

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

Educational Policy Studies Dissertations

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Spring 5-7-2011

Student Perceptions of Engagement in Schools: A Deweyan Analysis of Authenticity in High School Classrooms

Gloria D. Richards Perry
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/eps_diss



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Education Policy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Richards Perry, Gloria D., "Student Perceptions of Engagement in Schools: A Deweyan Analysis of Authenticity in High School Classrooms." Dissertation, Georgia State University, 2011.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/1901650>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Educational Policy Studies at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Educational Policy Studies Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS: A DEWEYAN ANALYSIS OF AUTHENTICITY IN HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS, by GLORIA D. RICHARDS PERRY, was prepared under the directions of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

Sheryl A. Gowen, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

Heather Marshall, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Bob Michael, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Hayward Richardson, Ed.D.
Committee Member

Date

Sheryl A. Gowen, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of Educational Policy Study

R. W. Kamphaus, Ph.D.
Dean and Distinguished Research Professor
College of Education

AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

By presenting this dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the advanced degree from Georgia State University, I agree that the library of Georgia State University shall make it available for inspection and circulation in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I agree that permission to quote, to copy from, or to publish this dissertation may be granted by the professor under whose direction it was written, by the College of Education's director of graduate studies and research, or by me. Such quoting, copying, or publishing must be solely for scholarly purposes and will not involve potential financial gain. It is understood that any copying from or publication of this dissertation which involves potential financial gain will not be allowed without my written permission.

Gloria D. Richards Perry

NOTICE TO BORROWERS

All dissertations deposited in the Georgia State University library must be used in accordance with the stipulations prescribed by the author in the preceding statement. The author of this dissertation is:

Gloria D. Richards Perry
457 Kelley Road
Cleveland, GA 30528

The director of this dissertation is:

Dr. Sheryl A. Gowen
Department of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303-3083

VITA

Gloria D. Richards Perry

ADDRESS: 457 Kelley Road
Cleveland, GA 30528

EDUCATION:

Ph.D.	2011	Georgia State University Educational Policy Studies
Ed.S.	2002	North Georgia College and State University Educational Leadership
M.Ed.	1997	North Georgia College and State University Science Education
B.S.	1994	North Georgia College and State University Biology

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

1995-Present	Science Teacher North Forsyth High School, Cumming, GA
1994- 1995	Laboratory Technician Georgia Poultry Diagnostic Laboratories, Gainesville, GA
1994	Laboratory Teaching Assistant North Georgia College, Dahlonega, GA

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

2006-Present	Phi Kappa Phi
2002-Present	National Science Teachers Association
2002	Who's Who Among America's High School Teachers
1994-Present	Professional Association of Georgia Educators

PRESENTATIONS:

Perry, G. D. R. (2007). *The emergence of change: An examination of leadership and complexity in schools*. Presentation at the Georgia Association of Teacher Educators, Atlanta, GA

ABSTRACT

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS: A DEWEYAN ANALYSIS OF AUTHENTICITY IN HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

by
Gloria D. Richards Perry

This qualitative study of the nature of engagement in schools explored how students viewed the work assigned to them by their teachers. Using normative and theoretical frameworks, research was conducted to determine whether students found work to be authentic and engaging in the manner that Dewey proposes school work should be.

Phenomenological interviews were used with individual participants as well as in a focus group session. Interviews and further questioning probed for information in order to gain a greater understanding of engagement from the student perspective. Furthermore, these methods afforded depth and richness that could further saturate the data.

The research questions were:

1. What do students identify as important factors that influence the degree to which they can be engaged in their learning experiences?
2. As described by students, do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a student's life outside of school?

The analysis of participant responses supported the notion that these learners want their learning experiences to be personal, relevant, meaningful, and active. If they felt

they were not getting these experiences, they shut down and/or turned the teacher off in their own head. These particular participants reported numerous examples of data that supported their need to be heard as students in the learning environment. They know what they want as learners and expect their teachers to provide the learning experiences they desire for their improvement. Participants in this study of engagement placed a high degree of emphasis on authentic learning. The data supported the notion that these participants want to have fun as they are learning but of far more importance, the data have shown they want their learning to be meaningful beyond the classroom setting.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS:
A DEWEYAN ANALYSIS OF AUTHENTICITY
IN HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

by
Gloria D. Richards Perry

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in
Educational Policy Studies
in
the Department of Educational Policy Studies
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2011

Copyright by
Gloria D. Richards Perry
2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I was accepted into the doctoral program at Georgia State University, it was one of the most thrilling and fulfilling moments of my life. I had finally made it to the pinnacle of what I deemed to be one of the most important goals I had set for myself. When I entered class for my first session as a doctoral student, I wondered if I had made a mistake. Could I face this challenge and succeed in an arena of which I had no prior experience? Was I a good enough scholar to make it through to the final crown of success – the awarding of the Ph.D.? I faced that challenge, and along with the support of my loving husband, Jeff, and my dear friend Ashlee Trammel, I was able to see the program through to fruition. I cannot express enough gratitude to Jeff in order for him to understand what a pivotal role he played in my success. He was always there with words of support at just the right moment. Ashlee helped me more than she may realize. She made certain everything around my house ran smoothly while I typed and edited away in my office. Gidget, my precious fourteen year old Jack Russell terrier, saw me through the trying times, as well. She stayed by my side or at my feet and slept as I read, researched, and wrote my way through this dissertation. Researching, writing, and the final process of editing a dissertation has been one of the greatest and most fulfilling challenges I have had to face in my lifetime. Without the support of those I love, and my God in heaven above, I would not have made it through.

I want to express my gratitude to my chair, Dr. Sheryl Gowen. You took me as your charge and helped guide me through the writing process. I thank my committee members, Dr. Heather Marshall, Dr. Bob Michael, and Dr. Hayward Richardson for your guidance, wisdom, and support during the final drafts of my work. I especially thank Dr. Bob Michael for allowing me to take up space in his office to go over draft upon draft of my work. He pushed my thinking and made a better person for it. One thing I can say for certain is that I have grown intellectually and confidently into the person I am at this moment. I have you all to thank because you pushed me to become better than I thought I could be.

I thank my friends at church and my colleagues at work. You all gave me praises when I needed them and support to make it through to the end. My mom, dad, my two sisters – Teresa and Vivian, my brother Al, and my nieces and nephews deserve thanks, as well. You may not have always known what I was doing or why I was doing it, but you all supported me in my endeavors and gave me praise for my accomplishments. To my mom, Bobbie, and my dad, Alton, I am eternally grateful for your love and support. Thank you for being there for me through it all. To BeBe, who heard an answer in the form of “Holy laughter” right when I needed it most. To Jeff, thank you for understanding me. I am eternally grateful for your love, support, and patience through one of the most challenging times of my life. Thank you all, and may God bless each of you as He has blessed me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1	THE INTRODUCTION.....	1
	Problem Statement.....	2
	Purpose of the Study.....	2
	Research Questions.....	3
	Significance of the Study.....	4
	Definition of Terms.....	6
	Paradigm and Assumptions.....	11
	Organization of the Study.....	12
	Summary.....	13
2	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	15
	Background Information.....	15
	Deweyan Theory.....	19
	Understanding and Defining Engagement.....	22
	Meaningful Problems.....	28
	Forms and Characteristics of Engagement	38
	Embryonic Communities of Learners	46
	Democratic Inquiry	49
	Student Voice.....	53
	Conclusion	59
3	METHODOLOGY	61
	Introduction.....	61
	Research Questions.....	61
	Research Design.....	62
	Sample.....	64
	Measures	69
	Data Collection and Analysis Procedures.....	71
	Framework Usage in Qualitative Research.....	80
	Limitations of the Study.....	81
	Conclusion	83
4	RESULTS	85
	Introduction.....	85

	Description of Participants.....	86
	Overall View of Learning as Authentic	88
	Individual Interviews	90
	Student Perceptions of School Values	112
	Focus Group Interview Session	115
	Summary of Findings.....	121
	Conclusion	125
5	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS	127
	Introduction.....	127
	Discussion and Significant Findings.....	128
	Implications for Policy and Practice	136
	Suggestions for Further Research	145
	Conclusion	146
	References.....	148
	Appendixes	160

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Question 34 on the 2006 High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) asked high school students from across the nation whether they would like to comment on the survey they had just taken. One student responded, “I wish school could be intellectually challenging as well as academically challenging” (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007, p. 1). This student’s opinion brings to our attention the difference between the academic world of the student – the curriculum and content, and the intellectual world of the student – the discussions and activities that require thought at a deeper level (Yazzie-Mintz). The student’s remarks reflect a desire for a different schooling experience – one that is academically rigorous but, at the same time, engages students who want to learn.

As Dahl (1995) explained, if educators are to support the learning of children, they must first hear what they have to say about learning. This study has attempted to allow the student voice to be heard. Learners need a space to explain their perceptions of the classroom and school and let us know what engages and disengages them in the processes of learning. By listening to and acting on what students want concerning their learning, teachers can perhaps sustain a level of student engagement that has not been previously understood.

Problem Statement

The problem of disengagement is a powerful and pervasive one in our middle and high schools. As research indicates, a significant number of students are disengaged from schooling and its processes, thus these students find ways to drop out, if not physically, then mentally, from school. Research suggests that students are disengaged because they are bored (Breidenstein, 2007; Intrator, 2004; Payne, 2002; and Yazzie-Mintz, 2010), disgruntled with the processes of school (Davidson, 1996), and disenchanted concerning their “fit” within a school (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Watkins, 2005). What is occurring in schools is very different from what goes on outside of schools. The differences in how students are being asked to behave, interact, and think in schools and what these same students value outside of school may be contributing factors to disengagement (Resnick, 1987; Splitter, 2008). The substance and nature of these opposing values between school and student and how students perceive their school as contributing to their engagement, provide a basis for an educational and societal problem that is worthy of study. By studying this problem, educators can use the information to bridge the gap between what is learned in school and how that learning is transferred for the betterment of society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate student perceptions of their engagement in school. Because disengaging from school can prompt dropping out, boredom, and negativity in students; the conditions by which engagement is fostered is worthy of study. I viewed student perceptions of their school and classes through the lens of Dewey’s (1916) notion of a democratic school. According to Dewey (1915, 1916, 1938a), high

school classrooms exhibit authentic learning to the degree that students perceive them as achieving the following:

1. The school represents an embryonic community of learners.
2. The curriculum is based on problems that are meaningful and relevant to students.
3. The work in schools promotes thoughtful engagement.

These characteristics of authentic learning are principles that can be found throughout Dewey's writings (1915, 1916, 1938 a). These principles then form a framework to analyze students' perceptions of their learning and represent a basis for the research questions presented below.

Research Questions

1. What do students identify as important factors that influence the degree to which they can be engaged in their learning experiences?
2. As described by students, do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a student's life outside of school?

These questions provided a base concerning students' perceptions of their classrooms and their school. Interviews and further questioning probed for more information in order to gain a greater understanding of engagement from the student perspective.

Dewey (1915, 1916, 1938a) proposed that for learning to be authentic, the three principles highlighted in the previous paragraphs should be evident in classrooms. Dewey (1938a.) further contended that a thoughtful citizenry needs to be developed in schools. Dewey's central premise is that schooling is a social process that should result in an

empowerment of students to contribute to the needs of the society at large. As posited by Gerics and Westheimer (1988), education does more than prepare children to participate in a democratic society; it represents “the very process of bringing children to share in democracy” (p. 49). By teaching students how to share in democracy, education becomes the means by which the community empowers individuals to become a society by virtue of shared common interests, free interaction, and equal participation. By engaging students in the ways of democracy (i.e., community groups, social networking for the good of mankind, and shared decision-making) teachers are preparing their students to ultimately participate as thoughtful citizens. The principles of authentic learning will be discussed in the literature review, whereas the concept of thoughtful engagement will be further explored during student interviews.

Significance of the Study

Strong, Silver, and Robinson (1995) found that curiosity and student interest are two major factors contributing to student engagement. They described two defining characteristics that arouse curiosity in students: (a) the information about the topic is fragmented or contains contradictions, and (b) the content has meaning to the students' lives. An educator's goal is to graduate the students of his/her charge and to provide the opportunities for those students to further their education and find success in society. Furthermore, it is important to understand why students want to go to school. Three out of four students who participated in the 2006 HSSSE answered the question, “Why do you want to go to school?” by saying, “Because I want to get a degree and go to college.” Nearly as many students responded with a socially-based response, “Because of my

friends.” Fewer than half of respondents reported attending school because of what happens in the classroom (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Although participants reported the desire to graduate and move on to college, they also reported a need to be “intellectually, academically, socially, and emotionally engaged with the life and work of their high schools” (p. 11). By arousing curiosity in students and connecting content to student interest, engagement could create the spark of interest needed to have students want to attend school, focus on learning, acquire new skills, and further their education.

Researching aspects of student engagement becomes further significant because there is evidence that engaging students may shield them from dropping out of school (Balfanz., Herzog, & MacIver, 2007; Davidson, 1996; Thornburgh, 2006; Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). A prominent concern of students is that their teachers, counselors, and administrators do not care about them. Research suggests this uncaring teacher attitude may contribute to student drop out (Lessard et al., 2007). The Lessard et al. study involved a longitudinal study of 80 high school dropouts living in the province of Quebec. Interview data, in part, elicited students’ thoughts concerning the teacher-student relationship. Teetering, a phase of the dropout process named in this study, involved students described as being off balance in their educational efforts. In this study, these dropouts expressed situations that pushed them toward remaining in school and others that pulled them farther away from the school context. Lessard et al. further showed that student-teacher relationships were integral to the teetering phase of dropping out for some participants. Supportive relationships resulted in students feeling valued, and thus possibly led them to remain in school. In contrast, some participants felt alienated and

pushed aside by their teachers. Conflicts between student and teacher were found to escalate to a point that the student would ultimately leave school.

If educators can gain awareness of what motivates students to attend school and, through this awareness, can develop methods, materials, and measures to prevent students from dropping out of school, then engaged learning may be a reality in all classrooms.

Definition of Terms

Authentic achievement – Defined by Newmann and Wehlage (1993) as achievement that involves students' construction of knowledge through inquiry that has meaning beyond success in school. I asked participants to report their perceptions of inquiring learning situations in their classrooms and if they felt they were using any of their knowledge to benefit society as a whole rather than learning for the sake of learning information.

Authentic learning – Authentic learning is defined in various ways depending on the theorist. The following paragraph explains the views of several theorists that are prominent in this study. Dewey (1915, 1916, and 1918) defined authentic learning as learning that is perceived by students to be communal, have meaningful problems, and promotes engagement that extends beyond the classroom. Renzulli, Gentry, and Reis (2004) described authentic learning as learning that occurs on a continuum of deductive/prescriptive learning to inductive/investigative learning so that students learn to use information gained within school for their future endeavors in society. Callison and Lamb (2004) described authentic learning as a form of active learning where students are exploring their world, discussing ideas with others, and making decisions that will impact

the future. Literature supports authentic learning as the method to engage students in their learning situations. I asked participants to provide their perceptions of learning – whether they considered it authentic and useful for future events; or if they considered their learning to be inauthentic – that is, useful only for what is going on in the classroom.

Authentic tasks – Authentic tasks are those tasks that are meaningful and relevant to students. The literature supports the notion that authentic tasks are necessary to promote authentic learning in the classroom. Participants reported whether or not their teachers provided authentic tasks or if they assigned tasks that filled time but had no real educational meaning for the benefit of society.

Behavioral engagement – Behavioral engagement is defined by Fredricks et al. (2004) as engagement based on involving oneself in the academic and extracurricular processes of school. My research study considered all aspects of engagement to attempt to determine what engages students in the learning process. Behavioral engagement is one aspect of engagement proper and is used to determine if students are fully involved not only in their academics but in the extracurricular activities that are offered at school. Research suggests more involvement produces more engaged students.

Cognitive engagement – Cognitive engagement is defined by Fredricks et al. as engagement based on student investment in school and the processes of learning. This form of engagement is concerned with how much students invest in learning. Are students willing to go the extra step to learn information and to persevere in the face of difficulty or do they want the teacher to explain every aspect of a task step by step so that all inquiry is removed? Interviews with participants provided the answer to this question in the results and conclusions section of the study.

Democratic ideal – Defined by Dewey (1938a.) as involving individuals within a society who place communal needs above those of individual needs. Because this study is considering whether or not knowledge transfers to society, participants' reports are being used to determine their perceptions of whether their school is a model for the democratic ideal.

Democratic inquiry – Democratic inquiry is learning that is defined by the degree to which the society can realize the democratic ideal (Dewey, 1938a) Students' perceptions of their thoughtful engagement with tasks will aid in determining whether they felt their school to be a democratically inquiring school or a school that has not made it to that level of social engagement.

Embryonic – Dewey (1915) described the embryonic community as being a miniature community of learners who actively apply their knowledge to everyday life events. He described an embryonic community as a factor that is necessary for thoughtful engagement. Participant reports of the degree to which they work with others in an inquiry setting was used to determine how they felt about community involvement in schools and how or whether that involvement had a direct benefit to society.

Emotional engagement – Defined by Fredricks et al. as engagement based on how students identify with the people and processes of school. Participant's perceptions of how they identify with others and whether or not this is a determining factor of their engagement was considered.

Engagement – Engagement is defined in many different ways depending on the theorist. Some theorists include only the behavioral and emotional components of engagement; whereas, others define engagement based solely on cognition. Still others

define engagement as involving usage of technology and stress the importance of engaging a digitally literate society with the tools available. My research considered all aspects of engagement – the behavioral, cognitive, and emotional components – as well as brought in some aspects of how technology is used to engage students.

Inductive learning – Defined by Renzulli et al. (2004) as learning that involves inquiry into real world problems. The research literature supports inquiry into real world problems as being a factor of engagement.

Instrumentality- Described by Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, and Akey (2004) as a motivational influence upon cognitive strategies that refers to the extent to which students believe a task will benefit them in the future. My participants reported their perceptions of learning and how they felt learning would benefit them in the future.

Justice-oriented citizen – Defined by Kahne (2004) as the person who strives to understand the dynamics between the interplay of social, economic, and political forces in order to alleviate injustices and inequities in our society. A portion of this study is student's perceptions of democratic inquiry within their school. The justice-oriented citizen is one type of citizen that could be found in a society of thoughtfully engaged members.

Norms – Defined by the participants in this study as aspects of school occurring on a regular basis and considered established protocol or rules that schools follow. These norms could be based on the culture and climate of the school or they could be based on criteria established at the state level.

Participatory citizen – Defined by Kahne (2004) as the person who actively participates in civic affairs and the social life of the community at all levels of

government. A portion of this study is student's perceptions of democratic inquiry within their school. The participatory citizen is one type of citizen that could be found in a society of thoughtfully engaged members. It represents a lower level of engagement in the affairs of society than does that of the justice-oriented citizen.

Personally-responsible citizen – Defined by Kahne (2004) as the person who acts responsibly in his or her local community by helping those who are less fortunate. . A portion of this study is student's perceptions of democratic inquiry within their school. The personally-responsible citizen is one type of citizen that could be found in a society of thoughtfully engaged members. It represents the lowest level of engagement in the affairs of society.

Social participation structure – Erickson and Shultz (1992) defined social participation structure as the cognitive and social aspects that students attach to a task when they are describing their interactions with the task. Research suggests (Miller & Brickman, 2004) students must have cognitive and social reasons for engaging in a task. If students are to remain thoughtfully engaged in a task, they should understand how it will benefit them now and the future benefit.

Thoughtfully engaged – Dewey (1915, 1916, and 1918) described the thoughtfully engaged student as one who works to solve problems that have meaning in the life of the student and will have an impact on society, as well. Participant perceptions of whether or not they are thoughtfully engaged were considered in this study.

Values – Defined by the participants of this study as aspects of school they find of worth or importance in their school lives. Values change depending on the importance attached to them by the participant.

Paradigm and Assumptions

During the process of formulating my research study, I found I most closely aligned my assumptions about the nature of the researcher with the qualitative paradigm. In the qualitative paradigm, the researcher views reality as having multiple perspectives, depending on how the participants view and explain a particular event (Mertens, 2005). My participants had their own views and voices about learning and engagement and all came from varied perspectives regarding learning. These multiple perspectives allowed for variations in data that provided reliability for the research methods selected. It is an epistemological assumption that the researcher interacts with what is being researched in the qualitative paradigm (Mertens). I interacted with my participants by engaging them in conversation during individual interviews and in a focus group interview session. My interactions included questioning during interviews, probing for further information concerning an answer that needed more clarification, and congenial interactions that helped to gain trust of the participants prior to the interview sessions.

Axiological assumptions of the qualitative paradigm concern values that are personally laden and biased due to their personal relevance (Mertens). I had to critique my own ideologies of engagement and learning because I have been working in the field of education for the past 15 years. I have a personal desire to engage students in their work and want every student to learn to his/her fullest potential. This bias had to be addressed with my participants before the interviews began. I explained to the participants that I have a vested interest in engaging students because I felt engagement led to enjoyment in learning.

Methodological assumptions of qualitative research assume that the research design is emergent. The design of my study has emerged from the literature review and from the data collected during interviews and the focus group session. There were no preconceived notions of apparent themes in the data. The themes were derived as I compared my literature review with what my participants were saying during the course of interviews. By comparing the two pieces of information gathered (literature and data elements) and by further comparing these elements to the Deweyan framework of authentic and engaged learning, my assumptions surrounding engagement were further reduced so that the data would be more reliable.

Organization of the Study

In this introduction to my research study, I discussed the importance of student engagement in high school and the need to develop authentic learning environments of communities of thoughtful learners. By doing so, it is probable that students will be more engaged in learning and will be able to transfer that learning to the good of society. I situated the purpose of my study within literature that supports the Deweyan framework of a democratic school. Following the introduction, I defined terms that were used throughout the study and how they apply to my research. I then provided a brief description and rationale for my choice of a qualitative paradigm and my assumptions associated with this paradigm. In chapter two, I present the historical background and theory concerning engagement and authentic learning and how it related to my study. I then explore the current literature, providing analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the research literature. Chapter three provides detailed information concerning the

methods of this qualitative study of engagement. Chapters four and five provide the details of student interviews and a discussion of the results of the study, respectively.

Summary

Chapter one provided an introduction to this study. I began with a brief introduction that explained why there is a need to study engagement. I further explained that allowing the student voice to be heard may be lacking in our schools. Because this is a study of student perceptions of engagement in their school, student voice became an important aspect to be considered. In the problem statement, I explained why the problem of disengagement is an area requiring further research. Some researchers consider disengagement to be a student issue, whereas this study considers that there may be opposing values between how a student perceives his or her school and whether or not the school structure promotes the disengagement. I then explained the purpose of the study. The purpose is to investigate student perceptions of their engagement in school. I explained that I would be using a framework based on Dewey's conception of a democratic school, with the basis being to determine how students perceive their learning as authentic. I followed the purpose with my research questions, which were used to examine how students felt about their learning experiences. I then explained that there are significant reasons to study engagement and provided a brief amount of supporting literature to back up my claims of these areas of significance. Following the significance of the study, I defined specialized terms that resulted from my research and how these terms are used in my study. I concluded with an evaluation of my own assumptions

regarding my study and how those assumptions made qualitative research my paradigm of choice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to investigate student perceptions of their schooling experiences and how those experiences may or may not have contributed to their engagement. By viewing student perceptions through the Deweyan lens of what it means to be an authentically engaged learner, a learner who is thoughtfully engaged with meaningful problems and one who is involved in democratic inquiry within a community of learners, I strived to determine what engages students in their learning. This review of the literature is organized around each of these Deweyan themes so that the reader can gain a better understanding of work that has been done in each of these areas of research interest.

Background Information

As high school teachers struggle to engage their students in active learning, it has been determined that many of these same students exhibit a lack of work ethic and indicate that they are experiencing disengagement in their high school academic classes (Balfanz et al., 2007; Barber, 1996; Lombardi & Oblinger, 2007; Payne, 2002; and Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). These researchers suggested students become more disengaged in the learning process as they move into the upper grades. Barber asserted that pupil attitudes are predominately positive at the start of secondary education but turn more

negative over the next two years, reaching the lowest point in year 10 before rising in year 11 as students begin preparing for exit examinations. Evidence from the 2009 HSSSE includes responses indicating that students want schools to be intellectually as well as academically challenging (Yazzie-Mintz). Based upon the survey results, students find school boring and non-inclusive. In the 2006 HSSSE, 72% of students report being engaged in their classes. The data suggested that the problem of engagement is not a pervasive one but with 28% of students not being engaged, it becomes a problem worthy of further consideration. Another troubling issue, reported in the 2009 HSSSE survey, is that only 57% of students feel they play an important part in their school community – a slight increase from the 55% who reported the same in the 2006 HSSSE survey (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).

The reasons students are disengaging from their classrooms have been described in several different ways. One such description concerns the deficiency model of schooling, which proposes that students drop out of school because they are in some way deficient in the proper socialization techniques required to make appropriate adaptations to the school environment (Gerics & Westheimer, 1988; McMahon & Portelli, 2004). A major premise of this model is that students need extensive interventions in order to adjust to the demands of schooling. As asserted by Gerics and Westheimer, the deficiency model has been the dominant implicit theoretical approach to the problems associated with school failure and dropouts.

Yazzie-Mintz (2010) purported dropping out as a way for students to disengage completely from school. Dropping out of school is a developing problem, with recent research suggesting one in three public high school students will not graduate

(Thornburgh, 2006). Thornburgh noted that the statistics become even more alarming for Latinos and African Americans, with the numbers approaching 50% .Yazzie-Mintz further asserted that more and more youth are considering dropping out of school, whether or not they understand the personal and financial repercussions of doing so. In the 2009 HSSSE survey, approximately 21% of students reported they had considered dropping out at some point during high school; 7% of respondents had considered dropping out many times.

A major concern related to student disengagement involves boredom with school tasks. Breidenstein (2007) found that boredom appears to be a necessary part of what occurs in middle school classrooms. He asserted that in middle school there are inherently boring subjects and inherently boring teachers. In his opinion, boredom cannot be avoided. Breidenstein further contended that boredom is not a “private affair” but is socially connected to others so that one must find members of the environment who are like-minded in thinking that the teacher or the topic is boring. Communicating boredom can be explicitly vocal, such as a verbalizing one’s distaste for the curriculum and/or methods being used to teach the topic. It can also be implicit or nonverbal, such as the raising of an eyebrow or a yawn when something disinterests the student. Breidenstein asserted the normalcy of boredom and the taboo to explicitly express one’s boredom creates an intriguing dynamic between teacher and student. A tacit agreement thus ensues, which permits a certain level of boredom to be accepted in schools. Politeness and tact prohibit students from confronting the teacher directly with their boredom while at the same time, teachers permit discrete forms of passing of time and disengagement with the learning task.

Yazzie-Mintz (2010) also noted that boredom is prevalent in our nation's high schools. In the 2009 HSSSE, 66% of students reported being bored in their high school classes at least every day and approximately 17% were bored in every class. Only 2% of the surveyed students reported never experiencing boredom in high school.

Csikszentmihalyi and Larson's (1984) study, in which students carried electronic pagers and self-report forms to monitor moods, was a seminal work regarding boredom in the classroom. The beepers were randomly activated, at which time students were to fill out self-reports of what they were doing and how they felt during that moment. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson found that "compared to other contexts in their lives, time in class is associated with lower-than-average states on nearly every self report dimension. Most notably, students report feeling sad, irritable, and bored, concentration is difficult, they feel self-conscious and strongly wish they were doing something else" (p. 9).

Research on disengagement also indicated that secondary students have an increasingly negative attitude toward schooling (Barber, 1996; Blatchford, 1996; Payne, 2002). Blatchford's study, however, showed that results are not always linearly related to age. Blatchford reported students as young as seven years referenced school as boring, although more students at this age reported school as interesting. About half of the students between ages 11 and 16 found their interest in school to be 'somewhere in the middle' (Blatchford, 1996, p. 269). School was considered mainly boring for the sixteen year old age group. Much of the boredom situations reported in the study concerned some aspect of work that is assigned in school. Blatchford's study indicated that students see school as a necessary factor for their future employment. Thus, students grow more

indifferent toward schooling as they enter high school, but they realize it is necessary for their future.

The aforementioned problems of disengagement are defined in terms of students being part of a ‘deviant population’ (Gerics & Westheimer, 1988, p. 44). These students failed to adapt appropriately to school, therefore they required interventions such as after school programs, attendance outreach, guidance and counseling services, and health services to help them adjust to the demands of school. Rather than placing blame on the student for inadequacies, another approach to engagement would be to consider the social organization of the school itself, as discussed above, and the work students are being asked to complete. By analyzing student perspectives on these topics, one can determine whether students are engaging or disengaging from their classes.

Deweyan Theory

Dewey suggested (1915, 1916, and 1918) that in order for students to have authentic learning experiences in school, they need to be a part of a community of learners who have the needs of society at the center of their learning experiences. This authenticity should then lead to engagement of learners.

School as community.

One characteristic that fosters democratic learning communities is the ability of students to be able to have active conversations with their teachers and their peers so that collaborative involvement in learning is encouraged. As asserted by Berry (2006), this level of student involvement is found wanting in today’s classrooms. An engaging classroom is involved in debate and discourse (Brown, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1989;

Newmann & Wehlage, 1993; Nicaise, Gibney, & Crane, 2000; Noddings, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978) in order to promote student thinking through social interactions.

School size may impede a sense of community. According to Strike (2004), large schools are administered similar to bureaucracies and rarely recognize the needs of students. Because their teachers do not know students, emotional barriers may emerge. According to Strike, students who are known and cared for by adults are more willing to take their education more seriously. Meier (2000) concurred and proposed that schools need local control and decision-making in order to foster a sense of community. Both Meier and Strike argued that standards-based reforms instrumentalize education by placing emphasis on regulatory measures and therefore, reduce potential for community. This form of instrumentalization expresses no shared conception of a quality education beyond the idea that higher test scores are best. According to Strike, standards-based education focused on higher test scores, therefore, promoting competition instead of community.

Dewey (1915) proposed that individualistic learning is measured through competitiveness so that one becomes conditioned to analyze and examine children based on how well they can get ahead of others in acquiring and processing knowledge. Dewey further asserted that in an active learning environment this competitive spirit is overcome by the free and willing exchange of ideas and suggestions. Dewey contended that students learn collectively from their successes as well as their failures so that miniature communities within an embryonic society can be achieved. This spirit and essence of community in classrooms and schools, as envisioned by Dewey, is the theoretical basis used to analyze student perceptions of engagement.

The democratic school.

A second characteristic of an authentically engaged classroom, as suggested by Dewey, involves the process of democratic inquiry (Dewey, 1916). Democratic inquiry is an educational process that teaches how to think critically and act in a democratic society. This process proposes that educators should inculcate democratic values and the process of critical inquiry within students so that they can become active, inquiring, involved, thoughtful, and productive citizens (Hahn, 1998). Dewey (1916) referred to this notion as the democratic ideal. He asserted that recognition of mutual interests as a factor in social control, and a change in social habit by the free interaction between social groups engenders democracy. It is through this shared interest in a common theme that allows the processes of democracy to prevail within the group. Dewey's assertion, "the extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer to his own action to that of others and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own..." (p. 83) describes this concurrent effort of varied people to come to a valid conclusion that will benefit the group as a whole.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) conducted interviews of students from two different school districts involved in a participatory form of democratic education contrasted with a justice-oriented form of education. They found the exclusive emphasis on personally responsible citizenship, apart from analysis of social, political, and economic contexts, inadequate for advancing democracy. These varied contexts enabled students to engage with their learning out in the community. In their analysis of these contexts, Westheimer and Kahne found that within each form of education – both participatory and justice-oriented – students were significantly engaged in community

affairs. By engaging in these community events, learning was made more meaningful and relevant to students. These researchers believed traits associated with participatory and justice-oriented citizenship are essential for developing the values of democracy in our youth.

Dewey forwarded the notion that schools must be embryonic communities of thoughtfully engaged youth who are working to solve problems that have meaning in their lives and thus will have meaning in society. He further proposed that school should mirror life itself. By doing such, schools become means of enlarging and enriching life experiences rather than being institutions divorced from personal experience and activity (Gerics & Westheimer, 1988). This research has analyzed the degree to which students perceive their learning as thoughtfully engaging. It is through this research that I have strived to address the problem of disengagement in the high school classroom.

Understanding and Defining Engagement

While many educators find it important to understand how to engage students in their work at school, few have attempted to formally define or study engagement as an outcome of the school process (Pope, 2001). Those who have attempted to define engagement have expressed varied views of the factors that influence engagement. These differences of opinion among researchers and theorists make the concept of engagement more challenging to understand.

Dewey (1938a.) described the engaging classroom as one involved in experiential learning. Dewey placed emphasis on the '*quality*' (p. 27) of the experiences that occur in the students' lives and brings to the fore two aspects of quality that should be considered.

These aspects of quality are how agreeable or disagreeable the experience may be for the student; and how the immediate experience of the student influences later experiences.

Dewey, (as referenced in Erickson and Schultz, 1992) referred to this quality of experience as the “social set-up” (p. 476). Students’ perceptions of the task, as either agreeable or disagreeable, will have a major influence on how the task will be experienced cognitively. This will then further influence how the student relates to other situations, which may employ the tactics used in a prior task. By the very nature of being engaged with the task, students may then have better cognitive access to information so that the information can then be applied to future learning situations.

Erickson and Shultz (1992) referenced factors affecting student task perception. They referred to the way a student perceives a task as the “social participation structure” (p.476). This task perception is described as being affected by the interplay of social and cognitive factors. According to Erickson and Schultz, a student may find a cognitively challenging task stimulating when the social task is comfortable and when the student feels he or she has the requisite knowledge to be successful. In contrast, a student may experience challenging tasks as stressful in an environment that is uncomfortable or leaves the student with a sense of disengagement from the learning environment.

Erickson and Shultz further asserted that this social participation structure involves prior knowledge and how it is associated with the current task, whether the student is or is not comfortable and has knowledge required to complete a task, how he or she feels compared to others and his or her abilities in the class, how interactions with the teacher in association with negotiating the parameters of task make the student feel, as well as other social and cognitive aspects that can be attributed to a learning situation. Thus, a

sense of belonging and access to the teacher to clarify information that may present a problem for students is important when attempting to create engaging learning environments.

Dewey viewed the educator as the person who must plan for the engaging classroom: “He must survey the capacities and needs of the particular set of individuals with whom he is dealing and must at the same time arrange the conditions which provide the subject-matter or content for experiences that satisfy these needs and develop these capacities” (1938a., p. 58). Planning of instruction should be flexible enough to permit freedom for individual experiences yet firm enough to provide direction toward “continuous development of power” (p. 58). Dewey viewed the development of experience coming about from interaction, leading one to the view of education as a social process. Dewey (1915) also contended that education must undergo a transformation. This transformation of education must involve making our schools embryonic communities where students are actively learning. He referred to this type of active learning as the use of occupations that “reflect the life of the larger society” (Dewey, 1915, p. 20). Embryonic refers to miniature communities of learners who are applying their knowledge to daily life. It is knowledge that can be used immediately rather than in some distant future. By actively using knowledge, such as preparing a meal for guests rather than learning from a book how to do so, students become active in the occupations evident in everyday society. According to Dewey, applying learning in this manner creates a renewed spirit within the school. In summary, students must be engaged with activities that have meaning for their individual lives.

Finn and Voelkl (1993) defined engagement as having both a behavioral component, termed *participation*, and an emotional component, termed *identification*. Participation is defined by Finn and Voelkl as the extent to which there is regular participation in classroom and school activities. At the most basic level, it involves a student attending school and class, paying attention to the teacher, and participating in curricular activities by responding in an appropriate manner to directions, questions, and assignments. Higher levels of participation involve a students' initiating a dialogue with the teacher, questioning, displaying enthusiasm for learning through the expenditure of additional time in the classroom, or completing more learning tasks than are actually required by the teacher.

Finn and Voelkl (1993) included involvement in subject-related clubs or community activities and in the social, extracurricular, and athletic areas of school life in addition to, or at times taking the place of, extensive participation in the academic work of the classroom. Identification, as defined by Finn and Voelkl, occurred when students felt a sense of belonging. Through this sense of belonging, students begin to internalize their importance to the school and the school's importance to them. Identification is likely to occur over time if students are active and participatory in their classes. Actively participating in the events that occur in a classroom makes the student feel needed, which encourages further identification with the school. Providing students with rewards for performance further reinforces identification. According to Finn and Voelkl, an internalized sense of belonging can further encourage students to become active participants in school.

Other researchers place the definition of engagement in a strictly cognitive realm. Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn (1992) defined engagement as a student's investment in learning, comprehending, and mastering both knowledge and skills. This definition of engagement centers on constructing meaning in order to produce knowledge and aiming work toward products and performances that have meaning beyond success in school.

The Newmann et al. (1992) definition centers on the cognitive aspects of engagement. In contrast to Newmann et al. (1992), other researchers (Finn, 1989; Fredricks et al., 2004; and Watkins, 2005) place importance upon both the social and cognitive forms of engagement. The combined literature of the aforementioned researchers concerns belongingness intermingled with a sense of achievement. Students who identify with school are then able to transfer that feeling of belongingness to achievement in classes. If one is to consider an all-encompassing view of engagement, it appears that the factors associated with both cognition and socialization should be addressed.

Schlechty (2002), Oblinger (2004), and Prensky (2005), defined engagement in terms of a digitally literate society that is "always on" (Oblinger, 2004, p. 2) and mobile, rather than placing the focus of engagement in the cognitive realm. Accordingly, they described students as learning best from experiences occurring in digital format. These students are comfortable in a digital environment and use that environment for communication, information gathering, and analysis. As posited by Oblinger, educational psychologists refer to the use of gaming as a form of educational engagement, and they consider it a form of *critical engagement* that utilizes metacognitive strategies as a process of reflecting on the learning itself. This form of engagement involves

collaboration among players, thus providing a venue for peer-to-peer teaching and for the emergence of learning communities. Game theorists refer to conversations concerning the strategies of the game and how to resolve challenges associated with the game as meta-gaming.

Prensky (2005) defined engagement as a combination of desirable goals, interesting choices, immediate and useful feedback, and opportunities for improvement. He described these characteristics of engagement as the same factors involved when students are playing computer games. Prensky (2004) and Oblinger (2004) understood the importance of cognition and behavior as aspects of engagement, but they considered socialization structures as a large component of engagement as well. In digital formats, socialization occurs by networking and creating spaces for students to contact one another by way of blogs, text formats, or other forms of social networking structures. Prensky (2004) and Oblinger (2004) believed the use of these networking structures and games for learning would greatly increase student engagement.

Schlechty (2002) made clear the difficulties in accurately and completely defining the concept of engagement. The words *engaged*, *engagement*, and *engaging*, according to Schlechty, have intricate yet subtle meanings. Duty and commitment suggest one set of meanings when referring to the word *engaged*, and involvement with a task suggests another set of meanings when referring to the word *engaging*. As Schlechty purported, the intricacies and multiple meanings become even more evident when referring to pedagogical engagement. One such example of the multiple meanings given by Schlechty concerned that of the engaging teacher. A teacher may be considered engaging because he or she is charismatic or has a winning personality, or perhaps it may

be because the teacher creates activities that stimulate students to want to work more diligently. Schlechty contended that it could be one, the other, or both of these factors when referring to engagement. Schlechty's premise concerning engagement assumed that "different types of engagement produce different types of commitment and, therefore, different types of effort and learning results" (p. 4).

It is evident that one must consider the cognitive and social aspects of a school environment in order to arrive at a full definition of what constitutes the construct of engagement. By considering all aspects of engagement, one can come closer to the parameters that form the authentic classroom.

Meaningful Problems

Conceptualizing authentic work.

In recent years, the nature of traditional learning environments and activities has been set apart from that of authentic learning environments and activities (Maina, 2004). As described by Maina, the notion of learners as blank slates, who come to the classroom to be filled with information by the teacher is no longer true of the authentic classroom. Newmann and Wehlage (1993) defined authentic as distinguishing between achievement that is meaningful and significant and that which is trivial and useless. They further defined authentic achievement as involving three criteria: students construct meaning and produce knowledge; students use disciplined inquiry to construct meaning; and students aim their work toward the production of products or performances that will have meaning beyond success in school. It follows that these criteria would be made manifest in the authentic classroom. Maina further asserted that learners need to be actively involved in

their own knowledge construction. Renzulli et al. (2004), however, proposed that learning occurs on a continuum ranging from deductive/prescriptive learning on one end to inductive/self-selected/investigative learning on the other. Deductive learning is characterized by learning that is on a fixed time schedule, contains predetermined sets of information and activities, segmentation of subjects and topics, tests and grades to determine progress, and a pattern of organization where learning is imposed from above and outside the classroom. The major assumption of deductive learning is that learning will have some value for future endeavors. Inductive learning, in contrast, is defined as “applying relevant knowledge and skills to solving real problems” (Renzulli et al., 2004, p. 74).

They contended that real-life problems share four criteria: the problem under study involves an emotional as well as a cognitive component required of each learner; there are no agreed-upon solutions or strategies to solving the problem; real-life problems motivate people to find solutions that will ultimately change actions, attitudes, or beliefs; and the problems under study target a real audience. This real audience represents a group of people who have a keen interest in the topic being studied and presented. Students may initially practice their presentation before their peers but then will ultimately present the final product to a group with a special interest in their topic. Renzulli, et al. (2004), described authentic learning as the “vehicle through which everything from basic skills to advanced content and processes come together in the form of student-developed products and services” (p. 74). It is then their contention that learning should include both traditional and authentic forms rather than relying on one form or the other to teach content. Research by Newmann and Wehlage (1995) reported

that educators felt there were times when traditional, less authentic instruction such as memorization, repetitive practice, and silent study as well as teaching for depth of knowledge was necessary to teach a concept or lesson.

Richardson (2008) supported this notion when he claimed the didactic lecture is not something that should be thrown out of the teaching repertoire. He supported the notion of using lecture to guide students in the learning of physiological concepts; but then also warned teachers that one must use methods other than lecture to keep students engaged. He suggested using guided notes so that students are active during lecture, using real world examples that are relevant to student's lives, and providing frequent breaks in lecture so students can remain focused. Richardson does not want the standard lecture to be removed from teaching but claims that it needs to be "fixed" (p. 23). It is his contention that "the well-organized lecture remains one of the most effective ways to integrate and present information from multiple sources on complex topics, such as those often encountered in the teaching of physiology" (p. 23).

Lee and Songer (2003) supported the notion that authenticity is addressed by using real-world problems, but they further asserted that authenticity is encouraged and maintained by linking students to a mentor, such as a scientist, so that data sharing, critiquing, and direct communication can occur. Maina (2004) asserted that authentic activities mimic real-world situations, but further claimed the learner is at the center of instruction and that "learning takes place in meaningful situations that are extensions of the learner's world" (p. 2).

One could assume that this real-life connection within the classroom makes authentic learning a powerful form of education. Students are asked to formulate ideas

and test hypotheses concerning scientific or sociological problems that have import in their daily lives. By having this connection concerning what is important to the student, the student will become a more engaged learner and want to spend the time and effort needed to realize a possible solution to the problem.

Intrator (2004) found that a second way of connecting with students, in order to make learning more authentic, is to connect content to questions concerning student interest. His study specifically involved teen questionings and making learning authentic for them. This form of connection concerns pairing student interest along with determining methods to engage the student in a dialogue. This dialogue is then used to integrate the content information of the subject under study to the study and contemplation of one's own self. Intrator spent six months shadowing teenagers in a large, diverse California school to determine their experiences with engagement. He also observed their teachers. He found that teachers who engaged students with greatest efficiency were those that were able to use any subject matter for an opening to a discussion of big ideas.

An example given was his observation of an English teacher who asked students to create an "experience wheel" that would compare Huckleberry Finn's developmental journey with their personal journey to adulthood. One student reflected her appreciation of the story of Huckleberry Finn, but further commented that what she really enjoyed and was engaged by was the fact that she could connect the story to her own life. It follows that this is another way of making a real-world connection with a student, teen or otherwise, in order to engage the learning process and make it more productive and enduring for him or her. Callison & Lamb (2004) further supported the notion of real-

world connections with regards to authentic learning as involving the exploration of the world, asking questions, identifying information resources, discovering connections, examining multiple perspectives, discussing ideas, and making informed decisions that have real impact.

Impediments to meaningful and authentic work.

If research supports authentic learning environments as the method that should be used to teach students how to internalize and effectively use information, it follows that classrooms should move away from the traditional method of lecture and rote learning. One solution is for classrooms to move to more authentic ways of teaching and learning. The following literature discussion focused on ways authentic learning situations may be impeded and then follows with a discussion of characteristics of engagement that could advance authentic learning.

A by-product of a lack of authentic and engaging classrooms and tasks is the focus on standardized testing in our nations' schools. In recent years, the push for academic accountability has made it ever more difficult for educators to create authentic and engaging environments for their students. Resnick (1987) reported information concerning the focus on testing and accountability in her research on schools. Her study claimed that schools were attempting to fill students with knowledge as quickly as possible without much thought for developing and nurturing the natural learning process. It is her contention that schools rely on the use of symbols and rules to teach content, whereas, outside of school, actions are connected with objects and events. It may be possible that schools are attempting to fill students with knowledge quickly in an effort to teach all standards before the testing date arrives. Wrigley (2003) further supported this

notion by contending that schools have reduced all sense of purpose in the effort to gain higher test scores. “We have almost reached the stage where what cannot be measured simply does not *count*” (p. 90). Meier (2000) contended that the worst thing we can do is to “turn teachers and schools into vehicles for implementing externally imposed standards” (p. 20). She further asserted that running schools as complex bureaucracies, controlled by standards and testing, hinders the ability of schools to teach in an authentic manner.

In authentic learning environments, teachers discontinue being providers of information and test-creators; instead they are represented as guides, scaffolders, and task presenters (Nicaise et al., 2000). Testing, in other words, is not the main focus in an authentic learning environment. The focus is on the student and his or her need at the particular moment in time.

The current structure of high schools is another proposed reason for the lack of authentic learning environments. Subjects are divided into separate entities that are then not integrated with one another in any sensible way (Lave, 1988). Furthermore, pedagogy is adult-centered with teachers and administrators defining learning objectives for groups of students rather than focusing on the individual learner and his/her needs (Resnick, 1987). Wrigley (2003) referenced this type of pedagogy as “a reinforcement of transmission teaching and alienated learning” (p. 90). Another aspect of school structure involves how school knowledge, if presented in a traditional lecture-oriented manner, is disconnected from real life (Resnick, 1987). Skinner and Cowan (1995) discovered similar results in a study involving students in their first year of teacher preparation as a primary school teacher. In surveys, most of the students expressed a dislike for science

courses. The researchers observed that the students were involved in recipe-style exercises that involved the lowest level of knowledge assimilation and that the students were following a set of procedures that had pre-determined answers. This way of teaching science undermines the way research is conducted in the real world, where scientists conduct experiments, as asserted by Skinner and Cowan, in a “dynamic, creative, and interactive fashion, constantly observing, making sense of results, hypothesis evaluating, redesigning tests and generating new ideas” (p. 4). Dewey (1916) cautioned that learning in school should be continuous with that out of school. It was his contention that the “absence of a social environment in connection with which learning is a need and a reward is the chief reason for the isolation of the school; and this isolation renders school knowledge inapplicable to life and so infertile in character” (p. 343).

Resnick (1987) and Fried (2005) described the process of schooling as a “game” that must be negotiated in order to “win.” Resnick further asserted that one must learn symbolic rules of various kinds, but the process of schooling is organized such that there is “not supposed to be continuity between what one knows outside of school and what one learns in school” (p. 15). Resnick described growing evidence that schooling may not contribute in a direct and obvious way to performances outside of school and that knowledge gained outside of school may not support in-school learning. This factor of increasing isolation between learning inside of school and how it transfers outside of school becomes a concern for the authentic educator.

Another concern of authentic learning environments involves time to adequately process and complete work. In a study conducted by Nicaise et al. (2000), student perceptions of an authentic classroom involving a mock space shuttle mission led to

complaints from some of the unsuccessful students in the program. The study involved 59 students from a Midwest high school. These 59 students were enrolled in 3 elective courses in which they learned information to help them with their work on the shuttle. The purpose of the study was to determine student perceptions of an alternative learning environment. The student responses to interviews and surveys could then answer the questions:

1. What, if any, key activities influenced students?
2. Do students think the classes are similar to or different from other classes they have taken?
3. How successful are students in this environment?
4. How do students feel about the mock space shuttle experience?

The courses the students participated in were Principles of Engineering, Aerospace, and Advanced Aerospace. Students were given freedom of choice when selecting the various tasks they would complete. The final, culminating activity involved a mock space shuttle mission that would occur over the course of a week. Most of the students in the study felt successful in their ability to create machinery that would enable the shuttle to perform properly. Other students did not feel as successful in their abilities and blamed their lack of success on several factors, such as lacking background information, unclear learning goals, unclear assessment methods, limited access to the teacher, or not having enough time to complete the projects.

Another view of the time barrier came from Intrator (2004) who described components of disengaged time. He referenced the time barriers as “slow”, “lost”, and “fake” time. Students in the study described slow time class work as being predictable,

mechanical, and dull. Students in slow time classes invented ways to occupy themselves, such as reading books or listening to their headphones. Lost time was described as being time that is truly not accounted for by the student. Students in the study described lost time as a time where one passively waits for class to end. Students involved themselves in fake time when they attempted to appear attentive and engaged as a show for their teacher. Pope (2001) referenced this behavior as “doing school,” by which she meant students go through the motions to appear focused and engaged in learning.

Another problem with creating authentic learning environments in high schools today concerns the existing gap between the resources and the background knowledge needed in order to create successful authentic learning environments. In the study conducted by Nicaise et al. (2000), students who entered into the space shuttle mission environment with some form of prior knowledge of engineering and aeronautics were more successful than their counterparts who had little to no experience with the subjects. Students who had little knowledge felt themselves to be less successful and even struggled in the environment. The students reported they needed access to resources (teachers, text, videos, Internet sites) so they could build their knowledge required to be successful in the situation. Some resources were available to the students but others were limited, or either the students did not know how to use them.

Lee and Songer (2003) confirmed the assertion that necessary resources and knowledge are a prerequisite for successful learning in authentic environments. They reported that real-world science involved a transformation of complex and ambiguous content, scientific thinking skills, and resources that supported scientific investigation. This transformation of inquiry from scientific inquiry to student inquiry has challenges

within itself. One challenge, determined by Lee and Songer (2003), is that authentic scientific inquiry is difficult to attain in the classroom because students come to their classes with little prior content knowledge. This content knowledge is a prerequisite for moving on to authentic learning situations. Callison and Lamb (2004) supported this assertion when they stated that authentic learning situations should involve resources beyond the school.

Edelson, Gordin, and Pea (1999) further asserted that students required a great amount of guidance because their inquiry is limited, to a degree, by time and resources. Their contention is that the processes of data-gathering, analysis, interpretation, and communication are all challenging tasks that are made even more difficult due to the need for content-knowledge in order to have the background to move into authentic analysis of a problem. It is Edelson's (1988) argument, as well, that real-world science is not accessible to students because authentic activities that are interesting to students are too open ended and require resources that are not readily available to teachers. An example from their study involving authentic learning of meteorological concepts concerned student use of a tool called a Climate Visualizer. The Climate Visualizer was designed as an environment for the visual interpretation of meteorological data. Edelson et al. found that although the proper tools were provided to aid in the interpretation of mass quantities of meteorological data, what was lacking was the proper training of teachers and students on how to use the tool to its utmost potential. While this research has focused on authenticity in the science classroom, it is understood that authentic learning can occur in any subject.

Forms and Characteristics of Engagement

Data from the 2009 High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) indicated there may be noticeable gaps across three dimensions of engagement: Social/Behavioral/Participatory, Emotional, and Cognitive/Intellectual/Academic. Following the brief descriptions of definitions of the types of engagements, an overview of the results gathered from the data of the 2009 HSSSE study is presented. There were 42,754 students participating in the 2009 administration of the HSSSE. Presentation of the data included large chunks of information that stood out from the survey. Schools participating in the study were encouraged to analyze the data based on their specific school needs. For example, if a school was interested in providing better supporting networks for students, they would want to examine the emotional dimension of engagement more closely than the other dimensions.

Behavioral engagement is mainly concerned with participation in the processes of schooling such as involvement in academic and extracurricular activities and is considered an important aspect for achieving academic success and preventing drop out (Fredricks et al., 2004). Emotional engagement concerns a students' identification with school and how students react to teachers, peers, and the processes involved with schooling. It presumably influences willingness of the student to complete the schoolwork that is given. Cognitive engagement encompasses the idea of a students' investment in school. It incorporates thoughtfulness and a willingness to complete tasks and to internalize and comprehend complex subject matter.

Yazzie-Mintz (2010) referenced behavioral engagement as “engagement in the life of the school.” HSSSE questions were grouped in this dimension of engagement to

include questions about extracurricular activities, students' interactions with other students, and students' connection with the community within and around the school. One form of behavioral engagement can be found in classroom settings where students are encouraged to actively participate in the learning environment by questioning, analyzing, and discussing their learning experiences. As asserted by Downer, Rimm-Kaufman, and Pianta (2007), behavioral engagement has been linked to school success. Time spent actively attending to classroom tasks such as reading, writing, actively listening, and questioning have been associated with positive outcomes in school; whereas, looking around the room without focus, engaging in competing or disruptive behaviors, or showing inattention has been linked to the same negative outcomes (Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995).

In a study of 1,013 fourth grade students, Finn et al. examined the relationship between teacher ratings of classroom behavior compared to school achievement. Students were identified whose behavior was frequently inattentive and withdrawn as well as students whose behavior was disruptive. Norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests found those students who displayed inattentive-withdrawn behavior displayed poor performance to the same extent as those students identified as disruptive. Disruptive students tended to draw more attention from teachers, whereas teachers tended to overlook inattentive-withdrawn students in spite of the profound effects nonparticipation could have on them.

Quality of the classroom environment also points to positive behavioral engagement in learning. High quality classrooms are those in which teachers offer students feedback that is focused on the process of learning, ask open-ended questions,

encourage autonomy, establish clear classroom rules, and provide a supportive and warm learning environment that challenges students to actively learn and participate in the learning environment. As Pianta, La Paro, Payne, Cox, and Bradley (2002) found in their study of kindergarten classrooms, greater on-task behavior and social and academic competence occur in classrooms of higher quality than those of lower quality. Much of the work concerning behavioral engagement has been conducted at the pre-school and elementary levels, but there is much evidence to suggest these early outcomes point to later success in school (Pianta & McCoy, 1997).

Yazzie-Mintz (2010) described the emotional dimension of engagement as “engagement of the heart”. Yazzie-Mintz further described this dimension as emphasizing students’ connection to and sense of belonging in a school. Questions from this dimension that were on the 2009 HSSSE included how students felt about their relationship to others in the school and how they felt about the ways and workings of the school. Researchers Finn and Voelkl (1993) identified a behavioral and emotional component to engagement in their research. Their study, conducted in 1993, was a continuation of the work reported by Finn in 1992 but with a focus on school rather than student characteristics that promote engagement among students at risk. The total sample consisted of 6,488 eighth grade students who met at least one of the three following risk criteria: being minority and attending an urban school; living in a family in the lower third of the national distribution of socioeconomic status; or coming from a home in which the language spoken was not English. The purpose of the study was to determine how the structural environment and the regulatory environment influence engagement in schools. The structural environment included aspects such as school size and racial/ethnic

composition of the school population. The regulatory environment was reflected in the degree of structure and rigidity of school procedures and the degree of putativeness of the school's discipline system, where each, as reported by Finn and Voelkl, has the potential of affecting the level of engagement of at risk students.

Measures included teacher reports and student self reports of several engagement indicators: absences/tardies – measured by teachers' reports of whether a student was frequently absent from class or tardy; not-engaged – measured by teachers' reports of whether a student rarely completed homework, was inattentive, and/or frequently disruptive in class; attendance – measured by students' reports of the number of times they missed school, skipped classes, and/or arrived late; and by the number of times parents were contacted about attendance problems; preparation – students' reports of the number of times they came to class without pencil and paper, without books or complete homework; and behavior – measured by students' reports of the number of times they were sent to the office for misbehaving; the amount of times their parents had received phone calls concerning their misbehavior; and whether the student had been in a fight with another student. A sixth measure, student-teacher relationships, measured students' reports of whether they got along well with teachers at their school; whether teachers were interested in students, praised their efforts, and listened to them; and how they felt teachers treated them. This measure was viewed as an indicator of school community and is the emotional component of Finn and Voelkl's research. As determined in prior research conducted by Finn (1989), evidence suggested that students who do not, from the earliest years, internalize the spaces of school so they view themselves as being an important part of the school environment, are at higher risk for long-term, adverse

consequences such as disruptiveness in class, absenteeism, truancy, juvenile delinquency, and dropping out of school. Students are most at risk for developing these negative behaviors if they do not develop strong identities with their school (Finn, 1989; Fredricks et al., 2004; Watkins, 2005). Other research conducted by Finn (1992), supported the notion that participatory behaviors discriminate strongly between successful students at risk and their less successful peers. The 1993 study conducted by Finn and Voelkl found that the most consistent findings were for the effects of school size. Results indicated absenteeism is lower, classroom participation is better, and students felt the environment was warm and more supportive when school enrollment was smaller. These findings were consistent across teacher and student reports for both classroom participation and behavior measures.

The percentage of minority students in grade 8 was related to three of the five participation measures and to students' view of the warmth and supportiveness of the school. Absenteeism is greater and teachers report that students are more often unprepared for class when there are higher percentages of minority students. At risk students reported a greater degree of community within the school with more minority students enrolled. These reports varied with race. Eighth grade African American students with few minority students or staff and White students in schools with high percentages of minority students and staff viewed the school as lacking in warmth and supportiveness.

Little association was found between certain selected aspects of the regulatory environment and the engagement levels of students at risk. One measure, requiring that students have passes when leaving class, was associated with poorer attendance and

behavior patterns and poorer perceptions of the supportiveness of the environment. All of these effects were reduced when regulatory and structural measures were combined in one statistical model. Finn and Voelkl (1993) stated that rules such as these may need to be enforced in larger schools, where attendance and behavior are more problematic. They further acknowledged that neither rules, severity of punishment for many behavior offenses, nor the degree of structure of school procedures had any direct effect on the engagement of eighth grade students at risk.

Watkins (2005) acknowledged that school sense of membership is associated with student's valuing of schoolwork, motivation in school, and expectancy of success in school and life. Furthermore, it was his contention that disengagement from school is not all about academic success but that school practices matter, as well. This assertion is based on information gathered from a survey of a representative sample of 224,058 15-year old students in 8,364 schools across 42 countries. These students were asked to respond to 'My school is a place where I feel I belong': 79% affirmed this statement, but differences ranged across various countries, such as, France (44%), Spain (52%), Belgium (53%) compared to Australia (85%), Finland (86%) and Hungary (89%). Willms (2003) asserts, "in nearly every country, there is a wide range among schools in the prevalence of students considered to have a low sense of belonging and low participation" (p. 54). Willms found that when considering entire schools and whether or not they foster a sense of community, belongingness is moderately correlated with academic performance in reading, mathematics, and science but for individual students, belongingness may not be strongly related to performance.

Yazzie-Mintz (2010) described cognitive engagement as “engagement of the mind”. This dimension described students’ effort, investment, and strategies for learning – the work students do and the way they do the work. Questions from the 2009 HSSE included items regarding homework, preparation for class, classroom discussions and assignments, and the level of academic challenge reported by students.

Students’ prior knowledge as well as their use of a variety of cognitive strategies, such as learning and thinking strategies, influences how well students learn from their academic tasks (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992). Pintrich and Schrauben asserted that it is less understood why strategies that are learned are not activated or transferred to other learning situations but it is surmised that motivation may be a factor involved in this transfer. As declared by Greene et al. (2004), there are several motivational influences on cognitive strategies, such as self-efficacy, achievement goals pursued by students, and how students perceive current task performance as being relevant to their future endeavors. The first of these, self-efficacy, had to do with how successes and failures influenced subsequent beliefs in self as a learner. These beliefs then influenced students’ effort and persistence as they interacted with the world (Margolis & McCabe, 2004). The second influence, achievement goals, considered the purposes for which students are engaged in a task. Greene et al. contended that students who are attempting to improve their content mastery use meaningful processing strategies and self-regulation strategies to a greater degree than those whose purpose was to demonstrate overall competence in content. The third motivational influence, instrumentality, referred to the extent to which students believed a task would have benefit for them in future learning situations or adult life. Miller and Brickman (2004) developed a model and explained how “personally

valued future goals lead to the development of a system of subgoals that facilitate future goal attainment” (Greene et al., 2004, p. 464). Miller and Brickman argued that the perception of current tasks as instrumental to future development has two benefits for self-regulated learning: the importance of the future goal is transmitted to the current task, and it influences the achievement goals adopted by students. Miller and Brickman further argued that future goals may influence achievement goals. When tasks are perceived to be important for future goals to a student, their incentive value is enhanced through their connection to the future goal. If the tasks are perceived to be important for the knowledge or skill to be obtained, students are then more likely to adopt mastery goals. When tasks are perceived as instrumental because of the importance of performing well as compared to others, students are more likely to adopt performance goals (Greene et al., 2004; Miller & Brickman). In summary, students’ perceptions of class work and the value they place on the work at the time determined the types of goals they developed.

While considering the various forms of engagement, it is helpful to analyze the data from the 2009 HSSSE survey. Some of the findings from the 2009 HSSSE survey were that girls reported being more engaged across all three dimensions of engagement than did boys; white students and Asian students reported being more engaged on all three dimensions than students of other races; across academic tracks, students in honors or upper level classes reported being more engaged on all three dimensions than students in other tracks; special education students reported being less engaged on all three dimensions than students in other academic tracks; students in general/regular education tracks and those in career/vocational classes reported equal levels of engagement on all

three dimensions, and fall between the honors and special education tracks in terms of levels of engagement on all three dimensions; students who are not eligible for free/reduced lunch reported higher levels of engagement in all three dimensions than did those students who were eligible for free/reduced lunch; and students reported being less engaged on all three dimensions as they progressed through their high school years. The HSSSE (2009) data indicated that much work needs to be done in high schools in order to create active environments of engaged learners.

Embryonic Communities of Learners

Belongingness/caring and the concept of community.

Belongingness is a necessary precursor to developing a sense of community in schools (Noddings, 2002; Osterman, 2000; Smerdon, 2002; Strike, 2004; Watkins, 2005). Strike posited that the sense of being included and of belonging is a significant factor in the willingness to internalize the norms of a community and refers to this internalization of norms as “normation.” Strike (2004) contended that normation is a process by which a student comes to fully appreciate and value subject matter so that information is internalized in such a way that commitment and competence begins to form when working with the subject matter. Strike further suggested that four principles are derived from this process of normation: it (normation) is crucial to both excellence in learning and engagement with learning; it changes people by altering perception, taste, and character; it involves initiation into the shared projects of a community; and it depends on belonging.

Dewey (1938a.) viewed education as a social process. His argument was that the quality of education “is realized in the degree in which individuals form a group” (p. 65). Dewey envisioned teachers and students working together in collaborative fashion with a sense of shared membership in the community. Through the processes of community building, this vision of shared membership could be achieved. But in order for the community building to occur, one must first address the concept of belongingness. It is through the sense of belongingness that the process and product of community is achieved.

Other work concerning belongingness asserts the importance of having trusted alliances in school and at home (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Osterman, 2000). Feelings of belonging and having a trusted adult in the school environment have been found to lead to important achievement outcomes such as higher grades, positive affect, engagement, and self-worth. A longitudinal study examining children’s motivation and coping in academics completed by Furrer and Skinner further suggested classroom engagement can be mediated by a students’ level of relatedness to the teacher in the classroom. The sample was equally divided by gender and included 948 participants in grades 3 through 6. Students completed self-report questionnaires including subsets of questions to measure their relatedness to specific social partners (parents, teachers, peers), their perceived control in their academic classes, and their engagement versus disaffection in the classroom. Teachers were asked to assess students on their level of engagement versus disaffection, as well. Findings of the study confirmed that when students showed a high degree of relatedness to teachers, parents, or peers, they also showed greater emotional and behavioral engagement in school. The study further confirmed that a high

level of relatedness between a student and his or her parent may be a psychological resource the student can take with himself or herself in order to be successful in other situations. In contrast, the student who had a low level of relatedness (i.e. feel unimportant or rejected by key partners such as parents and/or teachers) was more likely to become bored, disengaged, frustrated, and alienated from learning activities, which in turn led to further academic erosion . As Furrer and Skinner noted, "...poor performance coupled with disaffection erodes social support, leading children to feel further estranged" (p. 158).

Similar findings concerning the importance of relationships in school were reported by Osterman in a literature review that synthesized research about student sense of acceptance within the school community. Osterman reported that students who experienced a higher sense of relatedness behaved differently from those who did not have similar experiences. These students were more likely to enjoy and attend school and to be engaged. They were also more likely to enjoy participating in school social activities, invest more of themselves in the learning process, and interact with peers and teachers in positive ways.

Osterman further asserted that how students felt about their coursework in a particular class was correlated to the relationship they had with their teachers. In contrast, those students who felt alienated or rejected from school tended to be the ones who were consistently associated with behavioral problems, lower interest in school, lower achievement, and dropout. Roeser, Midgley, and Urdan (1996) gathered similar findings when they showed that perceptions of positive teacher-student relationships predicted

positive school-related affect that was shown to be mediated by feelings of belongingness in school.

Smerdon (2002) echoed this same claim concerning research of adolescents' perceived membership in their high schools. One important finding in her study was that adolescents who may be most in need of perceived school membership and may benefit most from it (those with difficult academic histories) were the ones who perceived lower levels of membership in their high schools than did their peers. Further support of this claim came from research by Watkins (2005) who found that students experiencing a greater degree of relatedness reported more positive perceptions of competence and autonomy in the school than those students who were less engaged. Watkins further asserted that as students' sense of community increases, participation increases.

Democratic Inquiry

Democracy and the democratic ideal.

Dewey (1938a.) referenced education as a social process that is occurring within many kinds of societies. Dewey (1938a.) set the criteria for measuring the worth of a form of social life by gauging the extent to which the interests of a group are shared by all its members and the fullness and freedom with which the group interacts with other groups. He further described an undesirable society as one, which "internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience" (Dewey 1938a., p. 95). The democratic ideal is attained when individuals within a society or group interact in such a way as to make the communal needs of the members of the society take precedence over the individual needs of any one member of the society. "A

society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic” (Dewey 1938a., p. 95). It is through this democratic ideal and fostering democratic principles and precepts that the thoughtfully engaged member of society is developed and nurtured.

Kahne (2004) proposed definitions of three types of citizens that may be members of a society – the personally responsible citizen; the participatory citizen; and the justice-oriented citizen. The personally responsible citizen acts responsibly in his or her community by helping those who are less fortunate through food drives or soup kitchen volunteerism and feel it is their obligation to do such things as picking up litter, giving blood, and recycling. The participatory citizen actively participates in the civic affairs and social life of the community at all levels of government – local, state, and/or national level. This is the citizen who organizes and follows through with events that will better society as a whole by engaging in collective, community-based efforts. This citizen would organize the food drive or be the authority in charge of the recycling efforts in a community. Kahne described the justice-oriented citizen as one who takes the initiative to try to understand and analyze the interplay of social, economic, and political forces in order to alleviate injustices and inequities that exist in our society. This is the citizen who gathers and analyzes information regarding hunger or poverty in the community, garners support to organize an effort to alleviate the problem, and then creates initiatives to further support community programs that will ameliorate future problems regarding hunger.

According to Kahne (2004), the type of citizen that is desired in a democratic community depends on the ideas intended to be fostered in the society. He conducted research within two school systems. His premise was to compare the impact of a participatory program with regard to that of a justice-oriented program by studying groups of students who were involved in each program at their respective schools. Both Madison County Youth in Public Service and Bayside Students for Justice were effective in achieving goals consistent with their conceptions of citizenship. Yet, according to Kahne the qualitative and quantitative data regarding these programs demonstrate important differences in impact.

Students in the Madison Program became very knowledgeable about how government works. The program seemed to have a powerful impact on the students' commitment to civic participation. Their committed work to help better the community through social projects and endeavors provided them with the knowledge they needed to find and mobilize resources for the greater good of the community and its members. However, evidence did not exist from interviews or survey data that the Madison Program engendered students to be an agent of social change or critique. Conversely, Kahne reported Bayside students were more oriented toward an emphasis on social critique but were less inclined to be participants of change in their communities.

Thus programs that educate for democracy may have very different outcomes. Some programs foster the ability and commitment to participate, while others may focus on critical analysis of members of a group and how to solve and prevent those inequities. The type of community one is in would depend on the focus one gives to the type of democracy to be pursued. Therefore, the type of community the leaders of a school are

choosing to develop and nurture would foster differing ideas of what it means to be a thoughtfully engaged citizen. This aspect of school structure could have profound effects on the development of democratically- minded, and thus thoughtfully engaged students.

Differences in type of democracy are contingent upon several factors. In her studies of democracy research, Davies (2002) found networks, alliances, and coalitions as more powerful and sustainable efforts than individual teachers, schools, or projects. However, there is not ample evidence to state that a larger coalition or network would result in more sustainable democratic outcomes. Davies determined in some instances that networks achieved greater outcomes toward democratic ideals, but under other conditions individual teachers were effectively able to set a trend for change where networks may be less effective. A clear contention of Davies was that “strategy will clearly depend on what is being democratized and what change is being attempted” (p. 264). The assumption is that schools that are arranged as communities of democratic learners may achieve more positive outcomes than those that are arranged to promote individualistic learning.

Dewey viewed democracy as a way of life that extends beyond participation in political institutions. Dewey (1927) considered democracy a process – a mode of interaction among citizens: “The clear consciousness of communal life, in all its implications, constitutes the idea of democracy” (p. 149). According to Kahne (2004), Dewey wanted schools to develop students’ shared interests in and commitments to common goals. “He wanted to pursue a form of social harmony that would redefine mainstream commitments to equity or excellence” (p. 236). As Kahne asserted, it is the

emphasis on dialogue and experimentation within a community as a means of social growth that distinguishes the Deweyan perspective of a democracy from all other forms.

With all the discrepancies as to what constitutes a democracy and what it means to be a democratic citizen, it is important that teachers and students work together to develop a plan that will create and foster democratic experiences (Singh, Basom, & Perez, 2009). Easton (2005) described the importance of creating situations that allowed student voice to be heard in democratic classrooms. “It represents power to students who have felt powerless in other educational settings. It represents responsibility to students who have not felt responsible for their education (or the education of others). It represents authority for what has previously felt out of students’ control: their education” (p. 54).

Student Voice

Lincoln (1995) explained several lenses through which we can learn about listening to the student voice. One lens that she referenced as scientific context, involved the evolving knowledge of how humans learn. Lincoln asserted that intellectual communities cannot ignore research that has been done concerning how students learn actively by engaging with their environment and reconstructing their knowledge through their social interactions. Lincoln further argued that,

since schooling is one of the most powerful shapers of both learning and acquiring world-view, it makes sense to attend to ways in which children actively shape their contexts and begin to model their worlds and the way in which we, in turn, shape the possibilities available for learners. (p. 89)

This attending to ways in which children actively shape and model their worlds concerns listening to the voice of the learner. In areas of curriculum arrangement, their voices are heard by asking what type of activities they consider engaging and thoughtful

work. Although research supports listening and attending to student voice, Johnston & Nicholls (1995) described a research study concerning students in a New Zealand school who did not want knowledge to be personally relevant and who expected the teacher to tell them what to learn and how they should learn it. The students thwarted all efforts of their teachers to get them engaged in the learning process. When the teacher tried to engage them in developing their own learning experiences, they resisted until they were given a list of facts to memorize and study for a test.

Some students may even voice a form of disapproval by saying “the teacher has denied them access to herself as the source of knowledge necessary to learn the forms they need to succeed” (Delpit, 1988, p. 128). This line of inquiry is further supported by Lombardi and Oblinger (2007) when they stated that entering college freshman often preferred traditional instruction over authentic instruction because they were more likely to use a right-or-wrong, black-or-white mental model. The students believed there are right answers out there and that the authorities have those correct answers. Lombardi et al. confirmed the notion that learners need authentic instruction to become competitors in a global economy, but that students are not accustomed to this form of instruction. They must be taught to think in terms of conflicting perspectives and answers that are not necessarily based on being right or wrong; and they must be taught to be comfortable with ambiguity.

Even though these may be a few isolated incidences of refusal to attempt engaging work and the frustrations involved when the teacher does not impart knowledge directly, it is an excellent illustration of the complexities and varied parameters of student voice. As asserted by Johnston and Nicholls (1995), the puzzle is in the fact that the

teacher is attempting to help the student establish voice and initiative but because the student voice is in opposition to the teacher voice, the effort is stalled.

Dahl (1995) urged educators to consider the student voice in writings they produce. Dahl's ethnography has focused on understanding children's perspectives; how they view school and the learning that occurs there; and the way those factors affect their voice as learners. The two together provide insight into who learners are, what they think, and how they see their lives in school. The research design of this study called for observing and listening to specific inner-city learners as they engaged in reading and writing; and developing field notes of what learners did – their actions and behaviors toward literacy activities – during these periods of reading and writing. As the study progressed, the research team began recording students as they made comments to one another and to themselves about their feelings in the reading and writing situations.

The researchers followed the same set of students through kindergarten and first grade within skills-based curricula using basal readers, and in a replication of the study, they observed for two years another set of inner-city learners using whole language. One of the findings of Dahl's research study concerning elementary school writers was that these students produce information in their writing that reflects what they lived each day in school, what was valued by their teacher, and what resulted from discussions with their peers. Dahl and her team watched students closely, recorded events that occurred as they watched these students, and then reported discourse on each student. While observing two students, one in the basal reader group and one in the whole language group, it became apparent that learner perspectives (attitudes, viewpoints, concepts) are interwoven with instructional events and are fundamental to teaching and learning. Dahl

also reported a connection with learner perspectives and instructional events. “Learners care about certain aspects of classroom life from their perspective (having the freedom to move, being in control of when they are called on, deciding when to engage in an activity, needing a feeling of autonomy), and those perspectives affect what happens in the specific lessons” (p. 128). Seeing the perspective of the learner and listening to the student voice is of importance so connections can be made for students. These represent the connections that will help students be more engaged in learning and will make learning more useful to them as it relates to their world.

Another salient point that came out of this study concerned the learner’s connection with an object, in this case a book, and a sense of well-being from performing well in connection with that object. As Dahl (1995) contended, “the importance of this connection is that it tells us something about how children think about their progress as readers. Children have the idea of ownership and are motivated by their sense of what they know they can do” (p. 127). Dahl also reported linkages between student’s writings and their home life. Visits to students’ homes gave insight that allowed the researchers to connect what the students value at home to the writings they produce.

As a result, building of children's multiple perspectives across contexts and over time indicates that children connect what they experience in school with who they are. Their sense of themselves helps determine how they interpret and act in school. Children think about themselves, what they are trying to accomplish, what they know how to do, and what they think is important and care about. They value ownership and consider their accomplishments as indicators of identity. They value their connection in the social network of other children. As Dahl (1995) contended, these notions suggest actions for

the classroom that will enable teachers to learn more about their students and how they view the world. Insights into what children value and care about help us structure the classroom worlds in which children are most apt to learn. They suggest that we pay attention to what children value as learners and consider their voices in order to support their learning.

These experiences suggest the importance of knowing about larger pieces of children's lives – within and outside of school - in order to make sense of their perspectives. Finally, this work suggests that children's voices can be heard and understood. They can be seen in children's patterns of engagement, in learners' choices, in evidence about what learners "own," in the self-talk of learners during writing and reading, in the shared but subtle cultures of children working together, and in the works children produce. As Dahl asserted, "learning from children's voices allows us to know at a deeper level who children are as learners and, because we have that knowledge, to expand and enrich our sense of what it means to teach" (p. 130).

Another aspect of student voice concerns student's ability to formulate questions that are thoughtful and inquiring and what teachers can learn from the questions their students ask. Commeyras (1994) and her research partner were involved in a seventeen-week study of twenty Euro-American and African American second grade students. The project, pertaining to storybook discussions, was two-fold. One aspect of the study involved conducting discussions in which students engaged in forms of critical thinking: considering multiple explanations, giving reasons for opposing explanations, examining the relevance of reasons given, seeking reasons from others, and using questions to seek knowledge and understanding. The other aspect of the study was to understand how

students moved from teacher-led whole class discussions of material to small group, student-only discussions. The goal was to identify the specific factors involved in transmission of the aspects of critical thinking-oriented discussions to second grade students. One focus of the questioning aspects of the study was to have students read and discuss a story, formulate questions that could have multiple alternative answers, and then discuss the alternatives. The researchers soon realized that this requirement for questioning was too restrictive and began to allow students to formulate questions that the students wanted to discuss, not strictly by being able to support two opposing viewpoints.

From this study conducted with second grade students, Commeyras found that students were able to formulate thoughtful questions in the context of schools, provided the topic was of interest to the students and that they wanted to discuss it. Further research concerning this study, from the standpoint of what teachers can learn from students questionings, was that “if students have trouble formulating questions, it is probably because their natural inquisitiveness has been depressed through current schooling practices” (Commeyras, 1995, p. 105). It follows that teachers should foster questioning abilities in their students as a way of listening to the student voice and as a method of increasing intellectual curiosity. This begins with allowing students to formulate questions based on their interests. Once again, this requires skill in subject, skill in the processes of pedagogy, and an awareness of the influences teaching has on society at large.

Conclusion

A review of the literature supports the notion that democratic environments offering authentic tasks (those that are meaningful and relevant) support engagement of students. By providing authentic learning environments, schools and teachers may: prevent students from dropping out or disengaging from school (Breidenstein, 2007; Yazzie-Mintz, 2010; Intrator, 2004; Payne, 2002); enhance learning situations so that information can be transferred to the real world (Lee and Songer, 2003); and promote higher order thinking in the classroom so that a democracy of thoughtful learners can be developed (Commeyras, 1995; Kahne, 2004).

Furthermore, research shows that certain conditions must occur to foster the development of authentically engaged students. Students need to feel they belong and are important to their teachers (Osterman, 2000; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). As posited by Furrer and Skinner, this supportive nature has positive influences on classroom engagement. A second condition is that students must feel that a problem is worthy of study in that it has meaning for their lives. Without this connection, students become bored with learning (Finn, Pannozzo, & Voekl, 1995; Yazzie-Mintz 2007) and will disengage from school mentally and possibly physically (Breidenstein, 2007; Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). A third condition is that learning has meaning beyond the classroom. Students want relevance in their learning (Resnick, 1987). Without relevance, students do not place value on learning (Pianta et al., 2002). A fourth condition is that learning is active. Research suggests students learn best when actively engaged in knowledge creation and personal interaction with the processes of learning rather than memorizing facts (Finn & Voekl, 1993; Maina, 2004).

Knowledge of the learner perspective concerning student engagement should provide a basis for educators to develop authentic learning environments for their students. By authentically engaging students, it is possible that we are influencing the degree to which students develop their knowledge and skills so that they may be productive citizens in a democratic society. And by listening to the student voice, we open more avenues so that these varied possibilities can become probabilities in the classroom.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

I conducted this research study in order to better understand the factors that promote engagement and motivation among high school students. A means to achieving this understanding was to have students voice their perceptions of these topics. I have employed qualitative research methods as a paradigm of choice due to the fact that qualitative research allows for rich description of meaning from the data that is gathered and analyzed, and it allows for interpretive understanding of the information gathered in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002). With qualitative research I am able to achieve personal, self-knowledge, which was one of the goals in conducting this research study. It was my intention that the individuals who participated in this study would gain a deeper understanding as to what is meant by authentic and engaging work in schools. By using qualitative methods to gather and analyze the data, I believed I would better understand the nature of how students are engaged in their work in school. I also gained a more complete understanding of what students considered to be authentic work and engaging learning situations.

Research Questions

Dropout rates are increasing in high schools across the country. The problem of dropping out of school – either physically or mentally – has challenged educators to

adopt new methods to engage students in learning. One of the methods some educators have begun to use is the implementation of authentic learning tasks. By incorporating real-world activities to gain the interest of students, educators are attempting to motivate students to learn the material presented in a way that makes students want to stay in school. Several theorists propose that in order for the desired level of motivation to be realized, educators must solicit the student voice and attend to their perceptions concerning their learning. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate student perceptions of how schools contribute to their engagement. While interviewing participants, I viewed their perceptions through the lens of what Dewey recognizes as a democratic school. Dewey provided three definitive conditions for the realization of authentic learning environments: (a) being a part of an embryonic community of learners, (b) providing problems that are meaningful and relevant to students, and (c) providing work that promotes thoughtful engagement. These conditions are all intrinsic parts of Dewey's notion of a democratic school of authentically engaged learners. I used them to guide me in developing the following research questions:

1. What elements within schools do students identify as important factors that influence the degree to which they can be engaged in authentic learning experiences?
2. Do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a student's life outside of school?

Research Design

In designing this research study, I believed it best to interview students for their perceptions of learning and engagement. I decided to use aspects of phenomenology

during the interview process because I was attempting to uncover the deeper meaning of what students considered engaging and authentic work in schools. By interviewing participants, both individually and in a focus group session, I attempted to uncover the essence of the students' lived experiences with their work in schools and how they have internalized the meaning of what such work has become to them. It is the rich and meaningful texture of the nature and essence of how students perceived work in schools that I strived to uncover during the data collection process of my study.

According to van Manen (1990), phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and how we attach meaning to those experiences. Conversing with participants during the interview process engages interplay between the verbal and nonverbal subjectivities of two people (Munhall, 1994). This interplay of two peoples' perspectives within their life-worlds - their feelings, thoughts, ideas, and principles – becomes intertwined during active conversations. Munhall referred to the interplay of the verbal and nonverbal subjective worlds of two people (researcher and participant in this case) as intersubjectivity.

As the researcher begins to have conversations with his or her participant, he or she steps back from being the research authority by allowing the participant to share information without threat of reprisal. The participant, during the interview, tells the researcher “what it is like” for him or her in a particular learning situation. During this time, the interviewer needs to remain completely objective and avoid interjecting ideas from one's own life-world. Being objective and avoiding inserting one's own ideas into conversations allows for the data to be more accurately reported from the participants. To

avoid subjectivity and interject one's own ideas could compromise the data collection process during the course of interviews.

Sample

I conducted this qualitative study of engagement at a suburban high school located in Northeast Georgia using a convenience sample of six eleventh grade high school students. My rationale for choosing only six students was because my interview protocol was extensive in order to gain the depth and richness of data I needed for the study. By using fewer participants in my study, I planned to gain a greater depth of inquiry. Students were selected out of their science class, but each student selected had a different science teacher.

My research contact at the school was the head of the science department. Based on the fact that she was head of her department, we determined that it would be more convenient to make contacts and arrangements for participants to be interviewed if she had close contact with the teachers of those participating students. Even though they were chosen from science, interview questions were centered on subjects other than science and how those subjects can be engaging or disengaging to the student.

My research contact at the site further assisted me in requesting lead teachers and having those teachers identify students to participate in the study. The main criterion for selection of students was that students were willing to share their ideas concerning engagement and authentic work in schools. Because some teens have difficulty expressing their views when asked thought-provoking questions, I asked teachers to select students who demonstrated good verbal skills in class. I made this a criterion for

selection because I wanted participants who would talk about their perceptions and feelings related to their classes and the work given to them by their teachers. Because the study is based on student perceptions and views of learning, I needed to recruit students who would talk about their experiences. A demonstration of good verbal skills would provide students who should be willing to talk and share their ideas in an interview situation. Another criterion for selection was the inclusion of minorities in the research study so that views from varied backgrounds and cultures could be considered.

Participants represented the countries of America, Colombia, Estonia, and Haiti.

Although various views from the different cultures became apparent in the data, these views were not critiqued because the evaluation of educational views by race was beyond the scope of this study. Teachers chose students for the interviews based on student willingness to participate in the study. Although bias could have been introduced into the study by having teachers select from willing participants in their classrooms, I believed this was the best selection method to use as I knew neither the teachers nor the students of this particular study site.

I conducted qualitative research as a means of understanding how students perceived their learning environments – as engaging or disengaging – and why they felt that way. Qualitative research allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning students construct from their experiences with work in schools (Merriam, 2002). As a qualitative researcher, I participated in the research process in two ways. I gathered student data from individual interviews and a focus group session. Individual phenomenological interviews were scheduled, at the principal's request, so that they occurred during the school day.

Once the six students were identified, I met with all of them at the same time to discuss the study and what would be expected of each student. At this time, I gave each student the informed consent papers (see Appendixes A and B) and a stamped envelope, asking that they return the paperwork to me within one week if they wished to participate in the study. I also had each student write down his or her name, class schedule, and e-mail address so I could contact each of them, if needed. As required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), students received a copy of the questions. The questions were provided to each student during the initial meet and greet session (see Appendix C for meet and greet protocol and Appendix D for interview questions). IRB approval was gained before initiating any form of contact with my participants. I had five of the six students return the signed paperwork. I contacted the remaining student, but she declined to participate. I informed the lead teacher of this problem and she contacted the science teachers to have one of them select another female participant. Once I had the paperwork from all six participants, I contacted each of them by e-mail or phone. I worked to schedule interviews so that they would not conflict with testing or the presentation of new material in the classroom.

Once interviews were scheduled, I met with each student individually so that I could conduct the interview in a quiet, private place where anonymity of the student could be maintained. When meeting with each student, I further explained the purpose and the student's role of participation in the study. I then asked students if I could use a digital recorder to have a record of the interview. Each participant agreed to be digitally recorded. I then interviewed each student and transcribed their interviews from the

recorder to a paper copy for analysis. I transcribed interviews verbatim with a word processor while listening to the digital recorder

By interviewing three males and three females, I gained valuable information from both genders. By interviewing students of various nations – America, Colombia, Estonia, and Haiti – I gained a general perspective, although limited based on the small sample size and amount of responses, of how schooling is viewed in other nations. The main benefit of my study was in having students thoughtfully analyze their own experiences with work in schools so that they would have a better understanding of their motivations or lack thereof, and be able to critique those motivations. It was my hope that students would gain personal insight about how they experienced work in schools and how they related to their work. By virtue of those insights and their increased knowledge of authentic learning, I desired that participants would gain a new awareness of how they could be fully engaged in their learning experiences. I further hoped teachers would be able to critique the way they impart information to students so they could critically analyze the methods and outcomes of their instruction.

By having students talk about their perspectives, they become more aware of what influences their thoughts and feelings about a topic (Lincoln, 1995). Following this assertion, students should then gain awareness from talking about what engages or disengages them in the classroom. Students can then have more control over these situations by talking to their teachers about their feelings and then conversations between student and teacher can bring about changes related to engagement in the classroom. As Dahl (1995) contended, “insights into what children value and care about help us structure the classroom worlds in which children are most apt to learn. They suggest that

we pay attention to what children value as learners and consider children's voice "if we are to genuinely support children's learning" (p. 129). The ultimate desire of gaining knowledge from this study was to have teachers learn to listen to their students and create engaging lessons and activities so that students would want to come to school and be excited about their learning experiences.

As posited by Willis (2007), current ethical guidelines call for participants to give informed consent, generally meaning they are told what the researcher wants to do and why. I gained informed consent from both participants and their parent/guardian by providing each person with a letter explaining the study. Both participants and parents of the participants had to sign the paper work in order to begin the interview process. During the meet and greet session, participants were informed of the purpose, procedures, possible risks, possible benefits, information about voluntary participation and/or withdrawal, and measures to ensure confidentiality while taking part in the study.

Concerning participants and the possibility of identification, I used pseudonyms so identity was unknown in the context of the research study. I used a code key to match the actual name of the participant to the pseudonym but kept it in separate place to maintain ethical measures and to maintain anonymity of my participants.

Focus group interviews presented another set of ethical issues to be resolved at the onset of the study. The main issue, as asserted by Wilkinson (2003), concerns confidentiality. Wilkinson contended that ground rules must be set to ensure that potentially sensitive material is not discussed outside of the group and that all group members go in to the focus group interview with a respect for others confidentiality. Establishing a degree of trust with my participants was essential during the progression of

the study. I worked to establish trust in my participants by explaining to them that the information they shared with me would not be shared with any of their teachers or with the lead teacher of the study. I explained to each of the participants that all information shared with me would remain confidential. Essential as well was that participants could trust one another during the focus group interview. By establishing trust, participants were more willing to share information openly and without fear of data being compromised.

In order to maintain an ethical stance during my research, I used methods to keep information secure and was candid with my participants concerning the purpose of my study. While gathering, organizing, and analyzing the data, I maintained ethical guidelines by assuring the data on the digital recorder and computer hard drive were secure and that only I had access to the digital information. The students and I were the only ones who had access to the data during the course of the study. Students were given access to their own transcripts for member-checking verification, and I had access to their digital recordings and my transcript notes. I also made certain my participants understood that the information shared in the focus group session should remain confidential. I verbally explained to each participant the importance of maintaining trust with their peers. What is spoken of in the focus group session should remain private and should not be shared with anyone outside of the research study and its participants.

Measures

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), failure to specify one's role as a researcher in a way the interviewees can understand may make the interviewing process difficult.

Rubin and Rubin further asserted that in establishing an acceptable researcher role, one should communicate to participants who you are in a way they can accept and understand. I took on the participant observer role so that my participants and I could actively engage in uncovering how work, engagement, and authentic learning are perceived in schools. I did not wish to be seen as the professional academic who wanted answers to her questions but to be in the role of active uncoverer of knowledge so that my participants would begin to question how they perceive work in schools. By assuming the role of participant observer, it was my estimation that I would better be able to gain the trust of my participants, thus arriving at data that would be more reliable in the context of the study.

Another concern in research is research bias. As part of the phenomenological method and qualitative methodology in general, I have attempted to recognize and attend to my own biases and values during the course of the study. Phenomenological research refers to this recognition of one's own biases as *bracketing* (van Manen, 1990). In the process of bracketing, the researcher identifies and recognizes inherent bias and deals with the bias accordingly. This was necessary for me to do because I am a high school teacher and desire for students to be engaged in their work. My own thoughts and feelings concerning engagement and work in schools had to be set aside during the interview process so bias could be minimized. I did not want participants to recognize the ideas and beliefs I had concerning engagement so I had to approach the topic and my questions with care not to create bias. This is a difficult process but must be recognized and adhered to during the course of the study. During the development of my questions, I maintained an ethical stance by wording my questions so as not to show researcher bias

toward a desired outcome. I took care, as well, to phrase my research questions and probes so that they did not contain bias.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Interviews.

By interviewing participants individually, I was able to achieve a basic understanding of how each student conceptualizes the meaning of authentic work in schools. I used the interview data to identify the beliefs, values, conceptions/misconceptions, and motivations concerning engagement and authentic work experiences that these students have had in school. Through initial interviews, individuals were able to gain a sense of their own conceptions and feelings concerning authentic work and engagement in schools. I chose to develop open-ended questions to allow participants to attempt to uncover the deeper meaning concerning engagement and authentic work in schools.

Phenomenological interviews.

Phenomenological interviews involve an in-depth analysis of insights that bring us, as both participants and researchers, closer to meaning in our everyday existence. As asserted by van Manen (1990), “Phenomenological human science is the study of lived or existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness” (p. 11). My phenomenological interviews involved three of the six key activities that, according to van Manen, are important in the research process.

The first of these activities was to turn to a phenomenon that is of serious interest to the researcher and create a commitment within oneself toward the phenomenon being

studied. According to van Manen (1990), turning to the nature of the lived experience means taking hold of an experience of interest and delving into it so deeply as to become engrossed in the process of the uncovering of the layers of the experience. During this process of uncovering of layers during the research process, one must employ a high level of commitment and scholarly thought. It is what van Manen meant to be “a thinker, a researcher, a theorist” (p. 31). I oriented myself as a teacher in a high school toward a deep interest in this study of engagement and authentic learning in schools because they are factors that should have great importance for all high school teachers. Concerning oneself with work in schools and how our students conceptualize work has many implications worthy for the improvement of both teaching and learning.

The second key activity I used during the interview process was that of investigating experience as students are living them. This form of investigation was important so that I could render full significance to the meaning of the experience. As van Manen (1990) contended, by gathering other people’s experiences, we become more experienced ourselves. In describing a lived experience, one should not conceptualize or provide causal explanations or interpretations but should describe the experience from the inside – feelings, moods, emotions. The focus should be on a particular example or incident or experience and how one feels as the experience is occurring, that is, thought that is an expression of immediate feelings before analyzing the experience – thought that van Manen terms pre-reflective. I asked participants to provide responses of what they considered to be authentic and engaging work in schools and to what degree this type of work may or may not be lacking in our schools. I asked participants to answer these

questions by describing their immediate feelings concerning learning – or to respond pre-reflectively.

By employing the use of pre-reflective thought, I attempted to uncover layers of an experience in order to arrive at the uniqueness or novelty of it. During the interview process, for example, I questioned participants about a scenario involving learning in two different social studies classrooms – one classroom teacher was lecturing on the branches of government and the other classroom teacher divided students into groups who then acted out the branches of government. I then asked participants to provide their perspectives on the different learning situations in order to gain pre-reflective understanding of the participants' thoughts and feelings about these learning situations. Participants were not given the scenario in advance, as they were the research questions, because I wanted to gain insight from them through pre-reflective thought.

The third key activity I used while conducting interviews was to reflect on the essential themes that distinguish the phenomenon. The purpose of phenomenological reflection, according to van Manen (1990), is to try to grasp the essence of a particular situation. In order to grasp the fullness of the situation, van Manen contended, one must engage in phenomenological question posing, reflecting and writing through consideration of the aspects of what he termed *lived space* (spatiality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived other* (relationality). These four aspects are seen in all experiences and allow one as a researcher to delve completely into the lifeworld of the participants. *Lived space* is concerned with how we feel in particular spaces and how we experience those spaces; *lived body* is concerned with how we react and feel within our own selves and how we portray ourselves to others; *lived time*

involves our perceptions with an experience in accordance with the subjective nature of time – how time may appear to speed up if we are enjoying ourselves and appear to slow down if we are not; and *lived other* involves our notions about another person and our relationships toward the other person. These four existentials of spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality, as posited by van Manen, make up a person's lifeworld and are essential to understanding the nature of a phenomenon or experience from the perspective of the individual. Because all of these aspects of phenomenology are subjective and can change with each person, it was interesting to consider each aspect as I interviewed each person. Participants experienced school differently, had different interests, and focused their energies on different qualities of schooling that would give them all an advantage or a possible disadvantage in that space. Although I did not consider each of these aspects with each participant nor are the phenomenological aspects considered in the data analysis, I was made more aware of the depth of each participant's lifeworld by being familiar with phenomenological reflective qualities.

According to van Manen (1994), phenomenological reflection involves conducting thematic analysis and then arriving at essential themes. The first step I employed in my research study was to listen to the data on the digital recorder. This allowed me to develop a general idea of the perspective of my participant and to be able to understand the context of the conversation. At this point, I was not interested in getting the information on paper but to gain a sense of the overall meaning of the conversation. I recorded approximately five hours of individual interview data. I then transcribed each interview session verbatim. This step allowed me to once again hear the data but also record the data in an additional format so that I could then begin to look at the data and

analyze for essential themes. The verbatim transcriptions resulted in forty seven pages of line-numbered interview data. Analysis based on the full transcription further allowed me to see, as well as feel, what my participants were saying in the text. I decided not to use software to analyze my data. As Creswell (2003) noted, software is useful for locating quotations and multiple perspectives of categories or themes, but it is most useful when the qualitative database is large. Because my database was not large, I decided to analyze the data by reading and re-reading my transcripts and coding them for overarching themes.

Once interviews were transcribed, I scanned for essential themes. I decided the best way to uncover the themes was through color coding text appearing multiple times and in multiple interviews. This process of open coding, as described by Mertens (2005), allowed me to find those themes that are essential to the understanding of engagement and authentic learning in schools. Once I had color coded text using different colored markers for different topics, I was able to reflect on the data and organize it into a coding chart (see Appendix E). Mertens references this coding scheme as axial coding. Axial coding allows the researcher to take the parts of the identified data from open coding and place the discrete units into a coding chart that makes connections between categories. The coding chart allowed me to organize essential themes under each participant's name and to be able to determine if the quality of the theme was present, absent, or neutral or used as explanatory information.

Following interviews, I analyzed and interpreted the data. As Creswell (2003) suggested, qualitative research is interpretive research where the inquirer is involved in experiences with their participants. Interpretation of data, according to Creswell, involves

the description of the individual and the setting, analyzing the data for themes or categories, and developing conclusions based on personal and/or theoretical meaning extracted from the data. I worked closely with participants in order to gain insights from individual interviews.

I then became more immersed in the data by interviewing participants in a focus group session. To provide trustworthiness, I kept an audit trail, including individual interview transcripts, focus group interview transcripts, e-mail conversations from participants, and voice data files (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Focus group interview session.

By employing a focus group as a method of group interviewing, I planned for a larger understanding of what constitutes authentic work in schools to emerge. Mertens (2005) suggested using focus group interviews when one wants to understand how individuals form a “schema or perspective of a problem” (p. 245). This focus group interaction, Mertens stated, allows for an understanding of how others interpret key terms and whether they agree or disagree with issues raised during the session. By interviewing participants as a group, thoughts and feelings concerning work in schools may be defined and redefined according to the discussions being given as a whole group. Understanding that through the use of a focus group, sharing with the group as a whole may affect others’ perceptions of what constitutes authentic work and engagement in schools; therefore, I used an open-ended question format so that participants could fully engage in the process of collaborative talk and discern meaning from interacting and discussing issues with others.

By utilizing a focus group format, I was able to bring my participants together to share in a common dialogue meant to “focus” on a particular topic or experience. An advantage of data collection using social group research is that the method is not tied to one specific theoretical framework (Wilkinson, 2003). Focus group research, from the social constructivist perspective, allows the researcher to observe how his or her participants make sense of the data by actively collaborating with one another. As Wilkinson asserted, during the discussions, views may be constructed, expressed, defended, and modified based on questioning and debate that occurs during the interaction with others in the group. Hatch (2002) contended that focus group sessions are an excellent secondary source of information besides the interview. Hatch further encouraged researchers who have a small amount of participants to use multiple methods of data collection, as I have done with interviews and a focus group.

Prior to meeting students for the focus group session, I prepared a different set of questions based on themes extracted from the individual interviews (see Appendix F). I scheduled the focus group session to occur during the school day and in the same location students had met me for the individual interviews. Students were given an e-mail invitation to attend the session, and all responded they would be in attendance for the two hour session. Three of the six participants attended the focus group session. The three who were interviewed in the focus group were Alaina, Cayla, and Eve. Later that same day, I sent out an e-mail to the boys requesting an explanation for their nonattendance. One of the boys responded he had forgotten about the session; another responded he had a test he could not miss that day; and the third boy never responded. I e-mailed the focus group questions to the boys and requested they send their answers to me if they wanted to

further participate in the study. I did not receive any feedback from them concerning the focus group questions. Therefore, I moved forward with the comments I had received from the girls. During the focus group session, one girl responded to my initial question and then the other girls would give a response that would lead into other discussions by the group. Hatch (2002) described the focus group as one that relies on the interactions of the group members. I encouraged the girls to listen to the question, comment as desired, and then to spring-board off each other's comments so that depth of knowledge concerning engagement could be realized. The focus group interview was approximately one hour and thirty minutes in length and resulted in eighteen pages of line-numbered transcribed data.

Member checking during the interview process was used in order to maintain credibility of the data. Mertens (2005) referenced member checks as the most important criterion in establishing credibility. Participants analyzed their interviews for information on feelings that I may have coded incorrectly during the course of data coding. When I met the participants for the focus group session, I provided them with their transcripts in order to determine whether or not I had transcribed the data inaccurately. Each participant was asked to go over the transcript line by line and to highlight any information that could have been inaccurately represented. All participants reported that I had accurately transcribed their individual interviews. The participants who were not present in the member-checking group were e-mailed their transcripts to determine if there were inaccuracies in recording data. All of these participants reported the data to have been transcribed accurately.

After member checking of interviews, I questioned participants in a focus group session for the purpose of further saturating the data in order to arrive at credible and warranted assertions during the analysis phase. At that time, each participant shared her feelings concerning engagement and authentic learning in schools and was given an opportunity to see how their peers perceived authentic learning. By virtue of the phenomenological aspects employed during the interviews and the grouping together of participants to share their feelings concerning engagement and authentic learning, participants may challenge others' opinions of learning or gain a new awareness of their own learning.

I further maintained credibility of the data by asking a colleague to review the data and in particular the themes I had derived. This peer review of my work afforded me greater certainty that the themes I had selected were truly apparent in the data. Initially, I analyzed for overarching themes but failed to categorize the data in some form of axial coding. My peer reviewer suggested coding the data by theme as well as frequency so I could accurately determine how students were engaging with their work. Once I began coding in this manner, I realized that another important theme had emerged from the data, so I included the additional theme, a culture of disengagement, in the data matrices. This is an example of what Mertens (2005) referenced as dependability. As Merten noted, "in the constructivist paradigm, change is expected, but it should be tracked and publicly inspectable" (p. 257). As changes took place in my study, I tracked them with a dependability audit. This record allowed one to see how my study changed with the accumulation of new literature and data. Confirmability, as defined by Guba and Lincoln (1985), is the qualitative equivalent to objectivity. Mertens described the confirmability

audit as the tool used to make certain the data and its' interpretations are not "figments of the researcher's imagination" (p. 257). Data should be able to be tracked to the original sources and the processes of synthesizing the data should be able to be confirmed. In order to establish confirmability of the data, I had peers review my interview transcripts to make certain my conclusions were supported by the data collected.

Framework Usage in Qualitative Research

Qualitative researchers may use theory as a framework for analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used information extracted from Deweyan literature concerning the theory of engagement to aid in my development of the normative frameworks used in this study. While analyzing the literature concerning engagement and authentic learning in schools, I developed a normative framework based on Dewey's conditions to support authentic learning. It was then used to aid in gathering and analyzing the data during my research study. This then supported and helped me focus my study so that I could take information I gained from my ongoing literature review and analyze the literature and data through a Deweyan lens of authentic learning. This framework for authentic learning has at its core the following components: (a) solving authentic problems, (b) meaningful experiences with problems, (c) working with others in a communal environment, and (d) supporting environment of thoughtful engagement that results in a higher moral purpose. This framework was developed in order to guide me in developing questions and acquiring data based on my research questions:

1. What do students identify as important factors that influence the degree to which they can be engaged in their learning experiences?

2. As described by students, do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a student's life outside of school?

Conditions for engagement and authentic learning.

I further developed a separate framework to guide me in the analysis of data gathered from my research participants. This second framework involved the necessary conditions for authentically engaged learning to take place. These four conditions became evident as I analyzed my research data for emerging themes, and as I completed the literature review: (a) learning has personal relevance (Finn et al., 1995; Yazzie-Mintz 2007), (b) learning occurs in a caring and supportive environment where students feel they belong (Osterman, 2000; Furrer & Skinner, 2003), (c) learning has meaning beyond the classroom (Resnick, 1987), and (d) learning is active (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Maina, 2004).

Once these themes were determined, I used them as a framework to analyze the interview data from the research participants. I used this framework to determine the degree to which authentic learning situations contributing to engagement existed in the school I studied for my research project.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are used to identify potential weaknesses of a study (Creswell, 2003). The limitations involved with this research study concerned the participants as part of a convenience sample. By using a convenience sample, I was able to contact my participants with ease. The problem with using a convenience sample lies in the fact that its usage decreases the transferability of the data in qualitative studies. All of my

participants were selected by their science teachers based on the criteria of having good verbal skills. The reasons I wanted participants with good verbal skills was addressed earlier. I also requested for minorities to be included in the study. A more credible method for selection could have been to have allowed students to volunteer participation in the study and then to have narrowed the selection based on established criteria.

A second limitation concerns the generalizability of the study. This study cannot be generalized to the population at large. It is possible this study could be generalized to other suburban populations with similar demographics. The main limitation pertaining to generalizability of the study involved the small sample size of the original interview participants, which was further limited due to the unavailability of some students to participate in the focus group interview session. Because the study only included six participants, one can consider their views as being a representative sample of their school, but their views cannot be considered representative of views of students across the nation.

A third limitation concerns researcher bias, as was addressed in the measures section of this chapter. Because I am a teacher who is interested in engaging students, it became difficult to interview students without focusing on engagement and how it should look in a classroom. I attempted to formulate my questions so that researcher bias was not evident. The mere fact that the study was on engagement may have prompted the participants to feel they should have answered my questions in a particular way. Each time I was able to do so, I would ask participants to further expound on an answer to a question. By doing so, I could get a full range of details without leading the participant in a particular direction with his/her response.

A fourth limitation was the fact that only girls participated in the focus group session. By not being able to obtain data from the boys of the study, my focus group data became limited in scope. The fact that the boys did not join us in the focus group warrants further study, but is beyond the scope of this current study. Furthermore, the reasoning behind why the boys did not join the focus group was not fully established. One boy replied to a follow-up e-mail that he had an important test that day and could not come to the focus group. The other boys did not reply to the follow-up e-mail nor did they provide answers to the questions when asked to reply by e-mail due to their absence. I provided every opportunity for them to give their responses if they wished to do so, but never received a reply. The fact that only boys did not participate in the focus group may have implications worthy of further study.

This study was limited, as well, because of the small amount of transcribed data. The line numbered transcribed data from the individual interviews was a total of forty seven pages, whereas the line numbered data from the focus group session was a total of eighteen pages. This small amount of data limits the credibility of the study, but I felt there was enough thick, rich data to report common themes I heard in the participants' narratives.

Conclusion

I conducted a qualitative study of engagement and authentic learning in order to determine student perspectives surrounding these school factors. I interviewed students both individually and in a focus group session through the use of phenomenological interview techniques. I then analyzed the data using frameworks based on Deweyan

notions of engagement and authentic learning. The exploration of deconstructing values, opinions, and beliefs about the nature of engagement in schools should provide valuable insight to the participants and educators.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate student perceptions of how schools contribute to their engagement. By examining student perceptions of what they expressed as engaging or disengaging learning situations, I explored the degree to which students perceived their classroom environments as authentic learning environments. I used the frameworks that I discussed in chapter three to guide me in a determination of whether or not students found their work to be meaningful and authentic. This determination was made based upon the degree to which students perceived their work as reflecting a Deweyan notion of embryonic communities, democracy, and engagement in schools. Student perceptions were recorded during open-ended question interviewing and in a focus group session. The data were then analyzed by using axial coding to determine overarching themes. It is the themes that precipitated from the data that I have reported in this results section. My research questions were:

1. What do students identify as important factors that influence the degree to which they can be engaged in their learning experiences?
2. As described by students, do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a student's life outside of school?

Description of Participants

In the following paragraphs, I have provided a brief description of each research participant and his or her view of what it means to learn authentically. Providing these descriptions will give the reader an understanding of what the participant means by authentic learning. This knowledge will promote further recognition of how the participant perceives engagement and authenticity and will help one understand the themes extrapolated from the data.

To begin my interviews, I asked each participant to define authentic learning. I did not provide a definition for them but asked each participant to think about what he or she knew about the words authenticity and authentic and to describe what they believed authentic learning is or should be. Each of the following synopses gives a brief description of each participant's views. Each participant provided his or her own definition of what he or she believed to be authentic learning vis-à-vis the value of school.

Eve seemed to place a high value on her education. She explained how her parents have driven her to excel in school so that she can excel in life. She claimed to see the future value of education and reported enjoying attending school – not only so she can be with her friends but also so that she can learn new information. Her description of authentic learning centered on the fact that of the things learned at school one should be able to “apply outside of school, like in your social life, your home, your environment, and your community” (IIE – 14 – 15). (See Appendix G for individual interview data which was coded as I (individual) I (interview) and participant's initial followed by line numbers of transcribed text.)

Mark was born in Europe in the country of Estonia and moved to the United States when he was in middle school. He reported enjoying the fact that he can choose the classes he wants to take and does not get placed into a particular track, as he was accustomed to in his native country. He further reported enjoying the social aspects of public school and spoke fondly of the time he gets to spend socializing with friends. His description of authentic learning was “something that you are going to use in life” and not something that they make you learn (IIM – 37).

Cayla described herself as a highly social teenager. She reported a love for working in groups and socializing with her friends. She is extensively involved in school activities, such as cheerleading and being a member of Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), a marketing club. She reported believing it is important that learning relate to life. When asked for her description of authentic learning, she replied, “using what you learn...and what you apply to your day-to-day life” (IIC – 11 – 12).

David reported he values his education but wants more choices as a student. He placed the highest value on learning that will be useful in real life. He further reported enjoying the fact that he can choose his electives because he sees them as being more valuable and as having more meaning to him as a learner. Originally from Colombia, David reported enjoying the fact that America has mixed gender schools. He expressed the difficulty he had interacting with members of the opposite sex when he initially came to America. His description of authentic learning was learning that “reflects on your life” (IID – 94).

Hunter reported he enjoys school and that he strived to excel in all of his classes. He reported he can see the future benefit of school and takes classes that will help him

meet his goals. He further reported enjoying the challenge that advanced placement classes provided to him and a willingness to take them so that he can push himself farther as a learner. When asked to give a description of authentic learning in his high school, he replied, “learning that has meaning for what you are going to do afterwards” (IIH – 16 – 17).

Alaina reported being an outgoing person who loves the social aspects of school. She viewed schooling and its processes as boring and mundane and wished more choices were available to students who know what they want to do in the future. She reported that she understood the importance of learning the basics of all subjects but largely was of the opinion that school is a combination of facts that she will not use in life. She described authentic learning as “learning that I know I’ll be able to use and that I’ll be able to retain” (IIA – 46 – 47).

Overall View of Learning as Authentic

The students who participated in this research study all viewed authentic learning as learning that they would be able to use and apply to daily life now and in the future. But five out of the six participants reported that learning in school is far from authentic. Students perceived their learning as information that is useless for future endeavors. As Alaina said:

We are learning useless stuff...I don’t think it is authentic just because I know I’m not going to use it, and I wonder why I am wasting my time learning this when I could be using the time to learn other stuff that I need to know. (IIA – 49 – 52)

Hunter further supported this statement when he says, “Take Spanish II...I can conjugate a verb but I cannot really say anything in Spanish. I have not learned to speak

even though I have taken two classes” (IIH – 79 – 81). Mark talked about end-of-the-year projects and how he viewed some of them as inauthentic and a way for the teacher to draw out the class to the last day of school. One project he specifically mentioned was a project completed in geometry. The goal was to build a box, similar to a shoebox, in order to make mathematical calculations. Students could use staples but could not use tape. Their box was to be completed from scratch and was then used to make measurements of length and volume. Mark expressed discontent in having to buy materials for the project. Although he expressed this discontentment, he indicated that overachievement is a characteristic of him as a learner. He spent his own money willingly in order to make the best box possible. Mark said he never really understood the purpose of having to create a box when any pre-made box could have been used to measure volume. He felt as if most teachers just need fillers to get them to the end of the year and this was his teacher’s attempt to find activities for students to do that would require time and effort. David further supported his peers’ comments by saying the math he is taking is not relevant to real life. He said, “I know I am going to need the basics like percentages and stuff like that, but I don’t think I’m ever going to need to find x over y ” (IID – 55 – 57). All of these students expressed a desire to learn information that is relevant to what they want to do in life. Their overall feelings were that the curriculum is being imposed on them from above, without consideration of what students need or want for their future. They want learning to be authentic such that their learning has meaning in the broader context and reaches beyond the doors of their classrooms.

Callison and Lamb (2004) described authentic learning as “involving exploring the world around us, asking questions, identifying information resources, discovering

connections, examining multiple perspectives, discussing ideas, and making informed decisions that have a real impact” (p. 34). They further defined an authentic classroom environment as one that engages students in the content and context of learning that has relevance to their lives and is seen by the teacher as one that simulates life beyond the classroom. This particular study did not focus on how teachers viewed authentic learning; rather it focused on student perceptions of what constitutes an authentic classroom.

Individual Interviews

Themes from research question 1.

Meaningful learning.

Callison and Lamb (2004) defined meaningful learning as lifelong learning beyond the assignment. They contended that when learning occurs beyond the assignment, students find “Information, problems, and questions to be interesting, exciting, challenging, and personally meaningful” (p. 35). Callison and Lamb further asserted when learning is meaningful, questioning continues to evolve beyond the school assignment and becomes an “inquiry set” (p. 35) they follow outside of school and in future academic endeavors. Newmann and Wehlage (1993) proposed a similar definition of meaningful learning. They defined meaningful learning as learning that has value beyond the instructional context. Newmann and Wehlage further asserted that student work should have impact on others in order for full engagement to occur in the classroom. A lesson gains in authenticity the more it connects to students’ lives outside of school. Newmann and Wehlage contended that this connection can be made if lessons

address real world problems or student's personal experiences are used as a context for applying knowledge.

Among the six students I interviewed in my research study, there were a higher number of responses viewing learning as meaningless than there were students who viewed their learning as meaningful. Eve described learning as being meaningful for the future but not the immediate future. Alaina described learning as being meaningful in her elective classes but described learning as meaningless in her core classes. The other four students described their learning experiences as meaningless to their future growth and acquisition of knowledge for use.

Eve described learning as meaningful for future goals. She expressed the fact that students do not see the road ahead of them, therefore, they are unable to see the importance of learning at the moment, but they will see the benefit in the future. When asked how she was able to see the importance of learning now, she replied that her parents have instilled a strong work ethic in her and that it would be unacceptable for her to not give school her very best. She expressed that she wants to be a doctor and understands the importance of making good grades now so that she can get into medical school later.

Alaina described her learning in math as being meaningless learning because she felt she would never use the information in life. She provided an example of learning proofs in her geometry class as meaningless learning and furthermore asked her teacher when students would ever use proofs in the real world. She described her teacher as stating the information would never be used in real life. From this statement, Alaina decided proofs were meaningless but she also reported that she is required to understand

them in order to earn a good grade in the class. Earning the good grade in class, she reported, would enable her to move forward to her immediate future goal of acceptance into the college of her choice.

When I asked Alaina about her elective classes, she told me she had taken a family law class that, to her, was meaningful and fun learning. She further described the importance of being able to choose a class that she liked. She expressed an interest in learning forensics so she thought the family law class might be a class she would enjoy.

Alaina stated:

I learn more from that [class] than I do from any other class just because I pick up on things that I hear in the classroom and I see it in real life, like outside of school and when I go out somewhere I actually see it happening. (IIA – 15 – 17)

An example she gave was when her public safety instructor took students out to simulate a routine traffic stop. She explained:

We went out and took his car out into the parking lot. A few people got in the car and a few people were [acting as] police officers. He came up with a story line and the police officers had to figure out the problem and that was fun because you got to see how it would be if it was a real police officer. (IIA – 78 – 82)

Alaina gave another example of meaningful learning when she stated her psychology teacher worked at making learning relevant by “taking us out and giving us all the vocabulary words we had been learning from the Power Points and the books he had been showing us...you had to reenact the word so it was kind of like charades with our words” (IIA – 72 – 75). By actively learning the words, Alaina expressed how engaging the activity was and how easy it was to learn the information.

When asked about meaningful learning situations, Hunter described his most meaningful learning experiences as being project-based. One such example concerned his

geometry class. Hunter said the geometry teachers had assigned projects to their students where the students had to figure out college tuition and other aspects concerning college costs. He described these types of learning situations as having meaning to him. He described most other learning situations as being either indirectly beneficial for future goals or as being meaningless learning situations. A meaningless learning situation he provided concerned learning in his Spanish II class, as mentioned previously in his quote regarding learning verb conjugations but not being able to speak the language.

Mark had a difficult time articulating whether or not learning had meaning to him. Initially, he expressed that geometry teaches one about shapes and how that information could be used in helping his mother with her garden. When I asked him to explain to me specifically how he could use math in gardening, he laughed and said:

I can't think of it right now...like how to place [plants and shrubs] so it will look better because geometry is all about shapes and how to make it [garden] look interesting...not boring...like you could place a line with different triangles or squares (IIM – 17 – 20)...but I think it's important to learn the basics [but you] don't have to learn everything...like formulas for trigonometry and all that stuff. (40 -41)

David expressed that the most meaningful learning experiences for him concerned learning that would be used in life. He felt the math that is being taught in the high school is not math that one needs for everyday use. His teachers, he said, explained that math is needed to develop the brain but he wondered why the students couldn't develop the brain with something they would use instead of information that was useless. "None of the stuff that I have ever done in [high] school in math have I ever used in my life," (IID – 51 – 53) he explained.

Where Mark found project-based learning to be most meaningful, David found it useless. He explained one example of his math teacher spending a day teaching the

concept of syllogisms and then assigning a project. The project was based on writing at least ten but no more than twenty syllogisms, putting them on a poster board, and decorating the board for audience appeal. David complained that the students were given three weeks to complete an assignment that he was able to complete in twenty minutes, and then the concept of syllogisms was never addressed again. He remarked:

I did it faster than some of the homework I get in that class...that was a summative [test] grade so I didn't get it...I was like, OK, are you just giving us stuff to fill in for a project so you can say you've done the project (IID – 73 – 76)...I am not sure why we had to spend so much time and then, like, give us a project and then we didn't see it again after that day. (IID – 85 – 86).

Cayla further supported how David felt about project-based learning. Her Advanced Placement (AP) teacher assigned students a portfolio to complete that she felt is not meaningful learning. She explained:

Because the AP tests are so hard, and they are geared to be hard, they don't expect people to pass them, so if you get a fifty on the test that is like getting a five on the AP test or if you get a forty that is like getting a four. But my teacher feels it is not fair to inflate the grades or anything so if you got a fifty, which is a really good score to get, he feels it would not be fair to raise the grade to a one hundred. [Therefore], he gives us a portfolio of all this work that needs to be done by a certain time. (IIC – 140 – 145)

It is apparent these participants find learning should have meaning and that meaningful learning should also be fun. Recurrent in the data were phrases such as, learning should be “engaging”, “not boring”, “active”, “social”, and “good and fun learning.” By finding meaning in learning situations, students can then feel there is a degree of application to what they plan to do with their lives. By making learning fun and engaging, teachers are more apt to have students who are able to transfer their knowledge to situations beyond the classroom. The second emerging theme – learning should be

personally relevant to the student – examined student perceptions of how learning may or may not be tied to what students find to be important in their lives.

Personal relevance.

According to Windham and Oblinger (2007), students cite relevance as the key value to authentic learning in the classroom. Furthermore, Windham and Oblinger posited that if learning is relevant, students are more likely to engage with the material because they do not view it as “busy work” (p. 4). Renzulli et al. (2004) contended that problems must have a personal frame of reference and be open-ended. A further contention is that this type of learning cannot occur unless students are choosing their own problem and selecting the path of its solution. As Shaffer and Resnick (1999) stated, the proponents of personal authenticity argue students play a crucial role in determining whether an activity is worthwhile and that some theorists claim that whether learners find an activity engaging and personally relevant is the only important measure of its authenticity. Myers (1993), for example, stated that even the most engaging assignment is not considered authentic until the student owns it for himself.

Eve viewed a personally relevant curriculum as one in which the student and the teacher develop as a partnership. She expressed the fact that teachers should “learn about the student’s personality and how the student learns” (IIE – 65). She said, “I think it is important to talk to the student to see their point of view and try to collaborate with them and develop a better way for them to learn” (IIE – 66 – 68). Her view was that teachers need to be concerned with student interest and that they should build the curriculum around the interest of each student so students will become more engaged in learning.

Mark explained that he enjoys being able to choose the elective courses he takes in high school. He also expressed that he enjoys being able to choose on level, honors, or AP level classes depending on his level of proficiency in a class. “If I’m not good in math, I’ll choose on level or if I’m very good in history, I’ll take AP...just great choice [here]” (IIM – 81 – 82). His native country of Estonia forced students into particular courses that the administrators or school leaders felt they should take. Therefore, Mark said he ended up taking twenty different classes spread out over the week and that made it very difficult to learn the information. “It’s really hard,” he said, “especially when you get into the upper grades. They’re pushing you very hard compared to here. It is much easier for me here because I can choose [my classes]” (IIM – 78 – 80).

David explained the idea of personal relevance as being applicable to the classroom and what goes on every day. “I think teachers should ask students what they want to do. I have several teachers who ask, do you want to play a game to study for the test or would you rather study with one another” (IID – 222 – 224)? When asked, what it means to have personal relevance in his learning, he expressed:

Some classes are good, especially when you are learning about things you want to learn and it is not so boring and everybody gets to say their choices. When you are doing things that you like or that you enjoy, you can learn so much more. (IID – 258 – 261)

Cayla was most concerned with the school structure and how it applied to personal relevance. She mentioned how the structure of school and the schedule does not give time to adequately learn information for long term use, but that it is an impediment to authentic learning. When I asked her why she and her friends come to school every day, she said, “Most people want to be here for friendships and stuff...they want to be with their friends, but they hate the structure.” She added, “Sometimes, though after

summer break, I really want to get back to learning and stuff, but then after the first month I remember – oh yeah – this is why I wanted summer so much” (IIC – 188 – 190).

Alaina articulated that she enjoys classes where the teacher models inside of the classroom what goes on outside of schools rather than lecturing about the topic. She expressed the fact that she places a high amount of importance on learning that she would be able to use one day.

Hunter did not report much information concerning a personally relevant curriculum. His one piece of supporting evidence was that teachers assigned projects to indirectly benefit learning. He felt it would be ideal if projects directly benefited learning but most projects, as he attested, only indirectly benefit one’s knowledge of a subject.

Caring and supportive environment leading to belongingness.

The third emergent theme was a caring and supportive environment leading to a sense of belongingness. Interestingly, all participants overwhelmingly mentioned this factor as being of importance in the authentically engaged learning environment. As noted by Furrer and Skinner (2003), children’s motivation, specifically their engagement in the classroom, is a likely pathway to belongingness.

As asserted by Furrer and Skinner, feelings of belonging may have an energetic function, awakening enthusiasm, interest, and willingness to participate in academic activities. “It seems to be more fun for children to be involved in activities with people that they like and by whom they feel liked in return” (p. 158). It is also their claim that relatedness may buffer negative emotions by minimizing feelings of boredom, anxiety, pressure, or frustration. Osterman (2000) contended that conditions in the classroom and

school influence students' feelings about themselves and that these conditions are reflected in student engagement and achievement.

While not all students experience alienation to the same extent, students and researchers described schools as “alienating institutions” (p. 360). Watkins (2005) asserted that participation in school is an outgrowth of student sense of belongingness. He further contended that this sense of belongingness influences patterns of behavior, such as delinquency, absenteeism, and drug use, inside and outside of school. Intrator’s (2004) view of belongingness is that students want their teachers to know them as people.

He asserted, “they want teachers to understand their experiences, interests, aspirations, needs, fears, and idiosyncrasies. Feeling known, understood, and appreciated matters” (p. 23).

Eve felt it was most important for teachers to learn more about their students’ likes and dislikes. She expressed the importance of the teacher talking to the students in order to find out where their interests lie and then determine a way to address those interests in the development of the curriculum. She felt that school challenges her but that her teachers work with her to develop ways in which she can learn the information in meaningful ways. She also expressed that her teachers encourage her to do her best with her work and that encouragement makes her more driven to work hard in her classes. Eve further expressed that caring needs to extend beyond the teacher into the home of the students. She felt the greatest benefit to learning could be achieved by collaborative support among the student, parent, and the teacher.

The information provided by Alaina concerning a caring and supportive environment revolved around how the teacher felt about teaching students and how

teachers related to their students. Alaina said, “Some teachers just don’t have a heart for kids” (IIA – 121 – 122). When I asked her to be specific, she explained how she felt about most teachers and how they appeared to her in class. She reported that some of her teachers have expressed to her and her classmates that they are just in the teaching field in order to get the benefits so that they can insure their family. But she stated too that some of her teachers, such as her public safety instructor, would always make time to listen to her. She expressed that she could go to him with any problem and he would listen to her. When she had a problem and needed someone to listen to her, she felt that most of her teachers just wanted her to go to the counselor. She felt that these teachers did not have the time for her nor did they want to hear her problems. She reported that she related better to the teachers who would take the time to care for her and listen to her. One thing she felt would best engage students in the learning environment would be to have teachers be willing “to help students and to make their class fun” in order to help them learn. “Without teacher support.” she said, “we don’t get anything out of it” (IIA – 166 – 167). Alaina made another significant remark when I asked her what she felt her teachers value about school:

Definitely not their students...um, I don’t know...honestly, I think they just value having a job that has benefits and they get paid and that it is something that they were interested in learning so they felt like they should teach it...I think that’s it, but I don’t think they are worried about students who do care about the class or who don’t care about the class...they just teach it no matter what...and, I don’t know...just like I said, I wish teachers cared more about their students and how they feel about their class. (IIA – 221 – 226)

Hunter pointed to the fact that his teachers have a big impact on the level of engagement in the classroom. He felt that his teachers were one of the greatest factors in making the class an engaging or boring place to learn. He expressed that the teachers who

care about teaching and how their students learn are the ones who spend time developing tasks that students will enjoy and want to participate in. He said:

My chemistry teacher is very engaging...we did a game yesterday...a review for the test...we did Survivor, where you have teams, and that is a fun and interesting way to review and learn...interesting...and students want to do it and they do...and everyone is learning (IIH – 103 – 107). The teacher has a big impact on engagement in the classroom...some of them are boring and some of them are very engaging. (IIH – 94 – 97)

Mark made comments similar to Hunter's responses. He agreed that some teachers are boring and that other teachers work hard to make their classes engaging. To him, the engaging teacher creates engaged students who want to learn. When I asked him if he felt students were bored in their classes and, if so, how he perceived the source of boredom, he said, "Sure...there are always people who just don't like the class...I think most of the time it is the teacher [who causes the boredom]...how interesting he is...how he talks..." (IIM – 115 – 117). Mark further spoke of how his teachers felt about their classes and their students when he shared:

Most of the teachers [value teaching and their subject], but I have had some teachers who say I don't care, I have to set this date [for a project or assignment to be due], and then I'll just sit back and go home. For most of the students, it's like, hey, yeah, she doesn't teach us anything so that means we can talk. But, there is a positive and a negative to that...if you don't work, then you don't learn anything. (IIM – 240 – 244)

He also mentioned the importance of creating and maintaining a relationship with the teacher in order to maintain a sense of belongingness. He explained:

I know kids who love their football coaches' classes, for example, for history I had a football coach and I have a coach right now. One of the kids is a football player so he really loves that class because his coach is teaching it. (IIM – 277 – 280)

He further expressed that the love students have for a class directly relates to the teacher rather than the subject. How one feels about the teacher, he said, is a factor that is a large part in determining how hard one will work in the class.

David placed emphasis on having teachers care about how well he is performing in the class. He said:

I think if you have teachers who care about you and want to make sure you are understanding the material, then when you come in for extra help and stuff, you are building a relationship with your teachers. I think that is really important because then you are comfortable telling them what you don't understand or what you don't like [about the class]. (IID – 161 – 165).

He further explained the need for teachers to be sensitive to how students learn.

He said:

I think teachers need to be more of a friend than just an instructor. Yeah, you have to be an instructor but you need somebody there that cares about you, as well. Like, if you go in there and you sleep, the teacher gets on you. It almost feels like some teachers are making us do this...they say the only reason I am making you do this is because at the end of the semester you are going to take a test and that test is going to reflect if I taught you or not, so if you guys fail then that means I did not do my job. I think, yeah, you're getting your job done but is the student really getting it? Do you even care? (IID – 198 – 207).

David further expounded on the importance of making connections with his teachers when he said:

My math teacher, I mean I like her and all, but there is no connection with her whatsoever. She is just talking and makes us do work, and makes us write, but if you have a question she will ask you to wait until class is over. I love it when teachers want you to ask questions and when they say they want to know what you don't get in their class. I like it when they care. (IID – 208 – 212)

David spoke about how the actively engaged teacher encourages him to care even more about the class. He said:

I think some teachers are here because they actually care. For example, [my science teacher], she cares and I know she cares. I know for a fact she cares because she goes around [the room] when she gives us an activity. She doesn't sit at her desk or stay on her computer. She literally stands up the whole time we are doing the worksheet and goes around every single table to every single student asking, "Do you get this? Show me what you don't get.... this is wrong...Do you know why it is wrong? You've got to do this"...and then she'll do it again. (IID – 290 – 301)

He further explained how his science teacher taught life lessons to her students.

He said:

I know she has had a lot of jobs and they seem more interesting [than teaching], but now she is like, I want to make the people who are going to make this country better. She is one of those people who will give us life lessons. She will stop teaching science and tell us life stories and she will tell us about her life. She doesn't go into detail about her personal life but she tells us about her life experiences. You can tell she cares. (IID – 301 – 306)

David also gave important data concerning teachers who are not necessarily caring. He expressed:

I think there are some [teachers] who just need a job. There are some that teaching is all they know how to do and if they are tired of teaching, they need to stop. The teacher that watches the clock every five minutes, they don't care. I think it is really important that when a teacher teaches that it is because she loves teaching but some don't know what to do with their lives, so they teach. (IID – 308 – 314)

Cayla reported that she learned best from the teachers who showed an interest in her and cared about her. She said:

I feel like I learn the best from them [teachers who care] because I feel like they care about me and as they care about me, I want to show them that I can learn and succeed. I am one of those people who like to please others. (IIC – 177 – 180)

Active learning was a theme that became evident in the participant data. Once again, all participants reported overwhelmingly that in order for learning to be engaging, it also has to be active. Active or activity, as a theme, took on many characteristics. Some

participants felt that active questioning was important, whereas, others felt that it was important to have engaging and fun activities [projects or games] as a part of learning.

Active learning.

As described by Windham and Oblinger (2007), authentic learning has a component of learning by doing. This form of active learning allows students to move beyond thinking into the realm of doing. In the course of a project or problem, students engage in problem solving and critical thinking that researchers and experts use every day. Students learn how to investigate problems rather than solving them from a textbook.

Eve reported active learning as one requiring active questioning among the students of the class. She said, “Actively engaged students are always asking questions and are always being curious. They [are the students who] will go above and beyond in order to apply what they are learning” (IIE – 51 – 55).

Alaina approached the idea of active learning from the standpoint of learning with movement and engaging activities. She said, “Some kids are fine with reading from PowerPoints but some kids want to be active and see” (IIA – 135 – 136). She also reported the need for the teacher to actively engage with students in order to foster active learning, especially in classes that she perceives to be boring. She explained:

I find my math class boring and the teacher is like funny as everything because she calls us her little mathematicians and stuff and she is so funny about it. But I don’t think all kids are looking forward to their classes and want to participate because their teacher isn’t engaging [active] with us.
(IIA – 158 – 161)

I asked Alaina why she felt young children love school so much and then later on in their school career the love for learning is lost. She said, “Because it is fun. The math

teacher is like, ok, today we are going to learn math, but we are going to paint math. They have fun and kids like to have fun” (IIA – 244 – 245).

Hunter reported information concerning active learning with activities as a plus but he further argued that some students just would not do anything, even if the class was engaging and fun. He said:

All [my] teachers are good teachers but they teach differently. Some of them are boring and some of them are very engaging (IIH – 95 – 98). My chemistry teacher right now...she is very engaging...we did a game yesterday...a review for the test...we did survivor where you have teams and that is fun and an interesting way to review and learn (explains how to play Survivor)...for the end user it is engaging and it is interesting...and students want to do that and they do...and everyone is learning. (103 – 108)

Conversely, Hunter mentioned that most students are lazy and do not want to engage in learning. He said:

I think my generation is lazy. We shut down simply because we don't want to do it. Most students just don't listen because they don't care and they haven't learned it [the information] because they are not listening, not because it's [the class] too hard. (IIH – 60 – 63)

Mark discussed aspects of active learning from the perspective of being actively involved in projects, rather than passively sitting and listening to the teacher talk through the notes. He spoke of completing a project in history that involved creating a spy booklet during 450 B.C. He mentioned that his teacher went on leave and a substitute teacher came in to take her place. At that time, learning became very different in his history class. He described how his female history teacher made class interesting by giving fun, engaging projects. He reported the male student teacher who took her place to be boring. He stated:

When he started talking you just wanted to go to sleep...like how he was saying the PowerPoints and nothing interesting... and like you just wanted to go to sleep. (IIM – 126 – 128)

David, like Eve, viewed active learning as active questioning and active interacting with the teacher and others in the class. He said, “I love teachers who are like, please, ask me questions” (IID – 211). He further mentioned the importance of interacting and having fun with the teacher and others in the class. He said:

Like in math, the math song [sings] negative b, negative b, plus or minus square root...you know...people complain about it and people hate it but when it comes to test time, you can hear people humming it. There are people who complain and people who say ‘this sucks.’ but either way, they are going to get it. We are human and we need time to be silly and not be so serious all the time. Then, if I still don’t get it, I would go up to the teacher and say I didn’t get that whole music thing [and she would give me other alternatives to learn the quadratic formula]. 9IID – 277 – 288)

Cayla also approached the idea of active learning as being actively involved in project-based learning. She said, “Projects always helped me get into things because it is not just writing down but it is writing it down, making it pretty, and making it the best that it can be” (IIC – 91 – 93). I asked Cayla if she ever gets to act out her learning in a class, such as, learning the branches of government by acting out the parts. She said, “I would love to do that but I know that in my class we could never have a day like that. Every day in U.S. History is a crunch to get information in for the end of the year [test]” (IIC – 95 – 100). Cayla also spoke to me about students who do not care about school. She said:

I look over and see him or her and think, how can you just sit there. Even if you don’t want to learn, how could you not care about the grade you are receiving. For instance, there was this one girl in my freshman science class who was really smart and could have had a really good grade in that class but she was obsessed with the Jonas Brothers. She would just sit there and listen to her IPOD® and write down songs. Most of the time you see these [disengaged] students with an earpiece in their ear or a game out playing. (IIC – 199 – 210)

In speaking about disengaged students, Cayla commented that it made her angry when students put their heads down on the desk. Alaina agreed that it made her angry as well but that the negative attitudes of those disengaged students makes her not care as much either. In analyzing this comment and the comments of others, I developed another theme that is relevant to this study – a culture of disengagement.

Culture of disengagement.

While analyzing the data from individual interviews and the focus group, reports from four of the six participants indicated disengagement was experienced by many students in this school. One cannot infer that all students in this school are disengaged. Furthermore, the data showed students were engaged in various classes and at various times. What it could mean is that some students in this school are experiencing disengagement, which could lead to further academic erosion. I developed this additional theme based on the comments from combined individual interview and focus group data.

Hunter shared:

Most students just don't listen because they don't care...they haven't learned it because they are not listening...not because it's too hard...(IIH – 61 – 63). some students, no matter what you do...are not going to respond to anything but most students will respond to something...so if you take this and this works for most students but these other students won't do it and these kids who are doing it will look at these other kids and say, well they don't care so why should we so it kind of goes up and down, I think...the school tries to do something that makes the students engaged and then there is this small crowd that doesn't care either way...(IIH – 67 – 73).

In the focus group, Alaina and Cayla made similar comments reinforcing what Hunter had reported in his individual interview. Their conversation follows:

Alaina – If kids don't care around you it makes you not care (FGA – 304).

Cayla – It makes me angry. Does it make you angry (FGC – 306)?

Alaina – It makes me angry but then it makes me not want to care, because their attitude toward the class rubs off on me (FGA – 308 – 309). A negative attitude will always win over a positive attitude...(FGA – 313).

During his individual interview, David commented that his peers were not actively engaged in the learning process. Some were reported as attempting to avoid school entirely. He said:

I have some friends who don't give a crap and they just want to go home (IID – 179 – 180). My ex-girlfriend is one of those people...I was with her for about 10 ½ months and something that killed me was that she was so lazy...she didn't like teachers yelling at her...one time when she got in an argument with a teacher the teacher yelled at her and she would go home...she'd go tell the nurse I threw up and need to go home...like it would ruin her day or like for example she would really complain that this teacher all he does is give us book work and I'm not looking forward to US History because all we do is take notes, and notes and notes and more notes...and like she would ask why do I need to know where the first shot was fired and it all stresses her out and then she gets a failing grade and doesn't do anything about it and she is one of those who will not go up to her teacher (IID – 181 – 191).

Cayla provided information regarding the student who passively participates in class. She said:

I look over and see him or her and think how can you just sit there...even if you don't want to learn...how could you not care about the grade you are receiving (IIC – 199 – 201).

The information from this quote was shared earlier, but I thought it interesting that when I probed for further information about why some students do not care, she reported, "all I can think of is the culture" (IIC – 204). All of the combined data points to a need to change the way school is done. Some but not all students are engaged in their

learning experiences. It is an educator's responsibility to find ways to engage as many learners as he/she possibly can.

Individual Interviews (Continued)

Themes from research question 2.

Student perceptions of school norms.

After extracting themes concerning students' perceptions of how factors in schools contributed to their engagement, I returned to the data and began coding themes regarding values and norms established by schools and whether or not a mismatch existed with the values and norms occurring in the everyday lives of students. As suggested by Resnick (1987), school is a special place for people but it is discontinuous with the everyday lives of students and how learning occurs outside of school. This notion is of particular importance when considering the democratic aspects of schooling and how schools are preparing students to live in a democratic society. After examining the themes, I will explain in chapter five how the norms and values could enhance or inhibit the development and furtherance of democratic processes within schools. The norms extracted from the data were: (a) inflexible scheduling and structure of schools, and (b) standards and the overuse of standardized tests as a measure of student achievement. The values extracted from the data were: (a) importance of the social aspects of school, and (b) importance of relating learning to the present. Each topic was explored and participant quotes were used to further support the use of the extracted themes.

Inflexible scheduling and structure of schools.

Most schools operate on a fixed schedule where students move from one class to another without much flexibility in schedule structure or freedom of movement of the students within the school. Some schools have implemented a hybrid schedule, mixing blocked days of four one hundred minute classes with regular days consisting of seven periods of fifty-five minutes each. The hybrid schedule, although more inventive than the regular six or seven period day, still requires students be in class at a particular time and stay with that class until the period is completed. Participants in this study reported that the use of an inflexible or rigid schedule creates a time crunch that makes it difficult to learn information in the timing schools want students to learn. Cayla said:

Block days are my favorite days just because I feel I get more things done and on regular days I feel like I am so rushed to get notes down [on paper] and everything...(IIC – 45 – 47).

She further expounded on the difficulty of learning content when rushed when she reported:

I feel in math class that's [scheduling] a really big problem because sometimes during the day you're taking notes and everything and you understand what you are doing until you get home and you have homework and then you get stuck on a problem and you go to class the next day and ask the question you don't understand and then half the class has gone by on the previous day [learning that information] and then you're already behind... (IIC – 51 – 66).

Cayla reported feeling as if the schedule impedes authentic learning experiences because there is not enough time to fully delve into a problem before having to leave class for the day. She further expressed that most teachers are not teaching authentically because they too are pressed for time. Their time crunch, she reported, involves cramming in the required standards before the end of the year tests.

Other data regarding inflexible scheduling centered on student's freedom to choose the classes they take rather than classes being required for graduation. Mark provided data concerning his familiarity with other cultures. Because he is from Estonia, he had firsthand knowledge of how schooling is different in the United States. He said:

I am a foreign person and in our school we cannot choose what we take...they just give us calculus and we have to do it...where here you can change...you can have calculus you can have AP calculus...which is much easier for me here since we have choices...(IIM – 11 – 14).

Alaina reported feeling as if the choices students are given in school should directly match to what that person wants to do in the future. She said:

I'd love to think of it [school] as preparation for life but I don't think it is just because you see the outside world and you ask your parents what classes did you take when you were growing up and they all say Oh I took classes for what I wanted to graduate in...for what my major was going to be in and stuff...so if you were going to do interior design, I understand they took an art class, they took a design class, they took math so they can know like dimensions and stuff. I'd like it if school was more like that... if you could focus on the field you want to be in... (IIA – 199 – 205).

Cayla further supported Alainas' comments when she said:

When I am learning about things like ancient wars where this happened to so and so and it doesn't really have anything to do with me...that doesn't really seem important to me... (IIC – 16 – 19).

David expressed discontentment with teachers not explaining why students have to learn what is being taught. He said:

I think if they are going to give you something to learn in school they should at least explain why you are learning it...but when they don't tell you anything and it's just numbers and letters and variables and I don't even know why...I just don't get it...(IID – 249 – 252).

Standards and the overuse of standards-based testing.

Data regarding school norms focused on the overuse of standards and standardized testing to measure student achievement. The norm of schools is to test

students in order to measure their achievement based on state or national standards; whereas, the world outside of school places emphasis on using and applying knowledge to perform a task. This mismatch of norms between school and student became apparent in the data. David commented:

I need to get you ready for the SAT [referring to his teacher]...it almost feels like some teachers are making us do this...they say the only reason I am making you do this is because at the end of the semester you are going to take a test and that test is going to reflect if I taught you or not so if you guys fail that then that means I didn't do my job...so I'm going to do what it takes to get you guys to pass that...and I think, yeah, you're getting your job done but is the student really getting it...(IID – 201 – 207).

Cayla mentioned how difficult it is to prepare for testing when the schedule is 50-minute classes. She said:

Every day in U.S. History is a crunch to get information in...because you have to fit in all the information for the test at the end of the year... (IIC – 98 – 100).

Hunter expressed that standards are set too low and that students will only put forth minimal effort in their classes because expectations are not set high enough. He said:

They [the state policymakers] have the classes to the lowest standard...I think they should make most of the courses a little tougher because Spanish, to me, you can't make that much tougher...I mean Spanish is Spanish...but most of the core classes they should make them a little tougher so that students have to put forth effort in order to pass because most students when they see they are failing...most, not all...will try to bring the grade up to at least a 70...(IIH – 152 – 158).

Mark emphasized that he just wanted to pass the tests. If he believed he would not use the information in the future, he said he did not put forth the effort required to commit information to memory.

Student Perceptions of School Values

Importance of the social aspects of school.

Participants were asked to explain what they believed their teachers valued about teaching school. All of the participants believed teachers valued imparting their subject knowledge and valued having a career with benefits. Participants were then asked what they themselves valued about school. One of the values mentioned by a majority of participants was the social aspects of school such as developing and maintaining friendships. Because friendships are an important part of their lives outside of school, these participants believed friendships should be developed with the same degree of importance inside school. Mark defined school as interesting and engaging based on friendships and social activities rather than the quality of the work provided to him by his teachers. He said:

Some of the classes are not interesting but you have to do them so that's sometimes not fun but like socializing and all the extra activities you can do in school is pretty cool (IIM – 219 – 221).

Cayla's data confirmed what Mark said in his interview. She said:

For most of them [students in the school] they want to be here for friendships and stuff...I hear lots of people like over breaks and stuff say 'I want to go back to school' but they don't really want to go back to school...it's like they want to go back to see their friends and stuff but not really go back to the structure and the learning and stuff...sitting in class and taking notes – cause that really does not sound all that appealing when you think about it...sometimes though after summer break I really want to get back to learning stuff but then after the first month I remember –oh yeah- this is why I wanted summer so much (IIC – 183 – 190).

Alainas' comments centered on how students valued sports rather than valuing knowledge. She said:

I don't think kids are really in it for the education...I mean kids who care about sports are in it for the sports...I mean some are who want to go to a

top notch school and I give all the power to them...but I mean my goal is to at least be successful in life...and I don't think everything I learn will benefit me in the long run (IIA – 230 – 233).

David confirmed Alaina's data when he stated students valued school because of sports. He also confirmed Cayla and Mark's data when he stated most students want to go to school because of the friendships they have developed.

Importance of relating learning to the present.

Participants shared the importance of teachers emphasizing current information when they are teaching. They believed too much emphasis is placed on content that won't help them attain their future goals. They also expressed the belief that much of their class work is busy work rather than learning that can impact their lives. Furthermore, they believed learning in school is very different from what is needed to be productive outside of school.

Mark expressed an interest in photography and explained that he wants to focus his energies on the path of study he wants to pursue. He further expressed the importance of learning the "basics" but he believed for him personally, he should not have to learn the formulas used in geometry or trigonometry. These courses, he explained, did not apply to what he wanted to do with his life. Mark believed the best way for schools to organize learning would be to have each student follow a path of study that is geared toward his or her future employment goals. He indicated that once students are in a field of study where their energies could be focused toward one goal, that engagement would be improved in schools.

Cayla supported Mark's belief about only having to learn the basics in school when she said:

There are a certain amount of math classes you have to take and a certain amount of sciences but if you are not planning to be a scientist or a doctor then the science classes really don't have any importance to you that much anymore...(IIC – 110 – 113).

Alaina also believed the curriculum should be focused on what a student wants to do in the future. She said:

You see the outside world and you ask your parents 'What classes did you take when you were growing up?' and they all say "Oh I took classes for what I wanted to graduate in...for what my major was going to be in and stuff."...so if you were going to do interior design, I understand they took an art class, they took a design class, they took math so they can know like dimensions and stuff. I'd like it if school was more like that if you could focus on the field you want to be in... (IIA – 199 – 205).

Cayla also expressed a belief that school does not provide opportunities to work with problems that are relevant, personal, and timely when she said:

Lots of times I feel like all the work I am doing at school is just busy work and sometimes I feel I would be better off staying at home and doing it (IIC – 130 – 132).

David expressed a similar belief when he said:

Obviously you need to do bookwork sometimes but I have had teachers that that's all they do...like obviously you need to do some bookwork for certain things like for answering questions then the teacher checks it and then goes over it but I have had teachers say just do the bookwork and that's all you have to do today...you do it, you keep it, you never hear about it again...so I don't think it's helping you in any way...(IID – 28 – 33).

Alaina commented on how schools are not providing experiences that would help a student relate to his or her world in the present when she said:

I understand the importance of understanding basic math like addition multiplication...like knowing how to take percents and stuff because that is stuff that you will need to know and like when you need to know how to balance a checkbook and stuff...they don't show us stuff like that...I think that's stuff that we need to learn so that when we get older we know how to balance a checkbook or know how to manage that kind of stuff...now it's just like angles and I don't know...weird stuff...learning X and Y charts and just learning stuff that I know I won't use (IIA – 36 – 43).

David reinforced Alaina's need for relating learning to a student's present life when he said:

Electives are something you want to do and you want to do them for a reason...I think with electives you can apply what you are learning at school to things you do at home... (IID – 146 – 148).

David further expressed a need to know the reason why he has to learn certain information. He said:

The point of school is not whether you are smart or whether you are not...they are trying to get you to understand what they are trying to teach you and there should be a reason for it...not just for the heck of it...and I want to be able to go home and be like mom I learned this...and I do that in things like culinary arts...but I have never gone home and be like mom, guess what I learned in math today...I do value psychology because I look at my friends and try to analyze them but I don't go home and talk to my family about math (IID – 325 – 332).

Focus Group Interview Session

When we gathered for the focus group interview, I told the participants how I coded the data in order to determine the themes that emerged from the individual interviews. I then asked them to have conversations with one another and with me in order to further explore the themes. I refined my original interview questions so thematic information could be explored in greater detail (see Appendix F). I did not further question students regarding research question two, but focused my group interview session on their comments from research question one.

Personally relevant curriculum.

Concerning a personally relevant curriculum, students reported that they wanted greater choice in their academics. But, they reported uncertainty concerning future

employment goals which they described as further complicating choices of their academic courses. Alaina expressed a need for more freedom when she said,

I wish there was more choice in academics...I think that would be better...I like the way we have the freedom to pick what we want in our electives. I mean I want to be able to study what I am planning on studying in college and what I want to major in and stuff. (See Appendix H for focus group data which was coded as F (focus) G (group) and participant's initial with line numbers of transcribed text.) (FGA – 152 – 155)

She further mentioned that some teachers say, “This is a class you will never use” (FGA – 173), so she questioned the relevance of taking courses required by the current administration when she could take a course that was applicable to her and her learning. She referred to choosing classes as being valuable because they are relevant to one's future.

Eve spoke of taking courses that were engaging to her but that may not be relevant for future endeavors. She mentioned that most of her family wants her to be a doctor and that she has been pushed that way all her life. When asked if she really wants to be a doctor, she mentioned “Even if I am not a doctor, I will do something in medicine” (FGE – 200). She further mentioned that she took a cosmetology class and her parents were wondering how she would use the knowledge in her future. She said, “They (her parents) would say, ‘Are you going to be a cosmetologist and what are you going to do to make money as a cosmetologist?’...so that class was fun but not something I would do as a career” (FGE – 208 – 210). Even though she enjoyed the class, she felt she needed to do as her parents wanted her to do.

When I asked students if they thought a personally relevant curriculum would work well for all students all the time, Cayla said, “Not all the time but in some cases,

yes” (FGC – 246). Alaina agreed that a personally relevant curriculum would only work if students knew what they wanted to do in the future. She said, “What if [Cayla] wants to be a teacher and then down the road she doesn’t...I don’t think that would work” (FGA – 248 – 249). Cayla responded, “But then there are some people who know exactly what they want to do or they are forced upon like they don’t have any other choice...in those cases, it would be helpful” (FGC – 251 – 252).

Meaningful learning.

During the interviews, all students reported learning should be meaningful but also fun. I wanted to explore this further with them so I asked them what it was like to be in a classroom where learning was meaningful but not fun. Alaina questioned, “What class is that [jokingly but with sarcasm]” (FGA – 260)? Cayla questioned, as well, by asking, “What would be a meaningful class” (FGC – 262)? Alaina then said:

My literature teacher made us learn vocabulary and diagram sentences. He taught us the three hundred vocabulary on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and I thought it was a waste of time but now that I have him again this year, I know what they mean...it is meaningful now and was meaningful then but I just could not see that it was meaningful last year. (FGA – 264 – 267)

She further mentioned that the class was neither fun nor boring. She said:

He would have them up [words] on the board at the beginning of class and we would copy them down and study them throughout the week and then on Friday we took a test...so then it was not like it was boring, boring...I mean copying off the board is not a big deal...but he could make it fun...he did football vocabulary games when we studied. (FGA – 271 – 275)

Cayla mentioned her AP classes not being fun but reported them as being meaningful. She said:

Learning to write for the AP exam where you have to describe all the literary terms and stuff...it is so hard...it is meaningful because it helps

you get a good grade on the test but it is not fun at all...I do not look forward to it because I am so not good at it. (FGC – 277 – 280)

I wanted to explore the issue of grades further with my participants so I then asked them if meaningful learning should involve a grade or should it be knowledge. All of the students agreed that meaningful learning should be about knowledge, but they also all agreed that the current focus on testing and competition for scholarships and college entrance forces them to constantly worry about their grades.

I then asked the participants to explain what it was like being in a classroom where learning is neither meaningful nor fun. Cayla responded:

It can be silent where everyone is just taking notes or it can be that the class is crazy and out of control because the kids know it is not meaningful or fun so they are going to find some other way to have fun. (FGC – 402 – 404)

Alaina said:

It can be like my last class where everyone is silent and you look around but no one is paying attention...not one person is looking at the teacher taking notes...some of them might print out the notes but that is just to have them printed so you don't have to write them...or kids are sleeping...kids that are sitting on the front row are sleeping...other kids are doodling on paper (that was actually me)...or texting...and then there is the smart kid...one kid that sleeps the entire time and gets a one hundred percent on the test...I don't understand it...but the teacher will carry on even if it is boring. (FGA – 406 – 412)

I probed for more information by asking if the teacher continued to teach as if every student was giving full attention to the lecture. Alaina said:

Yes...it's like do you see what you are doing...there are three of them right in front of you that are sleeping...duh...what are you doing wrong...no one is paying attention...if only one kid is getting an A on your test and the rest of them are barely passing a light bulb should go on...and the teacher should be like, ok, what am I doing wrong and why are they not engaging in what I am doing...so, if it is not meaningful or fun, it could be disruptive or it could be just plain silence. (FGA – 416 – 421)

Cayla mentioned that fun could be an open discussion and does not have to mean, as she said “You are doing something cool” (FGC – 427 – 428). She described:

Sometimes teachers think it is fun when it is not...like in algebra when you are working with all those polynomials that no one really understands but because the teacher is open and good at engaging people, it is like an o.k. class and you are actually having a pretty good time. (FGC – 428 – 431)

I questioned if they see the meaningful and fun classroom as being an authentic learning environment. All three participants perceived the meaningful and fun classroom as a representation of authentic learning. They mentioned that relating learning events to what is going on now is important in creating authentic learning classrooms and that because you remember it and can use the learning in your life makes it authentic.

Caring and supportive environment leading to belongingness.

When referring to caring teachers, all participants reported that they wanted their teachers to develop a relationship with them that involves not only teaching and learning but also to work with them and understand them as a person and a learner. They want their teacher to recognize if they are having a bad day and to talk them through it instead of ignoring them. They want their teachers to help them and be there for them, as well. Cayla further spoke of relationships with teachers and that sometimes it felt strange to have a relationship with male teachers. She reported that she felt more comfortable with developing relationships with her female teachers because they have nurturing personalities. Eve mentioned she was not concerned about a personal relationship with her teachers. She explained, “I want teachers to give me encouragement, but I am not interested in a relationship with my teacher. Just so they help me in the class so I can do better.” Conversely, Cayla said, “I feel more comfortable when my teachers want to get

to know me and have a relationship with me...so that I can talk to them about other stuff but stuff that is not too personal.” They further discussed that teachers need to know how to react with different personalities. Some students need encouragement to do well and the participants felt that the teachers need to foster that encouragement within each student. The participants felt, as well, that teachers should make themselves readily available to their students seeking help. Alaina explained:

If the teacher cares about you then you want to do well in their class and then you feel bad if you do bad but if you get a teacher who doesn't care and you do bad on a test then you are like – hah-that's what you get cause you're a bad teacher...no...I'm kidding...but it's like you can't help but do bad on a test because the teacher didn't help you...it's not really your fault...it's the teachers'...you went in to get help but you didn't get help because they were preoccupied with their e-mails. (FGA – 32 – 38).

Cayla reported having similar problems with teachers who were too preoccupied with life to teach. She said:

That happened to me one time in the second grade. My teacher wouldn't help me learn how to carry numbers when adding...I had been out with the flu and came to her to ask for help but she told me to just figure it out...she was on the phone and too busy talking to her boyfriend...my mom called the principal about it and I had to get taken out of the class...it was a big deal but she was not a very good teacher. (FGC – 46 – 50)

After hearing all the comments, I wanted to know what these participants felt would be the ideal situation of a caring and supportive environment. Cayla said, “The teacher teaches and they are open, but then after they teach they ask how people are doing” (FGC – 107 – 108). Alaina added:

It's an open class time and everyone wants to participate and the teacher makes it like fun...no not even fun...it doesn't have to be fun...just so you know the teacher cares and if she asks a question then everyone will respond...not just a few people here and there. (FGA – 110 – 113)

At the end of the focus group, all students stated that they wished school could be done differently. They were not certain how that could be done but they see that it is not being done in a way that is engaging them in the learning process. They also stated that they want to have a say in what goes on in schools and how things are arranged.

To conclude the interview, I read to participants Fulghum's (1990) short essay *Everything I learned, I learned in kindergarten* from a book of essays from the same title. I chose the essay because it teaches us how to live a balanced life of work, play, and learning. Because many of these aspects must also be balanced in the classroom, I wanted to find out what the participants thought about it. The comment recorded concerning the essay was, "Perfect, you'll get everywhere you need to go with that" (FGA – 540). Once the students began further analyzing the essay and debating with one another about its contents, they realized one needs to know more than is mentioned in the essay. They all reported that the simplicity of the essay and how to be and act for life was telling, but there are a few more things that one really should "know" to do well in life. Their need for relevance, importance, and authenticity became apparent as I shared the story and they reflected on the meaning.

Summary of Findings

In summary, participants responded to the following research questions during their individual interviews:

1. What do students identify as important factors that influence the degree to which they can be engaged in their learning experiences?

2. As described by students, do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a student's life outside of school?

Through transcription and analysis of the individual interviews, I extracted the following information from the data.

Learning needs to have personal relevance (a). Coding the data from the individual interviews resulted in a total of forty responses out of sixty suggesting the learning students are experiencing has personal relevance to them. Fifteen out of the sixty responses suggested that learning is not personally relevant, whereas six out of sixty comments regarding a personally relevant curriculum were based on participant understanding or clarification of the topic. For example, when Cayla formulated her definition of authentic learning, she responded, “using what you learn...and what you apply to your day to day life” (IIC – 11 -12). I coded this response and others similar to it as being neutral in nature with regards to a personally relevant curriculum.

Learning needs to be meaningful (b). Thirty four out of eighty four responses regarded learning as meaningful or fun or that students want learning to have those qualities. Forty five out of eighty four responses regarded learning situations as neither meaningful nor fun and five out of eighty four responses concerned participant understanding of the topic of meaningful learning.

Learning is best accomplished in the environment where one has a caring and supportive teacher (c). Thirty five out of sixty total participant responses regarded teachers as caring and supportive persons in the classroom. Twenty out of sixty responses regarded teachers as uncaring and unsupportive persons in the classroom. Five out of sixty responses were based on clarification of the topic of caring and supportive teachers.

Learning needs to be active (d). The theme of active learning resulted in thirty seven out of forty two responses viewing learning as active. Active learning was coded when participants responded that they were involved in learning by some form of activity, such as group work, discussions, or project-based learning. To summarize, the majority of these participants' comments have shown that learning is personally relevant to them and that learning is occurring in a caring and supportive environment but that the learning situations are not meaningful.

An additional theme extracted from the data was the existence of a culture of disengagement. There were a total of 8 responses given during individual interviews suggesting a current culture of disengaged students. This theme was included because five of the six participants mentioned their peers as being disengaged or disconnected from their learning experiences. A few of these responses were included for clarification of the theme. Cayla reported, "even if you don't want to learn, how could you not care about the grade you are receiving?...but to get them [her peers] to want to learn is a completely different thing" (IIC – 200 – 202). Mark explained, "...they have made their mind up already that they don't need school and that they don't want school and that studying is for losers or something like that...or for nerds" (IIM – 274 – 276). Hunter said, "I don't think it has to do with difficulty...I think my generation...we are lazy...we shut down simply because we don't want to do it (IIH – 60 – 61)...I do not think it is a teaching problem...I think it is more of a student problem" (IIH – 73 – 74).

The overarching themes of needing to have a personally relevant curriculum, meaningful learning, and caring/supportive teachers were then further explored during the focus group session. Participants were encouraged to learn from and provide further

information pertaining to others responses so that the data could become more fully saturated. The purpose of the focus group session was to participate in an in depth examination of the themes that were extracted from the individual interview data. A personally relevant curriculum was seen as an important aspect of authentic learning. A resounding comment that came out of these conversations was that these participants want a curriculum designed around their personal needs and interests.

They want to be able to choose their curriculum and focus it toward their goals for the future. A common comment made regarding meaningful learning was that teachers need to actively engage their learners with activities, open discussions, game formats for learning, and problems that have value in today's society. Common comments made regarding caring and supportive teachers were that teachers need to care about their students as people as well as learners. Although the majority of these participant responses involved having teachers who are caring and supportive, these participants reported a need to have teachers who want to personally know their students and to comment on them on a personal basis rather than merely as a student in their charge. These participants want their teachers to notice if they are having a bad day and to recognize they may need a learning break. These findings further support participant comments that they want learning experiences to revolve around them personally. They want to be authentically engaged in the processes of learning and deserve to have the opportunities this form of education can afford them.

Regarding research question two, participants were questioned about the norms and values of schools and whether there is a mismatch between these components inside of school and outside in a student's life. As Dewey (1915; 1938) contended, school

should mirror life itself. The norms extracted from the data were: 1) inflexible scheduling and structure of schools, and 2) standards and the overuse of standardized tests as a measure of student achievement. The values extracted from the data were: 1) importance of the social aspects of school, and 2) importance of relating learning to the present. As the data suggested, the majority of these participants indicated a discrepancy between the norms and values of school and the norms and values that were found to be important to them outside of the school environment. It is beyond the scope of this study to consider the effects of the differences between the norms and values of schools versus the norms and values of students. In chapter five, the idea of a mismatch between norms and values of schools and the student and how this mismatch could affect the furtherance of democracy in schools is explored.

Conclusion

In conclusion, personal interviews confirmed students are concerned about their own learning experiences and what teachers are doing to improve their learning experiences. Their responses supported the notion that they want learning experiences to be personal, relevant, meaningful, and active. If they felt they were not getting these experiences, they shut down and/or turned the teacher off in their own head. These particular participants have reported numerous examples of data that support their need to be heard as students in the learning environment. They know what they want as learners and expect their teachers to provide the learning experiences they desire for their own improvement.

The focus group session allowed participants to delve deeper into their thoughts and feelings concerning the processes of learning and how or even if they viewed learning as authentic and engaging. I felt the participants walked away from the session with a new awareness of themselves and their school surroundings. The main reason I believed this is because at the end of the focus group session, Cayla commented having learned so much from the interviews. She further asserted a belief that school is not as it should be and she wants it to be better for herself and others. I felt they would critique experiences and try to understand the motives surrounding assignments and the way information is presented in their classes. During the focus group session, I asked them if they believed they would evaluate their classes with more rigor and tenacity than they have done in the past. Overwhelmingly, the participants answered they would not view school the same ever again. I learned so much from them, as well. Allowing them to voice their opinions in a non-threatening environment gave me, as researcher, such wonderfully rich data that I could use in my own classroom to improve my practice in order to make learning more fulfilling for students.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate student perceptions of how schools contribute to their engagement. Research suggests students are becoming disengaged from their classes and that the problem becomes more pervasive as students move into upper grade levels (Balfanz et al., 2007; Barber, 1996; Payne, 2002; Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). While analyzing the literature concerning engagement and authentic learning in schools, I developed a normative framework based on Dewey's conditions to support authentic learning. I used this framework to gather and analyze the data during my research study. The framework helped me focus my study so that I could take information I gained from my ongoing literature review and analyze the literature and then my data through a Deweyan lens of authentic learning. This framework for authentic learning has at its core the following components: (a) solving authentic problems, (b) meaningful experiences with problems, (c) working with others in a communal environment, and (d) supporting environment of thoughtful engagement that results in a higher moral purpose.

This framework was developed in order to guide me in developing questions and collecting data based on my research questions:

1. What elements within schools do students identify as important factors that influence the degree to which they can be engaged in authentic learning experiences?
2. Do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a student's life outside of school?

I further developed a separate framework to guide me in the analysis of data gathered from my research participants. This second framework involved the conditions that are necessary for authentically engaged learning to take place. These conditions became evident as I analyzed my research data for emerging themes and as I worked toward completion of the ongoing literature review: (a) learning has personal relevance, (b) learning occurs in a caring and supportive environment, (c) learning has meaning beyond the classroom, (d) learning is active.

Once these themes were determined, I used them as a framework to analyze the interview data from my six research participants. I used this framework to determine the degree to which authentic learning situations, as described by students, exist in the study.

Discussion and Significant Findings

Solving authentic problems.

As was discovered in the present study, Dewey (1915) claimed there must be a transformation of the information to be taught to the child so that it is developed within the range and scope of the child's life. He further cautioned educators to avoid sugar-coating information to be learned so as to make it more palatable to the student. If the content is presented in a way to make it seem more enjoyable to learn, nothing is

accomplished in the way of educative learning on the part of the student. Emphasis is placed on the fun aspect rather than the content to be learned and because attention is not on the actual material, learning of information is not gained.

Participants in this study placed a high degree of emphasis on authentic learning. The data supported the notion that these participants want to have fun as they are learning but of far more importance, the data have shown they want their learning to have meaning beyond the classroom setting. An important finding noted from the data concerning the authenticity of project work was these participants do not want assignments to be filler assignments that have no meaning. If teachers plan to assign work, students want that work to have some bearing on what they need to know for their future. At a minimum, they want the assignments to benefit them in their learning efforts for the moment. They also want learning to pertain to the real world rather than just a representation of the content taught in the class.

As Lee & Songer (2003) reported, authenticity is addressed by using real world problems and can be further encouraged by linking students to a mentor who has experience with data collection, critique, and communication of information associated with the problem. This form of learning takes on higher meaning for students and provides opportunity for them to interact with others and with the community. The participants confirmed a desire to work with meaningful problems, but did not mention having worked with a mentor, other than their teachers, to learn material. Authentic learning occurs in high quality classrooms. As Pianta et al. (2002) proposed, greater on task behavior and positive outcomes, such as social and academic competence, are associated with classrooms of high quality. Data from my participants supported the fact

that some classes represented high quality learning environments having many interactions with the teacher and others. Other classrooms were described as boring and having few interactions, resulting in disengaged students who wait for the class to end. As was Dewey's (1913) contention, learning in the educative classroom created *thoughtfulness* by requiring students to use what they have learned but also to be able to pair that learning with new material that required reflective thinking to arrive at an answer. The educative classroom involves students immersed in curiosity and communication. Dewey (1910) described the role of the teacher in this classroom as follows:

His task is rather to keep alive the sacred spark of wonder and to fan the flame that already glows. His problem is to protect the spirit of inquiry, to keep it from becoming blasé from overexcitement, wooden from routine, fossilized through dogmatic instruction, or dissipated by random exercise upon trivial things. (p. 34)

Meaningful experiences with problems.

When one as a teacher is deciding how and what to present to students, one must discriminate between meaningful, educative experiences and those that are not meaningful when preparing lessons. Dewey (1938a.) referenced this discrimination as employing the principle of continuity. As Maina (2004) asserted, authentic activities mimic real-world situations that then become an extension of the learner's world. To be authentically involved with lessons and activities engages the learner toward his or her own interests and capacities. Miller & Brickman (2004) further affirmed the Maina research when they noted that students internalized learning when they found it to have benefit for their future goals. This internalization of learning occurs in environments where the learning is meaningful to the student and aligns with what the student plans for

his or her future. As Greene et al. (2004) reported, whether or not students perceived a task as beneficial for their future endeavors would determine how they approached that task. If they perceived the task as having no benefit to them in the future, they would be less likely to persist with the task and learn from the information for long-term use. Data from this study supported the notion that participants want their learning to have benefit for their future endeavors. Many of the participants reported a desire to have the curriculum related to their personal needs so they would not waste their time and effort on classes that would not relate to their interests.

In the interview conversation with Eve, it became apparent that she was interested in attaining the goal of becoming a doctor. Her learning is centered on her goals for the future and she strives to maintain that course as she completes her high school credits. Most of the students I interviewed did not find their learning in high school to be meaningful. Either they were disappointed in how their teachers handled the actual content in the manner that they paired that content with meaningless activities; or they were disgruntled when the content taught seemingly had nothing to do with their everyday experiences. Cayla believed advanced placement teachers were using activities that would boost grades rather than boost knowledge of content. David believed the math content was meaningless because it would not be used in everyday life. Mark expressed that learning formulas for math was useless information. The participants in this study confirmed that learning should have meaning and that it should apply to their everyday lives. As the data supported, students perceived meaning and application of learning to be of a greater benefit to them and their future goals than if they were asked to complete a task that had no meaning for them as a learner.

Another extrapolated finding was that learners are concerned about their grades but wanted learning to be evaluated another way besides using test scores. According to the interview data, learning for the sake of gaining knowledge was not the main reason students attended to information presented in class. The data suggested the main goal for most students is to get good grades, get into a good school, and then get a good job. Cayla mentioned that this is true for the majority of students, but there are some students who are living for the moment. These students, she mentioned, cannot see the importance of earning good grades early on so that the grades will benefit the student later on in his or her school endeavors. She said that grades were meaningful to her because they would help her get to where she wanted to be in life. She further noted that although grades are meaningful to her, she is not learning for the sake of gaining knowledge but the possibility of gaining an upper hand in society. Her comment was, “it is hard to really learn [the material] and thrive when you are just trying to get a good grade and that is all you can think about. And then the final exam comes around but you are not ready because you have just learned it for the test” (FGC – 502 – 504).

Alaina further commented that she wished there was a different way to evaluate student knowledge. Cayla agreed with her that testing is not the way to evaluate students. She said instead of penalizing students for what they don't know on a test, she wished teachers would reward them for what they do know. Cayla further argued that there are times when she studied hard for a test but then found she did not study what the teacher wanted her to know. She expressed that if she could tell the teacher her knowledge about what she knew, shouldn't that merit a good grade on the test? Alaina's concern was that when teachers want feedback on their tests they will typically ask their students how

the test was – good, bad, hard, or easy – but won't break it down to see where students are having problems. She said this bothered her because she wants to really understand what it is she does not know and to be able to learn from those mistakes. These students were concerned about the way knowledge was measured and want that measurement to be fair for all students. They further wanted meaningful measures of their knowledge acquisition.

Working with others in a communal environment.

Dewey (1915) contended that schools are in need of changes in structure involving the relationships of student to teacher and teacher to student, of discipline, of course offerings, and of factors that are active and expressive to meet the needs of the individual. He claimed these are necessities of the larger social evolution. What educators should do, according to Dewey (1915), is put them all together so that they act to create an ideal school system. To accomplish this end, Dewey (1915) stated,

To do this means to make each one of our schools an embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science. When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious. (p. 20)

Furman (2004) and Watkins (2005) supported the Deweyan notion of an ethic of community. Community is achieved when all stakeholders – administrators, teachers, parents, and students focused on instilling responsibility in the efforts of developing and maintaining the community focus. Furman further contended that this community building then leads to the development of positive interpersonal and group skills needed to effectively work in these communal groups.

The participants had a difficult time articulating a representation of the concept of community in schools. None of the participants felt they were involved in a community of learners. All of the participants believed they were individually and competitively learning in order to earn the grades they need for college admissions. Some of the participants believed community involvement meant participating in club activities, but many of them were not active participants of clubs. Mark spoke about group work in classes. He mentioned the fact that if you are in a group and your partner does not pull his or her weight for a partnered project grade; you have to complete all the work yourself so that you won't receive a poor grade. He expressed he felt some teachers were attempting to foster a sense of community by placing students in project groups, but that some students would not work which negates the attempt to achieve a community focus in the classroom. His statement and my collective data attested to the fact that teachers may be attempting to achieve community in their classrooms but that the true knowledge of community is lacking among both teachers and students at this particular school.

Supportive environment having a moral purpose.

Dewey believed in educating students for the betterment of society. He further believed that education was the means by which we become active and contributing members of a democratic society. As asserted by May (2009), "moral purpose is two-fold: students learning to become active citizens within the democratic society, and students seeing a purpose for their learning" (p. 125). The topics students study should connect to their interests and the values of the community (Dewey, 1915; Meier, 1993). Moral purpose then, is taking learning beyond the classroom in order to better society. As May posited, "students are learning to work together; they are learning how things in the

community affect them; and they are using what they learn to take action to improve society” (p. 81). In order for students to envision a moral purpose for their learning, they must first feel secure in a supportive environment with a teacher who cares about them. As Fullan (1993) asserted, “moral purpose keeps teachers close to the needs of children and youth” (p.12); and one of the main needs of students, as supported by the data in this study, is to feel a part of a supportive environment that involves a caring teacher.

According to the data in my coding chart (see Appendix E), overwhelmingly, most participants reported their teachers to be caring and supportive; but most participants, too, reported a culture of disengagement rather than a collective unit of students working toward the betterment of society. This is an area that requires further study as most participants in this study do not find the elements of democracy in their school but feel it should be a part of their education.

Participants reported the fact that they worked with others on projects and in small communities of learners during discussion activities, but that these activities did not transfer beyond the classroom. Participants also reported that the school participated in democratizing activities such as blood drives to collect for local blood banks and food drives to provide food for the hungry in the community; but that they did not feel a sense of democracy by participating in these events. Participants confirmed they felt a sense of well-being in that they had performed a good deed, but did not find the activities brought the school together in one communal effort for the greater good.

Norms and values.

The combined research of these six participants suggested that the norms and values found important in schools are different from the norms and values found

important to students. These participants believed the inflexibility of school schedules and the focus on standards and testing as norms of schools have made it difficult for students to learn the information presented to them by their teachers. Because they believed there is not enough time to focus and retain the information before moving on to another topic; they reported schools are just presenting information as rapidly as possible in order to test knowledge retention on a standardized test. This creates an environment of individuality rather than collegiality, which could deter the formation of democratic environments in schools. Furthermore, a value discrepancy reported by these participants was that schools are not delving into the meaningful problems that are relevant to today's youth. These participants want to move beyond basic knowledge into factors that have an impact on their lives and the lives of others. By focusing on this one factor, teachers can begin fostering democratic learning in their own classrooms. This finding represents a key factor in how teachers should organize learning experiences for students and will be considered in the implications section of this chapter.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Policy level implications.

The research suggesting effective leaders promote better teaching points out that states and districts should emphasize standards for education leaders (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2010). School leaders are critical to helping improve student performance. And by improving student performance, it is possible that students will become more engaged in their learning. Research conducted in 2004 by Leithwood,

Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom showed leadership as being second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that influenced student outcomes.

The emergence of standards-based reforms and accountability systems at the state and district levels has led to renewed interest in and inquiry into the district role in educational change. Spillane's (1996, 1998) case studies of school district and school responses to state education reforms in Michigan have shown the importance of the active policy-shaping role of districts. Spillane's analysis offered evidence that district personnel can exert a powerful influence on the kinds of instructional practices supported by districts, and the degree of consistency in instructional guidance provided to teachers.

If districts have this power to influence instructional practices and guidance provided to teachers, then schools should be able to use their district personnel as a guiding force to implement instructional change in the arenas of authentic learning and engagement. Some schools in the Northeast Georgia area have already begun to do so, but other schools that are located in poverty-stricken areas may not have the necessary resources or backing of their districts to instigate these changes (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). One such example of policy implemented to focus change toward engagement and authentic learning environments involves a program called Implementation Resource (IR) (Georgia Department of Education, 2010.) The IR is a collection of best practices that aid in the effective implementation of the School Keys: Unlocking Excellence through the Georgia School Standards. This document was created to support schools in their continuous improvement efforts. The IR is a companion tool to the School Keys and the Georgia Assessment of Performance on School Standards (GAPSS). The IR was developed in a collaborative process involving over 50 Georgia educators.

It is organized by the eight strands of the School Keys: Curriculum; Assessment; Instruction; Planning and Organization; Student, Family, and Community Involvement and Support; Professional Learning; Leadership; and School Culture. The IR includes performance actions, artifacts, and evidence to support the fully operational definition described under each standard of the School Keys (see Appendix I for sample IR documents and Appendix J for approval to use copyrighted material in dissertation). The performance actions provide all Georgia schools with a collection of strategies to support continuous improvement in learning strategies.

Another initiative being used in some Georgia schools to address the dropout rate is the Pathways for Reaching Opportunities in Preparing for Excellence in Life (PROPEL) initiative (Forsyth County Schools, 2010). The PROPEL initiative was developed by a group of stakeholders who researched, interviewed, and gathered data in order to devise a plan that would identify and remove obstacles to graduation so that graduation rates would be at one hundred percent. The key components of the plan are to: (a) Relate the curriculum to postsecondary education and careers, (b) Identify potential dropouts, (c) Establish caring, respectful school cultures with high expectations for all students, (d) Use school time and physical space efficiently, and (e) Expand community resources to ensure young children enter school with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful

Many of the themes discussed in this present study also appeared in these various initiatives. These initiatives are relatively new, thus it will take time to determine the outcomes of the strategies that have been put into place over the past two years.

School administrator level implications.

The administrator of a school carries a heavy burden of responsibility to ensure that all students are receiving a quality education. Even though his or her designee may monitor instruction by visiting classrooms and taking a snapshot of what is occurring in the room, it is ultimately the principal's responsibility to monitor instruction at the school level to make certain that instruction is being delivered in a timely and professional manner.

If students are disengaged, bored, disgruntled, and concerned with how they fit into the larger scheme of school (Balfanz et al., 2007; Breidenstein, 2007; Davidson, 1996; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Intrator, 2004; Payne, 2002; Watkins, 2005; and Yazzie-Mintz, 2010), then administrators should be aware of the problem and attempt to put programs and opportunities in place that would create spaces for engaged, fulfilled, and intellectually-stimulated learners. Reform efforts occurring at the middle school level have become models for improving the academic excellence of students by reforming the roles, skills, and outlooks of those who teach or administer in these schools and by improving instruction and pedagogy (Balfanz et al., 2007). But research is lacking in the area of how student engagement factors within these middle schools affect student achievement and ultimately the role this has in the nation's graduation rate crisis, especially when referencing high-poverty areas (Balfanz et al., 2007). Researchers agree there are many factors associated with drop out, including personal, family, and school-related factors (Lessard et al., 2007). Lessard et al. further found school-related risk factors associated with dropping out included academic performance, grade retention, and the student-teacher relationship. Furthermore, research conducted by Balfanz and

colleagues suggested there are early warning signs among six grade students in high-poverty areas that are indicators of dropping out of school and that the sixth grade provides a much higher degree of dropout predictability than any other grade before or after.

These early warning signs associated with eventual drop out are: poor attendance, poor behavior marks, failing math, or failing English. These data should give hope to administrators who are attempting to initiate change at the middle school level. If students are identified as failing one course, there could possibly be a much greater chance of addressing and correcting the deficit than in waiting until the student enters high school, when difficulties are experienced in multiple areas (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Students need to attend school, behave, and attempt to complete their assignments to the best of their ability.

Every student deserves a quality education in a supportive environment of teachers who know their content well enough to engage students in learning. If this is a problem, as the data from this study report, administrators need to intervene and provide the teacher in question with the professional learning support he or she needs to be successful at engaging today's learner.

Teacher level implications.

In order for teachers to be productive with innovations addressing student engagement and authenticity, they must be provided with professional learning opportunities. The craft of teaching contains within itself an enormous amount of ideas and innovative techniques that could be used to promote engagement and authentic learning within the classroom. But teachers cannot be expected to learn these new ideas

completely on their own. They either need professional learning opportunities or expert mentors to provide guidance to them. One specific example of the need for teacher training occurs within this study and was mentioned in the literature review.

The Edelson et al. (2009) research using the Climate Visualizer represented a study where teachers needed guidance in order to properly implement programs into their curriculum. The researchers wanted the exercises with the visualizer to be open-ended and student-driven inquiry lessons; therefore, initially they did not provide a curriculum resource to the teachers who worked with the program. This created frustration among both the teachers and the students. Teachers did not have the requisite knowledge to help students when they encountered difficulties and students needed their help to understand what the inquiry lesson wanted them to do. In later efforts using the Climate Visualizer, the researchers created a manual incorporating structured inquiry activities to accompany their software; therefore, teachers as well as students could experience the range of inquiry lessons the visualizer supported and they could choose which lessons would be most appropriate for their learning.

An example of expert guidance aiding teacher learning comes from research conducted by Hume (2009). Her study found science teachers lacking in knowledge of scientific inquiry based on the teacher responses given to questions concerning inquiry and what the literature says on the topic. She asked sixteen science teachers involved in an inquiry workshop to provide responses concerning their extent and depth of knowledge of authentic scientific inquiry. Hume reported:

If the designers of qualifications and classroom teachers are to achieve curriculum goals linked to authentic scientific inquiry, thus enabling students to develop insights into aspects of science practice and how

scientific knowledge is established, it is essential that they themselves are scientifically literate in this area. (p. 37)

Hume purported teachers could greatly benefit from expert guidance such as that afforded by research conducted by current practicing scientists. She agreed that teachers have quality information to report concerning older experiments, such as Fleming's discovery of penicillin, but research suggests student engagement, interest, and motivation are sparked by using examples from contemporary science (Hipkins et al., 2001).

Even if teachers understand how to use technologies to increase engagement in their classrooms, there are unanticipated consequences that may affect the learning environment. One of these unanticipated consequences is in how well students can use the technologies to perform the required tasks. One teacher leader reported her observations of a classroom involved in experiential learning in a virtual learning environment. She said:

Some of the students were completing the online experiment activity as part of the class due to the expectation that it be completed. Other students seemed more actively engaged as they truly enjoyed exploring the online learning environment and going through the modules. Students who are more technologically savvy seemed to possess higher levels of engagement as they were less concerned about maneuvering through the "laboratory" and could enjoy the experience. Today's learner may be more prone to enjoy this type of virtual experimentation and assignment as it puts the activities in an online environment (J. Prentice, personal communication, February 24, 2011).

Therefore, difficulties arise in creating engaged environments while using new technologies if either the teacher or the students are not comfortable with the format. There should be a level of comfort with the technologies or there should be an understanding that using a new format requires exploration without indemnification. In

other words, a student should not be penalized for not being adept at using a technology as quickly or efficiently as his/her peer can use it. Furthermore, a teacher should not be penalized by his/her administrator if the lesson does not go planned.

A second important implication for teachers is for teachers to consider student voice. Providing opportunity for students to voice their perceptions about learning and engagement allows for a greater understanding of educational topics for both students and teachers; but some teachers are not accustomed to allowing the student voice to be heard.

As Lincoln (1995) asserted:

Adults often underestimate the ability of children to be shrewd observers, to possess insight and wisdom about what they see and hear, and to possess internal resources we routinely underestimate. Children and adults combine power and create new forms of wisdom when they explore learning together. (p. 89)

By listening to the student voice, educators could become better at what they do. By virtue of hearing students' likes and dislikes concerning their perspectives on engagement, educators could open new arenas in both teaching and learning that would make students want to be in school. Students want their voice to be heard but not everyone is listening to them. As Lincoln (1995) asserted, before the student voice can be heard, teachers must be willing to hear and honor those voices. There are two ways, Lincoln suggested, for this to occur. Firstly, teachers must be willing to relinquish the only modicum of control they feel they have, and that is when they close their doors and begin to teach. Secondly, teachers must know how to elicit the voices of their students. Teacher education programs do little to promote eliciting and negotiating student contributions to curriculum and on demonstrating how students can structure their own learning experiences. Little attention is given on how to ask the right questions.

Professional education opportunities, as suggested by Lincoln, could be focused toward directly and refining these skills, but teachers must have the support of the larger social ecosystem. This means teachers would need support from the district and school level, as well as support from parents and guardians for reforms to be successful.

A third important implication is for teachers to promote and support democratic environments in their own classrooms. By promoting democratic experiences in their own classrooms, they can initiate and catalyze change throughout the school. This element requires teachers who are leaders in their learning environments and who are willing to initiate change at the school level. As Resnick (1987) stated,

Realizing this vision will require a civic consciousness that goes beyond the individualist one of current classroom learning models and draws on models of shared intellectual functioning such as we see in our best work environments. Building such civic consciousness, by long apprenticeship in the special kind of community that only school has both the distance and the engagement to create, may be the most important challenge facing educational research and reform today. (p, 19)

The overarching implication of the development of democratic schools is the understanding that an individualist method of teaching cannot continue for the desired environments to be supported. Teachers will have to break out of their comfort zone and begin collaborating with other teachers within and outside of their subject area, as well as with their students and leaders in the community in order to fully achieve democracy in classrooms.

A forth implication is for teachers to actively minimize the possibility of a culture of disengagement. As the data from this study suggest, even if students do well in school, they are not always engaged or want to be at school. It becomes incumbent for teachers to find artful ways to engage their learners to want to come to school and to want to learn.

The learning situations need to be crafted in ways that are not ritual or rote forms of learning, but learning that hinges on the wants and needs of students. These participants want learning to be meaningful. Furthermore, they want learning to support their future goals. Teachers need to have conversations with their students in order to understand their needs. They will then have a better understanding of how to develop lessons and what to develop in order to engage their learners. By engaging their learners, teachers create a better possibility for graduation and further learning the students in their charge. To make this a far-reaching goal, all teachers would need to have active conversations concerning engagement and authentic learning. This would require an administrative team who is willing to take on the challenge of revamping the curriculums so that learning is more timely and authentic to students.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study focused on student perceptions regarding how schools contributed to their engagement. Suggestions for further research would be to compare what teachers find engaging and authentic work as compared to what students find engaging and authentic work. One could then use a comparison model from which to create a reform agenda that would take into consideration both perspectives on engagement and authentic learning.

Another suggestion for further research would be to focus on how schools are educating for democracy and what type of student is being created in the process. In this study, participants were unable to clearly explain their understanding of a democratic education and its importance for creating thoughtfully engaged citizens. Westheimer and

Kahne (2004) purported varied priorities, such as whether one is attempting to educate for personal responsibility, participatory citizenship, or justice-oriented citizenship, embodied different belief systems and therefore, carried significantly different implications for pedagogy, curriculum, and educational policy. One could therefore, create a comparison research study that would analyze the different democratic priorities, coupled with authentic learning, to determine the level of engagement and authenticity experienced by learners of each democratic type.

Conclusion

In my attempt to discover student's perspectives of how schools contribute to their engagement, I used qualitative methods with elements of phenomenological interviews in order to uncover the depth and richness of what students have to say about their work in schools. The data were further saturated by having participants meet in a focus group to discuss the themes extracted from the individual interviews. I discovered a wealth of information referencing assignments and curricular activities with regard to how they should be well thought out and prepared so that students want to complete the work; how these participants felt their teachers should treat them in class; and how these participants believed the work assigned to them should have meaning beyond the classroom and not be a waste of their time and efforts. Furthermore, I learned these participants are not aware of democratizing influences on their education or the way these influences can affect them as future citizens.

It became evident to me that these participants want their voices to be heard. They want a different type of schooling experience. Furthermore, they want their teachers to

want to teach them. It is time for teachers to rise to the occasion and determine ways they can engage their charges in a different type of learning experience. That is, a challenging, authentic, and fulfilling education resulting in a young adult who can compete in and is knowledgeable of the ways of a democratic society. To do so would be an avenue to creating a thoughtful learner who could be an invaluable asset to society.

References

- Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Mac Iver, D. (2007). Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 223-235.
- Barber, M. (1996). *The learning game: Arguments for an education revolution*. London: Victor Gollanz.
- Berry, R. (2006). Inclusion, power, and community: Teachers and students interpret the language of community. *American education research journal*, 43(3), 489-529.
- Blatchford, P. (1996). Pupils' views on schoolwork and school from 7 to 16 years. *Research papers in education*, 11(3), 263-288.
- Breidenstein, G. (2007). The meaning of boredom in school lessons. Participant observation in the seventh and eighth form. *Ethnography and education*, 2(1), 93-108.
- Brown, A. (1992). Design experiments: Theoretical and methodological issues. *Journal of the learning sciences*, 2(2), 141-178.
- Callison, D., & Lamb, A. (2004). Key words in instruction: Authentic learning. *School library media activities monthly*, 21(4), 34-39.

- Commeyras, M. (1994). Were Janell and Neesie in the same classroom? Children's questions as the first order of reality in storybook discussions. *Language Arts*, 71(7), 517-523.
- Commeyras, M. (1995). What can we learn from students' questions? *Theory into practice*, 34(2), 124-130.
- Creswell (2003). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Larson, R. (1984). *Being adolescent: Conflict and growth in the teenage years*. New York: Basic Books.
- Dahl, K. (1995). Challenges in understanding the learner's perspective. *Theory into practice*, 34(2), 124-130.
- Davidson, A.L. (1996). *Making and molding identity in schools: Student narratives on race, gender, and academic engagement*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Davies, L. (2002). Possibilities and limitations for democratization in education. *Comparative education*, 38(3), 251-266.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. In L. Weis, & M. Fine, M. (Eds.), *Beyond silenced voices: Class, race, and gender in United States Schools*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*, New York: Dover Publications.
- Dewey, J. (1915). *The school and society and the child and the curriculum*. New York: BN Publishing.

- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Dewey, J. (1918). *Essays in experimental logic*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1927). *The public and its problems*. Athens, OH: Swallow Press.
- Dewey, J. (1938 a). *Experience and education*. New York: Kappa Delta Pi Lecture Series.
- Dewey, J. (1938 b). *Logic: The theory of inquiry*. New York: Holt.
- Downer, J., Rimm-Kaufman, S., & Pianta, R. (2007). How do classroom conditions and children's risk for school problems contribute to children's behavioral engagement in learning? *School Psychology Review*, 36(3), 413-432.
- Easton, L. (2005). Democracy in schools: Truly a matter of voice. *The English Journal*, 94(5), 52-56.
- Edelson, D.C. (1998). Realizing authentic science learning through the adaptation of scientific practice. In B.J. Fraser & K. G. Tobin (Eds.), *International Handbook of Science Education* (Dordrecht: Kluwer), 317-331.
- Edelson, D., Gordin, D., & Pea, R. (1999). Addressing the challenges of inquiry-based learning through technology and curriculum design. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 8(3/4), 391-450.
- Erickson, F. & Schultz, J. (1992). Students' experience of the curriculum. In Jackson, P.W. (Ed.). *Handbook of research on curriculum: A project of the American Educational Research Association*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.
- Finn, J.D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. [Electronic version]. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(2), 117-142.

- Finn, J.D. (1992). School characteristics related to student engagement. *Journal of Negro Education*, 62(3), 249-268.
- Finn, J.D., Pannozzo, G.M., & Voelkl, K.E. (1995). Disruptive and inattentive-withdrawn behavior and achievement among fourth graders. *Elementary School Journal*, 95(5), 421-434.
- Finn, J. D. & Voelkl, K.E. (1993). School characteristics related to student engagement. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 62(3), 249-268.
- Forsyth County Schools, PROPEL document, Retrieved November 5, 2010 from <http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/129410616212035640/lib/129410616212035640/PropelObjectives.pdf>.
- Fredricks, J.A., Blumenfield, P.C., & Paris, A.H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of educational research*, 74(1), 59-109.
- Fried, R. (2005). *The game of school: Why we all play it, how it hurts kids, and what it will take to change it*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fulghum, R. (1990). *All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten*. New York: Villard Books.
- Fullan, M. (1993). Why teachers must become change agents. *Educational leadership*, 50(6), 12-17.
- Furman, G. (2004). The ethic of community. *Journal of educational administration*, 42(2), 215-235.
- Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children's academic engagement and performance. *Journal of educational psychology*, 95(1), 148-162.

Georgia Department of Education, Enrollment by race, gender, and grade PK-12.

Retrieved November 12, 2010 from [http:// app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-](http://app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_ethicsex.entry_form)

[bin/owa/fte_pack_ethicsex.entry_form](http://app3.doe.k12.ga.us/ows-bin/owa/fte_pack_ethicsex.entry_form).

Gerics, J. & Westheimer, M. (1988). Dropout prevention: Trinkets and gimmicks or

Deweyan reconstruction? *Teachers college record*, 90(1), 41-60.

Greene, B. A., Miller, R. B., Crowson, M., Duke, B.L., & Akey, K.L., (2004). Predicting high school students' cognitive engagement and achievement: Contributions of classroom perceptions and motivation. *Contemporary educational psychology*, 29, 462-482.

Hahn, C. (1998). *Becoming political: Comparative perspectives on citizenship education*.

Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany: State

University of New York Press.

Hipkins, R., Bolstad, R., Baker, R., Jones, A., Barker, M. & Bell, B., et al. (2001).

Curriculum, learning and effective pedagogy: A literature review in science education. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Hume, A. (2009). Authentic scientific inquiry and school science. [Electronic version].

Teaching Science: Journal of the Australian Science Teachers Association, (55)2, 35-41.

Intrator, S. (2004). The engaged classroom. *Educational Leadership*, 62(1), 20- 24.

Johnson, D.W., and Johnson, R.T. (1989). Social skills for successful workgroup.

Educational Leadership, 47(4), 29-33.

- Johnston, P.H., & Nicholls, J.G. (1995). Voices we want to hear and voices we don't. *Theory into practice*, 34(2), 94-100.
- Kahne, J. (2004). Democratic communities, equity, and excellence: A Deweyan reframing of educational policy. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 16(3), 233-248.
- Lave, J. (1988). *Cognition in practice: Mind, mathematics, articles, and culture in everyday life*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, H., & Songer, N. (2003). Making authentic science accessible to students. *International Journal of Science Education*, 25(8), 923-948.
- Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.
- Leithwood, K., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.
- Lessard, A., Butler-Kisber, L., Fortin, L., Marcotte, D., Potvin, P., & Royer, E. (2007). Shades of disengagement: High school dropouts speak out. *Social Psychology of Education*, 11(1), 25- 42.
- Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry* Newbury Park, California: SAGE Publications.
- Lincoln, Y. (1995). In search of students' voices. *Theory into practice*, 34(2), 88-93.
- Lombardi, M. & Oblinger, D. (2007). Authentic learning for the 21st century: An overview. Educause learning initiative. ELI paper 1:2007. Retrieved March 23, 2010.

- Maina, F. (2004). Authentic learning: Perspectives from contemporary educators. *Journal of authentic learning*, 1(1), 1-8.
- Margolis, H. & McCabe, P. (2004). Self-efficacy: A key to improving the motivation of struggling learners. *The Clearing House*, 77(6), 241-249.
- May, S. (2009). *The visibility of Deweyan inquiry in an international baccalaureate elementary school*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from dissertation and theses database at GSU. (UMI No. 200908)
- McMahon, B. & Portelli, J. (2004). Engagement for what? Beyond popular discourses of student engagement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 3(1), 59-76.
- Meier, D. (1993). Transforming schools into powerful communities. *Teachers College Record*, 94(3), 654-658.
- Meier, D. (2000). *Will standards save public education?* Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Merriam, S. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mertens, D. (2005). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Miller, R. B., & Brickman, S.J. (2004). A model of future-oriented motivation and self-regulation. *Educational Psychology Review*, 16(1), 9-33.
- Munhall, P. (1994). *Revisioning phenomenology: Nursing and health science research*. New York: National League for Nursing Press.

- Myers, S. (1993). A trial for Dmitri Karamazov. *Educational Leadership*, 50(7), 8-12.
- Neild, R. C., & Balfanz, R. (2006). An extreme degree of difficulty: The educational demographics of urban neighborhood high schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 11, 131-141.
- Newmann, F. (1989). Student engagement and high school reform. *Educational Leadership*, 46(5), 34-36.
- Newmann, F., & Wehlage, G. (1993). Five standards of authentic instruction. *Educational leadership*, 50(7), 8-12.
- Newmann, F., & Wehlage, G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring*. Madison, WI: Center On Organization and Restructuring of Schools.
- Newmann, F., Wehlage, G., and Lamborn, S. (1992). The significance and sources of student engagement. In F. Newmann (Ed.), *Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools* (pp. 11-39). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Nicaise, M., Gibney, T., & Crane, M. (2000). Toward an understanding of authentic learning: Student perceptions of an authentic classroom. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 9(1), 79-94.
- Noddings, N. (1998). *Philosophy of education*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Noddings, N. (2002). *Starting at home: Caring and social policy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Oblinger, D. (2004). The next generation of educational engagement. [Electronic version]. *Journal of interactive media in education*. 8, 1-18.
- Osterman, K. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of educational research*, 70(3), 323-367.

Payne, J. (2002). Attitudes to education and choices at age 16: A brief research review.

Report to the department for education and skills research advisory panel on research issues for the 14-19 age group. Policy studies institute.

Pianta, R.C., La Paro, K., Payne, C., Cox, M.J., & Bradley, R. (2002). The relation of kindergarten classroom environment to teacher, family, and school characteristics and child outcomes. *Elementary School Journal*, 102(3), 225-238.

Pianta, R.C., & McCoy, S.J. (1997). The first day of school: The predictive validity of early school screening. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 18(1), 1-22.

Pintrich, P.R., & Schrauben, B. (1992). Students' motivational beliefs and their cognitive engagement in classroom academic tasks. In D.H. Schunk & J.L. Meece (Eds.). *Student perception in the classroom*. (pp. 149-184). Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Pope, D. (2001). *Doing school: How we are creating a generation of stressed out, materialistic, and miseducated students*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Prensky, M. (2005). Engage me or enrage me: What today's learners demand. Retrieved March 13, 2008 from www.marcprensky.com/writing/default.asp.

Prensky, M. (2004). The emerging online life of the digital native: What they do differently because of technology, and how they do it. Retrieved March 25, 2008 from http://slo.sbccc.edu/wp-content/uploads/prensky-the_emerging_online_lif.pdf.

Renzulli, J., Gentry, M., & Reis, S. (2004). A time and a place for authentic learning. *Educational Leadership*, 62(1), 72- 77.

- Resnick, L. (1987). The 1987 presidential address: Learning in school and out. *Educational Researcher*, 16(9), 13-20.
- Richardson, D. (2008). Don't dump the didactic lecture: fix it. *Advances in physiology education*, 32, 23-24. Retrieved August 22, 2010 from ajpadvan.physiology.org.
- Roeser, R., Midgley, C., & Urdan, T.C. (1996). Perception of the school environment and early adolescents' psychological and behavioral functioning in school: The mediating role of goals and belonging. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 88, 408-422.
- Rubin, H. & Rubin, I. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE publications.
- Schlechty, P. (2002). *Working on the work: An action plan for teachers, principals, and superintendents*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Shaffer, D. & Resnick, M. (1999). Thick authenticity: New media and authentic learning. *Journal of interactive learning research*. 10(2), 195-215.
- Singh, K., Basom, M., & Perez, L. (2009). Democratic Learning Communities in Educational Leadership Programs. Retrieved June 17, 2010 from the Connexions web site: <http://cnx.org/content/m19571/1.3>.
- Skinner, R. & Cowan, E. (1995). Authentic assessment: Projects for the future. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 392 611.
- Smerdon, B. (2002). Students' perceptions of membership in their high schools. *Sociology of education*. 75(4), 287-305.

- Spillane, J. P. (1996). Districts matter: Local educational authorities and state instructional policy. *Educational Policy*, 10, 63-87.
- Spillane, J. P. (1998). State policy and the non-monolithic nature of the local school district: Organizational and professional considerations. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35(1), 33-63.
- Splitter, L. (2008). Authenticity and constructivism in education. *Studies in philosophy and education*. 28(2), 135-151.
- Strike, K. (2004). Community, the missing element of school reform: Why schools should be more like congregations than banks. *American Journal of Education*. 110, 215-232.
- Strong, R., Silver, H., & Robinson, A. (1995, September). What do students want (and what really motivates them)? *Educational Leadership*, 8-12.
- Thornburgh, N. (2006). Dropout nation. *Time Magazine*. 167, 30-40.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Ontario, Canada: The Althouse Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Watkins, C. (2005). Classrooms as learning communities: A review of research. *London Review of Education*. 3(1), 47-64.
- Westheimer, J. & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of educating for democracy. *Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 237-269.

- Wilkinson, S. (2003). Focus groups. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 184-204). Thousand Oaks: SAGE publications.
- Willis, J. W. (2007). *Foundations of qualitative research: Interpretive and critical approaches*. Thousand Oak: SAGE publications.
- Willms, J. D. (2003). *Student engagement at school: a sense of belonging and participation. Results from PISA 2000* [Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development].
- Windham, C. & Oblinger, D. (2007). Why today's students value authentic learning. Educause learning initiative: Paper 9. Retrieved March 3, 2010 from www.educause.edu.
- Wrigley, T. (2003). Is 'school effectiveness' anti-democratic? *Journal of Educational Studies*, 51(2), 89-112.
- Yazzie-Mintz, E. (2007). Voices of students on engagement: A report on the 2006 high school survey of student engagement. [Electronic version ERIC document ED495758]. Bloomington,IN: Center for evaluation and education policy. Retrieved November 16, 2008 from ERIC database.
- Yazzie-Mintz, E. (2010). Charting the path from engagement to achievement: A report on the 2009 high school survey of student engagement. [Electronic version]. Bloomington,IN: Center for evaluation and education policy. Retrieved June 14, 2010 from <http://ceep.indiana.edu>.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

ASSENT FORM

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Assent Form

Title: A phenomenological analysis of engagement in the high school classroom.

Primary Investigator: Primary Investigator – Dr. Donna Adair Breault
Student Primary Investigator – Mrs. Gloria Richards Perry

I. Purpose:

Your child is invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to find out if conditions exist in schools that oppose authentic communities of students who are engaged in the learning process.

Research questions:

- (1.) What elements within schools influence the degree to which students can be engaged in authentic learning experiences?
- (2.) Do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a students' life outside of school?

Your child is invited to have a say because he/she is a high school student who is exposed to schoolwork every day. A total of 6 people will be asked to take part in this study. Taking part in the study will involve roughly 4-5 hours of your child's time from August 2009 until October 2009. The information provided to me by your child will not be shared with school officials, teachers, nor with other students. Information provided to me during this study will remain completely confidential. Your child will not be penalized if he/she decides not to participate in the study or decides to withdraw from the study.

II. Procedures:

If your child decides to take part, he/she will be asked to be interviewed and take part in a focus group interview with the other people in the study.

The first interview will require roughly one hour of your child's time. Your child will be audio recorded during the first interview. Once initial interviews of each person have been completed, your child will be asked to take part in a focus group with the other students who have been interviewed. The focus group session will require roughly two – three hours of your child's time. Focus group interviews will be audio recorded.

During the study, your child will work together with me as the main investigator and with Mrs. Laura Wilson as the contact for the study at West Forsyth High School. Your child will be asked to take part in the study from August 2009 until October 2009. Interviews and focus group sessions will occur during the school day. I may ask to meet with your child during IF or during a period where your child is caught up with his/her work.

APPROVED

Consent Form Approved by Georgia State University IRB May 27, 2009 - May 26, 2010

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Assent Form

Title: A phenomenological analysis of engagement in the high school classroom.

Primary Investigator: Primary Investigator – Dr. Donna Adair Breault
Student Primary Investigator – Mrs. Gloria Richards Perry

I. Purpose:

Your child is invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to find out if conditions exist in schools that oppose authentic communities of students who are engaged in the learning process.

Research questions:

- (1.) What elements within schools influence the degree to which students can be engaged in authentic learning experiences?
- (2.) Do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a students' life outside of school?

Your child is invited to have a say because he/she is a high school student who is exposed to schoolwork every day. A total of 6 people will be asked to take part in this study. Taking part in the study will involve roughly 4-5 hours of your child's time from August 2009 until October 2009. The information provided to me by your child will not be shared with school officials, teachers, nor with other students. Information provided to me during this study will remain completely confidential. Your child will not be penalized if he/she decides not to participate in the study or decides to withdraw from the study.

II. Procedures:

If your child decides to take part, he/she will be asked to be interviewed and take part in a focus group interview with the other people in the study.

The first interview will require roughly one hour of your child's time. Your child will be audio recorded during the first interview. Once initial interviews of each person have been completed, your child will be asked to take part in a focus group with the other students who have been interviewed. The focus group session will require roughly two – three hours of your child's time. Focus group interviews will be audio recorded.

During the study, your child will work together with me as the main investigator and with Mrs. Laura Wilson as the contact for the study at West Forsyth High School. Your child will be asked to take part in the study from August 2009 until October 2009. Interviews and focus group sessions will occur during the school day. I may ask to meet with your child during IF or during a period where your child is caught up with his/her work.

1

APPROVED

Consent Form Approved by Georgia State University IRB May 27, 2009 - May 26, 2010



VII. Contact Persons:

Call Dr. Donna Breault, Principal Investigator, at 404- 413- 8268 or e-mail her at dbreault@gsu.edu or call Gloria Perry, Principal Student Investigator, at 706-219-2819 or e-mail her at gperry@forsyth.k12.ga.us if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your child's rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.

VIII. Types of Interview Questions:

Student Interview Questions:

Research question #1:

What elements within schools influence the degree to which students can be engaged in authentic learning experiences?

Questions to ask students:

1. Do you feel your learning has meaning in that you value it and apply the learning to other situations in your life (i.e. authentic learning)?
2. How would you, as a student, define authentic learning?
3. What are elements that exist in your school that support authentic learning?
4. What are elements that exist in your school that inhibit or impede authentic learning?
5. Do you feel students at your school are actively engaged in the learning process? Why or why not?
6. What do think would actively engage students in the learning process? How could this be accomplished?

Research question #2:



Do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a students' life outside of school?

Questions to ask students:

1. Do you feel that what your teachers ask you to do in class will have any benefit for what you need to know outside of school? Probe for further information
2. Do you think of school as preparation for life or is it more or less to you?
3. Is school interesting or engaging to you? Why or why not?
4. Compared to life outside of school, what thoughts or feelings do you have concerning life inside school? Probe for further information.
5. What do you feel your teachers value about school? How does this compare with what students value about school? How can a consensus be reached so that teachers and students view schooling and its processes with the same worth?

IX. Copy of Consent Form to Parent:

We will give you a copy of this permission form to keep.

If you are willing to allow your child to take part in this study, please sign below.

Child's name (please print) _____	Date _____
Parent or Legal Guardian _____	Date _____
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent _____	Date _____



APPENDIX B

CHILD CONSENT FORM

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Child Consent Form

Title: A phenomenological analysis of engagement in the high school classroom.

Primary Investigator: Primary Investigator – Dr. Donna Adair Breault
Student Primary Investigator – Mrs. Gloria Richards Perry

I. Purpose:

You are invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of the study is to find out if conditions exist in schools that oppose authentic communities of students who are engaged in the learning process.

Research questions:

- (1.) What elements within schools influence the degree to which students can be engaged in authentic learning experiences?
- (2.) Do the values, norms, and requirements that comprise school mirror similar elements of a students' life outside of school?

You are invited to have a say because you are a high school student who experiences schoolwork and the conditions of school on a daily basis. A total of 6 people will be asked to take part in this study. Taking part in the study will involve roughly 4-5 hours of your time from August 2009 until October 2009. The information you provide to me will not be shared with school officials, teachers, nor with other students. Information provided to me during this study will remain completely confidential. You will not be penalized if you decide you do not want to participate in the study or if you withdraw early from the study.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to be individually interviewed and to take part in a focus group interview with the other people in the study. The first interview will require roughly one hour of your time. You will be audio recorded during the first interview. Once initial interviews of each person have been completed, you will be asked to take part in a focus group with the other students who have been interviewed. The focus group session will require roughly two – three hours of your time. Focus group interviews will be audio recorded. During the study, you will work together with me as your main investigator and with Mrs. Laura Wilson as your contact for the study at West Forsyth High School. You will be asked to take part in the study from August 2009 until October 2009. Interviews and focus group sessions will occur during the school day. I may ask to meet with you during IF or during a period where you are caught up with your work.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. I plan to protect you by following ethical guidelines such as, non-disclosure of actual name

APPROVED

Consent Form Approved by Georgia State University IRB May 27, 2009 - May 26, 2010



or place of study; protection of interviews and questionnaires so that only I as the researcher will have access to these items. I plan to lock up research papers in a fireproof cabinet. False names will be used to identify students. A code sheet will be kept separately from the actual names so that actual names of participants will not be known. The data will be kept by the researcher for a period of one year beginning at the time of data collection. At the end of the specified time period, all documents pertaining to the study will be shredded or otherwise destroyed.

Once the study has been explained, you will be given the opportunity to decline participation in the study. Students will not be penalized for not participating or for withdrawing from the study.

IV. Benefits:

Taking part in this study may or may not benefit you personally. We hope you gain from the study in that you will be more aware of your own beliefs relating to work in schools. Overall, we hope to gain information about meaningful learning experiences or the lack thereof in the school environment so that we can better understand students' engagement and motivation in schools.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Involvement in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You will not be penalized for dropping out of the study.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. We will use false names rather than your actual name on study records. Only I, Mrs. Laura Wilson, and Dr. Donna Breault will have access to the information you provide. Information from the study will be stored on a firewall-protected computer. All audio recordings will be protected on the computer and/or will be locked in a cabinet. Once the study is complete, all documents such as audio recordings and documentation related to the study will be destroyed. I will use a code sheet so that I will be able to match your false name to your real name. The code sheet will be kept in a separate locked cabinet, away from the other data, so that secrecy will be maintained. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally. Due to the fact that we will be working in a small focus group, you will be asked to not share information with anyone outside of the focus group.

VII. Contact Persons:

Call Dr. Donna Breault, Principal Investigator, at 404-413-8268 or e-mail her at dbreault@gsu.edu or call Gloria Perry, Principal Student Investigator, at 706-219-2819 or e-mail her at gperry@forsyth.k12.ga.us if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or svogtner1@gsu.edu.



VIII. Types of Interview Questions:

Student Interview Questions:

Research question #1:

What elements within schools influence the degree to which students can be engaged in authentic learning experiences?

Questions to ask students:

- (1). Do you feel your learning has meaning in that you value it and apply the learning to other situations in your life (i.e. authentic learning)?
- (2). How would you, as a student, define authentic learning?
- (3). What are elements that exist in your school that support authentic learning?
- (4.) What are elements that exist in your school that inhibit or impede authentic learning?
- (5). Do you feel students at your school are actively engaged in the learning process? Why or why not?
- (6). What do think would actively engage students in the learning process? How could this be accomplished?

Research question #2:

Do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a students' life outside of school?

Questions to ask students:

- (3.) Do you feel that what your teachers ask you to do in class will have any benefit for what you need to know outside of school? Probe for further information
- (4.) Do you think of school as preparation for life or is it more or less to you?
- (5.) Is school interesting or engaging to you? Why or why not?
- (6.) Compared to life outside of school, what thoughts or feelings do you have concerning life inside school? Probe for further information.



(7.) What do you feel your teachers value about school? How does this compare with what students value about school? How can a consensus be reached so that teachers and students view schooling and its' processes with the same worth?

IX. Copy of Consent Form to Participant:

We will give you a copy of this permission form to keep.

If you are willing to take part in this study, please sign below.

Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date



APPENDIX C

CHILD MEET AND GREET SCRIPT

Georgia State University
Department of Educational Policy Studies
Child Meet and Greet Script

Title: A phenomenological analysis of engagement in the high school classroom.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Donna Adair Breault – Principal Investigator
Mrs. Gloria Richards Perry – Student Principal Investigator

Statement about study to be read to the student:

There will be several parts to this study that I wish for you to complete. First, I would like to interview each of you separately to find out what you think work is like in schools. I then want each of you to participate in a focus group interview session so that we can discuss as a group what work is like in schools. All interviews will be digitally recorded and kept in a secure location. The information you share with me will not be shared with any school officials, your teachers, or any other students. Your statements will be totally confidential. You will not be penalized if you decide you do not want to participate in the study nor if you withdraw during the course of the study.

I will need approximately one hour of your time for individual interviews and two- three hours of your time where we can all meet together for focus group interviews. Sharing feelings and comments within focus group sessions is encouraged, as your perceptions are the cornerstone of this study. We will discuss times for individual interviews and focus group interviews at a later date.

Questions to ask students:

1. Are you willing to allow me to interview you and record the interview?
2. Are you willing to take part in a focus group session and share your feelings with others in the study?
3. Are you willing to allow me as researcher to use comments you make when I write the analysis and conclusions section of the study? (Your real name will not be used and any information you tell me will not be shared with school officials, teachers, or other students).

Student Participant #	Response to Question 1	Response to Question 2	Response to Question 3
1			
2			

APPROVED

Consent Form Approved by Georgia State University IRB May 27, 2009 - May 26, 2010



3				
4				
5				
6				

Types of questions that will be asked during the interview process:

Student Interview Questions:

Research question #1:

What elements within schools influence the degree to which students can be engaged in authentic learning experiences?

Questions to ask students:

1. Do you feel your learning has meaning in that you value it and apply the learning to other situations in your life (i.e. authentic learning)?
2. How would you, as a student, define authentic learning?
3. What are elements that exist in your school that support authentic learning?
4. What are elements that exist in your school that inhibit or impede authentic learning?
5. Do you feel students at your school are actively engaged in the learning process? Why or why not?
6. What do think would actively engage students in the learning process? How could this be accomplished?

Research question #2:

APPROVED

Consent Form Approved by Georgia State University IRB May 27, 2009 - May 26, 2010

APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research questions and questions for individual interviews

Research question #1:

What do students identify as important factors that influence the degree to which they can be engaged in their learning experiences?

Questions to ask students:

1. Do you feel your learning has meaning in that you value it and apply the learning to other situations in your life (i.e. authentic learning)?
2. How would you, as a student, define authentic learning?
3. What are elements that exist in your school that support authentic learning?
4. What are elements that exist in your school that inhibit or impede authentic learning?
5. Do you feel students at your school are actively engaged in the learning process? Why or why not?
6. What do think would actively engage students in the learning process? How could this be accomplished?

Research question #2:

As described by students, do the values, norms, and requirements that constitute school mirror similar elements of a students' life outside of school?

Questions to ask students:

1. Is school interesting or engaging to you? Why or why not?

2. Do you feel that what your teachers ask you to do in class will have any benefit for what you need to know outside of school? Probe for further information
3. Do you think of school as preparation for life?
4. Do you feel that what you are asked to do in school (lessons, assignments, etc.) will benefit you for life outside of school? Probe for further information.

APPENDIX E

CODING CHART

Data Collection Chart – Individual Interviews

Codes:

Personal relevance codes:	Meaningful learning codes:	Caring teacher codes:	Active learning codes:	Additional themes:
P ⁺ - learning has personal relevance	M ⁺ – learning is meaningful and fun	C ⁺ – teacher cares about student and how he/she learns	A ⁺ – learning is active and engaging	Culture of disengagement
P ⁻ - learning does not have personal relevance	M ⁻ – learning is not meaningful nor is it fun	C ⁻ – teacher does not care about student or how he/she learns	A ⁻ – learning is neither active nor engaging	
P ⁰ – neutral or explanations given concerning topic	M ⁰ – neutral or explanations given concerning topic	C ⁰ – neutral or explanations given concerning topic	A ⁰ – neutral or explanations given concerning topic	

Codes/Themes	Eve	Cayla	Alaina	David	Mark	Hunter	Total responses:
P ⁺	3	5	7	14	9	2	40
P ⁻	0	5	3	5	2	0	15
P ⁰	0	2	1	1	2	0	6
M ⁺	4	5	9	7	6	4	34
M ⁻	1	7	12	8	3	4	45
M ⁰	0	0	2	1	1	1	5
C ⁺	3	4	6	16	2	4	35
C ⁻	0	1	8	9	1	1	20

C^0	0	0	2	3	0	0	5
A^+	7	5	12	4	4	4	37
A^-	1	0	2	1	0	1	5
A^0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Culture of disengagement	x	x		x x	x	x x x	8

APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Themes from individual interviews (underlined) with questions (*in italics*) for focus group interview session:

Caring by your teacher

What is it like to have teachers who care about you in school?

When your teachers do not care, how does that make you feel and how does it affect your performance in your classes?

Does whether or not your teachers care affect you outside of school?

Describe a caring environment and how that would look –

Personally relevant curriculum

What is it like being in a school that gives you choice in your electives but not so much choice in your academics?

What would it be like to have a personally relevant curriculum?

Do you think a personally relevant curriculum would work well for all students all the time?

Learning should be meaningful, but fun

What is it like being in a classroom where learning is meaningful but not fun?

What is it like being in a classroom where learning is neither meaningful nor fun?

What is it like being in a classroom where learning is meaningful and fun?

Do you see the meaningful and fun classroom as being an authentic learning environment? Why or why not?

Describe a learning situation you have had that you would consider authentic and tell me what made it authentic learning to you.

APPENDIX G

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW DATA

1 Initial Interview – Alaina

2

3 1. Do you feel your learning has meaning and that you apply the learning to other
4 situations in your life?

5

6 *No. Not all the time. Some people say when are we going to use math and stuff and I*
7 *understand you have to use math as a daily thing but when you are learning crazy things*
8 *and teachers say Oh it doesn't matter its not like you are ever going to use it*
9 *again...Oh... your teachers say that to you (surprised)...Yeah...so then its like ok why are*
10 *we learning it? So what do your teachers say when you ask that question? We'll be like*
11 *why are we learning this and they'll be like it's just in the curriculum. So we're like we're*
12 *never going to use it and they're like I know you're not going to use it you just have to*
13 *learn it. Then it's like o.k. (chuckles)...but some classes, like I take the public safety*
14 *class...it's not a core class, it's one of my electives that I got to choose...I learn more*
15 *from that than I do from any other class just because I pick up on things that I hear in the*
16 *classroom and I see it in real life like outside of school and when I go out somewhere I*
17 *actually see it happening...or like with psychology – you can use it to think of other*
18 *things and stuff. Alright. Be specific. Take for instance the public safety class – what*
19 *content are you learning that you feel you are specifically applying outside? Like when*
20 *you need to be aware of things...he like shows you steps that like can trigger something*
21 *or if you know a problem is about to happen...He shows you like...Are you talking about*
22 *driving? No. That is driver's Ed. What is public safety? That is where you learn about*
23 *law enforcement and stuff. Oh. OK. And that's definitely a fun class. So do you want to*
24 *be in law enforcement do you think? No. I was just taking it because I know the teacher*
25 *is nice but I want to go into Family Law. OK. So I thought having a law background kind*

26 *of class would look good. It's a fun class and it kind of changed my mind if I wanted to do*
 27 *CSI or something like that because it totally shows you a whole new perspective of things*
 28 *that you can do in a law field and it's so much fun. So would you say part of extending it*
 29 *outside of the classroom would be that you are engaged in it? Yeah. That it is something*
 30 *that you chose that you are interested in...See I want to get at that whole notion of how*
 31 *it's applying to real life...whereas, you said math...be more specific about that...what*
 32 *math class are you referring to and what topic? Like geometry...Alright...so what in*
 33 *geometry? Like when you are learning about if and then statements...it's an...I don't*
 34 *know...Is that proofs? Yeah...proofs...we were talking to the teacher the other day asking*
 35 *when are we ever going to use this? And somebody else said it and she said, you're*
 36 *not...and we were like Oh...OK (questioning and wondering)...I understand the*
 37 *importance of understanding basic math like addition multiplication...like knowing how*
 38 *to take percents and stuff because that is stuff that you will need to know and like when*
 39 *you need to know how to balance a checkbook and stuff...they don't show us stuff like*
 40 *that...I think that's stuff that we need to learn so that when we get older we know how to*
 41 *balance a checkbook or know how to manage that kind of stuff...now it's just like angles*
 42 *and I don't know...weird stuff...learning X and Y charts and just learning stuff that I*
 43 *know I won't use. OK. I felt that way too when I was in school...that's the reason I*
 44 *wanted to do this study.*

45

46 2. How would you as a student define authentic learning? *Learning that I know I'll*
 47 *be able to use and that I'll be able to retain and spit back out...like I'll be able to*
 48 *say...OK...I know what this is and I'll be able to say Oh I remember this from*
 49 *going to class or something like that but like learning useless stuff like in math I*
 50 *don't think is authentic just because I know I'm not going to use it and I wonder*
 51 *why am I wasting my time learning this when I could be using time to learn other*
 52 *stuff that I need to know. Right...exactly...I see what you are saying there.*

53

54

55 3. What are elements that exist in your school that support authentic learning? You
 56 talked about that a little bit with the public safety but expound on that...what do

you think supports authentic learning in either that class or in psychology? Is it the teacher is it the curriculum itself?...just go into those things...*I think it's the teacher and the curriculum but I mean it's stuff you see daily...kind of like they show you and teach you and help you out...like some teachers...like those that teach core classes...and I'm not hitting on them because I love some of them...but they kind of just don't care...they are like here it is learn it...like when you get your elective teachers, they are more engaged in what they do...they want to help you and stuff...so it makes it different.* Right. I teach anatomy and that's an elective and I try to make it authentic in that we do things...it's not just learning from a textbook...of course you have to do that too...but I try to make it applicable...but I wish I could make it more so...I wish I could take them out in the community and do things with anatomy...but then I think how do I plan that? That's why I was wondering about your teachers because they could probably make it boring and mundane and textbook-oriented...*like yesterday in psychology we were learning about schema and what are the two A words? Accommodation... and like he took us out and gave us all the vocab words we had been learning from the PowerPoints and the books he had been showing us...and we went out and he gave each group a word and you had to reenact the word and it was kind of like charades with our words...so we did that and it was fun just because everyone got into it...they made it fun...but you also learned and you got to see how the word actually works. So that was fun...or public safety we did a routine traffic stop...we went out and he took his car out into the parking lot...a few people got in the car and a few people were police officers...and so he came up with a story line and the police officers had to figure out the problem...and that was fun just because it was hands-on and you got to see how it would be if it was a real police officer...How it applied to real life...That probably took some planning on the teacher's part...He could have made it boring by saying here's a textbook example...learn it...this is how it would be...but he went above that to go out there and say this is how it would look...Yeah and that's pretty cool.*
(9:04)

88 4. What are elements in your school that inhibit or impede authentic learning?
 89
 90 *What would that be like?* It could be anything...it could be time constraints...it could
 91 be...*like Instructional Focus?* OK. You can talk about that...*Instructional*
 92 *Focus...waste of time (emphasis in voice)* Really...*I think so, yes...(9:27)* You do
 93 think so?...Um Hm... *because some teachers say you can come to my room and I'll*
 94 *help you but then they are worried about other students who need help but some kids*
 95 *don't even take the time to use it...they'll just sit there and listen to their IPODs or do*
 96 *whatever...I mean 2 hours of a class or 1 ½ hours whatever it is... I don't think it's*
 97 *worth it...just because I don't think you get that much out of it...like, I'll go to a*
 98 *teachers' class like I did the other day and she said well you can wait one second, I*
 99 *have to work with another student and that student took up most of her time so I was*
 100 *just sitting there...so I don't think it really does anything.* OK. See I am wondering
 101 because I am on the planning committee that developed some of the IF
 102 lessons....*teachers don't even teach the lessons (great emphasis)...* Oh no... *they*
 103 *don't...they'll just be like...OK...it's a waste of time...not doing it...so all this stuff*
 104 *about reading the handbook...never read the handbook...bullying...whenever that*
 105 *stuff came up...didn't do it...the teacher is just like be nice to one another...that's it.*
 106 Because see the lessons that are built into IF are things to do with budgets...things to
 107 do with internet safety...things I think would engage students in that time but once
 108 again you have to have teachers that back the plan and want to use it effectively...*but*
 109 *they're just like you guys are old enough you should know right from wrong...kids*
 110 *don't know – maybe if you have a good support system, you know, but I always think*
 111 *of school as a small society...you're going to have people who end up in*
 112 *prison...you're going to have people in the upper echelons...you're going to have*
 113 *middle class...it's all in schools...you can see it now...yep (laughter – both)* What
 114 are some other things that you think impede authentic learning? Do you think it could
 115 be teacher preparation? I don't want to put words in your mouth but I'm trying to give
 116 you some ideas...your public safety instructor...is he experienced?...is he new? *The*
 117 *public safety teacher, he was a police officer before...like for a long time he was a*
 118 *police officer...did SWAT...did canine...all before he became a school teacher...Oh*

119 Wow... and I think that makes it even better...then you have teachers who have been
 120 teaching so long and they say I am only teaching so I can get the benefits and get the
 121 money type thing...it may not be good money but...and then like some teachers just
 122 don't have a heart for kids...and then to know that but to need a teacher but they say
 123 go to a counselor or go to a teacher you can trust to talk to...but we don't have
 124 teachers who are like that...I mean my public safety teacher I could go to him for
 125 anything...anything and I know he'd be there but like some teachers are like I'm only
 126 here just to do this...I don't love my job...Do you think the majority of your teachers
 127 are that way? Yes (emphatic)...they don't have a heart for it...and then like my history
 128 class...the teacher is brand new to teaching and I'm sorry but it is probably the
 129 hardest class just because he reads straight from the PowerPoint...doesn't give his
 130 own opinion on like stuff we are learning and he's not hands on...he'll be ready and
 131 like you look around the class and no one is paying attention...kids in the front row
 132 are sleeping...so that is probably due to the inexperience on his part...um hum...so
 133 he'll probably get better as he gets more experience with the content and starts seeing
 134 things that he can use to engage students...I feel like we're his guinea pigs...we're
 135 just learning from him but its not good and fun learning...some kids are fine with
 136 reading from PowerPoints but some kids want to be active and see...and I think more
 137 students are like that now than just reading from PowerPoints...cause everyone
 138 knows that school's boring...I think teachers need to make it...not fun...but fun for us
 139 to learn...I don't think teachers do that. Do you think school has to be boring? No.
 140 No? Not at all...I think it should be fun for kids to learn...I'd like it to be fun for me to
 141 learn...like some classes, I look forward to going to some classes and then other
 142 classes are like...oh great...I have to go to this class. What about time constraints?
 143 Do you feel like 50 minutes is enough time to get engaged in the topic or do you feel
 144 like once you get going its time to leave? Some classes I wish I didn't have to
 145 leave...it's like last year I had a teacher who had so much knowledge...like he just
 146 spit out things from everywhere and I loved it... as much as I did not like it when I
 147 was taking notes...it was nice to hear a teacher who knew what they were talking
 148 about and when we'd get one thing students was just go with it and then you notice
 149 that its not enough time and then its like we'll pick up tomorrow...but some classes its

150 *fine and then in others the teacher is like Oh look we have 15 minutes left so you guys*
 151 *can do homework...so some teachers...I would not say abuse the amount of time we*
 152 *have but they don't take it full...I think they just go with it...some teachers have*
 153 *things to do like that say they have to send out an e-mail...let me take 10 minutes off*

154
155

156 5. Do you feel students at your school are actively engaged in the learning process?
 157 Why or why not? *In some classes just because some kids think its boring...I*
 158 *mean, I find my math class boring...and the teacher she is like funny as*
 159 *everything because she calls us her little mathematicians and stuff and she is so*
 160 *funny about that but I mean I don't think all kids are looking forward to their*
 161 *classes and want to participate because their teacher isn't engaging with us*

162

163 6. What do you think would actively engage students in the learning process? How
 164 could this be accomplished?

165

166 If teachers had a willingness to help students and want to make their class fun and
 167 help us learn because I think without the teacher support we don't get anything out of it

168

169 7. What would you tell your teachers if you could just tell them face-to-face, this is
 170 what you need to do? Do you ever have a teacher ask that of you? Do you have a
 171 teacher say look, I want to make this engaging, what do I need to do? *Yeah... and*
 172 *they'll be like what kinds of stuff do you guys like to do? Like in environmental*
 173 *science we say we like to do lab so he'll try to do a lab once or twice a week and*
 174 *that's fun and like when he goes over the PowerPoints and stuff he'll be like what*
 175 *else do you think you guys could get from this and he'll kind of like help but then*
 176 *you have some teachers who are like no this is the way I am doing it this is the*
 177 *way I'm sticking to it...and some teachers...I am not sure how they do their tests*
 178 *but some of them just get them from each other or it's a book test so its not like it*
 179 *is anything they have ever said...because some teachers like when they give you*
 180 *notes...some like to add in what they also know and instead of just reading*

181 *straight from the PowerPoint they say other things and I think when they do that I*
 182 *pick up more on what they say and not what the PowerPoint will say...I don't*
 183 *know why but I just do and its never on the test. It's like a little story on the side*
 184 *and that is not on the test but that is what is engaging you...yeah...I don't know*
 185 *why it is but you get to hear their knowledge from them instead of just seeing it off*
 186 *the board... That's an interesting point because I've never thought of that because*
 187 *we all do that ...we all give little asides to help people understand but then we go*
 188 *back to what the curriculum says should be a good test question...I don't think it*
 189 *is and I don' ever think it is...and that is what we end up putting on the test*

190

191 8. Do you feel like what your teachers ask you to do in class will have any benefit
 192 for what you need to do outside of school?

193

194 *Not really...*

195

196 9. Do you think of school as preparation for life or is it more or less to you?

197

198 *I'd love to think of it as preparation for life but I don't think it is just because you see*
 199 *the outside world and you ask your parents what classes did you take when you were*
 200 *growing up and they all say Oh I took classes for what I wanted to graduate in...for*
 201 *what my major was going to be in and stuff...so if you were going to do interior*
 202 *design, I understand they took an art class, they took a design class, they took math*
 203 *so they can know like dimensions and stuff. I'd like it if school was more like that if*
 204 *you could focus on the field you want to be in... and some schools do that...I'd like*
 205 *that – I want to go to a school like that. That's a good idea, you think? Oh yeah... for*
 206 *sure...just because that is what you're interested in...if you're not interested in the*
 207 *Revolutionary War then why are you studying it? When am I going to use the*
 208 *Revolutionary War when I go to a museum? How often am I going to go to a*
 209 *Revolutionary War museum?*

210

211 10. Compared to life outside of school, what thoughts or feelings do you have
212 concerning life inside school? Do you feel that what you are doing in school with
213 your peers has some kind of direct benefit to the community?

214

215 *I don't think so...I don't know how to explain it...I just wish teachers had more*
216 *willingness to help students but like using it outside...I don't see it at all*

217

218 11. What do you think your teachers value about school?

219

220 *Definitely not their students...um, I don't know OK...honestly, I think they just value*
221 *having a job that has benefits and that they get paid and that it is something that they*
222 *were interested in learning so they felt like they should teach it...I think that's it but I*
223 *don't think they are worried about students who do care about the class or don't care*
224 *about the class...they just teach it no matter what...and I don't know...just like I said,*
225 *I wish teachers cared more about their students and how they feel about their class*

226

227 12. How does this compare with what students value about school?

228

229 *I don't think kids are really in it for the education...I mean kids who care about*
230 *sports are in it for the sports...I mean some are who want to go to a top notch school*
231 *and I give all the power to them...but I mean my goal is to at least be successful in*
232 *life...and I don't think everything I learn will benefit me in the long run*

233

234 13. How can a consensus be reached so that teachers and students view schooling
235 with the same worth?

236

237 *I don't know if that will ever happen. I think more students should have a willingness*
238 *to come to school and look forward to coming because a lot of them don't. If they are*
239 *in sports they are willing to come but not everyone is in it for the education.*

240

241 14. So why do young kids love school so much and then it gets lost?

242

243 *Because it is fun...the teacher is like ok we're going to learn math but we're going to*
244 *paint math...they have fun and kid like to have fun...So it's the fun component with*
245 *the learning component...Yes...*

246

247

1 Initial Interview – Cayla

2

3 1. Do you feel your learning has meaning in that you value it and apply the learning
 4 to other situations in your life? *I'd say that some of my learning does...I can*
 5 *see...like when I am watching movies or when I am talking to my parents about*
 6 *different things...and like history, when I think about our country and different*
 7 *things...I think that's important that it relates to you life...I guess that is authentic*
 8 *learning*

9

10 2. How do you define authentic learning? *I would say it is using what you learn...I*
 11 *can't really say just from school because it is really what you learn*
 12 *everywhere...and what you apply to your day-to-day life... So do you see that*
 13 *when you sit in history class that it applies to your daily life? Sometimes...like*
 14 *when we are learning about the Constitution and how that applies today and the*
 15 *decisions that our President's making and how that can affect me in my life...but*
 16 *when I am learning about things like ancient wars where this happened to so and*
 17 *so and it doesn't really have anything to do with me...that doesn't really seem*
 18 *important to me... So I think what I am hearing you say is that for it to be*
 19 *authentic, it needs to apply to you and it needs to be something that will be useful*
 20 *to you and to others...Um...hum... OK*

21

22 3. What are elements that exist in your school that support authentic learning?
 23 (Explain examples) and ask... Do you for example get to be President and have a
 24 House of Representatives and a Senate or do you just hear about it from your
 25 teachers and write it down? *That is pretty much what we normally do...in other*
 26 *classes we do some projects but for the most part it's teacher talks and you have*
 27 *notes and you write down what they say and that's about it...OK... so, Do you*
 28 *see anything that might support authentic learning? Do you see that possibly some*
 29 *teachers do things differently? Are there some teachers that go above and beyond*
 30 *and try to make it more engaging so that you are learning? Sometimes...like, for*

31 *example, lots of times in my chemistry class my teacher relates things to dating*
32 *because things like attract each other...and that sort of relates to high school*
33 *students...and in my language class my teacher really tries to take older works*
34 *and everything and put them in words that we can understand...OK...give me an*
35 *example...like we read...we were studying how to write an essay and we had to*
36 *use a work from the 1800's and it was a father who was writing to his son about*
37 *how he didn't expect him to really succeed and everything but the underlying*
38 *irony was that he did expect him to succeed and she applied that like to today like*
39 *how you can't just go on and go out in the world to get a college degree without*
40 *having your parents behind you...So she related the story to something today that*
41 *you could understand to make it easier to understand a story that was maybe not*
42 *very understandable...right... What about with the structure of the day...do you*
43 *think the structure of the time supports authentic learning? When you have block*
44 *days do you do more activities? Do you feel you can get more in-depth into the*
45 *learning? Sometimes we do...actually block days are my favorite days just*
46 *because I feel I get more things done and on regular days I feel like I am so*
47 *rushed to get notes down (on paper) and everything and...See that's good*
48 *feedback too because that lets us know that you feel learning, possibly, cannot be*
49 *authentic if there is a time crunch (6:49) If you are in a 50 minute period...(I*
50 *explain loss of time – dealing with roll, housekeeping business, etc. – not much*
51 *instructional time)...(agrees)...right, and especially, I feel, in math class that's a*
52 *really big problem because sometimes during the day you're taking notes and*
53 *everything and you understand what you are doing until you get home and you*
54 *have homework and then you get stuck on a problem and you go to class the next*
55 *day and ask the question you don't understand and then half the class has gone by*
56 *on the previous day and then you're already behind...(sighs and gentle*
57 *laughter)...that's another thing...how authentic would you say it to be to work*
58 *math problems?...I don't feel it is very authentic...I mean it probably has some*
59 *kind of importance that you have to learn this kind of math but wouldn't it be*
60 *much more engaging to have it apply to something that is going on right now...in*

61 the world...*um hum*...using that math...that's the kind of thing I am trying to get
 62 at...to find out if that is what students want...

63

64

65 4. What are elements that exist in your school that inhibit or impede authentic
 66 learning? *I'd say the schedule...something else...*do you see anything with the
 67 teachers themselves or with the students...*sometimes I feel like the students*
 68 *around you...like the students who are in my harder classes – they want to learn*
 69 *and engage more so they can fully understand it and remember it for the end of*
 70 *the year test but in some of my on level classes they are like talking and stuff and*
 71 *it is harder for you to get into the class because there are distractions and that*
 72 *kind of thing...*so what classes do you take that are on level vs. your higher level
 73 classes?...*my on level classes are French 4 and advanced algebra and*
 74 *trigonometry*

75

76 5. Do you feel students at your school are actively engaged in the learning process?
 77 Why or why not? Would you say it depends on their placement? ...*and their*
 78 *attitude...no matter who you are if you really want to do well then you will do*
 79 *well and you will be in higher classes and that sort of thing but if you are sort of*
 80 *like “well, whatever” then you are probably not going to be in the higher*
 81 *classes...*Do you think if students were more engaged that they might do better at
 82 that...they might feel better in the class and might want to learn?...*that is what I*
 83 *was sort of thinking...give them confidence to know they can do it so that it is not*
 84 *“oh well, I can't do this so I am not going to do it” but more of a “I can do it so I*
 85 *will do it”...*or if you could experience something outside of working mundane
 86 problems then it might make that knowledge transfer more readily...so you are
 87 saying students are engaged if they have an attitude that is geared toward being
 88 actively engaged ...*or a goal that they need to reach and in order to reach that*
 89 *goal they need to be actively engaged (11:04).* What do you think would actively
 90 engage students that aren't and how could teachers accomplish this? *All I can*
 91 *really think of...for me...projects always helped me get into things because it is*

not just writing it down but it is writing it down and making it pretty and making it the best it can be...and it is something that anyone can achieve because there is a rubric right in front of you that has a list of what you have to have or like you said like acting out the President and the Senate...I would love to do that but I know that in my class that would be impossible because we can never have a day like that but... Why couldn't you have a day like that?... Because (slight laughter...) every day in U.S. History is a crunch to get information in and... Why is that?...because...that it is just how it is...because you have to fit in all the information for the test at the end of the year...Alright, that is what I am trying to hear...so you've got that crunch of the test that you are trying to prepare for...yes...so that is probably another inhibition...yes...to authentic learning...definitely...(I explain how I love teaching anatomy because there is no end of course or AP test)

6. Do you feel that what your teachers ask you to do in class will have any benefit for what you need to know outside of school? If you are ready to go to college or if you are ready to graduate and get a career, do you feel that what you have learned here will benefit you in any way? *I think it would but mainly for college because there are a certain amount of math classes you have to take and a certain amount of sciences but if you are not planning to be a scientist or a doctor then the science classes really don't have any importance to you that much anymore...* So, would you think that it would be beneficial at this age to go into classes that you think would benefit you?...*sometimes I feel like that but people my age say they know what they want to do but people at our age really don't know what we want to do...when it comes down to it people change their majors all the time (14:59) so I mean I know pretty much for a fact I am not going to be a scientist but then again you really never know what could happen so I feel like you should have a basis of everything and it should probably even out at least to get pretty much the basics done*

- 122 7. Do you think of school as preparation for life or is it more or less to you? *In the*
123 *coming to school everyday and having a schedule and having it be from 8 to 3*
124 *sort of gives a feel for the business world and for the regular world from when*
125 *you would work from 9 to 5 or something like that and...so you think it teaches*
126 *you responsibility?...um hum...to be here on time to be where you have to go next*
127 *on time*
128
- 129 8. Do you feel school to be interesting or engaging to you? *Sometimes I don't feel*
130 *like that...lots of times I feel like all the work I am doing at school...it could...how*
131 *do I say this...lots of times most of the stuff is just busy work and sometimes I feel*
132 *I would be better off staying at home and doing it but then I think about my*
133 *teachers and how helpful they really are so then I think and say I can't really do*
134 *that but then I go back and think just staying at home would be beneficial but then*
135 *its all a toss up because it's a complete mix of my classes...like I feel for my US*
136 *History class if I stayed home I could get so much work done but that is just for*
137 *that class...if I were in a regular class then I wouldn't be able to do that because I*
138 *would not have a portfolio and all the work that I have to do just to get it done*
139 *and turn it in...I would actually have to learn it instead of just knowing it...So*
140 *what is this portfolio?...because the AP tests are so hard and they are geared to*
141 *be hard, they don't expect people to pass them so if you get a 50 on the test, that's*
142 *like getting a 5 on the AP test or if you get a 40 it's like getting a 4...but my*
143 *teacher feels it's not fair to inflate the grades or anything so if you got a 50 which*
144 *is a really good score to get it wouldn't be fair to raise the grade to a 100 so he*
145 *gives us a portfolio of all this work that needs to be done by a certain time and on*
146 *top of the portfolio he gives us homework that is due about every day...and the*
147 *portfolio has a lot of work in it but it has really helped me with scheduling my*
148 *time and everything but its hard to get all that done on top of my math homework*
149 *on top of my French homework...and learning French and learning all this other*
150 *stuff that goes along with it...So do you feel the portfolio is not truly*
151 *authentic?...no...I mean I learn it but it is not anything I would want to learn...So*

152 it is not anything that you feel you are going to use (out here – gesture
 153 outside)...*right*...

154

155 9. Compared to life inside school what thoughts or feelings do you have concerning
 156 life outside of school? (I clarify what Dewey says about connection between
 157 community and school...)...Do you see a mirror between the two?...*no...outside*
 158 *of school there's no...I mean there is still pressure to get things done but it is*
 159 *different kinds of pressure not things that can affect you later...I think I am*
 160 *getting off track...inside school it is all structured...like you will go*
 161 *here...here...here...but outside, at least for me right now...I wake up and do*
 162 *whatever and then I know I have to be here by this time but can do whatever in*
 163 *between and that's about it...so not so much structure outside of*
 164 *school...right...so I think what I am hearing you say is that it might be a better*
 165 *life inside of school if you had more fluidity to move from one place to another,*
 166 *as needed...yes...*

167

168 10. What do you feel your teachers value about school? *I'd say sharing what they*
 169 *know with their students and helping them to succeed...Do you think they have a*
 170 *genuine love for learning?...I feel like some of them do and others...not*
 171 *really...they are just there and they are going to teach you and that's it...they are*
 172 *not "ok, I am here and I will help you if you need help with anything...like they*
 173 *are I want you to learn not just learn"*

174

175 11. How does this compare with what students value about school? *I feel like the*
 176 *teachers that are more...I hate to say motherly (nurturing?)...but...cause not all*
 177 *of them are women and mostly women are motherly...but...I feel like I learn the*
 178 *best from them because I feel like they care about me...and as they care about me*
 179 *I want to show them that I can learn it and I can succeed...cause I am one of*
 180 *those people who likes to please others...Do you think students value that – do*
 181 *you think the caring of the teachers is what makes them come each day to school?*
 182 *What do you think drives your friends to come to school every day? What do they*

183 value and why do they want to be here? *For most of them they want to be here for*
 184 *friendships and stuff...I hear lots of people like over breaks and stuff say "I want*
 185 *to go back to school" but they don't really want to go back to school...it's like*
 186 *they want to go back to see their friends and stuff but not really go back to the*
 187 *structure and the learning and stuff...sitting in class and taking notes – cause that*
 188 *really does not sound all that appealing when you think about it...sometimes*
 189 *though after summer break I really want to get back to learning stuff but then*
 190 *after the first month I remember –oh yeah- this is why I wanted summer so much*

191

192 12. How do you think a consensus could be reached so that teachers and students
 193 view schooling with the same worth? Do you think there is a way to engage
 194 students to want to love to learn? *There might be...(long pause)...* What would
 195 make you want to come here every day and learn? *If I was...I don't know that is*
 196 *not right...(I explain my point of view concerning the bright-eyed student and the*
 197 *one with the head on the desk)...How can I get that kid that zones me out to want*
 198 *to love to learn? I don't know because when I am sitting there listening and the*
 199 *student you were just describing and I look over and see him or her and think how*
 200 *can you just sit there – even if you don't want to learn – how could you not care*
 201 *about the grade you are receiving...but to get them to want to learn is a*
 202 *completely different thing...Do you have any friends that way?...not really...I*
 203 *mean I have a couple of acquaintances that are like that and...What do you think*
 204 *it is?...All I can think of is the culture...like this one girl in my freshman science*
 205 *class...she was really smart and she could have had a really good grade in that*
 206 *class but every day she was obsessed with the Jonas Brothers...and she would sit*
 207 *there are listen to her IPOD and write down songs...and then lots of people like*
 208 *you were describing...like with their head down...most of the time you see them*
 209 *with an earpiece in their ear or a game out playing...actually, that might be a*
 210 *good way...to incorporate those things into learning*

211

212

1 Initial Interview – David

2

3 1. Do you feel your learning has meaning and that you value it and apply the
 4 learning to other situations in your life? *Um...like yeah of course, I think so...like*
 5 *do you mean... what do you mean?* Learning should have meaning and should
 6 transfer outside of school. Do you see that here? *In some things...like for instance*
 7 *math, we need it but there's things like syllogisms and stuff like if...then...there's*
 8 *a lot of stuff I think you really don't need in life at all...whatsoever...unless you*
 9 *want to focus on something specific that...you know...after you go through the*
 10 *regular school...and you want to focus on that then you should see those*
 11 *things...but those are things that I think make no sense...the one subject that I*
 12 *think that really applies to life is science because its like really important to know*
 13 *what the world's made out of and what it's all about...you know? and also*
 14 *language arts because it's communication with the world and you can express*
 15 *your feelings and write and obviously it really helps you when you're going to get*
 16 *a job and you're interviewing and you have to write but there are some things like*
 17 *sometimes the teachers don't really care sometimes and they just give you*
 18 *bookwork and that's when I think it's horrible...not because I am lazy to do the*
 19 *bookwork but you're just reading and there are so many people who have so*
 20 *much trouble reading and sometimes they won't say it...like sometimes I don't*
 21 *understand things and because the teacher's always so stressed and busy like I'm*
 22 *feel like...I'm not going to ask because it'll like disturb that person and I'd never*
 23 *end up understanding what I'm doing like it has no meaning to it at all...but when*
 24 *the teacher actually explains why we're learning this and kind of like lectures*
 25 *more than just doing busy work...then it's awesome...So do you think when the*
 26 *teacher assigns bookwork that it's a moment for her to catch her breath so she just*
 27 *says here, do these questions in the book, I need a moment to do my thing?...it*
 28 *depends because like a mean obviously you need to do bookwork sometimes but I*
 29 *have had teachers that that's all they do...like obviously you need to do some*
 30 *bookwork for certain things like for answering questions then the teacher checks*

31 *it and then goes over it but I have had teachers say just do the bookwork and*
 32 *that's all you have to do today...you do it, you keep it, you never hear about it*
 33 *again...so I don't think its helping you in any way... So you're thinking...what's*
 34 *the purpose?...yeah...it's a waste of time and I don't know but actually here at my*
 35 *school like I think it's awesome like I think every teacher really communicates*
 36 *except maybe like in math...math is easy for me but when I do have trouble I can't*
 37 *ever get the help because there are so many students and the teacher is always so*
 38 *busy that she can really never find time for you to come in and when you ask her*
 39 *to come in on one of her days like after school or before school, she's always*
 40 *booked...like she's like I'm already full...I'm already full and it's just it's too fast*
 41 *moving...and like the stuff I saw last year I have not seen at all this year and I'm*
 42 *about to graduate next year and I don't see the point of why we have to learn like*
 43 *certain equations, you know...like, they just don't make any sense and I'm like*
 44 *why are we doing that and I think they should focus more on...I don't know how*
 45 *to say this...maybe...like the things you need in life...like the math you're going to*
 46 *use when you are older...like if they did a survey of all the jobs you could possibly*
 47 *have and find out what math is the most important math that people need...and*
 48 *then there are students that ask like why are we learning this and she will say to*
 49 *develop your brain and to get it working...and I get that but can't we do that with*
 50 *the things we're going to need rather than with the things we won't need?...like to*
 51 *focus on what we need in life...like you are saying what mirrors life...none of the*
 52 *stuff I have ever done in school in math have I ever used in my*
 53 *life...never...ever...like common math that I can do in 4th grade is the stuff I am*
 54 *doing now in my life and I'm thinking unless I want to be like some accountant or*
 55 *something that has to do with math then I am going to need it but...I know I need*
 56 *the basics like percentages and stuff like that but I don't think I'm going to need*
 57 *to find x over y...all those things like I don't think I'm going to need that...I don't*
 58 *think I'm ever going to be seeing algebra again except the simple stuff... You said*
 59 *earlier a word...I remember the word but I cannot remember the term...a*
 60 *sylllogism...is that a math term? Yes...and it's also...I heard...logic...math and*
 61 *geometry that's all we've been doing...we've been doing syllogisms...like if it*

does not thunder then we will play a game...and then at the same time...So, it's
 almost the form of a hypothesis... it is...it's like 2 parts to the
 syllogism...hypothesis and prediction, I think? I'm not sure...but its just like this
 is a perfect example of this...perfect...we started out in school and we started
 doing that...like syllogisms for 2 weeks and she went over that like really strong I
 day and then at the end of the day she was like we have a project...syllogism
 project...you have to write at least 10 and no more than 20 syllogisms put them
 on poster board and like construction paper and decorate it and blah, blah, blah
 and she said just by doing the sentences, you get a 70 already... and I came to
 turn that in...I think that was on Tuesday and we got that like 3 weeks ago...I
 literally like did that in like 20 minutes and got an A and we had like 2 ½ weeks to
 do it...and then we never saw it again...I did it faster than some of the homework
 I get in that class...that was a summative grade so I didn't get it...I was like OK
 are you just giving us stuff to fill in for a project so you can say you've done the
 project...and it's not like it's the teacher...it's the whole math
 department...because she said this is a whole math/geometry project that
 everybody has to do and its things that are the simplest things...like you had to do
 this...if a butterfly lands on my car then my room will be destroyed that's the title
 of it and then it's like if the butterfly lands on my car then the alarm will go off...if
 the alarm goes off then the worker will get scared...if the worker gets scared then
 he's going to drop the weight...if he drops the weight then the car...you
 know?... Yeah...it's like the domino effect...exactly...that is what I was looking to
 say...and I mean, that's cool if it's required for the state for her to do that then
 let's do it but it's so simple that I am not sure why we had to spend so much time
 and then like give us a project and then we didn't see it again after that day...I
 didn't see the point of that like what was the point of that...I don't get it and I
 don't think that reflects life whatsoever cause that really is common sense

2. How would you define authentic learning? Describe a situation that you see in school that is authentic or one that you would want to see. *Stuff like the culinary*

93 *arts...I think the electives are very authentic learning because it is stuff that*
94 *actually does reflect on your life like...I have a class...psychology... and that*
95 *class right now is awesome because I'm starting to understand that's why my*
96 *little sister did this when she was that age...like you understand things and you*
97 *apply them in your life...I don't think I've ever...since we started school...like we*
98 *took a test...but usually he lectures us and gets it in our head and we do activities*
99 *and like understand what he's talking about...he cares and he makes sure your*
100 *learning...when someone makes sure you're learning and that you're getting the*
101 *point and you talk about it as a class and you know he asks questions then tests*
102 *you and you know whether you got it or not...and subjects like psychology you*
103 *can apply to your like because psychology is the study of the brain and the study*
104 *of emotions and why we do this and why we do that and that explained to me why*
105 *my sister's going through that and why I went through that 2 years ago...and like*
106 *Pavlov's dog theory...like every time he rang a bell and he made a habit out of it*
107 *and the dog would start spitting and salivating and then every time he rang the*
108 *bell the dog would start salivating even if he didn't feed the food...and so that*
109 *kind of taught me that if I want to set my mind to do something then I better make*
110 *it a habit and then if I do that every day then I'm going to be able to accomplish*
111 *what I want to accomplish... Oh, that's a good way of looking at it (14:14)...so*
112 *like stuff like that...when I learn that it kind of like inspired me to go home...and*
113 *for example, if I'm lazy about like flossing every night then I'm going to start*
114 *doing it every night...and then I know in about 2 weeks it won't be annoying to me*
115 *any more because that's why I don't do it...it's annoying...it takes too long...it*
116 *hurts...I just don't want to so then I thought after learning from psychology that I*
117 *would make a habit out of it...then it would just be a habit and you won't think*
118 *about it you'll just do it...so that is how I am relating psychology to my life... OK.*
119 *(15:16)...and stuff like math, don't get me wrong, I'm talking bad about math but*
120 *I have a good grade in math...I think math is pretty easy I just think its*
121 *pointless...another thing Dewey says about authentic learning is that it should*
122 *have application outside of the school walls and within the community...so*
123 *whatever you are doing in schools should have some direct benefit to the*

124 community...do you see anything like that in the school? *Are you asking me like*
 125 *about electives because I can find benefit in the community with electives...like*
 126 *culinary arts...you learn sanitation...you learn how not to give someone food*
 127 *poisoning...but you don't see it with the academic classes...any kind of*
 128 *connection with the community?...science...How do you see it with science? I*
 129 *mean do the kids go out and do something to benefit the community? no...I don't*
 130 *think so...I can see the importance of learning science especially if you plan on a*
 131 *career in science...like if you want to work in a nuclear plant so you won't make*
 132 *the mistakes that some of the scientists made...like history, same thing...like we*
 133 *learn about for example the holocaust...that way that won't ever happen again*
 134 *and you should apply that to life...I think there are people who are ignorant and*
 135 *don't...I see that in World History...we learn about the big important people and*
 136 *what they did to get where they are...but in school...no...the only way you are*
 137 *mimicking life is by the social interactions...I think mixed schools...schools with*
 138 *boys and girls are really important...because, for example in Columbia...I used to*
 139 *go to school there and its just boys or its just girls and I think if its just boys you*
 140 *have a hard time interacting and knowing how to treat the other...like my cousin*
 141 *who came over here from Columbia...he made really good friends with the boys*
 142 *but he didn't know how to treat the girls*

143

144 3. Do you see any elements here in this school that support authentic learning? You
 145 were talking about culinary arts so would you say the electives support authentic
 146 learning? *Yeah...because the electives are something you want to do and you want*
 147 *to do them for a reason...I think with electives you can apply what you are*
 148 *learning at school to things you do at home...How about with clubs or other*
 149 *activities...do you see any community involvement that way? I've never really*
 150 *been in a club*

151

152 4. Do you see anything in this school that inhibits or impedes authentic learning? Do
 153 you see anything with any of the teachers or the time structures or anything like
 154 that that makes authentic learning not happen? You talked about teachers

155 assigning bookwork and not really making it a good learning experience...is there
 156 anything else like that you could talk about? *Perhaps something that has really,*
 157 *really, really helped me in high school is that some of my teachers are really*
 158 *friendly...like, I want to be able to go to a teacher and talk to them...like, for*
 159 *example, the teachers I had last year there are about 3 that I still talk to and I still*
 160 *go into their classrooms and talk to them and tell them like this is what's up and I*
 161 *can even talk to them about my life problems...I think if you have teachers who*
 162 *care about you and want to make sure you are understanding the material then*
 163 *when you come in for extra help and stuff you are building a relationship with*
 164 *your teachers...I think that's really important because then you are comfortable*
 165 *telling them what you don't understand or what you don't like...like my*
 166 *psychology teacher tells us tell me the things you guys want to do...if you don't*
 167 *like powerpoints then let us know...he is really friendly so like if I don't get*
 168 *something, I'll be like, coach, I'm not getting this at all... and he'll be*
 169 *like...ok...then he explains it better but I have other teachers who are always*
 170 *stressed out and they are like always looking at the clock and they are always*
 171 *wanting to leave...they are like its 3:30 come on we're almost done... that is one*
 172 *thing I did...I took my clock off my wall so the students couldn't look at it and I*
 173 *couldn't look at it...I told them we did not need to be controlled by time... and*
 174 *that's another thing...do you feel that time inhibits authentic learning?...if you*
 175 *are focused on the darn clock on the wall you are focused on time and you just*
 176 *want to get out of here ...yeah*

177

178 5. Do you feel students here are actively engaged in the learning process? Like your
 179 peers, do you think they are actively engaged in learning? *Not so much...I have*
 180 *some friends who don't give a crap and they just want to go home. Why do you*
 181 *think that is?...I can tell you exactly why because my ex-girlfriend is one of those*
 182 *people...I was with her for about 10 ½ months and something that killed me was*
 183 *that she was so lazy...she didn't like teachers yelling at her...one time when she*
 184 *got in an argument with a teacher the teacher yelled at her and she would go*
 185 *home...she'd go tell the nurse I threw up and need to go home...like it would ruin*

186 *her day or like for example she would really complain that this teacher all he*
187 *does is give us book work and I'm not looking forward to US History because all*
188 *we do is take notes, and notes and notes and more notes...and like she would ask*
189 *why do I need to know where the first shot was fired and it all stresses her out and*
190 *then she gets a failing grade and doesn't do anything about it and she is one of*
191 *those who will not go up to her teacher...I am...I am going to go up to my teacher*
192 *and be like I don't get this at all and I'm not going into this test unprepared and*
193 *there's a lot of people who don't have what it takes to go up to the teacher and be*
194 *like I need help cause I don't get this...and sometimes the teacher can't help*
195 *because obviously there are all types of learning...people that are auditory*
196 *learners...people who need to write or they are not going to get it...people that*
197 *need to discuss it and repeat it...people who need to read it...You think teachers*
198 *need to be sensitive to that?...yes...I think teachers need to be more of a friend*
199 *than just an instructor...yeah you have to be an instructor but you need somebody*
200 *there that cares about you as well...like if you go in there and you sleep, the*
201 *teacher gets on to you...there like don't sleep in my class and look I need to get*
202 *you ready for the SAT...it almost feels like some teachers are making us do this*
203 *to...they say the only reason I am making you do this is because at the end of the*
204 *semester you are going to take a test and that test is going to reflect if I taught you*
205 *or not so if you guys fail that then that means I didn't do my job...so I'm going to*
206 *do what it takes to get you guys to pass that...and I think, yeah, you're getting*
207 *your job done but is the student really getting it like don't you care...not to talk*
208 *bad about my math teacher, I mean I like her and all but there is no connection*
209 *with her whatsoever...she is just talking and making us do work and writing...and*
210 *if you have a question...she is like after class Joe...after class ...not right*
211 *now...and I love teachers who are like please ask me questions...I want to know*
212 *what you don't get...so then I'm like...ok...I like it when they care...like I like*
213 *being able to raise my hand and them say ok what's up what do you need help*
214 *with but when they are like we just went over that you should have got it...I'm*
215 *like...hello...I'm not everybody else...and not everyone gets it...if everyone got it*
216 *then everyone would make 100's...but people don't...there are people who have*

217 60's...and people with 20's and then those with 98's...that has nothing to do with
 218 school that has to do with your home...She is thinking just because she taught it
 219 that everyone got it...yeah...and that's not how it is...

220

221 6. What do you think would engage students in the learning process? How could that
 222 be accomplished? *I think teachers should ask students what they want to do like I*
 223 *have several teachers who ask do you want to play a game to study for the test or*
 224 *would you rather study with each other...how do you guys learn?...being able to*
 225 *communicate...being able to feel that it is ok to ask a question or its ok if you*
 226 *don't like this...its ok because every body needs opinions about how they are*
 227 *doing things...because I have teachers who don't care...whether you like it or*
 228 *don't you are going to do it...if you're not going to do it then you're going to fail*
 229 *the class and people like me who don't want to fail the class end up doing it even*
 230 *though I don't want to...I have to do it...and even though I get a 100 on it, it may*
 231 *just be memorization not that I understand it...and then there are people like my*
 232 *girlfriend who give up on it and don't get help...because you have clearly said*
 233 *you are not going to change...alright...I hate going home and having to read a*
 234 *book for 45 minutes and answer questions on it...I think communication is the*
 235 *most important thing (33:06)*

236

237 7. Do you think what you are learning in school will apply to what you need to know
 238 outside of school? *...I can promise you...I think 80 % of what I am learning in*
 239 *school right now will not be used when I am older and I can also promise*
 240 *you...my mom is an awesome lady but she can't help me in math...she saw those*
 241 *things when she was younger but she doesn't remember those things now...we can*
 242 *talk about history and reading is awesome...I think it really helps you in life and*
 243 *helps you see other people's perspectives...like, I'll read a book and if I love it I'll*
 244 *read it in 2 days...I read Aragon in 2 days...it was awesome...like it kind of made*
 245 *me see things in a different way and it made me happy...something I read last*
 246 *year that honestly out of my whole career in life...the thing that I have gotten the*
 247 *most out of and applied to life was in American Literature and it was the book*

248 *The Last Lecture...I think since reading that book I have applied to life and my*
 249 *every day life (tells me about the book) ...I think if they are going to give you*
 250 *something to learn in school they should at least explain why you are learning*
 251 *it...but when they don't tell you anything and its just numbers and letters and*
 252 *variables and I don't even know why...I just don't get it...*

253

254 8. Do you find school interesting or engaging? Sometimes...for example, when I
 255 have my tennis season it is better cause I am looking forward to after school
 256 because I get to play tennis with my coach and with my peers. What about in your
 257 classes? Do you have good, meaningful learning experiences or is it all just fairly
 258 boring? Some classes are good...especially when you are learning about things
 259 that you want to learn and it is not so boring...and every body gets to say their
 260 choices...when you are doing things that you like or that you enjoy you can learn
 261 so much more from that but when a teacher is just standing there and making you
 262 copy notes...it's boring...why would you want to learn that...I just want to put my
 263 head down and fall asleep. Why do you think though that when we try to do
 264 activities some kids say that's just stupid why are we doing that? We'll try to
 265 make it interesting...like let me give you an example, I teach anatomy and we are
 266 going over the tissue types...how boring is that...so I have the students act out the
 267 tissue types and become the cells that are involved in the tissue type...I think it
 268 does help and some people just don't want to act stupid and say that it doesn't
 269 help but it really does...because in schools there are the popular people, the
 270 jocks, the people that are quiet and in their own little world...you know, there are
 271 all different kinds of people and I think that affects...like say there is this kid who
 272 really cares about what his friends say...that one of his friends says you know I
 273 really hate what Mrs. Perry is making us do...like, I don't want to go up there and
 274 get in a little cube and although I may think it is cool and I get it I may act like it
 275 is so stupid or so dumb...but if I say I like it then others may say WHAT how do
 276 you think that is awesome and I feel pressured to act a certain way...it does work
 277 and it does help...OK...Like in math the math song negative b negative b plus or
 278 minus square root...you know... people complain about it and people hate it but

279 *when it comes test time you can hear people humming it...there are people who*
 280 *complain and people who say this sucks but either way they are going to get*
 281 *it...So that connection with the teacher and being silly helps....yeah and we are*
 282 *human and need time to be silly and not be so serious all the time...and then if I*
 283 *still don't get it I would go up to the teacher and say you know that whole music*
 284 *thing...I still don't get it and she would be like ok Joe well let's do this...write the*
 285 *formula 20 times and then I'll be like ok I'll do that and then I'll go home and I'll*
 286 *be like wow I got it (45:31)...but if you tell that to like someone else, they'll say I*
 287 *don't want to write that 20 times I'd rather sing a song...but then they don't want*
 288 *to say that*

289

290 9. What do you think your teachers value about school? Why are they here? *I think*
 291 *some teachers are here because they actually care...for example...Mrs.*
 292 *Wilson...She talks about her old job when she was a chemist...seems like she had*
 293 *a better job then than now...personally I would not like to come to school and*
 294 *work with students... a lot of people are disrespectful...but Mrs. Wilson, she*
 295 *cares...and like I know she cares...I know for a fact that she cares...because she*
 296 *goes around when she gives us an activity...she doesn't sit at her desk or stay on*
 297 *her computer...she literally stands up the whole time we are doing the worksheet*
 298 *and goes around every single table to every single student asking do you get*
 299 *this?...show me what you don't get...let me see it...this is wrong, do you know*
 300 *why it's wrong...no...this is why it is wrong, you've got to do this...then she'll do*
 301 *it again...and I think she cares and I know she has had a lot of jobs and they seem*
 302 *more interesting but she is like now I want to make the people who are going to*
 303 *make this country...better...make them better people...she is one of those people*
 304 *who will give us life lessons...she will stop teaching science and tell us life stories*
 305 *and she will tell us about her life...she doesn't go into detail about her personal*
 306 *life but she tells us about her experiences...you can tell she cares... and I think*
 307 *there are teachers here who want to make it a better world in a few years. What*
 308 *about the others? I think there are some that just need a job...there are some that*
 309 *that is all they know how to do...teach...and if they are tired of teaching then they*

310 *need to stop...and it's like they don't really care and they just*
 311 *say...detention...they just want to get the day over with...the teacher that watches*
 312 *the clock every 5 minutes...they don't care...and I think it is really important that*
 313 *when a teacher teaches that it is because she loves teaching...but some don't*
 314 *know what to do with their lives so they teach.*

315

316 10. What do you think students value about school? *I think sports... and I think*
 317 *friends...and good grades are awesome...when you get a good grade you get*
 318 *motivated...and everyone is happy...Do you think anybody values learning just*
 319 *for the sheer sake of learning? Yeah...I think there are some people that do but*
 320 *only with things like culinary arts...I used to go to Alpharetta High School and I*
 321 *would get home and be so stressed I'd have to go lay down for 1 ½ hours before I*
 322 *could do anything else but at West...teachers are more of your friends...so you*
 323 *don't feel the stress of "you're gonna fail" ...or you're not going to be able to*
 324 *graduate...it's like I may say I am kind of stuck on this but my teacher promises*
 325 *me that she is going to help me...because the point of school is not whether you*
 326 *are smart or whether you are not...they are trying to get you to understand what*
 327 *they are trying to teach you and there should be a reason for it...not just for the*
 328 *heck of it...and I want to be able to go home and be like mom I learned this...and*
 329 *I do that in things like culinary arts...but I have never gone home and be like*
 330 *mom, guess what I learned in math today...I do value psychology because I look*
 331 *at my friends and try to analyze them but I don't go home and talk to my family*
 332 *about math.*

333

334

1 Initial Interview – Eve

2

3 1. Do you feel your learning has meaning and that you apply the learning to other
4 situations in your life?

5 Yes

6

7 2. Tell me how so?

8 Like...math... when you're learning how to do like $2 + 2$ in elementary school
9 you are learning to apply to your life at home. Or for your parents...to learn how to do a
10 budget and things like that...or you need English to write a paper in order to get a job.
11 Basically you need an education for life.

12

13 3. How would you as a student define authentic learning?

14 Things you learn at school you apply outside of school...like in your social life,
15 your home, your environment, and your community

16

17 4. What are elements that exist in your school that support authentic learning? What
18 do you feel is going on at your school that will help support your definition of
19 what you say constitutes authentic learning?

20 Basically, in every subject I see something that I can apply outside and at home. I
21 can see how science lab supports what I am doing at home. If I want to know why it
22 turned solid or why it turned liquid I can use what I have learned in science. Or in history
23 when you express your political view or how you see things such as how the government
24 is the way it is...

25

26 5. *What are elements that exist in your school that inhibit or impede authentic*
27 *learning? Do you see anything in your school that is in character against*
28 *authentic learning?*

29 It may be that you don't apply your learning right now but later on in life you will
30 apply it.

31

32 6. *Tell me a little bit more about what you just said that you may not apply it today*
 33 *but you see a future benefit?*

34 Yes, Yes...

35

36 *OK so you see a future benefit down the road when you will eventually go get a*
 37 *job..*

38 Yes...

39

40 7. *Do you feel as if it is directly applicable to your life right now?*

41 Some people might not see but some people might...*OK...but the more you are*
 42 *growing the more you see that it has an affect on you...So it takes a little growth and*
 43 *maturity, you think, to see the value of learning... Yes...Some people that are mature at a*
 44 *young age will see it, some that are not mature as a teenager will not see it, but in their*
 45 *adult life they will see it*

46

47 8. *Do you feel students at your school are actively engaged in the learning process?*

48 I would say yes... the one's I am friends with are into school and really care about
 49 their school. Some of them are not. *Some of them are not that are in some of your*
 50 *classes? Yes...not that much but you will find some. OK Can you tell me a little bit more*
 51 *about that? Such as, how do you see students actively engaged in their learning? They*
 52 *want to know...they are always asking questions...always being curious...they will go*
 53 *above and beyond. You can see by their actions if they are engaged in school...if they*
 54 *ask questions or are always being curious...and doing a lot of research...So extra*
 55 *research beyond what is called for in the classroom? Yes. And they apply what they are*
 56 *learning. So they apply what they are learning to a life situation. Some of them yes but*
 57 *most of them apply what they learn to the classroom. Some will apply what they are*
 58 *learning outside of the classroom but most are applying to their school life.*

59

60 9. *What do you think would actively engage students in the learning process? What*
 61 *about the students that you told me are not so actively engaged – what do you*
 62 *think would engage them in the process of learning?*

63 Probably if it is something they are really passionate about...*OK...So you think it*
 64 *would take students being passionate about a subject?* I think it is good for the teacher to
 65 learn about the students' personality and how the student learns...if they learn by
 66 experimentation or other ways...I think it is important to talk to the student to see their
 67 point of view and try to collaborate with them...*OK...and develop a better way for them*
 68 *to learn...So the teacher and the student should develop a partnership... Yes... So that*
 69 *you are talking to that student and finding out what they are interested in... Yes... and*
 70 *then try to build within the curriculum what would interest that student... Yes...Do you*
 71 *find that your teachers do that? Yes. OK. Your teachers have asked you what your*
 72 *interests are and then they build the curriculum to meet your interests? Yes...Yes...*

73

74 10. *Do you feel as if what your teachers ask you to do in class will have any benefit*
 75 *for what you need to know outside of school? Yes*

76

77 11. *Do you think of school as preparation for life or is it more or less to you?* I think
 78 it is more. *OK. How do you consider it more?* Like when you are comparing a
 79 person who has an education and a person that is an (?) you can see the
 80 difference. A person who has an education will not act the same way as a person
 81 who does not have an education and their ideas...their point of view...different.
 82 When people go to school and get an education it is better for their country... they
 83 see above and beyond...they see more for the country...they see better. When you
 84 have a country that is uneducated...it is not working...you have a lot of troubles.
 85 *OK. So you are really seeing the big picture on this...You are seeing above*
 86 *yourself...You're seeing that your education is going to benefit your nation. Yes*
 87 *and there is influence from generation to generation that influences others to go to*
 88 *school. OK*

89

90 12. *Is school interesting or engaging to you? Why or why not?* Yes...I feel like the
 91 more education you can get the more you can better your life...*Do you feel it is*
 92 *challenging enough?* It can be...It can be...OK... *What sort of classes do you have*
 93 *– do you have AP classes?* No...not yet...OK *So it is challenging to you? You feel*
 94 *as if the teachers are equipping you with what you need to be successful?*
 95 Yes...OK...

96
 97 13. *Compared to life outside of school – what thoughts or feelings do you have*
 98 *concerning your life inside of school?* Life inside school – what do you mean?
 99 OK. *Think about your life outside of school...what do you find to be of greatest*
 100 *importance and then think about life inside school...what are some thoughts or*
 101 *feelings you have concerning life inside of school?* I think it is different. I think
 102 other kids are getting an education at their house but it could be different from
 103 mine. Sometimes they are good and sometimes they are bad but sometimes you
 104 find good and apply it to yourself.

105
 106 14. *What do you feel your teachers value about school?* Everything. *Do you think*
 107 *they value preparing students for the nation as a whole?* Yes... or if not for their
 108 nation I think they value preparing students for the next generation and to
 109 influence people to do right.

110
 111 15. *How does this compare with what students value about school?* It depends. Some
 112 students value school and others do not value it as a good thing. *It depends on the*
 113 *type of person? Do you think it depends on their upbringing or do you more think*
 114 *it depends on the influences they have within the school?* Yes...It depends on the
 115 influence they have with the people around them or it might depend on their
 116 personality. Like laziness...if people are lazy they feel they should not have to do
 117 their work. *Do you see a lot of laziness in the classroom?* We could have laziness
 118 but the teachers are always encouraging us not to be lazy and with the
 119 encouragement of teachers...a lot of students...they are not lazy

120

121 16. *How can a consensus be reached so that teachers and students view schooling*
122 *with the same worth?* I think you should include parents, also. I think the teacher
123 is doing the best that he or she can do but you have to have the support of the
124 parent as well. *So you think there needs to be collaboration between the teacher,*
125 *student, and the parent and to have the parent be involved with what is going on*
126 *inside the school?* Yes...
127

128

1 Initial Interview – Hunter

2

3 1. Do you feel your learning has meaning in that you apply the learning to other
 4 situations in your life? *I do...me personally, especially, I do think that life inside*
 5 *of school should be that way and I do treat it that way but I do not think other*
 6 *students treat it that way...I would say most students probably don't...that's just*
 7 *my opinion....So you are feeling most students don't value it? I don't... Why would*
 8 *you say that?... the way when they come to school, they have what we call*
 9 *cliques...they get in their groups and they try to act that it is all about them but*
 10 *when they get outside of the school area, it's totally different...I've been with*
 11 *students like that...they go somewhere else and they act totally different...a little*
 12 *bit more mature...in school they feel like they can do anything...I am not sure why*
 13 *that is...even in the classroom, when the teacher is talking, they will interrupt..*

14

15

16 2. How would you define authentic learning? *Probably learning that has meaning*
 17 *for what you are going to do afterwards...*

18

19 3. What are elements that exist here at your school that support authentic learning?
 20 *Most of the teachers really try to make the environment the best for the students to*
 21 *direct themselves toward the future...pretty much all the administration and*
 22 *everybody...they support that*

23

24 4. Do you feel the tasks that you do in the classroom will benefit you for the future?
 25 *Um hum...definitely. OK...give me some examples of that...like um say*
 26 *geometry...I take geometry...we do some projects sometimes that would be real*
 27 *life situations that we would actually use what we learn in that class for real life*
 28 *situations...even algebra last year...we had a few project that had to do with*
 29 *trying to figure out college and tuition and all these different aspects to*
 30 *college...so it is some of the time that you feel you are doing projects that would*

31 have some benefit to you in the future...*Oh...I think everything indirectly benefits*
 32 *but some things directly benefit...Tell me any elements you see that inhibit or*
 33 *impede authentic learning...most of the student life impedes authentic*
 34 *learning...you have some students that go into AP or advanced classes...they're*
 35 *there because they want to learn...teachers recommend these students because*
 36 *they know they want to...these other students...they interfere with that and they*
 37 *impede that process so they do not go into these classes and they're the major*
 38 *contributing factor...the students that really don't care...*

39

40 5. Do you feel that students as a whole at your school are actively engaged in the
 41 learning process? *No...not as a whole...Why...well I wish I could tell you but I*
 42 *am not in their minds but as I see it they don't care...they just talk about what*
 43 *they want to talk about...they don't even pay attention to the teacher and half the*
 44 *time the teacher really can't do anything about it so...I don't think the students*
 45 *realize what is in the future for them...I don't think they realize if they do well on*
 46 *this test and this test and this test then they are going to get into this college...I*
 47 *don't think they realize what's ahead...they are not looking down the road...they*
 48 *are looking at right now*

49

50 6. What do you think would actively engage students in the learning process? *I*
 51 *honestly don't think you can change a students' mind...my parents have tried over*
 52 *and over again to try to get me to do things I don't want to do but if I don't want*
 53 *to do it...then I'll admit...I am not going to do it...it's the way I am it's the way*
 54 *most students are...they are not going to do it and you are not going to change*
 55 *their mind...no matter what you do...I don't care if you throw them out of the*
 56 *house...Do you think students find the task either so difficult or so unengaging*
 57 *that they shut down? I don't think they find it difficult...definitely not*
 58 *difficult...because when you look at the regular classes, they are actually based*
 59 *on the lower standards...the lowest possible standard those classes are based*
 60 *on...so I don't think it has to do with difficulty...I think my generation...we are*
 61 *lazy...we shut down because we simply just don't want to do it. Most students just*

62 *don't listen because they don't care...they haven't learned it because they are not*
 63 *listening...not because it's too hard...*

64

65 7. How do we reach those students who are totally turned off to school or have shut
 66 down? What is being done incorrectly? Is it a teacher problem? Is it a student
 67 problem? Is it a both problem? *Well some students, no matter what you do...are*
 68 *not going to respond to anything but most students will respond to something...so*
 69 *if you take this and this works for most students but these other students won't do*
 70 *it and these kids who are doing it will look at these other kids and say, well they*
 71 *don't care so why should we so it kind of goes up and down, I think...the school*
 72 *tries to do something that makes the students engaged and then there is this small*
 73 *crowd that doesn't care either way so it starts going back down again but...I do*
 74 *not think it is a teaching problem... I think it is more of a student problem*

75

76 8. Do you feel that what your teachers ask you to do in class will have any benefit
 77 for what you need to know outside of school? Do you see it with everything? Do
 78 you feel there needs to be changes in the curriculum itself? *It depends on the*
 79 *curriculum...say for instance, Spanish...I take Spanish II...I can conjugate a verb*
 80 *but I cannot really say anything in Spanish...I have not learned how to speak, yet*
 81 *even though I have taken 2 classes...so I think there could be minor adjustments*
 82 *to the curriculum but I think going along with it for 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th – in the*
 83 *end you will benefit...maybe indirectly but it is all a benefit*

84

85 9. Do you think of school as preparation for life or is it more or less to you?
 86 *More...because today if you do not go to school you are not going to get*
 87 *anywhere (and I've been taught this) even if you do not go to college, you are not*
 88 *going to get very far...probably not much over a salary of \$50,000 a year...if*
 89 *you're lucky you will...If you don't go to school you won't and if you do go to*
 90 *school and go through college...you're guaranteed you're going to make it*
 91 *somewhere...so school is definitely mandatory*

92

- 93 10. Do you find school engaging and interesting? *Depending on the course and*
 94 *depending on the teacher, of course...the teacher has a big impact on the*
 95 *engagement in the classroom...now all the teachers are good teachers but they*
 96 *teach differently...some of them are boring...some of them are very*
 97 *engaging...but yes...to me, I have always found school interesting (11:35). Talk*
 98 *to me a little bit more about that because out of all the interviews I am doing I am*
 99 *hearing this same theme that if the teacher is engaging the class is engaging even*
 100 *if the course is not...do you find that to be true?...I do...I had a math teacher last*
 101 *year...I am not going to point any names...but he was so boring...he was a great*
 102 *teacher...he would put the problems on the board...you would do it...and you*
 103 *would learn it...but the class was boring...and my chemistry teacher right*
 104 *now...she is very engaging...we did a game yesterday...a review for the test...we*
 105 *did survivor where you have teams and that is fun and an interesting way to*
 106 *review and learn (Explains how to play Survivor)...for the end user it is engaging*
 107 *and it is interesting...and students want to do that and they do...and everyone is*
 108 *learning*
 109
- 110 11. Compared to life outside of school, what thoughts or feelings do you have
 111 *concerning life inside school? The school offers options in joining certain*
 112 *clubs...like the Green Club...if you go into the Green Club, that is a direct benefit*
 113 *to the community outside of school... but most students do not take advantage of*
 114 *the different clubs and different activities to do things outside of school...they*
 115 *don't...so if I would have to answer that question yes or no I would say no...life in*
 116 *school does not benefit from the community as to what I see because most of the*
 117 *students don't take advantage of joining the clubs that would benefit the*
 118 *community...Do you think there is a way to build it into the curriculum so that it is*
 119 *not an outside of school thing but in your class you could do something to benefit*
 120 *the community?...they used to do something like that in middle school where they*
 121 *would set you up with an elective...you did not get to pick your electives...I think*
 122 *they should do that here...even if it is only one of your 4 years they should have a*

123 *required class that would be directed to helping in the community in some way...I*
 124 *think that is definitely possible*

125

126 12. What do you feel your teachers value about school? *Well, in order to be a*
 127 *teacher, you have to like kids and in order to like kids you have to know where*
 128 *they are going...the teachers know they are building a kids future one day at a*
 129 *time and high school is one of the most important times in that...because if you*
 130 *don't do well in high school, you're not going to make it very far...so the teachers*
 131 *that come here prepare to help these students get to where they want to go...every*
 132 *teacher that I've had always stresses this...they say you are here for one reason*
 133 *and that is to get here and then to get here (spaces with hands to show a*
 134 *progression through the future) so I think definitely that they know what is going*
 135 *on and that they are trying to help us...Do you feel all your teachers are that*
 136 *way?...I do...*

137

138 13. How does this compare with what students value about school? *They see the*
 139 *teachers as...they are just telling me that to make me mad...I don't know why they*
 140 *see it that way...I am unclear about that as I am sure so are the teachers but they*
 141 *really can't do much as far as trying to help them see it...I think they should show*
 142 *more examples of kids that drop out of high school at a certain age...the failure*
 143 *rate in college as opposed to a students GPA in high school, I think that would be*
 144 *a big awakening...things like that – statistics...I think they should show more of*
 145 *that to make students realize and to give them a rude awakening*

146

147 14. How do you think a consensus could be reached so that teachers and students
 148 view schooling with the same worth? *You are never going to reach every*
 149 *student...I think they should make the curriculums a little tougher...because right*
 150 *now I could go through any regular level class without studying and make a high*
 151 *B or a low A in it...as can most students... You think most students can do that? I*
 152 *do, I don't think I am an exception because they have the classes to the lowest*
 153 *standard...I think they should make most of the courses a little tougher because*

154 *Spanish, to me, you can't make that much tougher...I mean Spanish is*
155 *Spanish...but most of the core classes they should make them a little tougher so*
156 *that students have to put forth effort in order to pass because most students when*
157 *they see they are failing...most, not all...will try to bring the grade up to at least a*
158 *70... When you say not all students can be reached, I have a hard time with that*
159 *because as a teacher I don't understand why I wouldn't be able to but I struggle*
160 *with that because when I see 25's on a test, I just don't understand it and I don't*
161 *know that I will ever get the answer...they don't see...they don't see what's ahead*
162 *of them...But you obviously do...so where do you think that came from? ... the*
163 *way I was brought up my parents always stressed, if you don't get out of high*
164 *school and go to college, you're not going to make it far...but it was definitely the*
165 *way I was brought up...and that is something else that has a factor...students'*
166 *parents are a major contributing factor towards their future...if they don't bring*
167 *them up right they are never going to learn...it doesn't matter what teacher they*
168 *go to...(Explain to him about growing up and my desire to go to college and help*
169 *pay for it myself)...that's exactly my dad's story...he went to Georgia*
170 *State...graduated after 4 years...but paid the whole way through...he worked*
171 *while he did college...I did too...yep...and he bought his own car and he did*
172 *everything himself...he had that drive in his mind but his parents did not make*
173 *him do anything...I just don't see most kids as having that drive...that's why most*
174 *of the classes today are going lower and lower in difficulty because they know*
175 *these students are not going to pass...unless the classes are made easier...that's*
176 *what I think...So do you think that is driving a wedge between people who are*
177 *very smart and people who are very low?...I see it as being either here or here*
178 *(motions with one hand above head and the other about the waist) anymore*
179

180

1

2 Initial Interview – Mark

3

4 1. Do you feel your learning has meaning and that you apply the learning to other
5 situations in your life?

6

7 *The basic stuff...like basic gardening is helpful for geometry or something like*
8 *that...like, I help my mom with gardening so its easier to count...especially since my*
9 *mom is a designer...so she loves everything precise so I help her with that...I think if*
10 *you are not going into the field or going to be a super math person...like with*
11 *calculus but with calculus you can choose...which is great here because I am a*
12 *foreign person and in our school we cannot choose what we take...they just give us*
13 *calculus and we have to do it...where here you can change...you can have calculus*
14 *you can have AP calculus...which is much easier for me here since we have choices.*
15 *Alright... How do you think you use your math in gardening...geometry say? Uh...I*
16 *mean just be real specific, as specific as you can possibly be with me when you say*
17 *you are using geometry in gardening...Um, like (small breath of laughter) I can't*
18 *think of it right now...like how to place so it will look better because geometry is all*
19 *about shapes and how to make it look interesting...not boring like you could place a*
20 *line with different triangles or squares...OK*

21

22 2. Do you see any kind of community experience of learning going on inside the
23 school? *Half of classes it is I am sure...like cooking, last year we had cooking and*
24 *it teaches you the basic stuff about cooking because most of the people don't even*
25 *know how to cook for themselves...and about the community – maybe you can go*
26 *work in a restaurant where people are going to come...and they teach you the*
27 *basics of safety and all about the germs so its cool. Do you see it with the other*
28 *classes – like, for instance, math, English, or history classes? Any relevance*
29 *outside into the community? Like with science, I don't think so...but if you are not*
30 *taking upper level classes you are at least getting the basics...some of the*

problems in history you don't want to repeat the same mistakes and you want to learn from them... Yes, it does seem that we repeat our mistakes, doesn't it?

3. How would you as a student define authentic learning?

Its hard for me to say because I am foreign and it is the first time I hear this word...maybe something which you are going to use in life not like what they make you learn...like, chemistry, and you are not going in that field so why would you learn chemistry...but there is chemistry in everything...like cooking is a little bit of chemistry...but I think its important to learn the basics – don't have to learn everything...like formulas for trigonometry and all that stuff... So I think that what I am hearing you say, now correct me if I am wrong is that you need to learn the basics but if you are going to go beyond the basics it should be something that you want to apply to what you want to do in the future....Yep. So do you think students would benefit from a curriculum that allows them choice for what they want to do in the future? Yep, sure. How would you think that would work? Do you think students are mature enough to make those decisions early? Well, I don't really have a choice...like I'm a junior already...and I'm between...I know I want to do something creative...like math or science, I don't...I like those and I don't have bad grades in them but I know I am never going to use like calculus...except for when I go to college which will help me...I will know the basics and I'm not going to fail it in college What do you think you want to do? You said something creative...I don't know...like I want to do design...not interior design but like computer design like web design or animation so I'm somewhere like in between OK. But, like last week a representative came from FSU and told us about the university and how you can get a bachelors degree much more quickly...21 months...and in any other university it would take you like 4 years...and it will be much faster but you've already got your degree of professional design or web design or animation...and the whole university it like amazing they teach you have to work with films and sound for the movies and then there is like the visual arts but I'm not a really good drawer so I don't want to pursue that but like computer, I am really good at that and like my photography teacher says I have really

62 *great ideas and I can come up with them in seconds...she said that not everyone can*
 63 *do that (8:10) and its just like you are born with it or you are not and she says I am*
 64 *born with it. So, you think this school – since you can get your degree so quickly –*
 65 *they are focusing on those skills...Yes...but not like a liberal arts college where you*
 66 *have to have math, you have to have English, you have to have history...yes, there is*
 67 *only design or whatever field you chose for about 40 hours a week just like your*
 68 *normal work week would be...Right, but it is what you love...Yes...yes... It's what*
 69 *you want to do it's what you are engaged in...Yes...yes...it's not someone telling you*
 70 *this is what you have to do to get a degree...yes...OK...*

71

72 4. What are elements that exist here in your school that support authentic learning?
 73 *Like I said before...cooking – because I want to do something creative...photography*
 74 *which will give me the basics to be on the first step of photography and then I will go*
 75 *to the university to learn most of it...like simple math or being able to use simple*
 76 *math for banking and its very good that if you want to do banking you can choose –*
 77 *they don't make you do it...which is great because where I come from there is like 20*
 78 *classes and its spread out across the whole week and its so hard...its really*
 79 *hard...especially when you go to the 10th, 11th, 12 grade...there like pushing you very*
 80 *hard...compared to here...it's much easier for me because I can choose on level, or*
 81 *honors, or AP...like if I'm not good in math, I'll choose on level or if I'm very good in*
 82 *history, I'll take AP...just great choice...so you feel the choices are better here than in*
 83 *your home country...where is it that you are from...Estonia...when did you move*
 84 *here...about 2 years ago...Do you think there are any other elements or programs in*
 85 *the school that support authentic learning? Such as IF time – do you find that to be an*
 86 *engaging experience? What I think about IF is that it is a time to do your homework*
 87 *and they talk about the rules of school like you can't have your backpack for example*
 88 *or all this like SAT information but it doesn't teach you anything...it's a good time to*
 89 *study or to go to your teacher to make up a test which is great because some people*
 90 *don't drive and they'll have to stay for a test after school and it's not really good for*
 91 *them because sometimes they'll have to get a ride home...think about authentic*
 92 *learning as something that engages you enough to want to learn that topic like you*

- 93 were talking about the cooking class or anything that is creative...like the cooking
 94 class you were talking about...
 95
- 96 5. What are elements in your school that inhibit or impede authentic learning? Do
 97 you see anything that makes it not possible? *No...I don't think so...I think*
 98 *everything is in balance because you can choose your classes...I can choose*
 99 *creative classes because I have enough of my core classes to graduate so I can*
 100 *focus on what I want to do...Do you think the school day – the way it is set up –*
 101 *the time structure – could that impede authentic learning? Or do you feel like*
 102 *you're in your classes enough time to get engaged in the subject? Oh*
 103 *yes...definitely...because at least I have comparance to where I've been and what*
 104 *is here...and for example, we'll have science for 3 hours a week where here you*
 105 *have 5 hours a week of science and you get really into it... which is, I think*
 106 *good...it gets boring sometimes after about 4 of 5 months from starting school*
 107 *because you have the same schedule every day...where I came from we had a*
 108 *different schedule everyday which makes it a little bit different...Right...kind of*
 109 *changes up things and makes it a little more engaging that way...Do you think*
 110 *though that having the classes every day that it gives you more time to go in-*
 111 *depth with the learning or do you feel as if your teachers kind of repeat, repeat,*
 112 *repeat things? No...it lets you go more in-depth*
 113
- 114 6. What do you think would actively engage students in the learning process? Do
 115 you see students bored in their classes? *Sure... there are always people who just*
 116 *don't like the class... What do you think causes that boredom? I think most of the*
 117 *time it is the teacher...how interesting he is...how he talks...because, like last*
 118 *year I had a world history teacher and she was so energetic and she was giving us*
 119 *jokes and she would give interesting examples...not boring examples...of like how*
 120 *the timeline goes and we had very interesting projects to do...something like we*
 121 *had to do a spy book because we were learning back a long, long time ago in 450*
 122 *BC and how would a spy be in another area (era?) and so we had to do a project*
 123 *of being the spy and doing the book and firing the pages so we could make it look*

124 *old which was very interesting and back then we had a student teacher and our*
 125 *real history teacher was a female and when he came in the class he was really*
 126 *boring...when he started talking you just wanted to go to sleep...like how he was*
 127 *saying the PowerPoints and nothing interesting... and like you just wanted to go*
 128 *to sleep because she never made us write notes...she talked and for me I don't*
 129 *learn from just writing...if I hear a teacher say it I will remember it and its easy*
 130 *for me to remember like that or he made us write the notes...I would not write the*
 131 *notes and he was like why are you not writing the notes and I was like I'm just*
 132 *learning by you talking ...but its so like boring but it depends on the teacher...if a*
 133 *teacher lets you be loose in the class...not like running around all crazy and stuff*
 134 *like that but if they let you joke and talk rather than being strict and no*
 135 *talking...that depends on the teacher. So I think what I am hearing you say is that*
 136 *for a student to be actively engaged their teacher has to be engaged...if the*
 137 *teacher is engaged, it kind of falls toward the student and they become more*
 138 *active and more engaged in it...Yes. OK*

139 7. Do you think what your teachers ask you to do in class will have any benefit for
 140 what you need to know outside of school? *Some of the teacher yes, some of the*
 141 *teachers no...cause there are different projects and sometimes when the projects*
 142 *don't make any sense at all...every time a question is asked well where are we*
 143 *going to use this in life...and then they'll say something like well you'll know*
 144 *that's how much money you have in the bank but if there is already a person that*
 145 *is in the bank that can just tell you or if you can log into your computer and it will*
 146 *tell you why would you do it yourself...of course if you don't trust the bank that's*
 147 *a good option but most of the people look in the computer and they know...What*
 148 *are some projects that you feel do not have any benefit? Can you give me some*
 149 *examples of what you find to be beneficial projects and ones that are not? I know*
 150 *you said when you were learning about the BC era that that engaged you but can*
 151 *you apply that in any way? I can be creative about how I did the book and it*
 152 *makes me like this because I can do anything with the book...I have to have the*
 153 *information but I can write the information how I want to I can make the book*
 154 *look how I want to...So its that creative component that you're*

155 enjoying...Yes...yes...you like that choice to be able to creatively do what you
156 want to do...yes...So what are some projects you would say really have no
157 benefit? Well, last year we had to do a box make a shoe box from scratch...and
158 some tools we could not use...we had to use a stapler and no tape and it was like
159 a hard thing...What were you making? a shoe box from board...What was the
160 purpose?to count the volume of the box and it really didn't make sense to me but
161 I'm an overachiever and I like for everything to be perfect so my box looked like a
162 store-bought box...it looked amazing... all the students and the teacher were like,
163 this is so cool I wish I'd had this box and I don't really know...I didn't enjoy the
164 project because I had to pay like \$50.00 but it is my choice...the teacher did not
165 make me spend that much money...because most people took like paper to make
166 their box but the box looked...I don't know...like it was going to break in a second
167 and I don't like that kind of job (20:09) so I went to the store and bought lots of
168 materials to make it look amazing but it is not the teachers fault...if she told me
169 you have to buy this...this...and this...that would be a different situation but here
170 I chose it myself...the whole project didn't make any sense...we just had to make a
171 box and get the volume and the measurements so we had to do by the
172 measurements to create the box which was hard cause sometimes it could be a
173 little bit off but I got a good grade on it (laughs) and the same teacher made us
174 make...because she was ahead of the program...like she finished the whole book
175 before the school year ended...so in order for us to not do any tests she gave us a
176 huge project to do that she got from a book and the book is called Teen Center for
177 math class and you have to build a teen center...so you had to do the design and
178 the architecture...it was really like it didn't make any sense at all, whereas,
179 people who wanted to do architecture because it is in their field...they did the
180 whole thing incorrectly...like in my group – they were very unorganized and uh I
181 had a good grade already so the project was not going to hurt me so I said I don't
182 care cause it was the end of the year...I don't like to be bossy but if there is a
183 project like for 2 people where the teacher says you have to do this poster...I'll do
184 the poster on my own then I'll give it to a person...I can't trust a person to do the
185 poster and it not be presentable...Alright, I think what I hear you saying is that if

186 it is group work...if you are working in these embryonic communities as Dewey
 187 calls them...then everyone needs to value the learning experience but not
 188 everyone is...*Yes...you're valuing it so you would choose to do it on your own*
 189 *rather than take a reduction in the grade because your partner is not doing his or*
 190 *her part...because like I had a partner last year that...we did not have to do a*
 191 *poster but we had to present it to the class...we had a problem we had to figure it*
 192 *out and because we were presenting to the class you can show it on a piece of*
 193 *notebook paper because it just looked not good so I told them let's do it on*
 194 *posterboard with big letters and big numbers so people will see and*
 195 *understand...and he was like why would we do that we'll just write it on notebook*
 196 *paper...so I said don't worry I'll do everything so I printed it out and did*
 197 *everything and the funny thing that got me was about a week later when we got*
 198 *the grades...the teacher puts stars and she put his name for the project – not mine*
 199 *– which was, I don't know...I don't really like that teacher...I don't like how she*
 200 *teaches and I don't know I just never liked her so I didn't really care...So do you*
 201 *think it was a situation where she thought he did the work and she was so*
 202 *impressed because normally maybe he didn't do quality work and she saw it as*
 203 *“oh, gosh he did a great job so I'm going to put a bunch of stars...but then it's a*
 204 *group project...it's for 2 people...if the star had been for 2 people because it is*
 205 *their project...for one person, yeah...but for one person in a 2 person project*
 206 *(sighs laughter)...I don't know...so you weren't included and that bothered*
 207 *you...not really I just saw it and I was a little bit pissed about but I was like I*
 208 *don't really care...but you ended up doing all the work...and he gets the credit for*
 209 *it in the teachers' eyes...yeah...I'm sure you got a good grade...yeah...OK*

210

211

212 8. Do you think of school as preparation for life or is it more or less to you? *I think*
 213 *yes...preparing for life because it makes you be more responsible doing*
 214 *homework and projects so I think it makes you responsible because you have to be*
 215 *independent after you leave your parent's house which if you don't have the*
 216 *school experience your not going to have that much success in the real world*

217

218 9. Do you find school interesting and engaging? *Yes it is interesting to me because*
 219 *there's a lot of people to talk to...so the social aspect? Socializing, yeah...some of*
 220 *the classes are not interesting but you have to do them so that's sometimes not fun*
 221 *but like socializing and all the extra activities you can do in school is pretty cool*

222

223 10. Compared to life outside of school, what thoughts or feelings do you have
 224 concerning life inside school? *School is hard...sometimes you'll have 4 tests in a*
 225 *day so you have to prepare for each one of them if you want to succeed...if you*
 226 *don't care about your grade, then of course, why would you worry about it but I*
 227 *care about my grades so I study for each test...I'm not the perfect student, I'm*
 228 *lazy...I'll be like I'll wait for tomorrow I'll do that tomorrow...the last*
 229 *second...always...that's me...but if I can and I know if I read this paper I'll be*
 230 *ready then I will read it but yeah its like sometimes I don't want to go to school,*
 231 *I'd rather sleep. Do you think what you are doing in school and what you do*
 232 *outside of school has a direct mirror? Sure...Do you think it bleeds over so that*
 233 *what you are learning in your classes you are applying to what you do at*
 234 *home?...some of it, like cooking for example...like I can cook for my parents and*
 235 *they like it, so*

236

237 11. What do you feel your teachers value about school? *It's hard because I can't read*
 238 *a teachers' mind...Right, but when you see them in class do you see certain things*
 239 *that they value? Do they value their subject or do they just value the fact that they*
 240 *have a job? Most of the teachers, yes...like I had some teachers who say I don't*
 241 *care I have to set this date and then I'll just sit back and then go home...for most*
 242 *of the students, it's like "hey, yeah she doesn't teach us anything so that means*
 243 *we can talk" but there is a positive and negative to that...if you don't work you*
 244 *don't learn anything and of course, it depends on the class...like if its like*
 245 *calculus but if she doesn't teach you then how are you going to pass the test cause*
 246 *the tests are hard and they are all the same...she's not going to do some easy*
 247 *test... but some teachers, especially math teachers, it's like my class is the only*

248 *class that is important it is more important than all of the classes you have, they*
 249 *say*

250

251 12. What do students value about school? You say that teachers value their subject
 252 but what about the students, why do they want to be here? *If you ask 99 % of the*
 253 *whole school they will tell you to graduate so I can get money so if somebody is*
 254 *going to be in college and you ask why did you go for a masters or a Ph.D. they*
 255 *will tell you to get more money not for knowledge but just to get more money...so*
 256 *I am here not so much for learning but I'll know I'll have a better job if I finish*
 257 *high school with good grades and I go to a good college or university and finish*
 258 *with good grades I know I'll have the better job that someone who dropped out*
 259 *from high school...but learning for learning's sake, you really don't value?...*
 260 *some of the classes, like science...some of it, but not like super hard...I just...most*
 261 *of the time I just want to pass the test but not to remember...like for cooking, I*
 262 *know if I add this spice, it will make it good, I'll remember that...so it is probably*
 263 *that cooking is more applicable that you would remember because it is*
 264 *something...You'll use...you see as using at home and that is something that*
 265 *directly mirrors what you do at school...you're seeing it at home...Um Hum...but*
 266 *when it comes to calculus, basically its just learning it for the test but not learning*
 267 *it to apply it outside the classroom...yes...OK*

268

269 13. How do you think a consensus could be reached so that teachers and students
 270 view schooling with the same worth? Or could that happen? *It depends on the*
 271 *student...like if the student is like I hate school I just come to talk to my friends*
 272 *then I think it's impossible for that student to understand that you have to learn.*
 273 Do you think there's a way to engage that student to love learning...to want to
 274 learn...to want to participate? No...No? Why?... *because they have made their*
 275 *mind up already that they don't need school and that they don't want school and*
 276 *that studying is for losers or something like that or for nerds but of course it*
 277 *depends on the teacher...like I know kids who love their football coach's*
 278 *classes...for example, for history I had a football coach...and I have a coach right*

279 *now...and one of the kids is a football player so he really loves that class because*
280 *his coach is teaching it...so he's going to do homework just to say I can do it...So*
281 *you think it's more of a love for the teacher than the subject?...Yes...yes...OK*
282

APPENDIX H
FOCUS GROUP DATA

1 **FOCUS GROUP DATA**

2 **Caring by your teacher (all)**

3

4 What is it like to have teachers who care about you in school?

5

6 Alaina – I think it's nice. It's nice to have teachers who care about you and keep up with
7 your grades

8

9 Cayla – I don't think teachers really care – but (referring to Alaina) we have different
10 teachers, though.

11

12 Eve – some, not all

13

14 Me – Is it important to you guys to have teachers who not only think the curriculum is
15 important but to make sure you are doing well?

16

17 Cayla – I feel I am more comfortable when my teachers want to get to know me to have a
18 relationship with me so that I can talk to them about other stuff but stuff that is not too
19 personal

20

21 Eve – I want teachers to give me encouragement but am not interested in a relationship
22 with my teacher. Just so they help me in the class so I can do better.

23

24 Me- Do you feel students work harder if their teachers care about them?

25

26 Cayla – I know I do because I don't want to let them down. (all agree in unison)

27

28 Me – Do you feel that making a bad grade is letting the teacher down?

29

30 Cayla – I feel like that sometimes.

31

32 Alaina – yes but it depends on the teacher – if the teacher cares about you then yes

33 because you want to do well in their class and then you feel bad if you do bad; but if you

34 get a teacher who doesn't care and you do bad on a test – then you are like – hah – that's

35 what you get cause you're a bad teacher – no I'm kidding – but it is like you can't help

36 but do bad on a test because the teacher didn't help you...it's not really your fault it's the

37 teachers...you went in to get help but you didn't get help because they were preoccupied

38 with their e-mails

39

40 Me – talk more

41

42 Alaina – about teachers being preoccupied with their e-mails in the morning?

43

44 Me – yes

45

46 Cayla – that happened to me one time in 2nd grade; my teacher wouldn't help me learn

47 how to carry numbers when adding – I had been out with the flu and came in to ask for

48 help but she told me just to figure it out – she was on the phone and too busy talking to

49 her boyfriend...my mom called the principal about it and I had to get taken out of the

50 class...it was a big deal but she wasn't a very good teacher

51

52 Me – Do you think that is part of the problem though that teachers are so preoccupied

53 with other stuff?

54

55 Cayla – yes

56

57 Alaina – yes...like teachers who are going through marriages or have kids and stuff that
58 is understandable...but then others are like come in morning because that is the only time
59 I can give you help...but then you go in and they are too busy...like one time I went to
60 make up a test with a teacher but he never gave me the test...I just ended up sitting in
61 there waiting on him while he was sitting on the phone and doing e-mails and texting
62 away too...he was doing 3 things at once...that's a multitasker right there...don't have
63 me come in early in the morning for you to not help me with anything and then tell me
64 my grade is reflecting the way I am in class...well the way I am in class is because I am
65 trying to get something out of you and you are not helping me at all

66

67

68

69 When your teachers do not care, how does that make you feel and how does it affect your
70 performance in your classes?

71

72 Cayla – I makes me not want to try as hard

73

74 Eve – it makes you not want to pay attention to the teacher

75

76 Alaina – hey...that's they way I was last class

77

78 Me – What was the subject?

79

80 Alaina – US History

81

82 Me – Don't tell me the teacher's name but does he not care about the students or is he
83 just really content driven?

84

85 Alaina – I don't know...OK it's his first year teaching Junior US History...ding ding
86 ding...I think that is a warning sign...Juniors' - this is our year when we have to do

87 good...I mean as juniors and seniors this is when it all counts...and for a teacher who it is
 88 his first year teaching, I don't think it is fair because he doesn't fully understand what he
 89 is doing...you can tell by the way he is talking...he gets confused on what he is talking
 90 about stuff...and then he wants to fly right through...I want to pay attention when a
 91 teacher is talking to us and giving us lectures and be able to take notes but when he is like
 92 let's move on type thing...it is not fair

93

94 Does whether or not your teachers care affect you outside of school?

95

96 Eve – I think yes because when you talk to your parents you mention your teachers

97

98 Alaina – my mom always says 'why do you say that about your teachers?'; there are a
 99 few teachers that I like and those are the ones who care about the students and what they
 100 are teaching and how the students might react to what they are teaching

101

102 (10:39)

103 Describe a caring environment and how that would look –

104

105 Ideal situation of a caring environment –

106

107 Cayla – the teacher teaches and they are open but then after they teach they ask how
 108 people are doing...I don't know...

109

110 Alaina – its an open class time and everyone wants to participate and the teacher makes it
 111 like fun...no not even fun...it doesn't have to be fun...just so you know the teacher cares
 112 and if she asks a question then everyone will respond, not just a few people here and
 113 there

114

115 Cayla – also, its like hard to explain but it is a feeling you get from the teacher

116

117 Me – So by that feeling you know whether or not they are wanting you to be successful?

118

119 Cayla – yes

120

121 Alaina – right

122

123 Alaina – I like it when teachers move around and don't just sit at their computers

124 checking e-mail. Those are the ones I feel most comfortable with...

125

126 Me – Would that be the majority of your teachers?

127

128 Eve – I do not interact with the teacher unless I have a question

129

130 Me – do you feel overlooked?

131

132 Eve – not really

133

134 Alaina – that would bother me though. I want the teacher to notice me. I am a really

135 outgoing person so

136

137 Cayla – you want them to notice if you are doing well?

138

139 Alaina – doing well or having a bad day – If I am not talking or something they would be

140 like, ok, what's wrong? But even if it is just like with school work I want them to be like

141 what's going on? I don't want them to be like – oh, looks like she's having a problem –

142 darn, but to be like, oh, maybe I should go help

143

144

145

146

147 **Personally relevant curriculum (3)**

148

149 What is it like being in a school that gives you choice in your electives but not so much
150 choice in your academics?

151

152 Alaina – I wish there was more choice in academics...I think that would be better...I like
153 the way we have the freedom to pick what we want in our electives. I mean I want to be
154 able to study what I am planning on studying in college and what I want to major in and
155 stuff

156

157 Cayla – yeah but I don't know what I want to do in college...that's my problem. Like
158 right now I think I want to be a teacher and all that stuff but I don't know because I feel
159 like my whole life I have been following my sister and that is what my sister wants to do
160 but what if by the time I get to college I don't want to do that anymore.

161

162 Alaina- yeah that's true.

163

164 Me (to Cayla) – So you were thinking that if you were in classes where you would have a
165 personally relevant curriculum designed for you and they designed it around a theme of
166 teaching that you would take teaching courses. But after 4 years of taking the courses if
167 you decided you didn't want to do that...

168

169 Cayla – then you are kinda stuck

170

171 Alaina – but Cayla what about those classes you are in right now where a student may
172 ask the teacher when am I ever going to use this and the teacher will say you are never
173 going to use this...I mean you are teaching me something I am never going to use...Why
174 not teach accounting as a required course and geometry as an elective if you want to go
175 into engineering or architecture or something like that...and teach us
176 accounting...something everyone needs to know...I mean you need to know how to
177 balance a checkbook and all that stuff for when you grow up but geometry...when am I
178 ever going to use that...and the teacher says you are never going to use it...I don't want
179 to say it is not fair...it is just...

180

181 Cayla – it does not make sense

182

183 Alaina – yeah...I'd rather use stuff that would be valuable down the road in life

184

185 Me – ok- what do you think about that Eve?

186

187 Eve – um, I think they have the freedom to choose what they want to take but in my case,

188 my parents keep an eye on my grades and say this is what you have to have to be a doctor

189 and they have been putting this into my head since I was born that you have to be a

190 doctor...you have to be a doctor...so everyone is like putting pressure on me telling me

191 this is what you need to do and this is what you have to do

192

193 Me – but what if you don't want to be a doctor?

194

195 Eve – well with them telling me that for years, years, years, it is finally getting into my

196 head and that is what I want to do

197

198 Cayla – but do you really want to be a doctor?

199

200 Eve- even if I am not a doctor, I will do something in medicine

201

202 Cayla – Has there ever been anything else that you have thought about doing?

203

204 Alaina – we had cosmetology together didn't we?

205

206 Eve – I do play violin and they want me to play violin all my life and as for cosmetology,

207 I would go home and tell my parents of something fun I did in cosmetology and they

208 would say are you going to be a cosmetologist and what are you going to do to make

209 money as a cosmetologist....so that class was for fun but not something I would do as a

210 career...my parents have told me that if I am not a doctor that it would be a
211 disappointment to them
212
213 Cayla – are your parents doctors?
214
215 Eve – my dad is and my uncle is
216
217 Alaina – are you an only child?
218
219 Eve – no, I have 2 other sisters and they are supposed to be doctors also
220
221 Cayla – are they older or younger
222
223 Eve – younger...one of my sisters is outgoing and wants to be a math teacher but my
224 parents are like no one is going to change it...she does not like medicine, she likes math
225 so she has talked about being an engineer
226
227 Me – would the parents allow her to do that though?
228
229 Eve – probably not but that is her choice
230
231 Me – right, well at some point you become an adult and you get to make your own
232 choices, I was just wondering if they would support her in that decision.
233
234 Eve – probably, I mean my mom comes from a different background culturally than I do
235 and she knows that here we are given choice and freedom but my country you have to
236 follow you parent's choice and that is the way it is (20:00) that is how it is in Haiti
237
238
239 What would it be like to have a personally relevant curriculum?
240

241

242

243 Do you think a personally relevant curriculum would work well for all students all the
244 time?

245

246 Cayla – not all the time but in some cases, yes

247

248 Alaina – yeah like how Cayla said, what if she wants to be a teacher and then down the
249 road she doesn't...I don't think that would work

250

251 Cayla – but then there are some people who know exactly what they want to do or they
252 are forced upon like they don't have any other choice...in those cases, it would be helpful

253

254

255

256 **Learning should be meaningful, but fun (all)**

257

258 What is it like being in a classroom where learning is meaningful but not fun?

259

260 Alaina – what class is that (said with sarcasm)

261

262 Cayla – what would be a meaningful class?

263

264 Alaina – like my lit teacher, he made us learn vocab and diagram sentences ...coolest
265 teacher in the world...he taught us the 300 vocab on the SAT and I thought it was a waste
266 of time but now that I have him again this year, I know what they mean...it is meaningful
267 now and was meaningful then but I just could not see that it was meaningful last year

268

269 Me – doesn't sound like it was fun either

270

271 Alaina – well it wasn't really fun or boring...like at the beginning of class, he would have
272 them up on the Promethian board and we would copy them down and study them
273 throughout the week and then on Friday we took the test...so then it was not like it was
274 boring, boring...I mean copying things off the board is not a big deal...but I mean he
275 could make it fun...he did like football games when we studied

276

277 Cayla – I can think of one that is not fun, though. Learning to write for the AP exam
278 where you have to describe all the literary terms and stuff...it is so hard...it is meaningful
279 because it helps you get a good grade on the test but it is so not fun at all...I do not look
280 forward to it because I am so not good at it

281

282 Me – do you think everything revolves around grades?

283

284 Alaina – yes

285

286 Me – should meaningful be a grade or should it be knowledge?

287

288 Alaina – I think it should be knowledge, I don't think it should be a grade

289

290 Cayla – knowledge though is not the best thing...I mean I like parts of school

291

292 Alaina – at least we are doing it our way and not the riverside way?

293

294 Me – what is the riverside way?

295

296 Cayla – military school...by boyfriend goes there and he does not like it at all but he is
297 doing well in the academic classes because there are only 4 students in a class so he can
298 have the personal attention

299

300 Alaina – so cool...

301

302 Cayla ...that he needs to be successful

303

304 Alaina – if kids don't care around you it makes you not care

305

306 Cayla – it makes me angry...doesn't it make you angry

307

308 Alaina – it makes me angry but then it makes me not want to care because their attitude

309 toward the class rubs off on me

310

311 Me – I don't understand that though...why can't your positive attitude rub off on them?

312

313 Alaina – because a negative attitude will always win over a positive attitude like that

314

315 Cayla – that's true...I don't know why though

316

317 Alaina – the teacher can change that though...if the teacher sees there is a negative

318 attitude in the class she can say...why don't teachers ever have their students

319 reflect...like say what do you guys think I can do better or what do you think we should

320 do to improve note-taking or the tests...not so many times do teachers ask what you think

321 about the test...like, they will say it but they will just say good, bad, hard, easy but can't

322 they break it down and see where kids are having the problems or something...teachers

323 don't take the time to do that and that bothers me

324

325 Eve – if a teacher asks me how I feel about something I would rather be neutral and wait

326 to see the score...if I get an A then I feel good...I don't want to say I did great and then

327 when I get the test back I did not do so good

328

329 Me – what about the teachers who care about you? Do they take that failing grade and try

330 to do something to help you?

331

332 All – oh yeah

333

334 Cayla – my teachers will let us drop a low quiz grade to help improve yourself so that
335 you get a second chance

336

337 Alaina – like for me, do teachers notice when you are having a bad day and they say you
338 can take it easy?

339

340 Cayla – yeah, some do but then others are like whatever

341

342 Alaina – yeah...like whatever suck it up...but the teacher who knows you are having a
343 rough time but doesn't really know your situation but kind of does...they are like what's
344 going on and if you don't want to talk they tell you that after school you know you can
345 talk to me but like today you can take it easy...I like when teachers do that

346

347 Cayla – like one of my teachers I had had a previous year knew I was having a bad day
348 and asked me to stay after class so she could talk to me...I told her I was having a bad
349 day because my boyfriend had to go to military school and he was texting me all the way
350 there but then they suddenly stopped so I knew he had to turn his phone in and would not
351 be able to talk to me for 30 days so she helped me through that situation...I was late to
352 my next class and it was the beginning of the year so this teacher did not know me...She
353 asked me why I was late and I told her I was handling a personal problem...so she said
354 oh ok well have a seat...she made me feel worthless ...I mean my last teacher gave me a
355 hug and let me cry but this one was like oh sit down and take notes and just get over it

356

357 Alaina – I hate teachers like that...I don't hate them but I don't like the way they are
358 toward us ...ok...my mom will say you need to show respect to your teachers but for me
359 respect is a teacher who asks students how they are doing and helps them through
360 situations in the class including like what the curriculum is and stuff and seeing how they
361 are doing...and when a teacher does not care about their students...that bothers me and
362 when they get their frustrations out on the class...I don't think that's fair...and when my
363 mom says why do you guys say that stuff about your teachers, you should be respectful

364 and I tell her that they kind of don't care about us and when they don't care, it kind of
365 brings you down...and my mom says you should not say things like that about your
366 teachers...granted they are not there for the paycheck but you get nice benefits you get
367 long breaks...but I don't think they are there to be nice...they're just there

368

369 Me – you're not talking about the majority are you?

370

371 Alaina – with my teachers, there are a few that I can say I actually like and will be nice
372 but the rest of them...

373

374 Cayla – laughing – I'll be nice....sorry....

375

376 Alaina – the rest of them are like I don't care and I don't want to hear your story...but I
377 think what if I'm not giving you a story what if it is the honest to God truth...and I am
378 like I am not having a good day and the teacher is like, oh well, sucks for you

379

380 Alaina – I think it depends on the teacher though...don't you feel like you have a
381 personal relationship with some of your teachers

382

383 Cayla – oh, yeah...definitely and then definitely not with other ones

384

385 Alaina – yeah...those are the ones that when the bell rings, I am out...I don't even want
386 to say have a nice day

387

388 Cayla – sometimes it is awkward though and it is not like you don't have a really good
389 relationship or that you do or that they don't even care but that it would be weird to have
390 a relationship with them...like, it would be weird for me to have a relationship with my
391 US teacher because that is just not his relationship to anyone, really...and it may be that
392 it is because he is male and cannot really give off that motherly vibe

393

394 Alaina – I think teachers need to be people persons...they need to know how to react to
395 different personalities of people...you're going to have teenagers coming from different
396 backgrounds and with different interests and you need to know how to react to that...you
397 need to know how to be an engaging teacher

398

399

400 What is it like being in a classroom where learning is neither meaningful nor fun?

401

402 Cayla – it can be silent where everyone is just taking notes or it can be that the class is
403 crazy and out of control because the kids know it is not meaningful or fun so they are
404 going to find some other way to have fun

405

406 Alaina – it can be like my last class where everyone is silent and you look around but no
407 one is paying attention...not one person is looking at the teacher taking notes...some of
408 them might print out the notes but that is just to have them printed so you don't have to
409 write them...other than that kids are sleeping...kids that are sitting in the front row are
410 sleeping...other kids are doodling on paper (that was actually me)...or texting...and then
411 there is the smart kid...one kid that sleeps the entire time and gets a 100 on the test...I
412 don't understand it...but the teacher will still carry on even if it is boring

413

414 Me – just carries on as if everyone is paying attention?

415

416 Alaina – paying attention...taking notes...it's like do you see what you are doing? There
417 are 3 of them right in front of you that are sleeping...duh...what are you doing wrong?
418 No one is paying attention...if only one kid is getting an A on your test and the rest of
419 them are barely passing, a light bulb should go on...and the teacher should be like, ok,
420 what am I doing wrong and why are they not engaging in what I am doing? So if it is not
421 meaningful or fun, it could be disruptive or it could be just plain silence

422

423 What is it like being in a classroom where learning is meaningful and fun?

424

425 Alaina – it's fun and everybody is having a good time then

426

427 Cayla – fun can be having an open discussion...it does not mean you have to be doing

428 something cool or anything like that...sometimes teachers think it is fun when it really is

429 not...like in algebra when you are working with all those polynomials that no one really

430 understands but because the teacher is open and good at engaging people, it is like an ok

431 class and you are actually having a pretty good time

432

433 Alaina – that doesn't happen with any of my classes except my electives

434

435 Me – Do you all feel that certain personalities need to be entertained to be engaged?

436

437 All – yes

438

439 Alaina – I want to be able to talk in class so a teacher needs to have open discussions to

440 give me time to talk

441

442 Cayla – yeah...not just lecture

443

444 Alaina – and that is fun

445

446 Cayla – for you it is fun but what about people who don't talk and it is a class where you

447 really don't have any friends

448

449 Alaina – that's when people need to poke out of their shell

450

451

452

453

454

455 Do you see the meaningful and fun classroom as being an authentic learning
456 environment? Why or why not?

457

458 Alaina – yes, because sometimes they will relate it to things that are going on now and
459 then if you get the relation between back then and now...it's like...ok I kind of get it and
460 you want to learn more about it

461

462 Cayla – and because you had a good time you can remember it and use it in your life

463

464

465 Describe a learning situation you have had that you would consider authentic and tell me
466 what made it authentic learning to you.

467

468

469 Alaina – it may sound cheesy but like we learned the color codes in safety class and what
470 they stand for...like orange means alert...different colors mean different things...white is
471 like you are relaxed and black or red is like danger or you are engaged and on the
472 alert...so we went to Atlanta to a baseball game and when you don't think about your
473 surroundings all the time, it can kind of mess you up because in an area like that
474 something can happen and like the color system...I had to be alert where I was and know
475 what my surroundings were like...and like we did mock trials and stuff so that makes you
476 think about how things are handled in a courtroom and what goes on in a
477 courtroom...and we did our own trials, which was fun

478

479 Me – Why do you think students are disengaged?

480

481 Alaina – they don't care

482

483 Cayla – yeah, or it may come from their parents – so that if their parents don't care then
484 they don't care either

485

486 Me – what should we as teachers do to engage that crowd?

487

488 Alaina- make it feel like a welcoming environment like everyone has their own spot in
489 the classroom...they should encourage them and build them up and say you are going to
490 do something good later on down the road in life...you want to learn this...cause some
491 kids just say oh I am only going to flip burgers but the teacher should say no...you can do
492 bigger and better things in life...you could be the next CEO of a big company and make
493 millions one day...and teachers don't give that to you...they are like, ok., go work at
494 McDonald's

495

496 Cayla – like for me, my grades are meaningful because I want to get into a good college
497 and that will place me in getting a good job...it is easy for me to look forward but other
498 kids may only be able to see right now and they are not looking toward the future

499

500 Me – I just wish we did not place so much emphasis on grades

501

502 Cayla – right...it is like it is so hard to really learn it and thrive when you are just trying
503 to get a good grade and that is all you can think about and then when the final or EOCT
504 comes around you are not ready because you have just learned it for the test at the
505 time...that happens to me all the time

506

507 Cayla – I know grades are important I wish there was another way to do it though...like
508 other than tests...like my boyfriend cannot retain information as well as I can but it is not
509 fair that I can listen, take notes, and do well on a test but he cannot

510

511 Alaina – I wish there was a different way they could evaluate us on our knowledge

512

513 Cayla – or if you know information other than what is on the test but you miss the test
514 questions that you did not place as much emphasis on studying but you know other stuff
515 but then you have no hope left...I don't know...never mind

516

517 Alaina – no...I like that

518

519 Cayla – instead of penalizing students for what they don't know on a test, rewarding them
520 for what they do know...but there is no way to do that unless they have some weird brain
521 machine

522

523 Me – do you think teachers can evaluate students differently on their knowledge?

524

525 Alaina – that would be so hard though...I mean I blank on tests and I take the notes and
526 everything but I think it would be hard for a teacher to have a conversation with a student
527 to find out what he or she knows...that would be nice because then I would have a 100 in
528 all of my classes but I mean I know it is not going to work that way

529

530 Me – meiosis project explanation

531

532 Alaina – yeah that is engaging because you get to pick what you feel you will learn better
533 doing

534

535 Alaina – I am not going to say school is a waste of time but a lot of the time it seems like
536 a waste

537

538 Me – reading poem

539

540 Alaina – perfect. You get everywhere in life with that...you really will.

541

APPENDIX I

IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCE DOCUMENTS

Curriculum Strand
A system for managing and facilitating student achievement and learning based upon
consensus-driven content and performance standards.

Curriculum Standard 1: The school's curriculum is sequenced and organized to ensure students know, do, and understand the core content outlined in the Quality Core Curriculum or Georgia Performance Standards (based on phase-in plan).

Fully Operational 1.3:

As a result of this process of curriculum planning, all students participate in a curriculum that requires depth of understanding and rigor.

Performance/Action 1

School leaders and teachers recognize, understand, and build consensus on a definition for rigor and relevance as well as those effective, research-based practices that enable rigor and relevance in a standards-based classroom, among and across grade levels or content areas. This understanding is frequently revisited. (See Appendix Curriculum 1.3 A, B, and C for activities to prompt discussion about rigor, relevance, and standard-based teaching and learning practices.)

Artifacts:	Evidence:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Agendas and minutes ✓ Student work samples ✓ Performance tasks ✓ Unit of study and/or lesson plan templates ✓ Units of study and/or lesson plans 	<p>School leaders and teachers can articulate a common definition of what rigor, relevance, and standards-based teaching and learning entails. There is consistency across content areas and grade levels as the consensus is built.</p>



Curriculum Strand
A system for managing and facilitating student achievement and learning based upon
• consensus-driven content and performance standards.

What do students do in a standards-based classroom?
The standards-based classroom is one in which individual students and student groups are working with concepts, tools, and resources that will lead toward mastery of specific standards. Therefore, the standards-based classroom is rich in resources, opportunities, and conversations that make standards and expectations clear and further encourage student self-reflection. A standards-based classroom “looks like” a community of learners who speak about qualities evident in work that meets and exceeds standards. Students self-reflect on progress toward standards by a facilitated examination of their own work samples.
What do teachers do in a standards-based classroom?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Demystify” and “deconstruct” standards and their accompanying elements through facilitated dialogues and experiences as part of strategic and thoughtful instructional design ▪ Maintain an excitement about and focus upon standards through instructional design that is engaging, experiential, and affords students the opportunity to examine and perform standards ▪ Model processes for students to make cognitive processes more transparent ▪ Expect and demand student awareness of individual progress toward standards ▪ Monitor and document individual student progress toward standards to communicate with students, parents, and school/teacher leaders ▪ Provide resources that demonstrate standard performance (including collected student work samples) ▪ Provide regular, critical, and task-specific feedback to individual students, instead of feedback that is broad, ill-deserved, or meant for the entire group ▪ Encourage and facilitate student revision of work for continuous improvement and progress toward standard ▪ Differentiate processes and expected products for individual students and/or groups of students ▪ Utilize formative data such as student work and the application of results from formative assessments to make instructional decisions, including how to differentiate for individuals and groups ▪ Award grades as reflection of progress toward standard ▪ Collaborate with teachers across and within grade levels and across and within disciplines ▪ Maintain a classroom environment, including visual displays that support learning and progress toward specific standards
What do administrators and school leaders need to do in order to support the implementation of and monitoring of effectiveness in standards-based classrooms?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a daily schedule that allows for collaboration and professional learning time for teachers. ▪ Model a healthy sense of urgency that is balanced with clearly articulated school-wide expectations for instructional design and delivery. ▪ Provide time for teachers to be released of obligations in order to maximize time for relationship-building that enables teachers to truly know students. ▪ Facilitate professional learning teams around student work analysis and building a common understanding of the performance standards, as well as, measure professional learning by the extent to which changes are seen in the classroom. ▪ Support teachers in efforts to maximize learning within their professional learning communities. ▪ Design and utilize tools (such as a professional learning design, school-wide protocol, etc.) that support professional learning. ▪ Allow for structural divisions to personalize the learning environment and facilitate teacher/student relationships.



Curriculum Strand
A system for managing and facilitating student achievement and learning based upon
consensus-driven content and performance standards.

Appendix Curriculum 1.3 C

The following activity is taken from the 2006 publication of the *Graduation Counts! Guide*.

Activity IV – Conduct Analysis of Teacher-Provided Instructional Plans to Reveal Current Evidence of Rigor and Relevance	
Participants:	School Leadership and/or Professional Learning Groups
Facilitators:	Curriculum Specialists or Lead Teachers with Principals
Time:	TBD
Resources:	Rigor and Relevance Framework
<p>School leaders or previously established or, if necessary, newly developed professional learning groups specifically consider rigor and relevance in the routine analysis of teacher-provided instructional plans.</p> <p>Leadership should reserve scheduled, structured, and facilitated time for leadership teams and/or professional learning groups to analyze instructional plans from each grade level and content area with consideration for rigor and relevance.</p> <p>The International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE) Rigor and Relevance Framework may serve as a graphic organizer upon which to note the extent to which rigor and relevance is likely to result from each instructional plan. As a necessary follow-up, discussions should include results and next steps. This process should be ongoing and monitored.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Rigor/Relevance Framework</p> <p>The diagram is a 2x2 matrix titled 'Rigor/Relevance Framework'. The vertical axis is labeled 'RIGOR' with levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The horizontal axis is labeled 'APPLICATION' with levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The quadrants are labeled: Acquisition (A) in the bottom-left, Application (B) in the bottom-right, Automation (C) in the top-left, and Adaptation (D) in the top-right.</p>



APPENDIX J

PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

Ms. Perry,

Ms. Sue Goodman forwarded to me your request to include portions of the Georgia Department of Education's Implementation Resource as part of your Georgia State University doctoral dissertation regarding student perceptions of how schools contribute to their engagement.

This correspondence serves as notification that the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) grants limited permission to you to reprint portions of the Implementation Resource in the project described above.

Any reproductions must expressly state that all rights in and to the material belong to the Georgia Department of Education. Please note that this permission is a non-exclusive license granted by GaDOE for noncommercial uses only. The license is limited to the use by you only and cannot be assigned to or assumed by another party. No other permission is granted or implied, and all other rights are reserved.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 404-656-4689.

Sincerely,

Gregg Stevens
Assistant General Counsel
Legal Services Office
Georgia Department of Education
2052 Twin Towers East
205 Jesse Hill Jr., Dr. SE
Atlanta, GA 30334
gstevens@doe.k12.ga.us
404-656-4689
<http://www.gadoe.org>



APPENDIX K

DATA GATERING PROTOCOL

Data-gathering protocol

<u>Data Source</u>	<u>Who is involved?</u>	<u>Purpose:</u>	<u>Timeline for gathering of data:</u>	<u>Member-checking timeline</u>
<u>Individual interviews</u>	Students	Collect data concerning engagement and authentic learning in schools.	August – September 2009	End of September 2009
<u>Focus group interviews</u>	Students	Group sharing to further get at the question of “What is engaging work in schools?” – elicit student responses, thoughts, feelings, etc.	October 2009	End of October 2009

APPENDIX L

IRB APPROVAL NOTIFICATION



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Mail: P.O. Box 3999
Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3999
Phone: 404/413-3500
Fax: 404/413-3504

In Person: Alumni Hall
30 Courtland St, Suite 217

May 27, 2009

Principal Investigator: Breault, Donna Adair

Student PI: Gloria R Perry

Protocol Department: Educational Policy Studies

Protocol Title: A phenomenological analysis of engagement in the high school classroom.

Submission Type: Protocol H09460

Review Type: Expedited Review

Approval Date: May 27, 2009

Expiration Date: May 26, 2010

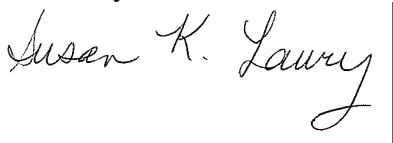
The Georgia State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the above referenced study and enclosed Informed Consent Document(s) in accordance with the Department of Health and Human Services. The approval period is listed above.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. When the study is completed, a Study Closure Report must be submitted to the IRB.
2. For any research that is conducted beyond the one-year approval period, you must submit a Renewal Application 30 days prior to the approval period expiration. As a courtesy, an email reminder is sent to the Principal Investigator approximately two months prior to the expiration of the study. However, failure to receive an email reminder does not negate your responsibility to submit a Renewal Application. In addition, failure to return the Renewal Application by its due date must result in an automatic termination of this study. Reinstatement can only be granted following resubmission of the study to the IRB.
3. Any adverse event or problem occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB using the Adverse Event Form.
4. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is obtained and that no human subject will be involved in the research prior to obtaining informed consent. Ensure that each person giving consent is provided with a copy of the Informed Consent Form (ICF). The ICF used must be the one reviewed and approved by the IRB; the approval dates of the IRB review are stamped on each page of the ICF. Copy and use the stamped ICF for the coming year. Maintain a single copy of the approved ICF in your files for this study. However, a waiver to obtain informed consent may be granted by the IRB as outlined in 45CFR46.116(d).

All of the above referenced forms are available online at <https://irbwise.gsu.edu>. Please do not hesitate to contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity (404-413-3500) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan K. Laury". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the left of a vertical line.

Susan Laury, IRB Chair

Federal Wide Assurance Number: 00000129