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ABSTRACT
        How one public school used its diversity to foster
community, while protecting itself from exclusivity, was studied. This study
challenges the assumption that a community-like ethos is impossible in an
urban neighborhood public school that has no special admissions requirements.
Case study methodology, with almost 250 hours of observation of classes,
school activities, faculty meetings, governance council meetings and parent
meetings, and semistructured interviews provided a portrait of Jackson
Elementary School, part of the Los Angeles (California) Unified School
District. In the fall of 1995, at the time of the study, the population of
the school was 92.6% Hispanic, and over 95% of the students qualified for
free or reduced-price meals. The school operated on a year-round schedule, as
it had for more than 15 years. The 1,170 students and 42 teachers were
divided into 3 tracks, each of which attended school for 2 months and was off
for 1 month. Experiences at Jackson School provide evidence that community
and diversity need not be in conflict. At Jackson, the individual was valued
and divergent opinions were protected so that people felt less need to defend
entrenched positions and more willingness to share. Through the celebration
of cultures and the recognition of a plurality of voices, the school used its
diversity to help strengthen community. School members were protected from
losing their individual identities because of their strong commitment to care
for one another and their mutual respect and trust. The freedom that teachers
had to teach in the ways they felt best was grounded in the trust that
faculty, staff, and parents had for each other. The negative characteristics
of community, such as exclusivity or intolerance, were counteracted by trust
and respect and the celebration of diversity. (Contains 42 references.) (SLD)

Community and Diversity in an Urban School: Co-existence or Conflict?

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association,

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Since the 1980s, there has been enormous interest in magnet schools, private schools, schools of choice and charter schools as the solution to what is ailing American education. Comprehensive public schools, it is argued, cannot do the job of successfully educating students because they are too large and impersonal (Ornstein, 1989; Powell, Farrar & Cohen, 1985), do not have a common vision or mission (Hill, Foster & Gendler, 1990), or have no motivation for students to do well when there are no consequences for poor student achievement (Chubb & Moe, 1990). In contrast, magnet schools, private schools, charter schools and alternative schools are viewed as able to be successful for the opposite reasons--they are generally smaller and more personal, often have a common mission or vision, and, because they do not automatically receive students or funds, must be excellent in order to be competitive with other schools.

In particular, these schools of choice have been touted as a solution to the academic failure of low-income urban students of color (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Hoffer, Greeley & Coleman, 1985; Jones-Wilson, Arnez & Asbury, 1992). This is accomplished, proponents argue, because of the shared values and common goals which such schools are able to adopt and the adherence to those values and goals which takes place through the self-selection into these schools (Bryk et al., 1993; Foster, 1992; Ratteray, 1992). This coming together around similar values is what Coleman (1987) has termed a "value community" (p. 197).

The argument that private or private-like schools are most likely to be successful in educating urban students of color because of their ability to share values, develop a community, and thus be able to accomplish their unified goals poses a threat to the ideal of comprehensive neighborhood public schools, particularly in urban settings. Proponents appear to be saying that schools can only be successful when made up of similar or homogeneous populations (at least in terms of shared values), or when they form a community by keeping certain (different) people out.

Thus, while many educators see the move toward community in schools as a positive and

much-needed step (e.g., Bryk et al., 1993; Sergiovanni, 1994), not all educators so enthusiastically call for "community" to be the centerpiece of educational reform. Instead, they point out the potential dangers and pitfalls associated with this concept (Hargreaves, 1993; Huberman, 1993; Noddings, 1994). Community has been negatively associated with restrictive, narrow-minded groups who either seek to impose a particular set of values on everyone or who maintain common values by keeping out those who differ (Peshkin, 1978; 1986). If shared values are necessary for producing community (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988), then questions must be raised about the desirability of promoting shared values in pluralistic public schools which are seeking to be inclusive, rather than exclusive. In this study, I was interested in seeing if community could be fostered in a way which allowed diversity to flourish and minimized the dependence upon shared values.

The study reported in this article challenges the assumption that a community-like ethos is impossible in an urban neighborhood public school which has no special admissions requirements. This article examines how one such school used its diversity to foster and cultivate community, while protecting itself from the "dark side of community" (Noddings, 1994) which tends toward exclusivity, particularity and intolerance.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Part of the confusion surrounding the discussion of community in schools stems from a lack of specificity about what is and is not meant by a term such as "community" in the context of schools. Writings from sociology and community psychology tend to define community in terms of relationships and shared values (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Tönnies, 1887/1957), but often fail to address concerns regarding the nature of those shared values, cooperative endeavors, rituals, mutual influences, and emotional connections, which is what skeptics fear. Teenage gangs share all these qualities, yet we would hardly embrace them as the model for public schools to adopt.

Philosophical writings provide a means for differentiating types of communities and protecting schools from the negative aspects of community which can develop over time and against which liberalism has repeatedly cautioned. Theologian Frank Kirkpatrick (1986) uses the work of Scottish philosopher John Macmurray to argue that communities formed primarily around self-interest, which he terms *atomistic/contractarian* and social theorist Philip Selznick (1992) calls *segmental participation* (e.g., the social contract), are not true communities. However, *organic/functional* models of community, which emphasize the common good and the function of each individual in serving the common good, are dangerous because they can easily subsume the individual within the group. Instead, authentic community (what Kirkpatrick terms *mutual/personal* and Selznick labels *communitarian liberalism*) is intentional, inclusive, heterogeneous, self-critical, mutually-binding, without evil intent, grounded in inclusive altruism, trust, and mutual respect (Bernstein, 1987; Kirkpatrick, 1986; Palmer, 1977; Rousseau, 1991; Selznick, 1992) , where "individual persons mutually relate in and through intentional love for each other for the sake of the other" (Kirkpatrick, 1986, p. 207). Just as good parents desire the very best for their own children, in an authentic community members desire the very best for all other members. The distinction between "my children" and "those children," for example, is broken down. This is what Selznick (1992) means by *inclusive altruism*.

Under this model, the school would not be good enough unless it were good enough for the teachers' and administrators' own children. There would be recognition of both the intrinsic worth of each person and the need to work together for the common good. Empowerment, along with a sense of ownership and responsibility for the school and its members, would exist among all stakeholders, including students. Leadership and participatory opportunities would be widely available. Finally, diversity, whether ethnic, religious, linguistic, or of opinion, would be celebrated and used to enhance the entire school community (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Selznick, 1992).

THE STUDY

To examine how one urban public elementary school manifested characteristics of a caring community in the midst of diversity, grasp the complexities of relationships between and among various members of the school community, and gain a variety of perspectives on the school's ethos, mission and goals, I conducted a single-site case study (Yin, 1989) over a period of one school year. The school studied was characterized by a positive climate and sense of community, effective site-based management, teacher collaboration and collegiality, significant parent involvement and enthusiasm, and student-centered curricular and instructional approaches. Case study methodology enabled me to examine what it meant to insiders and onlookers for a school to exhibit community, the process of cultivating a caring community, and the larger context in which this process took place, including the historical background of the school and the restructuring in which it was engaged.

The selected school was chosen based on recommendations from personnel working with urban schools undergoing reform. Achievement criteria were used partly as the basis for selecting the school, because of my interest in the relationship between effectiveness and community. While standardized test scores at the school were not stellar prior to the study, they were higher than other local public schools serving similar populations. Furthermore, the school had gained a reputation for instructional and curricular innovation and for success in implementing site-based management principles, and it had been cited by an independent evaluator as one of three schools undergoing restructuring in Los Angeles which were doing particularly well (McKinsey & Co., 1994).

Almost 250 hours of participant observation of classrooms, schoolwide activities, faculty meetings, governance council meetings, and parent meetings, along with semi-structured (audiotaped) interviews with students, parents, teachers and administrators regarding their perceptions of the school climate, culture, and ethos, were the primary means of data collection. Teacher interviewees were

chosen according to a stratified random sample by grade level and track. In addition, school and classroom documents were collected to provide historical and social context. These data coupled with field notes were analyzed using a modification of the constant comparative method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

THE SITE

Jackson Elementary School is located 16 miles from downtown Los Angeles and is part of the second-largest school district in the nation, the Los Angeles Unified School District. Adjacent to industrial and commercial areas, the school serves a neighborhood population residing in apartment buildings and tiny single-family homes. Due to the industrial nature of the area, the majority of the residents are blue collar workers or unskilled laborers. Many families are immigrants from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Families frequently move into and out of the area as jobs and apartment rentals change.

In spite of fairly high levels of transiency, the racial and ethnic composition of the school has changed only slightly in the past decade. The percentage of Hispanic students has increased steadily and stood at 92.6 percent in the fall of 1995. In contrast, the percentage of white students decreased from 11 percent to 3 percent during the same time period. The African-American and Filipino student populations remained fairly constant at about 2 percent each. From 1991 to 1996, enrollment at Jackson increased from 797 to 1170 students, 90 percent of whom were eligible for Title 1 services and 76 percent of whom were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Over 95 percent of the students qualified for free or reduced-fee lunches and breakfasts under the Federal Lunch Program, up from 82 percent ten years ago. In 1993, 26.1 percent of the students' families received AFDC, a higher percentage than most other schools in their region of the district.

In 1993, Jackson faculty and staff voted to become part of a new restructuring initiative in Los

Angeles, called LEARN, which stands for Los Angeles Educational Alliance for Restructuring Now. Spearheaded by educators, corporate and community leaders, LEARN's restructuring plan called for increased autonomy at the school level, particularly over budget, increased parent involvement in school site governance, integrated social services, and better professional development for teachers. Thirty-four schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District volunteered to be part of LEARN during its first year (1993-94), including Jackson. To become a part of LEARN, 75 percent of each of four "stakeholder" groups (teachers, administrators, parents, and classified staff members) at a school must agree to the decision. At the time of the study, over 150 Los Angeles schools were part of LEARN.

During the 1995-96 school year, Jackson was staffed by a principal, assistant principal, bilingual/Title 1 coordinator, full-time counselor, two special education teachers, and 40 regular education teachers (four of whom shared contracts), along with a variety of support personnel who provided services one or two days per week. Each of the 39 classes (pre-kindergarten through sixth grade) had a part-time aide, and additional aides provided support on the playground, in the library and computer center, and in the workroom. Twenty-two classes (kindergarten through sixth grade) were bilingual (Spanish and English), while fourteen were English-only.[1] The pre-kindergarten class had two sessions each day--one in English and one in Spanish. Special education instruction was provided in the student's primary language.

The administrators, coordinator and counselor were white females, and all but the counselor had some fluency in Spanish. Nineteen percent (8) of the teaching staff were male. Sixty-two percent

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[1] English-only classes were made up of both native English speakers and children whose native language was not English. The latter group was further divided into two groups: Spanish-speaking children whose parents preferred that they be enrolled in an English-only program, rather than in a bilingual program, and children whose native language was something other than English or Spanish, but for whom the school could not provide instruction in their native language (e.g., Vietnamese, Tagalog, Armenian). English-only teachers provided ESL and sheltered English instruction for those students who were Limited English Proficient.

were white (26), one-third were Hispanic (14), and there was one African-American and one Filipino teacher. Most of the classified staff were Hispanic, and all classroom aides were bilingual. Many of the classified staff lived in the community near the school, and several either attended Jackson as students or their children attended the school.

Due to overcrowding, the school operated on a year-round schedule, as it had for over 15 years. The 1170 students and 42 teachers were divided into three tracks. Each track attended school for two months and then was off for one month. The tracks were staggered so that only two tracks were at school at any given time. Teachers roved every month between the 26 classrooms. Because this schedule resulted in fewer instructional days for each track, the length of the school day was increased to make up the difference. Due to the year-round schedule, the only extended time when no classes were in session was the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. The school year began in early July and ended in late June.

FINDINGS

Some educational literature implies that community and diversity are unlikely to co-exist. There is evidence that schools which are more homogeneous in terms of race and ethnicity, higher in SES, smaller in size, and able to select their students are more likely to evidence communal school organization than those schools which are more heterogeneous, lower in SES, larger in size, and not able to pre-select students (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Fuller & Izu, 1986). Jackson School provides an interesting contrast to the norm with its fairly heterogeneous student and teacher populations, its low-SES, its large size (for an elementary school) and the fact that it is a neighborhood public school which admits students based on no special criteria. Analysis of Jackson in relation to the question of diversity surfaced three major themes: (a) Diversity flourished at Jackson, in terms of the student and teacher populations, the way the school responded to diverse student needs, and its encouragement of divergent

opinions. (b) Diversity helped Jackson keep the dark side of community in check by its very nature as a neighborhood public school, its support for minority viewpoints, its emphasis on shared leadership, and the way in which shared values were kept broad and symbolic. (c) Community and diversity were mutually supportive. Familiarity, not similarity, was what mattered in helping community thrive. Each of these themes are examined in more detail below.

Diversity Flourished at Jackson

Diverse Population

Jackson Elementary School was typical of many schools in urban settings in having a high percentage of low-income, language-minority students. But neither its student population nor its staff were homogeneous. While most students were of Hispanic descent, there was significant variation in the English proficiency with which students arrived at school, the length of time these students had lived in the United States, and the students' country of origin. In addition, there was a substantial number of students whose first language was English, particularly those of African-American and European descent, or whose first language was something other than English or Spanish (e.g., Russian, Arabic, Vietnamese). And though most students came from low-income backgrounds, the students whose mothers were teachers at Jackson, along with a small group of other students, came from middle-class and professional backgrounds. In addition, the ethnic make-up of teachers was quite diverse, with a small minority of African-American and Filipino teachers, a significant percentage of Hispanic teachers, and a large group of Anglo teachers.

The school also represented a great deal of diversity in terms of religious background and affiliation. Most Hispanic students came from a Catholic background, but students were spread across a broad spectrum of faiths. For example, two white children were involved with a fundamentalist Christian church in the area. Almost every class had one to four students who were Jehovah's

Witnesses, and therefore did not participate in the morning flag salute or in celebrating holidays.

Teachers also were active in a number of different religious faiths, including Mormonism, Jehovah's

Witnesses, Roman Catholicism, the Episcopal Church, the Unitarian Church, evangelical Christian

churches, and Judaism.

The teaching staff, while not surprisingly mostly female, included eight male teachers (19

percent), substantially higher than the national average of 11.6 percent (Hill, 1996). There was also a

wide range of age and experience among the faculty. Eight teachers were in their first or second year

of teaching, and nine teachers had over 15 years experience. Many were married and had young

children, but a considerable number had adult children, were single, or were married but did not have

children. Classified staff ranged from college freshmen with little job experience (including one

former Jackson student) to senior citizens, some of whom had been at Jackson for more than two

decades.

Responding to Diverse Needs of Individuals and Groups

Jackson staff members verbalized their awareness of the diversity of needs represented among

their students and sought to address those needs in a variety of ways. For example, students who were

new to the United States from Spanish-speaking countries were placed in bilingual classes, but the

English level of those classes was often well beyond the newcomers' abilities, particularly in the upper

grades. The coordinator, recognizing this problem, began to hold a Newcomers' Class twice a week,

where she worked with fourth, fifth, and sixth graders who needed assistance in learning basic English

vocabulary. In classes, these students were mentored and assisted by fellow students who naturally

took on such roles. In addition, the school instituted a Reading Recovery program in the fall of 1995

and had five teachers currently being trained and tutoring first grade students who were reading below

grade level.

The Guidance Committee, made up of administrators, the school counselor, the school psychologist (who visited one day per week), and the teachers and parents of students being discussed on any given day, met weekly and provided a mechanism for discussing struggling students and recommending appropriate action, including referrals for special education testing, as needed. The school counselor (still deemed a luxury on many elementary campuses, but considered an essential staff member at Jackson) also met with students individually and in groups to help them cope with family problems, learn how to develop prosocial behavior in the classroom, learn how to cultivate friendships, or resist pressure to join gangs or engage in substance abuse.

Multi-grade classrooms were a fact of life at Jackson, representing over half the classes there. Teachers took it for granted that they would have to deal with multiple levels of reading ability, English-language ability, mathematics ability and maturity in their classes, and they deliberately chose curriculum and pedagogical approaches which were adaptable and flexible enough to be appropriate for these wide ranges of skill and developmental levels. Teachers were concerned that they did not know how to adequately address all the needs in multi-grade classrooms, so they began using their Professional Development Days to address those needs. The entire staff voluntarily received training in Scottish Storyline,[2] which provided a "natural vehicle" for working with multi-grade classes, because of its student-centered, constructivist approach. The new mathematics program was similar in philosophy. In addition, some teachers paired up to regroup students for ESL instruction because they recognized that a wide range of English proficiency existed in their classes.

There was officially one gifted class at Jackson, but it also contained students in the class who were not designated as gifted, and the class had three grade levels in it (Grades 3-5). Placement in the

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[2]Scottish Storyline is an integrated, thematic model of instruction built on constructivist principles. "It relies heavily on children's previous experiences, provides children with real life problem solving, and makes education meaningful to children" (LEARN, 1994, p. 3). Teachers receive five days of off-site training for the initial implementation level.

class was based on a wide range of criteria, including teacher recommendation, not solely on the basis of a standardized test score. There was also one Special Day Class for students who were severely emotionally disturbed or had other fairly severe behavioral or learning disorders. Most designated special education students were mainstreamed in regular classes and visited the Resource Specialist for supplemental instruction in their needed area, usually reading or mathematics. Both the gifted class and the Special Day Class were well-integrated into the mainstream school culture. The classrooms were not distinguished from other rooms in any way, the students in these classes integrated throughout each day with other students, and their teachers participated in all faculty activities, including training, meetings, lunchroom participation and roving between classrooms.

Because of such a wide range of skill and ability levels in each classroom, teachers adopted a number of instructional strategies to meet individual needs. Cooperative learning groups were common strategies observed. These groups were heterogeneous, although in the case of mathematics, they were usually separated by grade level. Students were expected to assist one another in everything from appropriate behavior to problem solving and completion of work. Most classroom projects and assignments were given to pairs or groups to complete, including building pyramids to scale and preserving the internal organs of mummies (a fifth/sixth grade classroom), researching marine biology (a second/third grade classroom), illustrating core literature to learn about setting (a first/second grade classroom), or discovering multiple solutions for a pre-algebra activity (a third/fourth grade classroom).

It was also not uncommon to see three or four levels of work assigned to various groups of students, particularly in reading. Some teachers had as many as six non-permanent reading groups because they wanted to be sure to address the particular needs of each child, not easy to do in classes of 30 or more students. Shifting membership in groups was common, especially in classes with students

transitioning from Spanish reading to English reading. Each student made the formal transition after passing a Spanish reading assessment and oral English assessment, but there was a great deal of variation in the speed and ease with which English reading skills were acquired.

Although teachers acknowledged that it was difficult to meet the needs of all their students, they did not see it as a hassle--it was the expected way of doing classroom business. In one K-2 class, older students were seated next to younger students to provide ongoing assistance. When a younger child had a problem, a typical comment from the teacher to the older partner was: "You have to show her because she's little and doesn't know that yet." Then the teacher might say to the younger child, "Vicky, it's okay. Anna will show you. You're not supposed to know that yet."

Teachers too had diverse needs and the school was flexible in responding. For instance, when one teacher sustained an injury which made walking difficult and painful, another teacher willingly traded classrooms so the injured teacher could be closer to the center of campus. Beginning teachers were given mentors and had special lunchtime meetings to address issues pertinent to them, such as conducting parent conferences and completing report cards. Teachers who had more experience with computers provided one-on-one assistance to those with "techno-phobia."

Parent needs were also handled flexibly. Translation of written materials and in meetings was standard procedure. Parent Education Meetings addressed a broad range of topics generated by parents themselves, and ESL and computer classes provided parents with skills needed to assist them in job searches and day-to-day living. In addition, classes held both during the day and at night assisted parents who desired help in parenting skills. School personnel also helped parents with non-school-related problems, such as trying to find housing for a mother who had recently been evicted from her apartment. Sensitivity to individual needs, along with an ability to work out compromises, helped Jackson deal with a wide range of needs among its stakeholders.

Encouragement of Divergent Points of View

Jackson's previous principal (1986-1992) asked prospective teaching candidates to spend a day at Jackson in order to interact with teachers. Though she made the final decision regarding hiring, she sought the input of the teachers regarding how a candidate "fit" in terms of personality and philosophy. As a result, teachers who were hired understood the overall philosophy of the school regarding curriculum and instruction, particularly in relation to the bilingual program and student-centered approaches to learning. While the Personnel Committee instituted under LEARN operated somewhat differently, there was still an effort to ascertain whether teachers understood and agreed with the overriding philosophy and practices of the school. This was also fostered by the informal way in which Jackson teachers recruited their friends to apply at Jackson when positions became available. As the current principal said, "You don't bat a thousand, but our batting average is pretty high." Yet the school was also committed to hiring teachers who "won't be bullied into a particular teaching style" and who "are very independently minded and free thinking." Consequently, there was often a wide range of opinion on how to accomplish goals or what priority to place on budget items.

Nevertheless, there was a climate of tolerance toward and encouragement of differing opinions at the school. In decision-making situations, minority viewpoints were encouraged. While decisions regarding curriculum, budget expenditures and administrative policies were generally made by consensus or majority, it was not uncommon for a person with a dissenting opinion to convince others to change the way they viewed the situation. Parents, teachers and classified staff all expressed the view that they felt heard and respected for their ideas and opinions. Of course, there were still conflicts and differences of opinion, but the school fostered an environment where it was safe and legitimate to express an opinion, even if that opinion was not widely shared, as evidenced by numerous discussions at faculty and LEARN (governance) Council meetings on such topics as computer technology,

effective reading curriculum, and the use of categorical funds to purchase equipment.

Interestingly, on several occasions, teachers gave me their unsolicited opinions, often in public settings like the teachers' lunchroom, about curricular or organizational decisions with which they were not in agreement, and backed up their opinion with relevant data. Yet these same teachers communicated that they were quite content at the school and not interested in leaving. One teacher, who otherwise had many positive things to say about the school, felt that bilingual students were not moved quickly enough into English reading. Typically, though teachers might not agree with one particular decision, they often expressed enthusiasm over other decisions which had been made and new programs being implemented. Teachers appeared to feel free to express their views in both private and public settings, and this was confirmed by the comments one teacher made in an interview:

> The majority of the faculty, I would say, is pretty much able to express their feelings....Most of the faculty, I've seen at some time or another, will say what they're thinking....I think most of the time, [the dissenting voice] gets heard. In fact, I've seen times that someone's brought something up and...you see all of a sudden, it shifts directions completely....I have not seen many of the staff members be timid to express their viewpoint, whether it was agreed with or not.... And though there are some things that have kind of been decided, this is the direction we want to go, as far as in terms of Storyline, in terms of Mathland, I haven't seen anybody going around patrolling classrooms, and saying, "You will do this." And there are some teachers who are very up-front about, "Okay, I am just not doing a Storyline right now. I'm doing this and this."...I've certainly felt that I have had the freedom to teach in the way I thought best...There are some teachers who are not using Mathland, and I haven't seen anybody stomping their feet about it.

Thus, teachers were free not only to express divergent viewpoints, but also to make curricular

and instructional decisions which might be different from where the school as a whole had chosen to go. Though most teachers were using the hands-on mathematics curriculum, thematic teaching, and core literature, there was no condemnation of teachers who felt more comfortable with mathematics textbooks, science and social studies units, and basal readers. Training and implementation were typically voluntary. All teachers chose to participate in training for Scottish Storyline, including one teacher who was a year away from retirement, and most evidenced implementation of new curricular models, including Storyline, in their classrooms. The administrative staff recognized that for true change to occur, teachers needed to feel a sense of ownership. Thus, they never pushed teachers into training or new curriculum, but allowed teachers to freely choose. Most did (Fullan, 1991).

In classrooms, there was repeated evidence of students being pushed to look for alternative solutions and to express differing views on issues. One second/third grade class almost came to blows in creating their fictional society as part of a Storyline because some students wanted the law to require that Christmas be celebrated while other students, including two Jehovah's Witnesses, argued that they should not make that mandatory. The teacher used the situation to allow the students to explore differing beliefs and respect for those differences. In a third/fourth grade class, the teacher sought multiple solutions to a mathematics problem and encouraged divergent thinking and strategies.

Furthermore, teachers recognized that even though most students were Hispanic, a variety of cultural, ethnic, religious and language groups were represented at the school. Care was taken to gear the educational program toward all students, not just those who were Limited English Proficient or of a particular culture or religion. For example, the holiday program in December featured songs in English and Spanish, songs about Hanukkah, Christmas and winter, traditional Mexican dances, and stories from other continents. Jackson recognized its diverse population, the diverse needs of its stakeholders, and the necessity of tolerance toward divergent opinions and views.

Avoiding the Dark Side of Community

Noddings (1994) and others have written about the dark side of community--those negative characteristics, especially exclusivity, particularity or intolerance, totalitarianism, and the loss of individual identity, which can destroy whatever good there might have been in a community. Communities can become exclusive--building their sense of belonging by creating boundaries which keep others out (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), which, critics argue, is what often happens in elite private schools. Or they can manifest particularity or intolerance, where only certain ideas are valued and admitted into the community (Noddings, 1994). Organizations on both the left and right (e.g., Planned Parenthood and Citizens for Excellence in Education) often fall prey to this characteristic. In addition, communities can become totalitarian (Kirkpatrick, 1986), where the leader controls everything that community members do and think. Cult leaders such as Jim Jones and David Kouresh led such types of communities. Finally, communities can become so focused on the common good that the individual's identity and needs become lost or undervalued (Hargreaves, 1993). Well-meaning communities, including many churches and non-profit organizations, can burn out their people by being so focused on the mission that the needs of individuals are neglected.

A school which is seeking authentic community must address these concerns in a proactive fashion. Jackson School operated in ways which either avoided or minimized the dark side of community, and its ability to allow diversity to flourish was intricately connected with this.

Exclusivity. The very fact that Jackson was a neighborhood public school with no special enrollment requirements meant that it was by its very nature an inclusive place, at least for students. Because all children were within walking distance of the campus, their parents had the ability to access the school's resources much more easily than if the students were bused across the city. In addition, the mostly bilingual faculty and staff helped Spanish-speaking parents feel included and welcome at

Jackson. Furthermore, the principal's Open Door policy physically demonstrated the desire to be open and inclusive, since all were welcome to come into her office.

Particularity and Intolerance. The encouragement of divergent opinions, as noted in the previous section, was a primary means of combating this particular negative characteristic of community. Recognition that Jackson stakeholders were very diverse, with unique needs, and differing but legitimate opinions and styles, helped to keep the community from becoming skewed or intolerant of difference (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). They acted upon the belief that "likeness and difference, community and diversity are not opposed to each other but in some sense require each other" (Rousseau, 1991, p. 78). As I wrote in my field notes one day after two months at Jackson, "I have seen similar ideas in different classrooms, but there is certainly a lot of freedom for teachers to implement ideas in their own ways."

In particular, teachers expressed the view that they felt trusted to do what they thought was best for their students. One teacher articulated his feelings this way:

I would describe [Jackson] as a place where I feel treated like a professional. I've gone to Mrs. [Paul, the principal] countless times and said, "I'd like to do this. Can I do this?," and she says, "Why are you asking me? Do it." Whereas before, it was like, boy, if you didn't clear something with the big honcho, forget it. And I feel treated like a professional. I feel respected by my colleagues. And I feel like the decisions that I make are--they matter, and they're trusted. When I wanted to go against the Master Plan of the district--ooh, boy, I'm putting this on tape--the Master Plan says I'm supposed to still be teaching Spanish reading to my fifth and sixth graders. I went to [Helen, the coordinator] and [Leah, the principal] and I said, "I know what the Master Plan says, but these kids are going to middle school next year. I am not going to teach them Spanish reading!" And they said, "Well, of course not. You have every right to

make that decision. You're the teacher." Now our last coordinator would have hung me by the yardarms for not following the Master Plan. But [Helen] and [Leah] both said, "Go for it, you're absolutely right! We trust your judgment." And I'm like, "Wow, what a concept!"

In addition, Jackson's shared values were broad and symbolic, able to be interpreted and implemented in a variety of ways. There were shared values at the school, but they were kept at a high enough level of abstraction that there was plenty of flexibility in how they were lived out. For example, one theme which consistently emerged was the desire on the part of the school staff to do "what's best for the kids." Staff and parents concurred that everyone at the school was in agreement about wanting that. Nevertheless, because teachers had the freedom to attend training and implement curriculum according to their beliefs and styles, the one or two who felt more comfortable using math textbooks, for example, were able to do so. Other teachers respected their teaching styles because they were in fact all committed to doing what was best for the students. And because teachers shared their ideas with one another so readily, those teachers who were reticent about trying new approaches often came on board gradually after hearing other teachers' success stories. This was particularly true in the training teachers received for Scottish Storyline and the new reading curriculum. Because they were not forced to change, they were able to try new things when they were ready. And because everyone believed that they were all committed to doing what was best for the students, they trusted others' decisions which might have been different from their own.

When disagreements arose about what was best for the students, they could be taken to faculty meetings or the LEARN Council for discussion and decision. Appeal to expert information, whether from highly-respected faculty, the principal or an outside source, was often used to help move past impasse. The "force of the better argument...permit[ted] reaching a justified consensus" (Sirotnik & Oakes, 1990, p. 48) because everyone agreed that they wanted to do what was best for their students.

For example, in a discussion at a faculty meeting of how to improve literacy among Jackson students, one of the senior primary teachers, Mary Graves, repeatedly gave her opinion based on the conferences and training sessions she had attended, and the issue was easily settled in the direction Graves believed was best. This was not just blind deference to Graves but was based on her obvious expertise in the area being discussed. She had a well-deserved reputation among Jackson teachers of being outstanding in helping students learn to read. While everyone present agreed that improving student literacy was essential, the way in which that was to be accomplished was able to be discussed and negotiated. Perceived experts were persuasive but not demanding that things be done in a particular way.

However, this did not mean that an "anything goes" or "laissez-faire" philosophy reigned at Jackson. Selznick (1992) articulates both the need to "respect the right of an individual or group to fashion a salient, self-defining principle from some aspect of morality" (p. 530) and the need on the part of the organization or community to "safeguard...*belief* but limit...*conduct*, especially conduct that brings harm to others" (p. 531). Thus, when Jackson administrators had spent two years working with a teacher who was very harsh with the students, yet saw very little change, they strongly advised the teacher to take early retirement, which she did. Another teacher did not celebrate holidays because of her religious convictions, but she understood that she had a responsibility to prepare her class for participation in school programs. She was able to find a way that protected her own beliefs but allowed her students to fully engage in the community's celebrations.

Totalitarianism. The emphasis on shared leadership at Jackson helped to protect the school from the narrowness of thinking characteristic of some communities, and particularly over-dependence on a leader. Jackson had virtually eliminated a vertical hierarchy and had embraced horizontal power with widely-shared knowledge, decision-making and contributions (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). Decisions which affected the whole school community were discussed and decided through consensus

and voting at LEARN Council and faculty meetings. Many issues were delegated to committees made up of teachers, parents, and classified staff, who then came back and reported their recommendations or decisions to the group as a whole. Principal Paul was excited that inadvertently they had planned a Professional Development Day on a day when she and the assistant principal had to be absent from the school. The Staff Development Committee took charge of the day, planning a variety of training sessions which were either led by teachers or by an outside expert. The principal was able to relinquish control over these and other areas of the school, and she obviously celebrated the increasing teacher (and parent) leadership at Jackson. Shared decision-making and leadership helped protect the school from squelching divergent viewpoints.

Selznick (1992) writes, "The covenant of reason, like any other covenant, presumes consensus, a *shared resolve* to prefer and perfect dialogue and deliberation....The covenant of reason...is reflexive and self-critical" (p. 525). Similarly, Sirotnik and Oakes (1990) propose a framework of "critical inquiry" as a means of bringing about fundamental change in schools. Drawing on the work of Jürgen Habermas (1971; 1979), Sirotnik and Oakes (1990) argue that "critical reflection demands that participants be aware of how educational structures, content, and processes are linked to the social and political forces inside and outside the school" (p. 47). By raising the consciousness of school participants to become aware of how values and beliefs influence school culture, decisions and relationships, by developing "the methodology of critique" (p. 48) in schools, and by involving stakeholders in a critical inquiry process "characterized by free exploration, honest exchange, and nonmanipulative discussion of existing and deliberately generated knowledge" (p. 49), Sirotnik and Oakes believe that a "responsive, renewing climate in schools" (p. 49) is possible. At Jackson School, critical inquiry manifested itself in the intense faculty discussions over how to best promote student learning and literacy, and debates at LEARN Council meetings over how best to spend precious dollars

in the service of student learning. Nothing was a given--there was a willingness to throw out what had been done before and start all over if necessary to accomplish the goal they had all (including classified staff and parents) corporately agreed upon: "Roscoe's vision is for a community connected school where all children are valued and learn to become educated thinkers and caring members of society."

Loss of Individual Identity. Jackson School members were protected from losing their individual identity because of their strong commitment to care for one another, their recognition of the intrinsic value of each person connected with the school, and the mutual trust and respect which pervaded the institution at all levels (Kratzer, 1996). The freedom that teachers had to teach in ways they thought best was grounded in the trust that the faculty, staff, and parents had for one another--a belief that all were committed to doing what was best for the students. In addition, school members actively sought to meet individuals' personal and professional needs, thus keeping the primacy of the individual as an important value within the community. Selznick (1992) states, "The comprehensive community--the unity of unities--has an overriding concern for the well-being of individual persons" (p. 521). Furthermore, "no individual's well-being is more worthy of consideration than any other's" (p. 483) because "all persons have the same intrinsic worth" (p. 483).

Noddings (1994) provides several recommendations for avoiding the negative side of community in schools: (1) Balance the teaching of communitarianism and liberalism in social studies; (2) Ask ourselves and our students what we might believe or how we might live if we had been born in another culture, time or place, so that we can learn to recognize the contingency in community; (3) Draw on people and traditions which rely on ideas, not just symbols and written covenants; (4) Provide the continuity in schools that is required of genuine community; (5) Be cautious about building communities on common beliefs, instead building them on relationships themselves; (6) Build community around the notion of caring relations; and (7) Use the topic of "community" as a central

theme in critical thinking, so that students learn to resist unhealthy conformity or the temptation to think of their community as superior. Several of these recommendations were evident at Jackson.

Community and Diversity Can Be Mutually Supportive

Jackson School provides evidence that community and diversity need not be in conflict. While community can keep difference from becoming so much an issue that it continually divides, diversity can enhance community by allowing creative processes to bring about better solutions, and diversity can protect a school from negative and undesirable elements which exist in some communities. Nevertheless, there is often still a perception that diversity and difference are what keep people separated.

However, drawing from findings in biology, Morningstar (1996) argues that what draws people together into groups is not so much <u>similarity</u> as it is <u>familiarity</u>, and conversely, what keeps people separated is not difference as much as it is unfamiliarity. She illustrates this point with examples from two types of biological findings, one a controlled laboratory experiment and the other an observation in the wild. The latter observation, conducted by Ian Rowley, involved two species of cockatoos (galahs and Major Mitchells) which were differentiated by their calls, flights, and diets. Galahs and Major Mitchells had apparently laid eggs in the same nests at one point in time, but the Major Mitchells were stronger and chased off the galah parents. When the eggs hatched, the Major Mitchells cared for the galah chicks as if they were their own. These galah chicks learned to use the calls of the Major Mitchells, to fly much more slowly than was natural for their species, and to eat the diet of Major Mitchells (hard seeds and nuts) despite a bill which was not well suited for this purpose. When visiting galahs called to the adopted galahs, they did not respond. In other words, familiarity was the basis of response, not similarity. Morningstar (1996) concluded that "this preference for the familiar is adaptive" (p. 3).

Jackson School recognized that if people did not know each other, they would not be able to work well with one another, and therefore, a great deal of emphasis was placed on activities and events which helped people build relationships with one another. They recognized that familiarity was critical in bridging cultural, linguistic, educational, religious and other differences which existed between and among stakeholder groups at the school. In addition, the sheer size of the school and the numbers of people there made it difficult for people to get to know each other well, particularly because so many teachers had been hired in the last few years and student enrollment had increased so rapidly.

Principal Leah Paul deliberately instituted team-building activities when the school went through its initial restructuring phase in 1993 so that school stakeholders could learn how to work toward consensus and build connections. These kinds of activities continued over the years, because new people were constantly coming in and needed to be acculturated. For example, at a Professional Development Day in January 1996, teachers completed a crossword puzzle written by the administrators, which highlighted something about every teacher in the school, thus providing information and affirmation at the same time. During the first year of LEARN, the whole staff, including office personnel, custodial staff, classroom aides, teachers, and administrators, along with parent representatives, were involved in formulating the vision statement for the school. A year later they engaged in an Open Space activity, where faculty and staff could pursue the problem areas they were most interested in tackling. Through these kinds of activities, staff (and to a lesser extent, parents) got to know each other and learned how to collaborate. In addition, staff luncheons, group training, and classroom potlucks helped people build relationships with one another, giving them a foundation for accepting others' viewpoints. In other words, fostering familiarity helped to bridge diversity and difference.

CONCLUSION

Webb, Wilson, Corbett and Mordecai (1993) write that, "Conflict [between school stakeholders] tends to occur around 'borders' that define the cultural and political terrain within and around which these groups operate" (p. 25). But because at Jackson the individual was valued and divergent opinions protected, there was less need to defend one's turf or domain, and more of a willingness to freely share with one another. This resulted in a greater variety of, and often better, solutions to complex problems.

> When the organization is willing to give public voice to the information--to listen to different interpretations and to process them together--the information becomes amplified. In this process of shared reflection, a small finding can grow as it feeds back on itself, building in significance with each new perception or interpretation....The simple process of iteration eventually reveals the complexity hidden within the issue. From this level of understanding, creative responses emerge and significant change becomes possible (Wheatley, 1992, p. 115).

In addition, through the celebration of cultures, languages, and various forms of artistic and musical expression, and through recognition of "a plurality of voices" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991, p. 69), including classified staff who had never before had a voice, Jackson used diversity to help strengthen community. Their experience was much like that of a researcher and two practitioners who collaborated in an elementary classroom. They wrote about that experience:

> This trust, a trust that allows individuality and community, is not the kind of trust you develop by saying that you trust someone, or knowing that you *should* respect someone. The trust that really matters in our work is homegrown and rooted in shared trials in which we have dealt with our diversity and repeatedly demonstrated to one another that our respect for that diversity is deep and genuine [emphasis added]. In our conversations, we have also come to realize that

this is the very trust we are committed to developing among our students. It is a trust that

allows us to hold different values, to live different lives, a trust that would enable our students

to embrace their own diversity and make the most of it in our collective learning. (Wilson,

Miller & Yerkes, 1993, p. 103)

Jackson Elementary School illustrates that community and diversity can co-exist,

complementing one another, while protecting the school from the dark side of community. It provides

a model in which a diverse staff and student population can use that diversity to enhance the school

community, rather than allow it to degenerate into factions and infighting. In turn, this diversity

actually strengthens the school and allows for more effective teaching and learning, as evidenced by

increased scores on standardized tests and alternative assessments by Jackson students.

As management consultants Margaret Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers articulate (1996),

Stability is found in freedom — not in conformity and compliance. We may have thought that

our organization's survival was guaranteed by finding the right form and insisting that everyone

fit into it. But sameness is not stability. It is individual freedom that creates stable systems. It

is differentness that enables us to thrive. (p. 41)

Social theorist Philip Selznick (1992) bluntly states that "a proper understanding of community,

from a sociological point of view, presumes diversity and pluralism" (p. xi). Jackson Elementary

School understood this principle. It is hoped that it can provide a model for other schools wrestling

with how to build a sense of community in the midst of pluralism and diversity.

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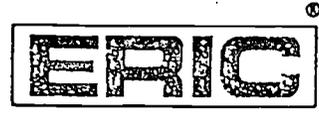
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