

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:
BRIDGING THE COMMUNITY AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

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Schools and communities can work together in many ways for mutual benefit: improved academic success and community vitality. In three papers, this dissertation presents evidence for the value of school-community interactions. The first paper highlights the possible synergy of the education, community studies, and institutional theory literatures as a way to theorize place-based education as a particularly beneficial type of school-community interaction. Separately, findings from a study of school-level decision making suggest that the most local communities are, if not more, influential on educational administrators as their broader institutional and professional environment, which runs counter to literature on the topic (e.g., Arum, 2000). Finally, findings from a case of a single elementary school situated in a larger set of communities describe the multiple ways a community can be defined from the community and school perspectives and emphasize the function of the most local professional environment for school leaders. Additionally, this case offers a description of the partnering activities of one isolated school. Together these three papers argue that the most local community in which a school exists can be a valuable partner and play a role in school-level decision making. These activities and others can enhance school-community connections in order to benefit students, families and communities.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hope completed a Masters of Science degree at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland with a thesis comparing the school closure policies in Midlothian, Scotland to those in West Virginia, her home state. Hope also completed a Masters of Arts at the University of Virginia in Social Foundations of Education. Prior to and while pursuing her degree at UVA, Hope taught elementary school at The Free Union Country School. Hope graduated from Haverford College in 2000 with a degree in History of Art and a concentration in Education.

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INTRODUCTION

In the history of schooling in the United States there are numerous examples of the tension between local and non-local control over schools. Early schools in the United States were fundamentally local entities with communities hiring their own teachers, constructing the buildings, supplying wood for heat, and providing for other needs. With local control, comes the influence of local beliefs, including varied expectations for standards and the abilities of various children. For example, in early America many young women were denied education, as were children depending on their family's country of origin or religion. In contemporary times local beliefs continue to limit educational access with diminished expectations of poor or minority children that can result in unequal educational achievement.

Nineteenth century reformers attempted to counter this local control with a standardization movement in the form of the Common School. These schools allowed access to all students including girls, immigrants, and children of varied religious backgrounds. This move toward less local control and increasingly homogenous schools was continued by the quest for the 'one best system' throughout the 20th century (Tyack, 1974). For example, a belief in an optimal enrollment size for schools led to the closure and consolidation of schools in hopes of attaining increased levels of efficiency and educational offerings. And currently, the push for national standards is an example of this quest for a homogenous public school system.

Traditionally, this tension between the local and non-local influences on a school is constructed to favor the non-local over the local because of the belief in the value of a homogenous educational system rather than a network of schools dominated by varied local beliefs. This homogenous system is understood to offer equal education by providing the same opportunities to children across the country regardless of the zip code of their birthplace. The network of locally dominated

schools is understood to undermine this equal opportunity to education by creating schools that adhere to different standards and expectations based on local values. Demonizing local control and placing complete faith in a nationalized system creates a false dichotomy. There are benefits and detriments associated with both levels of influence: local and non-local. Can a balance be struck between these viewpoints where equal educational opportunities exist for high quality education for all students without entirely removing the influence of local values and beliefs?

One obstacle to this balance is that in order to maintain uniformity and to continue their work unhampered from parochial local needs and goals, it is now understood that schools tend to commonly isolate themselves from their communities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978). Institutional theory argues that schools cannot be blamed entirely for this behavior as it has allowed them to continue their core activity of educating students, secure the necessary resources to do so, and maintain their professionalism by avoiding the scrutiny of observers and the whims or fads presented by outsiders (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978; Meyer & Rowan, 2006; Rowan, 2008). In other words, buffering educators from local community influences allows for a more efficient and effective educational enterprise. Nonetheless, this practice of buffering has created schools that are islands in their own communities – operating under a strong influence of non-local curriculum and professional standards and a weak influence of local needs and standards. If schools were more responsive to their local communities could they better meet the needs of students, families, and communities?

Although the local versus non-local tensions affect all schools, rural schools offer an excellent context for research. The sheer size of many suburban and urban school districts complicates the investigation of school-community connections. In contrast to isolated rural settings, larger suburban and urban settings have markedly more “noise” in the system making it more difficult to detect the phenomenon being

researched. Rural communities and school districts, with relatively few external interventions, are small enough that a single researcher or small group of researchers can study the varied forms of school-community connections without the complications and distractions of a “noisy” research context. In addition, the community and school leaders can speak to the interactions of the school and community with an authority that no leader in a larger district could manage again because of the size. It is reasonable to expect that the superintendent and principal know all the local educators, know all the local community leaders, and know all the partnerships and interventions bar none. The literature review in the first paper focuses on the role of the rural school in its community and the related educational and community development aspects. In the other two papers, I report the findings from studies conducted in rural schools and districts.

Many small rural communities are struggling with the loss of industry and jobs, shrinking populations, and the array of effects of an increasingly urban-centric and globalized economy. In many of these places, schools contribute to the process of population decline by educating students with the skills that will remove them from their community with success defined by college attendance and careers often only found in urban centers (e.g., Corbett, 2007; Carr & Kefalas, 2009). The central question is whether rural schools can strike a balance allowing them to both educate their students for success in a global economy as well as act as engines of community service and development for their most local towns?

School-community connections can be forged using many approaches. There are many roles a school can play in regard to community development. Schools can act as partners to their community and generate human and social capital that can benefit the students, families, and community (e.g., Hanham, Loveridge, & Richardson, 1999; Howley, 1994; Dewees & Velázquez, 2000). School buildings can

act as community centers bringing the community in for social services centralized in the school building or for participation in the education of community's children (e.g., MacKinnon, 2001). Moreover, teachers and students can go into communities through service learning projects, internships, entrepreneurship programs, or volunteer activities, thereby allowing the community to benefit from the expertise and resources of the school (e.g., Versteeg, 1993; Sher, 1977). Schools can also be attentive and responsive to their localities through a pedagogy of place that includes a critical examination of the local history, politics, geography, environment, and culture in the core activity of the school: education (e.g., Sobel, 2005; Smith, 2002; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Gruenewald, 2003; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995; Theobald, 1997; Theobald, 2006). Beyond these roles in community development efforts, there are important school-community connections that can enhance both the school and the community. Central to these connections are the two types of interactions on which I focus in my research: (1) parent and community involvement in the school and in the decisions made at the school-level and (2) partnering activities between the school and community.

In the three papers that follow, I examine school-community connections with attention to the question of how schools can become increasingly responsive and attentive to their immediate locality. In my first paper, I theorize the connections of school and community by presenting the important synergy possible in reading across the educational, community studies, and institutional theory literatures. In the second paper, I report my findings from a study of the decision-making processes of rural school administrators in connection to their Universal Pre-Kindergarten programs. In particular, I examine the influence of the most local community and the broader institutional community (Arum, 2000) in these decisions. In the third paper, I detail my findings from a case study of a single rural elementary school situated in a non-

rural school district. This case study focuses on the definitions and understandings of community and the partnering activities of the school from the perspectives of the school staff, the parents, and community members. Using these three approaches, I present an investigation of the practice and an assessment of value of school-community connections, particularly in rural communities, and the role of partnering, place-based education, and community involvement in school-level decisions.

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THEORIZING THE INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

Abstract

School-community connections are a complex and crucial subject for teachers, parents, community members, politicians and policy-makers, educational administrators, pre-service teachers and leaders, and educational researchers. A broad conception of school-community connections includes partnerships as well as community influence in school-level decision-making. In this paper, I consider school-community relationships through the two major areas of impact: educational improvement and community development. I explore potential theoretical treatments of this nexus of school and community, especially the varied definitions of community in the sociological literature (e.g. Bell & Newby, 1972; Warren, 1978; Wilkinson, 1991; Selznick, 1992), the view of schools in the institutional literature (e.g. Meyer, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978; Sipple, 1999; Burch, 2007) and the role schools are called by the literature to perform in communities (e.g. DeYoung, 1987; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Miller, 1995; Mulkey, 1992). I contextualize this current moment of tension for schools and communities in a broader movement of localism (e.g. Crowson & Goldring, 2009; Theobald, 1997, 2009; Hawken, 2007). Within this movement, I argue that alongside community influence in school decision-making and school-community partnerships, the development and implementation of place-based education can combine the educational and community development goals with the end result of stronger students, schools, communities, and ultimately, a stronger nation.

Introduction

School-community connections are a complex and crucial subject for teachers, parents, community members, politicians and policy-makers, educational administrators, pre-service teachers and leaders, and educational researchers. Evidence suggests that students, families, and communities fare better when schools and communities can work together (e.g., Sanders 2001, 2003, 2008; Melaville, 1998; Nettles, 1991; Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Lyson, 2002). These connections can take multiple forms and have varied goals, outcomes, and benefits. A broad conception of school-community connections includes partnerships as well as community influence in school-level decision-making. It is helpful to consider the school-community relationship through the two major areas of impact: educational reform and community development. In this paper, I approach the educational components through an investigation and review of partnerships and place-based learning. Finally, I discuss community development through an exploration of the ways schools are viewed as levers or engines for community development.

Beyond this discussion of these two components of school-community connections, I explore potential theoretical treatments of this nexus of school and community, especially the varied definitions of community in the sociological literature (e.g. Bell & Newby, 1972; Warren, 1978; Wilkinson, 1991; Selznick, 1992), the view of schools in the institutional literature (e.g. Meyer, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978; Sipple, 1999; Burch, 2007) and the role schools are called by the literature to perform in communities (e.g. DeYoung, 1987; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Miller, 1995; Mulkey, 1992). The definition of community is increasingly complicated with the influence of the global on the local and the tensions created as we now, thanks to technological advancement, can be more closely connected to people across the country or the world rather than to our next-door neighbors. Schools are immersed in

this global-local tension (e.g., *A Nation at Risk*, *Goals 2000*, *Race to the Top*), facing a complex set of goals with benefits to individuals as well as the state and society. Not to mention that the society to which schools much be responsive is increasingly a state- or national-level society rather than a local community-level society (e.g., Theobald, 2009). An institutional perspective on schools suggests that they isolate and buffer themselves from outside inspection and influence in order to maintain legitimacy, flow of resources, and the undisturbed core function of instruction (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978). Combining this complex set of definitions of community with a history of avoiding outside influence leaves educational administrators, teachers, parents, and community members in a bind as they attempt to engage in school-community relationships. For these reasons, it is necessary to examine the existing conditions for school and communities from a number of perspectives.

Background

It is necessary to note that beyond the varied ways I examine these issues between schools and communities, there are many others. There is a history of school consolidation, closure, and district mergers to consider, which have their own tensions in presentation, argumentation, and research (e.g., Tyack, 1974; Sher, 1977; Peshkin, 1978; DeYoung, 1987; Wood, 2008). In addition, there are global-local tensions derived from the processes and conceptualizations of globalization, modernity, and mobility (e.g., Corbett, 2007, Giddens, 1990; Urry, 2007). In this section, I highlight some of these arguments and theoretical lenses as background information to help bound the present analysis and review; however, these are not the focus of my analysis of school-community connections. I conclude with my own location of these issues in the realms of institutionalism, community development, and new localism.

Over the course of the 20th century and continuing into the 21st century, many small and especially rural schools and school districts faced decisions about closure

and consolidation. The number of schools in 1929-30 was approximately 248,000 and by 2006-07 this number had decreased to 99,000 (see www.nces.ed.gov). Many of the decisions of closure and consolidation were made due to financial arguments about economies of scale that can be found in districts and schools serving greater numbers of students. Other arguments have been made about the necessity of a particular size of school in order to offer the educational opportunities that children deserve. Regardless of the arguments used, the loss of a school for a community can be troublesome, socially and economically.

Taking their cues – or their legitimation – from Conant’s pronouncements that high schools should be no smaller than 100 kids per grade, legislators in virtually all states have closed own small rural community schools, condemning these places to a hopelessness about their vitality – present and future. We have sent the message – via our policy choices – that community is unimportant. In its place has come the message that life is about getting ahead, keeping up with the Jones’s of having things your way. (Theobald & Curtiss, 2000, p. 106-7)

In addition to this legacy of closure and consolidations, small schools and districts continue to consider these paths in light of fiscal constraints, as well as legislated incentives and even requirements. The state of Maine, for example, legislated that all districts serving fewer than 2,500 students must merge with other districts. Other states, including New York State, have considered policies mandating a minimum school district size (1000 students). In light of the history and current efforts that can result in the loss of schools for small communities, it is necessary to consider the role of a school in its community and the ways that schools and communities can work together for mutual benefit.

In addition to this history and the continued pressures for closure,

consolidation, and mergers, there are the tensions provided by globalization. In the U.S., global competitiveness is often evident as a motivation for school reform and desires for increased student achievement (e.g., *A Nation at Risk*, *Goals 2000*, *Race to the Top*). The inclusion of the local context in schooling is thought to run counter to these global needs and demands. In addition, anecdotes from teachers describe being caught in the middle between educating students to the highest standards, which often means they leave their home communities, and following parental wishes to educate students for the local job market. Corbett (2007), although in a Canadian context, describes how schools are inherent with lessons of mobility and students are in fact *Learning to Leave*. Carr and Kefalas (2009) describe the process of *Hollowing Out the Middle* that is occurring in a mid-Western community (and others across the U.S.) where those most successful in school are the “Leavers”, while those least successful in school are often the “Stayers”, and most unfortunate for the communities are the small number of “Returners”, those that have left for higher education and return to their home community.

In addition, theories of social reproduction (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1976/2007) and sites of power in communities (e.g., Gaventa, 1982) are important to consider in light of school-community relationships. Many parents avoid school engagement because of negative experiences in schools and many communities remain distanced from a school that holds a deficit perspective of the families it serves. While these histories of consolidation, discourses of modernity and mobility, and theories of social reproduction undergird my work they are not the theoretical frames through which I consider the school-community relationship.

In this essay, I contextualize this current moment of tension for schools and communities in a broader movement of localism (e.g. Crowson & Goldring, 2009; Theobald, 1997, 2009; Hawken, 2007). Within this movement, I argue that alongside

community influence in school decision-making and school-community partnerships, the development and implementation of place-based education can combine the educational and community development goals with the end result of stronger students, schools, communities, and ultimately, a stronger nation. Place-based schooling can also bridge the local-global divide, maintain high educational standards for all regions, schools, and students, and offer an approach to diversity that emphasizes community-level awareness of local history, culture, politics, geography, and environment. Place-based education (e.g., Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Theobald, 2006) not only combines the community development and educational components of the goals of school-community connections, it also recognizes what the institutional literature has revealed in regard to the tendency of schools to isolate and buffer themselves from outside (perhaps especially local) influences. Place-based education can meet the high standards of today's educational needs, play a role in community development efforts in all types of communities, and allow schools to ease into community involvement through the curriculum rather than through other forms of community integration (i.e., activities outside the school building that are not primarily academic) that may run counter to usual school practices. This type of community involvement can strengthen school-community relationships because it taps into the core function of a school, meaning the academic instruction, rather than being an add-on that is not a priority of educators. These topics are explored by approaching the literatures with the following questions:

1. From an educational perspective, how are effective school-community relationships defined and discussed in the educational literature?
2. From a community perspective, what are schools called to do in connection with effective community development efforts?

3. From an institutional perspective, how can the call for school-community relationships be understood in light of the active isolating and buffering of outside influences often practiced by schools?

School-Community Connections

American schools developed as local institutions established by and beholden to a specific community. In the 19th century communities would establish a school, build a building, hire a teacher, and collect funds to sustain it without the aid or involvement of state or federal governments (e.g., Rury, 2002; Tyack, 1974). Despite the increased involvement in the form of policy making and funding from state and federal governments, schools are still under a great degree of local control. Local schools boards are highly influential in the funding, staffing, and general functioning of schools. This close connection between schools and communities in regard to control and funding is not always matched with connections based on activities, curriculum, and engagement. Meaning, although local communities are involved in schools by levying and collecting property tax, they are not necessarily involved in the day-to-day learning activities of students. From the origins of public schools up to the present day there have been calls for schools and communities to be more completely intertwined. These calls have been wide-ranging including having schools resemble small communities, having students engage in community service, bringing expertise from the community into the school to enhance the curriculum, and much more. In this section, I define and explore school-community connections as having educational components and community components, meaning that the task of forging relationships or the goals and benefits of them may be more oriented toward the school or the community.

Educational Components

The responsibility of creating or maintaining school-community connections

often resides with school leaders. This can be a challenge for administrators busy meeting the demands of students, parents, teachers, unions, policymakers, and state and federal governments. In this section, I describe two potential educational components of school-community connections: partnerships and place-based curriculum.

Partnerships: definitions, types, goals, and motivations.

The definitions of partnerships in the educational literature are varied, with some being quite broad and vague and others being quite particular and specific. Sanders (2001) offers the following definition: “School-community partnerships, then, can be defined as the connections between schools and community individuals, organizations, and businesses that are forged to promote students’ social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development” (p. 20). While this is a comprehensive definition including the relationship, the potential partners, and the range of possible goals, I find it too focused student outcomes for my work. As an example of a more basic definition, in *Learning Together: A Look at 20 School-Community Initiatives* (1998), which was prepared by the Institute for Educational Leadership and the National Center for Community Education, Melaville offers the following definition of initiatives: “intentional efforts to create and sustain relationships among a K-12 school or school district and a variety of both formal and informal organizations and institutions in the community” (p. 6). This definition is broad and about the relationships between organizations rather than goals or activities. Bauch (2001) also uses a broad definition focusing on the relationship at hand: “Partnerships are built on social interaction, mutual trust, and relationships that promote agency within a community” (p. 205). My work requires a definition that combines Melaville’s and Bauch’s because Sander’s is limited by specifying the goals of a partnership within the definition.

Sanders and Harvey (2002) articulate categories of partnerships (see Table 1.1), the ways schools use partnerships (e.g., student and family support, school improvement, community development), and the obstacles faced in the process of partnering (e.g., lack of time, burnout, lack of partners). Similarly, Bauch (2001) articulates categories of connections between schools, communities, and families; however, she describes not the types of partners but rather important elements to consider, especially in rural communities. For example, she includes social capital and sense of place as resources present in small, rural communities, which can be tapped through school-community connections. In addition, she includes the categories of parent involvement, church ties, school-business-agency relationships (partnerships), and using the community as a curricular resource.

Table 1.1 Categories of Partnerships (Sanders & Harvey, 2002, p. 1347)

1. businesses/corporations	6. national service/volunteer organizations
2. universities and educational institutions	7. senior citizen organizations
3. government and military agencies	8. cultural and recreational institutions
4. health care organizations	9. other community-based organizations
5. faith organizations	10. individuals in the community

The literature on school-community partnerships often begins with an articulation of the vast social problems that inhibit the work of the school, which can best be answered by partnering with various social services agencies and community organizations (e.g., Heath & McLaughlin, 1987; Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Sanders, 2001). In other words, there are so many pressures on schools, students, and families that schools cannot single-handedly do the job of education, but can maximize their efforts by reaching beyond their walls and partnering with other organizations to best serve the needs of children. More specifically, partnerships may be used to increase student achievement. Examples of this may be business partnerships that bring

expertise or equipment into classrooms. Although on the surface academic achievement is often viewed as the central work of schools, it is not the dominant reason for partnering, at least based on its relative lack in the literature compared to other categories of motivation. I find partnering is more often viewed as a way to improve the conditions in the lives of students, families, or the school so that the work of educators can occur with fewer obstacles; therefore, improved student achievement becomes a byproduct rather than a focus of partnerships. The motivations for partnerships I find most prevalent in the literature are for school reform and improvement, support for families, community development, and the creation of a sense of place for students. For the sake of this essay, I focus on the creation of a sense of place. I describe these other categories in greater depth in other work (see paper 3).

Directly related to Crowson and Boyd's (2001) view of a new lens for educational reform, are partnerships that can be used to create and nurture a sense of place in children through interaction with both the people of a community but also the natural and physical place. The motivation for this work comes from several fields including environmental education, civic education, and rural education. For Theobald (1997; 2006) the question of bringing the community into the school in order to develop a sense of and connection to place is based on historical traditions of community rather than individuality and is related to the work of Putnam (2000), contemporary communitarians, as well as educators like Deborah Meier (e.g., 2002) and John Goodlad (e.g., 1984). In a similar vein, Gruenewald and Smith (2008) have collected a series of essays about educating for place in their edited work, *Place-Based Education in the Global Age: Local Diversity*. This volume includes descriptions of theory and practice related to the ways teachers can and do include place as a central piece of their pedagogy. These pieces articulate close relationships between schools and communities as teachers work to bring students closer to their physical and natural

surroundings. It is necessary to note that not all partnerships are motivated by the desire to develop a sense of place for students; nor does all place-based education include partnering. In the following section, I describe place-based education as a separate educational component from the partnerships defined in this section.

Place-based education: Definitions and motivations.

Place-based education, at least the name and current work, has its roots in the work of Sobel (2005), Smith (2002), Gruenewald (2003), Nachtigal (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995), and Theobald (1997; 2006), in the past two decades. The roots go much deeper in the history of schooling in the United States. Dewey is often cited as an inspiration in place-based education (e.g., Smith, 2002), as are the projects that followed in his footsteps during his own lifetime (i.e., Clapp's community schools). Foxfire, a project using cultural studies in Georgia in the 1970s, is often referred to by those involved in the current place-based schooling movement (e.g. Smith, 2002).

Smith (2002) describes place-based education and says "its aim is to ground learning in local phenomena and students' lived experience" (p. 586). Theobald (2006) states that "place-based curriculum and instruction capitalizes on the crucial role of context in human learning" (p. 316). Theobald (1997, 2006, 2009) stresses the importance of including community in schooling and employs historical, philosophical, and political analyses to sketch the reasons why schools in the U.S. are distanced from community and in what ways a cultural shift could attend to this distance, which he characterizes as problematic.

The community itself can become a kind of curricular lens to view the utility of history and mathematics or the aesthetics of music and art. Place-based teachers routinely ask themselves what kind of community contributions students can make through the development of understanding in traditional school subjects. (Theobald, 2006, p. 330)

Semken (2005) defines place-based teaching as a curriculum “in which the physical attributes of the cultural, historic, and socioeconomic meanings of places (i.e., sense of place) define and infuse content and pedagogy” (p. 151).

In a synthesis of the literatures of place-based education and critical pedagogy, Gruenewald (2003) notes “place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit” (p. 3). He finds that a connection between these two literatures comes in the form of a critique of a current assumptions of the U.S. public school system that schooling “should mainly support individualistic and nationalistic competition in the global economy and that an educational competition of winners and losers is in the best interest of public life in a diverse society” (p. 3). Tolbert and Theobald (2006) review two arguments supporting the place-based schooling movement:

The first is based on currently ascendant views related to how people learn and the variety of ways they can be intelligent. The second is based on an alignment between education and the full range of life experiences congruent with the human condition. (p. 271)

Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) call schools to re-create their communities in order to meet the needs of students, in particular they demand that schools should help communities and student understand their place.

[Understanding one’s place] ought to be the chief curricular focus in schools for several reasons. First, it promotes the time-tested learning power of combining the intellect with experience. Second, the study of place addresses the shortcomings inherent in our overly specialized, discipline-based view of knowledge. Third, it has significance for re-socializing people into the art of living well where they are. Finally,

knowledge of place – where you are and where you come from is intertwined with knowledge of self. (p. 134)

The motivations and curricular focus they describe necessitates a shift in traditional understanding of schools and the role of the school in a community and in the lives of students and families. This is the work of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members who seek to engage in the practice of place-based schooling.

It starts with teachers and school administrators viewing community well-being as one of their professional obligations. That view changes everything. Unfortunately, such changes will continue to happen only here and there, haphazardly, unless policymakers begin to see the sense and urgency of promoting the value of community – which is one of the original aims of free public education. (Theobald & Curtiss, 2000)

The nature of place-based education means it is inherently different from place to place and school to school and it takes the work of teachers and administrators to uncover what the educational relevant aspects of a particular location may be.

“Teacher should recognize the fact that no matter where they are, no matter how deteriorated the neighborhood might be, math, science, music, art, literature, and history surround them” (Tolbert & Theobald, 2006).

Smith (2002) emphasizes that because place-based education is essentially varied based on the particular location in which the work unfolds it is challenging to describe the practice; however, he forms categories of the examples he has observed. He notes that cultural studies and nature studies are often used as the basis for place-based schooling. In addition, he sees teachers using real-world problem solving and entrepreneurial-based projects to connect their teaching to the students’ communities and lived experience. Finally, he describes projects that focus on the induction of students into the community processes and he believes this might be the most

comprehensive method and most true to the theoretical underpinnings of place-based schooling. Smith (2002) writes, “The aim of this approach is to turn schools and the young people they serve into genuine intellectual resources that can be tapped by government agencies and others in efforts to address important community needs” (p. 591). Smith (2002) also finds common elements across the types of place-based schooling. He sees that local phenomena become the basis for the development of school curriculum and that students become creators of knowledge and that their questions become the guide to the schooling process. In addition, he sees that teachers become “experienced guides, co-learners, and brokers of community resources and learning possibilities” (p. 593). And finally, Smith observes that “the wall between school and community becomes much more permeable and is crossed with frequency” (p. 593).

Community Components: School as Community Development Engine

Schools are under pressures from numerous directions to educate *all* students to higher levels and be accountable for improvement in achievement while under intense fiscal stress with tighter local and state budgets. The traditional academic idea of a school in the United States does not include community development as one of its responsibilities and now, with increased pressures and fewer resources, may seem like the wrong time to broaden the role of the school. However, times of stress can lead to innovation and schools across the country are finding ways to increase their efficiency and provide improved academic programs through school-community collaboration. Examples of collaboration run the gamut from shared services to using schools as community centers. The notion of an expanded role for the rural school is not new in the rural education literature (e.g., DeYoung 1987; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Dewees & Velázquez, 2000; Miller, 1995; Mulkey, 1992). The types of roles and specific examples of school involvement can be considered through 4 categories:

economic models (human capital development), partnership models (social capital development), school as community center models, and community as curriculum models (sense of place development). These categories are connected to specific development efforts, which are listed following the category headings. These categories are not mutually exclusive and overlap in practice as described in the reviewed literature.

Economic model: Human capital development.

From an economic perspective, the typical role of schools is to prepare students to join the work force. DeYoung and Theobald (1991) describe this as a modern notion and one that places the preparation for a job beyond the local economy above the importance of community and place. Tensions can exist between what can be perceived as the parochial nature of small communities (i.e., locally-based education) and the goal of preparing students for a national or global economy (i.e., a compelling state interest); however, examples from the literature suggest that schools have found many ways to encourage students and schools to be involved in a local community while providing an education including nationally marketable skills.

In this model, students gain skills and knowledge in school and thereby increase their human capital. The overall increase in human capital at a community level can be seen as a form of community development as business and industry may seek to relocate to places with skilled potential employees. This has become increasingly important as economic restructuring has led to a shift away from extractive industries, such as farming, mining, and logging, and toward an increase in the manufacturing and service sectors (Van Hook, 1993), and the information economy more recently. The new economy requires new skills, skills that are not always needed or valued in individual rural communities. Van Hook (1993) also suggests that while schools create human capital, they also play an additional

economic role by attracting businesses because companies are more likely to relocate to an area with good schools as an incentive for their employees with children. Alternatively, the literature speaks to the development of entrepreneurial skills and the creation of school-based enterprises as important pieces in the process of rural community development (Hanham, Loveridge, & Richardson, 1999; Sher, 1977).

Critiques have been levied against the notion of schooling as a purely human capital development project (e.g., Howley, 1994; Mulkey, 1992). For example, Howley (1994) observes that learning is different from an investment in human capital and that education is better conceived in ways other than in relation to future earnings. He states that since the institutional role of schooling is not agreed upon it leaves space for rural schools to alter this economic construction of schooling as human capital development. Mulkey (1992) presents rural schools as places to prepare the future workforce and then challenges this as a limited notion:

The argument presented here implies a more crucial role for schools in the development *of* rural communities in addition to any contribution to growth *in* communities-that distinction between development and growth is more than semantics. (p. 14)

Mulkey does not dismiss all elements of schooling related to participation in the workforce; for example, he recommends that schools develop leadership and entrepreneurial skills in students. He expands this notion of school-as-preparer-of-human capital to include the broader needs of the local community.

Deweese and Velázquez (2000) describe schools as being “both well positioned and obligated to contribute to human capital development” in their work on a community in Texas with a majority Hispanic population. They widen this idea to include that schools can also focus on the development of business and leadership skills as well. Beyond human capital development, Deweese and Velázquez (2000)

describe schools as being in a position to create community social capital.

[S]chools can go beyond merely successfully fulfilling their educational responsibilities for the younger generation of the Hispanic population. By also teaching students practical business skills and leadership skills, they can contribute to capacity building in their local communities. By providing social services, such as health care and adult education, they can further contribute to the social development of the local community. By working hard to engage parents in their children's education, working to increase trust in the educational institution, and encouraging collaboration among parents and educators, they can work to build community social capital that is critical to both community development and educational achievement. (p. 216-217)

In these ways they establish a wide range of ways schools can be involved in creating, enhancing, and maintaining a vibrant local community.

One form of school-based development that can be viewed as economic is the school-based enterprise, as conceived by Sher (1977). This concept serves to teach and develop the business, entrepreneurial, and leadership skills of students, while also creating a new business or partnering with an existing business to provide a service to the local community. Sher helped develop REAL (Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning) Enterprises in the 1980s and the curriculum is now used in over 40 states at all educational levels, elementary through adult (www.cfed.org). However, due to the diversity of rural communities this program may not translate well in every context:

[T]he REAL program may not suit every situation. For example, rural areas with a tradition of coal mining can be characterized as having a

history of negative images of entrepreneurs (embodied as coal operators who controlled the town). In coal-mining communities it may be hard to overcome ingrained tendencies to distrust those who are their bosses. (Hanham, Loveridge, & Richardson, 1999, p. 127)

This quote emphasizes the importance of the context in regard to the role the rural school can play in community development. This passage does not suggest that there is no form of entrepreneurial programming that could work in a place with a history of extractive industry and skepticism of entrepreneurs. I argue that place-based education is well suited to areas where the local history is often viewed as a barrier to educational efforts. Place-based education allows for a critical examination of the local community and may expose the connection between the local history and the school, thereby laying the groundwork for the success of programs like REAL.

These authors display the variety of ways that a rural school could follow an economic model and approach community development through the creation of human capital. This may once have been a preferred model, as characterized by DeYoung (1987): rural development as vocational education, business partnerships, and school-based enterprise. However, it appears a shift has occurred based on critiques of the economic model (e.g., Hanham, Loveridge, & Richardson, 1999; Howley, 1994) and the application of the economic model only in conjunction with other roles (e.g., Dewees & Velázquez, 2000). Vocational education, workforce development, and the generation of human capital in general have certainly not been dismissed as roles of the rural school; however, I find that these aspects of schooling to be discussed in more recent literature as facets of the role of school as community partner.

Partnering: Social capital development.

Schools and communities are increasingly partnering with one another in the hopes of forming mutually beneficial relationships. Partnerships come in all shapes and sizes including relationships between schools and health organizations, civic groups, other schools, institutions of higher learning, businesses, and churches. Partnerships derive strength from the networks that are formed, which can be described as community social capital. In the same way that the individual human capital in the previous section can be viewed on the aggregate level as community human capital, so too can social capital, although this notion is debated in the literature (Flora & Flora, 2001; Luloff & Bridger, 2001; Schafft & Brown, 2003). For the sake of this section of the literature review, a brief and limited examination of social capital theory in connection with community will be required.

Putnam examined communities in Italy (1993) and the U.S. (2000) making connections between democracy, community well being, and social capital, as measured in part through social networks and group membership. An important distinction has been made in social capital theory between bonding and bridging ties, where bonding ties are among homogenous groups of people who usually know each other well, while bridging ties are those between people from heterogeneous groups who are much less well-known to each (Putnam, 2000). While each is important within a community, Flora and Flora (2001) stress the importance of a balance of within community ties and outside ties.

Although the social capital development role of schools can best be exemplified through partnerships it has additionally been portrayed from an equity standpoint, where schools can serve to ensure that student have equal access to the social capital networks within a community (Driscoll, 2001). Nonetheless, authors have pointed to partnerships as a method of community development in which schools

can be involved and which schools can initiate. Although not in a rural context, Shirley (2001) describes the rapidly increasing numbers of partnerships among schools and religious organizations due to legislation during the most recent Bush administration supporting and providing funds for faith-based organizations to provide services needed in communities, including to public school students. “One promising facet of collaborations between faith-based organizations and public schools relates to religious assets in poor communities that orthodox school improvement strategies entirely exclude” (Shirley, 2001, p. 234). This notion of mobilizing the assets of communities, including churches, is highly applicable in urban and rural areas alike where churches are strong community institutions.

In another example, Schafft, Alter, and Bridger (2006) describe a technological-based school and community partnership in a rural Pennsylvania district. The project was primarily focused on improving the education provided to local students; however, “educational improvement and community development were viewed not as competing agendas, but as inextricably linked with educational benefits multiplied by community benefits” (Schafft, Alter, & Bridger, 2006, p. 2).

In another rural specific article, Bauch (2001) writes about school-community partnerships in rural areas and emphasizes the role of leadership, school and community renewal, and the development of a sense of place.

The purpose of this article is to explore how a school-community partnership model of school renewal might be an appropriate means by which rural school communities can improve their educational processes. Such a model capitalizes on a community’s sense of place and other distinctive features of rural school communities. Central to a partnership model of school and community is a reexamination of the goals and purposes of rural schooling. (Bauch, 2001, p. 205)

Bauch (2001) finds six types of connections to be considered in “developing an authentic school-community partnership model” (p. 205). These connections include social capital, sense of place, parental involvement, church ties, school-business-agency relationships, and the community as a curricular resource. These types of connections are clearly related to the following two categories of this review: school as hub of community and use of community as curriculum in school. The overlap of these subjects is evident; however, the community development approaches remain distinct. The next category seems to serve as a bridge between the partnership model, where the school formally partners with the community, and the use of the community as curriculum, where the school can be connected to place more informally. The school as community hub epitomizes the connection between school and community by informally blurring the boundaries because the walls of the school become permeable to the local community.

School as community center.

Schools have long served to connect people in small communities where few other institutions draw membership from as large a segment of the population as public schools do. Schools serve as source of community identity: one need only imagine a Friday night high school football game between close rival towns to have sense of the ways schools can serve as a source of local identity. Schools, as physical locations, also act as meeting places, particularly in areas lacking the resources to provide community centers or other such buildings.

An early example of the school as the community center can be found in Hanifan’s (1916; 1920) instructions for rural educators. Working in West Virginia in the early 20th century, Hanifan emphasized the role of the school in community development, especially through the creation of social capital, a phrase that he is credited for having coined (Putnam, 2000).

In the use of the phrase *social capital* I make no reference to the usual acceptation of the term *capital*, except in a figurative sense. I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of a people, namely, goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit, the rural community, whose logical center is the school. (Hanifan, 1916, p. 130)

Hanifan describes a success story from his time in West Virginia and the list of accomplishments speaks directly to the school's roles in community development and the roles he describes span the categories of this review, centering primarily on the use of the school as community hub and use of community as curricular study. The accomplishments include: a community survey, community center meetings, an agricultural fair, a community history compiled by students, a survey of school attendance, evening adult literacy classes, fundraising for school libraries, and the development of school athletics. Hanifan (1916) concludes that this work was successful because it was not done for or to the citizens but rather in partnership with them:

Tell the people what they ought to do, and they will say in effect, "Mind your own business." But help them to discover for themselves what ought to be done and they will not be satisfied until it is done. First the people must get together. Social capital must be accumulated. Then community improvements may begin. The more the people do for themselves the larger will community social capital become, and the greater will be the dividends upon the social investment. (p. 138)

This tradition from early in the 20th century has continued as an assumed role of the

rural school as community hub. Community members gather for school events including fundraisers, cultural events, and especially athletics.

In communities with limited resources to build separate facilities for various services and to even provide numerous services, innovative solutions have including housing multiple entities in a single structure. MacKinnon (2001) uses a case study in rural Vermont to describe the way a school building can be used toward community development ends: “Public schools meet many community development criteria if the school is open to afterschool use for adults and children. The multiple uses possible include recreation, nonformal schooling, adult education and social gatherings” (p. 28). This shared use of space makes the school building, which is a community-wide investment, more accessible to the entire community. MacKinnon emphasizes that this use of schools takes carefully planning, including for example ways of using space near entrances as public space so as to not disturb the classroom activities. Moreover, MacKinnon (2001) concludes that this type of planning requires a broadened view of the school:

To begin planning how these spaces might be modified and to gain community support for investing in changing these spaces, community members need to expand their understanding of schooling to include much broader spectrum of community involvement than traditional models of schooling allow. (p. 31)

MacKinnon also notes that this use of space is similar to village greens or space once referred to as the commons. This allusion to the commons is reminiscent of Theobald’s (1997) argument that the reinsertion of place in school is deeply related to a shift toward or a return to a communitarian approach to life, and in this case, approach to schooling. In these ways, the use of the school as community center has both practical and philosophical purposes.

Community as curriculum: Place-based schooling.

One model described in the literature of how schools can influence community development is the use of the community as curriculum, which is a blend of the human and social capital development models into another approach. This method puts the focus of the effort directly on the students, suggesting a human capital development model due to the focus on skill development, but it combines this goal with the integration of students into their own community, which can lead to network (social capital) formation. As a blend this model has been described as the development of a sense of place within communities and among students (e.g. Driscoll, 2001; Theobald, 1995, 1997, 2006; Versteeg, 1993). Several authors, practitioners and researchers alike, describe specific projects that can be considered using the community as curriculum.

Versteeg (1993), a high school economics teacher, led his class through the process of conducting a survey for the local Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber learned about the quality of their advertising campaign and the students learned about community engagement. “Best of all, students discovered that they didn’t have to wait until they grew up and moved away to make a contribution, that they could play an active role in their community’s life as students. And some may even decide to stay in the play that they are coming to know, and love” (Versteeg, 1993, p. 55). Seidl, Mulkey, and Blanton (1999) describe a similar project where the youth of the community were able to have hands-on involvement in a community development effort. In this case the students created a business directory of the local region and conducted a survey of business leaders. In another example, Israel and Ilvento (1995) describe a project where students conducted a needs assessment of their community, which was then used by the local YMCA, Chamber of Commerce, and a planning committee. The process served to show students and community members in what

ways the youth of a community could be service in the area of development.

One Canadian example is helpful in this category, as it bridges the gap between these examples of hands-on projects and more philosophical arguments about community and place. Corbett (2004; 2007) describes a study conducted in a small fishing village in Nova Scotia. This study examined the experience of students who both left and stayed in the community and the role that schooling played in this decision. Corbett explores the connection between academic success and out-migration and the act of staying as a form of resistance. He concludes that rural schools may no longer serve the role of “creaming off” the most academically successful students; however, these schools have not completely addressed how to better serve the needs of students who may no longer equate academic success with leaving home. Corbett (2004) states that rural educators and policy makers should critically reconsider the impact of the accountability movement, with its reliance on standardized curriculum and testing as the principal means of assessing what counts as educational success. This call for a shift in the definition of success requires schools to become more responsive to local beliefs, interests, and aspirations.

Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) describe “using the community as a curricular lens” (p. 135) in order to encourage educational renewal, the re-creation of community, and to develop students’ understanding of place. They urge for community to be the primary curricular focus for four reasons:

First, it promotes the time-tested learning power of combining the intellect with experience. Second, the study of place addresses the shortcoming inherent in our overly specialized, discipline-based view of knowledge. Third, it has significance for re-socializing people into the art of living well where they are. Finally, knowledge of place – where you are and where you come from is intertwined with knowledge

of self. (p. 135)

Theobald (2006) expands on these ideas and notes that context is essential in the process of learning and that increased responsiveness to place can lead students to become more engaged in school. This engagement in school and locality can lead, Theobald (2006) writes, to a “genuine contribution to larger democratic processes” (p. 330). This place-based approach to education and community requires not only a shift in the role of the school but also in the conception of community. It suggests a communitarian approach to local and educational processes, with a focus and needs and goals of the community rather than primarily on those of individuals.

Theoretical Approaches

Defining Community

In *The Community in America*, Warren (1978) describes various approaches to conceptualizing community. He includes several categories including: (1) a geographic category, which he names the community as space; (2) a demographic category, which he calls the community as people; and (3) an approach to community in light of the distribution of power within it. Moving from these views, he articulates a view of community as shared institutions and values: “the shared institutional services are thought to constitute a shared way of life, a level of participation on which people come together in significant relationships for the provision of certain necessary living functions” (Warren, 1978, p. 32). This conception of community is certainly relevant to my work; however, his final category, which he uses for the remainder of his analysis, is the most useful in my analysis. Warren (1978) conceives of the community as a social system:

Thus, social-system analysis applied to the community must consider not only the interrelation of the community’s subsystems but the more direct, rational, and ascertainable relationship of the various subsystems

functioning on the local level to social systems beyond the community. A particularly important point is the nature of the systemic linkage between various community-based units and their respective extracommunity social systems. (p. 51)

In contrast to this social system, Wilkinson (1991) describes a community field, which I will define later in this section.

The shared theoretical concepts between Warren's (1978) social system approach and institutional theory become clear in a section in which Warren refers to Moe's (1959, as cited in Warren) work to illustrate three important differences between this approach to communities and the structure of formal organizations. The first is that the community is a system of systems comprised of a variety of types of organizations. The second is that communities are not structured and do not function in the centralized way that a more formal organization would. Finally, he suggests that community structure is implicit in nature, while organizational structure is explicit. This second point is a good reminder as to why overlapping services or a lack of coordinated services often exist within communities that may otherwise seem coherent. The explanation may have to do with this point that although communities appear to have structure, it may not function as a more formal organizational structure might. These differences are helpful distinctions in my work due to the similarity of this approach to communities with the institutional framework.

Beyond these conceptions of community, Warren (1978) describes a shift in communities in America, dubbed the "Great Change," from internal focus to increasing external connections. For Warren these extra-local connections reduced the role of the local community:

The community, from [Warren's] perspective, became little more than a stage where extra-local groups, organizations, and businesses pursued

their interest with little concern for how their actions affected local residents....As communities became more internally differentiated and increasingly linked to larger systems beyond their borders, the local ties that once connected all parts of a community into a system began to break down. (Luloff & Bridger, 2003, p. 204-5)

It is more useful to identify the balance of the local and extra-local connections and interactions within a community, rather than to reduce the local aspect to merely a context for extra-local affairs. The types of connections Warren outlines are the roots for other ways these types of local and extra-local connections have been conceptualized (e.g., Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000). Warren characterizes these community-level connections as vertical and horizontal, with the vertical being the local ties to extra-local agencies, organizations, and institutions, and the horizontal encompassing the way the local units are connected to one another, or the intra-local ties.

Warren's (1978) categories of connections align with other theoretical notions relevant to my studies. Horizontal and vertical connections are similar to the concepts within social capital theory of bridging and bonding ties (Putnam, 2000); however the level of analysis differs. Warren's horizontal and vertical ties may both be best categorized as bridging ties in Putnam's definition because they cut across *different* groups either within or outside the community. For Putnam, bridging ties are across heterogeneous groups while bonding ties are among homogeneous groups. In other words, bonding ties are assumed to be within in a community and across like groups, while bridging ties would reach outside it to different entities, though this is dependent on the level of analysis. If the level of analysis is social groups within a community, then the bonding and bridging ties would be in (bonding) and across (bridging) social groups all within the bounds of a community. As my level of analysis is at the

community level, Warren's vertical (extra-local) and horizontal (local) ties are more appropriate for my analyses.

The balance of these types of ties seems important to the well being of a community and a school, in this case. For example, Flora and Flora (2003) suggest that communities with high levels of bonding *and* bridging ties flourish to a greater degree than those with an imbalance. In communities with high levels of *only* bonding ties there is individualism and isolation from the outside and with high levels of *only* bridging there is a feeling of clientelism due to an over-dependency on outside agencies (Flora & Flora, 2003, p. 218-9). It may also be true that a balance of these types of connections and partnerships would have beneficial effects for a school district, rather than a heavy reliance either within or outside the community. (See paper 3 for further discussion of the relationship of the local community to the school district.) Bonding and bridging ties and their utility are strongly based on Granovetter's (1973) strong and weak ties. Granovetter's thesis was that there is a particular strength in weak ties. For example, in the search for employment it may be more important to have more weak ties in a number of fields, organizations, or locations than fewer strong ties. The diversity of weaker ties or of bridging ties may bring an increase and a diversity of information and opportunities to the individual, the school, or the community.

To the degree that Putnam's (2000) bridging and bonding ties are derivative of Granovetter's (1973) strong and weak ties, the distinction from Warren's (1978) theory gains clarity. Bridging and bonding ties are essentially weak and strong ties, respectively, and are with unknown (heterogeneous) and known (homogeneous) agents. Warren's vertical and horizontal ties have little to do with the strength of the connection among agents (prior or current) but rather emphasize the location of the agents: within or outside the community social system. This is more directly related to

my analysis of school connections being within or outside of the community and melds well with an institutional analysis where the outside agents may offer stronger vertical ties for schools than horizontal ties. In other words, a school leader may have stronger ties to their institutional network (i.e., other school leaders, state associations, state education department, etc.), which would offer a vertical tie for the local school, while they may have weaker ties to their members of their local community who could offer horizontal ties for the school.

Returning to definitions of community, Wilkinson (1991) articulates his conception of the community as an interactional field. He begins by articulating that community includes a locality, local society, and locally oriented action. However, locality is problematic because the relation of community to territory is vague and establishing clear geographic boundaries coinciding with a particular community is challenging; however, “rather than rejecting the territorial element, the interactional conception of the community supports the view that contacts among people define the local territory” (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 24). The local society approach is complicated because of the presence of ties to state and national organizations, echoing Warren’s vertical ties, which results in the diminished role of a local society and, consequently of community. Wilkinson, therefore, focuses on the community field, as opposed to Warren’s social system, and an interactional definition of community related to the social structure and social interactions.

The study of social interaction continues to be a fruitful area of inquiry in the sociology of community. If local ecology and local society no longer denote a holistic unit, community interaction in another matter. People who live together tend to interact with one another whether or not they participate in extra-local structures as well. Moreover, their interactions can form a community field even if the community is not

an ecological or social system. With a focus on social interaction, the sociology of the community continues to address important issues about completeness and integration of social life. (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 35)

This is a compelling argument as a way to maintain a focus on communities in sociological study without being preoccupied with the changing face of the physical and social dimensions of community. Wilkinson acknowledges the role of broad national and international forces on communities, but does not let this paralyze his interest in the study of the social interactions within a community field.

In the context of my research, I rely on a number of aspects of community; however, my primary conception of community comes from Wilkinson's interactional definition because my work focuses on the interactions within a community of individuals and organizations. This interactional definition of community relates well to the study of partnerships, which are interactions in this case between the school and the community. In addition, this definition coincides with the idea that this increased interaction through partnerships is a form of community development. Additionally, Wilkinson (1991) is more hopeful in his definition about the presence and viability of community in small rural areas. Nonetheless, despite his less hopeful approach it is essential for my analyses to depend on Warren's (1978) vertical and horizontal ties as a way to understand the role of a school and its connections within its most local community.

Role of Schools in Communities

In light of my research on the interactions between schools and communities, it is necessary to consider the ways in which community has been conceived in connection to schools. I will highlight the work of Arum (2000) because he has drawn an important and relevant distinction between the local, ecological community of

schools and the broader professional and institutional environment in which schools operate. Namely, are teachers and administrators engaged in and influenced by their local ecological community or are they more engaged and influenced in a non-local professional (i.e., institutionalized) community? Arum credits neoinstitutionalists with having defined and described this broader non-local environment:

“Neoinstitutionalists argue that schools are embedded not simply in local ecological communities, but more importantly in larger organizational communities” (p. 395).

This leads to a shift in research as well:

Neoinstitutional education research, therefore, offers an explicit challenge to traditional ecological educational research, which has conceptualized schools as being embedded primarily in localized community settings (e.g., Brofenbrenner, 1979). Schools are organizations, and as such their communities are by definition largely institutional in character. (Arum, 2000, p. 396)

Arum states that while both communities have existed for some time, the increasingly rationalized and mobile society may, in some conceptualizations, render the effect on schools of the local ecological community “inconsequential” (Arum 2000, p. 397).

Using Arum’s distinction between the ecological and institutional communities of schools, Sipple (2004) measures the local and institutional influences on school-level decision-making. Viewing Arum’s categories on a continuum, Sipple (2004) finds that while teachers and administrators are part of a broader professional community they are also not entirely removed from local interests when responding to state-level education policy. In other words, local communities can still influence local school decisions but only do so in the broader context of statewide and national reform efforts: “It is the ongoing interaction between local practice and institutional constraints that allow progress reforming school practice” (Sipple, 2004, p. 53-54). I

find it interesting to consider the interactions between the two communities surrounding schools as the forces from each influence educational leaders. I acknowledge the shift Arum (2000) describes and find it related to the turn toward increased homogenization and standardization of schools. My urge to want to temper Arum's (2000) emphasis on the role of the professional and institutional community over the local ecological one is related to my interest and belief in the role of the community within the school. I believe that without undermining the important strengths of standardization (e.g., higher or equal expectations for and of all students, disaggregation of achievement data by race) there can be a reinsertion of variation across schools through a re-emphasis of the local, ecological community. This may be achieved at the community-level through school-community interaction and partnerships (e.g., Bauch, 2001; Schorr, 1997) and at the student-level through place-based pedagogy (e.g., Gruenewald, 2008; Theobald, 1997, 2006).

Institutional approach

Meyer and Rowan (1978) describe the spread of formal education across the world and the development of educational systems with very similar organizational structures. This is similar to the spread of other types of organizations, except that within other fields such growth leads to increased coordination and control of the technical core by the administration, which is not what is exhibited in education. Rather there is a lack of coordination and inspection, leading Meyer and Rowan (1978) to adopt from Weick (1976) the phrase "loosely coupled." They use Weick's phrase to describe the gap between the formal structure of educational organizations and the technical work activities within. In other words, teaching activities go largely unwatched because of the decentralization of power in the American educational system. In addition, close inspection would probably reveal inconsistencies between

the structure and the activities, which could serve to confuse the system.¹ Instead of having a strict focus on academic goals, schools focus on the process of classification of teachers, students, subjects, and schools. Credentialing teachers and sorting students by age into particular grades and types of schools (i.e., elementary, middle, or high) maintains the formal structure of schooling, which makes schools legitimate in the eyes of the public. In addition this process of classification maintains a language, which schools and the public, especially parents, can use to communicate. For example, there is an assumption that a nine year old is usually in fourth grade in an elementary school participating in, among other subjects, fourth grade mathematics. This classification relates to the formal structure of schooling and serves to legitimate schools even if it reveals nothing about the activities occurring within the fourth grade, the elementary school, or the math class.

For Meyer and Rowan (1978), school systems are described as being loosely coupled; moreover, the organizational response by schools to demands for inspection by outsiders is a process referred to as decoupling. These authors list four reasons why a school administrator may avoid a close look at the practices within their school. They argue that the avoidance of inspection increases the commitments of the teachers and that the value of education is not often judged on the instructional efficiency anyway, but rather on the outward displays of expected schooling rituals: “spectacular buildings, expensive teachers in excessive numbers (a low student-teacher ratio), and elaborate and expensive topics (French for first-graders, or nuclear physics)” (Meyer & Rowan, 1978, p. 99). The third explanation, which I will quote at length because of its foreshadowing nature, concerns the protection of the classification system in schools from the technical activities.

¹ Please note that I am describing these arguments as they were made at the time (Meyer & Rowan, 1978). Current shifts in educational practice, including increased accountability and perhaps situations of tighter coordination, will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

In education, it is quite common that rules of practice institutionalized at state and federal levels create technical uncertainty at the local level. State-mandated curricula may be too advanced for the students at hand. And innovative state and federal programs often need to be adapted to the specific circumstances unique to the local school. Measuring what pupils actually learn in these programs or what teachers are actually teaching introduces unnecessary uncertainty, increases coordinative costs and creates doubts about the effectiveness of the status structure of the school and the categorical rules that define appropriate education. (Meyer & Rowan, 1978, p. 100)

Finally, their fourth point is that decoupling allows for adaptation to inconsistent rules. Inconsistent rules are common for schools that often have to react not only to federal, state and local policies but also to calls for education reform from numerous agencies and organizations, and not least to the demands of parents. Related to these motivations is an additional organizational response: the logic of confidence. It is with great faith that the school system can participate in decoupling. In schools there exists, as Meyer and Rowan (1978) call it, a logic of confidence meaning that without the verification of inspection, all involved parties must believe that everyone else is doing their job. This means that although each teacher in a school may close their classroom door and teach each lesson without any other adult in the room, the other teachers and administrators in the building have faith that that teacher is doing her job. There is an understanding that the lessons are being taught as they should be and that students are learning; however, articulating what “as they should be” means probably would be challenging in most schools, which adds to the lack of inspection. In public education in the U.S. there is not one consistent definition of a good teacher or of good teaching practice, which makes it hard to define what should be going on in a classroom.

Moreover, close inspection of these activities gets to the heart of this lack of a clear definition, which could result in a destabilizing force within schools or even with in the public education sector. It is this destabilizing effect to which Meyer and Rowan are referring in the passage quoted at length above and it is just this force, which leads to strong feelings about the rise of standards and accountability in a system, which has not had to be held to such close scrutiny.

Conclusions and Implications

Bridging Schools and Communities

Considering the educational and sociological literature and perspectives, although there are many calls and motivations for school-community partnerships (e.g., Sanders 2001, 2003, 2008; Melaville, 1998; Nettles, 1991; Crowson & Boyd, 1993) and schools as engines of community development (e.g., DeYoung 1987; Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Dewees & Velázquez, 2000; Miller, 1995; Mulkey, 1992), they can often be sidelined by the institutional nature of school processes (e.g. Meyer, 1977; Meyer & Rowan, 1977, 1978; Sipple, 1999; Burch, 2007). While many teachers, administrators, researchers, and community members may be calling for schools and communities to work together for mutual benefit through partnerships and other activities, the traditional acts of buffering and isolation by schools can make this particularly challenging. This is not to say that schools never partner, in fact institutional theory also sheds light upon reasons why schools do partner with communities, although often superficially. School-community partnerships can be enacted to create legitimacy for a school or for a local business. Local businesses that support the school sports teams, for example, may gain customers from this act of goodwill. And school administrators or board members may be thinking of the votes of the townspeople for the school budget when students complete community service projects.

Calls for and moves toward more genuine forms of partnering and collaboration should not be abandoned. Although distinct from partnering, place-based education may serve a number of the same goals called for in the partnership and community development literatures (Sobel, 2005; Smith, 2002; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Gruenewald, 2003; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995; Theobald, 1997; Theobald, 2006). In addition, since place-based education does not necessitate partnering it can allow schools to continue buffering and practices of isolation. Moreover, place-based education serves as an academic motivation for partnering activities, which according to the literature reviewed in an earlier section, is often not the primary motivation for partnering. While place-based education does not necessitate partnering it could serve to initiate a very different and perhaps more genuine form of partnership based on academic rather than legitimacy seeking goals.

The buffering practices of schools should not be dismissed as simply problematic in regard to community connections, but rather considered carefully by administrators attempting to balance the influences of the local community, the state, and the nation. According to the institutional literature, schools keep local influences at bay in part to maintain their own professional activities and the educational efforts of the school. Meaning that if school leaders and teachers were to respond to local influences to an extreme degree and attempted to concede to everyone's whims and fancies they would not be able to educate children. While buffering is important in this regard, it can be practiced to an extreme degree on the other end of the spectrum so that the local context goes unnoticed by educators. There is a careful balance to be struck and place-based education may help educators attend to the local without out being subsumed by it. Place-based education creates school-community connections through the core activity of the school: the teaching and learning occurring in classrooms. Gruenewald (2003) notes in similar language that place-based education

brings place to the core of schooling to a greater degree than partnerships traditionally have:

Research in service learning, community-based action research, and school-community collaboration can offer direction, but the partnerships these approaches imply need to be conceived not as tangential to core school curriculum, but as structures and practices that help re-think the classroom as the fundamental site of teaching and learning. (p. 10)

Not only does place-based education bridge this tension between the community and institutional context of schools, it can also be located in a current movement toward localism.

New Localism

The responses to trends of globalism are many and varied. One strand of these reactions has been a move toward localism as evidenced by political rhetoric, movements against ‘box stores’ like Wal-Mart (e.g., Shuman, 2006), and local foods movements (e.g., Lyson, 2004), to name a few. Localism in the later 20th century derives in part from economist Schumacher and his book *Small is Beautiful* (1973), which has been re-presented by Pearce in *Small is Still Beautiful* (2001). In addition, the works of Berry (e.g., 2002; 1990) have been influential on trends of localism in community development and agriculture. Finally, localism is a political movement and new localism in particular is rooted in Blair’s Labour government in the U.K. (Crowson & Goldring, 2009). During Blair’s tenure as Prime Minister, devolution occurred with power moving from the central government to constituent regions and communities, with the control over a range of domestic affairs being delegated to the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The images of communities that are either dying or losing their character seem to drive some arguments for localism.

The spread of the same brands, the same stores, and the same institutions has homogenized communities and dulled people's sense of place. Community life simply becomes less interesting if the streets in Encinitas, California, look identical to those in Portsmouth, New Hampshire – or, for that matter, to the canals of Venice, where McDonald's now appears alongside the gelato stands. (Shuman, 1998, p. 14)

This dulled sense of place may lead to the loss of a sense of community of the need for community participation. Putnam (2000) has described the plummeting rates of participation in civic and community activities and organizations across the United States. In his work on social capital he distinguishes between informal social capital, as indicated by social interactions like organized card nights or gatherings of friends, and formal social capital, as indicated by institutional interactions like club meetings or church attendance.

Unexpectedly, the level of *informal* social capital in the state is a stronger predictor of student achievement than is the level of *formal* institutionalized social capital. . . . [T]here is something about communities where people connect with one another – over and above how rich or poor they are materially, how well educated the adults themselves are, what race or religion they are – that positively affects the education of children. (Putnam, 2000, p. 300-1)

Putnam includes a focus on youth and schools in his brief agenda for social capitalists, which concludes *Bowling Alone* (2000). He mentions civic education, sustained community service, and schools within schools as potential educational agendas to

increase civic engagement and social capital in the U.S. Interestingly, Putnam gives one example of what others call place-based education: “Imagine, for example, the civic lessons that could be imparted by a teacher in South Central Los Angeles, working with students to *effect* public change that her students think is important, like getting lights for a neighborhood basketball court” (2000, p. 405). Despite the brevity of his inclusion of schools in his analysis and agenda for change, the fact that he includes schools at all sets Putnam apart from others writing in related fields.

Schools are rarely included in arguments for localism. For example, Shuman (1998) argues for a shift toward place-based economics by focusing on three aspects of self-reliance for communities: “producing locally for local needs, owning businesses locally, and recycling finance locally” (p. 28). Shuman, however, does not specify a role for schools in the move toward self-reliance for communities. In his more recent book, *The Small-Mart Revolution* (Shuman, 2006), there is one reference to schools in the index. This reference to schools is brief, however the argument is familiar to those concerned with questions of school closure, consolidation, and community development:

Speaking of schools, don’t forget that they too, are important generators of wealth. Around the country, school officials have unwisely decided to bulldoze smaller schools, many of which had proved the demand – through teacher, student, and school purchases – that drove neighboring LOIS [local ownership and import substitution] businesses. In their place new mega-schools, built on the edge of town, have become the new breeding ground for fast-food restaurants, truancy, and unregulated growth. These decisions, often made in the name of efficiency, have had many adverse consequences. (p. 169)

In this passage the fate of small schools runs parallel to the fate of small businesses;

however, Shuman does not find a role for schools, regardless of their size, in his revolution.

In *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World*, Hawken (2007) describes a social movement with no name but which exists and is growing, as indicated by the number of organizations around the world working toward social and environmental justice and indigenous people's rights. While he includes educational organizations in his appendix listing all the groups he researched as evidence of the movement, he does not highlight schools as a source of change in the text. Even in a rural-specific example, *Survival of Rural America: Small Victories and Bitter Harvests* (Wood, 2008), there is a focus on the effect of school closures on rural America but none on the potential power of schools to effect change in communities or development efforts in rural areas. It may be the institutionalized nature and understanding of schools as having a very narrow and precise role, to educate children, that keeps them separate from arguments about localism. However, I see a crucial role for schools to play in the new localism movement. In reaction to this decreased sense of place and of civic participation, schools can intervene using place-based education to increase students' awareness of place and knowledge of community and civic participation.

Role of schools in new localism.

Despite the absence of schools in many author's descriptions and prescriptions for new localism, there is a role of schools in this movement. In fact, the 108th Yearbook of *The National Society for the Study of Education* is titled "The New Localism in American Education."

There is a re-emerging interest in the role of the locality in American education. This has been occurring directly alongside a more recent emphasis upon national standards, state and federal mandates, and

international comparisons of gains in student achievement. “The New Localism,” as this movement is called is not a denial and refutation of national goals and centralizing efforts. It is rather, a refocusing of attention on local districts, communities, and neighborhoods in the context of national and global educational objectives. (Crowson & Goldring, 2009, p. 1)

In the Yearbook, Storey and Farrar (2009) describe the roots of new localism in the UK and the parallel effects on education in the U.S. and the UK.

A resurgence of localism in both the United States and the United Kingdom is currently raising new and interesting sets of leadership questions and governance issues around school improvement. In the U.S., a deep tradition of local control is encountering an increasing centralization of policy and accountability expectations. In the UK, by contrast, an already well-centralized system is engaged in a considerable devolution of policy involvement and decision responsibility to the locality. Despite their different starting points, what is “new” in localism for each nation is a reinvigorated effort to enhance the quality of schooling at the educational and community grassroots but within a framework of centralized control. (p. 17-18)

This is an essential point to make about the strength of allying school-community connections and place-based education within the framework of new localism. In this way it is clear that while these movements call for an increased role in education for the community and attention to the local context, it is not in opposition to the demands of the broader state and national policies. One of the critiques of local control of education (or local control in general) is the threat or tendency toward parochialism. The rhetoric in the U.S. insists that a child’s education should not be dependent on

their place of birth and in this way we can better maintain the notion that education is the great equalizer in this country. The inclusion of the local runs counter to this belief in consistency across the U.S.; however, new localism describes local control in light of and with attention to the national context. In other words, place-based education need not stand in opposition to federal and state standards.

I address partnerships and place-based education as two educational components of school-community connections, and Crowson and Goldring (2009) note the variety of angles associated with new localism in education: “Conceptual and theoretical developments in context-oriented learning theory, social capital theorizing, pedagogies of “place,” renewed explorations of school-community partnerships are some of the external forces under current examination” (p. 3). In addition to these components, there is also the broader question of what the role of the school is, in general and in relation to the community.

It is past time to put an end to our century-long amnesia related to what schools are for. Though the current policy context yields little reason to be optimistic that this might happen, the larger scholarly trends underway all point to a renewed interest in the role played by community in what it means to be human, a development that suggests that the insertion of community in public school curriculum may not be as far off as one might think. (Theobald, 2006)

I have presented a case where “the insertion of community in public school curriculum may not be as far off as one might think” (Theobald, 2006) because although the calls for school-community connections are varied and often problematic for schools, especially considering the institutional practice of buffering, place-based pedagogies serve to answer these calls through the traditional core activity of the school.

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WHO AND WHAT INFLUENCES SCHOOL LEADERS' DECISIONS:
THE CASE OF UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN IN NEW YORK STATE

Abstract

School-community interactions facilitate connections between schools and their local surroundings; however, these relationships are subject not only to local influences but also to broader institutional forces. Educational administrators' decisions about programming and partnering can be considered in light of *who* influences these decisions and *why*, as well as *why* administrators make these decisions. Leaders make partnering decisions using either or both local input and institutional level beliefs (Arum, 2000). Why educational leaders make decisions, like with whom and why to partner, is often related to regulations, norms, or deep-seated beliefs in the school or local culture (Scott, 2001). Data from case studies of five rural school districts in New York State provides a window onto the decision-making process surrounding the implementation, maintenance, and partnering involved in Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK). Findings suggest that the local and normative forces are strong while the non-local and regulative influences are weak. Implications for institutional theory, state and national UPK policy, and the practice of educational administrators in rural communities are discussed.

Schools and communities are inextricably linked and in small rural areas they are especially interdependent (e.g., DeYoung, 1987; Lyson, 2002; Carr & Kefalas, 2009). The presence of schools in rural communities is important not only for the academic and social lives of children and families but also for the economic well being of the area (Lyson, 2002). Increased social, political, academic, and economic pressures create the conditions for schools and communities to work together. Federal and state policies may encourage partnerships between schools and community-based organizations (CBO), universities, or businesses at the same time that local interests drive connections between schools and their communities.

Researchers have also observed that schools have become part of broader institutional environments, rather than solely part of their local communities (e.g., Arum, 2000; Meyer & Rowan, 1978). Institutionalists label these environments organizational fields and “these comprise the set of institutions that are either directly connected to a school (e.g., a regulating agency, a union association, a professional school) or share a structurally equivalent position (e.g., public schools – and to a lesser extent private schools – in the same state) (Arum, 2000, p. 395-6). Schools may even stop serving local needs to meet expectations of the institutional environment (Corbett, 2007; Carr & Kefalas, 2009). At the nexus of this reliance of communities on schools and the movement away from schools’ connection to local communities, a conundrum exists. In part the tension depends on the balance of what a school can or should do for its community and for its students. We argue a balance between the influences of the local community and non-local institutional environment can be struck in the way a school relates to its community through school-community partnerships (e.g., Bauch, 2001). School-community interactions create connections between schools and their local surroundings; however, these relationships are subject to both local and broader institutional forces. Educational administrators must decide whether or not to engage

in partnerships, what kinds of partnerships in which to engage, and whether the school and community will benefit from the partnering. These decisions can be considered in light of who influences these decisions as well as why these decisions are made.

Leaders make partnering decisions using both local input or institutional level beliefs (Arum, 2000). Why educational leaders make decisions, like those surrounding partnering, is often related to the array of relevant regulations, norms, or deep-seated beliefs in the school, profession, or local community culture (Scott, 2001). This paper draws heavily on new institutionalism, particularly Scott's framework categorizing the institutional pressures and environment in which schools operate.

These issues surrounding school-community partnerships will be investigated using the following research questions:

1. How are rural school districts in New York State responding to the state-mandated partnership requirement of the Universal Pre-Kindergarten policy?
2. How do educational leaders characterize the influences on their decision-making process?
 - a. How do influences from the local community and the broader national, state, professional and institutional communities play out in the decisions of educational leaders?
 - b. How are regulations, norms, and cultural beliefs employed in the decisions of educational leaders?

Policy Context

In New York State (NYS), state-funded pre-kindergarten has existed since the 1960's with a program called Targeted Pre-Kindergarten (TPK). This program had income eligibility requirements limited the access to the program to children from poor families. In 1997, NYS enacted a Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) program that would be open to all students regardless of income, eventually. In its inception, this

program was only available to urban and low-income school districts; however, by 2006 all districts were eligible to apply for the state UPK grant to implement the program. The 2006-07 school year marked the first year that the TPK funds and programs were combined with UPK to make one state-funded pre-kindergarten policy and program.

Although there are many aspects to the NYS UPK policy this paper focuses on one particular aspect of the policy: a partnering requirement. One of the stipulations of the NYS UPK policy requires that if a school district accepts the state grant to provide pre-K they must sub-contract at least 10% of the funds to a community-based organization (CBO). Thirty-eight states across the country fund pre-kindergarten programming of some type and yet only NYS and West Virginia having a provision requiring this type of sub-contracting (Barnett, Epstein, Friedman, Sansanelli, & Hustedt, 2009). Many states allow pre-kindergarten programming to be offered in multiple types of settings, including but not limited to schools and CBOs.

In NYS, the CBO with which a school district partners must provide care and education to at least a portion of the 4-year-olds enrolled in UPK in that district. The state funding for UPK is allotted on a per pupil basis, as is the K-12 school funding. There are a number of decisions to be made when a school district decides to take the state UPK grant. One of these decisions is whether programming can or will be offered within the school building or not, which is often dependent on the availability of classroom space and in particular age appropriate classroom space for 4 year-olds. This is not the same decision as whether or not to partner and with whom and how much of the grant to subcontract. Some districts subcontract 0% of the funds, others the 10% minimum, others 100%, and yet others somewhere between. In addition, some districts partner with a CBO and still offer the programming within the school building. Another decision that is made is whether the program will be a half-day or a

full day for the children. This is similar to the decision of having full or half-day kindergarten. This statewide policy arena provides an ideal context for studying school-community partnerships, especially those encouraged and required by a state education department. In addition, due to a differential take-up rate by location of UPK in NYS, this context provides a window on a one-size-fits-all policy that was designed for and adopted quickly in urban areas and much more slowly by rural districts (Sipple, McCabe, Ross-Bernstein, & Casto, 2008). This study examines the responses of rural school districts to the partnership requirement of the state policy, which will help fill the gap in the literature on rural school-community partnerships (Bauch, 2001).

Another aspect of the policy context of this study is the connection between UPK policy and educational administrators and leaders. This study fills the need for study of educational leaders in rural areas, which is in need of particular study in light of exceptionally high turnover rates of rural superintendents (Rogers, 2006). In this vein, this study focuses on the role of district and school leadership in forming and maintaining partnerships. In particular, as UPK partnerships are formed are educational leaders responsive to local community influences and pressures or to the influence of other school districts, professional organizations, or the state? And are educational leaders more cognizant or responsive to regulations, professional expectations, or deeply held assumptions about school practices?

This study focuses on rural school districts in order to better understand the particular opportunities and obstacles unique to or most prevalent in rural communities. Our understanding of the roots of the state UPK policy is that it was designed, at least in part, with New York City in mind.² In this context, it is of

² In conversation with state level officials involved in K-12 education and the early education community, the members of the Rural Early Education Project have been told that the partnership aspect of the UPK policy was a result of the policy being designed for New York

particular interest to understand the process of implementation in rural areas. In addition, there are advantages inherent in the study of small and rural communities including that the size allows for thorough study with fewer total interviews and with substantially less “noise” in the school-community context than in more urban areas, as there exist dramatically fewer interventions and partnerships in rural communities. There are members of the school district and the early care community that are able to speak with authority and knowledge on the entire community, which would be unlikely in a more populous town or city district.

Theoretical Framework

Educational leaders are subject to myriad influences and to better understand the potential tensions among these sources of influence this work relies on the theoretical lens of institutionalism. This framework highlights and categorizes the tensions an educational leader and his/her school district may experience being part of not only a local school community but also a broader institutional community (e.g., Arum, 2000; Meyer & Rowan, 1978; Meyer & Rowan, 2006; Scott, 2001; Sipple, 2004).

Arum (2000) distinguishes between the local ecological community of a school and the broader professional and institutional context and he suggests school leaders are increasingly responsive to the latter. The local ecological community is the geographic area around a school, for example the neighborhood or town or the attendance area from the school draws. The professional and institutional community is much broader and includes the people and organizations to which the school professionals are responsive, such as the school district, professional organizations

City. The state wanted schools, particularly urban schools, to be able to serve 4 year-olds; however, urban schools are over-crowded. The lack of space in schools spawned the partnership aspect of the UPK policy so that when schools accepted the state grant they could subcontract it to CBOs, thereby serving students even without available space in the K-12 schools.

like teachers unions or superintendent groups, and the state and federal education departments. This distinction raises questions, such as, are teachers and administrators engaged in and influenced by their local ecological community or are they more engaged and influenced in a non-local professional (i.e., institutionalized) community? Arum (2000) credits neoinstitutionalists with having defined and described this broader non-local environment: “Neoinstitutionalists argue that schools are embedded not simply in local ecological communities, but more importantly in larger organizational communities” (p. 395). He states that while both communities have existed for some time, the increasingly rationalized and mobile society may, in some conceptualizations, render “inconsequential” the effect on schools of the local ecological community (Arum 2000, p. 397).

Using Arum’s distinction between the ecological and institutional communities of schools, Sipple (2004) measures the local and institutional influences on school-level decision-making. Viewing Arum’s categories on a continuum, Sipple (2004) finds that while teachers and administrators are part of a broader professional community they are also not entirely removed from local interests when responding to state-level education policy. In other words, local communities, as the example of policy implementation at the ground level, can still influence local school decisions but only do so in the broader context, language, and structure of statewide and national reform efforts: “It is the ongoing interaction between local practice and institutional constraints that allow progress reforming school practice” (Sipple, 2004, p. 53-54). These theoretical frames make it possible to consider the interactions between the two types of communities surrounding schools as the forces from each influence educational leaders.

In order to better understand why school leaders make particular decisions, we turn to a discussion of Scott’s (2001) *Institutions and Organizations*. Scott (2001)

begins by broadly defining institutions as “multifaceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources” (p. 49). Institutions, for Scott, are made of organizational structures based on one (or more) of three pillars, as he calls his categories: regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive.

The regulative pillar includes those aspects of institutions and organizational structures, particularly laws or rules, which regulate and constrain behavior. The regulative pillar is coercive and forces compliance through fear of sanctions for disobedience. For example, an aspect of organizational structure in K-12 education that is regulative comes from state education departments, which impart regulation to be followed by school districts. For early education, regulative structure is dictated by other state level entities issuing health and safety standards for young children. For the sake of this study and the context of UPK policy the relevant agencies include, but are not limited to, the state and federal education departments, teachers unions, superintendent organizations and groups, the New York Office of Child and Family Services, and the Children’s Cabinet.

Scott’s (2001) normative pillar consists of elements of an institution that also constrain behavior but through a system of values, expectations, norms, and roles. Individuals learn through participation in systems and organizations that their role within a particular organization comes with certain expectations and that there is a social and professional obligation to comply. For example, a superintendent learns that there are particular rules and expectations associated with that position through professional networks with peers. Additionally, superintendents learn that there are particular expectations from local forces such as school boards, principals, teachers, parents, and communities. There may be a balance to be struck between the broader professional expectations and the ones particular to a locality. These normative expectations are not explicit and are not like the written rules and sanctions of the

regulative pillar. As with the regulative pillar, the normative pillar involves the constraint of behavior; however, it also includes an enabling and empowering feature through the balance of “rights as well as responsibilities, privileges as well as duties, licenses as well as mandates” (Scott, 2001, p. 55).

The cultural-cognitive pillar is deeply embedded in an institution and is difficult to see, recognize, and identify because of the embedded nature. This pillar involves aspects of institutions, which are related to shared understandings of reality, things that are taken-for-granted, and the interaction between the cultural influence and the individual’s process of interpretation. According to Scott (2001), “A cultural-cognitive conception of institutions stresses the central role played by the socially mediated construction of a common framework of meaning” (p. 58).

We use two theoretical perspectives in our data analysis to understand, categorize, and highlight the potentially conflicting influences on the decision making of educational leaders. Arum’s (2000) types of communities, including the local and the institutional, are used to consider *who* influences educational leaders as they are deciding to implement or maintain a pre-K program. Scott’s (2001) pillars are employed to understand *why* UPK is offered and *why* partnering exists: because it is mandated (regulative), effective educational practice (normative), or so widely agreed that it is simply viewed as standard practice or a taken-for-granted (cultural-cognitive). Using these theoretical perspectives from Arum (2000) and Scott (2001), this study examines the responses of educational leaders to the NYS UPK policy and its requirement to form local partnerships.

Data and Methods

This research is part of a larger project examining the implementation of UPK in NYS from its inception in 1998 to 2009. The data include case studies of rural NYS school districts (n=5) completed in 2008 and 2009. We purposively selected (Patton,

2002) these districts from the universe of high need rural districts³ based on their geographic location and levels of pre-K experience, except for one selected as an average need district. Four of these districts are a particular type of district with such small enrollment that there is only one each elementary, middle, and high school. The fifth district, due to recent consolidation, has two elementary schools because each district maintained their elementary school post-consolidation, and one each middle and high school. The benefit for this research of this constellation of schools within these districts is that the decision to implement UPK involves the superintendent and only one building principal. It is possible to learn about the decisions surrounding UPK from only a few people who due to the size of the district are able to know about the entire implementation process.

Data include transcripts from over 70 interviews of participants in the schools and communities. Our research team started interviewing in the schools and followed with interviews in the communities. Using snowball sampling (Patton, 2002), we selected community members based on recommendations from the school employees. In the schools we spoke with the superintendent, elementary principal, pre-K and K teachers, and special education teachers. In each community we spoke with directors and teachers at CBOs and other agencies involved in early care and education, including Head Start, Even Start, United Way, nursery schools, day care centers, private pre-Ks, and others. In addition, we spoke to parents in each district. Interviews included one-on-one with one researcher and one respondent, as well as groups of researchers and respondents of similar types, meaning multiple teachers or parents in their own groups. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and was semi-

³ The New York State Department of Education categorizes all school districts into Need to Resource Capacity Categories, including New York City (1), the Big Four of Yonkers, Buffalo, Syracuse, and Rochester (2), high need urban (3), high need rural (4), average need (5), and low need (6).

structured with researchers using the same interview guide as a basic outline of the topics and areas to be covered. These interviews were transcribed.

In this paper only the interviews with the administrators are analyzed. Only the administrators' decisions regarding UPK are considered with the understanding that many other people may be involved, but that it is the administrators' experience of the process that is the focus of this paper. For three of the five districts this includes both the superintendent and the principal. In one district only the superintendent was interviewed because he had recently been the elementary principal and had more knowledge of that position than the acting interim principal. In another district only the elementary principal was interviewed. The superintendent was less knowledgeable from an administrative standpoint, but he was interviewed instead in his capacity as a parent of a UPK student. These transcripts were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti.

The data were coded using a family of codes about decision making including who influenced the administrator (local or institutional) and why the decision was made (regulative, normative, cultural-cognitive) (see Table 2.1). In these interviews the decisions on which this work focuses include whether the district will begin offering UPK, maintain UPK, and with whom to partner in order to sub-contract the 10% minimum specified in the state policy. Those people influencing the decisions were coded as local if they were within in the school district, including parents, teachers, or the school board. Other influences were coded as institutional if they were outside the district including other superintendents, state level forces, or educational researchers. The reasons why the decisions were made were coded as regulative if the administrator referred to aspects of the state policy, especially the funding or the partnering requirement, as influencing the decision to offer UPK or to partner with a CBO. The reasons were coded as normative if the administrator referred to stated

(publically or privately) expectations of the community, parents, teachers, or other regional schools. Normative elements are openly discussed and motivated by a goal to improve professional and educational practice. In addition, decisions influenced by norms included reasoned arguments by administrators about school readiness, test scores, and early identification of special needs. These professional arguments are in contrast to the decisions motivated by culturally deep and socially embedded explanations, which are less clearly articulated or reasoned arguments. For example, the most common instance of decisions being coded as cultural-cognitive occurred in the district that had been offering pre-K for the longest and where it has become part of the way the school district functions. The administrators in that district do not actively decide to offer UPK, but rather they maintain the program because that is the deep-seated expectation of the community.

Table 2.1 Coding Scheme: codes, definitions, and examples from the data

Code Name (DM: decision making)	Definition	Example from the Data
DM_Who_Local	Using Arum’s (2000) distinction, these are influences from the local ecological community.	“It was interesting because we had to sort of sell it to the board and...there were some people that had different opinions about whether four-year-olds should be in schools.” (Superintendent, Lakewood)
DM_Who_Institutional	Using Arum’s (2000) distinction, these are influences from the broader institutional community.	“There were phone calls that I made to elementary principals who had been elementary principals longer than I had been and I knew they had programs.” (Superintendent, Southland)
DM_Why_Regulative	Using Scott’s (2001) pillars of institutions, these are decisions motivated by regulations.	“But I utilized totally this year our full amount which was \$256,000... We’ve increased our half-day numbers to get full benefit of the total grant.” (Principal, Riverton)
DM_Why_Normative	Using Scott’s (2001) pillars of institutions, these are decisions motivated by norms and expectations.	“Primarily the main focus is the earlier you get them in school the most likely you’re going to impact achievement. So for us it was no questions asked. I mean it’s definitely an important thing to do.” (Superintendent, Mountain View)
DM_Why_Cultural-Cognitive	Using Scott’s (2001) pillars of institutional, these are decisions motivated by culturally deep and socially embedded explanations.	“We’ve had the program so long that it’s become part of our culture and part of our expectation as part of our budget process.” (Superintendent, Lakewood)

Findings

The NYS UPK policy requires that if a school district receives UPK funds then that district must sub-contract at least 10% of the grant to a CBO. This serves to connect the school district to the existing network of early care and education organizations and to support these enterprises. Nonetheless, of the five districts under study, three have UPK partnerships and two have received waivers from the state exempting them from partnering (Table 2.2). In Mountain View⁴, the partnership meets the minimum of the requirement with four children being served, at the expense

⁴ All case names are pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of the participating school districts.

of the school district, in a Head Start program. Of the two other partnering districts, Southland subcontracts 100% of the grant to a CBO and Riverton has three pre-K classrooms two of which are run by a CBO and one by the school.

Table 2.2 School District UPK Information, 2008-09

(* denotes 2007-2008 data; **FRPL: Free and Reduced Price Lunch, percentages have been rounded to better conceal district identity)

Districts	Lakewood*	Mountain View*	Pine Crest	Southland	Riverton
District Size (sq. miles)	~125	~75	~250	~100	~150
District Enrollment	925	1500	1400	580	1750
Pre-K Enrollment	38	48	58	23	67
District %FRPL**	46%	60%	40%	54%	38%
Years pre-K	20+	2	1	2	8
Years UPK	1	1	1	2	2
Classrooms in school building	2	2 (4 half-day sections)	0 (rented space)	2	3
Partnering	waiver	Yes	waiver	Yes	Yes
% Funds sub-contracted	0%	~10%	0%	100%	~80%
Partner CBO	none	Head Start	none	Head Start	Head Start

Educational Decision-Making: Who is influential in UPK decisions?

School districts must attend to a number of decisions when offering pre-K and implement UPK, in particular. For example, the decision must first be made whether or not to accept the state UPK grant. If a district does accept the grant, then they must attend to the partnership aspect of the policy. Local educators must then request proposals from local CBOs and decide if they can or will partner and with whom. For example, districts can apply for a waiver if there are not agencies with which to partner. Additionally, district must decide how much of the grant will be subcontracted: the minimum of 10%, the maximum of 100% or somewhere in between. Then there are programmatic details to attend to including whether the

program will be a half-day or full-day program, if children will be offered transportation on school buses, who will teach the class (e.g. a current elementary teacher or a newly hired teacher with early education credentials), where the classes will be offered (e.g. in the school building or not), and what curriculum will be employed. As educational administrators consider implementing a program like UPK, applying for a state grant, or creating a partnership with a CBO, they may consult a number of people in or outside their schools and district. In these case studies the administrators refer to local influences like parents, teachers, and their school boards. In addition, they refer to broader institutional influences like other superintendents, state policy, and educational research. In each district the leaders refer much more frequently, in fact twice as often, to these local community members.

Local community influences.

Parents, CBOs, and school boards are the local influences mentioned by the administrators in our five case studies. In Mountain View, the superintendent and the principal refer to the influence of parents in their decisions, which has been present but has not yet resulted in what that parents are demanding: a full-day program.

It was difficult to get parents to come out and take a half-day program.

A lot of the comments we received was that full day and then there'd definitely be no issue....I know the need. I mean the community expressed a need of a full day. (Superintendent, Mountain View)

The superintendent is aware of the parental influence and includes it in the description of his decision-making surrounding UPK. The principal in Lakewood also cites the role of parents in the planning process, especially in a former NYS program, Targeted pre-K:

Part of Targeted pre-K, which they don't have [with] UPK, is a parent advisory committee. And so the parent advisory committee really felt

strongly about having pre-K for everybody. And because Targeted pre-K, the first kids that would be served would be, it's based on income.

(Principal, Lakewood)

This principal cites this community expectation as a reason for transitioning their program from Targeted pre-K, which served children from low-income families, to UPK, which has no income eligibility requirements for enrollment. For each of these administrators the voice of parents, a local influence, was strong in their description of UPK implementation.

In Riverton and Lakewood, the principals described the role of CBOs in UPK planning.

They all came together at the same time. And I wasn't in on the ground level for that. In fact no one here currently was. It was a former superintendent and a former principal that made that all come together.

[And the CBO], they were in on the ground level. (Principal, Riverton)

Riverton experienced support and collaboration from a local CBO in offering pre-K and beginning the UPK program. In contrast, Lakewood had offered pre-K within the district for years and did not include local CBOs in their transition to UPK.

I managed to get a waiver for the first year because Head Start wasn't ready to be a partner. (Principal, Lakewood)

In addition, there is a local early care center in Lakewood, which was not included in the planning due to the assumptions of the administrator.

I've been to the place for board meetings and they're just so financially strapped that they really can't do anything differently. When we first did the expansion of pre-K, I didn't know them that well and I was new and making lots of changes. When we opened up our four-year-old program, I thought, "Well, this is great, because [CBO] can assist with

all the three-year-olds, and we'll pick up all the four-year-olds. And we'll really be rocking in this county." I took their four-year-olds and I had an impact on their budget and it was not good at all. (Principal, Lakewood)

CBOs are prominent local players in the early care and education system; however, in the transition to UPK being offered in schools the CBOs are only as influential as school administrators allow them to be. In Southland and Riverton, CBOs have been crucial in the planning and implementation process. In Pine Crest and Lakewood, which are both more geographically isolated and less densely populated districts, the CBOs have not been included to the same degree in the programmatic decision-making.

Schools boards and school personnel are local community members who are central to the decision-making of educational leaders. In Lakewood, the superintendent was articulate about her own support of the pre-K program, as well as the principal's; however, they had had to convince the local board in the budgeting process.

It was interesting because we had to sort of sell it to the board and there are people that had different opinions about whether four-year-olds should be in schools....Our board right now is supportive but there are a couple or 3 members of the board who aren't necessarily gung-ho about the program. (Superintendent, Lakewood)

The school board plays a large role in the UPK decisions because of their central role in the budget process. The board did not instigate the adoption of UPK in Lakewood; nonetheless, they were supportive to the desires of the elementary principal and the district superintendent. The superintendent in Southland described a similar situation with his school board.

I'll be very honest with you; it was a difficult sell to the Board. I have a five member board, or he [former superintendent] had, the same five people....Well, I guess we were able to convince them that the benefits of the program outweighed the, we were able to convince them of that....It's interesting, since then the board has bought in, pretty much. They usually ask at a board meeting, "How are things going?" You know, they generate the question [about the UPK program].

(Superintendent, Southland)

This superintendent emphasizes that his Board's issues are no longer with whether or not the district should offer UPK but with keeping abreast of how the program functions. In the cases of Lakewood and Southland, the school boards were convinced by the beliefs of the school administrators that it was important to implement pre-K programming. In each case, the board takes its role seriously to scrutinize the school budget for unnecessary spending, but UPK was deemed an appropriate use of state and local funds.

Teachers were also mentioned as influential local influences in the UPK decisions, especially kindergarten teachers who were often excited to have students enter their classes with pre-K experience, whether in the school-based program or in a community program. The principal in Mountain View articulated clearly the role of their UPK teacher.

We have someone here that is, [name], is one of the teachers you're going to interview later, who fully supports the program. She has great knowledge of where the kids need to be and she was very instrumental in the beginning of designing what we're looking to do with the kids.

(Principal, Mountain View)

Having a teacher with early education experience to move from kindergarten down to

pre-K was crucial for Mountain View in their planning stages.⁵ The administrators were able to include her in deciding about how to implement the program once the decision to take the state grant had been made. The principals and superintendents in each district spoke often of the role that local influences, including parents, CBOs, school boards, and teachers had in deciding whether or not to take the NYS UPK grant and with whom to partner.

Broader institutional community influences.

Arum (2000) argues that educational administrators are increasingly influenced by the broader institutional or professional communities in which they exist. While there is certainly evidence for this in many cases and contexts, our data does not support that these rural school administrators were more influenced by institutional forces than those within their local community. In the case of decisions about UPK in NYS, the rural administrators in only three of our districts made clear reference to the inclusion of institutional opinions in their decisions. This may be because it is less clear what these influence are and from whom they come. Rather than referring to specific individuals as local influences, administrators refer to more vague entities like the state or educational research. For example, the inclusion of educational research or of a particular early education curriculum are examples of administrators including the views of their broader community into their decision-making, even though they are not specific people. In addition to these types of forces, the most common outside influences for these leaders are principals and superintendents in other districts in NYS.

The superintendent in Southland mentioned each of these influences in his interview. In regard to research, he details the district's use of research in the process

⁵ In light of our research, we would like to acknowledge that Mountain View's selection of a UPK teacher from within their elementary school may create a program that is more influenced by the K-12 public school system than the early care and education network.

of convincing the board to agree to the inclusion of the UPK program in the budget.

I was the elementary principal. I went out and did quite a bit of research. There were, I believe, three major studies that had been done, and I gathered all that information and did a presentation to the board. And it supported all the advantages of early education. And the board agreed to, the funding was there from the state and the board agreed to move ahead. (Superintendent, Southland)

In the interview with the superintendent of Mountain View, the director of special programs who was also in attendance, mentioned the use of early education research to support and promote the district's implementation of UPK programming.

There was a lot of research done by the school administration. And the board meetings that I was at were very positive about the benefits of pre-K. And all the literature and the science based research and how critical it was to the curriculum. (Director of Special Programs, Mountain View)

Employing educational research in order to support the decision to begin UPK is an example of institutional forces acting on educational leaders. The administrators are well versed in the evidence showing the benefits of early education and they bring this to bear in their decision affecting local programming. We find it important to acknowledge that the use of educational research helped districts to decide to implement a UPK program; however, we have no evidence that these districts designed their programs based on these research findings. This use of research generated the local political support needed to implement the program, which illustrates the value for administrators of the broader institutional influences.

Educational administrators display their immersion in their broader institutional community when they rely on their professional peers. In Southland and

Riverton, the administrators refer to having consulted with other principals and superintendents in the process of determining how to enact UPK. The superintendent in Southland refers specifically to having consulted with three neighboring districts in the process of deciding with which CBO to partner. All three districts were partnering with Head Start and his decision to partner with them was strengthened by his previous work with the coordinator.

I knew [person's name], the woman from Head Start, I knew her from working before in another district. (Superintendent, Southland)

It was not only his experience in his own district, but also his work in another district, that created the connections this superintendent needed to draw on the expertise of his larger professional community. The principal in Riverton speaks of a routine meeting that allowed him to access the knowledge and experience of his professional peers.

Monthly principal meetings, yes. [Name] BOCES⁶, we all meet together and we have different topics of discussion, but we also have round table. Pre-K was a huge topic a year ago because there was all that extra funding. [UPK programs] were just popping up all over the place. (Principal, Riverton)

The uses of educational research and of networks of other administrators are examples of institutional-level influences acting on the UPK decisions of these principals and superintendents. The administrators in Lakewood and Pine Crest were likely influenced by these broader institutional forces, as well; however, they exclusively referred to local influences when asked about the process of deciding to implement UPK and forge local partnerships.

Educational Decision-Making: Why are UPK decisions made?

⁶ NYS has BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services), which exist between the state and the district level of organization to serve as way to consolidate services among the member districts.

The decisions surrounding whether or not to implement UPK, whether or not to form partnerships, and if so, with which CBO are made for a variety of reasons. Using Scott's (2001) pillars of institutions it becomes clear that educational administrators are motivated by regulative, normative ("best practice"), and cultural-cognitive ("taken-for-granted") forces. The NYS UPK regulation has motivated some districts that have never offered pre-K education to begin UPK programs. Other districts choose to offer UPK or form particular partnerships because of the normative ("best practice") expectations of their community, school board, and teachers. Finally, a set of districts with many years of pre-K experience prior to the state's UPK grant program, have implemented UPK because it flowed naturally from what had become a taken-for-granted practice of school-based preschool education in their community.

Decisions motivated by regulative forces.

Educational administrators are accountable to a number of federal, state, and district regulations. UPK decisions are shaped and constrained by state education policies, which include rules about funding, partnering, enrollment criteria, and teacher credentials. The administrators from all five districts discussed the financial component of the UPK program, including the grant from the state, their local district's contribution, and the requirement to sub-contract at least 10% of their funding. In Southland, the superintendent was very clear that the financial aspect of the policy created their UPK program.

[We began the program] when the funding became available from the state. And I'll be honest with you; we would not be doing it right now if funding hadn't become available. There's no way we could afford that. (Superintendent, Southland)

In Riverton, the administrators are happy to be able to bring additional state dollars to their district.

And my superintendent, I mean he's thrilled to get that kind of cash every year. Not that it all comes to us, but he's thrilled that we can offer that kind of program and also bring in that kind of monies for our district, not only to help those pre-K kids but to help our program as a whole and our facility. (Principal, Riverton)

The Riverton principal explained their complicated financial picture with many intertwined funding streams from federal, state, county, and local budgets. This district uses the UPK grant, in conjunction with other sources including Head Start and Early Invention, to not only provide pre-K programming but to supplement the general operating budget. In addition, he explains how they made programmatic decisions in order to maximize their funding under the state regulations.

But I utilized totally this year our full amount, which was \$256,000... We've increased our half-day numbers to get full benefit of the total grant. Because we were usually losing out on about \$8,000-\$10,000 so we went back to the drawing board and said where can we add students. (Principal, Riverton)

The regulative forces motivated his decision on how many half-day slots to provide in the district because the UPK grant is based on enrollment, which can be doubled through half-day programming by running two half-day classes each with 36 children total rather than one full-day program with only 18 children. Regardless of the length of the daily program a district decides to off, the state grant pays for a half-day program and they can supplement this with other funds to run a full-day program.

In Pine Crest, the superintendent shares his confusion about the 10% rule in the state policy that requires that a minimum of 10% of the state grant be subcontracted to a CBO.

I'm not sure how that all works giving them 10%. And that seems

really absurd to me...Not [for our local CBO], they would do a good job of it. But the whole idea of 10%. How do you even begin to administer that? And how do they use it? And what accountability do they have to the school? (Superintendent, Pine Crest)

Pine Crest was challenged to abide by this regulation and they cite concerns about oversight and accountability, as well as their feeling that “we can do it better than anyone else”. In response to this aspect of the policy, Pine Crest administrators decided to apply for and were granted a waiver from this aspect of the policy.

The NYS UPK policy also includes regulations about the number children in a classroom, the age of students, and the credentials of the teachers. In addition, the universal nature of the program means that students are eligible regardless of their family income, which sets it apart from the previous NYS program: Targeted pre-K. Mountain View has opted for half-day programming because of funding, transportation, and space; however, they are having trouble meeting their enrollment targets due to the parental desires and needs for full-day programming.

The fifty children [enrolled in UPK] probably represent 50% of what the class should be because most of our classes are around the 100, 110, 120. So we’re really serving half, if not less than half of the class. And what we are up against is full-day childcare the parents already have available. (Superintendent, Mountain View)

In addition, this superintendent spoke to some of the state regulations about who is eligible for UPK.

The children have to meet an age requirement. They have to be four-years-old up until December first of that year. I guess it’s really a state requirement. They have to prove residency and things of that nature. (Superintendent, Mountain View)

The state requirement only allows four-year-olds in the program, which is problematic for some administrators who would like to offer two years of pre-K education to some children. The state policy also requires the program to be available to all children regardless of their family's income. This regulation becomes complicated when school districts partner with Head Start programs, which do have income eligibility rules.

Head Start has income requirements for 9 of their students. So 50% of each class, nine in each of those Head Start [rooms] come under Head Start kids. We call them Head Start kids. And then the other 9 don't have to be Head Start kids and we do those through a lottery. So we just draw, draw names. And we literally do that because we did not ever want to, and the regs [regulations] say that, I mean you've got to have a system. You can't say okay the teacher's kids get in first, you know, and all that. You have to do a lottery and luckily the last few years it's worked out that we eventually gave somebody a slot. But it many not be a full day, like they like. So that's how we go through that process. (Principal, Riverton)

Partnering also becomes complicated, and even impossible, when local CBOs are unable to meet state regulations.

With the new funding you have to have a community-based organization that's attached to you. In our district we have [CBO], which I think is a dying childcare center. I don't think it's going to be around long. They don't have certified teaching staff. (Principal, Lakewood)

The state requires certain credentials for the teaching staff in the CBOs that partner with the school districts to provide UPK. This regulation made the decision in Lakewood simple because there was not a CBO in their district that could qualify.

They applied for and received a waiver so as to retain 100% of the state grant and provide UPK run only by the district. In these financial and programmatic ways the federal, state, county, and local regulations have affected the decisions made by school administrators.

Decisions motivated by normative forces.

Educational administrators make some decisions based on the stated expectations of their communities including their professional peers, the parents in the district, the school board, and the teaching staff. In the case of UPK, many of the stated expectations surround the importance of expanding pre-K opportunities to all children who may not otherwise have access to early care or education, to identify special needs at an early point in children's lives, and to increase school readiness. In Pine Crest, the superintendent clearly stated early in his interview that they had decided to begin offering pre-K because of the recent proliferation of school-based programs in the region.

[District 1] is offering it. [District 2] is talking about it. [District 3] is offering it. You know there is a lot of UPK that occurs, a lot of districts around here. (Superintendent, Pine Crest)

In addition, this superintendent knew his school board would support the decision as it was a stated expectation of theirs that pre-K would be offered when the financial situation allowed.

Pre-K has been on that wall over there probably 5 or 6 years as a dream of the board. Long before foundation aid found it's way, some real child advocates on the board [were] saying this is something that would be great to do. (Superintendent, Pine Crest)

The decision to offer pre-K was easy for administrators in Pine Crest once there were state grants available because there were normative forces, like the school board's

values, motivating the process.

In Riverton, the principal describes making programmatic decisions about half-day and full-day classes based on his belief in the importance of serving as many children as possible.

The wait list is because everybody wants full day. If we have offered full for all three rooms, that would be awesome, but the problem is then you cut down on your numbers. Because then you have to turn even more students away. So by doing that combination of full-day and half-day, we pretty much make every student that wants to, except one or two in the last few years, get a slot. (Principal, Riverton)

A similar decision is made annually in Lakewood between offering full-day and half-day programs and having enough slots to meet the local demand.

It's numbers. It's that numbers game that we play every year, where we have to make a decision. We try to be flexible and give the program to everybody. And so I don't know until the cut-off date whether I'm having two full-day programs or one full day and two half-day programs. And so every year we're re-shuffling. Our goal is to try to reach everybody. (Principal, Lakewood)

Underlying these stated goals of meeting the demand for pre-K slots are beliefs about what the pre-K experience brings to children.

In Pine Crest, the superintendent spoke about deciding to offer pre-K based both on goals of school readiness and of opportunities for early intervention in the case of children with special needs.

Well, hopefully, you know, that's what pre-K is helping to do. They're getting pre-K then they're getting help. They're getting identified early with instructional support that they need to have. That way when they

get in kindergarten they're that much more successful. And then there's less remediation needed for things in those early grades.

(Superintendent, Pine Crest)

In Lakewood, the district with over 20 years of pre-K experience, they feel they have seen what the pre-K experience provides their students and that information helps the administrators and school board decide to continue the program.

What we discovered was that kids that went to the pre-K program were more prepared. And then when we looked back on our numbers we could also show that it was more frequently kids that did not have a pre-K program or some kind of early start that ended up being classified [as needing special education services]. So we used that information, it was sort of our own, you know, it wasn't exactly scientific, but it was information. (Principal, Lakewood)

In Riverton, the principal also mentioned goals of school readiness, and he added the benefit of students being familiar with the school building and the importance of offering pre-K in rural areas.

The social-emotional piece, you cannot put a value on that. That is so crucial. They're in our building. You talk about ready. They're here for a whole year before kids that do not go to pre-K are. They're familiar with the surroundings....They're familiar with the bus situation. They're familiar with all the teachers. They know me as their principal....I mean that's readiness in a lot of ways. The other thing is just the exposure to print is huge. In a rural area, I don't care if you're high need, middle need, or low need, or whatever you want to call it, exposure to print in rural areas is limited. (Principal, Riverton)

Being located in a rural area makes it especially important to the principal in Riverton

to be able to offer UPK. In Mountain View, the superintendent takes a broad view as to what pre-K experience can do for his students and hence graduation rates play into his decision to offer UPK.

Primarily the main focus is the earlier you get them in school the most likely you're going to impact achievement. So for us it was no questions asked. I mean it's definitely an important thing to do. And it we're really looking at the state standards and making sure that we have our students graduate from high school. So the earlier we get them in school we increase their chances of success. (Superintendent, Mountain View)

In these examples, educational administrators are including normative explanations in their descriptions of the decision to implement UPK in their districts. They are offering UPK for multiple reasons including that it is common in their region and they are influenced by the expectation displayed by other districts that UPK is part of the K-12 system. Administrators are motivated by the stated belief that more children should have access to pre-K programming and underlying this is the belief that pre-K increases a child's preparedness for school. This belief about school readiness, whether stemming from professional or local forces, is influencing the decisions of superintendents and principals by encouraging them that UPK is the 'right thing to do.'

Decisions motivated by cultural-cognitive forces.

Administrators decide to offer UPK and to partner with CBOs based on regulative and normative influences; however, there are additional forces that are not clearly articulated by professional networks or local communities. There are socially embedded beliefs and unstated expectations that influence the decisions made by educational leaders. Lakewood, the district with the longest experience with pre-K, is

clearly subject to these deeply held understandings about early education.

We've had the program so long that it's become part of our culture.

And part of our expectation, as part of our budget process.

(Superintendent, Lakewood)

Other administrators, in districts with less experience, use similar language but the pre-K values may not be as embedded in their wider professional and local networks.

I'm pro early intervention, early education, and as long as I'm here, we'll continue to have [UPK]. (Superintendent, Southland)

I am sold. (Superintendent, Mountain View)

As pre-K becomes more common in schools districts it will become an assumed and taken-for-granted piece of the K-12 system, which will then become the P-12 system. At that point, the forces influencing administrators in Lakewood may be prevalent in districts across NYS.

Deeply held beliefs about early care and education have also been influential in delaying the spread of UPK.

And there was a perception; I would say by, it was probably the minority, 2 out of the 5 [board members], that felt we would be taking children away. First of all we would be trying to formally educate them at too early a stage in their development. (Superintendent, Southland)

Similar sentiments, channeled through drawing a distinction between school and baby-sitting, were levied by board members in Lakewood.

Well, [the board's] concerns really are that this is a baby-sitting service. That they know a lot of the parents of the children who attend. And because they live in the community and they say those parents are not really concerned about their children having an education. They are concerned about their children being provided baby-sitting services.

And as taxpayers, it rubs them the wrong way. (Superintendent, Lakewood)

These concerns, though articulated by the superintendents, may not be stated beliefs of their board members, but rather deeply held understandings about what school is and for what age children it is appropriate.

These taken-for-granted processes also affect partnering with the UPK programs, both where partnerships exist and where they do not. In Riverton, the principal maintains the partnership with the local Head Start without question.

We've always had that set up. We've always been in conjunction with [CBO] through Head Start. And we've always, what I would say, have had to my knowledge an A+ agreement and an A+ working knowledge with them. (Principal, Riverton)

This principal maintains this partnership with Head Start because this is how it has been the district and has become an understood aspect of the UPK program. In Pine Crest, the administration has received a waiver to run their program within the school district, which was influenced by their deeply held beliefs about their programming in contrast to CBO programming.

I guess you'd say that that's a possessive feeling. That's a feeling of, and I wouldn't call it we can do it better out of arrogance, it's just out of experience. I thought this program could be based here. We could operate this program and should be operating this program.

(Superintendent, Pine Crest)

This superintendent cannot clearly articulate why the district feels so strongly about administering their own pre-K classes, but there is obviously a deeply held belief about school programs being offered within the school rather than by a CBO.

These examples provide examples of the regulative, normative, and cultural-

cognitive forces and motivations affecting the decision-making of these educational administrators. Regulative motivations affect the aspects of UPK decisions surrounding funding, partnering, enrollment and eligibility of students, and the credentials of the teachers. Administrators are responding to normative forces when they implement UPK because surrounding districts are offering it, they want to serve more children, or because they believe it will impact school readiness and early intervention efforts. It is these normative expectations that are most often reported by the superintendents and principals in our five cases. Rarely do the administrators report motivations that can be explained as cultural-cognitive. The few examples in the data include those districts with experience offering UPK, where the decision to maintain the program or the partnership is based on the tradition of having done so in the past. In the example of Lakewood, UPK has become institutionalized and is maintained because the system has become P-12, meaning that pre-K is as embedded as any other grade.

Discussion: The Institutionalization of UPK in NYS

The cases we present are five rural districts, four out of five being high need, all in the process of implementing UPK. The districts vary in size and location, though they have relatively small enrollments and are geographically isolated. The administrators' leadership experience varies by years in their positions and their districts. Most importantly, the districts have levels of experience with pre-K and UPK ranging from zero to over twenty years. Institutional theory is particularly applicable with this variety of programmatic experience because these districts provide windows on to different periods in the process of institutionalization. Additionally, these cases offer insight about the role of local and non-local actors in this process. We find that over years of experience with pre-K/UPK districts follow trends through responding to regulative forces, adopting a professionalized view of the program with normative

motivations, and over time some may create an institutionalized program maintained through cultural-cognitive expectations. In this process, it is the local actors and local politics that influence the decisions of educational administrators to a greater degree than their professional and institutional environments.

The Story of Institutionalization

Theoretically, Scott's (2001) institutional pillars are related and interactive in the process of institutionalization. Contextualizing NYS in the national arena of early care and education policies and programs, suggests that the deeply held beliefs (cultural-cognitive forces) on a national scale about pre-K being a taken-for-granted good have produced the political will to enact the NYS UPK policy (regulative force). With national sentiment motivated by personal experience and the positive findings in three major research studies⁷, support for pre-K has blossomed in the U.S. (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). With pre-K lacking in most K-12 school systems, pre-K can be used a political 'quick-fix' because it is an addition to the system, which is often easier to enact than a change or reform of what already exists. This social and political setting has created an arena friendly toward UPK policies across the nation. In light of state policy, NYS districts have experienced various forces and expectations in their own paths toward implementing pre-K classes. For example, although Lakewood now maintains UPK without active discussion (normative) or threat of state sanctions (regulative) it is likely that once, more than 20 years ago, they were responding to regulative forces. At the time when Lakewood began offering pre-K the state program was called Experimental pre-K. Since that time the program shifted to Targeted pre-K, which was limited to low-income families, and now to Universal pre-K. Without the

⁷ There are three major experimental pre-kindergarten programs, which have been the source of much of the educational research showing the benefits of early education: the Perry Preschool Program, the Abecedarian Project, and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006).

historical data it is difficult to know to what forces Lakewood administrators were responding when they began offering pre-K. Lakewood may have implemented Experimental pre-K due to regulative influences but has transitioned, finally, to UPK citing what can be interpreted as cultural-cognitive explanations for the decision. The initial NYS pre-K program may have been fed by the national beliefs, but now the political will exists in NYS alone to transition from Targeted pre-K to Universal pre-K because it is the ‘right thing to do.’

Our data provides a view of districts enacting UPK for different reasons, on to which Scott’s pillars can be mapped. Pine Crest, new to pre-K and UPK, is conscious of the regulations but operates under a professionalized view of the program, is motivated by the actions of surrounding districts, and responds to a local belief that early education is needed. In Mountain View, a district with a few years of pre-K experience, the practice has not yet become ingrained; however, the superintendent has a vision for a P-12 system for his district where pre-K will play an important role in improving literacy and, in the future, graduation rates. While, each of these districts is highly influenced by normative expectations in their UPK decision-making, Mountain View is able to envision the time when these decisions will no longer be made because it will be an accepted part of the school’s practice. In Lakewood, the district with the most years of experience, it is possible to see that while decisions about half-day and full-day classes are still discussed, the larger decision to maintain the program is now unspoken and anticipated by the local school board in the budgeting process.

The Strength of Local Actors

Arum (2000) categorizes the surroundings of schools and educational administrators as either the local, ecological community or the broader professional, institutional environment. He suggests that the institutional community has increasing

relevance for administrators to the point that the local may become inconsequential. Our data suggest otherwise, with the superintendents and principals in all five cases referring twice as often to local actors rather than institutional forces as they describe their UPK decision-making. We must consider that a greater number of references to local forces may not be an adequate proxy for the degree of local influence. This limitation of the data could be remedied in future work with more detailed interview or survey questions focused on the degree of influence of local and non-local actors. For the sake of this analysis, we argue that the frequency of responses about local influences can be interpreted as a strong force because it was these interactions that came to the minds of the educational leaders first and most often when asked about UPK more broadly.

With the NYS Department of Education being part of the broader institutional community, it is important to note that a portion of this state-level influence should remain separate from these analyses. One could assume that because the state created the UPK policy it displays a level of support to which administrators respond. In other words, as we coded our data we could have included every mention of the policy as an example of state influence on the decision-making. Instead, we consider this regulative influence separate from the local/non-local distinction. An example of the type of state influence that we would have coded as a non-local force would have been a phone call or other contact from a department of education employee encouraging a superintendent to implement UPK. In the course of our research, we have heard state employees describe using this method to urge districts to begin the program; however, none of our five districts reported experiencing this form of influence from the state education department. The only forms of institutional forces from our respondents were the use of professional networks and of educational research. In contrast to this limited outside influence, the administrators often referred to the teachers and parents

in their district and most often to their local school boards as having participated in the decision to begin or maintain UPK.

The small size of the school districts in these five cases means that the school district and the local community are often viewed as synonymous. This, however, may not be an accurate portrayal of the type of influence at play in the school. Arum's (2000) local and institutional distinction does not account for the possibility of a local institutional community that may be distinct from the local community and from the broader institutional community. It may be necessary to try to disentangle the influences of the local community as separate from the forces of the school district itself on the decisions of educational administrators. The interests of the local community may not be represented by the school district and yet in this analysis these have been treated as synonymous. In order to be attentive to local context of schools and the local institutional (i.e., professional) forces of school districts as distinct from the broader state level forces, it would be necessary in future work to consider a third component in addition to the dichotomy in Arum's work (see paper 3).

Implications and Further Research

This study has important implications for policy, practice, and theory. Although, it is clear from Arum's (2000) work that educational administrators are often surrounded and influenced by their professional and institutional environment, this is not the situation in our cases. The superintendents and principals in our study are conscious of their peers and professional organization, but they are more responsive to the local actors in the case of UPK. Further work in this area could explain the mitigating roles of the programmatic and geographic contexts. Do educational administrators in non-rural districts in NYS respond in similar ways to local pressures surrounding early care and education decisions? Do rural administrators consider local actors to the same degree in other types of school-level

decisions?

Scott's (2001) pillars of institutions and the process of institutionalization are helpful in exploring the motivations behind the decisions of educational administrators. The regulative environment created by the state UPK legislation is weak, in part, due to lack of sanctions to which school districts are subject. The administrators referred to regulations in their decision-making but usually only in regard to how many children could be served and how the funding could be spent. The regulations are not motivating these districts to implement UPK, but rather the normative expectations of their communities lead administrators to decide to take the state grant. In regard to policy, these data support that this detached role of the state creates what can be called a "loosely coupled" system (Weick, 1976). Further research in this area could explore the implications of the UPK system that is devoid of state inspection at the school level. Theory suggests that in this type of system school-level change would be unlikely to follow changes in state level policy. For example, if the state wanted to implement a particular curriculum in all UPK classrooms it is unlikely that administrators who are currently responding to local and normative forces would easily or quickly respond to those non-local and regulative demands.

This work has implications for the practice of educational administrators, particularly in rural communities where the turnover rate of superintendents is relatively high (Rogers, 2006). This high turnover rate is problematic for the schools, districts, and leaders because of the lack of continuity. Administrators new to their position, or more importantly to their district, may attempt to use strategies they employed in previous positions or information gathered from professional networks. However, educational leaders new to small, rural districts may struggle in a policy environment like UPK that is subject to local actors and local politics, rather than professional networks, and is driven by normative expectations rather than regulations.

The tacit knowledge gathered over years of experience in one locale may be more useful in this type of environment rather than information learned in leadership training or even in years of experience in a very different type of community. The high turnover rate of superintendents in rural districts in NYS could result in problems maintaining UPK for districts relatively new to the program. If a new superintendent arrives in a rural district and is unfamiliar with the local actors and the community expectations, they may turn to non-local or regulative forces during the decision-making process, which could result in a different fate for UPK. Since we did not see an administrator who relied on these sources, further research would be needed to see if reliance on non-local and regulatory influences results in different decisions surrounding UPK, either the provision of the program or the partnering aspect.

These implications for theory, policy, and practice display the importance of this work and the need for further research in the realm of UPK, policy implementation in rural schools, and educational leadership. In our five cases, the weak role of non-local forces and the regulative environment are contrasted with the strong influence of the local community and of the normative expectations. UPK has spread across districts in NYS with the decisions of superintendents being highly motivated by the needs, desires, and values of their local communities.

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DEFINING LAYERS OF COMMUNITY AND DESCRIBING PARTNERING ACTIVITIES

Abstract

Schools are located in and influenced by local, ecological communities as well as broader, non-local institutional environments (Arum, 2000); however, the legacy of school closures and consolidations has left many schools with an additional aspect to or layer of community: the school district. This study investigates the ways that both community members and school personnel conceptualize and define community and the potential school-community relationship. In light of the potential benefits of school-community relationships (e.g., Sanders, 2001, 2003; Sanders & Harvey 2002; Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Bauch, 2001), this study explores the connections that exist and are desired between a small elementary school, its local community, and the broader school district to which it legally, if not substantively, belongs. These issues will be explored using the following research questions: (1) how is community defined by the school administration, teachers, parents, and community members? and (2) how do school administrators, teachers, parents and community members conceptualize school-community relationships?

Schools are located in and influenced by local, ecological communities as well as broader, non-local institutional environments (Arum, 2000); however, the legacy of school closures and consolidations has left many schools with an additional aspect to or layer of community: the school district. This study investigates the ways that both community members and school personnel conceptualize and define community and the potential school-community relationship. In light of the potential benefits of school-community relationships (e.g., Sanders, 2001, 2003; Sanders & Harvey 2002; Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Bauch, 2001), this study explores the connections that exist and are desired between a small elementary school, its local community, and the broader school district to which it legally, if not substantively, belongs. These issues will be explored using the following research questions:

1. How is community defined by the school administration, teachers, parents, and community members?
2. How do school administrators, teachers, parents and community members conceptualize school-community relationships?
 - a. What school-community partnerships exist and what types are desired from the school and community?

Defining Community

In *The Community in America*, Warren (1978) describes various categories of conceptualizing community including: (1) a geographic category, which he names the community as space; (2) a demographic category, which he calls the community as people; and (3) an approach to community in light of the distribution of power within it. Moreover, he conceives of the community as a social system:

Thus, social-system analysis applied to the community must consider not only the interrelation of the community's subsystems but the more direct, rational, and ascertainable relationship of the various subsystems

functioning on the local level to social systems beyond the community. A particularly important point is the nature of the systemic linkage between various community-based units and their respective extracommunity social systems. (Warren, 1978, p. 51)

Warren refers to such connections to the extra-community social systems as vertical ties, while those connections within the community social system horizontal ties exist.

Beyond these conceptions of community, Warren (1978) describes a shift in communities in America, dubbed the “Great Change,” from a strong internal focus with an emphasis on horizontal ties to increasing external connections with an emphasis on vertical ties. For Warren emphasizing extra-local connections served to reduce the role of the local community:

The community, from [Warren’s] perspective, became little more than a stage where extra-local groups, organizations, and businesses pursued their interest with little concern for how their actions affected local residents....As communities became more internally differentiated and increasingly linked to larger systems beyond their borders, the local ties that once connected all parts of a community into a system began to break down. (Luloff & Bridger, 2003, p. 204-5)

This development of extra-local connections has occurred for schools within localities, as well. Arum (2000) argues that schools have become more reliant on the influence of broad professional and institutional communities than on the influence of the most local ecological community. These tensions described by Warren more than thirty years ago can be described today as problematic for small communities that have lost local businesses, population, and even character and vitality. However, these changes have an influence on schools and the school-community relationship, as well. Attention to these extra-local influences and on the most local school-community

connections can shed light on both community development and school improvement projects.

In contrast to Warren's social system, Wilkinson (1991) describes a community field, including a locality, local society, and locally oriented action. However, locality is problematic because the relation of community to territory is vague and establishing clear geographic boundaries coinciding with a particular community is challenging; however, "rather than rejecting the territorial element, the interactional conception of the community supports the view that contacts among people define the local territory" (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 24). The local society approach is complicated because of the presence of ties to state and national organizations, echoing Warren's vertical ties, which results in the diminished role of a local society and, consequently of community. Wilkinson, therefore, focuses on the community field, as opposed to Warren's social system, and an interactional definition of community related to the social structure and social interactions.

The study of social interaction continues to be a fruitful area of inquiry in the sociology of community. If local ecology and local society no longer denote a holistic unit, community interaction is another matter. People who live together tend to interact with one another whether or not they participate in extra-local structures as well. Moreover, their interactions can form a community field even if the community is not an ecological or social system. With a focus on social interaction, the sociology of the community continues to address important issues about completeness and integration of social life. (Wilkinson, 1991, p. 35)

This argument allows a focus on communities in sociological study without being preoccupied with the changing face of the physical and social dimensions of

community. Wilkinson acknowledges the role of broad national and international forces on communities, but does not let this paralyze his interest in the study of the social interactions within a community field.

In other work (see paper 1), I describe the role of place-based education in the development of school-community relationships. In this study, I focus on the importance of defining and conceptualizing community and the connection of this understanding to efforts of creating and maintaining school-community partnerships. While closely related, it is important to note that place-based education and school-community partnerships are not synonymous. Place-based schooling involves the use of the local surroundings, history, politics, and more for educational instruction and can employ partnering but partnerships are not necessary. Moreover, partnerships, which are the connections among schools and local organizations, can include place-based education but there are many types of partnerships that do not.

In this paper, I analyze the ways that school staff, parents, and community members define their communities. I explore an additional layer of community in relation to the school that is missing from Arum's (2000) dichotomy. He considers the most local community and the broader institutional community; however, in light of the history of the school I studied I propose that for many schools there is a mediating layer that is a local *and* professional layer: the school district. For many schools the school district is synonymous with the local community and would echo its concerns. Due to the history of school and district consolidation, there are many schools that are part of larger school districts that are not attuned or attentive to the needs of an individual school's local community. In other words, there are school districts that may represent a portion, usually the most populated area, of their district more than they represent other less populated or central regions of the district. Schools in outlying locations with smaller populations (a very common phenomenon as the result

of dramatic school and district consolidation this past century) may feel isolated or neglected within their own school district. For these schools an additional layer of institutional influence exists, which is not congruous necessarily with either the local or with the broader (state or federal) levels of community in Arum’s articulation (see Diagram 3.1).



Diagram 3.1: Nested Community Contexts

School-Community Connections: Partnering

The responsibility of creating or maintaining school-community connections often resides with school leaders. This can be a challenge for administrators busy meeting the expectations, needs, and demands of students, parents, teachers, unions, policymakers, and state and federal governments. In this section, I review the literature on partnerships, including the definitions, types, motivations, and goals.

Partnerships: Definitions and types

The broader concept of community involvement is described in the educational

research literature and within it can be found the concept and definition of partnership. In a review of the literature on community involvement and disadvantaged students, Nettles (1991) defines the term in the following way: “Community involvement consists of the actions that organizations and individuals (e.g., parents, businesses, universities, social service agencies, and the media) take to promote student development” (p. 380). This definition is not limited to partnerships but describes involvement and is narrowly focused on student development, over for example school improvement or community development. In another review on community involvement, Sanders (2003) describes a problem with the literature: “The resurgence of community involvement as a focus of interest in education has resulted in a considerable body of literature. This literature’s utility, however, is significantly compromised by its breadth and diversity” (p. 161). And for this reason she seeks to distill from the literature the main ideas and questions raised throughout the vast literature. In her piece she defines involvement as follows: “community involvement in schools refers to connections between schools and individuals, businesses, and formal and informal organizations and institutions in a community” (Sanders, 2003, p. 162). In her review she categorizes involvement as being in the form of a business partnership, a university partnership, a service learning partnership, or as school-linked service integration (Sanders, 2003). In earlier work, Sanders (2001) notes that involvement is as varied in the literature to be defined as parent involvement, community education and collaboration, or even community development.

Within community involvement, Sanders (2001) defines partnerships: “School-community partnerships, then, can be defined as the connections between schools and community individuals, organizations, and businesses that are forged to promote students’ social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development” (p. 20). While this is a comprehensive definition including the relationship, the potential partners, and the

range of possible goals, I find it too focused student outcomes for my work. As an example of a more basic definition, in *Learning Together: A Look at 20 School-Community Initiatives*, which was prepared by the Institute for Educational Leadership and the National Center for Community Education, Melaville (1998) offers the following definition of initiatives: “intentional efforts to create and sustain relationships among a K-12 school or school district and a variety of both formal and informal organizations and institutions in the community” (p. 6). This definition emphasizes the relationships between organizations rather than the goals or activities of partnering. Bauch (2001) also uses a broad definition focusing on the relationship at hand: “Partnerships are built on social interaction, mutual trust, and relationships that promote agency within a community” (p. 205).

In other examples, partnerships are never clearly defined but rather previous literature is used to support reasons for partnerships, with an underlying understanding of how they are defined. For example, Sanders and Harvey (2002) include references to Crowson and Boyd (1993) and Heath and McLaughlin (1987) showing how researchers have suggested that in order to meet the demands placed on them, schools must reach beyond their walls and into their communities. In this way the authors are adhering to a definition of partnership based on the utility of partnerships for school reform and improvement. Bauch (2001) focuses on elements of partnering in rural communities, including social capital and sense of place as resources present in small, rural communities, which can be tapped through school-community connections. In addition, she includes the categories of parent involvement, church ties, school-business-agency relationships (partnerships), and using the community as a curricular resource.

Beyond these definitions and categories, partnerships can be defined by their goals or the activities involved. For example, partnering can achieve particular goals,

including but not limited to, increasing academic performance, school improvement, community development, and the integration of services. These will be discussed in the following section as motivations and reasons for partnering rather than as definitions. Similarly, partnerships can be defined by the activities involved. “Common community partnership activities include mentoring and tutoring, contextual learning and job shadowing, academic enrichment, as well as the provision of services, equipment, and supplies to students and schools” (Sanders, 2001, p. 20).

Partnerships: Goals and Motivations

The literature on school-community partnerships illustrates the social problems that inhibit the work of the school and suggests these can be ameliorated through partnering with social services agencies and community organizations (e.g., Heath & McLaughlin, 1987; Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Sanders, 2001). In other words, there are so many pressures on schools, students, and families that schools cannot single-handedly do the job of educating children, but can maximize their efforts by reaching beyond their walls and partnering with other organizations to best serve the needs of children. Academic achievement can be understood as the focus of schools; however, it is not the dominant reason for partnering. Improved academic achievement is not the main motivation for partnering cited in the literature. Partnering is more often viewed as a way to improve the conditions in the lives of students, families, or the school so that the work of educators can occur with fewer obstacles; therefore, improved student achievement becomes a byproduct rather than a focus of partnerships. The motivations for partnering that I found most prevalent in the literature are for school reform and improvement, support for families, community development, and the creation of a sense of place for students (e.g., Heath & McLaughlin, 1987; Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Sanders, 2001; Bauch, 2001).

Partnerships can be used as a mechanism for school reform and improvement,

as well as being the result of school restructuring or reorganization. Shirley (2001) provides concrete examples from his case studies in Texas of the ways that faith-based partnerships can improve schools. He studied the ways that in one case a principal reached out to a church to help connect more deeply the school and community, and in a second case where a church leader desired to help the community by establishing a health clinic and forging better relations with the public schools. In each case, the schools, communities, and students were aided through partnering.

Partnerships may be created to offer support to students or families. This could take the shape of family involvement in the schools, continuing education for parents through GED classes, parenting support, full-service schools, and even the development of social capital. An important example of this is related to the community schools movement and it is the move toward coordinated or integrated services or even full-service schools (e.g., Dryfoos, 2008). These are often formed as school-based, school-linked, or community-based networks (Crowson & Boyd, 1993).

Another support for students that can be created through partnering is related to Coleman's (1987, 1988) understanding of the importance of social capital for children and families, especially in relation to school achievement. Arguments for the development of social capital, at an individual and community level, are plentiful in the partnership literature. For example, Sanders (2003) finds in a review of the literature that many children are growing up with a deficit of social capital and that the lack can be filled through partnerships that expose children to social networks within the community. In addition, Driscoll (2001) argues that schools can alleviate problems associated with the unequal distribution of social capital among children through partnerships connecting the school and the students to community networks.

Partnerships can be used a community development tool, for example through community service, development of civic responsibility, creating economies of scale

for purchasing services across a small town, enhancing the vitality of a community, through social and human capital development, and even through the provision of technology. Moreover, schools can act as community centers by opening the school building to the community for use during non-school hours. This role of partnerships for community development can take many forms including taking students into the community to conduct needed work in the form of community service. The range of work to be done varies in the literature with one of the more unique ideas being having students conduct needs assessment of their own communities (Israel & Ilvento, 1995). Similarly, in other areas students surveyed the business community in order to advise the chamber of commerce activities (Seidl, Mulkey & Blanton, 1999) and studied the effectiveness of the local chamber of commerce's advertising campaigns (Versteeg, 1993). Moreover, community development partnerships can be focused on the supply of workers in the community. For example, Sanders (2003) argues that community involvement and especially business partnerships can help schools effectively prepare students for the workforce and its shifting needs. The motivation for this type of partnership can also be viewed at an individual level as human capital development. Finally, in another example a school forged a partnership with the community to not only upgrade the school's information technology infrastructure but to make online access available to the community for a much lower subscription rate than any private provider (Schafft, Alter, & Bridger, 2006).

In particular, arguments are made about the role of the rural school in its community. The presence of a school in a small rural area has been found to have social and economic benefits related to population growth, housing, income, and employment (Lyson, 2002). Examining census data over time, Lyson (2002) found a decline in community indicators after towns and villages experienced school closure. For this reason, there are particular calls for rural schools to be involved in community

development efforts and these efforts can be the motivation for partnering between a school and its community. Miller (1995) emphasizes the need to develop social capital in rural communities. This is related to community level social capital, as opposed to the previously discussed individual level from Coleman's work. Community level social capital relates to Putnam's (2000) notion of a decline in social capital paired with a decline in communities. Through his work with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Miller (1995) is able to describe the efforts of several small schools in development projects, which he categorizes as using the school as a community center, creating projects to sociologically study a community (e.g., Foxfire), and school-based enterprise projects (e.g., Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning). Crowson and Boyd (2001) using Schorr's (1997) work, argue for a new lens through which to view the community relationship for schools. They combine ideas of importance of place, an ecological view of development, social capital, and individual agency to arrive at a combination of awareness of sense of place and politics of place that can play an important role in educational reform.

Data and Methods

The data are from a case study of one school, Maplewood⁸, which was purposively chosen (Patton, 2002) because it offers an interesting, though not unique, context for research. In my work on community involvement in school-level decisions about UPK implementation (see paper two) the school districts each have a single elementary school, except for one district with two elementary schools. In these cases the local community and the school district are the same geographic area. In contrast to those types of districts, the district in this study does not have simply local (within school district) and non-local (outside school district) forces at play. Instead, due to the geographic location and larger district size this school has an immediate local level

⁸ Maplewood is a pseudonym in order to preserve the anonymity of the school.

(school and community/town) and a broader local level (district and larger community/city), in addition to the non-local forces. This adds a layer of complexity to the definition of community, may increase the number of potential partners and/or the challenges associated with partnering, and makes it a particularly relevant study for districts that have experienced (recent or past) or are planning consolidation and mergers. In this case, and in the case of many consolidated and merged schools and districts, this community maintains its elementary school but the middle and high school students are bussed and served in the centrally located schools of the district closer to the city center. This context allows for the examination of an interesting set of school-community relationships.

I gained access to Maplewood through school-level permission from the principal as well as district-level approval from the central office. I conducted semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A for interview protocol) of individuals and groups of participants (n=21). The interviews lasted between 30 and 75 minutes. Within the school system I interviewed a randomly selected group of teachers (n=5 of 16), the superintendent, the principal, a past principal, a front office staff member, the head janitor, and the school's family liaison. The parents (n=7) I interviewed were recruited using a targeted approach by the family liaison, a request made by one teacher to her class, and by a full school mailing. I purposefully interviewed the PTA (parent-teacher association) president to understand any partnerships facilitated by the PTA. In addition, I spoke with another active PTA member, a parent who is also the president of the community council, and four other parents with differing levels of participation in the school and community. Most of the parents (5 of 7) had multiple children in various grades in the school and therefore had been affiliated with the school for different numbers of years (ranging from less than 1 to more than 12). I also interviewed community members (n=3) without current connections to the school as a

parent or staff member, including the town historian, a man who had lived his entire life in the town, and a woman who had raised children in the town and had not sent them to the local school but whose husband had attended it.

Using interview data from the principal, teachers, parents, and other community members, I explore the conceptions of community and the partnerships that exist or could exist between the school and its environs. For those relationships that do exist I highlight the benefits to the school and community and for those that do not exist the barriers to establishing them are discussed. In addition, I asked the participants for definitions of their community and I analyze these in light of geographic, social, local/non-local, and other conceptions. Finally, I connect the conceptions of community to the descriptions of partnering activities. For example, is the immediate community (e.g., within the local town borders) considered viable for partnering or is it the larger community (e.g., larger bordering city) that is viewed as the location of potential partners?

Transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed using the qualitative software, Atlas-ti. I used both pre-existing codes based on the theoretical framework and literatures and additional emergent codes, as necessary (see Appendix B for the list of codes, definitions, and examples). For example, I coded the way community was defined by respondents using codes for geographic, social, and professional definitions. In addition, I coded for definitions of the community that included a description of the most local community versus the school district as community or even a broader county-level definition of community. I also coded for definitions of community that were more like a list of community organizations. The emergent code in this area of analysis was for historical definitions of community that some respondents offered when asked to describe and define their town.

The Case

It is essential to understand the history and current context of Maplewood in relation to the community as a backdrop to the words of the participants, analysis, and findings. The process of consolidation which ended in the 1950s left this community that once had more than ten one-room schoolhouses serving all ages of students with only one central elementary serving pre-K to 5th graders. The children in Maplewood were all within walking distance of a one-room school until 1957 when Maplewood Elementary School was opened in its current location. All the children who had once walked to their own local schools were now sent to the one large school serving K-5th grades. In addition, this area was merged with the Oakwood City School District⁹, thereby completing the process of both school and district consolidation in the 1950s. The children of Maplewood now attend middle and high school in the city schools in Oakwood. In addition, in the 1980s there was another process of consolidation where Maplewood and another elementary school were to be consolidated and each was considered for closure. The other school was selected for closure and the students of the closed school were divided among other schools, but most were sent to Maplewood. Currently, Maplewood is one of fewer than 10 elementary schools in the Oakwood City School District (OCSD), which also includes multiple middle schools and one high school. All but two of the elementary schools are within the city limits of Oakwood, as well as the middle schools and the high school. Maplewood and one other outlying school, Beechwood, are the two rural schools in an officially non-rural school district.¹⁰

In the 2009-10 school year, Maplewood had fewer than twenty classroom

⁹ Oakwood is a pseudonym for the small city located less than 10 miles from Maplewood and the city school district now includes Maplewood Elementary School.

¹⁰ It is essential to note that they are only defined as rural schools locally and I use this term as a reflection of the district and school conceptions of the school as rural. There is no federal designation of individual schools as rural but rather the categorization is at the district level. Because OCSD is not a rural district then Maplewood technically is not a rural school.

teachers pre-K to 5th grade, as well as more than twenty other educational staff members, and approximately ten general staff members, including clerical, custodial, cafeteria, and transportation staff. Of the classroom teachers, nine have been teaching at the school for fewer than five years, five have been at the school between five and ten years, and only two have been at the school for more than ten years. The principal was in his second year at the school during the study. The enrollment in 2009-10 was approximately 240 students in pre-K through 5th grade.

Findings

Defining Community

I analyze the Maplewood interview data in light of the definitions of community provided in a previous section. In connection to Warren's (1978) work, many of the respondents used demographic and geographic explanation to define their community. Alternatively and more closely aligned with Wilkinson's (1991) concept of the community field, a few respondents defined the community by listing the community institutions and organizations, including the school. And finally, some descriptions of Maplewood as a community can be connected to Warren's (1978) "Great Change" theory and to Arum's (2000) explanation of the local and non-local influences on school leaders. These responses define the community in connection to the broader school district, or professional environment. Additionally, many respondents described the story of Maplewood in our conversations, thereby providing an historical definition of their community and school, as well as a nod to the future.

Demographic and geographic definitions.

When asked to define the community of Maplewood, the majority of respondents offered descriptions of the population of the area including comments on the rurality of the people, the lack of ethnic or racial diversity in the community, the poverty of the families, the degree to which the community is "tight knit." One parent

described a split in the community: “It’s a divided community. There’s the haves and the have-nots just like in most other school districts. I mean there are very, very rural places up there. And there’s the affluent places.” Another parent offered a nice description of the variety of people who make Maplewood their home:

The community is rural. That’s sort of the easiest explanation but there’s a lot more to it than that. The community has many different parts. There are people who live in Maplewood because their families have farmed in Maplewood and they have been in Maplewood since before the Civil War. There are people who have moved to Maplewood to get away from Oakwood but not too far away from Oakwood. So there are small family groups or they come so they aren’t constantly being watched in how they choose to live because it’s very easy to hide out in Maplewood. There are people who are very wealthy who live in Maplewood, who live there and go to that school district who have chosen to move out of the city and live on a fairly large piece of property a fairly well-appointed home. And they have quite a lot of resources. And then there are the average people ...and then there are the people who can’t afford to live in Oakwood because it’s too expensive and they have moved to Maplewood because the rent is cheaper, not being aware that there are some downsides to doing that. So the population itself is extremely diverse.

In this quotation, a parent describes many of the inhabitants of Maplewood as people who escaped Oakwood for a variety of reasons: looking for larger plots of land, less expensive cost of living, and a chance to not be “watched in how they choose to live.” This parent may be describing people who live in the most remote areas of Maplewood to avoid the gaze of neighbors or of social services or she may be

describing the people who make their home in an intentional, sustainable community within the catchment area of Maplewood Elementary School. In this community many families live communally and may have chosen that environment to avoid the attention of neighbors outside this intentional community who may be critical of their lifestyle.

Members of the staff describe Maplewood as being diverse, in reference to the economic diversity of the families, but say “it’s not as multicultural as you’d want.” Others echo this with concern about the lack of ethnic and racial diversity in the community and the school. Two teachers consider the lack of diversity in the school:

Teacher 1¹¹: When [the district was] talking about closing elementary schools, in my mind I was thinking if they close Maplewood at least our kids would get more exposure to other kids: Black kids, Asian kids, upper class white kids. They need to have that exposure otherwise they feel like this is the norm....

Teacher 2: Yeah there’s very little diversity. And there’s still, there’s still a lot of prejudice. I mean there’s...

T1: With the parents.

T2: With the parents and the families and there are still very, very old school thoughts about race and sexuality. People are very open about it.

A community member describes choosing to send her children to another elementary school even though their home school would have been Maplewood:

And it’s actually fairly important to me that my kids be exposed to a broader cross section. And [the school they attended] is obviously very

¹¹ In this passage and every passage with multiple voices, I will use T1 and T2 to distinguish between multiple voices in a group interview. These are not identifiers of a particular respondent. T1 will designate the same respondent in a single quotation but not across quotations.

diverse because of the universities. And the graduate school population and their kids are enrolled at the schools, the local schools.

This parent notes that the diversity due to the children of graduate students, particularly international students, is unlikely to change the population of Maplewood because few graduate students live that far from the campuses and so their children attend the elementary schools within the city. Another parent reflects on the lack of diversity in Maplewood:

Oakwood is a very diverse community and unfortunately because Maplewood is a rural school it doesn't have a lot of the diversity that some of the other schools have. But with the section 8 or lower rent housing, the affordable housing that they're building on [neighborhood] that is changing, which is nice. And the district is looking at redistricting again, which will help. But it's hard to get middle to upper income families to go there when they're closer towards the other different schools. So it's a weird geographic location to get a good diverse population in it.

This same parent also considered sending her own children to another elementary school in the district, but decided to keep them in their home school of Maplewood.

But I debated for a long time and I thought, well okay, I can either be part of the problem at Maplewood or part of the solution. So if I am one of those families that can bring something more to the table and I open enroll my kids out, I am not doing anything to help my community and school. So we stayed. And I love it.

This parent makes a direct connection between sending her children to her local school and the well being of the community and she feels she can make difference by sending her children and being an active parent in her local school.

Often combined with the descriptions of rurality and the diversity of the community, the poverty levels of the families in Maplewood are frequently mentioned by respondents. The principal comments on the poverty of the community:

The free and reduced [price lunch] numbers have been steadily increasing and right now they're hovering around 65%, so we're the second poorest elementary school in the whole district.

There are seven other elementary schools in the district, most of which are located in the small city of Oakwood. A teacher combines her description of the poverty of the community with a comment on the religion:

I would say it's rural, lower income than the rest of Willow County¹², I would say on the lower end of the spectrum. That's most of it, I would say, but I would say it's also a religious community.

Echoing this later in her interview this teacher describes the school and the church as the hubs of the community.

The poverty and isolation of the families limits their experiences, according to their teachers. A teacher took a group of 4th and 5th grade students to a chain restaurant in Oakwood for lunch as part of a school trip and another teacher reflected on this event:

Last year, she said about 50% of the class had never been to a restaurant. Of all the 4th and 5th graders, [50%] had never been to a restaurant. So a lot of these kids have experiences like at Wal-Mart, like they'd go downtown to the Wal-Mart and they'll go to the corner store for food, but a lot of these kids haven't had those experiences.

Like going to the [downtown public] library is a big thing for these

¹² Willow County is a pseudonym for the county within which Maplewood and Oakwood are located.

kids.

In addition, the isolation, attitudes, money, and lack of transportation limit the children's exposure to extracurricular activities:

Teacher 1: And a lot of these kids haven't had experiences like, like I have two kids this year who actually are like taking classes like karate or ballet or something. But normally I don't have any kids to do any kind of enrichment that they talk about. Maybe one or two kids in the whole class.

Teacher 2: There's a few yeah, but not on a whole. When I worked at [a downtown school] it was the total opposite. There was like two or three kids that didn't have some sort of after school activity or instrument.

Together these two teachers reflect on why it may be that the students take fewer classes after school:

Teacher 1: I think all the factors.

Teacher 2: Money.

T1: It's money, transportation, and a lot of the parents didn't have that themselves so they don't even think about it. It's just not even...

T2: It's not a priority.

I asked these same teachers if there may be things that the children in the country are exposed to that the children in the city may miss.

Teacher 1: I would say they get a lot of time outside because the parents, they're just like go outside and they're not allowed to come back in until dinnertime. But you know it's not structured time so they get exposed to a lot of bad behaviors and I think they're learning a lot of negative behaviors when they're out with their friends. Especially in

the trailer park here. So they're getting, they can get more fresh air but I think there are times when parents keep them in too much too.

Teacher 2: *I can't think of strengths.* [emphasis added]

Although the first teacher begins with what may be a positive experience for children growing up in the country, she moves quickly to her ideas of the negative effects of unstructured time. And it is telling that the second teacher cannot think of any benefits the students may gain from their rural upbringing. The teachers and staff observe the families living in rural areas and offer descriptions of the related isolation, poverty, lack of exposure to experiences and diversity, and even the priorities of the families. Many of the responses are based on knowledge of the families as supported by anecdotes given in the interviews; however, other responses from the teachers and staff sound like assumptions or generalizations not substantiated with particular examples. Nonetheless, many of the staff and teachers have lived and worked with the families in Maplewood for more than twenty years. Their care for the students and their families is evident in their words and in their work.

The community is described as old, in the sense that there are many people whose families have been there for many generations. One teacher comments: "it's very, very tight knit in that everybody has known everyone for quite a long time."

Two teachers build off each other when interviewed together:

Interviewer: What about for the people who aren't parents, would they still be involved in something that might happen at the school?

T1: Probably because they're probably a family member of someone that goes here or went here.

I: They have some connection?

T2: Yeah that's really true. There're so many generations, they all seem to know each other. It's like a web. Like even a lot of these road names,

a lot of these kids have the last names of the roads. I mean all the history.

And yet, while the staff describe “a lot of great individual people and families that we interact with, that we know personally, that we truly love” they also say “sometimes it’s not the friendliest community I’ve ever been in.”

The rurality is also closely tied to the geographic descriptions given by respondents. Some respondents, school staff and parents alike, described the community using road names and route numbers as the boundaries of the community and the school catchment area. Many also described how large and spread out the area is by using landmarks like local parks, housing developments, and the regional hospital. A past principal of the school compared the geography of Maplewood to one of the city schools in the district:

[The children’s] scenery is very, very different. You know the playground at [city school], for example, you know there are houses all around. The playground at Maplewood, you know you can see for miles. You know you can have a gym section in the winter of cross-country skiing because you just go out the door.

These social and geographic definitions of community echo Warren’s (1978) categories of community and lead to both judgmental, problematic understandings, as well as nostalgic images of the open space and scenery of the rural life. The parents and school staff both offer definitions based in the demographics of the community reflecting on perceptions of economic and racial diversity, as well as poverty and rural culture.

Community defined through local organizations and the school.

Wilkinson (1991) defines communities using the concept of a field including the locality, the local actors, and the local-oriented action. In the previous section I

described the social descriptions of the local actors in Maplewood. Teachers, parents, and community members also answered the question of how they define their community by listing community organizations or by immediately describing the school, as if the school and the community are one in the same. Organizations in these descriptions include the firehouse, the Grange, the community council, the gas station, and even a topless bar, though it was noted that this would make a poor partner for the school. The Maplewood Community Council is the organization most often associated with the school, since it is a non-profit “that is primarily charged with providing youth services for the town.” And with a nod to the past, one community member mentioned that the community used to have an auto repair shop, a post office, and a grocery store in the center of town.

In addition to this list of past and current community entities, some respondents took my question about community as being about the community of the school, rather than of the town. A parent defines the community in this way in the following passage.

If you’re going to say what’s the Maplewood community you know the first thing that comes to mind is well okay, you’ve got the Maplewood community in the context of the school. Then I’m going to think of the administration, the staff and school. I’m going to think of the families.

The superintendent describes the school both from her perspective as superintendent but also as a resident of the town of Maplewood and as a grandparent of Maplewood students. “Maplewood is a phenomenal school. It’s a little jewel that most people in Oakwood or Willow County have no concept of. Of how strong the school, the community happens to be.” For the superintendent the strength of the school and the community are intertwined.

The conceptions of the community as the local organizations or the school

itself as the community are directly related the conceptions of partnering described in a later section. The respondents who listed organizations within Maplewood often did so as an example of what used to exist or how few entities are still present in the tiny town center. This leaves the school with very few local partnering opportunities and results in many of the school's partners being in Oakwood. The description of the school as the community is often paired by respondents with its role as the community center. The school may not currently serve as a center for community members not affiliated with the school because those I spoke with had only been in the school in order to vote; however, the view of the school as a community center is essential for any movement toward enhanced school-community connections.

Maplewood through time: definitions using the past and the future.

The history of Maplewood is crucial to this case study because it was the process of school consolidation that left Maplewood Elementary School in an outlying and isolated position within OCSD. Many respondents described and defined their community through its history, as well as with an eye to its future. In the social descriptions of the community the school staff referred to the changing nature of diversity in the area:

It's very diverse. I mean we go from everything from low poverty levels up to doctors and professors. I mean it's not as multicultural as you'd want but in this kind of area, you know, a little country area, it's getting more diverse as we go.

The superintendent also described Maplewood as a "community in flux" anticipating it becoming a very different place in the next decade:

It really is a community in flux, a lot of [the community members] don't, I think, realize that yet. But it is a community in flux and some of that's being driven by the fact that the boundaries for the

Maplewood Elementary School are including new developments and people who do not have the same experiential background. They all value their children but it's just a very different perception of the world and what poverty is or isn't, what their expectations are, their rights are. So I think it would be very interesting to come back in ten years and really do a study because it's just hit the tip of the iceberg right now with how I think that community is going to be changing.

And yet, this anticipated set of changes for Maplewood may clash with a population the school staff describe as "very set in their ways" and a community where "change is hard." At least one teacher stated her belief that it is the school's role to teach about diversity in a way that may alleviate tensions that may come with the increasing diversity of the population of Maplewood.

I think at school we can really broaden their perspectives or just their understanding or their knowledge. They don't have to agree. But we could do a much better job with that. Not even just tolerance, I sort of hate tolerance, but gosh we can always start there.

This teacher is describing teaching tolerance to children as a bare minimum with an understanding, on which she elaborates in the interview that beyond tolerance can be an appreciation and embrace of difference. In the words of the respondents, the school played an important role in the history of Maplewood and hopes to play an important role in the future with whatever changes are coming for the community.

Layers of community: locality, district, and professional network.

The legacy of school and district consolidation has left the community of Maplewood with one elementary school, rather than many one-room schoolhouses offering K-12 education, and as part of the Oakwood Central School District (OCSD). The school staff, parents, and community members were descriptive about the tensions

that result from the school's position as an outlying school, as well as a rural school in a non-rural district. Their words speak to the communities that Arum (2000) describes as having influence on educational leaders: the local ecological community and the broader professional community. However, Maplewood presents a layer in between Arum's dichotomy: the local profession community, in this case OCSD. In Arum's work the local ecological community is perceived as being the same as the local school district because many schools do not have the tension that Maplewood describes of being estranged from their own district. In this section, the words of the respondents will clarify the importance of considering the local community, as well as a local professional community, in addition to the broader (state or national) professional community.

The principal described this tension between the school and the district in our first conversation prior to the beginning of my study and reiterated these sentiments during our formal interview.

[Maplewood] also has a community identity with Oakwood, being a school in the Oakwood City School District. It doesn't share a lot of the characteristics of many of the schools in the Oakwood City School District, which complicates it, the definition of community here. But it's kind of battling views of what community really is. So it is the local but the larger community.

When asked how she would define the community of Maplewood, one teacher clearly articulated both a local and a local professional community:

I think as a teacher I include [in my definition of community] everything that is the school district. So the Maplewood community also includes all the other schools in the district. But I think as a Maplewood resident I would include just the Maplewood community.

Not the city or and only barely to [contiguous village].

The views of the principal and teacher could be understood as the dichotomy in Arum's (2000) theory: the local ecological community and the broader institutional community. They each offer a definition of the local town of Maplewood and of the broader school district, which could be the local ecological and the broader institutional environment. However, this simplifies the construct of local/non-local and underestimates the tension between the competing understandings of what is local in a professional sense for educators. It is essential to note that neither the principal nor the teacher is referring to their professional community as the state or the nation, and yet, this is what Arum (2000) refers to as the broader institutional environment: the network of influences at the state or national level. Although in these quotations the teacher and principal do not include these broader state and national influences, we can assume that they like other educators feel pressures from those sources as well. It is this set of "battle views of what community really is" that make it necessary to add an additional layer between Arum's pair of environments influencing school leaders. For the educators and administrators at Maplewood there are three layers of influence on their work: (1) the local, ecological community of Maplewood; (2) the broader institutional and professional environment of the state and the nation; *and* (3) a local *and* institutional environment of the Oakwood City School District. This is an important addition to the layers in Arum's (2000) theory because it may be unique to schools in the outlying position of Maplewood. The schools within the city of Oakwood do not have a local ecological community that is separate from the local institutional community of the school district.

In connection to the competing definitions of local, there is a resulting sense of isolation from the district, as described here by a former principal.

It is far from Oakwood. Sometimes you feel like you're not connected

downtown at all. But of course you are. You are part of the district and the school principal is really the link between the community and the school district. You know if at [one downtown school], which is right over here or you're at [second downtown school], you know the fact that you're part of the Oakwood City School District, you know it's almost what they call a no-brainer. But when you're out in Maplewood, to know that you're part of the Oakwood City School District and the policies that the school district implements, you know makes a tremendous difference.

The former principal is explaining that the schools within the city know that they are part of the OCSD simply by their location in the city and their proximity to the central office buildings, from within which this former principal was speaking during the interview. And yet, she suggests that when working in Maplewood it is less clear that you are part of OCSD and that it is the building principal's responsibility to make that connection clear to the teachers and staff in the school. Teachers also describe the isolation of the community as being imagined more than a reality: "The perception is that we're out there. It's not that it's that far." The principal notices this same distorted sense of distance: "Most of the district revolves around a few square miles. This brings it out: we're nine miles from the Board building, but the perception is that we're 100 miles away out in farm country." This interpretation of the distance is important to take in to account rather than merely the number of miles between the school and the central office. In many larger districts schools may be even more spread out and yet will not suffer from the same sense of isolation because they are still within the understood bounds of their district. In other words, sometimes nine miles only feels like nine miles and sometimes it feels like 100.

Parents also describe the isolation of Maplewood in the context of OCSD:

You know it's interesting because it is such a rural school, there's a lot of people in Oakwood that don't see Maplewood as part of the Oakwood City School District. We're kind of so far removed from a lot of the stuff that happens downtown that a lot of times people think we're in the [Neighboring] District. So it's different but I think that's part of Oakwood's charm. Since most of the elementary schools cover such a wide acreage they really have, they all have their own sort of feeling. And I don't think there's any one school in the district that really represents the district as a whole you know except maybe the high school.

For this parent, the differences across the elementary schools are seen as a benefit and a way for the schools to reflect individual neighborhoods and areas of the district. A teacher describes the individuality of the elementary schools from a different perspective.

It is an interesting district because I've taught in three different buildings in the district and each one really is their own unique little community. And they're not unfriendly about strangers, but they have their own little community and they would just as soon keep it that way. I don't know if Oakwood is unique in that because they are really very different. I mean kids are kids no matter where you go. But I think adults perceive their school as their special place, their little kingdom and everything else they don't know about and they might not want to know about.

This isolation can lead to schools that are able to reflect their locality, thereby being more responsive to parental and community needs and concerns; however, in the case of Maplewood this isolation seems to result in more problematic conditions for

students, families and the community.

The perceived distance between Maplewood and Oakwood can affect the students, often adversely.

But it's also the perception of this community that this is Maplewood and this is our little boundary and this is where we are and that's Oakwood. And there are kids here who rarely travel to Oakwood. They might go to [next village] to shop but they rarely go to Oakwood. So they don't really feel like that's part of their community. (Teacher)

This feeling of Oakwood as "their community" becomes important when discussing the transition from elementary to middle school for the students from Maplewood. A community member who grew up in Maplewood, went to a one-room schoolhouse and then Maplewood Elementary School, sent his children through Maplewood Elementary School, and then taught at Oakwood High School has multiple perspectives on the position of Maplewood in the district and the effects on students, especially as they transition to the city schools.

When those students go on into the middle schools and the high school, it's and some of that is just image and some of it is the way parents interact with the school system. I think a lot of the rural parents were very uncomfortable going into the school being advocates for their kids. You won't find many Maplewood parents on the high school PTA or going to board meetings to speak out. And even as a kid going into the city to school, it's a very clear impression it's not your school. You know it's called the Oakwood City School District. That's the official legal name of the school. You don't live in the city. If it were the Oakwood *Central* School District or the Oakwood *Area* School District or something, you know just the name would make it feel different. It's

called Oakwood High School. You don't live in Oakwood. So there's a sense that it's not your high school.

As if in anticipation of these problems of transition, one parent emphasizes her currently positive feelings about the most local community:

I love the community. I really love it. I feel like people are very laid back. I feel like they're very friendly. It's a very open feel like people are real, they're not closed, they're very open. I've gotten a really good feel that people kind of have similar feelings that we do, that they want to know the other parents before they're going to let their kids go off.

So it's been really great.

However, this mother is describing this community in the past tense as the family anticipates a move out of the school district. They are moving less than one mile in order to gain residence in another district: "And it is the sole decision why we are moving, because of the school district." The other district is smaller and will not require what this mother perceives would be a difficult transition for their children into a larger middle and high school in Oakwood, the nearby small city.

Partnering: School-community connections

In this case study of the Maplewood community and Maplewood Elementary School, I use partnering as the avenue for exploring the school-community connection. The partnering activities defined by the school employees, parents, and community members reflect the definitions of partnerships in the literature (e.g., Melaville, 1998; Bauch, 2001). Although few partnerships may exist each respondent was able to speak about at least one connection the school has with the community; there are however, differences to note between those partnerships within the most local community, Maplewood, and those within the larger community of Oakwood. These local/non-local tensions can be viewed both using Arum's (2000) local and institutional

communities, as well as Warren's (1978) vertical and horizontal ties. In addition, the partnering work of the school reflects the segment of the literature that describes the role of partnerships as compensating for deficits in the community, families, or lives of the students (e.g., Heath & McLaughlin, 1987; Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Sanders, 2001).

Existing partnerships and benefits.

When asked to describe the partnering activities of the school most respondents, including all of the school administration and staff, half of the teachers and parents, and two of the three community members, mentioned the Maplewood Community Council (MCC) as a partner of the school. This is a non-profit organization with the mission of providing services for the children of the community. The council is made up of community members, including parents of students at Maplewood Elementary. The activities provided by MCC include a summer camp for children, a basketball team during the school year, and support for a Harvest Festival, among other programs for children ages elementary through high school. The president of the council describes the activities for middle and high school students that the MCC provides:

We have a middle school, high school program, mostly middle school that does activities after school: Primitive Pursuits, crafting groups, girls groups. There has been a group that does computer game design. We have a program manager that we contract with through [University] develop the programs. She is very connected to the kids and usually spends lunchtime at the middle school interacting with the kids and pulling from that information the things that they're interested in participating in and then trying to find those things and it's one of the very special things about her. But as a consequence we do have some

programs that the kids are very interested in participating in. In this way, the MCC helps to smooth the transition for the Maplewood students by placing a familiar and trusted adult in the middle school. The MCC president also describes the role the community plays in connection to greater community:

In addition we try and do some community events. We have a Harvest Festival at the end of September each year, which is our primary fundraiser but it's also a community event and we couple free events with money events so that they, anybody can attend. We would like people to attend whether they can really afford to pay for it or not. Most of our youth programming is either very low cost or free.

The MCC is the partner most often listed by the respondents and it is the most local partner for Maplewood Elementary. The principal explains why it is such a strong partnership for the school:

One of the most solid partnerships that we have is with the Maplewood Community Council because it's very, very small and it just serves this community.

By serving only the children in Maplewood and of the Maplewood Elementary School, the MCC provides an essential role in the community and is the primary partner to the school. It is the only local partner with the others mentioned by respondents being in the greater Oakwood community and school district.

The other most often mentioned partnerships include a program through which retired community members volunteer in the classrooms; however, these are Oakwood community members rather than Maplewood residents. The benefits of this program include the intergenerational aspect meaning that children are exposed to grandparent-type figures. This program is a partner to other schools in the district but in particular is described as being "very good about getting into Maplewood." This is as opposed to

student volunteers from the local college and university who seem less likely to come to Maplewood than the other schools in the district. This most often attributed to the distance they would have to travel, which is less than ten miles from either campus. Nonetheless the elementary schools in Oakwood are less than five miles from each campus and many are within walking distance or accessible by public transportation. For example, a teacher describes how offers may be made to all the teachers of a certain grade or program in the district, except the volunteers do not want to travel to the outlying schools:

We try really hard to make those [university] connections and again, it's the distance, at least in my classroom. We'll get all these things in [_ grade], we have these [offers for] volunteers from such and such but they won't come to Beechwood¹³ or Maplewood, but does anybody else want them? You get that. Because they can't drive the distance.

The superintendent reiterates this problem of transportation to the outlying schools from her district-level perspective.

Transportation hurts us there too because unless you're, if you're a [university] or [college] student and you don't have a car, it's pretty hard to get to Maplewood. Beechwood too but Beechwood is on the same hill, that side, whereas Maplewood, a lot of the college students view it as going to Podunk, [even though it] isn't that far away. Podunk, USA. And it's really hard to have them, one, think of going there, and two, have the wherewithal to get there.

Whether the distance to Maplewood is actual or perceived, it causes the school to be isolated from opportunities of which other schools in the district are able to take

¹³ Beechwood is a pseudonym for the other school in Oakwood City School District that is an outlying rural school.

advantage, in this case the volunteer time of college students.

Other partnering activities mentioned are made available to Maplewood particularly due to its position as a rural school in OCSD. OCSD has had incidents of bullying and violence in the middle and high schools that have been attributed to racial or socio-economic class tensions. These tensions are sometimes attributed to the populations of students that are separated in the elementary schools and who then come together for the first time in the middle and high school settings. In particular, the separation of the rural and urban children is thought to add to these tensions because of the differing demographics of the student populations. To alleviate these problems the district has focused on programs that partner rural schools with urban schools for fieldtrips and penpal activities. The former principal who now has another position in OCSD describes one of these programs:

It combines classrooms within the district with other classrooms.

Particularly building the bonds that those children will have when they go to middle school, just so they know some of those other children.

One parent spoke about this program from her perspective with one child in middle school and one still in elementary school: “I don’t think it’s been effective.” She went on to question if a fieldtrip in fifth grade would really make a child seek a friendship in middle school; however, this mother wondered if her younger child who she described as being on the autism spectrum may benefit from this program:

It’s not going to work with a typical child that knows how to make friends and makes friends easily. It’s not going to affect her at all.

Susie¹⁴ on the other hand, something like that could be highly beneficial.

¹⁴ Susie is a pseudonym for this mother’s younger child who is described as being on the autism spectrum.

It was my understanding that this program would pair the same two classrooms for multiple events or activities and across several grades, thereby enhancing the possibility that bonds could form among the students in different elementary schools. However, the teachers described how the classrooms with which they are paired change. “[We are paired] with another class. Who is supposed to be a feeder, that goes to the same middle school. It’s not always the same class.” Regardless of how the program is structured and whether there are unintended benefits for children with special needs, this district-wide program is attentive to the rurality of the two outlying schools in the district.

The other partnering activity described that Maplewood in particular benefits from in the district is due both to the rurality and the poverty of the students in the school. The superintendent describes the college access program:

There’s another Oakwood Youth Bureau program. It’s called the College Discovery Program where it’s specific to [the poorest city school] and Maplewood. There are students that have been together, now I think they’re entering the high school, and they’ve been together since 5th grade. It is a support program to help the families and the students realize that they can go to college. But we [the district] paired an urban school and a rural school with regard to that. And that’s forged friendships that have been really very, very beneficial.

I also spoke with a community member who works with the program and lives in Maplewood. He described in more detail the activities of the program:

Basically it is a program that identifies kids at the end of 5th grade who have good academic potential but probably aren’t thinking about going to college. Either because, this is an and/or, either because the economic means to think about it don’t exist or because they’re in

families where it isn't, it's not just that isn't an expectation it isn't even part of the thought process. And so this program identifies these kids. Half come from the rural areas, primarily Maplewood, and the other half come from downtown. And they're included in a mentorship program with homework clubs and scholastic tutors and weekend activities and summer activities and help and college visits and help applying to college, etc., until they graduate. It's been very successful. The first, actually, the first cohort of kids is about to graduate and they're all heading on to further education.

This program is targeted at children from socio-economically poor families with both few financial resources and little experience with higher education. In OCSD, the two poorest schools, as measured by the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced price lunch, are one urban and one rural school. In this way college access program is for the poorest families and also serves to pair urban and rural children and families from 5th grade through the end of high school in an attempt to open the doors of college to these students who may not otherwise consider it as a possibility.

Maplewood benefits most greatly from its most local partnering activities with the MCC. After this partnership, it seems that the volunteers who come to the school, mostly the retired community members because of the transportation limitations for college students, offer the most beneficial experiences for the students. The benefits of having these retired volunteers in the classrooms are mentioned by administrators, teachers, and parents alike. Following these partners, the Oakwood Youth Bureau partnerships are the most often mentioned. Maplewood has access to these activities in particular because of its status as a rural school in a non-rural district. The benefits to the students of these programs may be more limited, as suggested by the parent whose special needs child may benefit but not her typical child and by the college access

program that has limited benefit because only those who are identified may participate.

Barriers to partnering.

The barriers to partnering and reasons listed as to why particular partnerships do not exist or no longer exist can be summed up in one word: organization. The most often reported reason for a lack of partnering is that the time and effort required to organize partnerships prevent them from being formed and maintained. Partnerships formed by the MCC or by the PTA are formed and maintained by members of those organizations, predominately by parents who may have more time to spend on those activities. Administrators and teachers have much less time available to forge and maintain partnerships. But when asked about how to form partnerships, with the large university in Oakwood in particular, the principal responds that he has found help from others who have existing partnerships.

I hadn't been the first person from here to initiate [a partnership], I had a lot of help from my extended day coordinator who is constantly on the search for extensive partnerships for the extended day program. So she has found the contact for me and has, there are multiple contact [at the university]. There's no, even though [the university] has tried really hard to streamline things, it's been pretty haphazard. You just need to know someone who knows someone.

One teacher describes her impression of how hard it is to know what kinds of partnerships are even possible.

I think that [university] and [college] both offer things that I don't have a clue about. Because they're just out there and there's no real formal way to get the information to the teachers or to the administrators. I just kind of happen on it and go "Whoa, this is really good." And that's, so

I guess that's what I would like to see, something more organized.

Another teacher echoes this need for organization:

Organization. I think it's just not, everybody has really good ideas but it's in little bits and pieces. This is a good idea so let's do this and then you start to do it and then, but it doesn't get spread, it doesn't spread out.

Another teacher also seems to discredit her own initiatives to involve partners in her teaching, either because as the previous quotation suggests it is just in "little bits and pieces" or because it is not formalized.

Some of the girls I went to high school with are scientists up at [university] and so they come down [to my classroom]. But that's little pockets here and there.

I asked this teacher if there was a centralized point to go to find out about the partnering activities she could engage in with the university. And she says, "There might be. I am sure there probably are." She continues with an explanation of why she might not know about them:

You know how it is. When you are teaching, you think "Oh my gosh. I could teach them that 'o-a' says 'o' like coat so they can read." You focus on what you focus on. I am driven by pressure, by expectations, by your own expectations, your own perceptions of what is stressful and what is not. I could do more and I probably don't.

For this teacher finding out about possible partners may detract from her teaching by taking time away from her planning and instruction time. There are multiple pressures on teachers and partnering is not a priority in comparison to the importance of teaching literacy, for example.

The principal describes his role in regard to partnering and explains that the

time require to forge and maintain the partnerships is something he does not want to force upon his staff.

The difficulty in creating partnerships is that you have to coordinate that. So I'm finding there are lots of partnerships that are available but the problem I'm finding is coordination with it. So my dream world would have a coordinator or someone that's dedicated at least part time to making sure that things run smoothly: that the correct people are contacted and having systems for that. There are many, many willing organizations, groups, and individuals that are just there for the asking. But it's about the phone time and the contact and I just don't have the time to and the other resources to do that. And I can't ask any of the staff to do that. Again, we've relied on people and their projects and who they've know for this many years but when that person is gone, the partnership is gone. Unless they've made some kind of system for it to continue. The dream world would be a coordination of that.

In addition, he finds himself having to buffer his staff from some of the opportunities available and he only shares some of the possibilities with the staff so as to not overwhelm them.

There's a push and pull. Always a push and pull between the district saying that we have to have these partnerships and we will foster these partnerships and teachers who are saying this is just another thing that I have to do. And some going through the motions and some very interested and involved in it. Sometimes I am at meetings saying we really can't do this, being that active buffer. And things that are sent by email or something saying that this person really would like to work with people, I use my discretion of whether my teachers are going to be

interested in certain things. Like I just sent out something about some fire dog that is from the Red Cross to the K-2 teachers and it's up to them to contact this organization. But other things, everyone wants a piece of you so I really try to be judicious in how I send things out. So as not to overwhelm people because that's what will sink us.

The principal describes not only that there is a “push and pull” between what is expected and even required from the district and what teachers can do, but he also articulates his own strategy for developing the partnering activities of the school. He plans to move slowly and carefully so as not to overwhelm his teachers because “that's what will sink us.” This raises the question of what types of partnering may be easiest to begin and maintain and in particular may feel the least like “just another thing I have to do” for teachers. In other work (see paper 1), I argue that place-based pedagogy may offer a balance for teachers who are interested in partnering and yet, find that it takes away from the time they spend on traditional academics, like teaching that the letters ‘o-a’ sound like ‘o’.

Discussion and Conclusion

The case of Maplewood Elementary School sheds important light on a plethora of contemporary issues. While the story of consolidations, closures, and mergers is what lays the historical foundation for Maplewood Elementary School's current position within OCSD, a detailed analysis of the arguments and policies related to these particular issues is beyond the scope of this paper. The facts that Maplewood is isolated within its own school district and is a rural school without an official rural label are the residual effects of closures, consolidations, and mergers. And it is this position of Maplewood that makes it the appropriate case in which to challenge and extend Arum's (2000) theory of the two levels of community influence on school administrators. As the respondents, community and school members alike, recount,

Maplewood is different than the other schools in the district. The families are rural, many poor, and the children miss out on many of the opportunities the children in the city have. There are resources within the community of Maplewood; nonetheless, if the teachers cannot connect these strengths to the classroom then they will remain untapped for the children in relation to their formal education. The differences between Maplewood and Oakwood, and between Maplewood Elementary School and the city schools, leaves the outlying school in the situation of having a local community that is separate, distinct, and different from the school district. In Arum's (2000) theory, educators respond both to a local ecological community and to a broader institutional professional community. He argues they are increasingly more responsive to the broader institutional community leaving the effect of local ecological community "inconsequential" (Arum, 2000, p. 397). For the educators in Maplewood there is an additional layer of community. OCS D is a local *and* institutional and professional environment that influences the staff at Maplewood. This is not their professional network at the state or nation level, which is also influential, but it is distinctly local *and* professional. The educators in Maplewood do not have the simplified version of having the local community being congruous with the school district as the city schools in Oakwood have. Instead, Maplewood has its own identity and its own local influence on the school. This study is set in Maplewood but there are many other schools in the same position of being an elementary school remaining in a community that used to have its own middle and high schools. School and district consolidation in NYS and across the U.S. has left many schools in the situation of Maplewood. The findings and implications of this study can illuminate what may be the case for many educators across the state and the country.

Maplewood's local and non-local (meaning Oakwood) partnering activities also can be understood using Warren's horizontal and vertical ties. Those partnerships

within the community, like the MCC, are the horizontal ties of the school. The partners in Oakwood offer vertical ties for the school. However, like Arum's (2000) institutional community, Warren's vertical ties most often are associated with connections to state or national-level entities. Nonetheless, using a different level of analysis, the connections for Maplewood Elementary School to Oakwood and OCSD can be considered vertical ties. In this way, these ties are essential but could serve to diminish the local community as they are simply played out on the stage of the Maplewood community but offer little benefit to the community. An awareness that these ties are necessary for the school but could be harmful to the community sheds light on the need for the school to have both horizontal and vertical ties. In the following section, I offer place-based pedagogy as a method for developing additional horizontal (local) ties.

Partnering through Pedagogy

Directly related to the conceptions of community that this study has highlighted are the implications for partnering. It appears that there are no potential partners in Maplewood other than MCC. There are no local businesses other than a corner store/gas station. The organizations, businesses, and potential partnerships all seem to be located in Oakwood. And yet Maplewood Elementary School's strongest partner is MCC because it is the one partner that is able to focus only on that community rather than spreading its attention across all the schools in OCSD. How can the school find other ways to make use of the resources in its most local community, Maplewood? I see opportunities even in a small community with increasingly fewer apparent partners. The history, geography, politics, and people can all provide resources to be tapped in to by the school for the benefit of the students.

I asked teachers, administrators, parents, and community members if they had experienced the use of the local community in the education at Maplewood

Elementary. One teacher described a project she had done with one of her classes in the past, which is an excellent example of place-based education but which was extremely time consuming for her.

There are some really good things that I've done with Project Look Sharp. But they're huge and they're really difficult to maintain year to year because they're so huge. It was certainly worth it when I did it but I could not maintain it every year because it requires so much time. But it was definitely worth it. We did a study of Maplewood and took pictures, snapshots and made an iMovie and did all kinds of things all over the community. But it required a great deal, I know why producers get the big bucks. Because I spent on a 15 minute DVD it probably took me 100 hours to get stuff together.

The principal and some of the teachers describe how the grounds of the school were used in the past or are currently used by the students. There are orchards, vineyards, and gardens that were once tended to by the community and students together. There is currently a garden maintained by the pre-K class as a butterfly garden. And in the winter the students are able to take advantage of the rural surroundings by cross-country skiing in gym class. Each of these activities takes energy, time, and effort by administrators and teachers who may not have any of those resources to spare. The question remains as to how to make these activities so deeply entrenched in the school, particularly in the academic practices.

Over the course of my case study, I heard about the history and stories of the Maplewood community. I heard parents, staff, teachers, and community members describe the community and the resources within it, particular the resources found in the people of Maplewood. The town historian and other community members with whom I spoke know the community intimately, as do the veteran staff members, and

one or more of these people could serve to help teachers introduce the history of Maplewood to their students. The grounds of the school have been used before by teachers and community members and could once again be used and included in social studies, science, and mathematics lessons. In addition, while there were once many more there are a few remaining farms in the area. In particular, there is an active sugarbush where maple trees are tapped and maple syrup is produced. These resources could be included in the coursework of the school; thereby, forging new partnerships with the most local community. As the Maplewood principal mentioned, it may take an employee being designated as a partnering coordinator to make this type of work possible, but once embedded in the curriculum maintaining these ties could become part of the school day routine, as important as teaching that ‘o-a’ sound like ‘o.’

Conclusion

This study builds on a theoretical framework that combines educational literature on the role of the schools in its community, community studies literature, and institutional theory (see paper 1). Maplewood provides a case within which to observe the connections between the definition of community and the conception of the school-community relationships. The expansion of this study beyond the scope of my other work (see paper 2) allows the findings to be considered in light of a broader view toward community and another understanding of the school-community connection through a description of partnering. In addition, this study adds a community perspective by including the voices of parents and community members in the study.

The theoretical implications of this work complicate the findings that suggest that local communities are less influential than the broader institutional and professional communities (Arum, 2000). In addition, this paper adds an important

layer to this conception of the communities relevant to a school. This is crucial in light of the legacy and continued practice of school district consolidation. This study introduces the importance of considering the relationship between a school and its district, particularly for a school that is geographically isolated from the remainder of the district. In addition, this offers a way to use Warren's "Great Change" theory at a different level of analysis, within the interactions of small villages and towns, rather than among communities and the state or the nation.

Future research could compare the leadership perspective across the schools in a district, especially between those that are centrally located and those that are geographically remote. The principalship at Maplewood, as an outlying school, is described as having the additional responsibility of maintaining the tie to the school district. Does this responsibility exist for the principals of city schools in OCSD? Does it exist for principals of outlying schools in other districts?

In addition, research is needed addressing the connection between the school-community relationship and place-based education, especially the degree to which it can become entrenched in a school because of its position in the core activity of education. Can place-based education be a method for creating additional horizontal (local) ties for a school? Additionally, future work can address the role of administrators and teachers in the implementation of place-based education. More detailed analysis of my own data as well as future studies may also shed light on the connections of a teacher's own sense of place, whether it is in the school's local community or not, to their interest or ability to deliver a place-based education to their students. It will be necessary to consider the role of community studies and theories of place in teacher education programs. A teacher's own ability to recognize the importance of place in their own life and the lives of their students may enhance the school-community relationship, partnering, and the development of place-based

education.

This study is important for the practice of educational administrators. The role of a building principal in an outlying school may have an additional role to play as a connector between the school building and the school district, which may be more needed than in a more centrally located school. An administrator taking a position in an outlying school could use this information to better conceptualize their responsibilities.

This work lays the foundation for a crucial investigation of how the definition of local community may differ for school leaders and community members. If schools are called to partner with communities and serve as engines of community development, then schools and communities must be aware and considerate of any differences in their definitions of community and their conceptualizations of school-community interactions and partnering.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol: Principal

Community Definition:

- How do you define community? How do you define *your* community?
 - (Probe) The community of _? City of _? _ City School District? _ county? Beyond?
 - (Personal community? Professional community?)

School-Community Connections:

- What community does the school serve? Should it serve?
- How does the school serve the community? How could it?

Partnerships:

- What school-community partnerships exist?

(If many given, pick one to focus on.)

- How was this partnership started? How is it maintained? What role does the district play in this? How does it benefit the school and/or community?

(If none, ask about list from website.)

- _ Cooperative Extension; _ Retirees Volunteering in Schools (CRVIS); _ University Public Service Center; _ Community Council; Family Reading Partnership; _ College; _ Public Education Initiative (_PEI); _ Youth Bureau; SUNY _; _ County Health Department; _ County Sheriff: D.A.R.E.; _ BOCES; Town of _
- What partnerships would you like to see between the school and community?
(Specify community in connection to definition given above.)
 - How could this be started? What opportunities exist? Obstacles?

Decision-Making

- How do you make decisions about the following categories? In particular, who is involved in these decisions (see list of types of people)? Is there or can there be local influence?
 - (1) setting performance standards for students of this school;
 - (2) establishing curriculum at this school;
 - (3) determining the content of in-service professional development programs for teachers of this school;
 - (4) evaluating teachers of this school;
 - (5) hiring new full-time teachers of this school;
 - (6) setting discipline policy at this school;
 - (7) deciding how your school budget will be spent;
 - (8) creating community partnerships.

List of influences:

- (1) state department of education or other state-level bodies;
- (2) local school board;
- (3) school district staff;
- (4) principal;
- (5) teachers;
- (6) curriculum specialists;
- (7) parent association;
- (8) other parents;
- (9) community members.

Interview Protocol: Teachers and School Staff

Community Definition:

- How do you define community? How do you define *your* community?

- (Probe) The community of _? City of _? _ City School District? _ county? Beyond?
- (Personal community? Professional community?)

School-Community Connections:

- What community does the school serve? Should it serve?
- How does the school serve the community? How could it?

Partnerships:

- What school-community partnerships exist?

(If many given, pick one to focus on.)

- How was this partnership started? How is it maintained? What role does the district play in this? How does it benefit the school and/or community?

(If none, ask about list from website.)

- _ Cooperative Extension; _ Retirees Volunteering in Schools (CRVIS); _ University Public Service Center; _ Community Council; Family Reading Partnership; _ College; _ Public Education Initiative (IPEI); _ Youth Bureau; SUNY _; _ County Health Department; _ County Sheriff: D.A.R.E.; _ BOCES; Town of _
- What partnerships would you like to see between the school and community?
(Specify community in connection to definition given above.)
 - How could this be started? What opportunities exist? Obstacles?

Decision-Making

- How are school decisions made about the following types of decisions? In particular, who is involved in these decisions (see list of types of people)? Is there or can there be local influence?
 - (1) setting performance standards for students of this school;

- (2) establishing curriculum at this school;
- (3) determining the content of in-service professional development programs for teachers of this school;
- (4) evaluating teachers of this school;
- (5) hiring new full-time teachers of this school;
- (6) setting discipline policy at this school;
- (7) deciding how your school budget will be spent;
- (8) creating community partnerships.

List of influences:

- (1) state department of education or other state-level bodies;
- (2) local school board;
- (3) school district staff;
- (4) principal;
- (5) teachers;
- (6) curriculum specialists;
- (7) parent association;
- (8) other parents;
- (9) community members.

Interview Protocol: Past Principals

Community Definition:

- How do you define community? How do you define *your* community?
 - (Probe) The community of _? City of _? _ City School District? _ county? Beyond?
 - Has this changed since you were principal at _ Elementary?
 - (Personal community? Professional community?)

School-Community Connections:

- What community does the school serve? Should it serve?
- How does the school serve the community? How could it?
- Are your ideas about this different from when you were principal? If so, how?

Partnerships:

- What school-community partnerships exist now or when you were principal?

(If many given, pick one to focus on.)

- How was this partnership started? How is it maintained? What role does the district play in this? How does it benefit the school and/or community?

(If none, ask about list from website.)

- _ Cooperative Extension; _ Retirees Volunteering in Schools (_RVIS); _ University Public Service Center; _ Community Council; Family Reading Partnership; _ College; _ Public Education Initiative (IPEI); _ Youth Bureau; SUNY _; _ County Health Department; _ County Sheriff: D.A.R.E.; _ BOCES; Town of _
- What partnerships would you like to see between the school and community?

(Specify community in connection to definition given above.)

- How could this be started? What opportunities exist? Obstacles?

Decision-Making

- How did you make decisions about the following categories? In particular, who was involved in these decisions (see list of types of people)? Is there or can there be local influence?
 - (1) setting performance standards for students of this school;
 - (2) establishing curriculum at this school;
 - (3) determining the content of in-service professional development programs for teachers of this school;

- (4) evaluating teachers of this school;
- (5) hiring new full-time teachers of this school;
- (6) setting discipline policy at this school;
- (7) deciding how your school budget will be spent;
- (8) creating community partnerships.

List of influences:

- (1) state department of education or other state-level bodies;
- (2) local school board;
- (3) school district staff;
- (4) principal;
- (5) teachers;
- (6) curriculum specialists;
- (7) parent association;
- (8) other parents;
- (9) community members.

Interview Protocol: Parents and Community Members

Community Definition:

- How do you define community? How do you define *your* community?
 - (Probe) The community of _? City of _? _ City School District? _ county? Beyond?
 - How far from the school do you live (approx. mileage)? In what direction?

School-Community Connections:

- What community does the school serve? Should it serve?
- How does the school serve the community? How could it?

Partnerships:

- What school-community partnerships exist?

(If many given, pick one to focus on.)

- How was this partnership started? How is it maintained? What role does the district play in this? How does it benefit the school and/or community?

(If none, ask about list from website.)

- _ Cooperative Extension; _ Retirees Volunteering in Schools (CRVIS); _ University Public Service Center; _ Community Council; Family Reading Partnership; _ College; _ Public Education Initiative (IPEI); _ Youth Bureau; SUNY _; _ County Health Department; _ County Sheriff: D.A.R.E.; _ BOCES; Town of _
- What partnerships would you like to see between the school and community? (Specify community in connection to definition given above.)
 - How could this be started? What opportunities exist? Obstacles?

Decision-Making

- How do you see school decisions being made about the following types of issues? In particular, are parents and community members involved in these decisions? Is there or can there be local influence?
 - (1) setting performance standards for students of this school;
 - (2) establishing curriculum at this school;
 - (3) determining the content of in-service professional development programs for teachers of this school;
 - (4) evaluating teachers of this school;
 - (5) hiring new full-time teachers of this school;
 - (6) setting discipline policy at this school;
 - (7) deciding how your school budget will be spent;

- (8) creating community partnerships.

Interview Protocol: Central Office Staff

Community Definition:

- How do you define community? How do you define *your* community?
 - (Probe) City of _? _ City School District? _ county? Beyond?
 - (Personal community? Professional community?)

School-Community Connections:

- What community do the schools in the district serve? Should they serve?
- How do they serve the community(ies)? How could they?

Partnerships:

- What school-community partnerships exist for _ Elementary School?

(If many given, pick one to focus on.)

- How was this partnership started? How is it maintained? What role does the district play in this? How does it benefit the school and/or community?
- What partnerships would you like to see between the school and community?
(Specify community in connection to definition given above.)
 - How could this be started? What opportunities exist? Obstacles?
- How does or can the district support school-community partnerships?

Decision-Making

- How do think building-level administrators make decisions about the following categories? In particular, who is involved in these decisions (see list of types of people)? Is there or can there be local influence?
 - (1) setting performance standards for students of this school;
 - (2) establishing curriculum at this school;

- (3) determining the content of in-service professional development programs for teachers of this school;
- (4) evaluating teachers of this school;
- (5) hiring new full-time teachers of this school;
- (6) setting discipline policy at this school;
- (7) deciding how your school budget will be spent;
- (8) creating community partnerships.

List of influences:

- (1) state department of education or other state-level bodies;
- (2) local school board;
- (3) school district staff;
- (4) principal;
- (5) teachers;
- (6) curriculum specialists;
- (7) parent association;
- (8) other parents;
- (9) community members.

APPENDIX B

LIST OF CODES, DEFINITIONS, AND EXAMPLES

Code Name	Definition	Potential Examples from the Data
Def_Geo (Def: definition of community)	Geographic definition of community.	This code is used for definitions of community that use geographic boundaries (i.e., mileage, roads, town/city names, etc.).
Def_Social	Social definition of community.	This code is used for definitions of community that emphasize a particular group or network of people and references to personal communities.
Def_Professional	Professional and institutional definition of community.	This code is used for definitions of community that emphasize professional or institutional networks (i.e. teachers or administrators peers).
Def_Local	Community defined as the most local area.	This code is used for defining language that limits the community to the most local area/town to the school.
Def_District	Community defined as the broader local area.	This code is used for defining language that broadens the community to the school district, city, or county levels.
Def_Broad	Broader definition of community.	This code is used for defining language that broadens the community out to a regional, state, or professional level.
Def_ComOrg	Listing community organizations that exist as a definition.	This code is used for lists of community organizations or entities (i.e., Community Council, Grange, Firehouse, etc.) as the definition of community.
Def_Historical	History of community.	This code is used for descriptions of the history of the community.
SC_Role_None (SC: school-community relationship)	No role of school in community.	This code is used for any sentiment regarding schools not needing to be involved in the community.
SC_Role_HumanCap	Role of school is to develop human capital.	This code is used for any call for the school to develop the human capital of the community (this does not include the role of the school is to educate as a broad sentiment, which maybe better fit in SC_Role_none).
SC_Role_SocCap	Role of school in community is to develop social capital.	This is used for the role of the school being to create social capital (i.e. partnerships, connections, networks, etc.).
SC_Role_CommDev	Role of school in community is related to community development.	This is used for the role of the school being connected to community development efforts.
SC_Role_CommCent	Role of the school in the community is as community center.	This is used for any reference that school does or should serve as a community center.

SC_Role_Other	Role of school in community is other than above definitions.	This is a broad code to include other types of roles that the school might play in the community.
DM_Who_Comm (DM: decision making)	Adding to the SASS categories, this is the influence of community members.	This code is used when community members are mentioned as influential in particular school-level decisions.
DM_Who_Parents	Adding to the SASS categories, this is the influence of parents.	This code is used when parents (not as represented by the PTA) are able to influence school-level decisions.
DM_Who_PTA	SASS category: parent associations	This is used when the PTA as a group or representative of parents is able to influence school-level decisions.
DM_Who_Curric	SASS category: curricular specialist	This used when curricular specialists have an influence on school-level decisions and this may be a school, district, or state-level employee.
DM_Who_Teachers	SASS category: teachers	This is used when teachers in the school building are able to have an influence on school-level decisions.
DM_Who_Principal	SASS category: principal	This is used when the school building principal influences the school decisions.
DM_Who_District	SASS category: district staff	This is used when district-level staff (i.e. central office) influence school decisions.
DM_Who_SchBoard	SASS category: school board	This is used when the school board influences decisions at the school.
DM_Who_State	SASS category: state department or other state-level bodies	This is used when the state department of education or other state level professional bodies influence school-level decisions.
DM_Who_Local	Using Arum's (2000) distinction, these are influences from the local ecological community.	This code is used for all references to role of the most local community in school decision-making. This includes parents, community members in the local town, and school employees.
DM_Who_District	These are influences from an additional a layer between Arum's distinction between local and institutional.	This code is used for all references to role of the school district in school decision-making. This includes Central Office employees, school board members, and other community members from the city.
DM_Who_Broad	Using Arum's (2000) distinction, these are influences from the broader institutional community.	This code is used for all references to the role of state-level groups and professional networks in school decisions.
DM_What_Standards	SASS category: setting performance standards in the school	This code is used to refer to decisions about the academic expectations of the school.
DM_What_Curric	SASS category: establishing curriculum	This code is used for decisions about the curriculum used in the school.
DM_What_ProfDev	SASS category: determining the content	This code is used for decisions about the types of professional development for

	of in-service professional development programs for teachers of this school	teachers.
DM_What_EvalTeach	SASS category: evaluating teachers in the school	This code is used for decisions about how to evaluate the performance of teachers in the school.
DM_What_Hiring	SASS category: hiring new full-time employees	This code is used for decisions about hiring new staff and teachers.
DM_What_Discipline	SASS category: setting discipline policy	This code is used for decisions surrounding the behavior expectations in the school.
DM_What_Budget	SASS category: decisions on spending the school budget	This code is used for decisions about spending the building-level school budget.
DM_What_Partnerships	Additional category: establishing and maintaining partnerships	This code is used for decisions about how to and with whom to establish new partnerships and how to maintain existing ones.
P_Exist_Who (P: partnerships)	With whom the school has existing partnerships.	This code is used to identify who the school has current partnerships with in the community.
P_Exist_Begun	Who began partnerships.	This code is used to identify who initiated partnerships, particularly if it was someone within the school or the partnering entity.
P_Exist_Maintain	Who and how are partnerships maintained.	This code is used to identify who (e.g., specific teachers, administrators, parents, etc.) maintains school partnerships and what strategies (e.g., regularly scheduled events) are used to maintain them.
P_Exist_Benefit_Sch	What benefits the school sees from existing partnerships.	This code is used for any benefits the school sees stemming from the existing school-community partnerships.
P_Exist_Benefit_Com	What benefits the community sees from existing partnerships.	This code is used for any benefits the community experiences from the school-community partnerships.
P_Desired_Who	With whom are partnerships desired.	This code is used to identify with whom school staff, parents, and community members believe the school could or should be partnering.
P_Desired_Why	Why is this partnership desired.	This code is used to identify why these respondents want this partnership to exist, in particular what benefits do they expect.
P_Desired_WhyNot	What obstacles exist or why does this partnership not exist	This code is used for obstacles preventing the partnership that is desired or other reasons why it has not yet been created.

CONCLUSION

Small rural communities and rural schools face many challenges, including decreasing populations and school enrollment, as well as declining property values and school budgets. In addition, schools face competing definitions of success as many young adults must leave their communities in order to find employment. And yet, rural schools, like all American schools, are being called to educate all students to higher standards, meet the accountability demands of state and federal governments, and prepare students with the knowledge and skills for a global economy. Educators are under pressure from many sources, and not the least is the tensions between local/non-local influences on the school. In my work, I argue that in this moment of increased pressure and tensions, it is essential to be aware of our conceptions of community, especially local/non-local communities, and to pay particular attention to the conditions in which rural schools operate.

The legacy of nearly a century of school closures, consolidations, and mergers, has left some communities without schools and many with only an elementary school in the place of their own complete K-12 system. Communities that retain their elementary school fare better than other small communities without any school (Lyson, 2002); however, this position of being an outlying school in a broader school district presents additional challenges. For Maplewood, and potentially for many other schools that are isolated within their own school district, the position as an outlying school affects their ability to partner, strains the transition from elementary to middle and high school for students, and adds to the responsibilities of the building principal. Due the importance for communities of maintaining their schools, it is important to shed light on the challenges a school faces as an outlying school in its own district. These schools, isolated by previous consolidations, may need additional support for their students, families, staff, and administration. In addition, the method of labeling

school districts rather than school buildings as rural falsely leaves a school like Maplewood without the designation of rurality. If there are funding or programmatic opportunities from state or federal sources that are targeted to rural schools, then it is important to reconcile this school district/school building categorization issue. A policy change could create federal standards for school-level designation as rural and schools could petition the government for their own building-level label as rural in order to qualify for funding or programs.

As communities and schools struggle with similar challenges, it is time for them to enhance their relationships to work toward mutual benefits, including increased student engagement and community vitality. In my studies, I use the examples of local community participation in school-level decision-making and school-community partnering. In each case, despite the limitations of small communities, educators are nonetheless referring to their most local communities as being influential in decision making and partnering. In addition to these examples, I present options from the educational research literature of ways that schools and communities can work together including schools acting as a community hub, sending students in to the community through service learning or internships, or bringing the resources of the community in to the school. I argue that place-based education is a powerful method to be used to help schools and communities work towards shared ends. I present place-based pedagogy as a way to enhance the school-community relationship through the core activity of the school: education. In this way, educators and students critically examine their local community as part of their traditional academic classes. And schools are not forced to fight their buffering tendencies, which institutional theory presents as the strategy schools use maintain their practices, support, and funding through avoidance of inspection.

The papers in this dissertation draw attention to the conceptions of community

and the school-community relationship. I theorize the roles of the school and the benefit of place-based pedagogy by reading across three sets of literature: education, community studies, and institutional theory. This important overlap of research and theory opens the door to an enhanced understanding of the potential of the school-community relationship. I challenge Arum's (2000) categorizes of community that influence educational administrators by adding a mediating layer that is a combination of the local and the institutional. This layer provides a way to examine schools in outlying positions in their own districts, such as Maplewood. Attention to these schools is essential for educational leaders, policy makers, community developers, and researchers, especially in light of continued calls for district consolidation. I analyze the process of decision-making by superintendents and building principals through Arum's (2000) theory and Scott's (2001) institutional framework. My findings suggest an important role for the local community in school-level decisions, despite Arum's (2000) suggestion that professional influences are stronger. Using Warren's (1978) horizontal and vertical ties, I present a description of the partnering activities of a rural school with its local and broader community. Despite limited partnering opportunities in the most local community, Maplewood's strongest partner is the local community council, which emphasizes the importance of having a combination of local/non-local partners for schools in the smallest communities. There are partnering opportunities left untapped in Maplewood because of the limited time and resources of the school and the staff. With school-community partnering being important to educational achievement, family support, and community development efforts, schools like Maplewood need support from their districts to organize and maintain their partnerships.

In light of the struggles of small rural schools and their communities, it is time to focus attention on the unique needs of these areas. Students and families choose to

live or remain in rural places for myriad reasons. They deserve access to quality education in their local community that will prepare them for life in that or any community. And communities need to retain their schools whenever feasible to maintain their vitality and identity. Together schools and communities can work to achieve these shared goals of increased student engagement and community development.

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