their reactions to my interpretations. In late December, for instance, I asked them to look over a transcript while we were on our holiday break. I wrote a cover letter with focus questions to consider:

- How do we handle conflict? What do we do to clear the air?
- Do we have regular roles that we seem to take at team meeting?
- What is the female/male dynamic on our team? Are we two groups?
- What are we doing collaboratively? Are we developing new strategies together?

In sharing the transcript, I hoped to check my own assumptions against those of my team members, and to model the kind of inquiring stance I taken toward teaming. Though none of my colleagues responded to my questions in writing, each of them had oral comments. Each acknowledged our difficulties in dealing with differences, but agreed that having the opportunity to vent our frustrations was an important function for a team. At the same time, none of them suggested solutions to our dilemmas. The example suggests that we had crystallized a shared reality of accommodation, rather than of effective co-construction (I process this example more fully in Chapter 8).

A Key Actor

Fetterman says that "In the social group, (the key actor) may not be a central member . . . yet (he). . .  plays a pivotal role, linking the fieldworker and the community" (1989, p. 58). In this team study, Harry became the key actor,
filling me in throughout the year on his view of teaming, and the personal changes he was undergoing as a teacher and team member.

When I began this study, Harry was in a position with little power in the politics of the middle school, so he was not a key informant in the "gate keeper" sense (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 34). In fact, he was fairly uncomfortable in his first two years at Central Falls, and unsure of his place in the world of middle school teaching. He was easily flustered by an unexpected change in our schedule or a new administrative task that came down from the office for us to complete "yesterday." He was continually hounded by his department chair for misdemeanors such as being a day late with his book inventory.

Perhaps his lack of power in the politics of the school made Harry feel less threatened by my inquiry than the others on my team, or perhaps my interest in his point of view was empowering to him. At any rate, he gradually became more outspoken about his views during our team meetings, and he began to open the doors to his own feelings about teaming in a more open and honest way than did the others on our team. He began to share asides about our work, stopping me in the hall before the kids came to our classrooms in the morning or dropping by my classroom at the end of a day.

Gradually, Harry's participation in team meetings became more active. Meeting transcriptions from September through December reveal few lengthy comments from Harry. My notes indicate that he spent his meeting time bent over a notebook, furiously scribbling down the decisions the team was making. But by second half of the year, he began to lay down his pen and assert his views. "Just stop and listen," he insisted as we started to leave a February meeting. It was lunch time, but he had not finished giving his point of view. "Let me explain myself!"
Thick Description

Geertz describes the technique of "thick description" as the essence of ethnography, description that "is interpretive... of the flow of social discourse... rescuing the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fixing it in perusable terms" (1973, p. 21). The write-up of the team meeting data within this dissertation is a result of my effort to "rescue the said" of our discourse, to relate it to the co-construction of professional knowledge.

While I was involved with this team as an active team member, it was difficult to "rescue the said" from our meeting data, to affix meaning to our work beyond the daily task completion. But gradually, as I compiled meeting transcripts, delved further into the reflections of other researchers and commentators on teacher research, and reviewed my transcripts for meaning, I was able to distance myself from the intensity of the teaming moment. The discourse as reproduced in this dissertation is meant to fix the conversation of a middle school team in "perusable terms" to allow the reader to follow the team process related to sharing and constructing aspects of working professional knowledge.

What the researcher is faced with, says Geertz, is "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another... which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render" (1973, p. 10). Within the team meeting data are knotted our individual stores of knowledge about teaching and learning, and the team reality that we built together. Through successive siftings of the data, I untied those knots. In this section, I trace an example of team meeting data through various stages of analysis to illustrate that process.

Figure 2-3 is a team meeting transcript from October. On my first run through the data, I listened to the tape and typed the data verbatim, leaving a
Harry: question about the Olympics
C: I did mention, to the team, I think that I wanted to do a country in Central or
South America, and there are only a few left. Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia. I talked it
over with the kids and some of them had and interest in Bolivia.
Harry: I don’t know much about Bolivia
C: there is some beautiful music and the most important thing about Bolivia is the
Andes, and the lakes - Titicaca
Harry: I’ve heard of that
C: have you seen the W.C. fields movie...
of course the kids love it.
G: laughing
C: they will remember it for the rest of their lives giggle giggle giggle.
We have to do something about CP immediately. We have not been able to
communicate with his parents
G: Warren and I have spoken to him, we are putting him on a weekly checklist
C: but the parents have to be part of this, this is ridiculous
H: who brought the doughnuts? Thank you Jill.
G: um. looking at the list of kids who are behind
A lot of these kids aren’t doing a damn thing Shaun is one
C: he doesn’t even have a home. We have to think of some different strategies
G: I think we have to refer him
J: I’m having him after school tomorrow
H: how can we excuse him
C: Harry, if he doesn’t even have a home, how can we
Jill: he’s living with foster parents or something, who are taking care of him for the
time being. I had him go and call them in the office to stay and catch up on work.
He’s a walker, I told him to stay until he had the assignment finished. I went down
to the office, I checked my mailbox. I came back and he was gone
G: well, if he’s in a foster home, let’s get his foster parents in
C: in the meantime, how can we help him to pass
G: let’s start with guidance talking to him.
C: but why is that going to do any good if he doesn’t have a homelife? Carter
talking to him isn’t going to do any good
if he can’t do work at home. If Jill has him one day and I have him
Jill: he’s a walker
C: and let’s set a day. Then if there are other kids who fit that category, we can work
with them too, and parents but...
Harry: there’s a number where we can reach the foster parents? You want to hit
them with you’ll spend one day with each of us?
C: I think Shaun will do it himself if we show him that someone cares about him.
wide margin on the right. I typed references to sounds or body language, indicate the tone of our conversation.

In the second run through the data, I read over transcripts and highlighted discourse that followed a particular train of thought. I commented on our discourse in the wide right hand margin. Figure 2-3 illustrates the comments and underlines to indicate my initial reflection on the data. Some of my comments at this stage indicate my early categorization of our conversation, such as "sharing responsibility" and "how to motivate students." Other comments indicate how I reacted as a team member, such as "whose responsibility?"

After I compiled ten or so transcripts of team meetings, I reread them all, along with the side comments, to develop a scheme for categorizing my data. I transferred my list onto a database, using my hand-written comments as a guide. Figure 2-4 is an example of my categorization scheme for the month of October. On it are recorded the participants in the conversation, the topic being discussed, the date, and the page numbers in the transcripts where the conversation is found.

After categorizing the data, I went back over the data base to determine the general themes of our team meeting conversation. The themes from the October meetings include:

- Student progress (mentioned on 9 pages)
- Team strategies (mentioned on 5 pages)
- Group maintenance functions (mentioned on 5 pages)
- Philosophical issues (mentioned on 10 pages)
- Curriculum (mentioned on 8 pages)
- Administrative tasks (mentioned on 5 pages)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>team</td>
<td>getting to know Scott</td>
<td>9/14/94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C &amp; G</td>
<td>how to treat students</td>
<td>9/14/94</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Sharing perception of Scott</td>
<td>9/14/94</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>team &amp; Powers</td>
<td>getting to know Mike and Josh</td>
<td>9/14/94</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Reading list</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>team</td>
<td>Letter to parents</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Tasks - locker master</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>team</td>
<td>Planning - core</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Getting to know kids</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Getting homework out of kids</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>6-9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Getting to know kids</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>6-9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Team maintenance-smoothing feathers</td>
<td>9/14/94</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol &amp; George</td>
<td>Clashing perceptions of kids</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Clashing philosophy - whether to take away recess</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol &amp; George</td>
<td>Team maintenance - reinforcing ea. other</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Getting to know kids: learning routines</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Planning - field trip</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>10-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Team Maint. - reassuring Harry</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>11-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C &amp; J</td>
<td>Planning - field trip orally</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Planning open house</td>
<td>9/17/94</td>
<td>11-13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Planning - keep kids in for recess?</td>
<td>9/15/94</td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>How to handle Patrick - disagreement</td>
<td>10/17/94</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Planning - detention v. work session</td>
<td>10/17/94</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Clashing philosophy - incentive v. punishment</td>
<td>10/17/94</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the transcript indicates, our conversation wove these various themes together, rather than dealing with themes in isolation.

Later, I organized Chapters 4 through 10 around our recurrent themes. The database helped me to keep track of themes and find conversation to illustrate our work. For instance, I used large segments of the October 17 meeting in Chapter 5, "Knowledge of Students." The October data became the basis for "thick description" within are knotted threads of subjective knowledge of students, as well as our attempts at co-construction.

My own reflections about team issues led to writing of short reflection pieces. Eventually it occurred to me that our debate about a student's motivation wasn't just about our individual perceptions of this student, but emanated from subjective concepts about "best practice" for middle school learners. Figure 2-5 was written in January, after I read over my compiled transcripts of team meetings. It eventually led to Chapter 6, "Knowledge of Responsive Pedagogy."

Fetterman uses the term "crystallization" to describe the decision-making involved in analyzing data and drawing conclusions about it. It is "typically the result of a convergence of similarities that spontaneously strike the ethnographer as relevant or important to the study" (1989, p. 101). Moments of crystallization occurred for me sometimes during a team meeting, sometimes when I transcribed tapes, sometimes when I reviewed tapes. Always, they were triggered by hearing themes over and over again. My connection might be with other team meetings (either of the Coyotes or other teams I was a member of), or with the theory I was reading. My reflection piece, "Nightly assignments v. long term projects," resulted from my own classroom experience, measured against what my colleagues were saying, all in the light of reading I had been doing about student literacy (Atwell, 1987; Meek, 1991; Zinsser, 1988).
Reflection

Nightly assignments v. long term projects: student motivation

An example that is on my mind is our homework policy. Assigning homework is a taken-for-granted part of our middle school culture. As a social studies teacher, I typically assign lists of key terms to define or maps to label and color. Students are expected to finish assignments at home about three times per week. I become discouraged early on in the year at the poor rate of completion of assignments: on a regular basis, approximately 1/3 of my students were finishing their work at home. The math and English teachers assigned exercises nightly, expecting students to practice the techniques demonstrated that day in class. The completion rate in those classes is as poor as in my classes, compounded the greater frequency of assignments. And because both the math and English teachers weighed homework and tests each 50% when calculating grades, a significant number of students were failing.

When we discovered that homework completion was a shared problem, we began to try structural changes, emulating one another's techniques, striving to present consistent expectations to our students. Students stayed in during their 20 minute activity period to complete assignments. They were given the opportunity to attend extra help sessions. Individual weekly progress reports were sent home with missing assignments attached. Results were good, but only so long as we continued to send the work home. Students did not carry the momentum of completing work at home without the continual communication.

About halfway through the year, the English teacher and I assigned a joint social studies/English project to our students. We agreed to assign no other work for approximately one month. We drew up criteria for research and reporting together, bringing into the conversation our own habits and experiences of working students through research projects. We provided resource materials in class and walked students through methods of finding and using sources, note-taking, and expository writing. The results were encouraging. With the exception of a handful of stragglers, all students complete a report of high quality.

The English teacher and I evaluated the project informally and agreed that students were involved and motivated, and that, in general, their grades had improved for the term in which the project was assigned.
Thus, the dissertation is the product of my own learning spiral, as I built upon my own theoretical base and tested my conclusions against the daily interaction of my team. The result is a phenomenological description of how theory plays itself out in my own experience. The interpretative work was an interactive process, of attributing meaning to the work of the Coyotes team, and finding meaning through the theoretical work of others. Until the final printing, I continually spiral over the data, testing my own working knowledge against the shared reality of my team. The data help me to understand theory and the theory helps me to understand data. In the chapters that follow, I illustrate that process by weaving pertinent theory throughout.
CHAPTER THREE

THE CONTEXT FOR SHARING: WHAT TEAMING MEANS

A better approach is to create teams of teachers and students who work together to achieve academic and personal goals for students. Teachers share responsibility for the same students and can solve problems together...This community of learning nurtures bonds between teacher and student that are the building blocks of the education of the young adolescent.


The meaning of middle school teaming nests within a broad structural configuration known among middle school theorists as "Interdisciplinary Team Organization." In this chapter, I establish the boundaries of teaming, as they are drawn in the literature, as the structure is interpreted in the context of Central Falls Middle School, and as it is perceived by each of the members of the Coyotes team, the four content area teachers whose meeting time is the focus of this case study.

*In the Literature*

The middle school team is an interdisciplinary group of classroom teachers who are committed by the structure of a school to work together for at least a full school year. Their shared commitment centers around a population of students which may be of a single grade level or multi-age. In *Teaching 10*
to 14 year olds. Stevenson describes the interdisciplinary team as the "central organizational feature of middle level schools (that) . . . creates smaller communities for learning" (1992, p. 123). To Stevenson and others (George, 1982; Lipsitz, 1984; Lounsbury and Johnson, 1988), the essential feature of teaming, in terms of whole school organization, is the opportunity for both students and teachers to be affiliated with a small community within a school, to afford one another mutual support, and establish their own group identity. While team size varies from school to school, a common configuration for schools like Central Falls is for 4 or 5 teachers to be responsible for approximately 100 students.

When teams are established as schools within schools, they are afforded a level of autonomy that encourages creative collaboration. Often, teams are encouraged to develop a team style and identity—their own interpretation of the school philosophy and goals, and the expectations set out for them in the middle school literature and by middle school administrations. At Central Falls, each team has freedom and responsibility to arrange academic and enrichment time3 within a block schedule (figure 3-1 illustrates a similar whole-school schedule).

An essential feature of interdisciplinary team organization is time. Stevenson states that "to have a successful team, teachers meet daily for as much as an hour to plan programs, address problems, discuss students" (p.214). In smaller schools where it is not possible to schedule daily shared planning time, after school meetings are sometimes required during which team teachers plan for and review the progress of their students. In the case of the

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3 At Central Falls most teams stuck with traditional 45 minute teaching blocks. During our first year together, the Coyotes teachers arranged a rotating schedule that provided a double block in each academic subject over the course of a week, and skipped a block on the day following the double block.
Coyotes, daily shared planning time is an essential element that adds continuity to our conversations and establishes a setting for sharing our subjective realities of teaching.

Interdisciplinary team organization not only provides a high degree of continuity for students, but addresses problems associated with teacher isolation (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; Smith and Scott, 1990; Johnson, 1990). Since the one-room school house roots of American education, teachers have been viewed as masters of their classrooms, single adult creators of the learning environments where students may spend a period or a whole school day. While this history gives teachers a high degree of autonomy and authority within their classrooms, it is in many ways burdensome and isolating. In more recent times, the increased specialization of high schools and junior high schools tends to fragment the course of study for students, decrease opportunities for consensus building, and inhibit communication among teachers. The interdisciplinary team organization is one way to alleviate the facelessness of large middle and high schools, and to promote collaboration. Rosenholz's 1989 study links teacher collaboration to cohesive schools. Among the characteristics she lists of "high consensus schools" are shared goals, teacher involvement in technical decisions, and mutual support among educators. On the surface at least, teams at Central Falls Middle School afford teachers those characteristics.

The Institutional Reality of Central Falls

When I conducted this case study (during the 1994-95 school year), the interdisciplinary team structure was a relatively new phenomenon in the Central Falls school district. Traditional models of junior high and high school prevailed until the early 1990s. A crisis in space, the combination of an inadequate high school plant and overcrowded elementary schools, forced Central Falls to take
on a new building project. Building a new middle school seemed like a logical answer. The sixth grades would move out of the seven elementary schools throughout the city, and the high school would spread into the old junior high building just in front of it, if a new space were built for grades seven and eight.

Phil Bolton was the principal of Central Falls Middle School when I came to Central Falls. When I interviewed him at the beginning of my research year, he described the details of the transition to middle school. To Phil, arranging teachers and staff in teams was integral to the new building plan. He set out to educate himself and his staff by visiting middle schools throughout New England, attending conferences, and inviting middle school experts to Central Falls to speak to the staff and guide them through the transition.

"Teaming is the only way to go," Phil stated enthusiastically. "Particularly in larger schools, it is crucial for a student to identify with a smaller unit. In a smaller school, it may not be as important, but in a town like this where there are a lot of kids with problems, it's even more important to give them a positive unit for affiliation. The structure of teaming is that vehicle."

Early on, Phil turned his attention to building teaching teams. Committees of teachers were empowered with the responsibilities for participating in planning the new middle school. For two years, attending workshops and conferences, meeting with committees to formulate philosophy and plan the structures that would meet the needs of children grades 6-8 were added to the usual work of classroom teachers in the old junior high school.

A key committee set out to define the broad roles and tasks for teams. Teams would have the authority and responsibility for administrative decisions related to the day to day educational needs of their students. Meanwhile, Phil organized the first teaching teams based partly on individual requests, partly on his own intuitive sense of balance, considering personalities and teaching
strengths and weaknesses. "Every team needs a good organizer and motivator, someone who makes sure that things that needed to be done are done. Then someone has to serve the role of pastor—a good counselor for both staff and students. You also need a cheerleader, someone who is good at solidifying the team's group identity—one who can also instill group pride in kids."

To Phil, the success of teaming lay in an illusive chemistry in the mix of teachers on a team. He hoped to achieve overall harmony for the school. "I want to avoid having one team being perceived as the strong team," he said. His check on that goal was the number of requests he received during the summer from parents seeking a new team placement for their child. "If I get almost as many requests to move a child onto a team as off of that same team, I know it's fairly well balanced."

The first teams were in place during the last two years before the new Middle School was finished. Each team of teachers—an English, math, science, and social studies teacher—was responsible for about 100 students in a single grade (for the first two years, grades 7 and 8 were included). By the second year, a block schedule was adopted within which teaching teams organized academic time for their students and had a shared planning period.

"Even though we were a fledgling middle school, not knowing what we were doing, I think we worked the best for those first two years. We had about an equal number of committed people as skeptics, at the time. The change was hard on the skeptics, but now that they've gone through it, some of them are our most ardent supporters." Several years later, when I came to the new middle school, teachers were still committed to teaming. Many commented that the keys to the success of the middle school concept were the block schedule and adequate staffing to accommodate shared planning time. "If they cut back any more on unified arts staff," George said, "we can't operate on this schedule."
Once the new middle school building opened, Phil had to form teams all over again. There was a weeding out process: junior high teachers who were unhappy with the new middle school structure tried to move to the high school with the ninth grade. At the same time, a whole new population of teachers joined the middle school staff: Grade 6 teachers from neighborhood schools throughout the city were integrated with teachers of grades 7 and 8 who had already worked on teams for two years. Most of the existing teams were reshuffled, not only due to attrition, but to balance inexperience with experience.

To Principal Bolton, the new mix was crucial. "It was important to avoid creating an us/them atmosphere among teachers," he explained. "A third of the faculty coming into the school I really didn't know—well I knew some by reputation or rumor, but I certainly didn't know them in action. It was very important to have avoid division among teachers in this school, so I mixed the teams again. My primary goal was to ensure that every team had at least one member who was part of the existing faculty and every team had at least one member who was a new arrival. Then, all of the other dynamics that I considered in forming the first teams I tried to look at again. But that was extremely difficult in the case of people whom I'd never worked with before."

In forming and reforming teams, Phil was convinced that administrators should have a strong hand. "I don't think teachers can build their own teams. I think someone has to build them for them. People don't want to hurt each other's feelings. It takes a good hard look at the big picture to form balanced teams." Phil was also committed to the idea of having regular administrative contact with teams. "There are times when intervention is needed and it is the job of the administrator to do that. When things go wrong between teachers on a team, it can be very awkward—like a family. Sometimes things are just too close." But at Central Falls, Phil and the assistant principal Stacy Miller only
had time to drop by team meetings occasionally, to pass along information ( "I just got this flyer about an environmental camp in Maine, thought you might be interested"), or to put out a fire caused by some team foible. Phil shared an example: "Once, a sixth grade team sent a letter out to parents saying that they would no longer accept late homework, in order to prepare their students for the next year. Well, first of all, seventh grade teams don't have that policy, and secondly, the high school doesn't operate that way. It's not how college works, or how life works, for that matter. Life is not on time. That's a misconception. As an administrator, I should have caught that before it went out," he explained.

The Central Falls Middle School's block schedule set the framework for teaming. The school's Statement of Belief and Mission Statement and the Team Expectations (figures 3-2 and 3-3) set the tone for teaching and learning within that framework. These documents were developed by teachers and administrators two or three years before the new middle school building was completed. The brief mission statement echoes mainstream middle school philosophy: to foster the academic, emotional, and social development of students. The Team Expectations briefly identify team tasks to address middle school student needs:

- to meet daily to discuss and plan academic program, meet individual needs
- to establish communication with parents
- to group and schedule students to meet their individual needs

In Chapter 4, I describe how we organize around these expectations at the beginning of the school year.

Central Falls Middle School is a school in evolution, as teams build upon their own histories and the history of the school. From the stated expectations, we construct additional assumptions about what teams should be and do. An
We believe that:

- Middle Level students have unique physical, academic, social and emotional needs.
- Middle level students are physically active and need to be active participants in the learning process.
- Middle level students need a diverse curriculum to include technology, fine arts, applied arts, and physical education in addition to academics provided in a safe and caring environment.
- Education is a life-long process which will encourage students to be positive additions to the community.
- Education is a partnership that requires communication, commitment and involvement of the entire community, including but not limited to parents, businesses, students, and school staff.

MISSION STATEMENT

The purpose of the Middle School is to transform elementary youngsters into students who are prepared to meet the challenges of high school. In order to accomplish this transition, these conditions are met:

- We must recognize and work with the unique social and emotional needs of early adolescents.
- The middle school environment shall foster growth and development, mutual respect, individual and group responsibility and self-discipline in order to achieve maximum potential.
- The middle school should be an exciting and rewarding environment offering a wide range of enriching activities.
Middle School Team Expectations

The following are expectations of all teams at Middle School:

1. Assume responsibility for supervising the academic, emotional and social development for all their students while at the school.
2. Provide an atmosphere that fosters respect and understanding of others.
3. Strive to allow each student to develop their full potential as productive citizens.

To accomplish these goals, teams will:

1. Meet daily to discuss and plan academic programs which best meet individual needs of students.
2. Establish relationships with parents to assist in the achievement of our mutual goals.
3. Group and schedule pupils to meet individual student needs.

Within teams, roles must be assigned to provide for the necessary organization for smooth team operation.

1. SCHEDULE MASTER: After consultation with team members to reach consensus of scheduling philosophy and a discussion of individual student needs, this person builds the team's schedule. While serving in this capacity, the schedule master will make any necessary adjustments to the team's or an individual student schedule. This person will serve as the contact for locating students during the day.

2. TEAM MODERATOR: Conducts team meetings and parent conferences.

3. Scribe: Takes notes (minutes) at team meetings and parent conferences.

4. AGENDA WRITER: Prepares written agenda for all team meetings. If necessary, prepares any notes, reports, etc. prior to parent meetings.

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5. LOCKER MASTER: Assigns student lockers. Retains master team locker list and is first contact for any locker problems. If problem cannot be corrected, notifies custodian.

6. MEDIATOR: Second level for resolution of student/teacher conflicts (classroom teacher is first). Attempts to resolve conflicts in a manner which is satisfactory to both sides. Must be consulted in all minor chronic discipline situations prior to an office referral.

7. FIELD TRIP COORDINATOR: Arranges details for team trips. These include publishing a list of students going for the unified arts staff and office, providing coverage for students not going, supervising all necessary paperwork requirements (field trip permission forms, transportation agreement, individual student permission forms) and finalizing agreement with field site.

8. PUBLICITY DIRECTOR: Promotes team activities. Writes a description of all special events and activities for distribution to other teams, the school board, and press.

9. SPECIAL EDUCATION CONTACT PERSON: Acts as liaison between special education staff and team, and attends appropriate IEP meetings.
example at Central Falls is the evolution of heterogeneous grouping of academic classes. During the first years of the new building, sixth grade teams, coming from elementary school settings, assumed that classes should be heterogeneously grouped. Among the eighth grade teams, where many teachers came from junior high and high school teaching backgrounds, students were tracked in academic levels within their teams for the first few years. Gradually, heterogeneous classes became the norm at Central Falls, as the sixth graders moved up to seventh and eighth grade and advocates of middle school philosophy became a majority of the faculty in the school.

George Thibault, the math teacher on my team, described how the year before I came there was one eighth grade "holdout" team that termed themselves "the academic team." They divided their students into homogeneous "ability" groups for academic classes and mixed them heterogeneously for their unified arts and enrichment classes. Finally, in the third year of the school, they mixed their classes heterogeneously.4

The new Central Falls Middle School was built to accommodate about 1200 students, 70 teachers, and 25 support staff. Four wings are arranged like spokes off a central entry area, three wings to accommodate grade level teams and one for unified arts classes (see figure 3-4 for map). Downstairs, the central entry area accommodates two office suites (one the central office and the other currently the assistant principal and two guidance counselor offices), and the library. Upstairs, three computer labs fill the classrooms located above the library.

The three academic wings, or houses, have enough classrooms for four teams each: a grade each of 6, 7, and 8, as well as an extra team of one of the

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4 It is unclear whether the "academic team" changed their class groupings because of the normative pressure of the school climate, or because of pressure by the administration. George's description suggests the former.
grades (different in each wing). Teachers of a single team generally have neighboring classrooms, and there are enough classrooms with sinks and lab hook ups for each team's science teacher. Classrooms and small offices are located on two floors, connected by a stairway at each end of the hall. The offices were meant to be used by assistant principals, guidance counselors, and special education teachers, but in the two years I taught there, the special education department used them for pull-out classes for special needs students.

The unified arts wing accommodates art, home economics, and technology education class. The cafeteria, music rooms, and gymnasium are situated in a separate building block located off the main hallway. This wing is accessible to the other wings, and is not as large as the academic wings. Students move about the building from their academic wings to their unified arts classes and to lunch on a staggered schedule, so that a minimum of students are in the hall at one time. A visitor to Central Falls Middle School is seldom aware of the large number of students and staff working there, except at the beginning and end of the school day, when a huge wave of people moves into or out of the building.

The office is the hub of the building. Before 7:00 a.m. and after 2:15, one is apt to meet staff members from all over the building. Teachers filter in and out to use the two large copy machines to duplicate maps and worksheets for their students. Most of the conversation between teachers from different teams takes place over the coffee machine in the office, while teachers check their mailboxes, or while they wait in line for the copy machine. There, teachers are apt to share a copy of directions for a class project or a pertinent article. Otherwise, inter-team contact is limited to one's lunch crowd and monthly faculty or department meetings.
The principal, Phil Bolton, is usually the first to arrive and the last to leave. He puts on the first pot of coffee in the morning and chats with teachers as they arrive. After seven, he heads out to monitor student arrivals with three or four teachers who have bus duty that week. At seven, the two guidance counselors and the assistant principal manage the office, joining teachers at the coffee pot, leaning on the long office counter to talk over the day's or previous day's occurrences and answering the phones to list students who will be absent for the day. Guidance counselors and administrators are apt to give messages to a team member to disperse among his or her colleagues: which students have called in sick, which parents want to set up a conference, or curricular information that our team might be interested in knowing about.

This is the backdrop at Central Falls Middle School, an atmosphere that revolves around teams. Our identities are as the Coyotes or Timberwolves or Orcas, and communication to us and from us to the community is through the team. More important for this study, however, is the subreality of the Coyotes team and the particular teachers who come together at our team meetings.

**Subjective Realities: What Teaming Means to the Coyotes**

The players in this story—the Coyotes team teachers—became a team in the Fall, 1993. George Thibault and Harry Porter, the Math and English teachers on the team, were left behind when the teams they had been a part of reorganized. Jill Kilburn and I, the Science and Social Studies teachers, were hired in August to work with George and Harry to form a new Coyotes team. The Coyotes students were a team of sixth graders, and it is our shared task to ease their transition into middle school and to form ourselves into a cohesive team with its own identity.

My descriptions of the academic teachers of the Coyotes team are meant to inform the reader of our educational and professional backgrounds, in order
to better understand the subjective realities we bring to teaming. I compiled the descriptions from interviews conducted with each team member and comments that individuals made to me over the course of the data-collecting year (1994-95). The descriptions are bounded by what each of us says about what we do. I did not observe my colleagues at work in their classrooms to measure daily practice against our team meeting conversation. Occasionally, as the chapters in this dissertation unfold, I describe brief background incidents to clarify our meeting conversations and my conclusions about the effects we have on one another's teaching and teaming realities.

George: Worldly wise

George Thibault, the Math teacher on our team, has inside knowledge of the school's history. He was a teacher when Central Falls was a junior high school, and he participated in the transition to middle school. He often comments on the transition years, citing them as the best years for the school so far. To George, the transition process laid the foundation for a strong middle school, and served to solidify commitment to middle school philosophy. "It was important to involve all of the junior high staff, from developing a philosophy to structuring staff and schedule. Those who stayed with the school had a high degree of commitment. They became converts, or found elsewhere to teach, where their teaching style fit. Through the developmental process, we found out that it's the most effective way to teach this age level, grades 6-8. By developing it together, we became much stronger as a community."

George perceives the middle school concept as particularly suitable for the city of Central Falls. "We made some important compromises (such as heterogeneous grouping) that saved a lot of kids who were at risk. We were taking junior high kids and molding them by the middle school philosophy. It was hard to change at first, but it pays off."
George is a large man in his late 40s who can be intimidating to children, but who always has a roomful of kids after school for extra help—"getting straightened out," he would say. At the end of the day, his classroom looks like a place where people have been hard at work. Student desks are clumped in twos, threes or fours—the groupings where students pore over math problems together. During class, George sits up at the front, where papers spill to the floor at the small desk where he coaxes students through homework exercises or example problems on the chalkboard.

George attended school in a small New Hampshire town where everyone knew everyone else. His high school class of under thirty students was a close-knit group, which he sees both the positive and negative sides of. On the one hand, everybody was involved in everything. But, there were no secrets from anybody. "All in all, it was a very positive experience," he recalls. "Education was foremost in everybody's mind that was there. They gave us a lot of good values to model and to follow." He sees himself as a success story that began with a sixth grade math teacher who took an interest in him. "She took my brattish style and built it into something positive. Her encouragement moved me from being an average to an above average student." To George, middle school teams provide a similar sense of community. "On a team, we have a greater responsibility to kids than just teaching our subject. That way, kids don't slip through the cracks."

After high school George went to a junior college "to get my grades up," and later transferred to a teacher's college. He says he did things his own way. "I nearly lost my student teaching credit because I was substitute teaching, filling in for a teacher who left because the school climate was difficult. Because I could control the kids, they asked me to step in."
Throughout his twenty year career, George continued to gravitate to troubled spots. "My first position was in a school where a lot of the teachers weren't certified. I was hired to teach math, which was my minor. We did a lot of neat things, but it was hard. Once I had to teach in a hallway, then in the boiler room."

After eight years in the classroom, George decided to try his hand in the business world for a few years, returning when salaries and teaching conditions had improved. That was when he came to Central Falls.

"It was a good break," he says. "The interpersonal relationships in the business world, knowing how people think and how businesses function helps me to come out with concrete examples of the way our activities here school relate to the real world out there. I can show kids interrelationships in all of the subject areas, after being out there myself, seeing how all of this interconnects."

George sees Central Falls as a good match for him. "There are a lot of needy kids, and I can work on them to perform." At the same time, he emphasizes his ability to flex to their needs. "I can be stern or jovial depending on the need of the moment. In my classroom, I try to get kids to start to make their own decisions. I don't have rules unless we need to establish them, and we do that collectively."

George has had his ups and downs with teaming. "I've been on three different teams in five years," he explained, and there have been a lot of changes that we had little control over. It's OK if you've been given a chance to grow and make a contribution over a three or four year time period. But during our first few years as a middle school, that was not allowed to happen. We've been mixed around a lot. You were forced to balance off expertise, years in the system, with rookies. We really haven't had a lot of stability over the past few years."
"All of these changes have kept us from developing any continuity," he explains. A team should be a base of support, where members balance their strengths and weaknesses. If we're just given a chance to get to know one another, we know our strengths and weaknesses. Then, we learn to compensate for one another so that kids get the best possible pitcherful."

In the spring of 1993, George found himself alone on the Coyotes team. When one member decided to go back to elementary school teaching, the other two teachers took empty slots on another team, leaving George by himself. When Harry Porter was set adrift from his team, the Timber Wolves, the principal had no choice but to pair them up. Phil Bolton's task in the summer of 1993 was to find a good match of teachers to fill in the other two slots on the Coyotes team.

**Harry: Elementary Experience**

Harry Porter, the English teacher on our team, has been teaching for almost twenty years, all of those years in the Central Falls school district. His first experience with middle school was during the "second wave" of teaming, when the sixth grades throughout the city joined the 7th and 8th grades at the new middle school.

"I always thought I'd go to college, and teaching was a profession where I'd be doing something important," Harry said as he thought back. His family and school system in Connecticut valued academics: "It was very demanding, and I think we should be the same way with kids," he explained. "Still, I try to bring humor into my lessons." Harry recalled his eighth grade social studies teacher as a strong role model. "His stories made lessons come alive, made the information easier to remember, and that has influenced me."

Harry decided to become a teacher, attending a small private college. When he completed his studies for a bachelor's degree, he joined the Central
Falls school district as a homebound tutor. "These were disruptive students whom I worked with to help bring them back into the system," he explained. "I also had to work with classroom teachers to develop management plans for them, a role that I felt pretty inept in. That gave my self-esteem a battering, because I just wasn't prepared."

In order to meet the demands of his job, Harry began graduate studies, commuting to Boston for six years to earn his Masters in General Special Education. "And wouldn't you know, when I finished, I was pretty burnt out on special ed.," he confessed. "So I transferred into an elementary school classroom and used my special education experience to help kids who were being mainstreamed."

Then, Harry moved around to different schools. "I taught nine years in a sixth grade open-concept setting, and that was difficult--confusing and noisy. In my last school, I was the only fifth grade teacher, and that was my best experience so far. I could pace myself and my kids according to the day," he says. "There wasn't pressure to be keeping up with other fifth grades."

Harry's first experience with teaming was at the open-concept school, where he shared with another sixth grade teacher. They each taught one level of math and Harry taught social studies to both groups, while his partner taught science. "But the open structure of the building nearly drove me crazy", Harry added. "I have too much trouble focusing. It was just too distracting. I was a lot better off in the small school."

When given the chance to move to the Middle School, Harry decided to try it. "It is a school within a school," he thought. Other elementary teachers whom he knew were moving up with the sixth grade, so he decided to go too. But his first year there was a disaster. "I haven't felt comfortable here," he
confessed. "I always feel like I'm rushing around, that we have so many demands on us."

His first team colleagues were three impatient women, who were not sympathetic to his discomfort and confusion. They increasingly left him out of team decisions, and finally just ignored him. At the end of the year, they requested that another English teacher join them (from the now disbanded Coyotes). Essentially, Harry was left without a team. At that point, Harry's view was that teaming increased his responsibility rather than lessened it. Not only did he have to accommodate the needs of a larger pool of students than he ever had, but he struggled to get along with the other three members of his teaching team. At the beginning of my research year Harry explained: "I am not a very assertive person. It is difficult to have my voice heard. I am easily intimidated. So sometimes team meetings are very stressful for me."

For Harry, there were institutional realities stronger than that of middle school that framed his view of his mission as a teacher. When I questioned him about the structure and philosophy of middle school, he expressed uncertainty. To him, there was an inherent conflict in the mission "to build the social, emotional, and intellectual growth of the child." Counterbalancing that mission was Harry’s perception of the skills and content goals of Language Arts teaching.

"I don't mean to be a fuddy-duddy, and I do want kids to have fun, but I don't feel there is time to get accomplished what needs to be accomplished. A lot of stuff that goes on in this school to build the kid's social and emotional development takes away from our time for academics. And when a child fails or misbehaves, it all falls back on my shoulders. I am very old-fashioned when it comes to schools, very traditional. I have high standards and I tell my students: 'shoot for the stars.' "

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Jill: Giving Back to the Community

When Phil Bolton hired Jill, he looked to her to bring energy and enthusiasm to the team. "I knew she'd provide spark and vigor as a young teacher. I knew she'd be full of new ideas, and at the same time was not afraid to look somebody in the eye and say 'that's not right.'"

Jill came to the job with a mission. "I grew up here," she explained, "and I want to give back to the community part of what they gave me." At 26 years old, Jill Kilburn is the youngest and most energetic member of our teaching team. She takes a lot of pride in the outward appearance of things, and she brings that standard to whole team events that we organize throughout the year. Jill insists on similar standards with her students, encouraging them to work slowly through their science projects for quality of presentation.

Having grown up in Central Falls, Jill knows the community and the political climate well. The tone of her teaching is affected by her early education in parochial schools, as well as her experience at Central Falls High. "We were taught to treat people with decency and respect. . . . It carries over into my teaching." Still, she critically assesses of the failings of her early education: "They used reading and math as punishments. I was petrified of making a mistake in oral reading. Once, when I had to read orally, I mispronounced 'as' as 'ass'. The nun yelled at me and I was mortified. So now, I am careful about not putting kids on the spot."

Jill worked as a coach and swimming instructor throughout high school and college. She pursued a teaching career to continue working with kids: "I want to be a positive influence for them, and to bring back to this town some of what I gained from it."

Jill graduated from one of the state's teacher's colleges, switching from a physical education major to elementary education early on. "I was worried that
I'd be bored watching kids playing sports all the time," she explains. She was deeply influenced by her student teaching experience at a lab school near the college, and was troubled at the inequities of education from town to town. "The quality of teaching there . . . the materials we had to work with . . . the behavior of students. Sometimes it's a real let-down in the real world," she comments. Still, that same contrast was one of the reasons she returned to Central Falls to teach.

Her first teaching job was in a rural town north of Central Falls, in a self-contained 5th grade classroom. "Even though I trained with younger children, the only positions open were upper elementary. I discovered that I really liked the challenge of it. There were 25 students, only two with IEPs, I taught all subjects, and was able to connect them sometimes. But I always felt like I was neglecting something, so I set up a schedule where three days a week I'd teach science and two days a week social studies. That was one of the reasons I decided to switch to the middle school—so I could focus on one subject." Jill's first year at Central Falls Middle School (1993-94) was a busy one. She was recently married, settled into a new house, and had her first child in the middle of that year. She was torn between establishing herself as a middle school science teacher and adjusting to the roles of wife and mother.

Sometimes Jill wondered if she made the right choice in switching: "Now I am pressured by the demands of over 100 students, making sure that they're on task . . . giving them the individual attention that they need." Switching classes every 50 minutes set up a conflict between knowing her subject and knowing her students. "It's difficult keeping tabs on over 100 students in the short amount of time we see them every day."

In comparison with her team colleagues, Jill is in an idealistic place in her teaching career. To her, the contrast between the way things are in Central
Fails and the way things should be for all students is monumental. Not only does she question her ability to influence their academic progress, but her impact on their social skills and attitude. "I like more control than I have here," she explains. She regrets the lack of parental involvement at Central Falls Middle School. "In the town I where I taught before, parents were always volunteering. They coordinated programs like Odyssey of the Mind, and the town paid a stipend for it."

Stalled contract negotiations in Central Falls compound Jill's discontent. While the rest of the teachers on our team are at or near the top of the pay scale, Jill is at the very beginning. She takes the nightly rhetoric in the local paper personally. "I felt like I wanted to give something to this town. There's such a big difference between what kids have in neighboring towns and what they have here." When we started our second year together as Coyotes teachers, Jill was feeling defeated. "It goes deeper than just this school," she suggests. "The whole town seems to have a negative attitude toward education, and I wonder about sticking with it (the profession)."

Working on a team is not entirely new for Jill. Like Harry, she coordinated programs with the other 6th grade teacher in the elementary school where she taught. "We would switch off, she would teach social studies and I would teach science. But it really wasn't a team effort. We planned and graded separately, we didn't have coordinating schedules, and we didn't talk about what we would teach, just kind of switched, and graded the two groups of kids in those subjects. We pretty much worked on our own."

"In this setting, I think what does work is when we bring up a student's name at team meeting, and it kind of triggers something. It brings to mind some similar observation of my own, something that maybe I hadn't really thought about," she explains.
Jill sees both positive and negative aspects to teaming. "I don't think it's possible to mesh personalities, unless you know people really well. I don't think there's an ideal way to construct a team. I think the most important thing is to divide the work evenly, and to be able to depend on the others to take their share of responsibility. It bothers me when members of the staff do no innovative work in their classroom."

When we talked at the beginning of the 1994-95 school year, Jill was looking forward to our second year together. She appreciates the pool of experience on our team. "If I have a question about how something will work, planning a field trip or what approach to use with a large group, I like the opportunity to discuss it with all of you. Having other people to do some of the tasks for a special event is nice. As a self-contained teacher, if I didn't do it, it didn't get done," she commented.

Carol: Insider and Outsider

I entered the teaching profession in the early 1970s with an idealistic vision: to make a better world through social studies teaching. From the start, I strove to involve my students actively in learning to encourage them to become involved citizens. My first position was in a junior high school. During my second year there, we reorganized into teaching teams called "pods," with shared planning time--years before I heard the term "middle school." I enjoyed the benefits of sharing a planning period with more experienced colleagues as I learned to be a teacher of young adolescents. We viewed the "pod" meeting as a way to facilitate communication about student progress and with the administration (he attended our meetings once a week).

My second position was in a grades 5-8 school which became a middle school four years later. This time, the faculty planned the transition together, working around guidelines and recommendations by the New England League.
of Middle Schools. At the same time, I had my first opportunity to be a cooperating teacher with an intern in my classroom. I enjoyed the opportunity to discuss curriculum and instruction, and I was struck by the effect of our conversations on my own teaching. The oral reflection increased my self-awareness and ability to reflect-in-action (Schon, 1983) as I worked with students. After that, I accepted the opportunity to be a cooperating teacher whenever it was given to me.

A connecting theme in my teaching career was change. I was never satisfied to do things the same way twice. When I worked on a team, teaching the same subject four times a day, I worked to refine lessons from class period to class period. Over the fourteen years I was at my second school, I changed the way I taught my courses year to year, the grade level (7, 8, and 9), and with it, the team I was a part of. I took several sabbatical leaves to travel and explore. Finally, when given the chance, became "teacher-in-residence" at a nearby university. I spent two years supervising interns and teaching introductory education courses there. During the second year, I began graduate studies toward a Ph.D. in Education, hoping to bring together my worlds of professional interest: classroom teaching and teacher education.

When I interviewed at Central Falls, Phil Bolton was forthright: "It's a whole new team," he explained. "The two men were left when other members of their teams reorganized. I want you to meet them before you decide, but I think you'd be the one to pull it together. You would bring a lot of stability and experience." When he described the woman he had in mind for the science position, I was drawn in. "You two would be a good combination. She's young and full of ideas and you can help her figure out how to carry them out."

When I came to Central Falls, I was experienced in and committed to teaming. I had tried middle level education both ways. I viewed the key
structure of teaming to be our shared planning time. The collegiality of sharing a planning period with teachers who taught the same students made the job easier and more enjoyable. Our conversations eased the dilemmas of teaching.

Definitely, who was on the team made a difference in how collegial we became, and to what extent we could collaborate. In my previous jobs, teachers and administration didn't have a lot of choice of the mix of personalities on a team, because there was only one team per grade. Within the constraints of our team mix, we learned one another's styles, strengths, and quirks. We learned to work together to accommodate one another's preferences. The teams that melded best brainstormed best: we had fun putting together engaging activities for our students.

I came to Central Falls as an outsider, in several ways. For one thing, this would be a different context than I had taught in before. Most of my classroom teaching was in an affluent school district with high academic standards for its students. Central Falls was a small city with a more diverse economic base, significant social problems, and continual budgetary difficulties. My most recent teaching experience was two years spent as a teacher educator at the college level. I learned about Central Falls when I placed and supervised interns there. I was impressed by the school organization, and Phil was anxious to have me a member of his faculty.

My cooperating teacher and intern supervisor roles were fresh in my mind when I returned to classroom teaching and middle school teaming. I assumed others would have the same willingness to share pedagogy as I did. I looked for ways to draw my colleagues into sharing. I viewed our group as collaborative problem-solvers on the ever-changing landscape of classroom teaching. This role was bound to affect my team, and in our second year
together, my research stance was bound to heighten our self-awareness. I acknowledge these aspects of my subjective reality, as our shared story unfolds in chapters 4 through 10 of the dissertation.

During my first year at Central Falls Middle School, I established myself as a teacher among teachers, as I negotiated the difficult transition back to classroom teaching from the slower paced, more reflective, academic world of college teaching. There were aspects of my job that were totally new: I had never taught 6th grade and the school was three times larger than any school I had taught in before. I easily identified with my sixth graders who were learning to cope with the hustle and bustle of middle school. While they were learning to work their way around huge building and eight or so new teachers, I was negotiating my fit with three colleagues whom I had never met.

The urban setting of Central Falls, a less than supportive political climate, and the sheer size of the school jarred my sense of reality. Practices I took for granted in other settings were unheard of here. I was the newcomer, learning the ropes of a new school, a new team, and a new group of students.

My role as teacher among teachers became particularly clear during the fall, as I tried to establish myself with my department chair, who was responsible for my classroom observations and evaluation. In early December, he spent a class period in my room, and what seemed to me to be a lively and successful review session with my students was written up as "close to chaotic" by him. I fumed about the write-up with my team colleagues, and with their help, wrote a rebuttal for my file. We shared our various impressions and experiences. "They always target someone," commented George. "Last year, my department chair was on my case for the whole year. But we straightened it out."

Jill had the point of view of a former student of the department chair. "Don't worry, he's not even that good," she tried to comfort me.
Harry shared his own troubles. "My department chair chewed me out just the other day," he groaned. "She claims we didn't return all of the novels we used last month."

The incident clarified for me, and my colleagues, where I stood in the school culture: a teacher subject to the same lack of power in the system as they had, and one who had less inside knowledge than they did. For me, the incident was humbling: the department chair's words could jeopardize my status if I wanted to change jobs. We were in this together, trying to please all sides—students, parents and administrators—and receiving very little recognition for our efforts. At least we could provide a level of support recognition to one another, as members of the Coyotes team. This is one of the initial functions any teaching team is apt to provide, and it sets the stage for co-constructing a team reality.

**The Setting of Team Meetings**

When I began my research project in the Fall of 1994, my team had been together for a year. At the beginning of the 1994-95 school year, we took up where it had left off the preceding June, at least in our outward patterns. We met for at least a full class period each day, while our students attended unified arts classes. In the middle of the morning, our Coyotes students attended art or physical education classes on alternating days, followed by unified arts classes (music, computer science, library skills, technology education, and home and consumer sciences). Our pattern was to meet for the first free block and to eat lunch during the second block.

The double period without students gave the team some flexibility in its meeting time, but we tried to meet consistently between 10:30 to 11:15. The guidance office would schedule parent conferences during that block, and we always attended those conferences together. We set aside one meeting a week
for our special education teacher, who would go over the list of coded students with us. On days when we didn't meet for a full class period, we managed to find 10 or 15 minutes to touch base, to check in on planned team events for the week, to clarify our lunch duty schedule, or to share information about particular students.

The routine of our team meeting was to take ten minutes at the beginning of the period to ourselves, then to meet in Jill's science lab. George and Harry usually went out to the back of the school, just outside the cafeteria, to smoke. They would freshen up their cups of coffee on the way back. Jill often went to the teacher's room to use the phone, to check in with her husband or her child's baby sitter. I usually spent the ten minute break sorting through the chaos of papers on my desk after four classes of students had moved through my room in the past 2 1/2 hours.

We gathered at a table in the science lab, spreading out our notebooks and coffee cups on one of the old pitted lab tables (most of our school furniture was hand-me-downs from other schools in the district). This was the most comfortable meeting room for us, the chairs suiting our body sizes better than fixed chair and desk sets, and the table being more conducive to our group work. Jill's room was at the beginning of our wing, near the cafeteria. We usually left the door open for other school staff to find us if they were looking for us, or to hear our students in the hall if they came back between classes to retrieve a pencil or return gym clothes to their lockers.

Team meeting lasted for about 45 minutes, when we headed to the teachers' room for lunch. The men went to the cafeteria line while Jill and I warmed up leftovers in the microwave. We usually spread out, mingling with other teachers from other teams, and "specialists," the unified arts teachers. Often, we would bring up individual student names for discussion, or share
ideas with them about the interdisciplinary projects we were trying out. In general, we would enjoy the company of other teachers in the school who were not members of the Coyotes team.

The routine of a daily team meeting for the Coyotes, 10:30 to 11:15 every day, was the setting where we shared the burden of work that was expected of us: to administer a middle school program for our students. As the year progressed and we became more involved with our students, the nature of our tasks became more complex. In the next chapter, I describe how sharing a team reality begins: constructing our team organization at the beginning of a new school year.
CHAPTER FOUR

CONSTRUCTING TEAM ORGANIZATION: BEGINNING THE YEAR

*Order in the world is discovered by an individual . . .

*the individual modifies it continually in the process of

*living in it.*


Berger and Kellner's view of "discovering order" applies to groups, as well as individuals. A middle school team discovers order as it makes decisions related to team tasks at the beginning of a new school year. Through this process, we co-construct working knowledge about school organization.

While the school provides an institutional reality through the school mission statement and list of team roles and tasks, it is the process of interpretation and implementation of these tasks that establishes a team's subreality. Chapter 3 (Context) describes the institutional reality of Central Falls Middle School related to school organization. The "Team Roles" in our handbook forms only a skeleton of our organization, around which each team develops its own constructions: identifying team roles, establishing a class schedule, formulating class groupings, and determining what to do with the team enrichment period we are responsible for each day. Our decisions related to these tasks reveal our subjective realities of the middle school concept, and

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afford us opportunities to co-construct a team reality. While we make decisions related to team organization, we build patterns of interaction and collaboration.

The Institutional Reality of Autonomy

Larson and LaFasto studied a variety of teams over a three year period. One of their conclusions is that "getting people involved and giving them autonomy is what promotes collaboration" (1989, p.94). The institutional reality of Central Falls affords teams a high degree of responsibility and autonomy to organize our academic time within the school's block schedule, formulate class groupings, and create enrichment classes. A few teachers grumble about the added administrative tasks, but most welcome having two planning periods each day (one individual, one team planning) and the opportunity to share the tasks and dilemmas of teaching.

Part of the institutional reality of Central Falls is a minimum of administrative help—one principal and one assistant principal in a school of 1100 students. Therefore, we have a minimum of outside guidance and support for team task completion. Modeling for various interpretations of team organization comes informally (at faculty meetings and during lunchroom conversations) and publicly (through a regular school newsletter and local press releases). Team recognition has a normative function, setting models for "best practice" related to the middle school concept. Teams develop distinct identities within the school and greater community ("the Coyotes are nurturing,"

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5 The respondents in Larson and LaFasto's study were more likely to mention a lack of external support when their teams functioned poorly, than the positive effects of recognition when their teams functioned well (1989, pp. 109-111). At Central Falls, having a team report for the school newsletter was one of the unwritten team tasks. It helped teams to review their work every six weeks, promoted communication among teams, and added an element of inter-team competition. Phil, the principal, encouraged all teams to use the local press by asking for news items at the weekly faculty meeting and reminding us to publicize events when we came to him for administrative approval.

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or "the Herons are the academic team"). What follows are descriptions of our decision-making processes as they developed before the official start of school.

In the Fall of 1994, the Coyotes started our second year together. We were fairly typical in our development, building upon the school philosophy and expectations to create a distinct team persona. For the Coyotes, part of that persona is a sense of imbalance, which is illustrated in our varied involvement in pre-planning before the start of school.

Jill is the first to re-enter the teaching world. She comes to school one day in early August, anxious to see how the Coyotes have been fit into the whole-school schedule, eager to work with our student list. The principal, Phil Bolton, is hunched over the computer in his office. "Why don't you learn how to shuffle the kids into class lists?" he suggests. Jill agrees, and Phil takes the time to show her how to use the data base. She heads home with a school computer in her car and the goal of shuffling the list of 110 Coyotes students into four heterogeneous groups. Our students were assigned numbers by their various fifth grade teachers, one for academic ability and one for behavior. From that information, we are to group them heterogeneously. Jill sprinkles the four class groupings more or less evenly with the 22% who are "coded." 6

A few days later, she gives me a call. "You don't have to help," she offers, "but George and Harry are tied up with summer work, and I'd like to get started on the lists and a team letter."

I welcome the chance to ease myself into a new school year. The two of us meet at Jill's house. We work with the lists, helping one another figure out the data base program. I've brought a copy of last year's team letter, and we

6 Some students are "coded" with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), which entitle them to varying degrees of special education services in the school. Teachers are expected to be familiar with each student IEP and make classroom adjustments accordingly.
August 12, 1994

Dear Nicole and family,

Welcome to the Coyotes Team, Nicole! We are looking forward to meeting and working with you this year. To be ready for a year of interesting learning, please come to school prepared with the following tools:

- pens (black or blue)
- pencils
- three ring binder
- 4 pocket folders, one for each academic subject
- notebook
- colored pencils and markers
- reading enrichment book

The school provides you with an agenda book to record your assignments and keep track of school activities. You must always have a pleasure reading book with you, especially for our daily sustained silent reading and writing period each day.

Please complete the copy of the student registration card on the back of this letter. Complete all sections as you would want them to appear on the card. Please bring the letter with you on the first day of school.

Get ready for an exciting year!

Sincerely,

The Coyotes Team teachers
think of ways to revise it to orient our new Coyotes and their parents to our team (figure 4-1).

While our intentions are good, the effects of two members starting the teamwork without the others reinforces a Coyotes team reality: that involvement in team tasks and constructions is different for different members of the team. While George and Harry are probably relieved that Jill and I are beginning the team work without them (they both have summer jobs and don't want to think about school yet), the team letter is a construction of two voices rather than four. They may not buy into aspects of the middle school concept that Jill and I attempt to include in the letter: making expectations of students clear and fostering team identity, for instance. And so, the contents of the letter are not an objective reality of the entire team. More importantly, our uneven involvement in these early team tasks initiates an uneven pattern of involvement and collaboration that continues through the year.

Jill and I form a subgroup of our team, with our own subreality. We agree on certain norms for performance of team tasks. Jill is an energetic and particular young woman, eager to implement her ideas and to produce a certain quality of work. I am equally enthusiastic about supporting her with my years of experience, the "bag of tricks" I compiled as a teacher and team member in a variety of other settings. In combination, we are a powerful pair. We have a tendency to exclude George and Harry for the sake of expediency.

While it is more efficient at times to delegate tasks and allow individual team members to make separate decisions (in this case, creating a welcoming team letter), we lose the enriching quality of a four way conversation. In the following section, I describe the first four way conversation of the year. The discussion illustrates the coming together of separate realities, and how the
supportive nature of our team helps us to co-construct aspects of team organization.

Subjective Realities: Starting School

It is the first day of school for teachers. George, Harry, Jill and I sit together in Jill's science lab, the room where we always met last year. It is mandated by the school principal that we meet together for most of the day, to iron out team roles and expectations, to make final arrangements of time and student groupings for the first day of school for students. This is our institutional reality. But more important for the team is the reality of collegial support, through which we objectivate our various expectations for the first day of school.

George prods Jill for the finalized class lists, and Jill takes the pressure as criticism: "I'll have them by Thursday," she assures him. "I'm having trouble printing them out. Last year there were times when you didn't have lists for us," she reminds him.

Harry and I are less concerned with class lists and more eager to prepare our own classrooms. Going over the outline of first day tasks makes each of us more anxious. Harry and I begin to divide up the piles of forms that need to be filled out.

Jill tries to ease our anxiety. "It's simple," she says, "Just have the kids fill out the registration card and use that information for the rest of the forms."

I try to kid George out of his imitation over not having class lists. "Think of it this way," I suggest. "The list is going to change for the first two weeks anyway, and you'll have a much neater grade book this way!"

George makes amends by offering his ideas for decorating. "I have some study skills posters that I picked at Eastern Teacher Supply, I'd be glad to get you some on the way home," he offers. "Maybe if the kids see them more than once, they'll be more likely to use the strategies in all of their classes."
We turn to the first of the team tasks outlined by "Team Expectations" in the teacher handbook—choosing roles. At the whole-staff meeting that morning, the assistant principal reminded us to have our team roles to her by the end of the day. The framework lends an easy structure to team-forming and task completion at this early stage of meeting.

Jill has already been working on the class lists, and she chooses the role of Schedule Master. I lobby for the role of team scribe, the job that Harry had last year. The scribe takes notes at team meetings and produces communications to send to parents. I hope to be able to combine datacollecting for my research project with the role of scribe. "I'll be taping and taking lots of notes anyway," I explain, "so I might as well combine the jobs. Besides, maybe Harry will have more time to talk!" I kid him.

I talk Harry into switching last year's roles with me. The previous year, he took copious notes and neatly compiled them in a team meeting binder. Occasionally one of us consulted the notes to look for details about an earlier conversation or decision. I hope to use the notes in a more recursive way, to generate a meeting agenda. Already I perceive an interweaving of my roles.

Harry agrees to trade with me for "special education liaison." The liaison keeps track of the blue three ring binder that contains the IEPs for students on our team. He communicates with our special education staff, asking questions and setting up meetings about individual education plans and the progress of students on our team who have IEPs.

"Well I guess that leaves me as 'locker master'," George dead-pans. Jill had that job the previous year, and it was not a favorite among sixth grade teachers. Students are obsessed with their lockers, either wanting to visit them constantly or avoiding them completely. To some, combination locks are like a Chinese puzzle, perhaps to be finally mastered by the end of the school year.
To others, the locker is a place to hang out to watch the 7th graders who move through the hall just before we change classes. "But I'll get them squared away," George assures us.

Choosing team roles is an important function of our team organization, one that sets an institutional framework for collaboration for the coming year. But more personal realities—such as the shared commitment to our sixth grade students, and our shared anxiety about beginning a new school year, encourage us to collaborate effectively. At this point, we are able to accommodate preferences and share strategies bring continuity to the early days of school, for ourselves and for our students.

**Co-constructions: Team Organization**

Building a schedule for our students establishes a team reality for academic classes, both in terms of use of time blocks and in grouping a varied population of students. Our new crop of sixth graders will move from class to class and travel alone through the large middle school building to their unified arts classes for the first time. They come to the middle school from all over the city, and need time to get to know one another. We consider options for organizing a team schedule. We talk about the effects of structuring learning time in alternative ways to the usual 45 minute academic blocks in the same order each day. Our individual realities of "doing middle school" begin to emerge through this organizational discussion.

We draw on last year's experience as well as the norm of other teams in the building. We each have preferences, based on past experiences and teaching styles. Jill and Harry favor having four fixed groups who move through 50 minute academic blocks, while George wants to mix classes for each academic block. The school principal favors experimentation and periodic mixing of class groups. "At the middle school level, they tend to form cliques,"
he reminds us when he stops by our team meeting during our planning sessions. "If you can mix the groups every class period, they'll get to know the whole team more quickly."

The conversation below illustrates how we negotiate our subrealities to agree on a team schedule.

Jill argues for greater continuity. "Mixing the groups every period is too confusing for them. They are coming from self-contained classrooms," she argues. "They need as much guidance as possible at the start. You know how crazy they get in the halls!"

George reminds us of Phil's philosophy. "Let's face it," he suggests, "everything is new for them anyway, we might as well make them totally confused with a rotating schedule, as well as mixing their groups every period!"

We debate the effects of last year's groupings and recall that for about half of the previous year, we rotated classes on a five day rotation to give each of our class groupings a double class period in each of our classes, one day a week.

"You know I'm in favor of it," I announce enthusiastically. "We get so much done! And it's nice skipping one of the groups one day a week."

"But remember how difficult it was for our coded kids," Jill reminds us. "When they had time scheduled for classes in the resource room, they had to come into those double periods half way through. How are we going to accommodate them?"

Harry takes Jill's side, favoring the continuity and relative ease of establishing rules with four fixed groups of students who would move through the schedule on a fixed daily rotation. "It makes it easier to identify problems," he suggests. "Then if a grouping doesn't work out, we can worry about shuffling kids around. I think we should find groupings that work, and stick with them."
Harry and Jill are convincing. With learning to use lockers, moving from classroom to classroom, and finding their way around the large middle school, a rotating schedule might be an unnecessary complication. Somewhat reluctantly, George and I agree to a traditional format, plugging students into 45 minute classes that will meet at the same time every day, moving four academic groups through the schedule as a block. "In a few weeks," suggests George, "maybe we can begin to shuffle the classes."

While the discussion is about one aspect of team organization—how to schedule time for academic and enrichment classes—we draw in our separate threads of knowledge about developmental needs of students, responsive pedagogy, and the relationship of time to curriculum. In attempting to co-construct our team's schedule, we have to bend and flex, considering the knowledge and needs of the others on the team. Harry and Jill both are from elementary backgrounds and are more sensitive to the transition our students have to make in moving from an elementary to a middle school setting. George and I view ourselves as teachers of one of the academic disciplines, and are more used to dealing with 110 students a day. Continuity is not as great an issue for us.

When we discuss the possibility of having a rotating schedule with larger blocks of learning time, threads of elementary teaching pedagogy, academic disciplines, and the middle school philosophy are brought into the conversation—aspects of the institutional reality as well as our subjective realities. Together, we consider the context of our new group of students, and attempt to construct a shared reality of responsive team organization. For the time being, we agree to move four heterogeneously mixed groups of students through the same schedule every day. But we revisit the schedule in our discussions several times during the year, each time reconsidering the meaning behind the
schedule. What are the effects of having longer blocks of learning time, on students as well as teachers? What are the pedagogical implications of teaching in longer blocks of time? These question become important once again at the end of the year, when we construct a team "experiment" -- a thematic unit -- in which we "unstructure" learning time, and evaluate its results (described in chapters 9 and 10).

Knowledge of Collaboration: Team Building

Hovering in the background of all of our discussions is the issue of effective collaboration. How the team gets along, our ability to hear and consider the needs and strengths of one another, impacts the extent to which we are able to co-construct other aspects of a team reality. Although group process theory is not the focus of this dissertation, it does help to illuminate the ways in which the Coyotes work together (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Napier & Gersenfeld, 1985; Hill, 1990). As we set up and refine the class schedule, set up class groupings, create team programs, and discuss our new team of students, we are involved in our own community-building. The process of "ordering" time and a new group of students is a necessary process for any teacher at the beginning of a new school year. But doing these things together lays a foundation for more significant sharing of professional knowledge.

Our discussion of how to organize the afternoon enrichment period each day -- known at Central Falls as "team period" -- is part of the beginning of the year organization for the team, but it opens the door for pedagogical sharing. There are a variety of ways that teams structure the team enrichment time at Central Falls, from needlework to drama to math club to straight study period time. Last year, we decided to use team period for extra academic time, in the form of a reading and writing workshop. This year, George and Harry lobby to use the time as a study period, in order to provide extra help to students when
they fall behind in Math or Language Arts. Jill and I try to convince them that Reading and Writing Workshop will give our students much needed practice in literacy skills in a more relaxed setting. We convince them to follow last year's format, at least for part of the year. George is uncomfortable with teaching reading and writing, so we agree that he can rotate the four groups through a videotaped study skills program he has acquired.

The discussion of how to structure team period leads to a conversation about what enrichment activities are for:

"And I think we should have lots of assemblies this year," Jill suggests. "That's what the block of time in the afternoon is for, once a month or so. These kids need to socialize, they have to have something to look forward to!"

"We ought to do something to help them get to know one another at the start," George contributes. "I have some nifty activities that I picked up at a cooperative learning workshop this summer. Helping kids with their interaction, it's important!" he reminds us. "We'll avoid a lot of other troubles that way."

Harry puts his hand to his forehead. "It's already so much to do," he complains. "Shouldn't we get going on the novel reading?"

"You're right, Harry," I agree. "We are sort of barreling ahead. I think it's OK to start slowly. We don't need to leap into Reading and Writing Workshop right away. We need to take some time for our own transition as well as the kids!"

"We have the whole year," George reassures him. "We're way ahead of where we were last year in our planning. We should take some time for team-building."

As a member of the English department, Harry is particularly anxious about the novels. "My department head wants us to be sure to really read them,
not just give them to the kids," he worriedly reminds us. "We need to agree on ways to get the kids to take them seriously."

Harry's concern that we agree on how to implement novel studies, and the pressure he feels as we begin to discuss team goals for the year remind us of the importance for trust building, especially at this point in the school year. According to Larson and LaFasto, establishing a climate of trust nurtures the effectiveness of the team in its tasks. Through analysis of effective teams, they identified reasons why. According to their study, trust:

• allows teams to stay problem-focused (the absence of trust diverts energy)
• promotes efficient communication and coordination
• improves collaborative outcomes (when differences are made overt)
• leads to compensation - "picking up the slack" (1989, pp. 88-93)

In an earlier study Lortie (1975) touched upon the importance of teams for improving the teaching profession itself. "Collegiality may be induced through informal relationships brought about by tough faculty demands... solidarities (are) encouraged by common confrontation of difficult tasks" (p. 237). The institutional realities of teams at Central Falls—the shared responsibility for 110 students, the administrative demands of team tasks, the lack of external support—both require and foster trust-building. The political climate at the time—a strong citizens action group lobbying for budget cuts, the teacher's contract in its second year of arbitration—are additional contextual factors that encourage the creation of a supportive subreality among team members.

A week or so after school starts, the relaxed atmosphere of pre-start of school planning seems distant. Our team tasks are overwhelming as we
struggle to get to know our students and help them adjust to middle school. We try to focus on ways to create a home base for them, to set a tone for the team. Our sixth graders have a lot of adjustments—meeting the expectations of four new academic teachers, finding the unified arts rooms and another new set of teachers, switching classes every 45 minutes, and keeping track of their books and possessions as they move around, negotiating locker and bathroom time with all their different teachers... How can we help them balance their new freedoms with middle school responsibilities?

Though it is our second year together, as teachers we struggle with the same issues as our students do: getting back to work after a summer of freedom, getting organized, and getting along with our co-workers. And like our students, we each have different styles of orienting ourselves to the new year. Jill plans a field trip for our students during the first month of school. Harry wants to stay put, get to know our students on the familiar turf of his own classroom. I am anxious to change and adjust the strategies we used last year, and I eagerly support both Jill's and George's ideas for team building activities. Through the course of discussion, we agree upon several strategies for community building:

*It's our team meeting day, about two weeks after the start of school.*

"We really need to set other things aside and work on some community building. Here are the strategies I picked up last summer. I'll run them off and give some to everyone," he offers.

"I have the parachute," I add. "Maybe we could take recess and team period time, first do the paper and pencil stuff, then try to get them into some cooperative games."

"Exactly how does this work," says Harry anxiously. "Remember, I didn't take the workshop, George!"
"All we have to do is pass the questionnaire out to them and encourage them to interview each other," says Jill reassuringly.

After lunch we lead the kids outside and pass out the forms. "A prize for the person with the most interviews," hollers George.

Later, I haul out the parachute. The Coyotes sixth graders gather around the edge of the huge circle of nylon cloth and take turns tossing a student in the air. Some students clamor for a turn, others assure us they will never be tossed. Some like the job of calling—"One, two, three, toss!"—better than being tossed. Some students press for cooperation, "Come on you guys, stay and help after your turn!"

In similar ways, our teaching team tries to accommodate the needs of its members. We discuss another team letter to send home to parents, to inform them of upcoming events. The letter helps us to crystallize our plans and some of the goals we have tacitly agreed to. Berger and Luckman say that "conversation gives firm contours to items previously apprehended in a fleeting or unclear manner" (1966, p.152). In formulating our letter, we uncover our various assumptions and negotiate around one another’s preferences.

Harry asks to include one of his goals, to encourage students to read regularly at home.

"I think it’s reasonable to ask them to read for twenty minutes each night, don’t you? And we could send home a reading list, have it signed to be sure that parents get it."

Jill wants to give the field trip to the beach top billing. "Let's not give them too much to respond to at once," she cautions. "Don't forget that we have to send home information about the field trip and a permission slip. This is a team building activity too," she adds.
Harry doesn't seem to hear. "Would you have a problem with sending home a reading list and having parents sign it?" he asks, turning to me.

I try to negotiate a compromise. "I don't really think we need to send a list out right away. We could mention the importance of reading time in our letter, and follow up later with a reading list. We ought to keep it simple in this first letter."

George puts his own spin on it. "And we need to be firm, their money has to be in by Monday. No money, no trip," he announces.

We quickly brainstorm other announcements that can't wait for a future letter:

"School pictures Thursday. . ." 

"Lockers that need to be fixed. Parents need to be reminded that here is only one custodian here," George interjects.

Harry jumps in with an example: "Yeah, Carrie Duran's mother was in the other day complaining about her locker. We had the wrong combination written down. #81, at the beginning of the year, that we thought was 2-22-0 was really 2-23-0, George, 2-22-0 is 2-23-0!"

Harry's ability to remember the combination number breaks the tension of the accumulating issues. "He's the number man," I laugh.

"And her mom was really upset!" Harry laughs now at the memory.

The result of our pushing and pulling, as we lobby for our own priorities, is our second team letter to parents (figure 4-2). It represents the reality we agree to as a team and make public to our students and their parents—a stabilization of our team identity. We arrive at the final agenda through mutual support and agreement on priorities related to the middle school concept of developmental needs of students. It represents a basic team construction—beginning of the year organization for the team of students.
September 16, 1994

Dear Coyotes Parents,

We have had a successful start of the year. Our 6th graders are busy adjusting to the Middle School. There are some frustrations with lockers—some students are having difficulty learning to operate combination locks. Practice at home may help. For locks that are in need of repair, our custodian will take some time to get to them, as there are 1100 lockers in the school! Meanwhile, we are here to help: be sure to ask if students need alternative storage for the time being.

Schedules are still being ironed out. Some students have schedule changes while we adjust for class sizes. We may begin a rotating schedule next term to prevent students from having the same class before lunch or at the end of the day, every day.

We want to encourage students to read for pleasure to improve their skills. At school, we offer "Reading and Writing Workshop" during Team Period, and students should try to read at least 1/2 hour a day at home. Soon, we will send home a reading list to help you choose high interest books. We encourage students to read and do homework in a quiet setting without distractions.

You will soon receive a school calendar with projected team events for the year. We plan to take several field trips to sharpen student skills of observation and awareness of ecosystems. In both science and social studies, students will learn about the environment and the impact of people on the environment.

Our first field trip is scheduled for Friday, October 13. We will explore tide pool ecology at ___________________. The cost of the trip, to cover bus transportation, is $1. per student. We need ten parent chaperones to accompany us. Please indicate your interest on the enclosed permission slip.

If you have any questions or concerns at this time, please don't hesitate to call us at the school. We look forward to working together with you to make this a great 6th grade year for your child!

Sincerely,
During the first month at least, we are task oriented around the institutional expectations for teams at Central Falls. At the same time, on personal and group dynamic levels, we struggle with how to work together again, how to accommodate differences, and how to develop a team reality for ourselves and our students. These are aspects of professional knowledge about effective teaming that hover around all of the work that we do. In our previous year, we established levels of trust—and mistrust—with one another. We crystallized subjective realities of whom we can rely upon for what team tasks and which aspects of each other's personalities meld or clash in our process of team work. Napier and Gersenfeld note that, for a mature group, "There (are) periods of conflict resolution and harmony and even times when the group tends to regress into a pattern of indecisiveness and floundering" (1985, p. 465). At this phase of our team relationship, the reality of our team collaboration was harmonious, when we helped one another adjust to the shared aspects of our teaching.

Napier and Gersenfeld remind us that "The complex weave of relationships that compose any small group eventually become rooted in roles, norms, problem-solving procedures . . . and other conveniently labeled concepts" (1984, p. 454). While our school presents us with a format of roles and norms, in the form of "team expectations," the reality of our team relationship plays out in our work. Although we began on an uneven footing (the work that Jill and I did for the team in August), during the first month of school the sharing seemed to even out. Our voices can be heard more equally in the planning of team period and the writing of our second team letter. Our constructions related to team organization weave threads of professional knowledge related to adolescent development, responsive pedagogy, curriculum, and effective collaboration. In the next chapter, I focus the lens of
sociology of knowledge more specifically, on how we construct a shared reality of the students whom we all teach.
CHAPTER FIVE

KNOWLEDGE OF INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS: SHARING STORIES

We began to know our own stories better by hearing others' stories. As we listened to others' stories, we not only heard echoes of our own stories, but saw new shades of meaning in them.


For the Coyotes, team meeting time is a setting to share classroom stories of students and our interaction with them. Discussing the students whom we share helps us plan for the future. We compare notes and agree or disagree about what makes a student tick. We all agree that our meetings foster our understanding of students and their needs, and help us to be more consistent in our response to them. Meeting conversations illustrate the team hypothesizing about how to change behavior or motivate students. When we disagree about what makes a student tick, we sometimes force changes in our tacit understandings and co-constructions new understandings of particular

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7 I form this conclusion from team discussions and from interview data, when I asked my colleagues about the strengths of teaming.
students. In this chapter, I reproduce team meeting data to illustrate the process of enriching and reconstructing working knowledge of our students, and the natural progression of our conversation to consider strategies to help them learn. What is of interest to me in this chapter is how the collaborative reflective process begins, and how that process affects our working knowledge of students. I use the lens of tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1983) to describe the process of restorying our subjective knowledge of students. Through examples from Coyotes team meetings, I illustrate the retelling of classroom stories and the restructuring of understandings in the light of others’ experiences.

Learning about our students is the work that teams are organized to do best. Stevenson describes the primary function of interdisciplinary teams as the ability “to respond to program or student problems swiftly and with the benefit of collective thought” (1992, p. 211). Lounsbury, in his survey of sixth grades, concludes that the strength of early adolescent education is “sensitivity to developmental needs of the students” (1988, p. 41). First on the list of Team Expectations at Central Falls is “Assuming responsibility for supervising the academic, emotional and social development of students.” How students are doing is constantly the topic of our conversation. For different teams, the extent to which working knowledge of students is co-constructed varies. In my own experience, the conversation itself at least stimulates us to consider more than our individual perceptions of our students.

When we describe classroom interactions to one another, we freeze those examples in the language of special educators (IEP, ADD) or of middle school concept (social and emotional needs) or in terminology we develop together (the folder system). The act of representing experiences in language requires us to reflect and categorize. As I suggest in Chapter 1, we may crystallize aspects of working professional knowledge through mutual
agreement on meanings, or we may jar our individual meanings as we consider the meanings our colleagues interpret from a similar experience.

**The Lens of Tacit Knowing: Interiorizing the Particulars of Our Students**

When we tell stories about our students at team meetings, and when we verbalize our classroom interaction, we engage in a form of "typification" (Berger and Luckman, 1966). In verbalizing our own impressions of students, we "encode" their behavior. The encoding process requires us to measure this example against other examples, to generalize our observations. Later in the chapter, I demonstrate the process through the example of Scott. We contribute our personal working knowledge of him to the team conversation, and co-construct an enriched version of his learning needs.

Teachers' typifications include professional language that comes from formal education, workshops, or reading. In the case of middle school teachers, typifications are often about the realms of developmental needs of early adolescents, and the particular need or stage of development we interpret through a student's classroom interaction. The school, as well as the team itself, may have its own language to describe students. Special educators, guidance counselors, and administrative teams encode student behavior in the language of their own subuniverse.

A variety of personal interpretations by classroom teachers may present a dilemma for the team. Does a particular child have a learning disability or is he a behavior problem? Is he lazy or depressed? We challenge one another's classroom realities and typifications. Through retelling our classroom stories, and group consideration of outside data such as home environment and permanent records, we are encouraged to hypothesize together and to agree upon our typifications: to crystallize working knowledge of students.
Ideally, team conversations become an important mental exercise in the juncture for varying perceptions. The match or mismatch of different teachers' experiences with a child can serve as the catalyst for building a more complete knowledge of a child, and for developing a more full repertoire of activities to help each student learn. When a team works together to understand its students, it becomes a dynamic entity, a community of inquirers.

Measuring our impressions and classroom experiences against those of our colleagues also requires a critical effort. Why is a certain student well-behaved and involved in one classroom and not the others? Why does a certain activity work in one classroom and not the others? The possibilities for a team to engage in critical problem-solving related to knowledge of our students' developmental needs are endless. The dialogical process of our interaction encourages a level of reflection that is likely to lead to a better understanding not only of a particular student, but of the process of understanding any student.

The process of constructing more complete knowledge of students may be understood by applying Polanyi's framework for knowledge formation (from _The tacit dimension_, 1983). Polanyi holds that our face to face encounters are the sharpest reality. To know something, in a strong sense, it must be interiorized. Thus it becomes a part the scheme with which we interpret the world. Polanyi says that when we interiorize something, "we incorporate it (part of the world) in our body or extend our body to include it" (p. 16).

To interiorize a concept means that we integrate its "particulars." Those particulars are tacitly understood as we accumulate experience with them. However, a reflective effort-- scrutinizing the particulars of something (a problem, a natural phenomenon, the act of playing a piano concerto, or one's knowledge of others)--may momentarily destroy our integrated version of that thing. Then, it may be recovered in an improved way. In terms of a student, we
integrate an individualized reality of him or her through our interaction. By discussing the student at team meeting, we may jar that personal reality, then reconstruct a more complete version of who the student is. When impressions contained in our stories clash, we may question our own impressions, as well those of our colleagues. Through conversation with others, we collect additional data.

To Polanyi, we know more about a problem than we can tell. "To see a problem is to see something that is hidden . . . to have an intimation of the coherence of hitherto not comprehended particulars" (1983, p. 21). When we work with students in our classrooms, we respond to them in action. We have intimations of their particulars that we respond to on the spot. But in retelling our stories at team meetings, we struggle over them together. Our individual realities may be jarred, expanded upon, and reintegrated. It is at this level that we begin to co-construct our teaching realities.

Sharing professional knowledge about student development and needs sets the stage for reconstruction of other aspects of our work. At the beginning of a school year, the process of sharing impressions of students is part of our community building. By listening to and interacting with one another's stories, we begin to interiorize the ways of perceiving of our colleagues. We bring together bits of professional knowledge as well as our personal histories. Thus, we build a complicated and dynamic web of relationship that forms the basis for all of the work that we do together. The foundation of our work is based upon our mutual involvement with our students.

A Co-Construction: Knowledge of Scott

At the beginning of a school year we welcome our collaboration over getting to know students. What follows is an example of a student whom the Coyotes teachers puzzled over. We approached our discussion as a problem-
solving exercise. In discussing Scott, we brought together various subjective realities of one student, weighed the evidence of varying perceptions, sought additional data, and reconstructed a shared reality of him.

I chose the example of Scott because of my own confusion in naming his motivation and the struggle I went through to modify my classroom practices to help him learn. While the others on my team were equally concerned about this individual, we had varying typifications of him. We named his behavior in different ways. The discrepancies forced us to do additional research: we reviewed his records together and interacted with his case manager. I experienced the confusion suggested by Polanyi: my personal integrated version of Scott was destroyed. Then, through conversation about Scott's behavior and the additional data of his IEP, I experienced a conceptual shift. My reintegrated version of Scott was more complete. Through the team conversation, and with the facilitation of Scott's IEP case manager, we reconstructed a shared reality of Scott.

It's the third week of school, and we're all impatient to get moving through our curricula. As usual at the beginning of the year, the readiness of our students to proceed in our various subject areas varies tremendously. Right away, we are sharing stories about individuals, especially those individuals who just are not "with the program."

I'm still pretty foggy about who each student is. Scott is an example of student whom I had all wrong. As I enter the science lab for team meeting, I hear George and Harry complaining about Scott's behavior. "And he won't go barreling through the hall to specials, either!" exclaims George.

"Hey, funny you should mention him. I need to talk about Scott too. I'm having a hard time getting him to settle down," I admit as I sit down at the lab table with the others.
"He's having a hard time with himself," George responds sarcastically.

I ignore his crisp appraisal. "Now, he is a repeater, right? Because if he is, that's got to have an impact on how we treat him," I suggest. "We're talking about Scott," I say to Jill, as she comes into the room.

"All I know is, he's getting attention in inappropriate ways," she comments.

"Today, he didn't know what to do in class, didn't know what page we were on, where to write his assignment—he was genuinely confused!" I exclaim. "At first, I thought it was because he was talking to the kid next to him when I was telling them to write something. Now, I wonder if it's more complicated that." 

"Is he coded ADD?" asks Harry.

"Is he in the resource room for English?" Jill asks him.

"Well, who has the IEP book (the blue binder containing the individual education plans for every identified student on our team)?" George asks, looking to the rest of us.

"Isn't Harry Special Ed. Liaison?" Jill responds.

"Oh, sure," Harry remembers. "I'll get it."

"And we really ought to know if he's a repeater. I'll check with guidance," says Jill, heading out the door.

George and I are alone for a minute, and I use the time to talk about how we've responded to Scott. "He's rebellious, that's for sure. I think that the way we both came down on him today might be the wrong approach. It might just make him more rebellious," I suggest.

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8 This is the Coyotes team in action. We use our daily team meeting to solve problems of mutual concern. We're apt to interrupt our meeting to deal with a problem on the spot. At the same time, with our pooled resources, we're encouraged to look a little deeper into student problems. There are a lot of unanswered questions and some inconsistencies in our individual perceptions of Scott. Team meeting affords us the time to investigate.

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"I don't know," says George, mildly disagreeing, "in the lunchroom, in the hallways for the past few days he's been full of it, he's been getting attention. He knows what he's doing, and I told him, if he's going to behave that way, he's going to be treated that way."

I'm assuming that Scott has stayed back this year, and that he has a history of failure. "But I wonder if we tried to encourage him, say 'Scott, you're going to succeed this year. And if you're confused about something, you need to ask me,' maybe he won't be so rebellious."

Just then, Harry comes back with the IEP book and sets it on the table. I eagerly take it up and thumb through to find Scott's IEP.

"So, it says modified . . . in science and social studies . . . we've gotta wait for Jill to come back. He is behind in grade level for his age."

"Do they have test norms in there for him?" asks George.9

"It says here 'spelling modified 5th grade, reading modified 4th grade.' So we know that in English and science and social studies he's going to have a tough time reading directions. 'Needs assistance,' 'rules to control overall behavior,' 'behavioral level system,' so it seems like they've had him on a strict behavior management plan in the past. We should write down expectations for him, and maybe we can work some expectations out for all classes, so that we reinforce one another. Our expectations for him have to be well defined and well checked up on."10

Now I'm thinking aloud, comparing Scott's classroom interaction with what I read. The light comes on in my head. "Now I understand! I was giving

9 Our different interests in Scott's record reveal differences in our teaching and learning styles. While George looks for standardized test scores to compare with his perceptions about Scott's ability in class, I'm more concerned with the anecdotal accounts and classroom suggestions written at his IEP meeting at the end of the last year.

10 Here is a typical example of the interweaving of knowledge of students and knowledge of responsive strategies in our team conversation.
opposite signals to him today. As the kids were coming in and he asked where he should sit, another kid told him that we don't have assigned seats yet. Then Bobby Taylor came in and Scott asked him to sit next to him. Bobby said, 'I can't sit next to you, I have to sit in my assigned seat,' because yesterday Bobby and Scott were fooling around and I told them not to sit next to each other. I had to tell Scott to get up and move again. To Scott, I'm giving mixed signals. No assigned seats, but he has an assigned seat. That's when he decides to ignore the rules."

Jill returns from the office, talking as she enters the room. "He's not a repeater," she announces. "But he's big. I wonder if he stayed back in another grade?" She looks over my shoulder at the IEP.

"Well I guess I had that one wrong," I comment.

"He's coded EH (emotionally handicapped)," Harry contributes, looking at a list of the IEP codings for our population of Coyotes students.

"Here it says he gets confused very easily," I go on with the behavior plan. "George and I just kind of agreed that he's acting pretty impulsively right now, and it's no wonder, when he has so much new information to deal with."

"Real defensive, or offensive," George summarizes.

"Scott has difficulty expressing himself when he becomes frustrated or anxious," I continue. "I think we need to be extremely clear with him, make sure he's comfortable asking questions."

Harry pipes in with news from the grapevine, "He was telling me that his father is in the FBI! I guess he lives on the west coast. I wonder if there is a man in the household?" he wonders. 11

11The underlying assumption seems to be that Scott's home situation might have something to do with his rebelliousness with the male teachers on the team.
"What kind of services is he supposed to be getting?" George asks.

"His IEP calls for counseling once a week and shorter written assignments." Now I think of my own classroom reality. "You know, I'm going to hand Scott the map skills packet that I made up for two weeks worth of work and he's going to go nuts. He won't know where to start!"

George looks critically at his own classroom protocol. "To make it worse," he says, "I spent Monday going through the homework schedule, what we will be doing for the whole week. "Today when they were leaving, he said, 'I don't know what to do,' so I said, 'Go to your planner, look at your planner, and see what you wrote,' and he opened it and said, 'ohhh, that!'"

As we compare Scott's IEP with how his behavior plays out in each of our classrooms, we move to the next step, formulating strategies together. Each of our classroom styles, along with Scott's own history in the various subjects, brings out a variety of suggestions.

"Whose homeroom is he in?" asks Jill. "Someone needs to go over the planner with him at the end of school every day."

"And in class, maybe if we can pair him up with someone who is really clear on directions," I suggest.

Just then Steve Garcia, one of our special education counselors, comes in.

"We're talking about Scott, isn't he in your homeroom?" asks George.

"Yes, and I'm here to talk about him. Serendipity!" grins Steve. "He's in my program and I need to review him in two weeks. You need to know that in the spring, the elementary teachers made the decision that he was ready to try a regular math class, so we want to review how he's doing pretty quickly, and how much outside help he'll need."
"Well I'm leaning the other way!" George announces with a frown on his face. "Already he isn't making it. He's not keeping up with assignments, not paying attention in class." George uses this opportunity to point out the lack of teacher aide time we have assigned in our classrooms.

"Well, I guess that's what I need to know," Steve smiles good-naturedly. George backs off a bit. "But I don't know the kid very well," he admits. "Maybe we need to give him a little more time before we make a decision."

"Can we review his IEP," asks Jill, "so we'll know what to do to help?"

"We can do that now," Steve agrees. "First off, he'll do better in smaller groups."

"Yeah, that's part of his frustration too, working with the large number," George agrees. "But I can't be everywhere at once! There just aren't enough aides to go around!"

"I thought he was a repeater!" I exclaim. "I looked at him and said, 'Here's a mature young man.' Then when he started goofing off, I thought 'here's a mature young man going off in the wrong direction.' And now we're finally figuring out that he really doesn't know what's going on, he's confused."\footnote{In this conversation, I'm still amazed at my typification of Scott, before the team conversation facilitated my enriched knowledge of him.}

"He's going to need a lot of taking the time to explain things," says Steve. "He gets into trouble when he doesn't understand." And to George, "He needs both, explaining and a firm hand. Can you buddy him up with someone?" he asks, reinforcing the suggestions written in Scott's IEP. "He needs to have assignments written down, and it would help for him to be able to see written directions, as well as hear them."

"We all basically do," Jill assures him. "With sixth graders, you have to!"
"But we all do it differently," I lament. "Some of us give out written assignment sheets, others have a place on the board, and George and I use the plastic weekly assignment boards. Some of us give the assignments for the week and others daily assignments." I identify with Scott's confusion.

Steve reassures me. "He has to get used to that, to a certain extent."

"I think if we can be consistent within the same class he'll be OK," suggests George.

"And make sure he actually writes the assignments down," Steve reminds us.

Steve and George talk over ideas for reasonable sanctions for Scott’s hall behavior. "Just be sure to be clear with him," Steve suggests. "He will get rebellious if he doesn't understand what he did, why he's in trouble."

"I do think we need to be understanding too," I remind them. "There's so much for all of them to get used to, and Scott has trouble dealing with so many different signals.

George reinterprets Steve's earlier reassurance. "But that's OK, because we are all different, and we have different teaching styles, and he's going to have to get used to it."

"It's bound to be a ball of wax," Steve agrees. "His two greatest weaknesses are auditory attention, and memory. No matter what, he's destined to run into problems with organization."

Through the conversation above, the team reformulates its subjective realities of Scott, and co-constructs new working knowledge of his needs. We begin thinking that Scott is a behavior problem. We come out with enriched awareness of Scott’s emotional and cognitive needs, because we read over his records together, talked to his guidance counselor, and revisited all of our classroom interactions together. We uncovered the multi-faceted roots of
Scott's confusion, and considered how our variety of teaching styles within the team setting might help Scott learn to cope with diversity. We began to build a team reality of responsive methods to address Scott's individual learning needs.

The Coyotes' conversation over Scott is typical of our work. We come to team meeting with the problems that are most fresh on our minds. We work from the particular to the general to help one another understand our students. Although the Coyotes don't always agree on the best strategies for working with our sixth graders, we tug at one another's subjective knowledge to establish a team reality of appropriate teaching methods for Scott and others on our team. Our individual histories bring an enriched pool of strategies to the team. Jill models elementary school teaching strategies, emphasizing the importance of consistency. George favors letting students "fall on their faces" in order to learn about taking responsibility. His perspective forces Jill and me to look critically at our greater degree of intervention. Steve, the case manager, serves as mediator and facilitator. For the time being at least, we are able to agree upon strategies to help Scott organize and cope with the diversity of subjects and teachers he encounters in middle school.

The team conversation over Scott contains threads of institutional knowledge, that also affect our decision making and construction of a team reality. One of the goals of the Central Falls mission is to provide "a variety of activities to meet the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs of rapidly changing students." This, and the commitment of our principal to the middle school concept are added incentives for the team to follow the thread of Scott's development and to plan for the future according to that information.

A few changes in our behavior as teachers are in evidence in the days following the conversation. George is willing to wait a while before he passes
judgment on Scott's ability to succeed in the regular math class. "For the time
being, we'll try to mainstream him," George concludes. I adjust my classroom
plans—the social studies learning packet—to better suit Scott's needs and others
in the class who might be like him. All of us refrain from speaking of Scott as
simply a behavior problem.

Polanyi says that "To see a problem is to see something that is hidden . . .
. to have an intimation of the coherence of hitherto not comprehended
particulars" (1983, p. 21). I, at least, emerged from the team conversation with
a reintegrated sense of who Scott was, how to work with him, and how to
individualize instruction in general. Our pooled impressions helped me to
revisit my tacit assumptions and to consider more carefully future and similar
cases.

Facilitating Shared Knowledge

Part of the institutional reality of Central Falls Middle School is the
intervention on teams by "case managers," special educators and counselors
assigned to track the progress of students with IEPs. In the example of our
conversation about Scott, it is important to consider the effect of an outsider—
Scott's case manager—on our team meeting process. The guidance counselor,
Steve Garcia, is a frequent visitor to our team meetings. In the meeting
described above, he takes the role of Scott's advocate. For the Coyotes
teachers, he becomes the interpreter of Scott's IEP, suggesting how it might
play out in each of our classrooms, helping us to formulate a shared reality of
Scott and pedagogy that is responsive to him. Steve helps us weigh official
knowledge represented by the curriculum and the middle school concept
against the reality of this student.

At the same time, Steve has the authority to press for consistent
implementation of classroom strategies to carry out Scott's IEP. At Central Falls
Middle School, guidance counselors are an arm of the administration. They work among and between teams, rather than as a part of any one team. They set up the school's master schedule and change student placements occasionally, when they perceive such changes as beneficial to students. At times, guidance counselors serve as liaisons between the principal and teams, as well as between parents and teams. They follow the progress of particular students and suggest ways to adjust classroom methods to help a student learn.

At the Coyotes team meeting, Steve is typified by his role, and so his affect on our meeting is greater than any of the four teachers might have. We are encouraged to be on our "best behavior"—more attentive, more reflective, and more collaborative than usual. At team meetings, when we suggest and model teaching strategies for one another related to individual students, none of us has the authority to encourage uniform adoption of classroom strategies, as Steve does. At the same time, it is a shared reality of the Coyotes that Steve is a helpful outsider. He supervises a Coyotes homeroom advisee group and readily offers to attend assemblies or chaperone out of school field trips. As evidenced in the team meeting conversation above, he tries to accommodate our variety of teaching styles while seeking the best interest of his advisees. Steve's feedback to us indicates that he learns our stories as well, acting as a co-learner and co-constructor of strategies to help Scott and other Coyotes students. For the team, his participation facilitates the crystallization of working knowledge about the individual developmental needs of our students.

This team meeting represents the coming together of many strands of working knowledge: the record of Scott's past performance and his Individual Education Plan, written comments by other guidance counselors and teachers, Steve Garcia's "reading" based on his meetings with Scott, the team teachers' stories of Scott's current interaction in their classrooms, and the classroom
experiences of the four Coyotes teachers with Scott. Just as Scott is in flux, as he grows and changes while he is our student, our concept of him becomes more flexible through our conversation. There is evidence that our shared working knowledge goes beyond the particular, as we generalize responsive methodologies to other student examples during the year. We implement our agreed-to strategies more consistently with the added authority of Scott's IEP.13

In the next chapter, I continue to explore the sharing of professional knowledge about students and strategies, as the Coyotes interpret and implement subjective and co-constructed versions of responsive middle school pedagogy.

13 We give the special educator assigned to our team weekly feedback during our regular Thursday team meeting, revisit our conclusions about Scott (and others), and readjust according to how he is responding. The special educator uses our input to fill out weekly progress reports to send home with each of our students with IEPs.
CHAPTER SIX

KNOWLEDGE OF RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY: SHARING STRATEGIES

Just as the students are variable, so must their schooling provide complementary diversity—choices of curricular content, multiple approaches to teaching, diverse grouping formats. Expecting every student to learn the same material at the same time as a result of the same exposure is contradictory to their developmental diversity.


The responsive model of schooling that Chris Stevenson advocates for ten to fourteen year olds is, on the surface at least, the institutional reality of curriculum and instruction at Central Falls. In practice, adapting our methods to consider the individual needs of our students in the realms of intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development, is difficult. The team meetings described in this chapter reveal barriers within the institutional reality of the Central Falls school district, as well as between the subjective realities of the Coyotes teachers, that hinder our ability to construct a team reality of responsive pedagogy.

Still, our meeting conversations suggest that a team of teachers that shares responsibility for a particular group of students is apt to spend time hypothesizing about how to reach—and teach—each of them. We puzzle over our "problem" students together when we fill out progress reports and check in
with our special education teacher. When we share strategies that work in our separate classrooms we probe tacit understandings of "best practice," in terms of our subuniverse (the team) and in terms of middle school education in general.

Conversations about pedagogy occur naturally as we share what works or doesn't work with a particular student in our separate classrooms. In this chapter, the Coyotes teachers demonstrate various points of view about why students fail and what should be done about perceived lack of progress. By looking at several discussion segments related to student progress (individually and in the team as a whole), I begin to untangle the complicated webs of knowledge that we bring together during our team meetings—our various views of learning and learners, content and skills, and the mission of working with young adolescents. The first section of meeting data illustrates that behind the team's commitment to attend to the various realms of student development lie diverse subjective realities of each teacher on the team. For some, attention to intellectual development means academic development, as evidenced by progression through the established school curriculum, and the other realms are merely supportive of that goal. For others of us, the realms of development are truly interactive, and must be attended to simultaneously.

The second section of meeting data looks in on the team's regular Thursday IEP meeting. Each week, we meet with the special educator assigned to our team to update the progress of the 18 students on the team who have special education codings. For the Coyotes teachers, these meetings become a model for co-construction of responsive strategies to help students learn within the institutional realities of Central Falls.

The final descriptive segment in this chapter illustrates the delicate process of sharing our teaching strategies beyond IEP implementation. Over
the course of the year, there are particular strategies that become generalized and which we do apply to other students, especially those with organization problems.

This chapter illustrates both barriers and beginnings for a diverse group of practitioners to co-construct aspects of responsive middle school pedagogy. Knowledge of effective collaboration underlies our work, as we untangle the threads of personal practical knowledge, confront our various stances in relation to developmental needs of students and curricular issues, and slowly work to establish a collaborative vision.

**Institutional and Subjective Realities: Student Progress**

Our meeting conversation over student progress intensifies when it comes time to issue progress reports. Only three weeks after the start of school we sit down together to fill out our first stack of reports for the year. As we do so, we share impressions of how individuals are doing, and make assumptions about the future. "Sean is doing poorly for everyone, what are we going to do about him?" or "Katie is doing so well--she's going to be a leader on our team."

"What are we going to do about Bobby," Harry worries. "He's in and out of school, and even when he's here he doesn't do anything. We have to give him extra help during school, get him on track."

"You have to admit he's an unusual case," I remind him. "Bobby has hardly been here--he's left several times with migraines--and when he is here, he's disruptive. Guidance says he's seeing a counselor. I guess his mom is..."

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14 At Central Falls Middle School, teams devise their own progress report forms, which are then approved by administration (see figure 6-1). All sixth grade teams report on all of their students halfway through each six week marking period. Regular team discussion of student progress is facilitated, and mandated, in a way, by the student reporting structure.
having trouble with him at home. I just don’t think piling on a lot of make-up work is going to help."

“So you agree that because of circumstances beyond our control, like home situations, the work is not getting done?” Harry asks us.

George interrupts impatiently, anxious to name trends among our students. "You’re talking about one kid," he says, "but I think we need to look at the overall picture. I have fifteen kids I have to see who are behind and I’m not going to issue fifteen detentions, because they’re not going to stay."

“So what are other strategies we can use?” I ask.  

“We need to do what we did last year, to take team period one or two days a week and use it as a tutoring help session. We can split the kids up according to who needs help where. The priority right now is math and English, because those are the required things that need to be done," he says decisively.

I disagree, worried that our plans for enrichment period—the Reading and Writing Workshop—will be interfered with. "Why don’t we give them time to settle in before we start taking things away," I argue. "Let’s give the Workshop a chance to work before we mess with it." 16

The team identifies an obvious trend—the poor homework record of at least a third of our students. It is interesting that we agree to modify our classroom practices to implement Individual Education Plans for about 20% of our students, but are unable to construct a reality for our academic classrooms

15 While George’s reality of responsive pedagogy is to establish categories and clear rules, my own is that every case requires a different strategy or combination of strategies.

16 The Reading and Writing Workshop is a program for the team enrichment period that Jill, Harry and I co-constructed. In my reality, the workshop gives students extra skills practice within a more flexible and non-threatening environment. Classes are heterogeneously grouped to include students who attend a pullout program for language arts, and are not graded.
to similarly accommodate the individual developmental needs of the rest of our students.

George identifies a barrier in his own reality. "Math and English are the key subjects," he says, implying they require a higher level of adherence to the textbook curriculum. While he accommodates differences through a two-level system of assignments—"standard" and "challenge"—there are still a large number of students who fall behind on homework assignments, or who need constant attention in class in order to keep up. The special education aide who comes to math class is available only a few days a week. George's answer is to recommend a pull out program for students with IEPs. When a student "just isn't making it," he is apt to recommend that the student attend a special math class with other "identified" students in the resource room.

Harry's reality of responsive pedagogy is complicated by the high standards he holds for all of his language arts students, translated into grade level expectations for reading, writing, and knowledge of grammar. He worries that when he modifies his demanding assignment expectations for students, they will be short-changed. For Harry, being in a particular grade means having a particular level of skill in reading and writing, grammar and vocabulary development. But the contextual reality of Central Falls is that of a wide range of abilities within each grade.

There is added pressure for math and language arts teachers at the middle school. Standardized texts are used in all 16 sixth grade classes, and it is assumed that the same chapters will be covered by the end of the year. "I was under the gun last year," George explains, "because I didn't get to all of the chapters."

Harry describes being "chewed out" for spending too much time on writing assignments. "I believe in 'Young Authors,' " he exclaims as he
describes his pet project. "It gives the kids a chance to write about what they want, and to share their stories with each other." But his department head doesn't see it that way. So he rushes to cover grammar, spelling and vocabulary assignments, leaving students to work independently on their "Young Authors" writing project and several book reports during each six week term.

In contrast, Jill's reality of curriculum and instruction is that compromises can be struck. She identifies 8 or 10 key text book chapters that her department head deems "most important," and then develop projects and themes around them. "I know I have to cover these," she explains, "but that leaves me plenty of time for experiments, field trips, and projects." Jill is well organized, working through the curriculum material at a consistent pace that most of her students can keep up with. For students who fall behind, she arranges that they work with the special education aide who is in her classes twice a week. On lab days, she structures heterogeneous groups, mindful of spreading students with special needs around, making sure they have the support of a peer. Her biggest regret is that the more able students had a lot of waiting time. "I'd like to figure out a way for them to keep going," she says. "And that's why I want to have some science assemblies, to motivate the good kids."

The Coyotes dilemma of how to cover the established curriculum, while creating engaging and developmental responsive learning experiences is a common. All of us feel the tug of our interpretations of the middle school concept against the expectations of subject area proficiency. While the school and the team are expected to assume responsibility for the intellectual, emotional and social development of all of our students, academic progress is a priority. The teachers at Central Falls have little experience in structuring curriculum to encourage interaction among the realms of development, so they
tend to stick with the familiar, presenting a traditional departmentalized curriculum with occasional alignment of themes among subject areas.

Despite the barriers to change, the Coyotes team meeting conversations suggest our willingness to struggle with our teaching dilemmas and to share strategies to help our students succeed. Though we disagree about whether and how to remediate or motivate, when we listen critically to each other’s stories, and offer advice based on our own experience, we take the first steps toward co-constructing aspects of curriculum and instruction.

**Subjective Meanings: How to Motivate Students**

Sharing stories about student performance in our classrooms leads to a familiar debate for the Coyotes, and the lines are clearly drawn between us. For Jill and me, motivation means strategies to engage our students in their own learning. For Harry and George, poor homework performance means that remediation time should be provided, preferably when students want to be somewhere else, such as recess or team period, in order to force compliance. In their subreality, the desire for recess will motivate students to do their work.

*It is only three weeks into the school year and we are already typifying students--those who are "chronically" behind on their work, those who are uncooperative. "Wait a minute!" I protest, "I think we can’t be too hard on ourselves, or too hard on the kids, at this point. It’s a matter of getting used to each other. Maybe we need to help them work out strategies to cope with the work, rather than coming down hard on them. There’s some kids who are still so overwhelmed by the newness of it all!"

Harry shakes his head. "Yes, but what do we do about those who are so far behind already? I have a whole list of kids who should stay in for recess to catch up."
"Wait a minute," interrupts Jill. "We agreed at the start to let everyone go out to recess, remember?"

"But our hands are tied," he worries. "If they don't do homework, how can we make them succeed?"

Jill's reality is that recess is as important a part of the learning program as are our academic classes. According to middle school theory, the developmental needs of early adolescents must be attended to in order to maximize intellectual growth. But for teachers like George and Harry, it takes a leap of faith to adopt strategies that are responsive to all of the realms of early adolescent development, and to believe that students will make their own connections with learning, and become engaged the academic curriculum as a result. Our range of positions in relation to the middle school vision of attending to the whole child prevents us from sharing a vision and constructing responsive classroom methods together.

Jill's insistence on providing recess for everyone is based on her experience as an elementary school teacher. She is apt to join them on the field, pitching a ball and calling out to individuals on the sidelines to join the game. For her, recess is a regular part of the school day, as important an activity as academic classes, a time when students can socialize with their peers and vent their physical energy. "The ones who are having the most trouble are the ones who need to let off steam," she exclaims.

From the outset of the discussion above, I work to save the team period Reading and Writing Workshop. First, I want to avoid punitive measures of any kind at this point in the year, hoping instead to build on the energy our students have brought with them to their first year in middle school. Like Jill, I am concerned with creating an overall engaging learning environment for our students. They need time to socialize and be physically active at recess. My
commitment to Reading and Writing Workshop results from the same point of view—that students will benefit in their skills development from the more flexible atmosphere. Besides, it is the one aspect of our team reality of curriculum and instruction that is a co-construction.

Although it is not the focus of this dissertation, it would be instructive to explore the place of gender differences in our positions toward responsive pedagogy. The positions that Jill and I take suggest the "caring" stance described by Noddings. "We need to keep better track of them," Jill says. "At sixth grade, they just aren't ready to be left to fall flat on their faces." She hopes to establish the same bond with her Core Group (the team period class) that she had with her self-contained class of 25 when taught at an elementary school. "If they identify with one teacher, one who cares about how they behave outside the classroom (in the halls, at lunch, with unified arts teachers), they're bound to act more responsibly," she contends.

On the other hand, neither George nor Harry seem confident that a sense of relatedness can sufficiently motivate students. They measure this group of students, and each individual within the group, against a fixed standard, as represented by the sixth grade curriculum. This orientation suggests the "principled moral judgment" described by developmental psychologists such as Kohlberg (in Gilligan, 1977), Kegan (1982), and Belenky (1986). To George and Harry, we short-change our students if they do not "know" the sixth grade material by the time they move to seventh grade. The other realms—social and emotional—are side issues.

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17 A caring stance as described by Noddings, "need not lead to permissiveness nor an abdication of responsibility for conduct and achievement. Rather, it maintains and enhances the relatedness that is fundamental to human reality... in education it sets the stage for the teacher's effort in maintaining and increasing the child's receptive capacity" (1984, p.60). Her description suggests why attention to the social and emotional needs of adolescents may foster their motivation to challenge themselves in the academic realm.
Harry queries, "How can they succeed if we don't make them do their homework?"

"We have to do what we did last year," George insists. "We need to suspend team period activities until they catch up. If we don't come down hard on students right away, they'll just get worse. We ought to have that recess study in Jill's room, where there are no windows to the outside," he suggests. "I don't think many of them will want to come back a second time!"

George and Harry's reality of effective middle school methods is to withhold active learning time to force student responsibility. "We can't coddle them forever," says George, "sometimes it does them good to fall flat on their faces." To George and Harry, recess should be a reward earned rather than a necessary part of everyone's schedule. To them, there is a dividing line between academic and affective realms. While George encourages us to adopt cooperative learning strategies to get to know our team period groups, he is hesitant about incorporating them into his regular academic classes. "I need to wait until I know them better," he explains, "wait until I know their math levels."

George continues. "We have to get them on track when they're already falling behind. Recess and team period--those are times when we can get them to do their math and English. If they want their free time, they have to earn it."

Harry supports him. He's already anxious that he won't get through the grammar book. "It's only October, and I have eleven students earmarked for make up work," he says.

"And they are probably the same students and that's the trouble," I point out. "You and George are going to want them at the same time. We'll basically have to take team period away from those kids, and they're the ones who benefit most from it," I say, looking at Harry's list.
Co-construction—A Palette of Responsive Strategies

At this point in our discussion, we abandon efforts to share a reality of what recess and team period are for. We turn away from our dilemma to create a co-construction of various strategies we have contributed to the discussion, a palette to answer various student's needs. The co-construction includes aspects for both remediation and motivation. In this way, the team can benefit from our various subjective realities—our various teaching styles and histories.

Jill suggests another approach, one that considers individual motivations and needs. "We need to come up with lists, see who is having trouble in more than one class, and look at them individually. "It's not fair to suspend recess or team period activities when it's a minority of the kids we're worried about. We spend too much time punishing. What about the good kids, the ones who are always on task?"

"So what are some other strategies we can use?" I ask.

"Maybe a parent conference or a conference with us during team meeting time," she suggests.

George reconsiders. "Last year there were several chronic cases and once we pulled them in front of the team and sat them down and talked with them, it did have a positive effect."

"And remember how you worked with David Martin after school last year?" I ask?

"Yeah, but it was like pulling teeth," George said.

Jill suggests a goal. "Let's have a list by Monday. Then we can compare where each is having trouble, and then think about what each one needs."

A few days later, we look over our list of students at risk. George started the list with 15 or so math students who were 3 or 4 assignments behind. Harry wrote "language arts" next to most of those names, and added a few. I wrote
"social studies" next to 5 or 6 of them. Jill asks us to look at the list on her board.

"That list in the corner of my board is the students who are behind. They're staying after school if they don't catch up by tomorrow." 18

"OK," says George, looking at the compiled list of students. "A lot of these kids aren't doing a damn thing. Patrick is one." 19

I remind my colleagues of Patrick's story, shared with the team by a guidance counselor. He is living in a foster home while his mother finds a permanent place to live. Still, his mother is concerned and wants us to keep him after school to make up work, if necessary.

"He doesn't have much supervision," I remind George.

"Then let's refer him for a special education evaluation," he says.

Jill offers a more immediate solution. "I'm having him after school tomorrow. I just had him go to the office and call for permission. He's a walker. I said he could stay until he finishes the assignment."

George doesn't seem to hear. "Why don't we have Carter (the sixth grade guidance counselor) speak with him," he says.

"But how can we get him working in the meantime?" I wonder. "We need to talk to him, not to guidance!" 20

"He just isn't going to be able to do it at home right now," Jill reiterates. "I think he'll respond to the attention, staying after school. And he doesn't have to worry about a ride, so we can each work with him one day after school. . . ."

18 Her action suggests the point of view that we should handle student performance problems on our own, within our own classrooms.

19 George's harsh judgment of students suggests a black and white interpretation of student performance: they are either responsible or not, hard-working or lazy.

20 I view working with Patrick as the realm of the team, rather than of the guidance department. In my reality of middle school team work, we can identify a mentor within our team of teachers, or pool our strategies to help him to succeed within our team context.
"And maybe there are other kids who fit that category, we can work with them at the same time," I suggest. "We could make it a regular thing."

Harry likes the idea, at least related to Patrick. "There's a number where we can reach his guardian? We can propose the idea to them, that he stay one day with each of us."21

"I think Patrick will start to do the work himself if we show him that someone cares about him," I suggest.

Harry smiles. "Well I gave up being upset with him!"

"It doesn't do any good," I agree.

George brings up another name, as if to challenge Jill's strategy for extra help sessions. "How about Jason Carozza," says George, looking at the list.

"He's brand new still," I remind him.

"Well nonetheless," George says, "He's another one who just refuses to work."

"So do you want to keep Patrick and Jason for math?" I ask.

George hesitates. "Technically, detentions aren't supposed to be for homework, you know, so that schoolwork won't seem punitive?"

"Well," I suggest, "we don't have to call it a detention. Why don't we make up our own form, an after school work session, and hold one subject a night?"

Jill tries to clarify. "I'm sure it isn't Phil's purpose to stop us from keeping kids for extra help," she says in an exasperated tone.

George renews his effort to use team period for make-up work sessions. "I'd like to go back to our team period extra help sessions, and use after school for those who choose not to do their homework."

21 Harry relaxes perceptibly at this point. He seems encouraged to hear alternative strategies, varying possibilities to solve the "problem" of Patrick. As the year goes on, modeling by other members of the team empowers Harry to try out new strategies of his own and to become more flexible in the ways he implements the language arts curriculum with different students.
"But how do we know the difference, George?" I ask.

Despite George's protest, he agrees to go along with the team to provide after school help sessions as an alternative to using Team Period. In this case, the pressure of the majority convinces him to change his stance. I volunteer to draft a form to differentiate extra help from disciplinary detentions. We each choose a day to provide additional academic help after school, on a regular basis. Now that he has agreed to the plan, George wonders about the adopting the idea school wide. "If we could get a late bus, I'm sure other teams would be in favor of it," he suggests.

This team meeting illustrates how we prod one another to adopt our preferred strategies and compromise to accommodate one another's preferences. While George and Harry start out by advocating team strategies employed in past years (making Team Period an extra help study period, withholding recess from students who are missing daily assignments), Jill and I force a conversation about effective strategies. In the end, they agree to try the more responsive approach suggested by Jill. Together, we establish a new team reality of how to work with students who are behind on their work. In doing so, we practice a particular vision of responding to individual student needs.

First, we compile a team "at risk" list. Then, we consider a palette of strategies to apply differently for different students. We identify six or seven students whom we think will benefit from a parent conference. George volunteers to ask the guidance office to set up the conferences. We name two students whom we will bring before our team of teachers during our team meeting, to discuss their progress and develop a work contract with them. We refer one student, new to our team and the school, to the special education department to determine if she already had an IEP or should be considered for one.
Our team construct of extra help strategies is compiled of threads of professional knowledge contributed by each of us, about developmental needs of students, individual progress, teaching pedagogy, and school organization. Through supporting one another's ideas, and sharing the tasks involved, perhaps we can development a shared reality of the middle school concept.

**An Institutional Reality: The Authority of the Weekly IEP Meeting**

In this section, I present an example our Thursday team meeting, which is usually devoted to reviewing student IEPs. In the framework of this meeting, we begin to adopt more consistent strategies to help our students learn. The IEP meeting is a chance to build a shared interpretation of individualization within the institutional reality of curriculum at Central Falls.

Rick, the special education teacher assigned to our team, meets with us once a week to check on the progress of our "coded" students. The weekly conversation has an authority of its own. We are obligated by law to heed the modifications written into each Individual Education Plan. Special educators and administrators at Central Falls continually remind us of the threat of law suits, should we fail to implement agreed-to Individual Education Plans. Rick's meeting is one way to facilitate knowledge of and compliance with IEPs.

Rick's suggestions for classroom modifications are welcomed by the team. Gradually, as the year progresses, the strategies of the Thursday meeting begin to filter into our conversations about students who are not coded. Modifications relating to practice in a variety of learning styles or organizational strategies make a lot of sense for all of our students who are coping with the new demands of middle school.

"I'm going to start sending home a regular Friday progress report with every student on the team who has an IEP," Rick announces. "That way, if they are falling behind, they can use the weekend to catch up. I'll be calling parents..."
too. So let's go through them alphabetically. How about Dana, how's he
doing?"

"He's turned in some assignments since we had a parent conference,"
offers George.

Jill adds insight, "He's very good at answering questions orally in class."
I nod in agreement.

Harry has another impression. "He's scared to death to make a mistake.
I discovered that if I don't make him write the example sentences, but just the
answers, he'll complete his work"

Rick considers the spectrum of comments. "I need to see him for study
skills. He hasn't been coming during team period.
Maybe I can give him the extra time he needs, if you all will let me know what he needs to finish."

"He's in my room during team period, I'll make sure he comes," Jill offers.

"Patty Carini," continues Rick, "How's she doing? Remember, she has been diagnosed with ADD, but she doesn't take medication."

"She's doing very well in math" George contributes. "She likes working with Carrie Duran. They keep each other on task."

"In Language Arts the Young Author's stories are her strength," Harry contributes. She can sit and write forever...

I look at my record. "Her work tends to be late."

George helps me out. "Quite often, Carol, she's got work done but it's just not organized. It's jammed in the bottom of her book bag or whatever, so it's an organization thing more than anything else, I think."

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22 Rick works with some of the students with IEPs on Monday and Wednesday during Team Period. He uses this time both as a guided study, and for whole group instruction in study skills. For instance, he institutes a folder system for students to keep track of their work. They keep double pocket folders for each subject, using one side for work in progress and the other for completed work.
"I'll work with that group during the team period study," Rick says. "We need to go through their bags, their lockers. We'll get them into the folder system, one for each class. If you remember to ask them for the folder, they'll most likely have it."

Patty Carini is a good case in point. Because each of us structures our classrooms differently, her performance and interaction are different from class to class. By describing her performance to one another, we begin to formulate a shared reality of her needs, and strategies to address them. We align some of our classroom methods to give her the continuity she needs. George's observation about her having the work, but not being able find it is helpful to all of us. Rick's folder system helps Patty to organize, and forces us be consistent. We suggest the system to other students who have similar troubles with organizing. "Send a few of them in during homeroom period," Rick suggests, "I'll have my kids show them how to organize it."

It is through the IEP conversation that I consider new strategies to motivate Patty. When I hear about her performance on the "Young Author's" project, I am surprised. She completed very little work in my class, always starting a vocabulary review sheet or map, only to lose it or haul it out of her backpack in a crumpled mess. Maybe I can structure some story-projects for her that will stimulate her interest. I devise an assignment in my head: "Imagine you are a Mayan princess. Describe a day in your life. Be sure to include some historic details, such as the way a Mayan temple looks, the food you would eat and the clothes you would wear. Be sure to mention the technology the Mayans used, as well."

Little classifies "the routine sharing of materials, ideas, techniques, and plans, a level at which teachers reveal their practices regularly" as a higher level of collaboration (in Kain, 1996, p. 174). The Central Falls Middle School
expectation that teams follow student progress provides a format through which we can routinely share teaching techniques. Under particular circumstances -- the IEP meeting being a case in point -- the Coyotes teachers move to that higher level of collaboration, of collectively adopting strategies to insure that particular students will succeed. The authority and consistency of the weekly IEP conversation encourages a higher degree of collaboration.

**Extending the Conversation to Classroom Strategies**

Toward the end of our review of the "at risk" list, we're propelled into a more generalized discussion about classroom methods, precipitated by Jill's frustration:

"It seems like we spend so much time talking about the same kids, who is behind on assignments, who has been out of school too long... What about the good kids," Jill queries. "Why don't we think of ways to reward them?"

"I don't know if this could work in other classes," I venture, "but right now in my class, kids can't work on the paper mache globes unless they are caught up in their other work, the paper and pencil stuff. So, for instance, they come in and I check their notebooks for their vocabulary assignment. Those who haven't done it have to work on their assignment before they can do the hands-on projects. Kids are apt to help each other, to make sure that everyone can participate in projects. Can you think of some kind of positive incentive in your classes?"

George describes his own motivational strategy. "When I get going, I'm going to set up cooperative groups. That usually gets kids working." When he divides the class into cooperative groups, students can work with one another, fulfilling their need for social interaction as they facilitate one another's learning. But if students aren't productive in a group, they have to work alone. The group becomes the incentive to work."
"But I haven't started yet," he laments, "I have to know what their math levels are first."

I ask Harry how my strategy for motivating students might play out in his language arts classes. "You might think of one day, say a Friday, to play your vocabulary game. But set the criteria ahead of time, that only the ones who are caught up can participate. The others can spend the time doing make-up work." Harry doesn't answer but looks down, studying our "at risk" list.

George jumps in with another idea, an extension of my own. "It'd be nice if we could send some of them to the library, if they want to go down to work on a project when they finish their work." At the same time, he identifies a barrier to change: "Trouble is, without a full-time librarian, there aren't too many periods when we can do that."

I think about how the research idea could work within the classroom. "Have you thought about setting up two centers in the classroom?" I ask Harry.

He groans. "That's easier said than done. I did that in my elementary classroom, and having kids working in centers was like a three-ring circus."

I sympathize, but try to encourage him. "I know, it's really hard. I had three things going on today: globes, a makeup quiz for some kids who were absent, and the kids in a corner doing their homework that they didn't complete. With 28 kids doing different things, it's nearly impossible to keep tabs on all of them."

That sends George off on another barrier to individualization. "We really could use more classroom help. Now I'm looking at the kids with IEPs, and I don't know how I'm going to meet their needs without an aide in the classroom. If we only had the help in the classroom, that would give me the flexibility to do extra things with those who are caught up."
While George and Harry go on about the stressed special education system in our district, Jill and I continue our discussion of strategies for individualizing instruction.23

We talk about student learning contracts -- listing unit activities for students to choose from and work through at varying paces.

"Let me see one of your contracts," she says. "When I get further along in my curriculum, I'd like to do that."

"I want to be able to motivate kids to move on," she explains, "The ones who finish early--I'd like to have some projects for them." We talk about the possibility of giving them special labs or research projects, and how my social studies contracts might work in her setting. We project activities that students might do to expand on the material covered in the science text, looking for choices that will engage them in their own inquiries."

"The contract idea helps me to look ahead and develop a better idea of where this is going, beyond the daily textbook work," she says.

A week later, Jill shares her version of the contract with me. I store her interpretation away in my mind to refer to for the next incarnation of my own contract. Our conversation, and the resulting strategies, illustrate our different pedagogical preferences and levels of willingness to change. Although the team agrees to work to individualize, we disagree about how to achieve that goal.24 We interpret student success in different ways, and evaluate their progress by different criteria in our separate classrooms.

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23 Here is an example of how a team can break down into subgroups, or have an incomplete sharing of its constructions. While Jill and I tend to be constructive, George and Harry identify barriers to change. Sometimes we convince them to join our plans and planning, at other times we plan around them.

24 The Central Falls school board has a strict retention policy. Students are required to pass both math and English and either science or social studies in order to pass to the next grade. For the 1994-95 school year, there were 10 retainees of 325 students in the sixth grade.
Conversations about student progress reveal our subjective realities of curriculum and instruction. Woven through those positions are our individual interpretations of the middle school concept. At the same time, the middle school mission of attending to the intellectual, social, emotional and physical needs of individual student development prods us to listen to one another and to consider a variety of strategies to fulfill that mission.

With the illustrations of team tasks and conversations in mind (Chapters 4, 5, and 6), I turn to our process of meaning-making in Chapter 7. In all of our work, we reveal our separate realities of the school and team norms. The conversation examples in Chapter 7 illustrate an effort by the Coyotes to share and build a team reality of norms.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONSTRUCTING TEAM NORMS, NEGOTIATING MEANINGS

Multiple realities, voices and discourse join together and clash in the process of coming to know.


Beneath the surface of our attempts to co-construct team schedules, groupings, and enrichment classes is our struggle to make meaning of our work. This is the normative function of teams. Carried along in the threads of our discussion are our subjective realities of the nature of professional knowledge. In this chapter, I examine the normative function of teaming as related to professional knowledge. Then, I present an example of the Coyotes teachers' attempt to agree upon norms for our students through a new behavior incentive system, "The Coyotes Paw".

The quality of our team collaboration is built upon the work that we do together. As we co-construct team schedules and groupings, as we examine and reexamine the progress of our students together, we reveal to one another the underlying meanings of our work. Through discussion, we attempt to co-construct meanings. At least in terms of students (see the example of Scott in Chapter 5), we are able to enrich our knowledge of the learning needs of students and agree to implement teaching strategies that are more responsive to those needs. Through discussion, we tacitly establish a team norm of
accommodating the needs of students to assure their success in the sixth grade. Our daily discussions crystallize the norms we agree to.

Through sharing of the dilemmas of teaching, we examine and reexamine the meaning of the daily teaching work that we do. In the Coyotes team meeting discussions there is evidence of both crystallized and shattered meanings, as we uncover our tacit assumptions and agree or disagree. The conversation itself is a reflective act, however, that stimulates evaluation and reformation of our working professional knowledge. A reality of teaming is the continual challenge of re-evaluating our work.

Co-constructing meaning in our work: Professional Knowledge

While the Coyotes team relationship provides us support in fulfilling the school's expectations of us as teachers, especially in various aspects of the middle school concept, it also presents dilemmas to us, beyond those presented within our own classrooms. Our subjective interpretations of middle school pedagogy create such a dilemma. Harry and George attend most closely to the intellectual realm of adolescent development, as evidenced by coverage of textbook chapters. Jill and I adjust our classroom content and practices to attend to student needs and interests, weaving the realms of social, emotional, and physical development through the academic curriculum. Throughout our meeting conversations runs the question, "What does it mean to attend to the intellectual, social, emotional and physical realms of student development?"

The relationship of people and ideas—and the conflict of people and ideas that is likely to occur on a team—encourages the kind of continual reflection that Britzman and others (Waller, 1961; Greene, 1984; Clandinin, 1993) identify as the root and nature of teacher knowledge—"multiple realities, voices and discourse (that) join and clash in the process of coming to know"
(Britzman, 1991, p. 33). While Britzman's examples are of student teachers, her study has important implications for experienced teachers who are members of an interdisciplinary team. The multiple voices that come together in our meeting conversations include outside voices of authority (the middle school concept, administrative directives, departmental curricular goals) as well as our individual histories as teachers. The multiple voices cause us to question our taken-for-granted assumptions and to take a new look at our work, and the meeting setting encourages us to reflect collaboratively over theory, authority, and the realities of our shared everyday setting.

Britzman describes reflection over theory and practice as "internal discourse." Our team conversation helps us to objectify meanings in a similar way. The space of time we are afforded by team meeting allows us to back away from action and reflect upon the meaning of our work. It is a chance to examine our own tacit assumptions and reintegrate our working professional knowledge in the light of new information. When we confront our teaching dilemmas together, we extend the discourse. The multiple realities and multiple voices presented by the various members of a middle school team push the evolution of our professional knowledge.

In her study of fledgling teachers, Britzman describes the effects of teaching on becoming a teacher. For a student teacher, the multiple realities and voices are the authoritative knowledge of coursework and the new reality of being a classroom teacher. Britzman posits that the "voices of others" (theory) will not take on significance, will not truly be a part of a student teacher's ideological framework, until an internal discourse takes place. Her study points out the problematic gap between theory and practice, between the practical

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25 See discussion of interiorizing the particulars of our students in chapter 5, based on concepts from Polanyi, M. *The tacit dimension*. 1983.
world of teaching and the ideological world of best practice. She suggests how teacher education programs might help beginning teachers use theory and practice interactively. Teaming seems a way to continue the conversation, to help teachers to actively apply theory throughout their careers.

For an experienced teacher, one whose pedagogy is well formed and reinforced through years by classroom practice, a theoretical base is likely to be well established, reinforced by practice. I have seen my experiential methods work. My subjective reality is that a project centered approach accommodates a variety of learning styles, boosts student self-esteem, and engages students as active learners. John Dewey's progressivism comes alive in new ways for me each year that I teach. My internal discourse is about how my methods are working with each individual in my classroom, and how I can help my students prepare for the demands of a rapidly changing world.

Working as a member of a middle school team allows and encourages me to establish my subjective reality of pedagogy as objective. My team meeting may help me to objectify my subjective reality of the middle school concept, to crystallize its meaning for myself and others. Or, disagreement over the necessity for developmentally responsive pedagogy may require me to defend my practice. As a Coyotes teacher, for instance, I expend a lot of energy trying to convince George and Harry that activities should motivate learning rather than serve as rewards for learning. On the other hand, teaming may help me to extend my working knowledge of responsive pedagogy. The act of discussing student contracts with Jill causes me to adapt and expand the idea. I work with her to adapt the method to another setting. At the same time, I reconsider experiential theory in a broader context than that of my own classroom. Can this mode of teaching really work in George's math class or be applied while still meeting the demands of Harry's department chair?
Contextual Factors: Fostering Evolution of Professional Knowledge

For most middle school teachers, authoritative knowledge is represented by the middle school concept, as articulated in journals and at conferences, in school and school board policies, and through ongoing professional development workshops. At Central Falls, it is stated through the school Mission Statement and Team Expectations. But in order for the authoritative knowledge to become part of our practice (in Polanyi’s language, for it to be interiorized) it must come into relation with our subjective practical knowledge, that is, our own classroom applications. The interplay of the two is Britzman’s "internal discourse." Going through the motions of coursework, talking about middle school philosophy in faculty meetings, and setting up a block schedule for the school is one thing. But living the philosophy in our classrooms is quite another.

There are important aspects of teaming that foster the evolution of our working professional knowledge, and co-construction of applications of official or institutional knowledge. As we converse about official knowledge—be it block scheduling, performance based learning, or the responsive pedagogy of the middle school concept—we are better able to contextualize that knowledge. As I think about the work of this team, and others I have been a part of, the following characteristics emerge as factors to attend to in order for team conversations to progress to reflective conversations, and for team planning to encourage the evolution of our working professional knowledge:

- **Match and mismatch of subjective positions.** When teams provide daily support and trust for the teachers who are members of them, professionals are more willing to take risks and to pursue their own evolution as responsive teachers. The diversity of gender, teaching histories,
pedagogical preferences, and epistemological positions impact the extent to which members of a team are able to provide support and develop a climate of trust in their professional team.

- **Autonomy.** When teams afford teachers freedom and space within a whole school environment to develop more individualized applications of official knowledge, professionals are able to respond to their own interests and needs as well as those of their students.

- **Authority.** When teams are given some decision-making authority, their work is validated. At Central Falls, for instance, teams are given authority to structure schedules, form class groupings, follow and report student progress, and construct an enrichment program for our students. Strategies to extend the authority of teacher groups should be attended to.

The example of the Coyotes Team points to the difficulties in establishing a teaching team as a community of inquirers. Britzman refers to the "epistemological community" in which,

> Every voice speaks to particular ways of knowing as it positions the speaker within an epistemological community. Each of our images of what constitutes knowing . . . is part of what structures one's subjectivity: what is valued as truth or discarded as fiction, how one defines her relationship to the world and others, what is believed about power and powerlessness, when one takes interpretive risks, feels the right to make interpretations and theorizes about experience, what is taken for granted . . . and how one understands teaching and learning (1991, pp. 23-24).

When a team is perceived and perceives itself as a community of knowers, the members are viewed as drawing out and affecting one another's ways of knowing. Although ways of knowing is not the focus of my dissertation it is an important factor to consider for further research. Lyons says that the dilemmas of teaching are a "web of self, craft, relationships, values and ways of knowing (1990, p. 167). The dilemmas of teaming are interwoven with these same factors. The teaming relationship may reinforce our own epistemological
positions, as well as accentuate our differences. The extent to which these differences support or challenge team reflection and successful collaboration are important factors to consider in forming and reforming professional teams.

Berger and Kellner describe how a collaborative entity must "continually construct, maintain and modify a consistent reality that can be meaningfully experienced by the individuals who are a part of it" (1964, p. 23). If a team is to construct a shared reality, it must engage in conversations that seek to "validate fundamental definitions of reality" (Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 24). Through conversation, we reveal our subjective positions toward official as well as our working professional knowledge. As we plan events for our shared group of students we reveal the tacit meanings we each hold in our professional work.

Over the months, as the Coyotes team plunges into the work of school organization, getting to know our students, constructing curricula, and collaborating effectively, we establish norms and struggle to share meaning in our work.

**Subjective Realities of Professional Knowledge**

As described in Chapter 3 (Context), the members of the Coyotes team are a varied group in our teaching and teaming backgrounds. The conversations of chapters 4, 5, and 6 illustrate how varied are our teaching and teaming practices, and foreshadow our difficulties in agreeing upon the meaning of our work. To better understand the complicated process of sharing meanings, I review our different positions in relation to the middle school concept and in relation to our professional knowledge, as revealed in the conversations of earlier chapters.

Jill is learning to work in the system, to integrate the voices of authority with her own standards for teaching performance. In her second year of teaching middle school science, she feels more secure about the curriculum,
and asserts her own voice within the demands of her department. She is a developmental sponge, constantly tapping the resources of her colleagues to realize her own goals for students. At the same time, she probes our taken-for-granted realities of teaching strategies when she questions, adapts, and refines our past practices.

Jill has high standards for herself: "I became a teacher because I wanted to give something back," she says. She assumes that the rest of us will have similar goals and is frustrated when other team members don't live up to her standards. Consequently, during our second year together, she is more reluctant to let go of some of the details of the special events that she initiates. A side effect of Jill's dilemma is that she sometimes doesn't have the time or energy to follow through with plans. She ends up rushing around at the last minute, tending to the details of duplicating a field trip form or having the office cut a check to pay for buses. Her team members compound the dilemma with critical comments: "Hey Jill, what's happening with that weatherman you were going to invite in to talk to the kids?" or "Have you asked Sandy (the secretary) to make out a check for us yet?"

As an experienced teacher, Harry feels a tremendous responsibility to "the system." For him, being a middle school teacher is a balancing act, answering the authoritative voices of the middle school concept (attending to the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs of students) and to his perception of curricular knowledge in Language Arts.

Coming to middle school after fifteen years as an elementary school teacher has upset Harry's equilibrium. Trying to track the progress of 110 students is daunting for him. He resents interruptions and schedule changes that seemed continuous in the middle school. When there is an early dismissal or a team assembly, he worries that he wouldn't get through his lessons with all
of his students. "What are we going to do with period 7?" he might ask. "We've lost them twice this week because of special events." Whole-team projects seem like "extras," frills that distract us from our "real" academic work. "It's hard enough for me to get done what I need to," he say, and that means daily grammar lessons and vocabulary and spelling lists, book reports, and "young authors" drafts. It is "getting homework out of" so many of the kids.

But Harry is also in transition. The Coyotes team provides a variety of other voices within which Harry is able to develop his own voice. An example is his ability to draw lines of responsibility for Reading and Writing workshop. "I'd rather check their book reports myself," he explained to me, "because they count for a language arts grade. I want to read them myself to see their progress." Later in the year, Harry confided: "At first I was intimidated by you. Now, I say if she can be assertive about what's good for kids, so can I!" In the second half of the year, he frequently made side comments to me about the team, taking an active interest in my research project.

During our second year together, he represents us on the district Teacher Council, never missing a meeting, always providing us with detailed notes of what goes on, asking our opinions about some of the discussions that come up. We work to match team tasks with Harry's style. "I know that when you're in charge of the awards assembly, we won't overlook any of the kids," Jill tells him. A week before the event, he prods each of us to nominate students of the term in our subject areas. He produces carefully scripted citations for them. On the day of the assembly, he sets the standard for the rest of us, wearing a natty tie and somber dark jacket. Finally, he begins to assert his position with his department chair. "She sees my Young Authors writing projects as taking away from other things, but I told her it's the most important part of my work with kids!"
George, like Harry, cites various sources of authority for standards against which to measure teaching practice, student performance, and team success. He comments about the position of the principal: "Phil likes the rotating schedule, mixing kids up from time to time so that they'll identify with the whole team rather than a subgroup." At the same time, George positions himself as an authority on the team. He is the only member who was in on the transition from junior high to middle school. He translates middle school theory in terms of Central Falls Middle School history. He evaluates the success or failure of school enterprises in terms of school and town politics, frequently identifying aspects that are barriers to change. To George, the beginning years of teaming were the best. "The beauty of a team," he says, "is that once we know each other, we can take up the slack when it's needed. Those first teams had continuity. Since then, we've been switched around and haven't had a chance to establish the kind of continuity we need."

The team itself, and the rest of Central Falls Middle School have a normative effect on George. He cites our reputation: "We're known as a team that won't let kids fall through the cracks," he says. "Guidance knows that, and that's why they've given us so many special needs kids." Concern with team recognition becomes incentive to collaborate. "Our team assemblies, environmental camp—we're an active team," he says proudly.

George's confidence in the Coyotes team has both positive and negative effects. While he usually supports the ideas that Jill and I hatch, he is apt to leave the responsibility for implementing curricular projects to us. George is most comfortable doing the jobs he has always done. He good-naturedly volunteers for the dirty work of collecting parent signatures on progress reports or badgering kids to participate in team fund-raisers. He is skillful at peping up our homeroom groups for inter-team competitions or providing incentives for
student fund raising (such as a free homework night to the student who sells the most candy bars). The payoff is that when George is late to a parent conference or leaves an assembly early, he assumes the rest of us will cover for him, an assumption that leads to resentment.

George has a fixed standard for what a team reality should be, based upon the first team he was a part of, and judges our difficulties as related to a lack of consensus among team members. He feels railroaded by Jill's and my enthusiasm. "Sometimes it seems like one person has an idea that they push through, without really giving the rest of us a chance to discuss it," he suggested during an interview. "In that case, the idea still belongs to that person, rather than to the team."

My own reality of teaming enlivens and challenges our team. My past history and my current role as a researcher encourage me to question the voices of authority in the school. Rather than seek stability and continuity, I welcome the sense of disequilibrium that change brings to our work, and question taken for granted ways of doing things. Interaction with three very different colleagues stimulates my own learning and I assume that others will learn through our interaction, as well. I view the team as a setting for development of our professional knowledge, where the sharing of teaching perspectives can lead to construction of methods that are responsive to our particular group of students. Resistance to change frustrates me, and when I'm told, "We have never done things this way at Central Falls," or "We tried that and it didn't work," I take it as a challenge. To me, the relative autonomy of teaching teams at Central Falls Middle School is an invitation to experiment. My self-confidence and belief in the benefits of implementing various aspects of middle school philosophy carry me past the authoritative voices of department head or high school expectations. But my
dual role of teacher and researcher positions me as both an insider and an outsider on the team, and desensitizes me to the positions of my colleagues in relation to professional knowledge. When George remarks that, "Sometimes one person has an idea that they push through, without really giving the rest of us a chance to discuss it," it is a reminder of the delicacy of collaboration, and the complexity of co-constructing new conceptualizations of individualization, responsive pedagogy, and other aspects of the middle school world.

The disparity of our positions toward professional knowledge, as well as toward the knowledge we are expected to impart to our students, results in continual dilemmas for the Coyotes team. In the example that follows in this chapter, as we establish a behavior modification system (agreed to norms for our students), we uncover disparate meanings in our subjective positions as teachers on the team.

Gilligan and Murphy summarize the problem: "Some persons begin to question the limits of their abstracted forms for intellectual solution of moral problems . . . they doubt whether it is possible to construct generalizable rules, which however internally consistent they may be seem to perilously ignore the particulars they organize" (in Kegan, 1984, pp. 228-229). The Coyotes team meeting dialogue that follows illustrates the problem of creating a normative "system" for our developmentally diverse students, and of interpreting and applying the system in a fair and consistent way.

**Co-Construction: A Behavior Modification System**

*Halfway through the school year, we circle through the discussion of students at risk once again. I am frustrated by the same old complaints that never seem to be resolved. "Why don't we offer an incentive that will help the things we are always complaining about," I suggest, "make it something that everyone wants so they're motivated to behave."*
Several other teams at Central Falls Middle School have instituted a reward pass given to students for good behavior. The pass is used for certain privileges such as going to lunch a few minutes early or attending a reward movie once a month.

George urges us to focus on the "problem areas", behaviors we want to change. "There are always kids in the hall when they shouldn't be, and the cooks in the lunchroom complain that our kids are too noisy in line."

Jill looks at the positive side. "The kids who have paws could use them for a lav pass, instead of us having to sign a pass," she says, "or to go the library or run an errand for us. Then we could think of some reward, like roller-skating, for kids who have kept their paws for a month."

George suggests a format. "So what you do, is, you start out with the premise that everybody can have one. Keep track of it by number, by name, whatever you want to do. Then you set the criteria how they get to keep it, how they get it back. How they use it and how they lose it."

"We can start with the honor roll kids," suggests Jill.

"But we already reward them," I say, "with the awards assembly once a term. Maybe we should consider other criteria, like consistently being prepared for class."

To George, the two go hand in hand. "If they do their work, they get the grades," he states.

But Harry sees my point. He lays his pen down for a minute and considers. "For some, C+ may be the best they can do."

"I think we need to think of a way to reward some other behaviors," I say, "ones that aren't necessarily acknowledged by the honor roll."

"Good kids," summarizes Harry.

"The kids who are always on target," agrees Jill.
"And there are honor roll kids who are in trouble," notes George. He brings us back to the structure of the system: "We have to make this reasonable to track. We can do a real simple spot check, a couple of times a week. And as far as I'm concerned, if a kid is one day behind, you should do something."

"What about if someone is absent or something?" asks Jill.

"I'm not talking about absences, I'm saying those who just didn't do their homework," he clarifies.

"Remember kids like Patrick, who don't have much stability at home," I add for illustration.

"Well, you make individual adjustments, you modify and compensate," George suggests.

"Maybe we have to start with the premise that when a kid who doesn't do homework, there are extenuating circumstances?" I ask.

"Maybe we need to look for patterns," says Jill.

Our conversation reveals our subjective realities of behavioral norms, and disturbs the surface continuity of our team reality. While we attempt to agree upon norms of behavior, Jill, Harry and I are stumped by the particular. "You end up punishing kids for things that are out of their control," Harry summarizes when we bring up the example of Patrick.

The work of Gilligan (1977, 1982) illuminates the dilemma that we face in trying to establish team norms. When we consider examples of individual students, there are no objective cases. The degree of adherence to any standard that is part of the institutional reality of the school or that we construct as a team reality is tied to the special circumstances of every student. The reality of a team—the coming together of a variety of observations about student
circumstances—increases the likelihood of constructing a complex team reality of each student, but one that demands flexing to those circumstances.27

The middle school concept demands an orientation of connectedness, if we are to attend to the "social, emotional, physical and intellectual" needs of every student. A behavior modification system that is responsive to those realms of individuality requires flexibility.

Jill thinks about how to encourage our students to buy into the "paw system."

"We can make posters to put in everyone's room," she suggests. "That way it will be fair to the kids, they'll know what to expect."

"And I will remember how the system works.," Harry laughs.

"Now what will the criteria be?" Jill asks. "Let's start with the positive things, like to maintain a paw you need a few basic things, like respect."

"And that can cover a lot of cases," I suggest, "from writing on desks to the way they treat others."

"And will passing to and from classes fit in somehow?" Jill asks. "That's an area that our kids arehaving trouble with lately."

"And those who have paws can go straight to lunch, while those who don't have to line up and wait," says George.

"Now one of the things I'm most concerned about," says Harry, "is kids coming prepared to class. God they're awful, always back and forth to the lockers. They need to come with homework, book, pen and pencil, notebook."

"Call it 'prepared for class,' " says Jill.

"If it's a more general term, then each teacher has some flexibility," I suggest, "because each of us has different expectations in our own classrooms."

27 See examples of our IEP conversations in chapters 5 and 6.
"It seems like the gist of it is to have a paw we have three things, ‘to be respectful of people and materials, to pass to class quietly, and to be prepared for class.’ Let’s give it a day or so and see if we can come up with anything else,” I say as I look over the meeting notes.

“But will the kids understand how the particulars fit?” George asks. “What about being late to class, hanging out at the lockers, stuff like that.”

“We need to bring the kids together and explain what we mean,” says Jill.

George grins. “We could do something unorthodox and try to make the kids part of the process for setting the guidelines.”

Harry and I groan simultaneously. I’m wondering how we can facilitate this with 110 students. “Won’t it unnecessarily complicate things?” Harry asks.

“We can sit them in a big circle, on the floor of the team room,” says George, “and write on a big sheet of newsprint.”

I consider how it might work. "If we work with a restricted period of time, say a half hour, and give them some general guidelines to work from. . . "

And so, on Friday, we bring the Coyotes into the team room, a large unfinished room on the second floor of our wing. Jill briefly describes the behavior incentive system. As our students suggest ideas, I write them under categories of 'how you use it,' 'how you lose it,' and 'how you get it back.' George calls on students as they raise their hands. Students are excited about receiving their 'Coyotes Paws,' and eagerly brainstorm about the rewards that should go along with them.

The session is brief, so I take the papers to my classroom for a few days to solicit additional input. Finally, the Coyotes teachers meet to consolidate our student’s ideas at a meeting a week or so after our student meeting. They seem to fit the general categories we talked about before the session. The posters we will hang in our rooms announce:
The Criteria to have and keep a Coyotes Paw are:
- to respect other people
- to respect the learning environment
- to pass quickly and quietly to class
- to come to class prepared.

Subjective realities: Implementing the system

Although we are able to agree upon a seemingly simple framework for student behavior expectations, in the weeks that follow the system falls apart. What seemed to be agreed upon norms are interpreted in different ways by different members of the team. We do not share the meaning behind the system.

At first, our students are energized by the things the bright orange pass represents for them: approval, privileges, belonging to the group. They proudly flash their passes as they walk out of my class to the lunchroom. The few who have lost their pass—either by leaving it at home or because a teacher took it away—reluctantly wait at the back of the line.

For the teachers on the team, the pass represents concrete changes. Students automatically line up and pass quietly to lunch. We don’t have to stop to write a paper pass for students going to the bathroom or on an errand to the office.

But two weeks into the system, the surface continuity begins to break down. We take passes away for a variety of reasons, which seems inconsistent and arbitrary to our students. Jill and I take an occasional Paw for inappropriate hallway or recess behavior, keeping them for a day. Harry regularly takes them for non-completion of homework, and keeps them until the homework is made up. George focuses on general behavior in the hallway or at recess, but is arbitrary about how or when students can get them back.
"When I decide you deserve it," he tells one. Two weeks after the Coyotes Paws are issued, both George and Harry stacks of twenty or so laminated passes on their desks. A good third of our students are staying in for recess. Students come to me to mediate. "Will you ask Mr. Labranche to give back my Paw?" Depending on why it was taken, I approach George about giving it back. "It's not working," I plea, "when kids have no incentive. If they don't have their Paw and have no idea when they'll get it back, why behave in the hall?"

Students who are chronically in trouble or behind on their homework fall back into their low self-esteem mode. "I'll never get my Paw back," Josh confides in me. "Mr. Porter has it." From that, was I supposed to deduce that he'd never catch up with his homework or he'd never behave? At any rate, Josh didn't think it was within his power to earn the privilege back. Eventually, the small number of students who go to lunch early or who use the Paw to go to their lockers or run an errand are hardly noticed by the rest of the team. Eventually, so many of our students don't have Coyotes Paws that it ceases to be motivational. Most of the students who need recess most are sitting inside without their pass. Finally, Jill and I beg for a moratorium on recess use of the Paw to allow everyone to go outside.

Our lack of success in sharing a team reality of how to implement a behavior modification system points to the difficulty of establishing team norms, and interpreting them in consistent ways. We bring varied positions to our co-constructions, toward standards and power, the value of rewards and punishments, and the meaning of responsive pedagogy. The failure of our Paw System points to one of the fundamental dilemmas of teaming: collaborating among and around the personal values and teaching philosophies that various team members bring into the team relationship. Our disagreements point to deep-seated differences among our epistemological
positions, and the lack of commitment to both "talking the talk and walking the walk" of the middle school concept.

**The Nomic Function of Teams**

Constructing a team reality in terms of knowledge of students, responsive pedagogy, and effective collaboration has a nomic function. As illustrated in the example above, in the process of constructing a team reality we struggle to share meanings. We probe the meanings that have been long established in our individual work, and attempt to agree upon new meanings for our shared work. The nomic function of teams is a process of building a shared identity, an interactive process of conversing, implementing plans in our shared and individual settings, and receiving feedback from our students and the wider school community.

The process can be viewed as a process of "nomos building," as described by Berger and Kellner (1964, p. 23). The team conversation "validates fundamental definitions of reality," much as a marriage or family does, but in an institutional setting. Berger and Kellner posit that "validation requires ongoing interaction with others who co-inhabit the same socially constructed world" (p. 24). Through our meeting process subjectively experienced meanings become objective: "in interaction with others (they) become common property" (Berger & Kellner, 1964, p. 26). Our perceptions, values, judgments, and visions for the work that we do are revealed and, possibly, changed through the team conversation. This conceptualization of meaning-making illuminates both the challenging and validating aspects of teaming.

The meaning of teaming is different to different teachers, depending on their histories and their current place in a professional life cycle. At times, a team culture may be isolating and stifling. Jill alluded to aspects of our team reality that she did not want to be a part of: "I'm embarrassed when you leave
an assembly," she told George. George, on the other hand, recalled the camaraderie of the school without teams: "I miss the contact with a lot of people I used to see more of before we became a middle school," he said. "We don't have enough opportunity to hear what other people are doing."

Schools that are more team-centered than whole school-centered sometimes run the risk of inhibiting change. The nomic function of teaming may crystallize agreed-upon meanings within a team, reinforcing tendencies to resist change. An example is the team at Central Falls who viewed themselves as the "academic team." They were the last to organize class groups heterogeneously, a taken-for-granted part of responsive middle school pedagogy. They did so reluctantly, and look back nostalgically on their earlier years.

And so it seems that stabilization of a team, the ability to agree upon definitions of reality, can have both positive and negative effects. Fostering group identity and coordinating programs are facilitated when a team develops a shared nomos. When we share meanings, we establish a higher degree of trust among teaching team members and a higher degree of continuity for our students. In the case of the Coyotes, the best of our work seemed to be in aspects of team organization (chapter 4) and knowledge about student needs (chapters 5 and 6). We demonstrated an agreed to nomos: "that no student will fail." But in the example of the Coyotes Paw, we are unable to agree upon the meaning of the system. What appear on the Coyotes Paw chart to be crystallized meanings for the team are cracked. Students are thrown into an atmosphere of imbalance by our varied implementation of the system, and teachers are frustrated by the actions of their colleagues. Finally, we abandon the system altogether.
In chapter 8, I describe an example of team reflection about our collaborative processes, as we confront and attempt to understand our differences. The chapter centers around a single meeting, a conversation in which we try to explain our subjective realities to one another. Through conversations such as these, the process of nomos-building goes on. If we are to create a team reality of shared pedagogy, we must understand our subjective realities. If we are to forge new meanings together, we must continually attend to our knowledge of effective collaboration, of understanding and accommodating one another.
CHAPTER EIGHT

KNOWLEDGE OF EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION:
TALKING ABOUT OUR DIFFERENCES

We grow in dialogue . . . through a multiplicity of forms of friendship and collegiality.

Bateson, 1990, p.94.

In chapter 7, I examined how the team conversation probes the underlying meanings about responsive middle school pedagogy among the members of a team. The multiple voices that represent our subjective realities sometimes support, sometimes challenge us. For the Coyotes, differences in our interpretations of the middle school concept lead to dilemmas and discontinuity for our team. While we seek the support of our colleagues, we are often frustrated and misunderstood. Bateson holds that a model of lifelong learning and adaptation is essential for teachers to prepare students for the "fluidity and discontinuity are central to the reality in which we live" (1990, p. 13). If we view aspects our professional knowledge as continually becoming, the discontinuities of a team can be helpful in increasing our abilities to bend and flex to the multiple voices of our students. Teaming requires another level of adaptation for teachers, which is seldom acknowledged. This chapter illustrates the difficulty of understanding and negotiating our differences. I describe one confrontational meeting in which the Coyotes attempt to understand each
other's subjective realities and to negotiate a more collaborative relationship. We probe our differences and break down our actions to discover one another's motives. We leave the meeting with heightened awareness of one another's subjective realities, and perhaps a more realistic sense of the difficult task of collaboration.

The story begins after our holiday break, as we meet to set new goals for the team. I follow the thread of planning through several meetings, to trace our talk about plans gone awry, and our confrontation of the differences among us. The discussion illustrates the importance of co-constructing professional knowledge about pedagogy and effective team process.

**Constructing a Team Assembly: Playing Out Tacit Assumptions**

In chapter 1, I describe "best practice" for middle school organization, including providing engaging enrichment activities for students. At Central Falls, part of the institutional reality is for teams to plan and implement activities that attend to the intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs of students in a more integrated way than is done through the four traditional academic disciplines. The school's block schedule includes an afternoon "team period" for every team, during which enrichment and remedial courses are offered, and special events are scheduled. In the subuniverse of the Coyotes team, we establish an uneven pattern of involvement and commitment to responsive middle school pedagogy which is illustrated by our interpretations and applications of enrichment time. Jill is the prime mover for special events. She

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28 Polanyi explores the subjective nature of our knowledge in *The Tacit Dimension* (1983). Each of us integrates new knowledge related to the tacit knowledge that is the personal construction of every individual, depending on his or her experience. In the case of the assembly, we each play out the plan according to our tacit understanding of the meaning and importance of the assembly. This confrontational meeting is related to our different behavior at the assembly.

29 In Chapter 1, I use this term for methods that attend to and foster development in the realms of intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development of early adolescents.
craves change and channels her energy into planning field trips and assemblies for the team. She continually struggles with George and Harry to include all of our students in these events, while they lobby to use team activities to motivate students to complete homework. Jill's interpretation of enrichment time is that it be an extension of the science curriculum. During class time, she moves students through textbook work and lab experiments in an organized and conscientious way. Through field trips and assemblies, she stimulates student interest in the wider world. During the first half of the year, she arranged for a T.V. weatherman to speak and a State Police officer to demonstrate his partner: a Rotweiler. She planned events that fostered team spirit, as well, such as the Halloween roller skating party she arranged with another sixth grade team.

The team's reality that results is not integrated, but complicated. On the one hand, everyone appreciates Jill's work. Events are fun and instructive. Regular inclusion of assemblies in our team schedule fosters a positive and enthusiastic team identity. On the other hand, the uneven commitment to middle school pedagogy by various members of the team is mirrored in uneven contributions of time and energy to whole team events. We all come to rely on Jill, and she begins to resent the uneven effort for planning whole-team events. The following conversation reveals how the construction of a team event happens, and why it is not an integrated team construction:

*Jill is restless. She sips on a bottle of mineral water, getting up every few minutes to do some little job around her room, wandering back and forth to the lab table where we usually meet for team meeting.*

"You know what?" she starts, "I really am not motivated for school right now."
I'm not either," I agree. "I always have a hard time getting focused after a vacation."

"I think the kids must be feeling that way too," she observes. "We should, every 2 or 3 weeks, do something, something they can look forward to. Isn't it your turn?" she says, turning to George. "We've had the police dog demonstration, and Carol's friend the laser repairman. You must know someone you can invite in."

"I'd like to see the kids go bowling," George offers. "We can bring in math, structure competitions."

Jill agrees. "Trips like that, skating or bowling, they are two different trips that will cost next to nothing. We ought to do that with the kids more often. We don't go out to recess very often in this weather, they really need a break."30

"I'd like to consider using team activities for motivation, too," George says. "If a couple of them stay behind, that will give everyone a message, that if you don't do the work, you don't get the reward."

"We've talked about this before," I remind him.31 We agreed before that our kids deserve some time out from Reading/Writing Workshop or extra help sessions. We give them an extra academic period every day that a lot of teams don't, so it's OK to take an afternoon off for a group activity once in a while.

Harry isn't so sure. "Yeah, but we need to make it clear to the parents and the public that this is a reward for hard work, not just, 'oh this is what we do, and this is how it's going to be.'"

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30 It is at this point that we break into our separate realities of enrichment events. While Jill believes in the curricular and pedagogical importance of extending our students' learning through events that integrate various realms of their learning, George wants to "use" enrichment events to motivate students to complete their academic assignments.

31 This is a small example of how I weave my own subjective knowledge—the enriched knowledge I brought to team meetings as a result of my work transcribing tapes—into the team discussion, in an attempt to make it objective, team knowledge. I tend to stop our rehashing of the same issues to encourage my colleagues to structure solutions.
we play with middle school students.' That's the way it's perceived by some
parents and the public—that we're playing with them.\textsuperscript{32}

George knows the value of team activities in terms of attending to the
social needs of students, and he tries to reassure Harry. "There are always
going to be people in the community who have that impression."

Jill tries again to prod the men, not only to support team activities, but to
take ownership of planning them.\textsuperscript{33}

"Isn't it your turn is it to organize an assembly?" she asks wryly, looking
over at Harry and George.

"Somehow I don't think a poet will get quite the degree of attention a
Rotweiler does!" Harry exclaims, recalling the dog demonstration.

"But you must be able to think of something!" she insists.

Harry's sense of responsibility to the team moves him forward. "All right,
just give me time, Jill. I promise, I'll look into plays in the area. And you know if I
agree to arrange it, I'll take care of every detail!"

"Great!" she responds. Then, she reveals the plan she has up her
sleeve. "Well, here's what I have. This brochure came in the mail yesterday.
What do you think of these programs? They're put on by the North Country
Science Center."\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32}Harry's reality of team enrichment events is one of dilemma: while he values the motivational
aspects of providing assemblies, he fears the repercussions from a department head who
expects student mastery of grammar objectives and a public perception that academic
performance is not a priority at the Middle School.

\textsuperscript{33}The subtext for our discussion of enrichment events is Jill's growing resentment that George
and Harry are not doing their share in the team tasks we are responsible for.

\textsuperscript{34}Once Jill is satisfied that George and Harry will share the responsibility of team events, she
reveals her underlying agenda—to bring in the North Country presenters. This indicates a shared
knowledge of effective collaboration—that the men won't take on team events if she continues to
do all the legwork. At the same time, she reveals her own dilemma in relation to collaborative work-
-that she is has priorities about which events take place and is unwilling to give over the details of
those events to others. Her dilemma indicates the subreality of our team—that there is a lack of
trust among the team members.
Instead of supporting her idea, George challenges it: "We could call the camp we brought the kids to last year. They put on outreach programs too."

Jill is visibly irritated. "Look, we just need to plan it. If you want to invite that other group, you should call them."

"I'll try to call them today," he says.

"Let me tell you what North Country offers," she goes on. "A couple of activities go right along with our ecology theme: 'Adapting to Nature' and 'Winter Animals.'"

"And what do they charge?" George asks.

"They could schedule two demonstrations in one day, have them speak to two small groups. They even bring in live animals. They charge a fee and travel."

George hedges, focusing on cost.

"I don't know," he says, "How much a mile are they charging? Twenty-five cents did you say? Then that will be about two hundred bucks."

"I'm in favor of it," I answer.

"Just pick out the ones that are appropriate for you, because that would be ideal for what you're doing in science," George says, apparently abandoning his idea to call the environmental camp.35

"And how are we going to pay for it?" Harry asks.

"We have money in our account from the school magazine sale," George assures him. "Now we need to figure out when we need to invite them. How about on one of the early release days," he suggests. "Our classes are so short

35 George's subjective reality of team events is to contribute as little effort as possible, while appearing to have a vested interest. While appearing the expert on alternative resources in environmental education, he defers to Jill to handle the details of planning the event. The actions of both George and Jill reinforce the uneven commitment of team members, and in a sense make disparity a taken-for-granted team reality.
on those days, it's hardly worth having them. It's a perfect time for a special assembly."

Jill goes back to her desk to check the school calendar. "There's one about three weeks from now. I'll try for that."

George takes the calendar from her. "You know, winter break is just after that. I could plan a bowling party just before vacation. You can teach them the physics of it, Jill!"

"Forget it!" she says. "I know nothing about physics! Besides George, that one will be your field trip. I might even stay at school that day with the kids who don't want to go!"

Our Subjective Realities of Team Events

The reality of our team, revealed through conversation, is that our sharing is on the level of task completion. Jill calls the Science Center, George checks the calendar and books the assembly room, I inform parents of our plan through our monthly team letter, and Harry lets the unified arts teachers know our students will miss their 4th period elective one day. But the subtext is contrary to effective collaboration. The assembly remains "Jill's assembly." Her own answer to the dilemma of uneven commitment to producing team events is to prod George and Harry to each take on an event of their own. At the end of the conversation she refuses to get involved in "George's event." She is wary of taking on any part, that she will once again end up carrying the weight of planning the bowling party. "I may even stay home with the kids who can't go that day," she says.

In the implementation of team events, we continue the team reality of separate interpretations of middle school pedagogy established in our planning conversation. While Jill tries to control every detail to ensure the event will go off smoothly and that pre-conceived learning goals (in various realms of student
development) are attended to, George is satisfied that we are fulfilling a part of the institutional norm of Central Falls Middle School by simply having a whole team event every month or so. There is differentiation of roles and relationships of power in reference to team tasks. While George talks the talk of engaging middle school pedagogy, seldom does he initiate events that involve him in extensive planning. An example shows up later in the year when George agreed to plan a bowling party. Jill is outraged when she discovers that he gave a student the responsibility for calling and arranging times at the bowling alley.

"It was Nicole's uncle, and she was totally unprepared," Jill exclaimed in an exasperated voice. "What does that make him think of our team?"

In the planning of the nature assembly, we fall back on old patterns. While George challenges Jill's plan, he isn't committed enough to his alternative to make the phone calls. While Jill wishes the men will take over the legwork of planning an assembly, she proceeds with her original idea rather than chance we will have no assembly, or that it will be planned and implemented poorly. Our actions reinforce a team reality that some of us will not or cannot structure engaging whole-team activities. The result is a team reality of ineffective collaboration: team events "belong" to individuals rather than to the team as a whole.

The Science Center presentation goes off with a few glitches. One of the presenters isn't able to come, so a single presenter speaks to all 110 Coyote students at once. Early in the program, George disappears from the room for fifteen minutes or so, returns to remove students from the assembly, and disappears again for the rest of the presentation. Later, we learn that he met an art teacher in the office. She complained that some of our students misbehaved--there were bits of clay all over the floor. George sees fit to
investigate the matter right then and there, and to effect a punishment on his own.

The incident illustrates our separate realities concerning enrichment activities and effective collaboration. From George's point of view, handling a discipline problem on the spot takes priority over the assembly. From Jill's point of view, George is shirking his responsibility to a team event and jeopardizing the assembly decorum. She is angry that students missed part of the assembly, and embarrassed that George caused a disruption by removing students from the front row.

The conversation below illustrates our attempt to share our various realities of the assembly, and to construct a collaborative team reality. George and Jill are both able to explain themselves, describing their subjective priorities to one another. Still, in the course of the conversation, we don't move to the next important step in effective collaboration: reaching consensus about how to accommodate both voices.

"During this meeting, let's put other business aside," Jill requests. Let's just talk about what's bothering us about working with each other."

I'm feeling nervous about the impending confrontation. I'm worried both about inhibiting our conversation and impinging on our privacy. "Should I leave this on?" I wonder aloud, indicating the humming tape recorder.

"Sure, leave it on," Jill says.

Both men nod. "This kind of meeting is important for you to pay attention to," George suggests.

"We can always change our minds," I sigh.

Jill begins. "I want to talk about the science center assembly." Her words come out in a flood. "It might not seem like a lot of work to you, but for me to organize the science program takes time... I felt like this was my program, I
was really upset that with a hundred kids that one of us left. We didn't have enough coverage. Kids were being pulled out of the front row. Think how the presenter felt, pulling kids out, shutting the door. Then before that, the skiers were leaving (students participating in an afternoon ski program). It was just really distracting."

She turns to George. "And I didn't think it was fair that one of us left the whole entire time, regardless of the reason."

George defends himself. "I had things, team things to attend to. When the art teacher told me about those kids, I made a judgment, that it was important to talk to those kids and have them clean up their mess before they left for the day."

"The point is," says Jill, "it didn't have to be handled at that time. The kids could done their clean up time another day in the lunchroom. You could have questioned them during homeroom. That was my program. I was really upset that you chose to do that during that time. And think how the presenter felt! In and out, shutting the door, it was really distracting!"

I try to reassure Jill. "It really wasn't a disaster. As a matter of fact, I was just telling Harry that they'll remember an event like that forever. The research project that we're spending so much time on is just one more exercise for them to organize their thoughts. But what they are really going to remember from this year is the animals they saw and the characteristics of mammals that they learned from the demonstration."

George defends himself. "The problem is that we individualize and personalize things. And what I did is not a personal slap in the face."

Jill goes on. "I feel like you were taking advantage of the rest of us by leaving," she explains. "There are plenty of times when I'd like to take a break too, but we all need to be there. It's not fair, George."
"But this wasn’t planned ahead," George answers. "I needed to make phone calls, two phone calls to be exact, to superintendents about the contract business. I just haven’t had time to do the work for the union. Then you know how it happens. I kept getting grabbed, by guidance, by the art teacher. Then, there were some of our kids running in the hall, the kids who were dismissed to go skiing. I had to stop them and set them straight."

Berger and Luckman note that "the validity of everyday knowledge is taken for granted until further notice" (1966, p.44). George seeks to validate his actions: leaving the assembly to take care of business that he believes benefits all of the team members, and handling a behavior problem on the spot. Jill seeks not only to validate her concept of how a team assembly should be conducted, but to establish her pedagogical standards as a shared team reality. Our confrontation serves notice to all of us that our individual realities are not always a shared reality. Jill assumes that everyone values the team assembly to the same extent she does and has the same standard for performance of a whole team event. George assumes that his team mates will "take up the slack" when he decides on his own to attend to another team matter. Insensitivity to individual differences and needs—Jill’s need to produce quality events for our students and George’s preference to take care of behavior issues on the spot—inhibit our ability to effectively collaborate. We do not buy equally into the importance of the Science Center assembly, nor the value of modeling attentive participation in the assembly. In both George’s and Jill’s minds, it was "Jill’s assembly."

This incident points to our separate realities of effective team collaboration. From the outside, we have to wonder how great a range of diversity a team can handle. What is a "tolerable" range of difference in relation to important issues like middle school pedagogy and responsiveness to the
developmental needs of our students? For the Coyotes, our subgroups—the men and the women—offer us collegial support, and modeling of different interpretations of responsive middle school pedagogy. But it has been difficult to establish a shared reality beyond the team organization described in chapter 4 and knowledge of student differences illustrated in chapter 5. Perhaps the subjective knowledge of various members of the Coyotes regarding the importance and conduct of enrichment activities is too diverse for us to co-construct a team reality in those realms. It seems that the differences between George and Jill are so pronounced that they are not able or willing, perhaps, to carry out a joint team project. George views his own position as privileged, in terms of changing his commitment midstream without consulting the team member who planned the assembly. He expects a different standard of behavior from students than from himself, and is willing to take the chance of leaving a few loose ends, confident that our students will learn from the unexpected. Jill, on the other hand, prioritizes our decorum and involvement in the assembly as the model for student behavior and learning. Therefore, from her point of view, the nature assembly was ruined.

While we perhaps know the subjective realities of our colleagues better than ever, through observation and conversation, Jill, at least, begins to distance herself from team collaboration more than ever. She becomes increasingly possessive of details of team events and more reluctant to entrust them to other members of the team. George's actions fuel her discomfort with teaming—that other team members will not carry our her own standards of quality and craftsmanship, and that she is doing the work of others on the team.

The outcome of the nature assembly illustrates that internalization of the concept of middle school related to effective teaming—what the literature says, and Central Falls Middle School team tasks—has been different for different
members of the team. As we continue our conversation, I attempt to help the team establish a shared reality of our differences, to understand how we can begin effective collaboration over middle school curriculum and pedagogy.

Recognizing Our Differences

In the course of our confrontational conversation, I try to explain my evolving professional knowledge related to teaming to my colleagues, hoping to objectify my assumptions. If we can understand the threads of our subjective realities that are brought into the team conversation, perhaps we can agree upon a team interpretation of effective collaboration.

You know," I say, "we're really four different individuals who are trying to figure out how to team. Now that we're in our second year together, maybe it's even harder. Now we know each other well enough to assume that certain people will take care of certain things or act in certain ways. Sometimes we take each other for granted," I suggest.

"We really need to let one another know ahead of time if we need coverage," Jill agrees.

I push the conversation further, to consider our differences. "There's related problem too, and that's the difference in our standards. Harry and I are in the thick of it right now, trying to coordinate our efforts on the research project. He has half of the kids to conference with, I have the other half. We agreed ahead of time on the directions for their research, but we just can't foresee how our directions will play out. Now we're finding out about our different expectations."

"You know, there are times when I feel uncomfortable with the way you're doing the research project, too," Harry responds, defensively. "There are kids

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36 My attention to our differences, and the way they play out, echoes the thinking I was doing about our "team reality" as I processed team meeting tapes. My own talk at this meeting is an example of ways I began to weave my enriched knowledge into our team conversations.
who come to me with notes on their topic and I say, 'Education, what's this got to do with your main topic, the people of Argentina?' and they say, 'Mrs. Mulligan says it's OK.' What do I do then? When you contradict what I say, it puts me in a bind!"

"I think I'm looking for the same things, but I'm just a little looser about the process," I suggest. "I just don't think we can anticipate the questions and problems kids are going to run up against in that kind of project. Over the years we might gradually develop a mutual understanding of what we're each going to say to the kids about the research project and what we're going to do, but you just can't coordinate every move."

Despite our careful planning, Harry and I cannot predict the outcomes of our joint project. We agree upon the steps for research and the time frame for our students to implement those steps. We create forms to record notes and bibliography on and a detailed assignment sheet to guide the project by. But as we implement the project, our differences in pedagogy and understanding of adolescent development emerge. Those separate realities bump up against each other as we speak with the same students about their work. Through our joint counseling of students in their research projects, our differences emerge.

To Harry, our differences are threatening. The uncertainty of what I will say to students upsets his continuity. To me, the mechanical way that Harry applies the project is too constraining to be responsive to individual interests of students. How can he flex to their needs when he has an inflexible vision of the final product of their research? What begins as an attempt to make each other's work easier--sharing the task of advising our population of students as they work through a research project--becomes a complex task of discerning and working through the webs of individual and official knowledge of how to teach research skills.
In order to collaborate effectively, both Harry and I have to see our differences as enriching rather than divisive. The "problem" of our differences—the subjective realities that are brought together—can never be completely solved. Our individual constructions of professional knowledge are different, as well as the way we perceive the reality of each student. By learning to recognize differences in learning styles of students, and in teaching styles of our colleagues, we will be more successful at co-constructing learning projects for our students.

In terms of pedagogy, Harry's question is an important and valid one. How do our differences as teachers affect our students? When we take our heightened awareness of separate ways of knowing to the next step, co-construction of curricular projects, then we become more effective collaborators, and make the most of the team structure for our students. The subjective realities that Harry and I bring together as we guide students through their research increase the possibilities for students to make their own connections with their learning. At the same time, when we are able to view our own professional knowledge as evolving, we increase the potential for co-construction of new interpretations of middle school pedagogy.

As the conversation continues, I struggle with the dilemma of acknowledging our personal professional positions while co-constructing responsive methodologies from those positions.

"Maybe we should just divide our roles more clearly," I say in an exasperated voice. "Harry can teach the research skills and I'll stick with content."

"So Harry would grade for grammar and punctuation and Carol for information?" asks Jill.
"Right," I answer. "You know the grammar, the mechanics, the outline better than I do," I tell Harry, "And I'm not good about outlining. When I do research myself, I never go beyond a sketchy outline."

"I guess we can't expect to be the same. We're coming at this research project from two points of view. But if I need to hold strictly to your standard, five parts to the outline, for instance, I don't know if I can do that," I lament.

"For me," Harry explains, "it becomes more difficult when I'm trying to second guess someone else. If a student comes to me with a subheading that you approve, and I can't see how it fits, well it just kind of puts me in a bind."

"Still, do you really think our differences are detrimental? Think about giving students a chance to connect with one or both of us," I suggest.

The bind I feel is whether to sacrifice the opportunity to guide my students from the multiple perspectives of research skills and content learning in favor of structuring a collaborative project that Harry is more comfortable with: more clearly defined roles for both of us. I prefer to view my students' work holistically rather than be blocked into a rigid subject-area role. At the same time, Harry and I are forced to confront our subjective realities of the project—to "bump up against" one another's knowledge of pedagogy, developmental needs, and curriculum. We are forced to converse, to push one another to reconsider and perhaps restructure our working professional knowledge, if we are to engage in collaborative projects.

Because this is a four-way conversation rather than two, other team colleagues affect our ability to collaborate, facilitating understanding at times, encouraging division at others (the underlying reality of two subgroups in the Coyotes team relationship). George's reality is that there is a fixed standard that we can arrive at, if only we have enough time to talk about it. "We just never have enough time to follow through," he says. Jill's reality of the situation is her
own subjective assumption that others will not carry out a project to the same standard she sets for herself.

It is evident, in the face of the diversity of the four Coyotes team members, that when we agree to collaborate on curricular projects, it is impossible to work out all of the glitches. We do not know our differences until they play out in practice. By the same token, we do not know how the research project will play out another year with another new batch of students. More than 100 new perceptions create a never before seen brew of classroom climate and student needs. The reality of teaming is diversity, and one of the keys to effective collaboration is how we view that diversity. The team conversations illustrates my attempt to share my reality of responsive pedagogy. Perhaps by working together, Harry and I will model differences for one another, and help one another to be more sensitive to differences. Through our conversation we may increase one another’s ability to respond more effectively to each student’s interpretation of the project.

While flexibility seems like inconsistency to Harry, perhaps by working on similar shared projects with me, he will see how flexibility plays out as a climate for student learning. Though he is confused and dismayed at times with the changing directions I give to students and wonders about the effect of my random style on my students, perhaps the juxtaposition of my style with his will facilitate his own responsiveness to student differences. In Chapters 9 and 10 I pursue this question further as the team plans and implements an interdisciplinary thematic unit.37

37 There is earlier evidence, as well, that team modeling increases Harry’s flexibility. Earlier in the year, Jill and I convince him to try more flexible methods for novel studies. He lets go of his step by step process of novel reading in favor of collaborative group work and oral discussion, once he realizes the methods work for Jill and me. In chapter 6, Harry describes allowing some of the students with IEPs to speak their book reports, he enjoys the resulting conversations and discovers that the conversation encourages them to continue their reading. Then, he extends the oral option to other students in the class.
Meanwhile, I bring up earlier events in an attempt to share my own reality of our differences:

"We all have different standards for things," I go on. "Remember at the beginning of the year, Jill, how upset you were when George had kids write the names on the progress reports before we filled them out? To George, a consistent appearance wasn't as important as involving the kids, giving them some responsibility."

"Well I was really embarrassed," Jill admitted with a smile. "Some of them weren't legible. But maybe I'm more sensitive because I've just started teaching. I'm concerned about what parents think of something like that."

"Well, they did get the job done," George says sheepishly.

"If it's not done right, it really bugs me," says Jill, hoping to gain some understanding from him. "I really put a lot of pride in my team."

"That's another thing about teaming," I point out. "Sometimes you aren't identified as an individual teacher, but as a team. In everything that we do we need to remember that. It's hard for me, because you know me, I'm like a bull in a china closet. I go barreling through stuff without looking at the trail I'm leaving behind. Once in a while you need to remind yourself that there are others to consider!"

"That's scary," George admits, "because I'm like that too. You and I are closer in style and Harry and Jill are. And because of that we're a strange team. Still, I think we've succeeded very well."

"I guess it does work, whatever we're doing," Jill agrees. She is clearly relieved. Her voice has quieted and the stress of confrontation has disappeared.

"We balance each other off and we all pitch in and cover each other and capitalize on each other's strengths," says George.
And that, perhaps, is just the problem, I think to myself. We're at the point in our team relationship when we're comfortable—and beginning to take each other for granted. "I think we're learning," I concede.

"I want you to know, this meeting today has not been a waste of time, by the way," announces Harry. "I saw this as a priority, getting all of this garbage out."

"It's excellent," Jill concurs. "I think this is the best meeting we've had."

"It's going to help a lot, but it's by no means the end," I say.

"How can we do any business if there are ill feelings?" asks Harry. They have to be taken care of first.

"Finally, we didn't talk about any kids. We took the whole time for talking about us," says Jill.

I encourage her to let go of some of the work. "You need to delegate some of the things you need done to carry out your ideas for the team," I suggest. "And all of us need to try to be more explicit, about what we each expect of one another and what our own expectations are for the events that we plan together, if we are going to be able to trust one another."

Heightened Awareness: The Researcher's Lens

As I reflect back on this meeting, I am aware of the dual perspective that I began to weave into our meetings—that of researcher and practitioner—and how one perspective affects the other. My perspective sets me apart from my colleagues, and perhaps makes me less optimistic about how far we had come as a team. When I try to explain my own difficulties to Harry, I find myself as defensive as he is about how to implement the research project. Instead of moving toward a shared reality, the conversation seems to accentuate our differences. Our separate pedagogical positions in relation to responsive middle school pedagogy seem irreconcilable. At this stage, we do not see the
problem as the other does. Like Jill, I am not sure I can accommodate my colleague's differences.

At the same time, the conversation prods me to reconsider my own subjective reality. My knowledge of different learning styles and the effect of learning style on methodological choices increases. I am better able to see the teaching world as Harry sees it. The increased awareness helps me to be a better teacher, more cognizant of the effect of my random style on concrete learners, more able to lead them into a variety of learning styles and activities. The potential for the team relationship to encourage the evolution of our professional knowledge should be recognized, and fostered as an institutional reality, if we are to make the most of the diversity of most teaching teams. Perhaps then professionals will be motivated to work harder for effective collaboration, to seek the consent and support of their colleagues, and to co-construct curricular projects.

The conversation above reveals a dilemma of teaming: while it might be easier to stick to our tried and true classroom methods, to do it ourselves, the multiple perspectives of teaming hold important potential not only in terms of creating responsive learning environments for students, but in terms of the continued evolution of our working professional knowledge. At the end of the meeting, my comment was, "On a work level, at least, we'll become more understanding of what each other's needs are, the more we work together. And the fact is, we are identified as the 'Coyotes Team,' as much as we're identified as the individuals that we are. We've each got to consider that."

Looking back on this meeting, I hear the separate realities that we bring to the conversation, in relation to the middle school concept, school organization, and effective collaboration. Although we consider the meaning of our differences, we are not moved to the next step, to co-construct compromises.
for our whole team activities. When Jill asked to review the tape from the meeting, she listened to it several times, and later commented, "We're each saying 'I can't change,' or 'I don't want to change.' In a sense, the meeting and her review of the tape crystallized negative meanings about teaming for her. The tape of the meeting reveals the hard work ahead if the Coyotes team is to co-construct a team world.

In the ensuing chapters, I describe the best of our work—the implementation of an interdisciplinary thematic week by the Coyotes team. While chapters 9 and 10 reveal our continued difficulties, our successes in planning and implementing the unit lay the groundwork for more effective collaboration. In those chapters, I explore the aspects of the project that facilitate the evolution of aspects of working professional knowledge, and shared interpretations of responsive middle school pedagogy.
CHAPTER NINE

THE OCEANS UNIT: TEAM CONSTRUCTION OF PEDAGOGY

If we were to introduce into educational processes the activities which appeal to those whose dominant interest is to do and to make, we should find the hold of the school on its members to be more vital.

John Dewey, 1900, p. 28.

In Chapter 7, I examined how teacher's conversations—in this case, middle school team meetings—trigger introspection and engage teachers' frames of professional knowledge with current and past experiences. Through conversation we objectify our meanings related to the middle school concept, construct and interiorize new meanings, and institutionalize meanings as team norms. When these processes occur among teachers related to co-constructed programs and methods, pedagogical change is facilitated. This chapter explores the co-construction of new expressions of responsive middle school pedagogy by the Coyotes teachers, and the implications of our work in terms of effective teaming and evolving professional knowledge.

A middle school team is a setting within which teachers are encouraged to share teaching strategies and redefine pedagogy in terms of their students and the world. When change initiatives are undertaken by schools, the daily
team meeting is a setting where conversations occur about new theory and the realities of the teaching world. In this chapter, I describe an effort by the Coyotes team to apply middle school pedagogy within the setting of our school, our team of students, and the professional community of Coyotes teachers.

I begin the chapter with the theoretical voices—what the middle school theorists say curriculum and instruction should be. Through examples from the literature and from current practice at Central Falls Middle School, I describe how these aspects of the middle school philosophy play out in reality. Then, I detail our own process of planning an interdisciplinary unit. Dialogue from several of our meetings illustrates how the planning process stimulates a learning spiral about interconnections among the curricula we teach. The supports and challenges of our team relationship spur us on to take pedagogical risks together. Finally, at the end of the chapter, I describe what the Coyotes Oceans Unit looks like in action.

Authoritative Voices: Middle School Curriculum

Dewey envisions ideal schools as small communities "saturating each with a spirit of service, providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction" (1890, 1990, p. 29). Middle school curriculum theorists take up the thread of active learning to suggest broad curricular goals for young adolescents: hands-on learning, fostering responsibility for self and others, collaborative enterprises, and real-life problem-solving. (Beane, 1990; Bough, 1983; Stevenson, 1993).

The team structure of Central Falls Middle School is meant to foster a "small community" spirit in a school of about 1100 students and 70 faculty. Settings for active learning are limited, however, usually articulated through unified arts classes (such as Home Economics, Technology Education, and art), or enrichment classes that various teams devise for their Team Period.
Elements of "community service" are incorporated through our homeroom advisory groups where students share classroom cleaning chores, plan a garden plot (each team is responsible for one area of the school grounds), and adopt needy families at Christmas time.

Still, the academic curriculum at Central Falls Middle School tends more toward seat work than active participation. Teachers move conscientiously through their textbooks, so that the required skills and content will be covered when students move on to the next grade. The expectations of Central Falls High School creates additional pressure to dispel the notion that the middle school is "all fun and games."

The institutional reality of Central Falls is far from a fun and games agenda. Like most middle school teachers, we struggle to address all of the realms of adolescent growth—physical, social, emotional, and intellectual—as well as the individual academic skills and content knowledge development of our students. The challenge for the Coyotes teachers, as for most middle school teachers, is to attend to individual needs while constructing both rigorous and engaging curricula.

The key structures of middle schools—block scheduling and team organization—encourage teachers to experiment with curriculum and teaching methods. Possibilities abound in the experiential schools literature, from oral histories to environmental camps there is a notable thread of melding process with content, of engaging, broad-based problem-solving (Wood, 1977; Wigginton, 1972; Kraft & Sakofs, 1988). Prawat's work suggests a link between experiential learning and thinking skills. He stresses the importance of students being absorbed in a task in order to gain the tools for understanding in a particular realm. He calls for curriculum that builds on a student's innate curiosity by giving them opportunities to use ideas, rather than learning about
them. (1991, p. 5). Fidel and Monk further suggest that teaching higher order thinking skills requires "a setting that has intellectual consequences" and "activities that aim to create a kind of mismatch between internal structure and an external event that leads the student to refine, differentiate, and restructure the conceptual system" (from Kraft, 1985, pp. 184-185).

In a middle school such as Central Falls, exploratory courses during team period are a start at experiential methods that encourage students to be active problem solvers. In mini-courses like Ecology Club, students identify real-world projects, identify steps for change, and implement the steps themselves. In the Coyotes team, Jill organized "Book Buddies" with a neighboring elementary school. Each Thursday, she took her team period group to read with a third grade class. Each sixth grade student chose a book to read to their buddies and the third graders read to them. Sixth graders interviewed their buddies and wrote books for them based on the needs and interests of the third graders. Students practiced reading, writing, thinking and speaking skills while increasing their self-esteem, collaborative skills, and responsibility in the real world. The course exemplified the best of the middle school curriculum by interweaving various realms of development, and immersing students in a setting as inquirers and problems solvers.

The Institutional Reality: Barriers

The institutional reality of Central Falls Middle School is that in the four major academic disciplines, curricula and methods hadn't changed much from the junior high school model. Students spent more time at seat work and practice exercises than at real-life problem-solving. As the Coyotes team conversations reveal, at least a third of our students weren't keeping up with those exercises. Seldom do teams take the leap to construct curriculum and methods together that do a better job of engaging students in their own
learning. Barriers to change are as much a part of the institutional reality as is the rigid interpretation of curricula.

George and Harry are especially apt to point to our responsibility to the high school. "The high school department chair says the kids are unprepared," says George. "I have to get through the chapters or they'll have my head!" The high school expects students to be able to take notes, read textbooks, and "know" the skills of grammar, math, writing, and reading by the time they reach ninth grade, and middle school teachers are not, in general, confident that they can deviate from textbook curricula without depriving students of important skills and content. Science and social studies texts usually come complete with detailed teacher's guides, workbooks or worksheets, and tests and quizzes, carrying with them the underlying message that there aren't other ways to teach the content. Many schools, especially large schools with multiple sections of the same grade (at Central Falls, there were 12 sections of approximately 28 sixth graders) monitor teachers to assure that the same content is covered each year in each academic class. Once again, the tacit message is that the content should be covered in the same way, at the same rate.

Studies such as those by Beane, Lipsitz, and Lounsbury suggest that it isn't enough to provide the time and structure (a block schedule, for instance) to bring about curricular restructuring. While a system may embrace a vision of curricular restructuring, there are other supporting factors that must be added to the equation to bring about change in teaching practices. Collegial support, in the form of specific opportunities to co-construct pedagogical experiments, is one strategy that can work. Collaborative planning time specifically devoted to pedagogical conversation, toward planning and implementing specific programs, may foster change. But as the Coyotes experience demonstrates, guidance and support must be continually and consistently offered through a
variety of methods such as structured planning sessions, coursework, consultants, or interteam sharing.

Margaret Yonemura says that, "Teachers need opportunities to bring their intuitive knowledge to consciousness for critical evaluation. In order to teach effectively, they also need help in coping with stress as well as appreciation of their work. They are in a strong position to help each other in these aspects of professional development" (1982, p. 240). Her study suggests strategies to foster the work of existing teaching teams to explore and implement theory related to curriculum and methods. In her own example, dyads of peer teachers had specific theories for inquiry. She followed the progress and outcomes of one-on-one conversations between peer teachers. The conversations were structured, centered around classroom practice, "serious examinations of and reflections upon the practices and underlying theories of one teacher to which another gives undivided and supportive attention at times set apart for this" (1982, p. 240).

The Coyotes team conversations occur naturally, with little outside direction, and most times with no consideration of theory. Seldom do we set aside time for "undivided attention" to one another's reflections. More often, critical consideration of our own practical knowledge is on the fly, related to a particular student "problem." The planning and implementation of a thematic unit by the Coyotes team is a notable exception. We set aside at least three full meetings for planning of the unit, and a special after school meeting for evaluating the results. We explicitly referred to middle school theory in both the planning and evaluation stages, related to experiential learning, interdisciplinary planning, developing broad cross-curricular goals and questions, and restructuring learning time. We brought together personal
practical knowledge related to pedagogy, and devised courses within the theme that were related to one another in content and skills goals.

Yonemura alludes to factors of her peer dyads that lessened the resistance of teachers to examining their own practice (1982, p. 241), and it is interesting to note aspects of our interdisciplinary planning that were similar. Though our group was not voluntary, it was our choice to conduct a teaching and learning experiment. The school climate allowed teams to interpret the mission statement in a variety of ways. There was no administrative guidance, but there was no administrative scrutiny of our project. These aspects created an atmosphere of free inquiry for us.

In her dyads, Yonemura observed "teachers ruminating together to crystallize the practical principles that guided them in diverse attitudes" (p. 247). Her description fits the Coyotes in the best of our work, constructing our own interpretation of middle school curriculum.

A Team Planning Spiral: Brainstorm

The idea for a thematic unit week blossomed when Mary Draper joined our team. She is a young and energetic intern from a nearby college who joined me in my social studies classes in February. She was quickly accepted as a teaching team member. As the end of her internship approaches, we dream up the idea of splitting our group of 110 into five sections instead of four, for the academic blocks of their day. That way, Mary can have her own group for the "solo week" portion of her student teaching.

We begin talking in mid-March about a thematic unit to coincide with Mary's solo week. Five of us gather in Jill's science lab for the daily team meeting. This time, the team agrees to devote the entire 50 minutes to thematic unit planning (see meeting notes, figure 9-1). The initial stage of unit planning
is a brainstorm. We share subjective realities of interdisciplinary planning in the process. We begin with only the name of the unit in mind: the oceans.38

As the conversation unfolds, we each have a concept of what a thematic unit should be, and it takes a while to free ourselves from the constraints of what we had each heard or done in the past, as well as from the traditional lines of subject disciplines, to formulate a shared interdisciplinary project.

"What I conceived of," I start, "was to throw out the curriculum for a week, and for each of us to teach something that hinges on the Oceans theme. We should have the freedom to leave our textbooks that week," I suggest.

Others on my team aren't ready for such a free-form approach. We push and pull between establishing a unit structure and brainstorming content ideas.

George focuses on subject areas. "We need to outline the objectives each of us wants, in social studies, language arts, science."

"At least a small outline just so we know what the other is doing," Jill agrees. "Maybe we can think of it as presenting the same information through different subjects."

Mary looks for threads among the subjects. "What are the skills we want to teach?" she tentatively asks.

I throw in another variable, the class schedule. "Here is a chance," I suggest, "to make the most of our large blocks of time."

We talk about a variety of possibilities. Should we follow our regular class schedule, working the Oceans theme into our established curricula? Should we work with one group of kids for a whole day? In that case, students

38 Without realizing it, Jill introduced the idea of a curricular theme early in the year, by planning a field trip to the seashore during the first month of school. She built on that theme with the concept of interrelationships of living things throughout the year. I began to spiral off her theme in my social studies classes, attending to the interdependence of people and the world as we studied countries of the Western Hemisphere. With Jill's prodding, we agreed to a culminating field trip to the islands off the New Hampshire seacoast, where we would learn about the cultural and natural history of the region. "Just to widen their experience, if nothing else," Jill said.
could go to a different class each day for a week, Mary's unit making up the fifth class. The least disruptive plan is to carry on with our regular academic schedule and incorporate the Oceans theme into our team period each afternoon.

At the beginning of our planning cycle, we tug at one another's typifications about middle school learners and learning, the subjective realities constructed of personal history, theoretical coursework, and practical experience. A thread of pedagogical knowledge that I brought to the conversation, for instance, was ways to engage students in their own learning. Starting years ago in methods courses, it was the "motivation" section at the top of the lesson plan. Mary, on the other hand, brought a process learning perspective fresh from her college coursework. She searched for common skills and processes within and among the subject areas as a focus for planning. George focused on traditional lines of responsibility, within the academic disciplines, as a way to determine the contribution we would each make in our students' overall learning. He was willing to suspend his role of math teacher when he perceived that I would teach navigation. "Then perhaps I can teach something in social studies, my second area of certification," he surmised. Jill's conceptualization of a course for the thematic week was holistic, reflecting her elementary educator certification. First, she brainstormed activities (whole class formulation of the parts of the seaside ecosystem on the board; taping thumbs down to feel what it would be like without that evolutionary turn; pairs of students searching for particular organisms on the nature trail behind the school). Then, she analyzed those activities for a wide range of knowledge and skills to be taught and practiced: concepts of ecology, cooperative work skills, drawing diagrams.
In the process of planning, we seek to establish our individual points of view as a shared reality—to objectify what we each know about teaching and learning and to establish all of those threads as parts of the interdisciplinary unit. What emerges, however, is an entirely new construction, formulated as a result of the multiple voices of our planning.

The next step is to categorize our brainstorm. Mary writes on the board, content, skills, methods, activities. Then we can shuffle our ideas into categories as we throw them out. We begin to loosen up, contribute ideas more spontaneously, and trigger a flurry of energy among the group. At the same time, we forget ourselves, break away from our preconceived notions, and allow the energy of the moment to draw us into the planning spiral.

Mary ventures an idea, something she heard about in one of her methods courses. "I am thinking about a simulation that gets students into problem solving about the dwindling fish resources on George's Bank. Different groups of kids represent different interest groups."

George is drawn in "And that would tie in to the current news, about closing part of George's Bank," he says.

"What would be really exciting," I imagine, "is to have a variety of activities going on, a simulation, a play, a demonstration, a mural. We could even have parents to an afternoon thing, to present the final products."

Harry groans and shakes his head. "Please," he says, "we've just gotten over the Olympics!" 39

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39 At Central Falls Middle School, the Olympics are a school-wide competition in which each team represents a country. Each team is assigned a week to decorate a large display case in the hall as a diorama to represent their country. Huge banners are designed and displayed in the main hall of the school. Finally, the teams compete in relay events during a week in April. Points are amassed from all of the activities to determine which team in each grade wins the Olympics.
We've learned to accommodate Harry's tendency to be overwhelmed. We try to draw him in with connections to his teaching areas, reading and writing.

"You might have kids write poetry or make books," I start.

"Or read the Old Man and the Sea," says Mary.

"Sure!" I add. "You could finish that in a week!"

"What about the Island of the Blue Dolphin?" George asks. "That's one of the Core Group novels anyway. Has everyone read it?"

We go back to activities.

"We can incorporate some outdoor adventure activities," says Jill.

"Orienteering would fit in with your navigation stuff, Carol."

"I wonder if we could include some of the unified arts people," says George, looking up at the board, "They could do some building, or cooking... sea recipes."

"We could make seaweed pudding," laughs Mary.

"We could make a fish cookbook, a New Hampshire ocean cookbook," continues Jill.

George is engaged in the free flow of ideas, and begins to think about problem solving: "I might work with some principles of how boats float. We could do trials with different materials."

"Maybe you can use a fish tank from one of the other science labs," Jill suggests. She looks up at the board, at the variety of connections we've found, looking for a conceptual thread. "If Carol does navigation and George does buoyancy," she summarizes, "she'll be doing ships on the ocean and George ships in the ocean, and mine, ecosystems, are by the ocean. Mary's kind of draws them all together, looking to future planning."
The Team Planning Spiral: Finding Commonalties

Our brainstorm is an interesting study in the interaction of five separate reserves of subjective knowledge. While we try to meld our academic disciplines for problem solving "courses," we incorporate personal connections, pedagogical preferences, and normative constraints about what public school education should be. In the process of this free-form planning, we work to accommodate individual interests, as well as the personal and institutional constraints of our context.

With her summary of the concepts, Jill moves us into the next stage of planning, finding commonalties among our ideas. It is at this stage that the team begins to structure the unit. We debate whether to introduce a series of concepts to our students sequentially, or to embed similar concepts in a variety of experiences. We outline the themes we developed—on the ocean, in the ocean and by the ocean—and link them with a broad concept for inquiry: interrelationships. Thus, the conceptual focus of our unit emerges from our brainstorm. We agree upon a conceptual thread among our thematic courses, establishing that thread—interrelationships—as valid and important for our students to learn. We construct methods together to engage our students in their own learning about that general concept, and subtopics of the conceptual thread.

"We're really hitting that theme in different ways," I point out.

"And we ought to come back with an outline of our different courses," Jill suggests. "How we plan to arrive at the theme of interrelationships."

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40Jacobs and Borland describe the basic steps for interdisciplinary unit development: - to brainstorm a topic and graphically illustrate it (as spokes from a hub) - to search for commonalties among ideas and develop questions from them - to design activities that develop students' higher level thinking processes within the context of the inquiry (1986, pp.161-163).
George nods in agreement. "I'll see what I can do to line up guest speakers," he offers. "I might like to do something about history of shipping, get the captain of the excursion boat company, or a local boat builder."

Mary offers to record and reproduce the scheme we've developed on the board, to group our ideas by category.

Harry clarifies the time sequence. "... the first two weeks in May, because Mary will be finished after that."

Jill promises to verify our field trip and to organize it as a culmination of our theme, while I offer to draft a schedule and class groupings. "We can have five classes instead of four," I remind my colleagues, "if we can find a room for Mary to use."

In our first planning session, we break new ground by reconstructing our practice in several ways. In terms of school organization and curricular knowledge, we agree to abandon our normal 45 minute academic blocks, textbook chapters, and the tight boundaries of our subject areas, to give students flexible project time around a theme. We begin to view curriculum more holistically as we reveal our own personal interdisciplinary interests (boat building, navigation, and environmental issues). We help one another draw those interests into our classroom teaching. We abandon our usual academic boundaries to draw threads of other disciplines into our courses. Jill will focus on interaction of people with the environment. The center of my course will be the geography and math skills needed for navigation. Mary's students will participate in a citizen's action simulation, using speaking and listening and collaborative skills. George will incorporate personal interests in the history of boat building in the area while guiding students in the skills of constructing scale drawings of their choice.
And what about Harry? Although he is not able to conceptualize the theory behind interdisciplinary learning, nor to make a personal connection with the Oceans theme, the brainstorm session is a chance for him to begin to absorb the structure of interdisciplinary planning. He hasn't found his niche, but the team establishes a framework upon which he can build his own connections.

Team planning around the thematic Oceans unit seemed to spiral from our initial ideas, as we track over the same issues and move forward a little bit each time we plan. Over the course of the next few weeks, we fill in details about how to structure our time, what concepts to teach, and how to teach them. We build a Coyotes team version of an interdisciplinary thematic unit.

Jeanne Bamberger describes the process of collaborative problem solving as "spiraling" or "conceptual chaining," as participants in a collaboration session move between concrete examples and generalizations. "The materials and their relations serve as the vehicles through which the participants carry themselves beyond what they know already to a new view. Searching for one another's meanings, each participant is at the same time informing his or her own" (1991, p. 54). In the case of the Oceans unit, the "new view" is both the structure of the unit (knowledge of school organization) and the interaction of traditional subject disciplines toward a more integrated version of curricular knowledge. The talk of our planning sessions triggers ideas in one another, as we uncover the old and build a new team conceptualization of interdisciplinary learning.

Bamberger's example, "The laboratory for making things" involves a group of teachers in developing science experiments for student learning. For the Coyotes teachers, the laboratory is our daily team meeting, and the context of school and students. We begin as if we are conducting an experiment, with
familiar structures (our academic disciplines and class schedule), gradually spiraling outward to consider new expressions of curriculum and pedagogy. In the early planning stages, we uncover interconnections among our subject areas, probe tacit understandings of middle school curriculum, and formulate a shared understanding of thematic learning in the middle school setting. We take off on each other's ideas, gradually developing collaborative goals and personal expressions within the activities we plan our students.

The sum of our planning is greater than its parts. Through sharing our teaching practices, and attempting to structure collaborative learning experiences, we can develop a vision of how the structures of middle school are related to authentic student learning. By planning together, we push the envelope of each other's thinking on pedagogy.

A Team Planning Spiral: Designing Activities

In this section, I describe how we help one another construct activities for the thematic unit. Mary initiates the discussion. She distributes copies of her synopsis from our last planning session (figure 9-1). She has grouped her notes by subject category, to indicate which teacher might incorporate the skill, content, or activity listed. Subtopics are as broad as "pollution" or as specific as "Fish Banks Game." At the bottom of the sheet she listed activities that might be tied to various unified arts subjects and ideas for guest speakers.

Mary is the most conscientious of any of us. She hands out an outline for the course she plans to teach that week, a citizen's action session. The theme is the relationship of various interest groups to the dwindling lobster population in the Gulf of Maine. Students will be randomly assigned to particular roles and will align themselves around the issue according to the points of view carried in their roles.
"It's not very detailed," she explains, "because the kids will have to decide the knowledge they'll need to form their arguments. I'll provide books and articles for them to use. I'll start with a general overview, a video that Seacoast Environmental provides."

"Oh, I'm glad you had more copies," says George. "I misplaced the one you gave us a few days ago. What's this you're doing now, fish populations?"

"The skills focus will be economics," she explains, "the impact this has on various interest groups in the seacoast area."

"It's great!" Jill exclaims, "and in my class we'll be looking at the creatures in the Gulf of Maine—ecology. We'll start out with some of the simpler organisms, then fish, mammals that live in the ocean waters, especially in this area, things that are important to the fishing industry. I want them to make the human connection. How do we fit, and how can we give back into the system? I talked a man who owns a fish processing plant, and we got into this big discussion about how they're closing down big areas for fishing. So your key concept will be part of my unit too."

"In all of our courses, we can help them to think of people as part of the ecosystem," I suggest.

"It's true," says Jill. "The kids have a real hard time grasping how we are a part of the food chain. We've got to find a way to restart it. Right now, we're an end of the food chain. We've got to give something back into it."

"It reminds me also of how the river system feeds into the ocean, has an influence on it, the whole thing about the importance of a water shed," says Mary.

"That's good!" says Jill. "What are some other topics we would do along that line?"
Team Interdisciplinary Unit: Oceans Theme (3/14/95)

**Science**

- Fish
- Fish Ecosystems
- Coastal ecosystems
- Gulf of Maine ecosystem
- Pollution - Earth Day connections
- Fish Hatcheries

**Social Studies**

- History of fishing
- Local historic communities, sites
- Canada/US coastal geography
- Sustainable growth simulation
- Navigation, orienteering
- Fish Banks Game

**Math**

- Coastline - size - charting
- Land graphs/diagrams
- Math of sustainable growth
- Shipping, buoyancy, boat building

**English**

- Poetry writing
- Literature about the sea (*Moby Dick, Old Man and the Sea*).
- Pollution, Earth Day letters

**Other**

- P.E. Project adventure
- Art Mural of underwater scene
- Sewing Cookbook of coastal food resources
- Computer Simulations
- Cooking
- Netmaking

**Outside Resources**

- Local boatbuilder; reproduction boatbuilder
- Owner of cruise company - historic stories of the ship line
- Naval shipyard connections (oral history)
- Lobsterman to talk about life style, risks and benefits of the work
- Coast Guard station at Newcastle
- Seacoast Science Center
- Seacoast artist and marine life printmaker
- Celia Thaxter writings
"In my class we'll be doing navigation with 'Geography Search,' a computer simulation. The kids will be ship's crews, using latitude and longitude to find their way across the ocean. I guess it's connected in a couple of ways: There's a lot about cooperating as members of a ship's crew. They'll be in the place of European explorers, their impact on this hemisphere. Survival's a big thing. Conserving food and water, being aware of the movements of sun and stars to plan where they're going."

George is interested. "Considering what you're talking about, I might want to do another area, the historic aspect, history of sailing ships, European explorers all the way back to the Vikings. We can talk about their concept of the world back the n. Kids will enjoy making scale drawings."

"Of Viking ships and Spanish galleons?" I ask.

"And the Gundalow," Mary adds.

"Construct models," says Jill.

"Contact the Tech.Ed. teachers for advice," I suggest.

"To learn about boat style, purposes," George continues. "I just want to have some fun and do something different. Besides, Carol will be doing math with the navigation stuff."

"Form and function," I think aloud. "I guess that's a concept you're hitting on in science when you talk about adaptation and the various sea creatures."

"It's good for kids to see that things are not isolated, that our disciplines are interrelated," says George. "It will be different for them to have me teaching history."

As our talk turns to activities, we seek commonalties among the content and concepts. Without formally establishing it as such, an underlying norm for our various courses seems to be activity based problem solving methodologies.
Without realizing, we design a program for our students that "builds on their innate curiosity" and "give them opportunities to use ideas, rather than learning about them" (Prawat, 1991, p.5). The fruits of our planning suggest the importance of collaborative curriculum planning, even when classes are taught within the boundaries of the traditional "big four" subjects. As George says, "helping kids make connections" is an important goal for middle school curriculum. The conversation spawned by planning a thematic unit week furthers that objective.

_We talk about coordinating our efforts over the long term, a conversation that continues in the unit evaluation stage of our planning cycle. "We might even think of projects that can be on-going," I suggest, "something like Sizer's demonstrations."_

"What if we develop a list of projects that the kids can choose from," George suggests, "to continue after the unit. They could work on them with us during team period."

"Sounds like research!" says Harry.

_I try to differentiate from the research paper we co-taught. "But working with what they learn during the theme unit week, rather than book research," I say, "and these projects seem to cross the subject areas more fully."

"Yes," George agrees, "they choose what to do with what they learn, like a model, a mural, a book..."

_His words echo my suggestion in our earlier planning session, that we develop a variety of activities through which students could express their learning._

**More Effective Collaboration: Harry Joins the Spiral**

Harry still hasn't found his place in the thematic unit. I remember Harry's earlier comment: "I have a hard time working from someone else's plan," he
said. To him, collaboration is a tremendous burden. Not only does it require him to plan in a different mode than he was used to, but he feels the constant pressure to "do it right" for the rest of us. Perhaps he sees the Oceans Unit as "Jill's baby," and worried about performing his part of it to her standard.

If overall team collaboration is to occur, Harry has to join the learning spiral. In the process of planning, we gradually develop our tacit skills of drawing one another into a shared vision. Our shared reality of effective collaboration is illustrated in the patience and skill with which we work to include and empower Harry. We have been able to co-construct a team norm of collegiality from threads of personal experience: George's friendship, my experience of helping interns to find their teaching voice, Jill's commitment to the effectiveness of a caring stance in student learning, Mary's assumption that 'anyone' can try new methods. Despite his confusion and reluctance, Harry continues to seek and develop his own voice in our thematic unit.

I try to clarify for him. "It will be like being an elementary teacher," I suggest. "You can do anything with writing around that theme, you can have a variety of things for kids to choose from and not have to rush!"

Still Harry is unsure. He is stumped by his perception of content boundaries. "Science is my weakest area," he says. "Do you have a unit on the ocean in your science book that I could look at Jill?"

"But I'm not working with a specific chapter," she explains. "There'll be connections with our ecology chapter, but I'm using materials from the Oceans Science Center to apply it to the Gulf of Maine. And there are a lot of social studies concepts in there, too, about our responsibility to the environment, about the historic effects of developing the seacoast area."
"I guess what I'm trying to say is it would help me if you would give me your science book some time so I could look at that and see how I can integrate ecology into my language arts, it would help."

Mary tries a different perspective. "What about related things concerning the oceans, that aren't science," she suggests.

"Umm," he thinks for a minute. "There are letters, remember the letters I helped Mrs. Mulligan's Ecology Club write?"

"And only a handful of the kids on the team actually wrote letters," I assure him.

"Sure, that's great," says Mary. "And my classes are working forming committees to deal with the future of the seacoast. Your idea is another angle to political action."

"I've been on a whale watch--maybe we can focus on how to save the whale," says Harry, slowly finding his own personal connection.

He begins to plan his connecting activities orally. "Letter writing skills... conservation... interrelationships..."

As always, the ability of the Coyotes team to construct a shared reality—in this case, of curriculum and instruction—is directly related to the extent to which we can understand and accommodate one another's subjective realities. How do we orient our colleagues to frameworks that are not a part of their taken-for-granted knowledge structures? In addition to personal constraints—our individual frames of knowing that may inhibit effective collaboration—there are contextual constraints within the school, society, and profession. An additional consideration is the societal competitiveness mentioned by Yonemura, the "one upsmanship" that inhibits teachers' abilities to open their pedagogical doors to one another (1982, p. 243). In my own experience, there are additional factors, such as the isolation of our classrooms, the critical climate that surrounds...
public education, and the lack of power that teachers have in school hierarchies. All of these factors diminish teachers' confidence in taking the risk to try new methods. Team norms of effective collaboration take on added significance, therefore, in the light of institutional and societal constraints to pedagogical sharing.

In the case of the Oceans Unit, particular attention should be paid to the effects of having a teaching intern as a member of the team. Our responsibility to Mary creates a team norm of responsibility, both to her and the plan we agreed to. We promised her a room of her own during the Oceans unit week, which would also be her solo week. She, more than any of us, views her unit plan as an experiment in student learning. She is an inspiration to us for taking risks to design better methods for student learning, and we feel an obligation to be role models: for risk-taking in the interest of improving the learning program of our students.

In planning the Oceans unit, Mary is more effective than any of us at coaxing Harry into the planning spiral. She is the most non-threatening member of the team. She is learning the ropes too, with no practical experience in the realm of interdisciplinary planning. Harry is personally less intimidated by Mary's quiet confident style, as well as her place in the professional teaching life cycle.

Harry knows Mary will listen to him in a non-judgmental way. Her history in the teaching world is shorter history than any of us. Once, she taught a team period mini-course in his classroom for a week, about interpreting advertising. Some of her activities worked well, while others were a bit over the heads of our 6th graders. In general, the room was a lot noisier and more active than Harry was used to. "I don't know how you can think, with all that confusion going on," he said.
"Maybe we can sit down with the materials after school and figure out some ideas," Harry suggests to Mary toward the end of our activity planning session. One-on-one collaboration suits his style.

**Last Minute Jitters**

The complexity of a socially constructed team reality makes the establishment and maintenance of stabilized and crystallized meanings difficult. Our subjective realities of professional knowledge continually tug at institutional norms and the agreed to subuniverse of the team. While our conversations further the maintenance of a team reality, the successful implementation of agreed to strategies for team organization, middle school curricular projects, and applications of responsive pedagogy depends on the degree of commitment each individual has to a shared vision. When the unit was over, Harry was able to articulate for himself the challenge of co-constructing a team reality:

Despite our promising planning sessions, just a week before the implementation of the thematic unit, it seems that everything will fall apart. The discrepancies in our goals and values, the gaps between our individual frames of pedagogical knowledge, and the degree of confidence that each of us has in taking pedagogical risks, come to the surface once again. A questioning glance from our administrator is the trigger for last minute jitters. The reality of reluctance to put forth the effort to construct individual unit plans takes precedence over the willingness to take pedagogical risks.

It is the Monday before we are scheduled to implement our unit, and we meet to check on last minute details.

*I've arranged to borrow a classroom computer from Barbara and the company has already sent "Geography Search" on preview. I'll divide kids into ship's crews to take turns working their way across the Great Ocean. Between
turns at the computer they'll plot the course, work through some paper and pencil questions, and we'll take a break to go outside to plot courses on land," I explain.

"I've pushed the kids through the ecology chapter," Jill says. "Now we can try a lot of activities that demonstrate the concepts in relation to the ocean: categorizing sea creatures, taping their thumbs down so they can feel what it would be like if we had taken a different evolutionary turn, drawing diagrams of ecosystems."

Mary shows us her lesson plan. It is a description of the estimated time segments for the interest groups who will participate in the day-long simulation she has planned, about dwindling lobster resources. During the time frames, students will conduct research, create materials to convince their peers of their points of view, present arguments, and negotiate a solution.

The men on our team are apologetic. "I knew I wouldn't have time over vacation," Harry admits.

We have a week to go, and neither George nor Harry have prepared their activities. An unusual number of interruptions keep us from meeting until Friday, when we all come together for a final planning session. George starts the meeting with a bombshell.

"While you were out yesterday, Phil (our principal) stopped by. We told him about the structure, day-long courses, and he strongly recommended against the rotation we planned. He said, if it were him, he'd avoid keeping the kids in one class for a day."

I can't believe what I'm hearing. I respond angrily, "George, you can't drop out now!" and leave the room.

George was dropping hints all week that he wasn't ready: a family member was sick, his child was having trouble in school, business interests
took up his vacation time. There were pressing union meetings after school and
our teacher's contract still wasn't settled. Rather than acknowledge his
discomfort, I cheerfully moved on to something else, hoping that my own
optimism would be catching. The daily unforeseen pressures of teaching kept
all of us from important details of collaboration. Filling in the particulars of our
lesson plans, carrying on a more detailed discussion of the intersecting skills
we would be teaching, and lining up our materials well ahead of time were
tasks we should have completed and shared well ahead of time. All of us
planned for our classes "on the fly," to a certain extent, flexing with unforeseen
changes in schedule or student problems. But "on the fly" just doesn't work
when we rely on each other for intersecting classroom plans. Tacit assumptions
don't work in collaborative unit planning. What is assumed must be made overt,
communication of the details is essential.

Phil's question to the team is an important one; that perhaps cannot be
answered without trying it in practice. Can our students sustain interest in a
project for more than one class period? In addition, other questions that are
behind our last minute jitters will not be answered unless we try out
"experimental" practice: Do we as teachers have "enough" to keep them
interested and involved? Will the interdisciplinary expression we have
formulated further their intellectual development?

The effect of Phil's question on different members of the team points to
the relative power of whole-school norms, as well as the effect of having an
administrator at our meetings. There are important strategic considerations in
the amount of autonomy teams are allowed in decision-making, and the amount
of support they are given in their efforts to change and improve practice. How
could Phil, our principal, have asked the team strategic questions about the
thematic unit week without giving George and Harry reason to abandon the
whole project? Leadership that encourages responsible experimentation is a key issue to be considered in further research.

I storm out of the room, looking for a place to quiet myself, finding consolation with a computer teacher who happened to be on her break. It occurs to me how differently George and I interpret the principal's words. What I take as a challenge to prove or disprove pedagogical assumptions behind block scheduling, George takes as criticism or a warning.

When I've calmed myself, I wander back to my team, wondering if it will be possible to salvage this unit. I start by apologizing.

"It just won't do for any of us to start this unit with misgivings. We have to have consensus about what we do with this. I just wish your misgivings were clear from the start."

George defends himself. "You didn't wait to hear us out! We can still do it, but just follow the regular schedule."

But to me this is the essence of our curricular experiment, to present our problem-solving activities in extended blocks of time.

Jill steps in to mediate our positions. "First, you have to know what went on yesterday. Phil didn't exactly say we shouldn't do it. He just said he wouldn't want to have them in a classroom all day."

"We all know they can't be doing the same thing all day sitting at their desks," Mary points out.

I explain my position, wishing the principal were here now. "I thought we were going to engage them in projects, things that need more than a class period..."

True to form, the Coyotes teachers continue our conversation, trying to salvage our commitment to one another. Once again, our conversation serves to construct and maintain a team reality, this time around an interdisciplinary
thematic unit. Once again, we turn again to George and Harry's courses, trying to help them line up materials to carry out their plans.

"I haven't been able to find a guest speaker, so I guess I'll do something totally different," George says. "Go back to my other idea about the history of boats and shipping."

"Look at the supplementary material for Geography Search," I suggest. "There's a timeline and some early navigational instruments."

"Yuh, that's what I need." He thumbs through the manual.

"And I'll bring you my big book about the history of sailing ships," I offer.

"I do like this material from Greenpeace," says Harry, "but is it enough?"

"There's that little resource book about projects kids can do to save the earth," Jill points out.

Harry and Mary talk about the kinds of writing kids might do in his class during the thematic unit. He begins to brighten up. "They could even write poems, if they don't want to write letters," he says.

We turn to the time issue, which was Phil Bolton's real concern. How are we going to incorporate breaks?" asks George.

"I'm taking my kids outside to try some orienteering, with pocket compasses," I contribute.

"So Harry and Jill and I should target a way to get them outside, integrate it into the project?"

"I'm just taking a recess, probably before lunch," Jill says.

"And we can check in each day," I remind him, "and think about adjustments along the way."

Thinking about my own disappointment over the lack of follow through by George and Harry, and wondering about the extent to which we can share our separate perceptions of effective middle school pedagogy, I address the team:
"I guess to get everyone else feeling the same way about a project is a stretch anyway," I suggest. "So at the end of all this, what will we say? Is it worth the frustrations of trying to plan something like this together, and if so, why?"

I turn to Harry. "For you and Jill, especially. I wonder how you feel about having the kids in one room for a day, having more flexible time with them, in the light of your elementary experience. You've been in a self-contained classroom. In a way, this unit is more familiar to you than the rest of us. You could just take off on an idea when you wanted to. You made the decision to drop the regular schedule by yourself.

"That's right," Harry agrees. "But I never would have tried this with our middle schoolers a year ago," he reminds me. "Being on this team helps, it has helped my professional growth," he states firmly. "I feel better, more effective, more knowledgeable about what I'm doing--teaching in my subject area--than when I was alone. Because I wasn't getting the feedback. When you're self-contained there's no feedback."

"Yeah, you're isolated. Really isolated," I agree.

"I like the feedback. And it's a real challenge for me to be working with strong personalities!" he grins.

I feel badly that he is unprepared for the thematic unit, and wonder if he's being pushed into something he doesn't feel up to. "Harry, I don't want you to feel overwhelmed over the weekend, but I guess that's the way you plan, right?"

On the desk beside him are piled the resources that Mary and Jill and I have given him—Greenpeace materials and the ecology project books. "That's right," he assures me, "I never look at the next week until Friday. Don't worry," he goes on, "I won't let my team down."
Providing and maintaining a supportive climate for teacher planning sessions is an important consideration for both middle school administrators and team members. George and Harry let the other members of the team down by waiting until the last minute to plan their unit segments. At the same time, Jill, Mary and I forged ahead with our own plans, without holding George and Harry accountable for the steps along the way. In a sense, we formulated separate realities within two subgroups of the team. In the end, however, the Coyotes teachers upheld their responsibility toward one another, and that important element of teaming prodded us to complete the final legwork for the thematic week. Harry was apologetic:

*He motions for us to wait a minute longer. He waits for our attention, as if he is making a speech.*

"You have to remember," he begins, "that this team has come a long way. Last year, we planned a joint research paper, and we developed the Reading/Writing Workshop for team period. I honestly think we did very well together. Now this year, we got to know each other even better, and we've accomplished even more. I think we've given the kids a really strong program."

"But sometimes," he struggles for the right words, "there's a lot of stress that goes along with it. We have different ideas and different personalities and different styles. We try to pull it all together, and that is the most challenging part of working on a team. Trying to work with each other and get along together and you know, without offending each other--finding harmony. There's a lot to do and not a lot of time to do it in. That puts a lot of stress on people, and it doesn't always make us at the top of our game."

At this point, Harry is able to articulate the reality of our team climate and his evolving knowledge of effective collaboration. Working with different personalities presents a challenge to all of us, and his assessment is that "trying
to pull it all together" is worth it, citing results such as our Reading and Writing Workshop, and the joint research paper. At the same time, he makes a plea for understanding: "there's a lot of stress and "we're not always at the top of our game."

Harry is making no excuses for himself, nor is he asking others to "cover" for him. Instead, he is stating his own reality, and in doing so, seeking to establish an intersubjective link between us. Berger and Luckman say that "internalization is the basis for understanding one's fellow men and for the apprehension of the world as a meaningful and social reality" (1966, p. 130). In seeking understanding in a public way, Harry seeks to establish a reciprocal reality, one in which we all feel as he feels--"the challenge of teaming". For Harry, the member of the team who has the most difficulty finding his voice in the world of middle school teaching, this example is particularly significant, illustrating his growing knowledge of effective collaboration.

Epilogue to the Chapter: Looking in on the Unit

In this section, I go beyond the boundaries of what we say about our work, to view the Coyotes teachers in action, in order to provide the reader with a picture of the results of our interdisciplinary thematic week.

It is the Monday morning of the week of our Oceans unit. I'm hanging around the main office of Central Falls Middle School with my coffee cup, waiting for a new pot to brew. George arrives with an armload of books and his coffee cup.

He hefts a big stack of materials onto the long office counter and flips open a three-ring binder. "I've worked out two main projects here," he says, pointing to the neatly typed pages. "I'll talk a little about the history--sailing ships that crossed the Atlantic from the Vikings to now. Then we'll set up cooperative learning groups, self-selected pairs or triads, according to their
interest. They can either make a scale drawing or a timeline of events in maritime history." He has photocopied drawings of Viking ships and barkentines, clipper ships and Spanish galleons. "I'll do a little history, and then I'll show them how to enlarge the drawings, poster sized. Do you have some large paper in your room?"

He turns the pages of his binder to show the unit plans that Mary and I had shared with our colleagues the previous week. "Now, if I can get Harry's and Jill's, we'll have this all together for another year."

He grins as I thumb through the binder, proud of the work he's done over the weekend. This is George's organizational strength, gathering up the threads and tidying up our planning cycle.

"This is great!" I say, "We should be sure to include the feedback forms that Mary and I worked up, too."

George's simple device, of consolidating the paper pieces of our thematic unit plan in a binder, is a way of publishing our unit. Seeing the whole thing together in print is satisfying to all of us, a visual representation of the work we put into planning the unit and how the separate expressions of the Oceans theme fit together. The binder is an artifact of the team's collaborative interpretation of middle school pedagogy from which we can plan future thematic units. The results of our "experiment" can be reviewed for future planning. This, along with feedback forms that Mary and I devised for students and for teachers, became the data from which we can plan future units.

For George, a concrete visual learner, the binder institutionalizes thematic planning as a part of the Coyotes team reality. "If we can meet after the unit and revise and adjust," he suggests, "then we'll remember what worked or didn't work another time." His weekend work is an important contribution to the team. He structures a way for us to consider and reconsider one aspect of
middle school learning—a team interpretation of an interdisciplinary thematic unit.

It is mid-morning. My students are working in small groups, as members of five ship’s crews. They have learned the rhythm of the Geography Search simulation: “Endeavor!” the group at the computer calls out, signaling that they are finished their turn—a simulation of a day’s progress across the ocean—and the next crew comes up. After their turn, they return to their seats to plot their course on a grid. Then they turn to the other projects they will complete during the day: to answer several sheets of questions about the concepts of the cruise and to write a ship’s song. We take a break sometime during the day to go outside and make sundials, to demonstrate how navigators from Columbus’ time determined local noon.

One of our special education aides comes in to see if I need help and I ask her to stay for a few minutes so that I can visit my colleagues’ classrooms. The atmosphere is different in each room that I visit. At first glance, Harry’s class seems arranged as usual, in rows, with pairs of desks together for students to work cooperatively on their grammar exercises. But today Mr. Porter is not at his desk in the front of the room. Instead, he’s sitting with a student, both with heads bent over a poem the student is writing, brainstorming about the wording. Other students are sitting in ones, twos or threes, talking quietly or meticulously writing the final drafts of letters, poems, and stories. Harry looks up to see me standing to the side of the room with my camera. “Oh, Mrs. Mulligan, I didn’t hear you,” he smiles.

“Deidre Smith came by to see if we needed her, so I left her with my class so I could take pictures. Is it OK?” I ask.

Harry nods his permission. “Great idea. I’d like a copy too, if you don’t mind.”
Mary's classroom is busy and noisy. Student interest groups of 5 or 6 are making posters, and arguing over the best slogan for the upcoming lobster rally. Mary holds a huge roll of red paper as two girls measure and cut. One group catches me as I wander through, to read the speech they plan to make to the citizens action meeting that will be held just after lunch. When I head back into the hall, I catch a glimpse of another group in the cafeteria practicing their "save the lobster" cheer.

In George's room, some kids are lying on the floor with large sheets of paper and yardsticks, carefully making grids for the scale drawings they are working on. Others are working together on long sheets of paper they have taped to the wall or a window, discussing where to place events on the timelines they have drawn. George looks up from his desk, where he is thumbing through a book, helping a student to decide which sort of sailing craft she will try to draw. He glances over his glasses as I come in. "Oh, great, take a picture of Charley's Spanish galleon up there on the wall. He and Mark and Tony did unbelievable. Look at the detail!"

I can't find Jill, she has taken her students off to the nature trail. On the chalkboard there is a large food chain diagram, a cooperative venture in several different handwritings. There are no chairs in the spare classroom that she has agreed to use. Instead, there are carpet pieces on the floor for students to sit on, and two large tables covered with large sheets of paper and cans of markers. On her desk is the roll of masking tape and a nerf ball, her tools for the "lack of opposing thumb" demonstration.

In each classroom, the shared reality of self-directed, active learning projects is in evidence. Teachers are working side by side with their students as partners in learning. At the end of the day, we are all tired, perhaps because
we are more involved in our work than usual. In the next chapter, I relate what we say about what we did during the thematic week.
Reflective teaching works uphill against the epistemology built into the bureaucracy of the school, with its lesson plans oriented to the 'coverage' of standardized units of privileged school knowledge, its standard divisions of time and space, its routines for testing and promoting students and teachers . . . all geared to a view of knowledge built around 'right answers.' In such a context, it is extraordinarily difficult to take the time to listen to a kid, register surprise, become curious, and do the detective work that may lead to insight.


In this chapter, I describe our critical conversations regarding the Oceans thematic unit. When evaluative conversation becomes a part of the institutional reality of a school or a team, teachers are able to reconstruct subjective realities of curriculum and instruction and establish objective meanings (Berger and Luckman, 1966, p.153).

First, I draw upon the literature of "reflective practice" to link the social construction of a team's reality to the evolution of our professional knowledge.
The meeting time of an interdisciplinary team is one context within which teachers are able "to do the detective work that may lead to insight" (Schon, 1988, p. 26). Using the work of Schon as a reference point, I describe our evaluative conversation as an example of collaborative reflection-on-action. For the Coyotes, our "debriefing" conversations about the Oceans Unit, and our shared impressions of the effects of the restructuring experiment in terms of future practice suggest that focused reflective conversations can support positive school change.

**Strategies for Reflective Planning**

Reflexivity is a natural process when teachers assess student progress, plan curriculum, or structure learning time together. Schon's observation suggests that reflective teaching is "detective work." If we view the teaching context—the school, the curriculum, and our students—as interactive and continually changing, we must be detectives, continually assessing and adjusting our teaching practices according to the shifting context. Teamwork facilitates the detective work. We are apt to spark one another's curiosity about how things work (both in our own practice and that of our colleagues). At the same time, the collegial support of team members creates a safe place within which we can question "the bureaucracy of the school." The pooled resources of a team of colleagues encourages us to re-form teaching practice in responsive ways.

The planning cycle of our interdisciplinary thematic unit helps to institutionalize a critical perspective for the Coyotes team. In the beginning brainstorming sessions, we began to interpret middle school pedagogy in the light of our own situation. We brought together subjective realities of how to do interdisciplinary planning, how to devise active learning projects, and how to provide adequate learning time and formulated a highly contextualized version
of middle school pedagogy. The experiment infused levels of spontaneity and uncertainty into the action of our classrooms, which we reflected upon both during our daily team meetings and in the final analysis, during the unit evaluation session.

To Schon, reflective teaching means "helping (kids) coordinate their own spontaneous knowing-in-action with the privileged knowledge of the school" (1988, p. 19). For the Coyotes teachers, our planning cycle helps us to establish institutional realities (voices of authority such as middle school experts, the school mission statement, and the work of other teams in our school) as part of the reality of our subuniverse. At the same time, the planning cycle helps us crack taken-for-granted norms within the system (such as covering textbook chapters and interpretations of high school expectations) and within our team.

The structural supports of middle schools encourage teachers to work together to find a way around barriers to change. Daily team planning time, a shared commitment to support one another and our students, a block schedule that can be restructured to accommodate longer teaching and learning blocks, and the school-wide expectation that teams plan enrichment and interdisciplinary units provide a context for questioning and for change.

The institutional reality of Central Falls Middle School includes what Schon would call "zones of discretionary freedom" (1988, p. 27), aspects such as a team's daily shared planning period and large blocks of time within which we could schedule academic classes for our students. The context of the Coyotes team included additional factors that encouraged reflection on practice: developmental differences among the members of the team, the spirit of inquiry that my own research injected into our meetings, and the continual "why" questions brought up by my student intern. These contextual factors
encouraged us "to imagine and try out interventions aimed at making (our) organizational world more vigorous, substantive, and desirable" (Schon, 1988, p. 28).

Examples of Critical Conversations

Evaluation is an integral part of any planning cycle, but is too often missing from the institutional reality of schools. Too often, evaluation is only performed by administrators when they assess the performance of "their" teachers, or by a team of experts from the outside for the school's accreditation. Teachers are seldom encouraged to evaluate their own work or given the authority to restructure teaching practices in response to their own critical analysis. While teams can provide a continually supportive context for critical analysis of our work, often we are too involved in task completion to question the purpose of those tasks. Task completion in compliance with the institutional realities of Central Falls Middle School and of the district are self reinforcing. George, for instance, measures our achievements through statistics such as our small number of discipline referrals to the office, the number of assemblies we offer our students, and the 20% of the team with IEPs who are evenly mixed in our four class groupings. But seldom do we reflect on how things went, how they can be improved, or why we do them in the first place. Maxine Greene advocates a deeper level of reflection on teaching: "talking about what practice is for" (1986, p. 70).

It is through our interdisciplinary thematic unit that the Coyotes finally take steps to make critical evaluation a part of our planning cycle. If we are to re-form curriculum and methods from a team experiment such as a thematic unit, structures and strategies must be incorporated from the start that institutionalize critical analysis. The planning cycle of the Oceans Unit incorporates critical aspects from the start. We progressed from the
brainstorming stage to categorization to fleshing out student activities in an organized fashion, utilizing meeting notes to move us along to succeeding stages. We constructed feedback forms for teachers and students to document our reactions and realizations. We committed ourselves to an after school evaluative meeting to review the unit and plan for the future.

During the implementation week, we met briefly during our planning period to check in with one another. There was a tacit understanding among us that we would help one another salvage our courses if we ran into snags, or that we might even scratch the unit mid-week if things weren't going well. Finally, and more formally, we devised feedback forms to document our reflections about the unit week: short questionnaires for the Coyotes teachers to fill in at the end of each day of the week (figure 10-1) and a series of reflection questions for students to answer on the last day of the unit (figure 10-2). We were thus able to document our individual journeys through our curricular experiment, and our students reactions to the broad, activity centered themes they participated in.

According to the daily feedback forms, the week began on a positive note for all of us. Each day, when we took time to share anecdotes about what was going on in our classrooms, we adjusted our own classroom activities or cooperative groups according to the overall picture of student interaction with curricula. As the week went on, we fine-tuned our activities, to help students balance their efforts in the roles they played in the various classes. Students began to identify areas of personal interest within the Oceans theme, and were able to carry those interests from course to course, from activity to activity.41

41During the Oceans Unit, the Coyotes had one group of students in their classrooms for the day, except for their regularly scheduled unified arts classes. Five student groups rotated through five courses, one on each day of the week. This meant students would be with us for approximately 135 minutes in the morning before lunch, and for 90 minutes after lunch.

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Daily Teacher Feedback Form: Oceans Unit

Date: May 8, 1995 - English

1. Briefly describe your plans for today:
   1) Poetry (using presentation, Simon) - Endangered marine animals, those affected by pollution
   2) Letters to marine based environmental agencies asking for membership
   3) Abortion - Write script for short eng. acct play addressing marine environment
e 4) Write short story personifying marine life endangered & affected by pollution
   5) Environmental-Brainstorming projects - Environment, Big Business, Citizen Group - Project

2. This is what actually was done:
   Poetry, letters, brainstorming points of view for power plant
   Writing, research - Citing rationale behind power nuclear power plant
   Stand (Environment, Big Business, Citizen Group)

3. Things you liked about today:
   It was nice feeling like a science teacher if only for a short time. Students were attentive as I discussed ecosystems,
   food chains, endangered, abused marine life. I was most impressed with the sensitivity & compassion expressed in their poetry & letters.

4. Things you need to change for tomorrow:
   - Start introduction to discussion of oceans, ecosystems, effects of pollution in marine life etc.
   - Coordinate groups - changing pairs to groups - 4 heads better than 2. Less papers to wait for in order to move on
to the next activity.

5. Things the team needs to change for tomorrow - for the future
   - Have the ocean's unit taught first. Activities would reinforce concepts already taught. Students could
   more successfully participate in activities. Takes the necessity of having to spend 30-45 minutes covering the
   material before having them participate in the activities.
Oceans Unit Student Feedback Sheet

To help your teachers plan future activities, please take a few minutes to give us your opinion.

Describe something that you liked about each course you participated in this week:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lobster Hearing - Ms. Draper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ship Designs - Mr. Thibault</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography Search - Ms. Mulligan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceans Eco-systems - Ms. Kilburn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing about oceans - Mr. Porter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What did you like about meeting in one class for a full day?

What didn't you like about meeting in one class for a full day?

Was this thematic week a nice change for you (yes or no)?

Would you be in favor of having another week of day long classes at another time in the year (yes or no)?

List topics you would like to spend a day studying:
During the unit week, there is more than the usual amount of classroom time for thinking in action and responding to our students' learning than we have in the constraints of the usual 45 minute teaching blocks. At the same time, we are more reflective about our work during team meetings and through the daily feedback forms. Our comments show willingness to adjust our plans according to what went on in our classrooms and our colleagues' classrooms. In terms of the social construction of reality, we use the classroom experiences of our colleagues to adjust the activities in our own classrooms. A group that began the week in my class with the "Geography Search" simulation found ships from the Ages of Exploration to draw to scale in George's classroom. I spent more time telling students the historic background of the ships we sailed on in our simulation, to facilitate their learning in George's class. Students who began the week with Mary's citizens action simulation came to Harry's class with some very specific ideas about the letters they would write to environmental groups. Harry was able to spend less time going over background material because of the information the group brought in from their citizen's action research. There was more of a give and take of information about endangered species than on the previous day and more time writing.

What follows are excerpts from our team meetings and feedback forms during the unit week:

"Even though we planned these groupings carefully, each one seems to have its own chemistry," I suggest on the second day.

"Yeah, my group today had a hard time focusing on their roles," Mary says. "I don't know if it's because the newness has worn off, or if it's the personalities."

I look at her class list. "There are some in there who have a hard time concentrating," I comment. "I think I'll take another look at the way I've
organized them into ship's crews for Thursday. Maybe I can spread the active
kids around."

"All I know is, I'm exhausted!" George exclaims.

"The break time is really important," Harry observes. "I took my kids out
at 10:00 and they came back ready to work."

That helps me to pay attention to providing down time for my students
too. "They were so involved, we just kept going, and by 1:30 they were just
worn out," I agree. "We'll go out to make sun dials earlier tomorrow. Then we
can check them again in the afternoon."

The overall impression is that we, as well as our students, are having fun.
It's a relief to have a break from "getting work out of kids," to exploring projects
side by side with them. We all feel more free to go with the interests of
individuals. The wide range of activities we're providing appeals to a wide
range of learning styles. Kids are making unforeseen connections with the
content.

I share the motivational aspects of the computer simulation. "They're so
excited to get their turn at the computer, then they rush back to chart their
location. Kids are helping one another chart, and explaining how latitude and
longitude work," I explain.

Harry describes the effects of teaching the unit on himself. "I'm learning
so much," he shares one afternoon, "At least as much as the kids!"

At the same time, he identifies an area for improvement: "Students are
coming to me unfamiliar with the content. I took too much time covering material
before having them participate in activities. So tomorrow, I'll make the
introduction to the material shorter, and consolidate groups. Four heads are
better than two and there are fewer papers to wait for to move on to the next
activity."
On our feedback forms, Jill, Harry and I all mention how well our students are working in cooperative groups. Our comments show our thinking about "why" we should use cooperative groups in the classroom: "students are motivating one another to complete tasks" and "they are explaining complicated concepts to one another" and "expressed sensitivity and understanding of the content."

George points out the improvement in quality of work by his students in his scale drawing exercise. "Look at the drawing that Tony's group is doing," he points out proudly during one of our morning breaks, "He's usually the one that's lost, and he's showing the others how to do scale drawings."

**Extending the Planning Spiral: Looking Ahead**

An evaluative team conversation such as the Coyotes post unit week discussion helps us to "apprehend a problem, reconstruct our experience, and develop new understandings of action situations" (Grimmett, 1988, p.12). How would our reflection in and on action inform future classroom practice? George's unit binder documents the planning of the unit, and serves as a concrete representation of the team's curricular construction. Perhaps it will serve as a model for future interdisciplinary units. But in terms of the social construction of reality, it is our after school conversation that helps us to internalize the structure, outcomes, and potential for the Oceans Unit thematic week. Through that conversation, we are able to help one another synthesize what a thematic unit can mean, and translate our observations to inform our future practice.

We sit down with the folder of student feedback forms, looking for patterns in their responses. Mary hands around the reflection forms that we filled out at the end of each day, to jog our memories.
We're all present but George. He stops by briefly, explaining that a
parent has stopped by to talk about her son's math work.

"I'll catch up with you later," he murmurs to Mary, rushing off. She is
visibly disappointed—this conversation is her chance to find out what the
"experiment" meant to this group of experienced teachers. But the other team
members shrug and carry on.42

Jill starts. "Another time," she suggests as she looks through one of the
folders of student forms, "we can have them fill these in every day, so we have
an idea of how they're reacting to each of the courses right away."

She is enthusiastic as she reads their responses, and begins to recall
details of the thematic week. "I really think we should do more themes, but think
about the timing," she suggests. "For me, this was a busy time, just at the end of
a term. Maybe a better time would be before Christmas vacation or February
vacation, when we're breaking with the routine anyway."

Harry nods his support. "We could have thematic units regularly
throughout the year, and give them a chance to follow up on the concentration
during a vacation. With all of the ideas that are bouncing off of them, we could
give them ways to reinforce that learning, to take off on those activities."

I'm intrigued with Harry's idea—that thematic classes can be a stimulus
for independent learning. "Do you think that was happening?" I ask.

"Yes," he assures us. "And it was happening for me! I'd never really read
about Greenpeace before, and the environmental issues, and it made me more
aware. A lot of kids asked for addresses, so that they could send for their own
materials."

42 George's action suggests a lack of commitment to the evaluative process that is common
among classroom teachers. Our time is precious, and meetings often seem a frill, a distraction
from our task completion.
"What about the effects of sustained work time, how did they respond to that?" I wonder as I thumb through one of the folders of student feedback forms.

"There are a lot of comments like 'we didn't get interrupted,' and 'it was nice being out of the crowded halls,'" says Mary.

"As far as the schedule is concerned, the kids really seemed to respond to the opportunity to focus on a project," I suggest. "At least in my room, I think a lot of them would have had a harder time getting into the computer simulation if their time was broken into 45 minute class sessions up over a week."

Harry thinks about the effects of the relaxed pace on his own teaching: "I didn't feel hurried and flustered like I sometimes do. I knew that, if I didn't get done at 8:50 or 9:35, we could just carry it right over. I let myself get involved in the subject, and I think that affected the kids."

"I think the prolonged time with the navigation simulation, along with some hands on activities, gave kids a chance to absorb the structure of concepts like latitude and longitude," I add.

"What about being a whole day with one project," Mary wonders. "My kids were pretty tired at the end of a day."

I identify a question for further inquiry. "I wonder if they always are, but we were more aware of the energy, because we'd been with them all day."

Jill adds insight from an elementary school perspective: "Mornings are definitely better energy times. Maybe another time we could run the theme activities just mornings?"

Harry agrees. "We could make it half or two-thirds of the day another time."

"Especially if they were working on some sustained project that's the culmination of a unit," I add.
"And that would give us a chance to carry something over from day to day," Mary says. "I missed having carry-over to another day. If they had a task to do for homework, maybe they'd feel more accountable for the project they were doing, it wouldn't be a one-shot affair. By the end of the week, I thought kids weren't taking the projects as seriously."

"Maybe another time," says Jill, "we should be more organized about the sequence of classes, how one class informs another."

Harry lends his view of the "accountability" issue. "What I told them was, this is a week's worth of work that you're doing in one day, so that's big percentage of their grade! They were expected to produce several pieces of writing that day."

"I guess we just need to be clear about our expectations at the beginning," Jill summarizes. "We could have expectations that take all of our courses into consideration."

"Something that might help," Jill goes on, "is to have a student feedback sheet at the end of every activity, when it's fresh in their minds, rather than at the end of the week. That way they can tell us what they've learned. And we might see how the different classes interact between day one and day five."

"Yeah," Mary agrees. "That was a problem. I didn't even leave time for an oral assessment at the end of the day. That would help."

"You know George brought up the idea of having students choose a project to work on during Team Period during successive weeks. We might think about having a day or several days of culminating activities, after a month of working the theme in our regular classes. It'd give 'em a chance to choose, and to bring together their learning over that month," I suggest.

"It'd be perfect for February," Jill suggests, "When we can't get outside much, and the work energy is usually good."
Harry sees the potential for fostering the interconnectedness of content throughout the year. "Then they could collect background information from all of their academic classes, and could bring everything together in a focus project," he says.

"I noticed that my Monday classes knew the least and the Friday classes the most," says Jill. "After we talked about what eats what, then they had a bigger picture of what they were dealing with when they went into Mary's simulation."

"And when the kids came to me who had already been in George's class, they had a lot better idea of what the sailing ships might have been like for the European explorers," I remember. "Then they were more likely to relate the simulation to history, as well as to the geography skills they've been learning for years."

"I got into some interesting discussions on lobsters, too, taking off on things that Mary was doing, talking about the laws of supply and demand," says Harry. "The kids were bringing me information!"

The preceding discussion illustrates the learning spiral that the Coyotes teachers initiated among themselves as a result of undertaking a curricular experiment, and as a result of engaging in an evaluative discussion about the experiment. In the evaluative conversation, we revisited taken for granted aspects of middle schools—such as block scheduling—in the light of our observations of student learning during the thematic unit week. In this way, we are able to objectify our learning and perhaps reform our team practice accordingly:

"It makes me look at using the flexible schedule differently," says Jill. "Having the freedom within the schedule was nice. We could go outside and take a break whenever we were ready."
"What about incorporating longer class blocks all of the time, using a rotating schedule like we did last year?" I ask.

"Personally, I don't feel that 45 minute periods are long enough," says Harry. "What surprised me was how focused they were. They listened intently at the beginning, when I had to tell them about the background—talking about something that I don't consider my strength, in science! But I'd done a lot of reading up on it over the weekend, I was prepared. It was exciting to me to see them so interested in those things."

Mary points to the pile of student feedback sheets. "That's what their comments say, that they had more time, they didn't feel pressured."

"And because of the lack of interruption, you actually have more time," Jill points out.

"Do you think it worked well because we had spent time planning, or do you wish we had planned more?" asks Mary.

"I felt bad that it got to the last weekend, to the wire, before you knew what you were going to do," I add to Harry. "Was it because it was the first time that you had worked on a thematic unit?"

"Partly that," Harry answers, "and partly because I didn't know how I fit into the unit. Because science is not my thing, I had a hard time figuring out what my part should be."

Harry, the member of our team who had the most difficulty accepting and implementing aspects of middle school pedagogy, is able to make personal connections with interdisciplinary and activity based learning during the Oceans unit week. During our evaluative session, we are all propelled to more general applications, such as our debate over the advantages and disadvantages of longer blocks of academic learning time.
Team Modeling: Collaborative Reflection

As we review and compile the realizations that came from our individual experiences of the thematic unit, we begin to synthesize plans for the future from our collective outcomes. The experimental nature of the unit carries on, as we identify specific topics for reconsideration: the timing of a focus unit, how interdisciplinary themes might be applied more regularly throughout the year, ways to carry cooperative learning projects from one classroom to another, and how to restructure learning time to encourage greater student involvement with their learning.

The team established new norms for itself by undertaking the thematic unit experiment and taking the time to evaluate it. Despite the reluctance Harry and George showed to undertake change (at one point, George confessed, "Sometimes it's just too much work to change"), they went along with the plan, took risks in terms of curriculum and instruction, and expressed satisfaction with student outcomes and their own teaching.

I identified Harry as a key informant in this team study, because of his willingness to articulate the new understandings of middle school teaching that he developed during my research year. His feedback during our team evaluation of the unit describes changes in his working professional knowledge of middle school teaching that culminate during the unit week. His success in implementing his thematic unit course reinforced his new way of viewing student development. In his classroom, participating in a whole day of thinking and writing with his students, he witnessed the interaction of various modes of student development—social, emotional, and intellectual—while he was learning with them.

Part of Harry's learning came through working on a team, receiving support, and being encouraged to try methodologies his colleagues had been
successful with. He exhibited his building confidence by speaking up at team meetings, sharing his reflections about middle school pedagogy, and being more flexible in his teaching.\textsuperscript{43} Though he had worried back in January that our enrichment activities would take away from academic time, after the Oceans Unit week he described his new understanding of the interaction of the physical, social, emotional and intellectual realms of development. "You know," he exclaimed in May, "I can see how attending to those other things--the social and emotional side--brings out the best in kids. Some of them \textit{can't} learn unless we pay attention to their esteem issues."

He described his own reflection on practice, as it had developed over the past year: "I think because I looked at middle school from the perspective of an elementary school teacher, I was more focused on their skills than anything else. Meeting the emotional and social needs of students wasn't a priority. I've learned through some of the activities that I've done during team period--like putting on skits and playing word games--add to their social and emotional growth. Those things are esteem building. When we pay attention to those issues, they're more willing to take on academic challenges!"

He went on to describe the importance of team support: "I don't feel I'm in this by myself. If a student is an academic or behavior problem, I hear that from other teachers (at team meeting). I don't feel like I have to solve this problem all by myself." But Harry's new found comfort with middle school teaching went beyond collegial support: through conversation, he began to

\textsuperscript{43} To what extent had team meeting conversations influenced Harry's change? It is hard to tell, because there were other things that encouraged a more assertive Harry: he was sorting out some personal issues in his life, he was in his third year at the middle school, and the Coyotes teachers a were far more supportive team for him than his previous team had been. But Harry's new-found voice was an important factor in helping me to draw conclusions about the effects of teaming on teacher knowledge.
"see" the implications of middle school philosophy in practice, and was gradually encouraged to try aspects of middle school pedagogy himself.

For any teacher, the process of teaching becomes clearer to ourselves as we explain ourselves to one another, be it a teaching intern or a team colleague. The conversation itself stimulates connections between theory and practice. In a middle school team setting, we are apt to explain ourselves when we promote a technique or activity with our colleagues, or when we plan a whole new structure together. In evaluative conversations, the compilation of our various realizations helps us go beyond the moment of understanding, to adapt and adjust our teaching and teaming in a more organized fashion. These aspects of a team reality should be attended to closely, in terms of bringing about positive systemic change in schools.

For me, the Oceans unit constituted the first opportunity I had in my career to co-plan beyond and among the usual curricular format. My colleagues helped me to view the theme and realms of student development from a new point of view. We all became generalists among generalists, free to collaborate in terms of broad learning results: students were inquirers, students understood the multi-faceted nature of real world problems, students were actively engaged, etc. The structure of the unit and the planning cycle we implemented facilitated my awareness of important aspects of effective collaboration, as well.

Harry explained the effects of our team conversations in general, as he moved from the stage of being supported in his daily work to a higher level of comfort in taking risks in his teaching.

"Our work this year has stimulated my flexibility," he explained. "You can try something different, try someone else's ideas. And then you add them to your repertoire of teaching skills. That has happened to me to a large extent
since I've been over here" (the middle school). He described his own constructive weave of working professional knowledge: "We don't use everything that the others do, but we modify each other's methods... it's a hodgepodge of everything we learned in school and all the people we come in contact with, and we're carrying all of these things along with us."

"But I've probably grown the most in the past year of any other part of my professional life," he went on. "Working as a team member has kept me fresh, alert, more productive than before. I really feel a sense of accomplishment."

Harry's words hit upon important aspects of a team reality: the rich climate that a group of colleagues can provide as a setting for professional growth. Team planning time is a space for conversation about our work, where we may ponder the meaning our work and structure new solutions together. As Harry's experience suggests, teaming holds important possibilities for making teaching a more vigorous, reflective activity.
The Coyotes story uncovers the real world of middle school teams, the dilemmas of conflicting subjective realities, the frustrations of uneven support for the middle school mission of responsive pedagogy, and the crystallized meanings that inhibit change. While the difficulties of collaboration and co-construction of a team reality among a random mix of practitioners are apparent, the story also suggests the educative potential of supportive, nomos-building communities of practitioners. In this final chapter of the dissertation, I revisit aspects of the Coyotes story that foster or inhibit our ability to establish shared realities, and highlight ways that co-construction of a team reality can foster positive change.

**Barriers to Effective Teaming**

The context of middle school teams, especially when they function as schools within schools, is acknowledged for its benefits to students (Carnegie Foundation, 1989; Lipsitz, 1984). But if teams are to live up to their potential, we must attend to the daily difficulties of working closely with a diverse group of colleagues.

The Coyotes story is far from an idealized story. It describes the realities of mismatched goals and lack of collaborative meanings. The barriers to more
effective collaboration among the practitioners in this story, and the institutional barriers to change in the context of Central Falls Middle School, are many times barriers to systemic school change and barriers that hinder professional growth among public school teachers.

On a middle school team, differences in the subjective realities of the teachers involved may counterbalance the motivation to collaborate. The recurring problems for the Coyotes which are processed in Chapters 7 and 8 include uneven commitment to responsive pedagogy, lack of trust in team co-constructions, lack of energy, and difficulty in finding voice. Although we offer one another daily support in working with our shared population of students, the effort to understand and live up to the expectations of our colleagues often seems to complicate rather than alleviate our teaching dilemmas. All of the members of the team exhibit reluctance to collaborate at one time or another. Harry repeatedly complained that "I have difficulty working in someone else's system."

Differences in gender, epistemological and pedagogical positions, and teaching styles and preferences all present barriers to effective collaboration. Future research efforts should explore more fully the effects of these various differences on team collaboration, and strategies to facilitate more effective collaboration among diverse members of a group. For the Coyotes, our daily work informed us about our differences, and engaging projects seemed to help us to work around our differences. There were few conscientious efforts to process our differences, however.

At Central Falls Middle School there was little institutional support for teams to become better collaborators and to co-construct new solutions to the dilemmas of middle school teaching. The Coyotes experience points to a need for training and support to increase team effectiveness. In several instances,
the presence of an outsider facilitated our work. The authority of the IEP meeting, and the skill of the special education counselor who sometimes attended our meetings encouraged more effective collaboration to meet individual student needs, for instance. The presence of an intern on our team improved the quality of our collaboration, as well. Teachers on the team were encouraged to stay on task and process their work in more clear and open ways to fulfill their role as cooperating teachers.

At Central Falls, the school's middle school mission and the authority of traditional academic department heads created a dilemma that stood in the way of our co-construction of responsive middle school curriculum and instructional projects (described in Chapter 9). Jill figured out ways to work around the science curriculum. "I'll cover the chapters that are most important, then I'll have time for labs," she explained. On the other hand, George and Harry attended first to keeping pace with textbook chapters, viewing active learning activities as extras. That view sheltered them from criticism by department heads, and discouraged them from taking pedagogical risks.

**Connecting Professional Knowledge**

In the social construction of knowledge, we validate and enrich meanings, as well as discover new meanings. On a middle school team, each teacher brings an individual story to the team relationship. The team as a whole has its shared story to draw upon as well. It is through narrative (in our case, conversation) that we make connections with official knowledge (in our case, with the middle school concept). Theorists such as Britzman (1991), Clandinin and Connelly (1991) and Polkinghome (1988) establish the place of story in the construction of knowledge. "Deliberately storying and restorying one's life is a fundamental method of personal (and social) growth: it is a fundamental quality of education" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991, p.259). In terms of teams, regular
meetings provide a setting within which we carry on a continuous conversation in which we retell our classroom stories and reflect upon them.

One Coyotes team member in particular—Harry—describes how the team conversation fostered his voice. At the beginning of the school year, he was often silent, as he struggled to find his own connection with the middle school concept. Gradually, he was able to reconsider middle school teaching and learning, in the light of his own and his teammates’ experiences. He eventually became an active participant in the Oceans thematic unit, during which he restructured his classroom methods and experienced important realizations about middle school learners.

Harry’s experience illustrates how team members may model alternative solutions for one another to help us to connect theory with practice. At the same time, his previous team experiences point to the complexity of developing school and team environments that foster positive change. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule describe the connected classroom as one in which students feel empowered to take risks, to reveal the process of their thinking and to consider alternative solutions to dilemmas (1986, pp. 219-227).

Similarly, when teachers on a team understand, support, and trust one another, the team meeting becomes a safe place for sharing and we are encouraged to bring the processes of our thinking to light. When it works—when we are receptive to alternative voices, are willing to collaborate, and when we offer mutual support—we can help one another see more clearly the possibilities to hone our teaching craft in responsive ways.

We must attend to the subjective realities of our colleagues, if we are to co-construct a responsive learning environment for our students. The Coyotes experiences described in Chapters 7 and 8 point to the need for intervention and support to facilitate team effectiveness. Just as knowledge of the learning
styles or literacy strengths of our students can help us to engage them in
learning, so can attention to the teaching and learning styles of our colleagues
help us to engage one another in collaboration. Still, as the Coyotes example
illustrates, accommodation of differences is far easier than collaborating in the
light of differences. "Perhaps we should divide the roles in a cooperative
research project," I suggested in frustration. There was little incentive for us to
compromise and reconstruct practice together—to agree on assembly conduct,
or explore the positive effects of having two teachers with two points of view
advise students about their research projects, for instance.

Co-construction of team projects requires more than accommodation.
While the principal at Central Falls attended to differences among his faculty by
intuitively trying to balance teams ("I don't want any team to be perceived as a
weak team," he explained), teams were not given adequate support or training
to be able to cope with and improve team imbalance. As illustrated in Chapter 4
(Team Organization), from the beginning of the school year, Jill and I made
decisions and fulfilled team tasks without the voices or the labor of Harry and
George. We had neither the authority nor the motivation to establish a more
balanced reality of task completion.

Still, a climate of caring created by Jill and me had positive effects on the
team. Harry was gradually able to find his voice on the team through team
accommodation, modeling, and reinforcement. Though encouragement from
his team members, he identified team tasks that he was comfortable with, such
as structuring and leading the honor roll assembly. Gradually, he developed a
sense of agency as a middle school teacher. Through hearing the successes
of other teachers on the team in motivating students (the contracts that Jill and I
developed to encourage student choice and more individually paced learning,
for instance) he developed his own translations of responsive pedagogy.
Offering students a variety of modes for reporting on their free reading books is an example of his increasing flexibility.

In forming teams, teachers and administrators must attend to the complexity of weaving multiple strands of working professional knowledge that team members bring to their work. Attention should be paid to the effects of particular teacher voices on one another. An example is my own effect on Harry.

"At first," he confessed in our final interview, "you intimidated me. But then I began to say to myself, if she can try these things, so can I!

When Harry and I ran into snags about the collaborative structuring of Reading and Writing Workshop, he exhibited his emerging confidence when he requested that I not grade student book reports. "I really want to follow their progress in book reports over the course of the year," he explained diplomatically. Harry's experience is an important one to consider in terms of continued teacher development, especially among experienced teachers who are having difficulties. Through careful structuring of teams, and providing appropriate supports to team members, groups of teachers may encourage positive change in one another.

The effect of including a beginning teacher on a team is another important factor to consider. For the Coyotes, having Mary as an intern on our team increased our sense of authority and encouraged us to become more reflective about our work. We tried to verbalize our tacit assumptions to a higher degree, and improved our team communication as a result. Our commitment to Mary's projects increased our cohesion and encouraged more uniform compliance with co-constructed curricular plans.
Enriching Our Professional Knowledge

From the start, the Coyotes team is perceived by its participants as a safe place to tell classroom stories. While teacher conversations about students are often viewed as slam sessions, where negative typifications and gossip are generated and passed on, the Coyotes story suggests otherwise. As Chapters 5 and 6 illustrate, while the Coyotes returned again and again to familiar complaints about students "at risk," we were able to move on to enrich our knowledge of individual student needs through conversation.

There are important contextual factors to attend to, in order to increase a team's effectiveness in co-constructing knowledge about students. In the case of Scott (Chapter 5), we engaged in cooperative research about a student whom we typified as a behavior problem. By the end of the team meeting, we restructured our concept of him, based on more complete information and the comparing of classroom stories with the data. With the help of Scott's case manager, we crystallized new meanings and agreed to modify our classrooms in consistent ways, to help Scott learn.

It was the combination of conflicting voices with the standards and structures of the institutional reality that moved us on to co-construct more responsive solutions for Scott. In the institutional reality of Central Falls, shared commitment to individual student developmental needs was embedded in our title (Central Falls Middle School), our mission statement, and the tasks a team was expected fulfill. The time and space of a daily team meeting allowed us to reflect collaboratively. We sometimes validated one another's subjective knowledge, sometimes extended one another's reflections, and often conducted cooperative research as we tried to typify student behavior.

In the subuniverse of the Coyotes Team, weekly IEP meetings moved us beyond sharing stories about students to co-constructing strategies to help
them. The presence of a special educator at those meetings (Chapter 6), moved us toward a more responsive pedagogy, at least in terms of our "coded" students. Later, there is evidence that a more responsive model was carried over to work with other students. Harry, for instance, began to let go of his rigid interpretation of student progress (completion of nightly grammar assignments) by extending the oral book report option to other "at risk" students during the final term of the year. He recognized that student learning occurs in highly individualized ways, and, perhaps through the IEP conversation, began to feel empowered to modify the language arts curriculum to facilitate student connections with the curriculum.

**Co-constructing professional practices**

A year long view of Coyotes conversations suggests that the regular interaction of a group of practitioners can encourage new practice, revitalize old practices, and provide support for beginning teachers, as well as those who are experienced but marginally effective, to become what they had never dared to before. At the same time, the Coyotes story points to the importance of institutional supports for the evolution of professional practices through teacher conversations.

For a middle school team, knowledge of our students and their developmental needs lays the foundation for discovery of new meanings in our work. The Coyotes team's interdisciplinary Oceans evolved in response to questions about fostering authentic and active learning among our students. We employed important strategies that institutionalized our inquiry (data collecting and record keeping).

From the start, the unit was viewed as an experiment, apart from the authority of the established academic curriculum. That view freed us to restructure time and activities according to our individual interests and our
shared reality of the needs and interests of our students. Chapter 9 describes our planning sessions as a learning spiral, structured around Jacobs and Borland's steps for interdisciplinary unit development (1986). As we planned, we probed one another's stores of professional knowledge about curriculum and instruction. What we planned was a new construction, built as various teachers among the five participants found connections to the theme and stimulated one another's interest and understanding. The combination of an open planning structure at the beginning (brainstorming) with a gradually co-constructed organizational framework (note-taking, categorizing, George's overview of the unit arranged in a binder, student and teacher feedback forms) left room for individual connections while assuring commitment and follow-through by all team members.

The most important aspect of the Oceans Unit, related to our knowledge of team organization, was the incorporation of strategies for critical analysis of our unit construction. Chapter 10 describes our efforts to process the meaning of the experiment in curriculum and instruction. Considering what others have concluded about middle school curriculum (Beane, 1990; Lipsitz, 1984; and Lounsbury, 1988), the thematic unit could be a "brilliant moment" (Lipsitz, 1984) or turning point for the team in restructuring the academic curriculum (Beane, 1990). What could make the difference is the final aspect of our planning spiral-looking ahead to implications in our mainstream planning.

In our after school conversation to process the unit, we concluded which aspects of the thematic week were successful, based on anecdotal and survey evidence. We moved our planning cycle ahead from that analysis, choosing successful aspects of the unit to incorporate as a part of our team reality, such as implementing a rotating schedule so that each academic class met for a double period once a week, fostering student-selected interdisciplinary projects.
at regular intervals throughout the year, and fostering connections between in-
school and out of school learning. The conclusions that the Coyotes arrived at
through experimentation and careful observation of outcomes echo current
themes in school restructuring, such as "authentic learning projects" and
"performance based assessment."

Our experience suggests that in a climate of support and through the
perspective of multiple voices we are apt to find new ways to adjust and reapply
theories that have always been a part of our teaching repertoire, or to discern
applications for school restructuring efforts. Throughout the year, our
conversation centered around students at risk. Gradually, we established a
climate of trust within the team, in which we were willing to take risks together.
We embarked on a co-constructed curricular project that in part would address
problems of student motivation. In our reflective conversation, we focused on
student behavior and involvement. Finally, we ensured that our experience in
the Oceans unit would inform our future planning, through George's unit binder
and our special evaluative meeting.

While the setting of Central Falls Middle School allowed teams to
establish their own authority in terms of team organization and translations of
middle school pedagogy, there was little support for experimentation such as
the Coyotes embarked upon. There were few opportunities to share team
efforts either by grade level or in the wider school culture. There was no forum
through which our experience could inform the institutional reality of Central
Falls Middle School. In a middle school setting, strategies and structures such
as a school wide thematic week can become a setting for inquiry. Most
importantly, if such projects are to be co-constructions, and if teachers are to
experience the benefit of multiple voices in their daily problem-solving, a variety
of institutional supports must be provided. These may include regularly
scheduled inter-team planning and sharing sessions, access to outside facilitators, released time and stipends to support planning, and opportunities for teams to publish their results through a teacher's resource library, newsletters, or public exhibitions.

The Team as an Educative Place

The social setting of a middle school team should be acknowledged for its educative qualities. As the Coyotes experiences indicate, conversations among teaching team members extend the possibilities for professional development within our teaching context. When given authority to interpret broadly stated school policies, groups of teachers are able to create strategies and programs that are responsive to their collective interests and needs, and those of the students with whom they work.

At Central Falls Middle School, teams were given autonomy and authority to construct their own team organization within a block schedule, for instance (described in Chapter 4). Team established separate identities in the school through structuring schedules, class groupings, and their own translations of team enrichment period. By composing letters to parents and conducting group parent conferences, teams communicated their identities beyond the team.

To afford curricular projects the authority they deserve in a school culture--as an educative ventures for teachers--the conversation must be extended to the whole school. Requiring teams to co-construct interdisciplinary units yearly, providing opportunities to review and critique such ventures cross-team settings, and publishing team curricular projects are ways that the authority of teams can be extended in this realm.

It is important to reconsider our concept of what teams are for, as well as our concept of the origins of professional knowledge. When teams are viewed
for their potential as centers for application and generation of theory, they will be afforded the authority to continue the conversation between the practical and the theoretical. If teams are given the support to realize their constructive potential, they can become more educative places, for both teachers and students. The institutional realities of schools must attend to the balance of support and challenge for teacher teams, as well as other peer support groups for professionals. Teachers must be empowered to develop responsive solutions to daily teaching dilemmas, and to critically assess the results of their efforts.

Specific aspects of the Coyotes team history point to a variety of support strategies that would foster the educative qualities of teacher conversations. The combination of an open agenda for planning (the brainstorm stage) with strategies for record-keeping and categorizing (listing our ideas on the board, taking notes and distributing them, determining a strategy for categorization by consensus) facilitated inclusion of various members of the team in the planning spiral. Continuation of planning from meeting to meeting, and affording teachers flexibility in their activity planning resulted in more even participation and implementation of co-constructed plans. In our Oceans unit, despite the late arrival of George and Harry in the concrete planning of activities, they followed with individualized connections to the theme and the teaching methodologies we agreed upon (described in Chapter 9).

The team applications of theory embedded in our Oceans unit can be viewed as an example of experiential learning for the team. Dewey says that:

"The quality of experience has two aspects. There is an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness, and there is its influence on later experiences. It is the business of the educator to arrange for the kind of experiences which . . . engage his activities and . . . promote having desirable future experiences" (1938, p.97).
The excitement of our post-unit evaluative session describes how co-constructions can revitalize teams and prod the evolution of our professional knowledge (in the case of the Coyotes, this was especially evident from Harry). Similar experiences can be formalized through whole team attendance of summer curriculum planning institutes or multi-day workshops. In the context of the school, opportunities to share curricular constructions with other teams, and to participate in interdisciplinary planning with other teams can legitimize our work and encourage further evolution of team "experiments."

Evaluative conversations held at regular intervals infuse teams with the "thinking back, planning forward" cycle that Dewey says is the essence of education. This may be accomplished formally, through evaluation and goal-setting by teams at the beginning and end of a school year, or informally, through a device like the Coyotes team annotated agenda. The weekly routine of brainstorming on Mondays, revisiting our agenda throughout week, and recording our progress in the form of an annotated agenda institutionalized our reflective process.

Reconstructing the Concept of Professional Knowledge

For Clandinin and Connelly, the gap between school restructuring initiatives and changes at the classroom level originates in the one-directionality of knowledge generation about teaching and learning. Reddy (1979) uses the "conduit" metaphor to describe the one-directional view that learning is funneled down to the learner. In terms of Central Falls Middle School, this view is echoed in the authority of the traditional academic curriculum. Knowledge originates from above (School board approved curricula starting at the high school level, state standards, textbook series) and is applied from below. While it seems acceptable that teacher knowledge is always becoming, does this mean that we are continually honing our craft
situationally, or are we forever incomplete, continually needful of having professional knowledge handed down to us?

At Central Falls Middle School, the conduit metaphor persists, in relation to the official knowledge of the academic curriculum, as well as the middle school concept. Our applications of middle school theory of curriculum and instruction are compartmentalized and almost formulaic. Our shining moments of interdisciplinary and active learning are the yearly school-wide "Olympics" and the enrichment activities offered by some of the teams. Otherwise, curriculum and instruction persist in the junior high model: training students in the habits and skills necessary to succeed in the high school curricula. Active learning is unusual and seat work the rule.

Lytle and Cochran-Smith say that "teachers should be among those who have the authority to know—that is, to construct knowledge about teaching, learning and schooling" (1993, p.43). At Central Falls Middle School teams have a high degree of freedom to co-construct curricular experiments, but there is no reinforcement or encouragement to do so. Seldom are there opportunities for two-way conversations between teachers and policy-makers such as the superintendent of schools, school board, or state board of education. Never are teachers credited with the ability to initiate constructive change according to local needs, nor inform policy-makers about what is needed and what works.

The Coyotes interdisciplinary unit is a small example of the potential for contextual restructuring gone unnoticed. It was a chance to provide data to dispel Phil's concern about keeping students in day-long classes during the Oceans thematic week. From his point of view, the attention span of middle

44 The work of Lytle and Cochran Smith (1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1993) describes various applications of teacher research. They propose a new framework for knowledge based on the collection and analysis of teacher research. Knowledge about teaching and learning, they posit, is not a "stockpile," but "multiple conceptual frameworks that others can use in their own situations" (p.59)
schoolers would not tolerate sustained concentration on one project. While we learned otherwise, the results of our experiment never went beyond our team. In order to make the most of teacher generated practical knowledge, conversations should be fostered between teacher groups and policy makers on all levels. Teachers should be given authority and support to plan and implement change initiatives that are locally responsive.

In the eyes of the team, my position as researcher served to legitimize our experimental effort and the practical knowledge we generated. Mary's master's project engaged us in a higher degree of commitment to co-construct new teaching practices. The team established a reality of inquiry for the project and for processing of its results. The post-unit evaluation meeting relates the positive influence on our individual realizations about middle school teaching that resulted from the planning and implementing cycle.

Donald Schon says that "reflection involves some form of experimentation in which practitioners attempt to create meaning of the problematic aspects of a practice situation through problem-setting and problem-solving" (1983, p. 40). When a team is given incentive and support to structure its own solutions for the "problematic aspects of practice," we are able to generate aspects of professional knowledge in a contextual, practical sense. Schools that take on regular curricular and instructional research projects may encourage the evolution of professional knowledge and facilitate the co-construction of contextual solutions.

45 In chapter 2, I describe the interactive nature of my position and my inquiry, as a teacher and a researcher in the same setting.

46 Oja and Smulyan's study of the effects of action research on teacher development (1989) is an interesting counterpoint to my team study. Teams of teachers, chosen from a pool of volunteers on the basis of their various developmental levels, chose and carried out action research projects. The authors studied the effects of collaboration and research on participants in terms of adult development theory.
This study processes the socially constructive aspects of typical middle school team meetings and connects those aspects to the generation of working professional knowledge. By viewing the team conversation through the lens of the social construction of reality, I have illuminated the educative aspects of teams. Further study of middle school teams, through this and other lenses, should be undertaken to continue to explore the potential of the setting for professional growth, and the importance of teacher generated translations of systemic change. Other practitioners in other settings may connect with and learn from our stories, just as we are able to learn from the colleagues on our teams.

This study is an unusual longitudinal view of the work of a typical practitioner group. Through narrative and dialogue, it makes explicit the reality of middle school teaming practices, difficulties, and potentials. The methodology should be considered for future applications. By measuring theory against my own experience of working as a member of a middle school interdisciplinary team, I experienced the co-construction of working professional knowledge on a daily basis. Through retelling the team story as example, and through critically processing its meaning in terms of theory, I invite others to experience the work of this team, and to reconsider the work of their own practitioner groups.

The Coyotes team story is the story of my own "awakenings and realizations" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995, p.13) in terms of the professional development potential of a middle school team setting. The subtext is my own growth, as I made connections between theoretical knowledge and the practical knowledge of a team, between social theory and teaming practice. The work made explicit my own process of professional development: the continual reconsideration and revision of my craft in the light of daily teaching.
experiences. What emerged more clearly is the importance of collegial conversation in facilitating responsive teaching. My hope is that by taking a long look inside a team, and by interacting with my own process of interpretation, perhaps others will see more clearly what I have experienced: that the reconstruction and co-construction of professional knowledge is an every day reality for teams.


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