Orchestrating Classrooms: A Collaborative Inquiry Study of Novice Teacher Community Building

Leah G. Welte
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd
Part of the Elementary Education and Teaching Commons, and the Secondary Education and Teaching Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/862

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact dylan.burns@usu.edu.
ORCHESTRATING CLASSROOMS: A COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

STUDY OF NOVICE TEACHER COMMUNITY BUILDING

by

Leah G. Welte

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Education
(Curriculum and Instruction)

Approved:

Scott Hunsaker, Ph.D.
Major Professor

Cinthya M. Saavedra, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Todd Campbell, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Gary S. Straquadine, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Barry Franklin, Ph. D.
Committee Member

Byron R. Burnham, Ed.D.
Dean of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2010
Orchestrating Classrooms: A Collaborative Inquiry Study of Novice Teacher Community Building

by

Leah G. Welte, Doctor of Philosophy
Utah State University, 2010

Major Professor: Dr. Scott Hunsaker
Department: Curriculum and Instruction

Creating a community of learners with and among students in a collaborative classroom environment provides the keystone for developing the skills necessary for success in the 21st century. Some preservice teachers envision that community building can enhance the learning experience for them and their students and want to learn and employ the necessary strategies. This study examined whether such a desirous group of novice teachers could identify the key factors they believed comprise community building and could successfully establish a community of learners during their first full year of teaching, supported by participation in a collaborative inquiry group.

Four novice teachers met monthly throughout their first year for two-hour sessions during which they discussed and examined various aspects involved in establishing their classroom communities. They created and shared artifacts designed to promote a caring, respectful relationship between them and their students as well as
among the students themselves. These novice teachers discussed the challenges inherent in helping students with differing sociocultural, language, and behavioral needs bond with one another. They also supported each other in dealing with the myriad of necessities and constraints involved in implementing a start-up classroom. During the final session, group members synthesized what they believed constituted the essence of community building. They also elaborated regarding the areas of success they had achieved during their initial year of teaching. Finally, the members identified that participation in a collaborative inquiry group had supported their first-year experience. The group judged their overall experience as productive and successful.

The researcher’s perspective was somewhat different from the other group members. Difficulties identified in the process were using collaborative inquiry as the method to gather data for a dissertation while endeavoring to act as an equal group member, requiring in-depth analysis of novice teachers who had not previously participated in action research and were still in the early stages of developing their practice as well as the tendency of novice teachers who had experienced the same preservice program to employ groupthink rather than to challenge one another’s statements. Further research should study collaborative inquiry as a method employed throughout preservice programs.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Scott Hunsaker for his patience in guiding me through the dissertation process. He also supported my study by authorizing university funds for costs associated with my group’s collaborative inquiry. I also appreciate the willingness of my committee members, Dr. Gary Straquadine and Dr. Barry Franklin, to remain on my committee despite their personal changes at the university, as well as Dr. Cinthya Saavedra and Dr. Todd Campbell, who joined my committee as replacement members.

My family deserves my greatest appreciation for their encouragement and understanding, especially my husband, Dr. Richard Welte, who gave up many hours of companionship as I worked at my computer. To my son, Dan, and daughters, Veronica and Stacey, I want to express my love and respect as well as to share my continued love of learning, exemplified by this doctorate, which I know they emulate. I also wish to thank my nephew and niece, Dr. Jeffrey S. and Rebecca Job, and their family for making it possible for me to spend overnights and summer stays while I fulfilled my course requirements in Logan. My special sister-in-law, Dorothy Job, was also a constant encourager. Their interest and support of my efforts to earn this doctorate were most helpful. Finally, my dear friends, Dr. Elaine Byrd, Penny Heilman, and Dr. Pat Wolfe, continually cheered me on toward the finish line, which I appreciate more than they know.

Leah G. Welte
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT .......................................................... iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................. v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES ....................................................... viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................... ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER

#### I. INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 1
- Problem ................................................................. 1
- Purpose ................................................................. 5
- Research Questions ............................................... 8

#### II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ........................................... 9
- Placing Classroom Community into Context .................. 10
- Key Ideas for Community Building .............................. 14
- Barriers to Novice Teacher Community Building ............ 36
- Supports for Community Building ............................... 44

#### III. METHODS ............................................................. 57
- Selecting the Topic ................................................... 57
- Selection of Participants ............................................. 61
- Selection of Methodology .......................................... 65
- Tensions of Researcher as Participant .......................... 69
- Participant Decisions Affecting the Collaborative Inquiry Group ........................................ 71
- Other Issues Influencing Collaborative Inquiry ............. 72
- Creating the Constitution for the Collaborative Inquiry Sessions ................................... 73
- Working Out Other Details for the Collaborative Inquiry ........................................... 74
- How Our Experience Was Gathered and Gleaned .......... 81
- Another Line of Thinking Provided by the Researcher in Our Collaborative Inquiry .................. 94
- Threats to Validity and Checks for Validity in Our Collaborative Inquiry .......................... 96
- Limitations of Our Collaborative Inquiry ....................... 99
- Conclusion about Our Collaborative Inquiry ................ 103
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV. FINDINGS OF THE COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY GROUP: THE TRUTH OF COMMUNITY BUILDING</th>
<th>104</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting On Previous Collaborative Inquiry Sessions</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ejournaling as Part of Our Collaborative Inquiry</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Class Visitations Added to Our Collaborative Inquiry</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Determines Our Truth During the Final Collaborative Inquiry Session</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essences of Community Building the Researcher Described from Analyzing Collaborative Inquiry Session Transcriptions</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF NOVICE TEACHER COMMUNITY BUILDING USING COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY | 167 |
| Discussion of Novice Teacher Participation in Collaborative Inquiry Groups | 167 |
| Implications for Further Study about Novice Teacher Participation in Collaborative Inquiry Groups | 175 |
| Discussion of Community Building in the Elementary Classroom | 175 |

REFERENCES .............................................................................................................. 177
CURRICULUM VITAE ................................................................................................ 192
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A List of Each Date, Location, and Session Leader for Collaborative Inquiry Sessions</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Record of Expenditures Taken From Method Journal Kept During Collaborative Inquiry</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>School and Classroom Demographics</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Copy of individual slides presenting the five elements of community</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Copy of collaborative inquiry constitution created by group members</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Snowball USB Microphone connected to MacBook laptop</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Front cover of binder used as portfolio for sessions</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>School district 2008-2009 school calendar with collaborative inquiry session and class observation dates marked</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Agenda used as organizer to stimulate discussion and decision making during initial collaborative inquiry organizational meeting</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Ice breaker used by collaborative inquiry group members to introduce themselves to one another at organizational meeting</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The organizer on which members were able to record their individual experience in areas we had brainstormed as being possible areas of focus for action and reflection cycles</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>A sample page from a Kiersey Temperament Sorter taken to help the member determine her personality type teaching style for discussion purposes</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The questionnaire the researcher made to help the member crystallize various aspects of her for discussion purposes</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>List of first grade class jobs together with the weekly pay and a bank slip so a student could save her money</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>The team song using every student’s name together with team-building ideas; set to the Tune of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.”</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>A kindergarten class practices problem solving skills during a class meeting</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>An organizer designed for upper grade students to self-select behavior class and individual goals and to self-evaluate weekly progress toward achieving them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>An excerpt from the beginning of field notes taken in one member’s classroom during the half-day visitations. Each member took field notes during three other members’ visitations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>A searched list of group emails generated by one of the members and sent to all members of the collaborative inquiry group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>An organizer with our collaborative inquiry group’s three questions restated to be answered individually in preparation for achieving group consensus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Partial statement about common themes identified during final collaboration and proposed statement for group’s editing to achieve its consensus of novice teachers’ truth about community building during their first full-time year of public school teaching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Problem

Orchestrating an elementary classroom in a way that establishes a community of learners means that a teacher must successfully create and organize important facets of learning with community building as the keystone. A recently published classroom management textbook introduces a description of what such an undertaking requires:

A community is a group of individuals who share a vision.... Community is as much a feeling as it is a concrete entity. [Efforts to create community are focused on] arranging physical space to create a user-friendly ambience...planning curriculum that is interdisciplinary and collaborative...implementing daily classroom activities that foster a communal atmosphere...structuring experiences that give students the opportunity to serve others while learning.... The value of community becomes a reality when every member has a voice in decisions that affect him or her. (Henley, 2006, p. 60)

Many novice teachers develop the desire to create such a community among elementary students during their years of preservice education because they participated successfully in cohorts themselves (Seifert & Mandzuk, 2006), experienced the positive features of community membership (Cooper, 2007), and productively engaged in service learning (Bollin, 2007; Potthoff, Dinsmore, & Eifler, 2000). Furthermore, they may have envisioned a clear idea of what must be accomplished in order to bring “people of different backgrounds voluntarily together in support of a common goal” (Fendler, 2006, p. 310). Such a vision emerges during their upper level university courses, where these novice teachers’ beliefs develop over time as they change from students to teachers (Doyle, 1997). They gravitate toward writing the type of lesson plans that involve small
group interaction utilizing alternative assessments rather than relying solely upon direct instruction and tests. Moreover, such novice teachers may enthusiastically develop integrated social studies units with essential questions that involve students in decision-making. Finally, they may select methods to teach literacy, mathematics, and science that involve student collaboration and plan ways to effectively arrange a classroom environment to generate student autonomy. Such novice teachers have the opportunity during fieldwork encounters to put into practice some of the strategies they have learned when they work with supervising teachers who share this philosophy. Yet, the belief system of novice teachers is fragile, and they may find it difficult to craft a comprehensive, realistic plan of action for their first years within most capstone courses as they are currently structured (Prushieck, McCarty, & McIntyre, 2001). Nor can the opportunity to fully implement their community building strategies be provided consistently to novice teachers during their relatively brief experiences as student teachers in cooperating teachers’ classrooms (Feiman-Nemser, 2003).

Once placed in their first teaching assignment, novice teachers may set aside their desire for student-centered community building and return to a more controlling, authoritarian mode as they react to the demands (Assaf, 2008; Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner, & Kauffman, 1982; Pelletier, Seguin-Levasque, & Legault, 2002) and the accountability pressures they face (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Faulkner & Cook, 2006; Hammerness, 2004). Furthermore, the newly acquired beliefs and desire of novice teachers to create a communal environment may not be sufficient to counterbalance their years of personal experience as students of “transmission model teachers” (Richardson,
2003, p. 1635).

Often hired near the beginning of the school year, novice teachers have a number of immediate needs. The first is to fashion a functional environment out of a 900-square-foot room filled only with desks and chairs. Hours are spent creating bulletin board spaces to present student work or motivational displays. They visit discount stores and recycling centers to stock cupboards with resources, purchase organizers, and fill shelves with appealing books. Concurrently, novice teachers work to digest information and strategies from multiple teacher guides and ancillary resources as they try to match them to the state core standards that represent required student learning. What is more, they wrestle with meshing school and classroom schedules into a meaningful, timely arrangement that makes possible captivating lessons sensitive to issues such as gender and racial equity (Martin, Chiodo, & Chang, 2001). At the same time, novice teachers attempt to plan differentiated learning for the English language learners, special education students, gifted, and slower learners who are included on their class lists. Moreover, all these essential community-building factors are addressed under the specter of the high stakes accountability of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This 2001 mandate required novice teachers to cause every individual placed in their charge to achieve adequate yearly progress on state tests in reading, mathematics, and science. Lack of time and effective resources to accomplish all the tasks that must be done become novice teachers’ greatest adversaries and represent their consistent cries (Meyer, 2002).

School district personnel are aware of the seriousness of the challenge presented
to novice teachers as they try to orchestrate successful classrooms during their initial years. Sincere attempts are made to support novice teachers with mentors and collaborative school teams (Giebelhaus & Bendixon-Noe, 1997). However, the dismal data regarding the rate of retention for novice teachers suggest that the efforts made by school districts have not yet proven effective (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). In fact, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) reported that “student discipline problems and poor student motivation” (p. 32) were two of the most significant reasons given by the 30-50% of novice teachers who leave the field some time during their first 5 years. Such troubling teacher turnover represents a persistent financial drain upon school district budgets, estimated by the Department of Labor to be 30% of the annual average teacher salary, not to mention an untold cost to student learning from the consistent lack of experience of many of their teachers (Emeric, 2006).

More consistent and coordinated plans for induction that effectively support novice teachers’ efforts to build community must be instituted (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) since novice teachers persistently list classroom management as one of their greatest stresses (MetLife, 2005; Veenman, 1984). In addition, more can and should be done in preservice courses and fieldwork to support novice teachers’ desires to create and maintain a classroom community despite mitigating factors by providing them with collaborative research opportunities that promote increased self-reflection and enhanced self-efficacy (Francis, 1995; Moran, 2007; Tegano & Moran, 2005).
Purpose

A significant number of studies have begun to investigate important individual components of community building that address the challenges facing novice as well as experienced teachers. For example, building caring relationships between novice teachers and their students (Goldstein & Lake, 2000, 2003) and increasing connectedness among students (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997) have been established as two areas of social interaction important to the overall achievement of individuals in a classroom. In addition, factors that make school an appealing place for diverse students (Brown, 2004; Howard, 2001), environments that create student resilience (Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, & Hambacher, 2007), and strategies to enhance student autonomy (Patrick, Skinner, & Connell, 1993; Reeve, 2006; Reeve & Jang, 2006) add to the conversation about how teachers can help students from all cultures become equal members of the community. Moreover, the significance of teachers’ collaboration with students (Garcia & Donmoyer, 2006; Kitchen & Stevens, 2008) as well as other significant adults (Perry, 2008; Zellermayer & Tabak, 2006) to build student self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Dunlap, 2005) and student group cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Slavin, 2002) appear to be important teaching strategies for teachers to maintain positive interactions in a classroom. Finally, research indicates that novice teachers profit from collaborative experiences, including action research, which have become valuable aspects of some teacher education programs that promote reflection, self-efficacy, and practical applications of inquiry (Moran, 2007; Prushieck et al., 2001; Tegano & Moran, 2005).

Despite exhaustive reviews of literature concerning the above individual issues, I
have yet to find studies that shed light upon the ability of novice teachers to incorporate the components of learning into a comprehensive, consistent plan of action that creates a viable community within their classrooms. Moreover, I found no reports of mentoring or collaborative studies that implemented approaches designed to support novice teachers as they attempt to accomplish such an all-inclusive undertaking. In the same way that an Olympic runner must coordinate all the skills she and her coaches have examined separately in order to win her individual race, the novice teacher must become empowered to synthesize many factors into an articulated classroom community experience for her unique student group. Beginners who possess the persistence and resilience, and who are provided sufficient guidance, continue in the field to become experienced, caring teachers whom students recall throughout their lives (Kottler & Gallavan, 2008).

Because of the lack of research on such an important topic to novice and experienced teachers, I elected to conduct my studies on community building. As a lecturer in a college teacher education program classroom management course, I taught my students, based upon my personal experience as an educator, that community building is a key factor to facilitate student learning. Whenever possible during my doctoral coursework, I searched for studies that might inform my empirical understanding. Discovering the dearth of studies concerning community building within novice teachers’ practice, I conducted two qualitative phenomenological pilot studies with preservice teachers during their fieldwork experiences. My focus was to discover their perceptions about their understanding of community building and their ability to create a community
of learners in other teachers’ classrooms both before and during the student teaching experience. These same participants were willing to join me to continue our study of community building when they became novice teachers with their initial classrooms of students.

Because I believe that novice teachers must become reflective practitioners, and I had already completed pilot studies about their practices, I gave my participants the option, which they chose, to employ the collaborative inquiry method to study with me whether it might be useful as a vehicle to uncover our perceptions about our ability to create a community of learners in our first-year classrooms. Collaborative inquiry is an adult learning process during which participants experience repeated, rigorous cycles of action and reflection as they attempt in a proactive manner to develop or change their practice over an extended time period regarding an aspect of teaching in which they share equal interest. Even though selecting this process involved relinquishing direct control over my dissertation study, I trusted that I might learn more about community building by participating in such an adult communal group experience. Because it was important for me to be as equal a participant as possible, I elected to take the position of a full-time elementary teacher during this study, something I had not done for 15 years, in another state and school district. Although I had this background, in many ways I shared the challenges of novice teachers. Moreover, I chose the qualitative study approach of collaborative inquiry because it was through the thick description of the perceptions of us participants (Patton, 2002) of the synergy of factors important to creating a learning community that could best enlighten ourselves and others as to how novice teachers
might orchestrate community building with their learners.

**Research Questions**

The main goals of this study were to better define the complex interactions that result in a classroom community and how novice teachers might effectively support one another in creating such an environment during their initial years of teaching. The research questions below guided this process from its inception through data analysis and on to the writing of the story (Glesne, 2006).

1. What are the shared perceptions of novice teachers about what constitutes community building in a classroom?

2. What are the shared perceptions of novice teachers about how the process of collaborative inquiry supports the development of a classroom community?

3. What are novice teachers’ shared perceptions about their ability to create a community of learners among their diverse students during their first full-time year of teaching?
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My literature review examined significant qualities that seemed to be necessary for novice teachers to exhibit within themselves or components they needed to implement with their students so that a classroom community of learners was created: (a) the teacher-student caring cycle, (b) student supportive relationships, (c) group student cooperation, (d) student self-determination, (e) novice teacher qualities, and (f) novice teacher support systems.

I conducted extensive computer-assisted searches using Ebscohost and selecting the databases Academic Search Premier, ERIC, and PsycINFO. The descriptors I used to conduct multiple searches included community, community building, community of learners, learning communities, teacher caring, student connectedness, student relatedness, student group cooperation, student collaboration, diverse student community building, student self-efficacy, student self-determination, student self-confidence, traditional novice teachers, adult novice teachers, novice teacher collaboration, novice teacher collaborative inquiry, novice teacher action research, mentoring novice teachers, novice teacher self-efficacy, novice teacher beliefs about teaching and learning, learning environment, service learning. As articles, studies, books, book chapters, and dissertations were found, I checked each abstract for relevance and sought complete copies for all those considered pertinent. Whenever articles, book chapters, or dissertations were not immediately available on the Utah State University electronic library, I requested them using the USU Interlibrary Services (ILLIAD) process. The
sources I obtained were read in their entirety with citations and references reviewed for additional relevant resources. The depth and breadth of information gleaned from this review provided a valuable foundation for this study and helped to clarify the meaning that was created during the collaborative inquiry process employed as its method.

**Placing Classroom Community into Context**

John Dewey associated community with democracy and discussed the concept at length in a number of his writings. At one point, he stated, “Wherever there is conjoint activity whose consequences are appreciated as good by all singular persons who take part in it there is community” (as cited in Hickman & Alexander, 1998, p. 295). In the past decade, the idea of community has experienced resurgence with several types of productive communities becoming increasingly the fashion in education. The emphasis upon school community is associated with Sergiovanni’s (1998) representation of schools redefined with community as their focus. Wenger’s (1998) often cited “communities of practice” (p. 7) among educators was discussed in a single chapter of his book about communities of workers in the business sector. Teachers have also been strongly encouraged to become part of professional development communities (DuFour & Eakers, 1998; Hord & Sommers, 2009). More recently, small learning communities have been established within comprehensive high schools or as schools in their own right (Sammon, 2007). Finally, Warren (2005) identified three types of community-school collaborations: (a) community schools that offer a full spectrum of services on their campuses, (b) community-sponsored schools that are chartered by the school district or state, and (c)
school-community organizing where schools collaborate with community organizations. Whatever their structure, common threads are woven into the fabric that comprises an educational community. Notwithstanding the names or focus, Cobb (1992) defined the essence of community in the school as requiring “responsibility, collective activity, loyalty, working together, shared values, accountability, commitment, identity, and voluntarism” (p. 2). He went on to say that “an effective school community has to be a community in which personal relationships outweigh impersonal rules…based on shared vision and close personal interactions that are not a frill, but a necessity” (p. 23). Franklin (2010) synthesized its appeal:

Community is clearly an alluring concept for one who wishes to understand such cultural practices as schooling…. The term invokes an array of positive and desirable relationships including belongingness, common identity, consensus, intimacy, solidarity, shared values, and unity to name but a few. In a world that is becoming increasingly complex as well as more dangerous, the concept of community conveys a feeling of safety and happiness. And according to the sociologist Raymond Williams, it is a term that never appears to be used negatively. (pp. 3-4)

It seemed clear that the idea of individuals learning to work together within a social environment for the overall success of the group was flourishing within the educational process.

Inherent within the more comprehensive school communities is the need to create an individual classroom community of learners. Allen (2000) hailed such a classroom as a place that “will produce students who will be respectful to others and participate in class appropriately and with confidence” (p. 24). He further defined the qualities that must characterize the classroom community as:

1. helping students drop their guard enough to get to know one another as people.
2. creating a feeling of safety, both physically and emotionally.
3. including the give and take of joint problem-solving efforts.
4. welcoming conflict.
5. celebrating the unique contributions of each individual.
6. favoring non-competition. (p. 25)

In addition, Fendler (2006) recommended that community required “common experiences be built into...instructional strategies and curriculum” (p. 23), and Weinstein (1998) indicated that the “focus [must be] on prevention of student behavior problems...in which norms are established and academic routines promote constructive work” (p. 152) to promote the positive environment in which communities thrive. The melting-pot model for building a classroom community through assimilation and homogeneity has evolved to include the idea that “people of different backgrounds can voluntarily come together in support of a common goal” (Fendler, 2006, p. 310). Furthermore, hooks¹ (2003) believed that creating classroom community among diverse learners is similar to both the democratic process and a healthy family that “is shaped by a mutual willingness to listen, to argue, and to make peace” (p. 126). In a similar spirit, Miele (2004) stated that community “can bring together the people, the resources, and the drive to construct meaningful experiences to enlighten [everyone] about the benefits of living in a diverse community” (p. 138). Goldstein (2002) provided a comprehensive list of the qualities that characterize a community of learners, including “being valued, supported, challenged, encouraged, and doing the same for others, having a safe place to ask questions and to take the risk of answering questions, knowing others well and being known and respected by them in turn” (p. 45). Finally, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) summed up

¹ bell hooks purposely declines to capitalize her first and last names.
the necessity of classroom community building by noting that classroom orchestration, with a learner-centered focus, requires “structuring respectful classroom communities where students can work productively and where goals include academic achievement, social and emotional development, collaboration, and character development” (p. 327).

Of course, the teacher provides one of the key ingredients that determine whether or not such a community is established within a classroom. The National Academy of Education Committee report (2005, as cited in Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005) provided an enlightening comparison of the teacher’s challenge to orchestrate a community:

To a music lover watching a concert from the audience, it would be easy to believe that a conductor has one of the easiest jobs in the world. There he stands, waving his arms in time with the music, and the orchestra produces glorious sounds, to all appearances quite spontaneously.... In the same way that conducting looks like hand waving to the uninitiated, teaching looks simple from the perspective of students who see a person talking and listening, handing out papers, and giving assignments. Invisible in both of these performances are the many kinds of knowledge, unseen plans, and backstage moves—skunkworks, if you will, that allow a teacher to purposefully move a group of students from one set of understandings and skills to quite another over the space of many months. On a daily basis, teachers confront complex decisions that rely on many different kinds of knowledge and judgment.... To make good decisions, teachers must be aware of the many ways in which student learning can unfold in the context of development, learning differences, language and cultural influences, and individual temperaments, interests, and approaches to learning.... Above all, teachers need to keep what is best for the child at the center of their decision making. (p. 1)

The elements of classroom community building are an essential endeavor that all teachers who wish to maximize student success must try to accomplish. However, in the spirit of the above metaphor, no perfectly composed scores with directions exist to help teachers orchestrate a classroom community, and the teachers’ musicians, her students in
the classroom, do not always focus intently throughout the performance, striving to play each note flawlessly. As a result, facilitating a community of learners on a daily basis remains a daunting task for all teachers, let alone novice teachers who are just learning how to correctly use the baton.

**Key Ideas for Community Building**

A plethora of classroom management textbooks, teacher self help books and chapters within tomes about significant educational topics attempt to delineate the necessary aspects for managing a classroom effectively. Ironically, novice teachers, who most often are assigned to read such information, do not yet possess the experience that allows them to find it meaningful and fail to develop the overriding principles to be successful in their initial teaching assignments. A purpose of this study is to determine what elements of the educational process are essential—the sine qua non—to creating a community of learners. By determining what should be the focus for novice teachers, it is hoped that their success might be better enabled as they captain their first ships upon the largely uncharted waters of their classrooms.

**Novice Teacher Caring**

A variety of affective qualifications that teachers should possess to become successful in creating a community of learners have been outlined in numerous articles. Dewey (1933) indicated decades ago that the teacher “must give full time and attention to observation and interpretation of the pupils’ intellectual reactions. [She] must be alive to all forms of bodily expression of mental condition...as well as sensitive to the meaning of
all expression in words (p. 275). In addition, Ready (as cited in Hoy, Hoy, & Davis, 2004) listed a number of requisite qualities:

1. Love children.
2. Respect all children and parents in all circumstances.
3. See potential in all children.
4. Motivate children to reach their highest potential.
5. Be a spontaneous and creative educator who is able to see teachable moments and seizes them.
6. Have a sense of humor. (p. 21)

It is significant to note that four of the six qualities above specifically concern attitudes toward children and none of them focused upon content. Helm (2007) also stressed the need for positive social/emotional qualities, stating:

A successful teacher possesses the dispositions of caring and empathy and has a strong work ethic and critical thinking ability.... We all expect the teacher to be able to teach his or her subject matter and to have good content knowledge, but more important, those teachers should be willing to teach the child first. (p. 109)

Again, the cognitive aspect of teaching concerned with content is considered to be a given, while the child-centered qualities remain the focus. Synthesizing the findings from their multiple studies, Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) mentioned an additional affective dimension of the teacher as that of presence, which they defined as

[Being] wide awake to one’s self, to one’s students and to their learning in such a way that learning is served through skillful and compassionate analysis and access to both subject matter knowledge and pedagogical strategies.... Trust is essential to presence. Teachers need to know and to trust themselves and they also need to know and trust their students and the contexts in which they work. For teachers, this knowledge and trust are created every day by staying connected to themselves, their students, their students’ learning and their communities. (p. 284)

These studies are representative of those that examine some form of teacher caring and intuition when determining what is necessary for teachers to be successful in creating a community of learners.
Researchers studying the caring component of teaching commonly cite the prolific writings and theories of Nel Noddings, who believed that the act of caring required the teacher-carer to become totally immersed in the needs of the students, with her energy devoted to them and their projects (Noddings, 1986, 1992, 2005). To cement the caring relationship, students who represent the cared-for must also be able and willing to respond to the teacher (Noddings, 2002). Becoming deeply knowledgeable about her students’ interests, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as their preferred modes of learning creates the opportunity for the teacher to develop that capacity of mind called intuition, which enhances caring relationships. In fact, Noddings and Shore (1984) indicated that caring and intuition interact in three ways: “1) the sense of caring and intuitive feelings between teacher and student; 2) the enthusiasm for a subject area that students share with their teacher; and 3) the instinctive love for learning or teaching they share” (p. 165). Moreover, the act of caring about some students can be a conscious, ethical decision that is made by the teacher whether or not the students are naturally appealing. A teacher may feel that she must be caring even if she does not want to care in some instances (Goldstein, 2002).

Moreover, although all students seem to respond positively to teacher-caring, a number of studies have established that it is essential to the success of urban, economically and ethnically diverse students whose numbers steadily increase in most classrooms. Their predominantly white, middle-class teachers must demonstrate significant understanding and support for their diverse students’ cultures, economic circumstances, and special needs to create that bond of caring. For example, Howard
(2001) found that African American elementary school students indicated three factors that made them desire to attend class and learn: (a) caring teachers who have high expectations for academic success that balance strictness and support; (b) a warm, family-like classroom environment with traditions and routines; and (c) learning that is exciting and stimulating “wherein students are actively connected to what is being taught” (p. 145). His qualitative study was one of only a few where elementary students were interviewed to discover their perceptions about the relevance of their schooling. However, he did not document the perceptions of the teachers about their degree of intent and ability to provide culturally relevant community building, which would have strengthened the validity of his recommendations for classroom strategies.

Notably, Mexican youth who have been instilled with *educación*—personal dignity and social responsibility—by their families, clearly show that authentic caring relationships, often missing with their teachers, were crucial to their learning (Valenzuela, 1999). Again, Valenzuela’s emphasis was upon the perceptions of high school students about their teachers’ degree of caring and the importance of both kinds of responses to their academic achievement. Nevertheless, she did provide detailed accounts of teachers’ comments from which the reader must infer what attitudes and actions need to be emphasized by caring teachers.

Furthermore, Brown (2004) concluded from his study interviewing 13 urban teachers that nearly all students noticed their teacher’s caring through nonverbal cues—facial expressions and body language—in addition to their verbal responses to behavior and student comments. He went on to say that African and Hispanic students reported
they knew teachers cared when they (the teachers) pressured students in an assertive manner to complete assignments, pay attention, and perform better academically. However, in Brown’s study, the teachers ranging in experience from 2 to 33 years and were at least somewhat established in their method of dealing with students, which is different from the challenge that faces novice teachers.

In a carefully conducted study of novice elementary teachers who varied by race themselves, Bondy and colleagues (2007) found a strong similarity in their approach to community building with diverse students. All three teachers emphasized that genuine caring relationships must be developed with their students from the beginning hours of school by the teacher sharing stories about herself and students learning to know one another on a personal level. These novice teachers emphasized the significance of making the classroom an emotionally safe and respectful place to learn.

Finally, Delpit (1988), another researcher of students of color, indicated that demonstrating caring requires a culturally sensitive teacher to provide whatever structure, scaffolding, and even “additional codes of power” (p. 292) that enabled diverse students to pass through “the gatekeeping points” to succeed in the dominant culture. She also emphasized the critical importance of teachers to these students.

I have discovered that children of color, particularly African American, seem especially sensitive to their relationship between themselves and their teacher. I have concluded that it appears that they not only learn from a teacher but also for a teacher. If they do not feel connected to a teacher on an emotional level, then they will not learn; they will not put out the effort. (Delpit, 2006, p. 227)

It seems clear that the concept of creating a community of learners requires an authentically caring teacher for the success of students of color and that this authenticity
must include high expectations for performance and achievement.

On the other hand, Deiro (2003) provided an alternative viewpoint about caring, gained from her study of six experienced secondary teachers over a year and a half:

A teacher’s respect and an ethical use of power are key to students’ perceptions of caring. None of these caring teachers was nice-nice. Being permissive, sweet, warm, or gentle is not the prerequisite of caring. Caring teachers can be stern and strict. They can even appear detached and aloof. But they must be respectful to be perceived as caring. (p. 62)

Although the teachers Deiro (1997) studied worked in different socioeconomic areas—inner city, rural, and suburban—she found that six common bonding strategies were used by the teachers:

1. Creating one-to-one time with students
2. Using appropriate self-disclosure
3. Having high expectations of students while conveying a belief in their capabilities
4. Networking with parents, family members, friends of students
5. Building a sense of community among students within the classroom
6. Using rituals and traditions within the classroom. (p. 60)

Despite the fact that she studied secondary teachers’ relationships with their students, Deiro’s concept of caring may be significant to community building, especially with upper grade elementary students.

Significantly, Larrivee (2000) extended Deiro’s (2003) caring concept by suggesting that teachers with very different teaching styles and personalities can become successful community builders—they do not need to be “intimate, affectionate, or indulgent” (p. 18). She agreed that the essential element the teacher must demonstrate is respect, which is shown by thoughtful listening, valuing, and including students’ ideas in the learning process, and demonstrating the belief that students are capable. Larrivee
believed that the teacher must value the development of caring relationships as much as the teaching-learning process, and that the “foundation for community-building begins with the teacher...at two levels...teacher bonding with students and nurturing thoughtful and considerate interactions among students” (p. 19). It would appear that the concept of teachers developing caring relationships with all the students in their classrooms is essential to their success and may also be linked to similar supportive relationships being developed among the students.

Finally, McLaughlin (1992) discussed the tension between caring and control that exists in classroom relationships. He concluded that the teacher’s authority needs to be tempered by negotiation within a social structure that “can result in enhanced classroom solidarity and greater student responsibility” (p. 1). Because the teacher is ultimately the person who is responsible for all the aspects of the classroom and students, McLaughlin’s conclusion seemed to suggest that he or she establish a reasonable balance between the concepts of caring and control.

**Student Connectedness**

In order to create a community of learners, a group of researchers has validated in a large body of studies that it is also necessary for the teacher to support her students’ psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and connectedness (i.e., relatedness) with her and among their peers (Reeve, 2006; Reeve & Jang, 2006; Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004) in order for them to be successful. Significantly, the above three constructs seem to operate interdependently within a classroom. Reeve and Jang (2006) commented that “teachers can provide students with high-quality interpersonal
relationships...and out of that relationship context, students can experience and begin to exercise their own sense of autonomy” (p. 217). According to their findings, teachers range from the highly controlling type who interferes with students’ self-determination about their learning to the highly autonomy supportive type who facilitates students’ learning by “identifying and nurturing students’ needs, interests, and preferences and by creating classroom opportunities for students to have these internal motives guide their learning and activity” (Reeve et al., 2004, p. 149) and, thereby, their connectedness with one another. Helping students develop autonomy promotes engagement, which is evidenced by their being interested, attentive, and persistent in learning—a sign of underlying motivation. Furthermore, students whose teachers were autonomy supportive became connected to one another, exhibited greater motivation toward mastery, and showed more understanding of concepts, which led to greater intrinsic motivation and higher academic performance (Reeve et al., 2004).

Significantly, Ryan and Deci (2000) found that, even though an activity may not be intrinsically motivating to students, the teacher is able to integrate the entire student group’s connectedness to one another as she creates a positive attitude toward activities for extrinsically rewarding reasons if the students have a degree of choice and a desire to attain the outcome. The researchers also indicated that such extrinsic integration is likelier when the activity is one about which the students feel competent. The researchers acknowledged, however, that their studies were limited by being conducted with individuals and in the laboratory rather than the classroom setting and that much of their data is correlational rather than causal. The researchers encouraged practitioners to test
the extent to which their findings can be applied in authentic and complex settings.

Another large-scale quantitative study demonstrated that, as teachers plan with their students interesting learning activities that provide choices and options, students, as a group, remain engaged, feel capable, and behave responsibly (Wentzel, 1999). In addition, a group of colleagues from various universities continue to examine the interrelated aspects of connectedness. Their findings indicate that providing specific, nonjudgmental feedback concerning progress or the need to address a problem encourages students’ inner motivation and communicates the belief that they are competent (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Patrick et al., 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Such feedback may take the form of a behavior reflection about an action, paraphrasing a verbal comment, as well as specific encouragement or compliments from the teacher to her students or between students (Kostelnik, Whirren, Sodeman, & Gregory, 2006). When necessary, the teacher’s gentle explanations of why one choice is more or less appropriate for the circumstance enable students to remain connected with her and with one another despite the correction (Reeve, 2006). Carefully controlled, large-scale studies examining various facets of connectedness over two decades, indicated that connectedness between the teacher and students promoted the desire to interact effectively with other students in the classroom environment, which was related to student achievement (Deci et al., 1982; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Patrick et al., 1993; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Children’s strong feeling of connectedness to peers was also found in a large-scale study of 1,226 second- through eighth-grade students to have a positive effect on
general self-esteem and identity as well as being actively engaged in school. The researchers indicated that connectedness with peers as opposed to adults increased as students shifted from elementary to middle school (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997). In an even larger but similar study, Lubbers, Van Der Werf, Snijders, Creemers, and Kuyper (2006) found that secondary students who were well accepted by their peers were less often those who could be considered as failures within the system and were positively associated with achieving academic progress. Another significant finding was that “peer acceptance and connectedness were more strongly related in classes with more negative climates” (p. 492), which may corroborate the above-mentioned conclusion of Lynch and Cicchetti (1997). Moreover, other quantitative studies have established a positive relationship between the perceptions of children regarding the emotional and social support of their peers and engagement in learning, self-concept, motivation, and academic goals (Birch & Ladd, 1996; Hymel, Comfort, Schonert-Reichl, & McDougall, 1996; Wentzel, 1999).

The importance of connectedness among students to student success has been well established by the above-mentioned studies conducted by researchers for decades across the United States. However, these researchers also generally acknowledged that their measures might have benefited from being more elaborate and that their samples might have included more diverse and disadvantaged students, as “connectedness to peers may be more important to motivation” (Patrick et al., 1993, p. 789) for those children than was evidenced by the majority children in their samples. Notwithstanding the researchers’ stated concerns, the overall quality of the large number of quantitative
research studies on topics related to connectedness seems most impressive and needs to be considered as important to developing a community of learners.

An additional support for connectedness among students has been provided by recent qualitative studies that are beginning to confirm the importance of developing a peer culture of connectedness in order to facilitate a classroom community. For example, in one kindergarten classroom, the researcher immersed herself into the classroom peer group for 108 hours to study the dynamics whereby the students formed their peer group culture (Lash, 2008). She witnessed students both cooperating with the reasonable classroom rules and yet circumventing them at times to assert their agency and covering for each other. Lash concluded “the children’s agency formed a community that was stronger in ways than any the teacher might have instilled in them” (p. 38).

**Group Cooperation**

In a comprehensive meta-analysis of controlled studies over the past 30 years, Johnson, Johnson, and Stanne (2000) have chronicled the effectiveness of cooperative groups, structures, and learning activities in promoting positive social relationships, important to community building, at all grade levels and in all subject areas. This review of 164 studies also found 194 different effect sizes for academic achievement that validated the effectiveness of eight different methods of cooperative learning used in schools. The effectiveness of cooperative efforts was established across grade levels through college and found positive outcomes in studies about preventing and treating a variety of social challenges such as diversity, antisocial behaviors, low self-esteem and alienation, and many others. In this comprehensive review of the research
comparing cooperative, competitive, and individualistic efforts to learn, Johnson and colleagues concluded:

Students working together cooperatively expect to, and do in fact, explain what they learn to groupmates, elaborate on what is being learned, listen to others’ perspectives and ideas, monitor each other’s participation and contributions, and engage in intellectual conflict.... Learning is a personal and social process that results when individuals cooperate to construct shared understanding and knowledge. (p. 21)

One example of group cooperation, as described by Kriete (2002), is where students start the day with a morning meeting interactive group experience creating a positive feeling of community that lasts throughout the day. To reinforce the cooperative group approach, elementary students can be placed for the year in heterogeneous base groups that meet briefly each day to give “the support, help, encouragement, and assistance each member needs to make academic progress (attend class, complete all assignments, learn)” (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 9). The students’ interaction ultimately results in the supportive social relationships that encourage feelings of community. In addition, when students are organized into short-term, informal groups for a single cooperative activity or for longer-term formal cooperative groups during a unit of study, each member becomes responsible for the successful learning of all, whether it is to achieve the mastering of skills or to develop cooperative group projects or performances. Huss (2006) discussed the importance of the essential components that have proven necessary to promote effective cooperation among small groups, which are (a) positive interdependence, (b) face-to-face interaction, (c) individual and group accountability, (d) interpersonal skills, and (e) group processing. Direct cooperative learning methods consist of very specific techniques that can be easily learned and implemented by
teachers while conceptual learning methods include those that require more extensive training but allow teachers to use them as a template to turn their existing lessons and activities into cooperative ones (Johnson et al., 2000).

More recent studies of cooperative learning continue to appear in the literature. Their results validated the effectiveness of the cooperative group strategies in promoting student academic success and positive learning attitude although the researchers expressed concern that implementing the above-listed components and recognition of the key role teachers play in promoting their students’ thought processing are essential for the outcomes to be most effective (Gillies, 2008; Hornby, 2009; Yin-kum, 2008). Significantly, Sharan continued his decades of research work on the effectiveness of cooperative group investigations as he worked with others to apply his strategies to groups of students in Singapore (Tan, Sharan, & Lee, 2007). As hypothesized, high-achieving students significantly exceeded their lower achieving peers academically whether working in small or whole groups. However, students participating in the small group investigations made positive comments about their experience with group investigation, noting in their written evaluations that they “enjoyed the learning process, built stronger team spirits, acquired research skills, and had a deeper understanding of the topic with group investigation” (p. 153). The researchers also noted that adapting the classroom teaching traditions to include the essential characteristics of group investigation is vital to students achieving success in their learning.

Cooperative interactions are important to the development of a classroom community of learners among diverse and heterogeneous students. Specifically,
Calderon, Hertz-Lazarowitz, and Slavin (1998) contended that cooperative learning made a positive difference for language development in English language learners. In contrast to the individual and competitive learning that was evaluated in a number of studies as being less effective for learning, Johnson and Johnson (1989) indicated:

> If the discords of diverse students meeting in the school are to be transformed into a symphony, students need a positive self-view, the psychological health to face conflict and challenge, and the social competencies required to work effectively with diverse peers. Personal and superordinate identities are developed through group processes. It takes membership in cooperative groups to develop a personal identity, an ethnic identity, an identity as a citizen of a society, and an identity as a world citizen. There is considerable evidence that working cooperatively increases students’ self-esteem and psychological health, their ability to act independently and exert their autonomy, their interpersonal and small-group skills, and their understanding of interdependence and cooperative efforts. (p. 21)

Cooperative learning groups, “in essence, develop their own cultures...where all members have equal value. Most learning groups will become a multicultural unit knitted together by a common set of values” (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 18). Each cooperative group lesson provides the kind of interesting learning that helps all students focus their attention, which motivates the engagement that results in learning.

More recent studies continue to support the idea that cooperative learning is effective as a strategy to facilitate positive relationships among students of different ethnicities. In fact, Madrid, Canas, and Ortega-Medina (2007) found in their study comparing competitive peer tutoring, cooperative peer tutoring, and teacher-led instruction with Hispanic and English bilingual students, that cooperative peer tutoring resulted in the highest rate of correct responses to teacher questions by student groups. Similarly, Hurley, Boykin, and Allen (2005) found that African American fifth graders learned a math-task more effectively in communal groups than they did studying
individually. The researcher mentions that his findings support prior research done with students in language arts activities, but he cautions that it remains unclear as to why communal learning enhances the motivation and success of African-American children. Being involved in structured cooperative learning (SCL) team experiences over time resulted in “increased popularity and decreased differences in perceived differences of non-cooperativeness across ethnic backgrounds” of the immigrant students involved in the SCL experiences (Oortwijn, Boekaerts, Vedder, & Fortuin, 2008, p. 221). The researchers supported the idea that extended interaction among students of different cultures helped interethnic friendships to be developed. However, Sweeney, Weaven, and Herington (2008) found that for group-learning activities to be effective over time required that teachers work proactively to help them understand the benefits of group participation. In fact, DelliCarpini (2009) concluded from her study “if preservice teachers are not exposed to effective models of Cooperative Learning (CL) in their teacher education programs, it may be unrealistic to expect them to engage in CL in their own classrooms” (p. 42). According to Slavin and Cooper’s (1999) review of 19 studies of cooperative learning methods used with diverse students, the data suggested:

In such learning groups, they are not only acquiring academic knowledge and skill but are also constructing a shared cultural paradigm for defining the group.... They are establishing a group culture—a culture that sets the context in which social relationships among students are defined, established and given value and meaning. The hope is that students will carry this cultural paradigm into adulthood. (p. 659)

Notwithstanding the challenges that accompany group work, providing interactive, cooperative experiences for diverse students does appear to support community building among both majority and minority students.
While a plethora of studies extol the virtues of cooperative learning, there are also those who question its validity. In her comprehensive critique of the literature on cooperative learning, for example, Robinson (1991) found a number of weaknesses. Specifically, studies did not attend to the needs of academically talented students, and many studies relied on “weak treatment comparisons to demonstrate the effectiveness of cooperative learning” (p. 1). She alleged that traditional classrooms where discussion is discourage are most often the control groups and that, in most cases, achievement is only defined as the learning of basic skills. Anderson, Reder, and Simon (1997) also noted that “a huge number of practitioner-oriented articles...tend to gloss over difficulties with this approach” (p. 16) despite the fact that a number of studies report no differences. They went on to say that “it is not a panacea that always provides outcomes superior or even equivalent to those of individual training” (p. 17). Although it is certainly good advice not to consider any educational strategy as a universal remedy for the ills that plague public schools today, the concept of children working together to achieve a common, desired goal from the beginning of their school experience continues to hold much promise.

**Learning Environment**

The learning environment, which includes such things as the physical background, arrangement of desks and materials, use of time and space, establishment of procedures and traditions, as well as curriculum presentation, contributes to creating a community of learners within an elementary classroom. While practical articles exist in the literature to help teachers make decisions about such important factors (Fraser, 1979;
Loughlin, 1977), there appear to be few research studies that evaluate their relationship to community building (Cohen & Lotan, 1988). For example, Loughlin (1977) commented briefly upon most of the above-mentioned factors, but only in a philosophical manner.

A high level of complexity in the learning environment tends to promote sustained involvement and a long attention span as well as independence from the teacher’s assistance and suggestions.... Arrangements of materials can encourage children to extend and integrate their ongoing work, or initiate new interests and projects.... Space can be arranged to stimulate useful language interaction between children, to shelter an individual working child, to foster and extend group inquiry, or to encourage cooperative interaction.... Subject matter and behavior are both important considerations for teachers as they plan, organize, and provision [for learning].... The environment can become an extension of the teacher. (p. 126)

This type of information is helpful to conceptualization, but does not establish the practical steps necessary, nor what are the most effective strategies. A group of studies that begin to suggest specifics was completed when open classrooms were in vogue. For example, Cohen and Lotan, (1988) found an increase in the number of learning centers in operation permitted less teacher supervision and teacher facilitation, while less direct supervision permitted more student working and talking together (or student communication). In addition, student cooperation correlated positively with gains on mathematical achievement tests. (p. 1)

An occasional, enlightening study can be found since that time (Manke, 1994; Marx, Fuhrer, & Hartig, 1999; Parsons, 2002). Manke (1994) conducted a comparative study with the purpose of shedding light upon how time and space was used by teachers to establish and maintain power relationships with their students.

The physical environment of the classrooms and the teachers’ choice of what kinds of activities should fill the classroom day had strong effects on the kinds of behaviors in which students were able to engage. The first fifth-grade classroom was arranged so that students had little opportunity to move about and were discouraged from directing their gaze or their attention away from the teacher.
standing in front of the chalkboard. In the other two classrooms, much more physical freedom was afforded to the students by the arrangement of classroom space, and they made use of it.... In most classrooms, the organization of time and space is the prerogative of the teacher. In the first two classrooms teachers kept this resource firmly in their own hands; in the third classroom, the teacher turned over to the students some control of the way space was used. (p. 9)

The researcher’s detailed description of the actions of the teachers and the responses of their students revealed the degree to which a community of learners could be established.

Marx and colleagues (1999) investigated the relationship between classroom seating and questioning done by fourth graders. They found that semicircular seating, which enabled face-to-face discussions, was associated with more questions being asked by the students than when they were placed in seating in rows and columns, and it remained stable over time. Finally, the detailed description of the learning environment in two teachers’ classrooms, one a novice teacher whose pseudonym was Liberty and who built community with her students and the other whose pseudonym was Captain and who maintained an autocratic relationship with his students, establishes stark differences in the teachers’ stated goal of creating a communal environment for democracy and democratic citizenship (Parsons, 2002).

The most recent studies appear to focus upon different factors; nevertheless, they are significant to community building (Chandra & Fisher, 2009; Kember & Leung, 2005; Zhang, Scardamalia, Reeve, & Messina, 2009). The results of Kember and Leung’s study indicated a more traditional concept of community building.

A suitable teaching environment was characterized by a focus on understanding, the active participation of students in learning activities, a coherent curriculum, and assessment which focused on analytical skills and self-learning capability. Strong student-student relationships nurtured communication and interpersonal skills. There was a mutually reinforcing effect between the type of teaching,
Their findings support the need for the entire learning experience to be student-centered and that students must be actively involved in all its phases for a community of learners to be established.

On the other hand, Chandra and Fisher (2009) created an example of a newer type of community, the online community, which is representative of the web-based learning environment being widely implemented across the educational scene. They developed Getsmart, an electronic learning (e-learning) opportunity for students, which included “a variety of learning opportunities, such as modeling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection, exploration and questioning, through web-based lessons, tests, online chats and interactive activities” (p. 33).

Finally, Zhang and colleagues (2009) conducted a 3-year study creating responsibility for developing community knowledge using Knowledge Forum software his group created with a group of elementary students. In the first year, students were assigned to year-long base cooperative learning groups that did not interact; during the second year students participated in interactive small groups that exchanged information; and in year three, small collaborative teams formed and disbanded based upon decisions made by the members. The third year “resulted in the highest level of collective cognitive responsibility and knowledge advancement” (p. 8). The researchers stated that their study “explores new possibilities for engaging dynamic opportunistic, community-wide collaboration among young students in line with the current view of knowledge creation as a social and emergent process” (p. 13). The sophistication of this type of learning
community may be somewhat mind-boggling for a large body of teachers, especially novices, as exemplified by the researchers’ explanation of the process.

To promote effective knowledge work in this community space, Knowledge Forum provides supportive features that allow users to build on, make annotations, add reference links to one another’s notes, and create rise-above notes and views to summarize, distill, and advance their understanding and create higher order integrations of ideas. Scaffolds help them engage in high-level cognitive operations: theory improvement; creation of working models and plans; presentation of evidence, data, and reference material; and so forth. Having this community knowledge space and its related interaction tools helps to enable collective responsibility for knowledge advancement. (p. 9-10)

Furthermore, none of the above studies discusses the role of the teacher in such a learning environment, and all assume that sufficient computers exist in classrooms, both of which represent major failings. Unless novice teachers understand they have a dynamic, integral responsibility for creating and orchestrating the learning whether it is conducted face-to-face, online, or in a blended manner, they will have difficulty in accepting the responsibility for integrating such learning experiences. Novice teachers must also be technologically prepared, whether they are digital natives or immigrants themselves, in order to have the efficacy to deliver such learning experiences. Finally, school districts need to provide the necessary hardware to make such community building experiences feasible. Nevertheless, such studies of advanced, student-centered communities of learners provide novice teachers with the vision of what is possible for their students.

**Service-Learning**

Service-learning can be of great value as a facet of community-building that may be implemented by novice teachers. Although there remains some disagreement as to the exactly what constitutes service-learning, Lake and Jones (2008) provided their simple,
clear definition.

A teaching/learning method that connects meaningful community service with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility. As an approach, service-learning is viewed as an innovative and effective instructional strategy that can enhance and enrich the teaching and learning experiences of both faculty and students. (p. 2147)

Their study discusses several findings: (a) that novice teachers found service-learning meaningful when it was experienced in their undergraduate coursework, (b) that they were able to implement empowering service-learning projects with their early childhood students during field work, and (c) that service-learning “was an avenue for teaching in an integrated or constructivist manner” (p. 215).

A similar study yielded even more dramatic results, perhaps partially because the researchers were able to offer mini-grants of $200 to interns in their university early childhood teacher education program involving their students in service-learning projects. Some of the projects were close-to-home activities such as beautifying a part of their school campus, but one group of second-graders presented a unit on dental health at a residential children’s home, bringing gift bags with toothbrushes, dental floss, toothpaste and healthy snacks as well as donating two dental health picture books to the home’s library. A number of the second graders’ parents who supervised on the field trip actually went back and became volunteers at the residential home, an unintended consequence that spoke volumes to their own children (Freeman & Swick, 2003).

The opportunity for service-learning to act as “a coalescing force for the cornucopia of American ethnic, spiritual, and cultural diversity” (Kielsnieier, 2003, p. 10) is another advantage it may provide. Furthermore, a number of supporters of service-
learning remain adamant that one of its values can be in connecting real-world experiences to the core required curriculum such as that specified by NCLB. A specific example of a study that accomplishes this aspect is one that involved service-learning with fifth graders in an urban setting. This study is especially valuable in that the teacher compared the experimental group to a control group, both of which she taught literacy/social studies. The classes were equally matched in terms of number of boys and girls. Importantly, she established base line scores for reading and math scores for both groups in order to measure growth in these areas over time. The experimental group experienced greater achievement gains as well as better attendance and fewer suspensions. A flaw in the research, however, is that the researcher did not establish significance through statistical correlations that could have been completed at least for the criterion-referenced testing as well as the attendance and suspension factors (Soslau & Yost, 2007).

Ironically, Billig (2000), from her review of the body of service-learning research, cautioned that much of the data were not based upon true studies but rather upon service-learning program evaluations. She advised that more researchers needed to use control groups and longitudinal studies that test hypotheses, of the type that is described above. Nevertheless, Billig acknowledged that significant impact appeared to be made upon students from their participation in service-learning. Several of her many conclusions were especially pertinent to the concept of community-building: (a) service-learning results in greater mutual respect between teachers and students, (b) service-learning builds cohesiveness and positive peer relations, and (c) service-learning participants are more engaged in their studies and more motivated to learn. It is interesting to note that all
of the studies mentioned the significance of service-learning creating connections between students and the school or local community, while the sense of community that develops among students is mentioned only in the article summarizing the research. Community building that occurs among the participants is another area that needs to be recognized and discussed with regard to service-learning.

**Barriers to Novice Teacher Community Building**

Along with establishing what is essential for novice teachers to create a classroom community, it is equally important to determine what prevents many of them from achieving the initial success they strongly desire. A great deal of literature exists about roadblocks to teacher success and recommendations for change. A purpose of this study is to discover and isolate categories of obstacles, making it possible for novice teachers to better grasp their significance and counteract their control.

**Barriers within Novice Teachers**

Novice teachers experience hurdles to community building contributed by their internal circumstances as well as from their experiences. Goldstein and Lake (2000) found that some novice teachers bring beliefs and values to their initial years of teaching that may hamper their ability to develop an effective classroom community. In their study, the researchers followed the thought processing of participants about teacher caring during their first field placements through “electronic dialogue journals or ejournals” (p. 864), a single data source that was acknowledged as the major shortcoming of the study. Although they did not expect a sophisticated understanding of the concept of
caring to develop within these beginning novice teachers, the researchers were 
disappointed that their participants did not progress farther along the continuum from the 
simplistic, romanticized view of caring as an in-born trait to a deeper and broader 
understanding of the term. They conclude that the inflexibility of existing beliefs about 
caring and teaching are not likely to change simply because of brief fieldwork 
experiences. The researchers suggest that critical self-reflection, course readings that 
challenge novice teachers’ beliefs, and interviews with experienced teachers might better 
promote the realistic view that can prevent the “burnout, exhaustion, and perfectionism” 
(p. 870) that hinder community building.

Earlier studies found that novice teachers, especially at the elementary level, often 
associate the idea of creating community most with building strong and rewarding 
classroom relationships but without connection to the curricular, management, or 
instructional practices employed in the classroom (Hargreaves, 1998, 2000; Weinstein, 
orientation to care as personal care can actually lead to less care rather than more” (p. 

If teachers are primarily concerned about establishing warm, nurturing 
relationships with children, they may not recognize that caring can be enacted 
through teaching well. Moreover, they may not appreciate the link between caring 
and expectations and may be reluctant to exert the authority needed to create an 
orderly, productive environment for learning. (p. 155)

It seems clear that a narrow view of what constitutes building a community can weaken 
novice teachers’ ability to successfully create a community of learners.

A comparative study done by File and Gullo (2002) demonstrated that novice
teachers may have a difficult time reconciling their vision of community building with the reality of the classroom experience. Separate groups of beginning and student teachers from both early childhood and elementary education programs expressed similar attitudes about how a classroom should be managed and curriculum provided. The only significant difference between the groups in this study was that student teachers from both programs “advocated more frequent use of strategies such as time-out and external reward systems” (p. 134). The researchers suggested that this finding about practices, which were contrary to community building, may have occurred because the student teachers were well into their full-time practicing roles at the time of the survey. An acknowledged weakness of this study was that the researchers asked only that participants complete a self-report survey about their beliefs and did not observe their participants in the classroom working with students. Their results, however, are aligned with the classic study by Deci and colleagues (1982), which demonstrated that teachers resort to more autocratic methods of teaching when they are pressured by accountability expectations.

As with all people, novice teachers are subject to the experiences in their own schooling (Chong & Low, 2009), which may make it difficult to incorporate teaching strategies that emphasize community building. For example, direct instruction and lectures are methods used to transmit information in nearly all, if not all, classrooms to varying degrees. Novice teachers have sat in those classrooms for 12 or more years and subconsciously may have a deeper understanding of those two models of teaching (Richardson, 2003). Although novice teachers spend 2 to 4 years in preservice education
programs where more student-centered methods may be modeled and taught by professors, novice teachers’ lengthier “apprenticeships of observation” may result in a greater reliance upon direct instruction and lectures (Lortie, 1975, as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2008, p. 563). Moreover, Pajares (1992), in his discussion about researching teacher beliefs, explained that belief systems were stronger than knowledge systems and, as a result, are very hard to change. What’s more, he said:

> The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter, for these beliefs subsequently affect perception and strongly influence the processing of new information. It is for this reason that newly acquired beliefs are most vulnerable. (p. 317)

From the knowledge systems gained during their coursework, novice teachers may become enthused to try out student-centered teaching models while in their field placements, but some may lose confidence because their belief system about risk-taking (Dweck, 2006) did not allow for initial failure. Worse yet, others may develop a false sense of confidence that student-centered teaching models do not require careful thought and reflection. MacKinnon and Scarff-Seatter (1997) related an enlightening quote from an elementary science methods student in their study.

> I am very anxious to return to my classroom and teach science. Constructivism has taught me [that] I do not need to know any science in order to teach it. I will simply allow my students to figure things out for themselves, for I know there is no right answer. (p. 53)

Serious challenges face novice teachers as they strive to use their knowledge about community building to appropriately change their prior beliefs.

**Barriers Within the System**

Serious obstacles exist within the educational system that hinder novice teachers
in learning how to create classroom communities. They have to do with teacher education and district induction programs, as well as with accountability pressures. Since the early 1980s, both Darling-Hammond (1986, 1994, 2006, 2008) and Feiman-Nemser (1985, 1992, 2001, 2003) have consistently challenged colleges and universities to provide higher quality teacher preparation. Of late, both women have coupled the problems they find in preservice education programs with ineffective induction programs provided by states and districts. Their clear messages have generated a good deal of research attempting to identify the difficulties and suggest remedies.

Historically, and even to the present, mentoring has been the most common method for novice teacher support (Feiman-Nemser, 2001), and much of the research reveals its inconsistent effectiveness. For example, in one California study, three school districts’ induction programs were evaluated using interviews with district officials to categorize them according to mentor/novice ratio, which the researchers believed was indicative of the district’s mentor selection, training, and contact time between mentors and mentees. Student achievement scores for new teachers were also analyzed. Although the validity of the researchers’ assumptions might be questioned, they conclude that programs are effective only if mentors meet high selection criteria, are carefully trained, and are able to work with their mentees on a weekly basis, a very costly undertaking (Fletcher, Strong, & Villar, 2008). In another study in Connecticut, qualitative case studies were completed in two urban, high-poverty school districts matched according to their free and reduced lunch percentages and similarity of mentor training policies as well as working conditions. The researchers concluded that differences in mentor selection,
strategies for matching mentors with mentees, and professional development were significant in making one district’s induction program more effective than the other (Youngs, 2008). The above studies are indicative of the continued difficulties presented by using mentoring as the primary tool for supporting novice teachers in their efforts to become successful in creating communities of learners.

Accountability pressures compound the induction problems by placing novice teachers under the kind of pressure that Deci and colleagues (1982) found causes teachers to return to autocratic teaching methods. A similar study associated teachers’ willingness to enable their students to be autonomous with the degree of pressure they felt from colleagues and the system (Pelletier et al, 2002). The groundbreaking work of Deci and colleagues continues to be documented by research that shows the negative effects resulting from the impact of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) high-stakes assessment. This powerful 2001 Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act maintains an unrelenting annual requirement for accountability through high-stakes, multiple-choice testing. Kantor and Lowe (2006) stated that NCLB “tends to drive out the strongest, most creative teachers” (p. 484). Diamond and Spillane (2004) found that schools experiencing difficulty in meeting the requirements of NCLB narrow their instructional goals, scaling back curriculum in other areas in order to focus on than those subjects and skills being tested. This occurred at the expense of students’ learning concepts and experiencing problem solving in groups, which is critical to effectively prepare students to become thoughtful participants in the democratic society that includes community building (Apple & Beane, 2008). Furthermore, Meier and Wood (2004)
indicated that rather than striving toward higher achievement and student success, schools recognize that they will all be considered as failing by the year 2014 under the present NCLB guidelines, which results in further mitigating the efforts of learner-centered teachers’ efforts at community-building. Hammerness (2004) concluded:

These are challenging times for teachers. Mixed messages, conflicting demands, and increasing needs on all fronts surround them. Each day, teachers face increasing requirements and significant pressures on their daily practice from administrators and policymakers. It is hard to be, or remain, a teacher of quality committed to one’s ideals. (p. 33)

Furthermore, in a study by Faulkner and Cook (2006), teachers reported dedicating weeks of instructional time to test preparation and, as a result, narrowing the curriculum they taught to concepts that would be assessed on the statewide exams. Significantly, on the survey used in this study, teachers revealed that they chose instructional strategies they believed would teach to the test and covered only necessary material, forgoing the use of authentic assessments, and sometimes contemplating unethical behavior.

Finally, in a comprehensive study using the National Survey of Teachers’ Perceptions of the Impacts of State Testing Programs, Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003) reached similar conclusions. They reported that twice as many teachers in high-stakes testing states wanted to transfer out of grades where the test was administered and also stated, “High-stakes state-mandated testing programs can lead to instruction that contradicts teachers’ views of sound educational practice, increasing stress and lowering morale” (p. 20). Certainly, under such difficult conditions, novice teachers may find it very difficult to make building classroom communities a high priority.
Barriers Within the Culture

One final hindrance to community building that novice teachers must overcome is presented by the diverse cultures inhabiting their classrooms, which represent a wide variety of student needs. Darling-Hammond (2008) also communicated about this challenge for years but never more succinctly than when she wrote:

Furthermore, the demands on teachers are increasing. Teachers need not only to be able to keep order and provide useful information to students but also to be increasingly effective in enabling a diverse group of students to learn ever more complex material. In previous decades, teachers were expected to prepare only a small minority for ambitious intellectual work, whereas they are now expected to prepare virtually all students for higher order thinking and performance skills once reserved to only a few. (p. 300)

In one study of novice teachers’ views of the challenges brought on by culturally and linguistically diverse students, the researchers found that “new teachers facing students who do not meet their preconceptions become disillusioned, growing increasingly authoritarian, even planning instruction to control misbehavior” (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004, p. 738). This tight control by the novice teachers was compounded by their assumption that a cultural mismatch was the problem. Mentors of these novice teachers tried to help their mentees by using frame analysis; its purpose was to enable the novice teachers to view their students differently. Although novice teachers reported difficulty in practicing this reframing technique, they were more successful in “interpreting, generating alternatives, and making thoughtful decisions in the complexity of classroom life” (p. 741).

Speaking to the broader view of diversity, which is the reality for an increasing number of novice teachers, Crosby (1999) pointed out:
Urban schools, especially those in the inner cities are staffed largely by newly hired or uncertified teachers. These teachers, who were trained to teach students from middle class families and who often come from middle class families themselves, now find themselves engulfed by minority students, immigrants, and other students from low-income families—students whose values and experiences are very different from their own. (p. 302)

Most teacher education programs now require courses in multicultural education, but one study indicated that such courses are not always effective in changing novice teachers’ perspectives. Rather, the researchers found that cooperating teachers have the primary influence over what progress novice teachers make in their knowledge and skills about how to work with diverse students. Without cooperating teachers who are experienced and motivated about multicultural education, a relative rarity at present, the researchers found that novice teachers do not learn to maintain the high standards that are part of demonstrating caring, to develop learning experiences that consider the backgrounds of their students, and to relate effectively to their students’ parents (Tellez, 2008). It would appear that creating a community among the assorted student groups needing to coalesce within a classroom may pose a serious challenge to novice teachers.

**Supports for Community Building**

The literature is replete with researchers’ efforts to identify avenues to strengthen teachers’ attempts at creating a community of learners among their students. Those studies that involve novice teachers in such endeavors are less common but are especially significant to this study. A purpose of this study is to synthesize the essential aspects that might effectively arm novice teachers to sustain their initial efforts at community building.
Qualities Within Novice Teachers

Studies of qualities of novice teachers that may strengthen the likelihood of their success in orchestrating their classrooms through community building are recent and enlightening. Four relevant areas include teacher agency, personality type, degree of self-efficacy, and personal experience related to teaching. One study looked at novice teacher agency as it related to maintaining child-centered teaching practices and found that “robust patterns of autonomy, self-efficacy, intentionality, and reflectivity were found in the data” and that these four conceptual tools might be useful in “preparing and supporting teachers who will take on the challenge of maintaining child-centered practices in contexts of standardization” (Paris & Lung, 2008, p. 266). Moreover, Evelein and colleagues (2008) conducted a study about the basic psychological needs of novice teachers for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They found that the degree to which those teacher needs are successfully met ranges from the extreme of the freeze, fight, and flight emotional response of fear to the tend-and-befriend response of approach. Where a novice teacher falls along the continuum is related to their personal circumstances as well as the experiences they have in their educational environments, which the researchers encouraged should be carefully structured and supported. Finally, Achinstein and Ogawa (2006) found that teachers who had strong values and beliefs about teaching that were carefully considered and deliberately chosen (i.e., teacher agency), engage in resistance to educational practices that challenge their principles and remain true to their belief system. It would appear that novice teachers with strong teacher agency may be more successful in implementing community building despite the
pressures of accountability.

Personality type in successful teachers who are able to facilitate community building runs the gamut, according to general studies using the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which has been established as having high reliability and validity (Capraro & Capraro, 2002). The MBTI established four general personality type indicators: (a) extraverted (E) vs. introverted (I); (b) intuitive (N) vs. sensing (S); (c) feeling (F) vs. thinking (T); and (d) perceiving (P) vs. judging (J). In a more focused study, however, Rushton, Morgan, and Richard (2007) compared the personality types of a group of highly successful, state-honored teachers with two comparison groups of elementary teachers and found that there were significant differences in the personality types. The honored teachers, as a group, exhibited most often ENFP personality type, one of those commonly called NFs, which are described:

ENFPs are energetic and enthusiastic teachers. They often stimulate students to seek out what is unknown and make it known. They promote imagination and creativity in their classrooms through many different kinds of activities. Their students usually feel that their ENFP teachers understand them and help them to deal with their personal problems. (p. 439)

The general teacher groups exhibited most often ISFJ personality type, one of those commonly called SJs, who are said to have “an abiding respect and sense of personal responsibility for doing what needs to be done in the here and now” and who need to keep things under control and consistent. With regard to teaching, the SJ’s perspective can be described as “preservation, prevention, and protection” (Rushton et al., 2007, p. 438). This study involved the purposefully selected Florida League of Teachers of the Year (ToY) group (58) who had gone through a rigorous selection process completed by
their school districts using eight specific criteria, two of which directly address community building. The comparison groups were large and randomly selected, one of national schoolteachers (804) and the other a sample of Florida teachers (189). The study was carefully conducted, but the researchers suggested only that further studies might “investigate the specific skills and strategies as well as their interactions with students to better inform the profession as to the specific traits that make them effective teachers” (p. 440).

Another study using the MBTI found a significant correlation between supervisor-trainee similarity on the sensing-intuition index or the thinking-feeling index and the trainee’s satisfaction with the supervision and supervisory relationship. The researchers acknowledge that students and their supervisors can adjust to differences in personality but suggest that recognizing one’s own personality type and the effect of personality type differences can help to promote more successful interactions (Moore, Detlaff, & Dietz, 2004).

Capretz (2003) encouraged other teacher educators to follow his lead and “broaden their repertoire of effective teaching technique to reach all students at least some of the time” and to “consider varying their teaching styles to motivate and establish common ground with those students who have varying traits different from their own” (p. 422). As with these examples from experienced teachers, knowledge of personality type may be a factor that can help novice teachers become more successful in building community with and among the diverse student personality types who comprise their classroom.
Teacher self-efficacy—teachers’ beliefs about their capability to impact students’ motivation and achievement, has been found to be correlated both with teachers’ behavior in the classroom and with student success outcomes. In one study comparing novice teacher and experienced teacher self-efficacy, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) found that novice teacher self-efficacy was, not surprisingly, somewhat lower than that among career teachers. Also important was the finding that novice teacher self-efficacy was influenced more significantly by support from their colleagues and their community rather than by mastery teaching experiences, which come from actual teaching accomplishments with students. Career teachers’ self-efficacy was not significantly influenced by either factor, which supports the researchers’ prior finding that “self-efficacy beliefs are most influenced early in learning and become fairly stable and resistant to change once set” (p. 950). This study, the latest among many the researchers have completed, makes their conclusions important in identifying support systems for novice teachers to feel confident about creating a community of learners.

A longitudinal study of novice teachers from the beginning of their teacher coursework through student teaching and to the end of their first year revealed that self-efficacy was greater for novice teachers in high socioeconomic status (SES) classrooms who felt more supported and found their teaching assignment less difficult. Moreover, if a novice teacher’s self-efficacy were to dip, this more often occurred toward the end of her first year of teaching. The researchers in this study were not totally satisfied that one of their measures was highly specific to the tasks of teaching and published a retraction of some of their conclusions as a result. They have since created a specific measurement
tool to use in the future (Hoy & Burke, 2005). Because of the integrity exemplified by the above unusual practice and clearly present in her other studies I have reviewed, it seems highly appropriate to have confidence in Hoy’s findings.

Finally, Scott (2003) studied the ability of novice teachers to integrate complex teaching models into their practice using follow-up, partially structured telephone interviews with 98% of the members of two cohorts of recently graduated novice teachers. She found that those who were the most successful and consistent in combining methods to make their lessons more complex exhibited high self-efficacy, that is they were “clearly the most self-confident, self-efficacious, and metacognitive of all the respondents in the study” (p. 373). It would appear that having strong self-efficacy may be a factor that influences the ability of novice teachers to create a community of learners.

Articles and books have examined the qualities and needs of mature learners who have become an increasingly significant percentage of novice teachers (Castro & Bauml, 2009; Harris, 2003; Shifferraw & Burton, 2008; Walsh, Abi-Nader, & Poutiatine, 2005). One such article defined an adult learner as

a person who (1) has been away from formal, full-time education for at least four years or (2) is a veteran of the armed services, or (3) is at least 24 years old, or (4) is married, widowed, divorced, separated, providing primary care for a child, or supporting a dependent. (Post, 1993, p. 10)

The researcher goes on to say that the general characteristics of adult students, as compared with traditional students, are that they “are more likely to have had varied experience in all areas, including marriage, parenthood, full-time employment, and travel” and “to be returning to complete an earlier, interrupted plan to obtain a college
degree” (Post, 1993, p. 10.) Since the advent of alternative licensure, adult novice teachers may also have switched from a prior job due to its boredom, lack of autonomy or from a sense of not making a difference. Differences in characteristics of adult students as learners have also been outlined; they are “in general more independent and self-directed, comparably more achievement-oriented, and with higher educational goals” (p. 10). Finally, adult students tend to be juggling more types of responsibilities and experience greater challenge in meeting all of their expectations, but they are also quicker to relate learning to authentic experiences. Studies that consider the challenges and successes of adult learners who become novice teachers are rare. One such qualitative study explored how a group of novice teachers who were also mothers negotiated their dual roles beginning with their entrance into the teacher education program. The researcher noted that the women found “the struggle to manage and reconcile their two lives stressful and fatiguing, and that this struggle limited their energy for both studying and effective parenting” (White, 2008, p. 170). She concluded that those who juggle the dual roles of mother and novice teacher need to do it “in an environment that supports them and their specific needs” (p. 171). Despite the dearth of research on this important component, the description of characteristics assigned to adult students, who later become novice teachers, appears to lend itself well to orchestrating a community of learners within a classroom.

**Action Research Involvement**

As the constructivist, learner-centered movement in education has gained added momentum; there has been a resurgence of interest on the part of adult educators in a
variety of action-based inquiry that is essentially a social activity. Known by such titles as action or participatory action research, action or appreciative inquiry, or collaborative inquiry, this general type of research focuses upon those in the teaching field becoming active participants in examining their own processes or those of others by gathering and analyzing data to construct new knowledge that improves educational practices (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000). Studies of novice teachers who become involved in action-based research present intriguing challenges and promising results. For example, van Zee, Lay, and Roberts (2002) involved a group of novice teachers attending a science methods course in a collaborative process with existing elementary teachers, which initiated those novice teachers into the process of collaborative research about learning to teach. They found “group investigation seemed to be effective in modifying the self-perceptions of many of the [novice] teachers to be more confident and competent at teaching science” (p. 609). A significant number of the novice teachers indicated that their conception of what teaching entails was enhanced by the experience. Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, and Hathorn (2008) formed a collaborative inquiry group of professional developers whose task was to create a similar process for collaboration among their trainees. They found their “focus on how to foster and sustain a culture of collaborative inquiry provided insights into the structures and processes that support this kind of collaborative endeavor” (p. 1), although continuing in such a group was compounded by their other responsibilities. Kitchen and Stevens (2004) also studied their own professional practice as they integrated their curricula and placed their novice teachers into action research project groups that “encourage inquiry and reflection, connect theory to practice, and
create links between preservice and in-service teaching” (p. 1). Using a similar structure, two novice-teaching teams were facilitated by Moran (2007) in an early childhood methods course. She concluded, “The ways in which novice teachers’ participation begins to change [i.e., due to participation in cycles of collaborative inquiry] may be as valuable an indicator of novice teacher development as the possession of new knowledge and skills” (p. 1).

Various forms of action research also seem to be effective as novice teachers gain experience in teaching. Garcia and Donmoyer (2006) found from their support of a collaborative inquiry project in two underperforming schools “collective ownership of ideas is accepted early in the process, but the expectation [is] that everyone who participates will receive something of value as a result of participation...[and] inviting school people to tell their stories” (p. 67). Moreover, Tillema and van der Westhuizen (2006), who supported three different groups of experienced teachers that sought solutions to work-related issues, found that their groups collectively resulted in low satisfaction with the knowledge productivity of the groups’ efforts. However, their results did show some difference among the groups in satisfaction with the three criteria they established (i.e., problem understanding, perspective shift, and commitment). Zellermayer and Tabak (2006) achieved more positive results from a similar study where they facilitated a school-university partnership that resulted in a change process involving “the interrelationship between teachers’ changing conceptions of knowledge, their emerging views of collegiality and their transforming sense of identity as the mechanisms for knowledge construction” (p. 1). Doyle (1997) concluded from her study of novice
teachers in the preservice program that their personal beliefs changed from viewing teaching as giving information to teaching as facilitating and guiding learning. The finding occurred when novice teachers encountered the full range of experiences and were challenged to plan, teach, and reflect upon their lessons over time. Her data sources included self-report surveys completed at the beginning, middle, and end of each participant’s years of coursework, as well as information gleaned from novice teacher reflective journals. Again, there was no mention of participants being observed during the actual teaching of lessons, which represented a weakness in the study. Nevertheless, this study suggested that beliefs internalized from personal experience during developmental years may be ameliorated by effective strategies used throughout coursework and practical experiences for the duration of novice teachers’ preservice education programs. Naylor (2008) was involved as the facilitator for four inquiry projects with teams of teacher-researchers over a 10-year period. He found empirical evidence that “benefits to teachers...include a greater sense of professional efficacy, reduced isolation, and a belief that students’ benefited from the teachers’ inquiry” (p. 1). Perry (2008) worked with collaborative action research groups to influence “teacher efficacy beliefs, teacher isolation, and student achievement on writing in grades 1 and 2” (p. 1). She used mixed methods that included a quantitative 20-item questionnaire and a review of student test scores along with qualitative data achieved from face-to-face group sessions, field notes, as well as individual interviews. Perry (2008) found that positive change resulted because “teachers were able to receive collegial support from colleagues, improve their teacher self-efficacy about teaching writing, and reduce teacher isolation within their building”
It seems clear that teacher education programs are being changed to include more components that require community-building experiences for novice teachers.

**Professional Development Groups**

Additionally, teacher educators are becoming involved in changing their own courses to model the practices they want their novice teachers to internalize over time. Professional Development Schools (PDS) across the country study how their practice of proactively involving their novice teachers in learning communities empower those novice teachers to reflect upon their beliefs, analyze their classroom practices, and begin to build a philosophy of teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Gimbert, 2000). An example among many, one teacher education program has upgraded their instruction to include early and later levels, deliberately placing novice teachers in communities that become involved in increasingly more complex practice “where novice teachers [initially] teach and learn in dyads, then dyad teams, and finally Collaborative Action Research Teams” (Tegano & Moran, 2005, p. 297). In addition, two professors in a teacher education program conducted a personal, professional development program over two years that changed their large group lecturing style with passive student participation to a more student-centered approach. Novice teachers in their course received information about the philosophy of education via specially prepared videos, which were followed by small group discussions facilitated by the professors and a large group debrief. A survey completed by students as well as focus groups and non-participant observation data indicated that the students found their learning of and enthusiasm for the information increased. The researchers acknowledged, despite the
difficulty some students had in adjusting to the less traditional strategies, the novice teachers not only learned about the philosophy of education, they experienced it, as their professors modeled the sort of reflective analysis that novice teachers need to develop (Tormey & Henchy, 2008). Moreover, the description of a capstone course in another teacher education program is very promising as a model for a student-centered, reflective final experience. Goldstein and Fernald (2008) described the process whereby novice teachers negotiated a learning agreement for the course that focused upon synthesizing their understanding of “student-centered learning, empathic listening, as well as affective and experiential learning (p. 31).” Novice teachers became involved in communities that experienced “collaborative learning through sharing and writing about personal and professional growth.”

**Multicultural Education Programs**

Meeting the challenge to prepare novice teachers for teaching assignments with increasingly diverse students is also happening more consistently within teacher education programs. One study in a large urban teacher education program involved “interviewing participants, organizing and interpreting findings, providing feedback [to participants], and facilitating change [in participants’ attitudes toward their diverse students]” (St. John & Cadray, 2004, p. 99). The process was conducted as part of the efforts of a department committee charged with enhancing the teacher education curriculum to become more multiculturally appropriate. The goal of the researchers was to influence the teacher educators to become more caring and responsible, which is the primary cultural need of African-American students as established by many studies about
helping their novice teachers prepare to teach effectively in diverse cultural settings. St. John and Cadray concluded that their intervention process did, indeed, have the effect of broadening the discussion of the teacher educators to include caring about the voices and experiences of African American students. They observed, “These teacher educators embodied a transformation...” (p. 108).

Another study originating at one of the sites within the California State University system involved faculty members in collaborating to structure a professional development plan that educated all members of the elementary and secondary teacher education faculty about credential program requirements related to English learners, special populations, and technology. The researchers concluded that involving the faculty in planning, conducting training sessions over time during regular meetings that were required, and receiving strong support from the administration contributed to the success of the professional development. Faculty changing titles of their courses to include the concept of diversity, designing signature assignments about diversity concepts and positive outcomes from faculty surveys were their measures of success (O’Hara & Pritchard, 2008). The above program descriptions and studies represent positive signs that teacher education faculty are involving themselves and their novice teachers in community building and reflective practices during their teacher education programs that will better prepare those novice teachers to create communities of learners among diverse students as they become responsible for their own classrooms. The hope is that this study will contribute to and extend the body of information that informs both teacher education programs and novice teacher induction programs.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

This chapter describes the methodology, which was implemented in conducting the research for this dissertation. It discusses how my interest in the topic came about, defines and explains the selection process of a less orthodox approach to collect the content that was used as data, and the process through which the data were interpreted and meaning made. The methodology experienced in this study seems best told as a narrative, which developed over time. As the main characters in this narrative, my companions and I traveled in lesser-known waters without a detailed map, sometimes simply sailing with the current. I experienced the trip playing multiple roles, trying to keep the boat on an even keel, wanting to paddle during becalmed times, yet striving not to be the captain. Despite its challenges, the journey was an exciting and rewarding one that is revealed within this dissertation.

Selecting the Topic

The selection of classroom community building by novice teachers for my dissertation topic was based largely upon my philosophy of education. I am a White female whose education took place during the era when behaviorism was at its peak. I remained a compliant, unquestioning student throughout my school career and earned grades that enabled me to graduate at the cum laude level from the teaching program at U.C.L.A. Although my fieldwork included experiences in Madeline Hunter’s University Experimental School of direct instruction, I believe that I also graduated in philosophy. It
was when I stepped into my first teaching assignment with a group of gifted fifth graders that I began the exciting experience resulting in who I have become as an educator. I stored the inappropriate textbooks and, with student input, created curriculum that took us to the heights and depths of learning necessary to challenge their fertile minds. Although I worked primarily with gifted elementary students, my philosophy for successful teaching came from years of experience with all types of students. From my doctoral studies, I am now able to label my perspective as dialectical constructivism and to find that I align myself most closely with the Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning.

The specific progression that led to my dissertation’s focus upon classroom community building by novice teachers with their students originated when I taught the final classroom management course to all fourth year preservice students at a local university. It was in preparation to teach that course when I realized that creating a community of learners in a classroom was the most effective metaphor I could determine for classroom management, better termed classroom orchestration, which I achieved during my teaching experience. I had not yet used the term community building or orchestration to label the synergy that happened between the students in my elementary and secondary classrooms and me. However, the various strategies I employed generated contact annually with different former high school and college-age students who reflected that their year with me had been one of the most effective preparatory and motivational learning experiences of their school careers. I was also aware from my personal experience as a district administrator and elementary principal, supported by my initial doctoral administrative course, that meaningful adult collaboration strategies to create
communities among teachers and their administrators are considered essential to successful student achievement in schools (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Wenger, 1998). Therefore, as the central focus for my preservice college course, it seemed appropriate to strive to empower novice teachers with similar strategies to establish communities with their students, which should positively affect their students’ behavior and academic achievement.

Seeking a way to impart what I believed were the elements of community building in an integrated, straightforward way to nearly 130 preservice teachers in four sections of the classroom management course, I created a glove metaphor with five digits, each of which signified one of the essential elements to create a classroom community (see Figure 1). Attempting to model the five strategies I taught, every few weeks my preservice students and I tackled a different digit’s concept, which these novice teachers experienced from their homework and in a multi-sensory manner during cooperative class groups. The final weeks of the semester, each student was asked to apply and record relationship-building experiences with three diverse students through journaling during their fieldwork. Although a majority of my students in each section responded neutrally or positively to the metaphorical experience, some vocal students were strongly concerned that they were not being told basic rules to manage student behavior, which was the teaching focus of their prior professor. Confused and disappointed by these mixed results, I began a passionate pursuit of knowledge about community building, which resulted in a continued, extensive review of the literature regarding each of the concepts included in the glove together with other themes revealed
**Figure 1.** Copy of individual slides presenting the five elements of community.
along the way. I wanted to explore deeply and broadly the research and experience of others who defined and created community in order to enlighten myself.

Whenever possible in my doctoral program I focused my papers on the topic of community building and was mentored in this effort during several courses taken from Dr. Barry Franklin whose writing on community is prolific. Not finding studies in the literature that considered the implementation of an integrated plan for community building by novice teachers, I also centered the topic for the required studies in both of my qualitative research courses on what the perceptions of novice teachers were about community building and their ability to implement successfully a community among elementary students during fieldwork experiences. Shedding light upon the possibility for community building among novice teachers and their students became the major focus of my graduate studies and, subsequently, this dissertation. The goal, which evolved over several years, is to inform educators who are responsible for preservice education and novice teacher induction programs about prior research as well as the possibility for novice teacher community building suggested by my studies.

**Selection of Participants**

For my qualitative research courses, I had already conducted pilot ethnographic studies about community building, first with one female preservice student and then with another four female preservice students, all five of whom agreed to continue as the participants in my dissertation study. These participants were purposefully selected because such selection leads, as “to information rich cases for study...from which one can
learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, as cited in Glesne, 2006, p. 34). I learned through interviews and observations that each of my participants possessed an initial understanding of community building in a classroom and was committed to creating a community of learners among her students. I observed and discussed with each woman the frustration she felt from trying to implement strategies for community building during her preservice fieldwork experience over a short period of time with the cooperating teachers’ students in a foreign classroom. I wanted to follow these same women into their first year of teaching to ascertain what their perceptions were of their ability to create a community of learners among their own students, in their own classrooms, over the entire year.

All of these novice teachers were White women of European descent who chose their own pseudonyms and came to the study with interesting backgrounds that qualified them to be considered adult learners. Missy, in her 50s, was the eldest of the participants, having raised a family, run a business, and suffered through a trying divorce before returning to complete her education. As a child, she recalled playing school instead of house and said that teaching was in her blood. The passing of her father, a retired principal, provided the inspiration to choose the elementary level. Initially, she worked as an aide in a special education middle school class; the staff and her children at home encouraged her to become a full-fledged teacher. During the preservice program, Missy endured two operations on her eyes, the protracted illness of her daughter, her father’s passing and her mother’s coming to live with her. She considered dropping out more than once but persevered despite these difficulties, which were exacerbated by severe financial
challenges. Although her fieldwork experiences in community building were generally positive, Missy indicated during our interviews that she’d like to have accomplished more of her vision.

Emma was the youngest of the group at 23; she was married with no children at present. Emma was a traditional preservice education student but seemed more knowledgeable, having participated in high school classes for elementary teaching and completed part-time work at a preschool during college. Her desire to become a teacher was deep; she spent many enjoyable hours as a child schooling her stuffed animals.

Emma was a positive person who naturally got along well with students. Influenced by her upbringing to perform with excellence at whatever she attempted, she exhibited characteristics of perfectionism. During our interviews, she reflected serious self-doubts about having achieved the degree of success she desired during her fieldwork experience. It was only when the principal came in to observe during her student teaching and encouraged her to hold onto her community building goals that she was able to experience a greater degree of satisfaction.

Melanie was 24 years old; she was newly married and had completed her undergraduate work in the traditional manner. Her interests were varied which made teaching a good fit. She matriculated into the elementary education program having first majored in the health and science fields. Melanie believed strongly in giving service, and she fell in love with teaching after volunteering and being an aide in preschool programs to help support herself during her school years. She enjoyed working with all elementary age students but saw her participation in young children’s play as a strength that helped
them know she was approachable. Enthusiasm was characteristic of her communication, both verbal and nonverbal. During our interviews, Melanie stated a clear vision of how she planned to create a community of learners and experienced sincere frustration with her kindergarten cooperating teacher who assigned her students to individual desks in rows for much of their experience. Melanie felt that her cooperating teacher frowned on the community building activities she implemented and looked forward to being in charge of her own classroom and students.

Holly was unique in that she had the longest and most pervasive educational background, as a descendant from generations of teachers. She had worked as a Head Start and preschool teacher before and during her preservice program. At age 31, who, along with Melanie and Emma, had matriculated through the dual major program, which requires a number of additional classes to earn a certificate to teach both early childhood and elementary education. Holly had experienced difficulty with reading and writing throughout her own education. During our interviews, she admitted to having had a generally hard time in school beginning with her first grade year, which was very difficult. Assigned to a special needs program during her elementary years, Holly was told that she’d not be able to carry a full load of classes as a junior high student. It was then that a caring teacher mentored her with the encouragement, strategies, and techniques she needed for success. Holly wanted to teach young children in order to right the wrongs and prevent the problems she experienced. Her experience with student teaching was unique among the participants in that her cooperating teacher had simply left the students and classroom in her hands after the first week, commenting that Holly
didn’t need her to be present.

Tammy was a 35-year-old, married, mother of three, whose middle child was multiply disabled by a rare disease contracted before birth. She had begun her college education years earlier with the goal of becoming a law officer. Her experiences as a wife and mother, as well as her parents being long-time educators, had led her to return to obtain a degree in elementary education. Tammy had also served as a group leader for families with disabled children, and she exhibited strong organizational and time management ability. In our interviews, Tammy stated a clear understanding of community building and a high degree of confidence in her ability to implement strategies that would create a community of learners among her students. Her efforts were initially hindered by working with a cooperating teacher whom she needed to please but whose students had not experienced any consistent method of classroom control. During her initial fieldwork, he did allow Tammy to model several of the community building strategies she believed would be effective. Her cooperating teacher was pleased with the results, and she was given permission to implement those strategies during her student teaching.

Selection of Methodology

Because I had already conducted pilot ethnographic studies with all my participants, I felt that we were a unique group. All of them had been my students in at least one preservice education course over 2 years. Missy I had supervised during student teaching and Tammy had been my student in a second course. As a result, we had
interacted closely in a number of settings. I became concerned that using the same ethnographic method might be redundant. In discussions with my qualitative research professor, she suggested that I investigate collaborative inquiry as a possible method to extend and deepen the understanding regarding my topic of community building by novice teachers. From her description, cooperative inquiry seemed to represent a metaphor for what I believed should happen between teachers and their students, and I became enthusiastic to learn more about this approach.

From my review of literature, I discovered that collaborative inquiry is a form of action research but that it differs from others in that the initiator creates a team of peers who become co-learners whose purpose is to answer a question of importance to all of them through repeated cycles of planning, reflection, and action (Goodnough, 2005). Initially, this method seemed a good fit for our group. The idea that the researcher functions as a participant who learns with the group rather than about the group appealed to me as it exemplified the philosophy of community building and also seemed appropriate to the special circumstances of my participants. In addition to participating in my pilot studies, these women were students in courses I had taught in the preservice education program at the local university, and our relationships over two years had become ones of trust and mutual respect. I suspected that Buysse, Sparkman, and Wesley’s (2003) representation of collaborative inquiry as “learning [that] occurs within the context of social relationships with other members of the community who have similar, if not identical, issues and concerns from the realm of practice” (p. 267) might galvanize our further experience. Moreover, Brookfield (1995) termed collaborative
inquiry’s reflection and action process as “stance and dance” (p. 25). The stance implies that the outlook of group members is that teaching practice must always be open to further investigation, and the dance is one of experimentation that involves the multiple rhythms necessary to a successful classroom experience. This metaphor seemed also resonant of my prior experience with these women.

I discovered from reading the work of the hallmark figure in the adult learner movement, Knowles (1984), as well as other adult educators’ work (Brookfield, 1995; Houle, 1996; Merriam, 2001) that the collaborative inquiry approach is an adult learner strategy, especially designed for those who are self-directed learners in their personal and professional environments. Collaborative inquiry is very learner-centered, as it “involves learners in as many aspects of their education as possible and in the creation of a climate in which they can most fruitfully learn” (Houle, 1996, p. 30). These adult-learning principles, embodied in collaborative inquiry, seemed highly appropriate to my novice teacher participants, as they had already exemplified the necessary self-directed and self-sufficient qualities during our preservice courses and pilot study experiences together.

Additional analysis of the collaborative inquiry approach revealed that the group employing collaborative inquiry becomes a learning culture where members construct meaning with each other, listening and valuing one another’s ideas and appreciating the synergy of teamwork in a democratic environment. Creating the routines for conflict resolution as well as for celebration of success in advance are clearly important because of the emphasis upon divergence. A sense of community develops among the adults as the equal colleagues achieve understanding and construct meaning from their personal
experience. The idea that we participants might create an adult community of learners while each member concurrently practiced community building with her elementary students provided the strongest motivation yet to select this approach.

Moreover, during their preservice coursework with me and other professors, these women had created many of the artifacts described as important to collaborative inquiry—poetry, drawings, videotapes, mind maps, recipes, portfolios, journals, classroom cases, learning maps, stories, metaphors, proverbs, questionnaires and/or group emails to record the group’s thinking and construction of meaning over time. I noted that it is through the repeated, structured cycles of action and reflection that change is generated within those who engage in collaborative inquiry. Notwithstanding this individual benefit, the construction of new knowledge to enhance educational practice, which is publicly shared with the educational community, is the ultimate goal of the collaborative inquiry group (Bray et al., 2000).

The factors associated with collaborative inquiry resonated with what I knew of my participants’ teaching philosophies and their initial practices, and I determined to ask if they were willing to consider collaborative inquiry as the method for my work with them. Wanting to provide my participants a real choice, I offered to use either the same ethnographic approach including multiple interviews, field observations, and ejournaling—the triangulated approach used in our pilot studies—or the collaborative inquiry approach, which I described briefly in writing. Responding individually, my five participants were uniformly supportive of using collaborative inquiry as the method for our work together, which, therefore, was used as the data gathering method for my
dissertation study.

**Tensions of Researcher as Participant**

During my examination of the collaborative inquiry literature, I found that collaborative inquiry groups share the responsibility for leadership, essentially making the group one of collective leadership. When the framework, strategies for problem solving, and maintenance factors have been established, the initiator of the collaborative inquiry must quickly concede equal authority to the other group members. Achieving an appropriate balance in participation among the collaborators is one of the collaborative inquiry group’s greatest challenges, as the others may continue to look to the initiator to facilitate the process (Bray et al., 2000).

I recognized that this was a conspicuous drawback to using collaborative inquiry as the approach, because achieving true equality within our novice teacher group would be uniquely difficult. Although our prior professor-student, researcher-participant relationships were assets in the respect that we knew one another’s background and beliefs regarding community building, they were also a liability by virtue of the fact that they were not relationships of equality. They knew that I had served for years as a public school administrator and about my former experience as a classroom teacher. Moreover, at that time, I was still a full-time lecturer at the college, and the collaborative inquiry group’s primary function was for my dissertation study, which also made my role a more prominent one than would be desirable. Yorks (1995) described in his dissertation similar apprehensions about the equality of his core collaborative inquiry group, whose question
was “How is learning experienced in collaborative inquiry?” (p. 30). In order to answer their question, each of the core group’s members initiated and became a member of another collaborative inquiry group with a different question of mutual interest to that group. The resolution of their difficulties was achieved by being very open with other group members about the complexity of their situation and “continuing to question ourselves about the concern for doing research with, rather than on, people” (Yorks, 1995, p. 32). Despite their vigilance, Yorks mentioned that “Periodically, one or more of us has a feeling that we are talking about our field groups in drawing our conclusions” (p. 32). I resolved to make every effort to become as much an equal participant in the group as possible, although I needed time to ponder how to achieve that goal.

My situation was very hectic as I finished graduate coursework, finalized my college teaching year and was notified that the college’s 1-year lecturer positions might not be continued. In midsummer, when I had successfully passed my comprehensive exams and could focus upon finalizing my dissertation proposal, I gave careful consideration as to how I might best address my need to become an equal within the collaborative inquiry group. One possibility was to remain for the year at the college level as an adjunct, if not full-time, teacher with at least one class of preservice students with whom I could attempt to build a community of learners. A second option was not to work while completing my dissertation and to rely upon my past experience as a teacher who had practiced community building. Neither of these options seemed feasible in light of what I had learned was essential to effective collaborative inquiry group participation. A third possibility was to seek a teaching position in the school district where my
participants were applying. Not having taught at the elementary level for nearly 15 years, I was unsure about teaching in a different state and school district, although that option made the most sense considering our need to be a group of equal collaborators. To help me with my decision, I met with a school district administrator whose acquaintance I had made during my college supervision duties and explained my dilemma. He strongly encouraged me to consider taking a teaching position in the district and recommended me to a principal who was hiring for a new school. In short order, I accepted a fourth grade assignment, experiencing many of the qualms I felt when beginning my teaching career. Making the choice to teach full-time did not absolve me of the need to remain vigilant about my former relationships with the others in my collaborative inquiry group, but I had begun the process of trying to become as equal a participant as possible within our collaborative group of six novice teachers.

### Participant Decisions Affecting the Collaborative Inquiry Group

The decision to create a collaborative inquiry group was made as my participants finished their student teaching, completed their capstone course requirements, graduated from college, and began the daunting summer process of interviewing for teaching positions. Meanwhile, I had committed in my dissertation proposal to use collaborative inquiry as the method. In order for the group to complete the number of cycles of planning, action and reflection to sufficiently promote and measure change, I recognized that our process needed to be in effect for at least several months. I felt pressured to move forward quickly but had to complete the necessary revisions to obtain approval to defend
my proposal. At that point, Missy was hired by a school district 20 miles to the northwest of the college. She reluctantly decided, with her move to a new area and placement at a year-round school in a different district from the rest of us, not to continue with her commitment to participate in the collaborative inquiry group.

Knowing that in a collaborative inquiry group “ongoing participation in the process is voluntary” (Yorks, 1995, p. 28), I did not try to dissuade her although I believed her strong voice for community building would have added a valuable dimension to our group’s experience. To finalize plans with the other participants, I met with our group of five to discuss the details of conducting a collaborative inquiry and to give each participant full disclosure before she made her final decision to participate. Following that meeting, Emma determined that the time to participate in the group was no longer in her schedule due to a new church assignment, her full-time teaching job, and her home commitments. Her loss was also significant because of her commitment to teaching excellence, her willingness to voice her beliefs, and also because her decision diminished our members to four, less than the suggested collaborative inquiry group size of 5-12 (Bray et al., 2000).

**Other Issues Influencing Collaborative Inquiry**

As the approval process of my dissertation proposal continued, my research dissertation committee member asked that I include another strategy to check the validity of our reflective discussions—group classroom observations during one of our action cycles. Although observations are not a part of the collaborative inquiry process,
including it strengthened the authenticity by enabling triangulation of the data that was gathered during discussions and from an analysis of artifacts. Rewrites of my proposal and other events, among them my mother’s passing and the start of the public school year, prevented my proposal defense until October. During that successful proposal defense, committee members advised that I research more broadly into the constructs of community and adult learning, which are included in Chapter II, Review of Literature. The implementation of their suggestions proved valuable to our group collaborative inquiry experience. My initial goal had been to complete my dissertation data gathering by early in the spring semester, writing the dissertation by the end of spring semester and defending during the summer. Already a somewhat unrealistic goal, the need to include two days for group classroom observations and the late date when I successfully defended my proposal eventually led me to extend the study. It was a fortuitous decision. The members were willing to extend our sessions for two additional months, more data was collected, and our truth was written based upon our experience during the entire school year.

**Creating the Constitution for the Collaborative Inquiry Sessions**

Arranging the collaborative inquiry experience necessitates careful thought and implementation of details that ensure the success of the process. Many pitfalls can be avoided when the members of a collaborative inquiry group negotiate what the ground rules will be before the process begins. Collaborative inquiry is” akin to narrative investigation” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 104) in that it cannot be controlled in the same sense
as the more traditional qualitative research approaches due to the holistic experience that takes place during group interactions. Nevertheless, the “lived experience of the participants can be treated as a text to be interpreted” (p. 104). Therefore, during our initial planning session on August 7, 2008, our group created a constitution, which was recommended by Bray and colleagues, to govern our sessions (see Figure 2). We agreed to meet monthly for 1½ and 2 hours and established our use of time so that each member would have an approximately equal amount of time to share her narrative as well as to interact with others about artifacts and classroom situations. Other topics of discussion were deemed appropriate to include because the group was anxious to entertain all ideas or thoughts that might add to the overall discovery about community building that could be reached through the group experience. Finally, at each session, we agreed to work to reach consensus about the topic on which we would take action during the coming month.

**Working Out Other Details for the Collaborative Inquiry**

To ensure that all of our discussions were completely recorded with high sound quality, I agreed to purchase a Snowball microphone, which records up to 15 feet with a 360-degree radius and to record onto a Mac Book using the iLife, GarageBand software program, set to Real Instrument, Female Basic Vocals (Figure 3). Our group agreed that each participant would member check every session after it was transcribed to ensure that her comments, and that of others, were as accurate as possible. Trustworthiness is established by the group’s requirement to achieve consensus about what is their truth as
well as accepting and stating a minority report whenever inability to reach agreement occurs. Defensive reactions and complex power relationships are to be prevented and can be “minimized through the use of open, reflective, and critical reflective inquiry” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 107). To keep our experience as representative as possible and to address any differences of opinion as they happened, we agreed to communicate only with the entire group so that any exchange of information would be experienced by all members.

Figure 2. Copy of collaborative inquiry constitution created by group members.
Figure 3. Snowball USB Microphone connected to MacBook laptop.

simultaneously and in the same manner. In short, conversations about our collaborative inquiry would take place during our sessions and through group emails, each respondent selecting “Reply All” if a response was necessary.

After some discussion about how often and where it would be advisable to hold our sessions, we determined that they would occur on Saturday from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m. so that we would be refreshed after the week of teaching and interfere with weekend family experiences as little as possible. As the initiator of the group, I researched options for meeting places that might be available to a group such as ours. It seemed preferable not to meet in private homes since families could be inconvenienced and a degree of professionalism might be sacrificed. I found that the only libraries in our area with
meeting rooms required a fee and could not be scheduled for months in advance. We discussed the feasibility of using those library locations as well as the idea of trying to secure a meeting place at the college. Neither of these options was preferable to the group. The suggestion was made that we would be wise to locate the sessions in a school classroom. After some discussion about maintaining equality among the participants, we agreed to meet in each participant’s classroom on a rotational basis and also decided that the person whose classroom provided us the location would be the leader or hostess of that session. We scheduled the sessions as shown in Table 1 on a copy of the district 2008-2009 school calendar, so that our dates would not conflict with school holidays and district required days. I had already provided a district calendar (Figure 4) within a 2-inch, 3-ring notebook, given to participants for record keeping during our collaborative inquiry (Figure 5). The notebook included dividers for whatever sections we decided were necessary and plastic sheet protectors to hold each of the artifacts or other items

Table 1

A List of Each Date, Location, and Session Leader for Collaborative Inquiry Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session date and time</th>
<th>Location of session</th>
<th>Session leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 25th – 8:00–10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>H. Elementary School</td>
<td>Melanie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 15th – 8:00–10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>G. Elementary School</td>
<td>Holly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 13th – 8:00–10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>M. Elementary School</td>
<td>Tammy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 3rd – 8:00–10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>G. Elementary School</td>
<td>Leah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 31st – 8:00–10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>M. Elementary School</td>
<td>Tammy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 25th – 8:00–10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>G. Elementary School</td>
<td>Holly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 25th – 8:00–10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>M. Elementary School</td>
<td>Leah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. After the initial session at H. Elementary, it was considered too far to travel, and the remaining sessions were held at the more centrally located schools.
Collaborative Inquiry Portfolio For Leah Welte

Figure 4. Front cover of binder used as portfolio for sessions.

Figure 5. School district 2008-2009 school calendar with collaborative inquiry session and class observation dates marked.
from our sessions as well as the introductory session sheets I had designed to facilitate our decision making (Figures 6 and 7). We agreed to bring the notebook to each of our sessions with all the items we had completed or gathered in order to stay focused upon our goals and organized within our data gathering.

During the final minutes of our organizational meeting, members discussed what might be some artifacts that individuals definitely would not consider as viable. Consensus was reached that we would not ask ourselves to write proverbs, poetry or recipes, nor would we generate drawings regarding our community building. Finally, we

---

**Collaborative Inquiry Planning Meeting**  
**August 7, 208**  
Melanie, Emma, Holly, Tammy Leah

1. “Self-Portrait” Introduction & What Brings You Here?  
2. Why Use the Collaborative Inquiry Approach?  
3. A “Constitution” – What We Expect & What We Assume  
4. An Organizational Plan for Busy People to Accomplish their Goals  
   a) Who will lead each session? Where will it be held?  
   b) What day of the week and time of the day?  
   c) Will sessions be held every three weeks or once a month?  
   d) What artifacts will the group use as evidence of developing or promoting change in our practice?  
      1) portfolios 2) journals  
      3) case descriptions 4) learning maps  
      5) stories 6) metaphors  
      7) proverbs 8) poetry  
      9) drawings 10) videotapes/audiotapes  
      11) mind maps 12) recipes  
      13) group emails 14) blogging  
5. What should be areas of focus for planning/action/reflection cycles?  
6. Plan initial area of action and artifact in preparation for first session.

---

*Figure 6.* Agenda used as organizer to stimulate discussion and decision making during initial collaborative inquiry organizational meeting.
Figure 7. Ice breaker used by collaborative decision making during initial inquiry group members to introduce themselves to one another at organizational meeting.

brainstormed about what might be possible areas of focus for our cycles of planning/action/reflection regarding the creation of a community of learners in each of our classrooms. Members mentioned Morning Meeting, Class Meeting, class procedures, teacher expectations, signs of mutual respect, room environment, classroom atmosphere, disciplinary consequences, organization of curricular units, teaching strategies, student-teacher relationships, student-student relationships, teacher/student personality types, teacher instructional style. Of those listed, group consensus was reached that the topic of
Morning Meeting, a type of structured, social skills developmental program would be the initial topic to be implemented and reflected upon. This program had been observed in action in other teachers’ classrooms during the group members’ preservice training, but no one had had the opportunity to implement the four components—Greeting, Sharing, Group Activity, and News and Announcements during her fieldwork experiences. Our group members did not own either of the Morning Meeting books with detailed instructions and many ideas for providing the variety within each component that would make the program viable throughout the year. Considering the purchase of necessary items for our collaborative inquiry as part of my dissertation expenses, I ordered for each member from Amazon.com the book she preferred, which was sent to her home address before the school year began. Implementing and bringing a tangible artifact from our version of Morning Meeting was agreed to be our first desired action and artifact for reflection at our next session.

**How Our Experience Was Gathered and Gleaned**

Following the trail blazed during the initial collaborative inquiry work done by Bray and colleagues (2000), we considered our collaborative inquiry group as employing the phenomenological method, which “aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” and “explores how human beings make sense of experience...both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Therefore, it was necessary for us to gather data from a variety of individual and group sources. This we did by recording all group sessions, transcribing them into nearly 90,000
words over some 200 pages of single-spaced, Times New Roman 12 point font. These member session transcriptions provided the greatest source of meaning making for our experience. For example, at each session, the session leader and I arrived ahead of the other members, her to let me in and me to set up the recording devices and whatever snacks I had purchased in my capacity as dissertation researcher. The others arrived, and our session began being recorded. The first few minutes were filled with the stories of our individual experiences throughout the month, which usually proceeded in a spontaneous way. At her discretion, the session leader turned our discussion to the topic we had agreed at the prior session to become the focus for our reflection.

Comments were made in a relatively unstructured manner, with the session leader facilitating the discussion using a structured device or simply directing us with her comments. For example, at the beginning of the new year during the January 3, 2010, session I led, I asked each of us to complete an organizer titled, Community Building Update—Plans for 2009: What Works and What I Want to Change (Figure 8). My

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Building Update</th>
<th>Plans for 2009 — What Works and What I Want to Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Room Environment</td>
<td>Transitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions</td>
<td>Procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Communication</td>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Learning</td>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Relationships</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lessons</td>
<td>Teacher Student Relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8. The organizer on which members were able to record their individual experience in areas we had brainstormed as being possible areas of focus for action and reflection cycles.
purpose in doing this exercise was to create another artifact of our individual experience midpoint in our collaborative inquiry group experience, relative to a number of major areas we had brainstormed at our initial session as being possible topics of focus for our action and reflection cycles. It also stimulated group discussion as each member shared some of the points she had written as her goals for 2009. Another example happened during my second session as leader, the final session in May, for which I prepared several organizers to facilitate our process of reaching final consensus. We decided in April to complete the Kiersey Temperament Sorter (Figure 9), derived from the Meyers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator, to focus on how our personal temperaments and teaching

![The Keirsey Temperament Sorter](image)

*Figure 9.* A sample page from a Kiersey Temperament Sorter taken to help the member determine her personality type teaching style for discussion purposes.
styles might influence community building in our classrooms. At our reflection session, I asked that we complete the Teacher Attitudes for Achievement questionnaire I had prepared (Figure 10) to help each of us give voice to our individual experience over the month. The discussion, albeit brief due to the number of items we needed to complete that last day, proved enlightening as we constructed our final truth about what essential aspects of community building we felt we were successful in implementing most effectively and what personal factors might have contributed to that outcome.

Figure 10. The questionnaire the researcher made to help the member crystallize various aspects of her for discussion purposes.
During our reflection sessions, each member contributed, but the degree to which she spoke varied, based upon the relevance of the topic’s example being discussed to her personal experience. For instance, when Tammy explained the economy system she had instituted in her fifth grade classroom using simulated money under the topic of classroom procedures, Holly commented at length about her similar experience with paying her first grade students with real coins for being particular classroom managers (Figure 11). Neither Melanie nor I had such a strategy in place in her kindergarten nor my fourth grade classroom, so our involvement was in the form of questions for clarification and challenges as to what effect such payment systems might have on the success of the overall goal of community building.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weather Manager — 15 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendar Manager — 10 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pledge Manager — 20 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Manager — 25 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair Manager — 25 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch Managers — 10 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line Manager — 25 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class locater — 10 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Manager — 20 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant Manager — 10 cents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door manager — 25 cents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**First Grade Bank Slip**

How Many of each?

Pennies: ______
Nickels: ______
Dimes: ______
Quarters: ______
Total: ______________

Figure 11. List of first grade class jobs together with the weekly pay and a bank slip so a student could save her money.
Sometimes, we brought and shared artifacts at the session during which each item was discussed; often, however, the member simply explained the artifact or process because the need surfaced during the discussion. Those artifacts were either emailed to the members, if practical, or were brought to a subsequent session or were observed functioning in the person’s classroom when we visited. For example, Tammy explained her Class Song, including the name of each of her students, set to the tune of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” to go with her sports theme for the year. She did not have the artifact with her but sent it to us subsequently (Figure 12). Holly simply discussed her “We Can…” door covering, and we saw it during our visitation.

The final minutes of our sessions were spent in determining the next topic for focus during the month. For example, the second topic, following that of Morning

![Team Song](image)

I want to be with Team
They are the very best!
There’s Ali and Alley and Andrew there,
Ryker, Reagen, and Nile have flair.
With Bailey, Brian, and Jareed
Zhaun-Paul, Dallas, and Jake
Ashton, Brody, Madi, Haylee, and Cole
Cory, Chelsey, Kylee, and Tom
Korbin, Marvin, Maddie, and Cody
Haley, Natalie, and Emme
Amelia, Bryce, and we can’t forget Martha
Team is just GREAT!

Figure 12. The team song using every student’s name together with team-building ideas; set to the Tune of “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.”
Meeting, became the implementation of teacher organizational strategies and time management to enable us to focus our efforts upon activities we alone could do most effectively, such as book advertising and personal reading encouragement to individuals, to demonstrate individual caring to our students. Characteristically, the session leader and I remained after to clean up and to put away the recording devices, which I transported to the next session since I needed to do transcribing.

In addition, each member kept her own portfolio of artifacts, representative of her individual and our collective experience with each of the community building topics of focus we chose for action and reflection. The portfolios were used to amass the evidence from artifacts developed or discovered and found effective in implementing the topics. Artifacts commonly included photographs taken of room environment, strategies conducted by the teacher, or interactions among students during an experience. For example, Melanie described her Class Meetings, but we did not have the opportunity to witness them so she included a photo of that experience in her portfolio (Figure 13). Other artifacts ranged from my organizer that facilitated self-responsibility (Figure 14), to the plastic cups each first grader used to store earnings that could purchase items at the weekly store event, to the poster upon which student-created class rules were recorded with their signatures contracting to keep those rules, a procedure which all of us completed. In addition, notes describing the process for a number of her artifacts in detail were included by Melanie, who had interjected her comments less often during our sessions.
Figure 13. A kindergarten class practices problem solving skills during a class meeting.

Figure 14. An organizer designed for upper grade students to self-select behavior class and individual goals and to self-evaluate weekly progress toward achieving them.
Finally, each member took an average of over 2,500 words of field notes about every other member’s experience during our three-hour visitations to one another’s classrooms. Each one of us was observed by the other three members for half a school day, the first being observed in the morning, and the other in the afternoon over a two-day period (Figure 15). We did not prepare any special activities; rather, our purpose was to gain first-hand, deeper insights into how each of us experienced community building with her students in her classroom. Each member contributed her visitation notes, but we were unable to record separate discussions of our observations due to the day’s impacted schedule and the disruption it would have caused in our working classrooms.

Emails from reflections between sessions proved to represent only a small fraction of the data that was gathered (Figure 16). For instance, I initiated an email asking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3/30/08 Tammy Visitation Field Notes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Room environment – baseball theme Team Hone. Catch a good Book bulletin board; presidents timeline Harry Potter books; wall of fame with student pictures; current events board; map with where different events have taken place; qualities looked for-attitude discipline strength perseverance; place value b.b. with decimals; charts that celebrate! Service; class saying – Now I am the VOICE, I will LEAD not follow; I will BELIEVE not doubt; I will create not destroy; I am a FORCE for GOOD; I am a LEADER; DEFY THE ODDS; Set a new STANDARD; Step Up! Step Up! Step Up! Step Up! Step Up! Also a list of class rules with a promise We the class of , in order to have a happy and successful year, promise to do the following: 1. Be kind; 2. Be attentive; 3. Help each other; 4. Be respectful; 5. Always do our best work; In order to do this, we will come to school willing and ready to learn each day. As we work hard together, we will celebrate our success through class parties and other rewards. We promise to work together to make this year the best ever! rocks! Bulletin board with pictures and card students have given her. Lots of boxes of books. Posters that say Dare to try and TEAM Together Everyone Achieves More; Teamwork A Teacher’s Heart is Quilted with Smiles; banner with TEAMWORK-each student’s hand outlined and statements about what teamwork does. Lots of books in plastic tubs in the back of the room; football field with poster; All kids involved in reading and very quiet; two reading groups have met and students lead the discussion with intermittent questions by the teacher. On easel at the back of the room is a heart with the saying We love you and all the student’s names.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 15.* An excerpt from the beginning of field notes taken in one member’s classroom during the half-day visitations. Each member took field notes during three other members’ visitations.
Figure 16. A searched list of group emails generated by one of the members and sent to all members of the collaborative inquiry group.

for advice about a lunch recess dodge ball teams issue, partly to test the waters regarding group emails. Although all the other members answered my request, no one else initiated another group email to discuss an issue or share a situation to celebrate. Our other group emails were essentially organizational in nature; short and to the point. Essentially, the phenomenological approach assumes that

there is an essence or essences to shared experience, [which] are the core meanings mutually understood through the phenomenon commonly experienced [that enables people] to make sense of the world and, in so doing, develop a world-view. (Patton, 2002, p. 106)

At our final session, considering all of our data, it was our goal to achieve and record our collaborative inquiry group’s world-view of the community building strategies necessary
for novice teachers to successfully create a community of learners during their first full-time year of public school teaching. In order to accomplish our goal, we found, as did Bray and colleagues (2000), that we needed to determine common themes from the point of view of hermeneutics, which is a theoretical approach, expressing that “what something means depends on the cultural context in which it was originally created as well as the cultural context within which it is subsequently interpreted” (Patton, 2002, p. 113). We did not attempt to do group coding of our transcribed sessions nor our classroom observations. Yorks (1995) described in pages of detail the painful and unproductive attempts his groundbreaking collaborative inquiry group made to apply group and individual coding, the traditional qualitative research technique, to their experience. Rather, we used a similar holistic approach to that which Bray and colleagues (2000) developed and finally found to be an effective tool for their groups to reach consensus—”phenomenology-in-several-voices” (p. 103), which involves individuals recording their thoughts and then synthesizing them into a group synthesized statement.

Viewing our experience holistically and reaching group consensus was the focus of the process during our final session. First, each of us individually answered on a sheet of paper (Figure 17) from her personal experience each of our three questions.

1. What are the shared perceptions of novice teachers about what constitutes community building in a classroom?

2. What are the shared perceptions of novice teachers about how the process of collaborative inquiry supports the development of a classroom community?

3. What are novice teachers’ shared perceptions about their ability to create a
Questions We Need to Answer Individually:

1. What do you believe were the essential qualities for community building to be developed in your classroom?

2. What are your thoughts about your ability to create a classroom community during your first full-time year of public school teaching? What about your first year made it more or less difficult?

3. What are your thoughts about how our process of collaborative inquiry group supported or hindered your experience?

Figure 17. An organizer with our collaborative inquiry group’s three questions restated to be answered individually in preparation for achieving group consensus.

...community of learners among their diverse students during their first full-time year of teaching?

Second, each member listed her descriptors for each of the questions on large newsprint sheets and presented what she felt were the key ideas for each question that she had gleaned from her experience throughout the year. She was free to refer to artifacts she had gathered and to tell stories or examples that clarified each of her points. Finally, our group worked collectively to discuss, achieve consensus and record the essential themes that we shared on our newsprint sheets, which remained side by side on the whiteboard in answer to each of our group’s questions. Yorks (1995) stated that hermeneutics “is a process of insightful grasping and formulating a thematic understanding: not a rule-bound process but an act of ‘seeing’ meaning...the product of
insightful discovery and disclosure” (p. 45-46). Our collaborative inquiry group found that the experience during the final session did achieve the discovery and disclosure of our collective understanding of community building in our elementary classrooms. Although we expressed the challenges inherent in participating in a collaborative inquiry group during our first full-time year of public school teaching, we also gained a greater appreciation of the value of four pairs of inner eyes that saw shared meaning across what each of us had individually and collectively experienced through the collaborative inquiry approach.

In my capacity as dissertation researcher, the members gave me all their notes answering our three questions, organizers, portfolios, and newsprint sheets. I reviewed all of that data, but most significantly the shared themes we had agreed upon, and prepared common statements regarding each of our collaborative inquiry’s questions (Figure 18) to send in a group email. Completing the final draft of the truth achieved by our collaborative inquiry group proved not to be too lengthy a process. Members had represented their thinking largely to their satisfaction during our final session and found that our common themes were represented in each statement. Their need was to edit the statements with alternative word choices for some of the details. Our statements of truth regarding community building and the collaborative inquiry approach, which enabled achieving them, stand ready to be shared with our educational colleagues. More detail about this part of the process will be presented in Chapter IV.
Figure 18. Partial statement about common themes identified during final collaboration and proposed statement for group’s editing to achieve its consensus of novice teachers’ truth about community building during their first full-time year of public school teaching.

Themes and Consensus of Our Truth:

Shared Themes: Consensus about Community Building from Final Collaboration: Sense of caring, mutual respect, risk-taking, failure is OK; consistent, high expectations; feeling of belonging; shared success, joys, sorrows, vision; ownership/self-responsibility; engaging curriculum; shared planning/options in learning.

Translation of Themes and other Notes into Rough Draft Statement (our “truth”) about Community Building: Orchestrating a community of learners in an elementary classroom, regardless of the age and grade level of the students, involves five key factors. First in importance to community building is to foster a sense of caring among all class members whether they give specific compliments, participate in a class cheer, or receive correction for an inappropriate choice. Giving service and showing empathy for one

Another Line of Thinking Provided by the Researcher in Our Collaborative Inquiry

During the collaborative inquiry process, I completed another type of data gathering—journaling—separate from the group experience. My major professor asked that I keep a journal during our process that included: (a) method entries to record the practical aspects of the research activities, expenses, and so forth; (b) reflexive entries to record my rational thoughts as the researcher regarding my question, subquestions, and the progress of the process; and (c) reaction entries to record my emotional gut reactions
to the experience as the responsible researcher who is no longer in charge. Entries were made over a 7-month period as appropriate to the type of journal entries, for a total of 11,272 words. For example, the method journal (Table 2) was used on a more limited basis as expenses occurred at the beginning, on a monthly basis and only occasionally as needs arose from our collaborative inquiry group interaction. Our greatest expense was to cover the cost of members’ activities, which included reimbursement for their substitutes for class visitations, mileage for travel, and other miscellaneous expenditures incurred from their participation. The $667.50 to cover this expense was generously provided from university funds found by my major professor, Dr. Scott L. Hunsaker. My greatest personal cost was for the initial materials used throughout the collaborative inquiry process and for the food items to provide a positive ambiance and to allay hunger during our early morning Saturday sessions.

Table 2

*Record of Expenditures Taken From Method Journal Kept During Collaborative Inquiry*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Portfolio with dividers, item keeper, Morning Meeting book, treats, microphone</td>
<td>Start up items</td>
<td>$292.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Session treats</td>
<td>Group session facilitation</td>
<td>$13.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Session treats</td>
<td>Group session facilitation</td>
<td>$14.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Session treats</td>
<td>Group session facilitation</td>
<td>$22.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Session treats, copying organizers, Kiersey Sorter</td>
<td>Group session facilitation, determine personality type</td>
<td>$38.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Substitute reimbursement, travel, related expenditures</td>
<td>Conduct classroom visitations</td>
<td>$667.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Session treats</td>
<td>Group session facilitation</td>
<td>$15.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Session treats, copying, newsprint sheets, pens</td>
<td>Group session facilitation, completion of process</td>
<td>$24.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflexive and reactive entries were made in the journal an average of three times per week, Tuesdays and Saturdays for consistency, and intermittently as thoughts or issues arose, such as interactions with individual members, or as I prepared for the next steps of our process. For example, about 25% of the entries in the reactive journal have to do with my concerns and the frustrations I felt from needing to relinquish control to the group, about 50% to celebrate as group progress in various aspects was made within our collective group experience and the final approximately 25% were miscellaneous entries. I found that the reflexive journal entries were related to the reactive journal entries, as about 50% of the reflexive entries were completed following a reactive entry to analyze objectively my emotional response to an occurrence. Keeping the journals was an effective tool to help me track my experience and as a method of data gathering about the group’s and my individual process. Excerpts from these journals will appear in separate sections throughout the Chapters IV and V.

Another type of journal, containing 20,756 words, I kept to record my personal journey as I accepted a teaching position after years as a public school administrator and working at the college level. Serving again as a classroom teacher whose background experience as an educator had both breadth and depth, the experience was a somewhat novel one. I determined to record my story from that unique perspective, both for my personal benefit and for possible later writings.

**Threats to Validity and Checks for Validity in Our Collaborative Inquiry**

Several threats to the validity of our collaborative inquiry process were identified
and checks were established to resolve those threats as much as possible. The first and most serious threat, elaborated upon by Bray and colleagues (2000), is called “groupthink, a tendency toward concurrence seeking” (p. 108) rather than consensus finding. It most often occurs when there is social cohesion within the research group and “a style of leadership that advocated a preferred solution” (p. 108). With regard to the social cohesion concern, our group had experienced the same preservice education program, which created a commonality of beliefs. Furthermore, two of our members had participated in the same college cohort, and I knew from our prior work the generally common vision about community building each of the members shared. Therefore, we did have greater social cohesion than a group from diverse environments would have had. As a result, the ease with which we achieved conclusions about the essential elements and strategies for community building might have unavoidably represented concurrence as much as consensus. Nevertheless, an examination of our discussion session transcriptions substantiated that none of us practiced a leadership style that attempted to unduly influence the outcome of our definition of community building. Each member’s experience and conclusions were equally valued and included. It must also be remembered that defining the essential elements of community building represented only one of our questions and that we derived our definition from classroom experience, at that point, rather than the theoretical visionary statements made during interviews conducted before our collaborative inquiry process ensued. The other questions had to do with our efficacy as novice teachers using collaborative inquiry as a process and determining our ability to create a community of learners during our first full-time year of
public school teaching, which was new territory to be explored by each of us during our individual and collective journeys. Finally, using references to the writings of experts and remaining open to one another’s alternative thinking throughout the process provided as effective a check to the threat of groupthink as possible in our special circumstances.

The second threat to the validity that needed to be controlled was the credibility of our collaborative inquiry group experience. To check that threat, we gathered a great deal of data over an extended period of time. Multiple sources of data collection were also employed, including transcriptions of 15 hours of session discussions; member checked for accuracy, examination of a great many artifacts in classrooms and brought to sessions, and field notes taken during classroom visitations. Using these various strategies enabled triangulation of data (Glesne, 2006). For instance, the classroom visitation process was very validating in that the community building strategies members discussed in sessions were seen in action between them and their students as well as among their students. Room environment observed during visitations also validated that the artifacts brought to sessions or included in portfolios, and many that couldn’t be captured, were, in fact, being used to facilitate the creation of a community of learners within each member’s classroom. The threat to credibility was checked in very powerful, plausible ways.

The final major threat to the validity of our process was whether or not our group implemented the collaborative inquiry approach in the manner in which it is intended. This threat was very real because every collaborative inquiry group is “a living and learning social organism” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 110), which takes on its own life. This threat was dealt with by providing a summary of the collaborative inquiry approach in
writing at the initial planning session and reviewing the key aspects with the members. During that establishment meeting, the major criteria suggested by Bray and colleagues, were implemented in the form of the constitution, group selection of day, hours, and location, rotation of leadership at sessions, and group selection of topics to be acted upon in our practice between sessions and artifacts to be reflected upon during each session. Beyond these initial actions, it was up to the session leader and the members to fulfill the criteria in a responsible manner during and between sessions. Our group’s experience was unique when compared with other collaborative inquiry groups described in the literature, but there is much evidence among the data we gathered to indicate that our members did fulfill the primary criteria for implementing the collaborative inquiry approach.

Limitations of Our Collaborative Inquiry

As with any involved study, I have learned much from this research experience that is of value to me, and, I believe to the field of education. The following chapters will report the results and discuss them in detail. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge the limitations that impacted this study.

First, ours was a small, context specific group of novice teachers. Each of us had prior background in teaching, but mine was so long lasting and varied that it is difficult to recognize me as a novice teacher. Granted, it had been years since I last taught elementary students, and I worked in a new state and school district. Nevertheless, I must acknowledge that the procedural aspects of my past experience as a teacher served me
differently from the other members, like an experienced bike rider adjusts more readily to a state of the art bicycle that includes revolutionary changes from the old two-wheeler. In addition, our members, though formally novice teachers, could be considered adult learners who may have responded to the collaborative inquiry process in a different way from less experienced traditionally prepared novice teachers. For example, although it was her first year of public school full-time teaching, Holly had taught full time in a Head Start preschool program at one point, which made her educational background richer than the other members. Tiffany’s personal family experience was so demanding and enriching that she had developed coping strategies beyond the rest of us. Melanie, the most traditionally prepared of our members, still had greater experience in working with young students as her part-time work during high school and college. Therefore, other researchers need to be prepared to have an experience that is somewhat different based upon the background and experience of their collaborative inquiry group’s members.

Second, the demographics of our schools, as shown in Table 3, revealed relatively homogeneous Caucasian student groups, and only my classroom makeup varied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total school/classrooms</th>
<th>Caucasian %</th>
<th>Hispanic %</th>
<th>Black %</th>
<th>Economically disadvantaged %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>549/Kgn = 55 Grade 4 = 28</td>
<td>88.5% Kgn = 93% Grade 4 = 75%</td>
<td>8.5% Kgn = 7% Grade 4 = 25%</td>
<td>1.5% Kgn = 0% Grade 4 = 7%</td>
<td>33% Kgn = 29%; Grade 4 = 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>479/Grde 5 = 32</td>
<td>95% Grade 5 = 91%</td>
<td>5% Grade 5 = 6%</td>
<td>.4% Grde 5 = 0%</td>
<td>17% Grade 5 = 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>319/Grde 1 = 17</td>
<td>75% Grade 1 = 76%</td>
<td>20% Grade 1 = 24%</td>
<td>.03% Grade 1 = 0%</td>
<td>58% Grade 1 = 56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
significantly from my school statistics. The overall statistics were disappointing, especially to Holly who indicated that she had hoped to be able to work with a significantly more culturally diverse group. I was also disappointed, recognizing that addressing cultural diversity during our first year of teaching might not be one of the group’s primary areas of focus because two of our members had almost completely White student groups, and even my class group was comprised of less than one-third diverse students.

Third, our collaborative inquiry group was unable to hold, in some respects, to the criteria we had established in our constitution. For example, the school where Melanie and I worked was relatively remote compared to the other two members’ schools. After driving to our school once, the other members requested that we use their centrally located classrooms, and we agreed in order to save time and transportation costs. In so doing, we lost the opportunity to observe the room environment changes in Melanie and my classrooms that might have tangentially added to our data, although that was not formally a part of our sessions. Furthermore, our use of artifacts was somewhat different from the description given by Bray and colleagues (2000). They described creating artifacts specifically for the purpose of examining or delineating the members’ practice. At our initial meeting, our group’s members were not receptive to required artifacts being assigned in advance, having just graduated from their preservice program and being heavily impacted with their first year teaching requirements. Alternatively, all of the members of our collaborative inquiry group were actively involved throughout our process in developing, or finding from a variety of resources, the artifacts that we used
with our students to create a community of learners. Many of the artifacts we used were very similar, such as the class rules posters, the self-assessment strategies, and the procedure management tools. However, the actual strategy or organizer was tailored to the grade level and the individual who developed or implemented it. We found it more meaningful to focus on a topic area and then to create or find artifacts that we implemented and then shared with the group during the topic reflection time of our sessions.

Fourth, the first year of full-time public school teaching is, perhaps, the most demanding time in the professional life of a teacher. For our members to commit even to be part of a collaborative inquiry group during that year was a source of amazement to me as the dissertation researcher. Our members were, clearly, a unique group of persons, as acknowledged above, who tailored the collaborative inquiry process to meet our needs. Therefore, one of the benefits of the group’s existence, as stated by its members, was the opportunity for individuals to share concerns about individual school experiences with a group of neutral, supportive novice teachers. As shown by the review of our session transcriptions, some time was spent in this activity, which was not strictly a part of the collaborative inquiry group description given by Bray and colleagues (2000). Nevertheless, Yorks (1995) stated that the collaborative inquiry groups in which he participated also experienced this very socially characteristic activity. Much of the time, this part of the discussion was significant to the group because it described the hindrances to community building, but occasionally it benefited primarily the member who was relieved to be able to share her frustrations.
Finally, as in all studies, I am limited by my ability to adequately document the complete experience. For example, the words to describe the spoken language, along with its nonverbal language qualities, are sometimes insufficient. Using the outward manifestations of change of individual collaborative inquiry members to describe their inward development may be somewhat suspect because it involves my making inferences. At the very least, the selection of what to include as examples and what to leave out as less significant is inherent in qualitative research and always affects the outcome (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Glesne, 2006; Patton, 2002). Recognizing these limitations created an awareness in me that I needed to represent each collaborative inquiry group member as fairly and equitably as possible throughout Chapters IV and V so that our “phenomenology-in-several-voices” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 103) rang out clearly to evidence our collective truth.

**Conclusion about Our Collaborative Inquiry**

This chapter has described in narrative form the methodology that governed this study. The metaphor of a journey into unknown waters remained suitable throughout the experience. The way was uncharted other than basic maps provided by those who had gone on similar journeys before us, which was certainly helpful. Nevertheless, we needed to apply our own Rosetta Stone to those maps because our intended ports and destination were unique to our collaborative inquiry group. The next chapter provides a detailed description of our journey including references to the richness of our experience.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS OF THE COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY GROUP:
THE TRUTH OF COMMUNITY BUILDING

It is Saturday morning, May 25, 2008, at 7:45 a.m., and I am parked in the school lot waiting for Tammy to arrive. This is the third time our collaborative inquiry group has met at Tammy’s school because of its central location, but it is my day to act as the session leader. Each of us has served as the leader twice, except for Melanie, who led only once because we have held seven sessions, not counting our class visitations. Today, as usual, I have brought some snacks to keep up our energy during our final two-hour collaborative inquiry session. I also will continue to set up the sound system in an inconspicuous place so that we can try to forget that each word we say is being recorded for transcription. I count on the fact that the Snowball USB microphone is sensitive enough to capture our voices from across the room because today we won’t be sitting around the kidney-shaped reading table we usually use for our discussions. Each of us will need a larger workspace to complete the process I have planned. This final session is the one where we must synthesize and reach agreement about what we have learned from our collaborative inquiry experience this year. I am excited to reach closure, and I’m sure the other group members are, too. Tammy has just arrived; I grab the boxes of items I need, and we head to her classroom.

Reflecting On Previous Collaborative Inquiry Sessions

Although the constitution we established at our organizational meeting formally
established the organization for our sessions, the actual implementation of our prior sessions appeared as fairly free flowing interactions with a similar physical arrangement occurring in each of the meeting locations. The session was generally divided into three time periods. First, individuals debriefed about classroom situations and student experiences. Second, the leader guided members to participate in a focused reflection about the community building idea we had agreed to take action upon during last month’s session. Finally, the last few minutes were spent determining what we would like to make the center of our attention for action during the upcoming month. The session leader sat in the indented teacher position at the kidney-shaped table in each classroom, with the rest of us arranged around the half circle area where students sat for small group reading. Although I brought snacks each time and members felt comfortable to sample briefly, the group was more intent upon discussing than eating. The microphone was placed unobtrusively at one side of the table with the laptop on the floor by the table leg and beneath the microphone. I created a new Apple Garage Band Project on the laptop for each of our sessions, and once it was set to record, touching the laptop’s space bar started the process, which continued without attention until our session concluded, when I touched the space bar a second time. The sound quality of the recordings was consistently good because the recording software provided a female vocal option, which I activated each time. I am confident that the transcriptions were as accurate as the human ear could make them. Moreover, the group members checked the transcriptions, which was a positive way for them to review what was said as well as to verify the accuracy.

The degree to which we adhered to the above-described organizational plan was
somewhat subject to whether the session leader’s style was more or less directive, which didn’t seem to be significant to our members. Customarily, casual conversation began as soon as there were two of us in the room. We continued until all four had arrived, and the leader sat at the table to begin her debriefing. Once each member had the opportunity to share sufficiently about her significant occurrences during the month, the leader began the reflection section by mentioning the topic of our action for the past month. For example, when Melanie functioned as session leader, the conversation below transitioned the group into the analysis of our action item. The concept we had chosen for action was Morning Meeting, a 15-30 minute oral language process that is designed to promote mutual respect and understanding among diverse students through four activities—greeting, sharing, group activity, and news and announcements:

Holly: Oh, so those are like their desks but on the wall.

Melanie: Yes, if we put those things in the cubbies or their mailboxes, they would [be taken] home. Shall we get started? So, Morning Meeting!

Holly: Morning Meeting.

Melanie: Yea. Do you have some thoughts?

Holly: I do have some thoughts. I do Morning Meeting every morning for 15 minutes. It’s really hard to fit in even though I call it Oral Language. We do a lot with oral language because I have three Spanish speakers, and we’re working on their English. I don’t think the other teachers agree with how I spend my 15 minutes in the morning.

Melanie: What kind of things do you do in Morning Meeting?

Holly: We start out with a greeting. My greetings so far have been a lot of songs.... Our Share comes later.

Tammy: We don’t do a Share. We do sharing in other ways. We’re not there yet, and you know frequently my kids get to greet. My kids like to greet me, but
teaching them to greet each other respectfully is going to take a lot of effort.

Leah: Maybe there’s a difference between fourth and fifth grade or the place where [our school] is located, but so far, all we’ve done is greeting and sharing. We’ve split up the sharing so I have five or six students sharing each day.... At first, I just started out with the greeting—the ball toss.

Tammy: That worked wonderfully with my sixth grade [student teaching students]...My fifth graders, I just thought, oh, no. (Group Transcript, October 25, 2008, pp. 3-7)

Thus began a half-hour exchange of ideas about how each of us used the concept of oral language to bring our students to a greater understanding and support for one another. Discussions such as this one were constructive with the exchange of ideas emanating easily from one member to another throughout our time together. Each group member was a good listener and appeared to be genuinely interested and concerned for the other novice teachers’ and the students’ welfare. No one stepped on someone else’s lines, dominated the conversation or evidenced a need to disagree on minor points.

Nevertheless, the discussions were spirited; members simply allowed one another to state experiences, extending and elaborating upon prior statements made by others without making judgmental comments.

Usually one or two of our members brought an artifact to share at the meeting. Most often I brought at least one item that related to the area of action for the month. If an artifact was discussed but the member did not bring a copy, it was emailed to the other members or brought to the next session. From all our members’ perspective, the artifacts were valued as resources we might use wholesale or adapt to our personal needs. As an example, I implemented a helpful idea from Holly’s Student Manager Sheet, a more responsible title than the class jobs title I had used with my students. Also, Tammy
brought a copy of the class chant she and her students composed and the class song she wrote which included all her students’ first names; both of her ideas I wanted to adapt to use with my students. All our prior sessions lasted the full two hours that we had agreed to set aside for collaborative inquiry on a Saturday each month. All members attended each of the seven sessions although Melanie joined us twice after we began due to her personal circumstances.

As discussed in Chapter III, I kept a multilevel journal with entries that reacted and reflected upon the collaborative inquiry process experience from my perspective as the dissertation researcher. With regard to the organization and implementation of the process, my entries show that I gained an increased comfort level over time with the modifications we made in our collaborative inquiry and the relaxed leadership styles of the other members. I learned to trust the uniqueness inherent in our novice teachers’ group collaborative inquiry. Following the introductory meeting where I included several graphic organizers to structure the experience, I wrote this reaction/reflection journal entry:

Reaction: I fear that we will not observe the collaborative inquiry process as described by the authors whose work I’ve studied. I feel doubtful because the group didn’t agree to create most of the types of artifacts specifically for our sessions, and that seems to be a major strategy to structure the collaborative inquiry experience. I think the list included too many ideas similar to the required assignments they had to complete for their preservice education program. It probably sounded like a bunch of other assignments.

Reflection: I couldn’t override the group’s consensus, so I had my first taste of what it is going to be like not to be in charge. We did review the article I wrote on collaborative inquiry and agreed upon the other criteria, so that’s a good sign that the group seeks to implement the requirements of collaborative inquiry. I recognize that I cannot and should not seek to control the group, but I can facilitate what happens, just as the other members can, through my examples
during discussions and the artifacts I contribute. (Journal Entries, August 7, 2008)

My anxious reaction primarily originated from the depth of study I had completed about collaborative inquiry and my perception that our process could only be effective if we created common artifacts for the purpose of examining our practice. It was clear that the group members did not share my perspective, and I would have to live with that decision.

Following our next session, where Melanie was in charge, I reacted and reflected more hopefully about how the collaborative inquiry process functioned by that point:

Reaction: I feel fairly positive about our first session. Melanie was pretty effective in facilitating the Morning Meeting oral language discussion, and we also talked about ways to show students we are excited and to get them excited about their individual reading. I had the urge to remind everyone about the session structure we agreed upon because I’m conscious of how productively we use our time. I didn’t say anything about that because I wasn’t in charge, and I need to focus on being an equal. In fact, I felt already like maybe I talked too much and need to stay more in the background during our discussions. I’m torn. This isn’t going to be as easy as I had hoped. (Journal Entry, October 25, 2008)

Reflection: I can begin to recognize from reviewing the session transcription that there is evidence of community building being shared during our discussions. Promoting increased personal reading and selection of just right books is a way of showing we care. We also talked about how teacher caring includes correcting students and even showing them our frustration about their poor choices. I shared my student self-assessment sheet to promote self-discipline. We suggested something similar, but simplified, for Melanie’s difficult kindergarten student. We spent more time on topics other than Morning Meeting, which was our focus, but that may be because we are “getting our sea legs” regarding collaborative inquiry. (Journal Entry, November 8, 2008)

Since we rotated the meeting leadership assignment, I was not in the position to lead again until January. The two other meetings in between were entirely discussion based although other artifacts were shared. My reaction/reflection journal entry from the November session showed concern and some frustration:

Reaction: I have brought at least one artifact on the focus topic to share at each
I keep hoping that others will do the same, and I feel frustrated that they don’t anticipate bringing copies. It’s not like they aren’t finding or creating them. For instance, Tammy told us about her class song and chant last time, but I had to ask her again to send copies to me. They are such great bonding ideas that I’d like to adapt them for my class, but it’s getting late in the year to do that. Holly gave us each a copy of her manager sheet when she was leader and emailed us her phonics cards right away. Also, I still feel uncomfortable with how often I spoke during our session. I think I’m trying to facilitate the discussion so that we elaborate on the ideas that are brought up and so there is lots of opportunity to give examples of how we are building community.

Reflection: I believe I’m more focused on outcomes because I’m the researcher who needs the evidence from artifacts and examples. I know that Tammy is really busy with her extra history assignment, so I need to be patient. I got a simple idea from Holly’s artifacts, but Tammy’s artifacts are more relevant to me. I will keep encouraging the focus on and exchange of artifacts during our discussion sessions. Also, I need to get some resolution about my “equal” participation—what that means I should and shouldn’t say. Maybe I can do that during the holiday.

(Journal Entries, November 15, 2008)

I was able to review and dig deeper into the literature about collaborative inquiry and was excited to find that Yorks (1995) in his dissertation recorded a similar concern that was resolved for his core group when they met with William Torbert, a noted authority on action research, who “commented that one can’t empower others if he or she disempowers themself, seemed to give me permission to be more active in shaping the direction of the CIL’s inquiry” (p. 193). The above information helped me to be more comfortable for the remaining sessions in facilitating the discussions to the degree that seemed necessary.

In January, when I was in the position of leadership again, I created a graphic organizer that asked each of us to put on paper an assessment of our individual progress towards community building and what everyone wanted to accomplish during the remaining months of the school year in the various topic areas we brainstormed at our
organizational session the prior August. We shared ideas we had written down with the group and used them as a vehicle to determine our next areas of focus. My reaction/reflection journal entry by this time showed more confidence in the process and my role.

Reaction: I feel good about this session because I got to hear what others are accomplishing in topic areas we haven’t yet selected for action and reflection. I think it also had to do with the fact that I was formally in charge this time. I continue to think about having enough recorded experiences for my dissertation and that we discuss with enough breadth and depth to be ready to create powerful truth statements when we finish the sessions. I got and gave ideas today that helped me with both of these concerns.

Reflection: Going through a “where have we been and where are we going” process seemed very well received at this point in our collaborative inquiry. I don’t think any of us, including me, had taken the time to take stock because we are busy with the day-to-day survival of the classroom. It was helpful to look at the big picture and to write goals for ourselves that can guide the last months of the year. We also talked about our progress with our portfolios, and I believe that there will be artifacts, both those we’ve discussed and others, included for my dissertation. (Journal Entries, January 3, 2009)

Out of the many entries I wrote, these representative ones clearly demonstrate the mixed feelings and thoughts I experienced during the period of data gathering. I was never entirely comfortable with my place in the process, but I became more confident and skilled at balancing my roles. Yorks (1995) discussed a similar concern he had and concluded, “This is to be expected given the emergent nature of the collaborative inquiry process” (p. 213). The knowledge of his comment gave me peace of mind.

Ejournaling as Part of Our Collaborative Inquiry

The members of our collaborative inquiry group did not complete as much ejournaling in between sessions as I had anticipated. I sent the following email to everyone in November for consideration.
My student jobs haven’t been working as well as I’d like, and Heather’s idea about all of hers being “manager” positions gave me an idea ...I did go ahead and create a simple job application and a list of manager jobs. I gave both out yesterday with a cutoff of Monday afternoon. Several of my kids stayed in for part of recess to fill out theirs, so there seems to be some enthusiasm for the process. I’ve attached both items in case any of you want to create your version or use this one.

I am having a challenge with my kids wanting to play organized kickball at recesses without a ref and ending up with some arguments and hard feelings. So far, we’ve stopped counting scores and outs, just letting all the players have their ups and then exchange with the team in the field. Also, everyone has to sign on to play for the week so the teams’ numbers are even. Each player has “handicapped” themselves as a level 1 (beginner), 2, 3, or 4 (advanced) and they are randomly assigned to create even teams. Is there anything I’m missing? (Email, November 8, 2008)

In response, Holly answered with this comment:

I am so pleased something I said last meeting is helping someone. I had the students come up with most of the jobs. They get paid for the job they do and the kids also came up with the amount for each position. This has made the jobs so important. We open a store on Friday’s and they can buy things in the store. This has been very nice because this is the way they get new pencils and anything else they need. (Email, November 10, 2008)

Tiffany gave me welcome advice about both topics.

Leah, I have class jobs too, and they work pretty well, although I pay the students. They also have to rent their desk. I’ve read Rafe’s book, and I took my class economy from my cooperating teacher last year (who also read Rafe’s book). I’ll bring my song on Saturday, but I just made it up to the tune of “Take me Out to the Ballgame”, and included everyone’s names and some stuff about how great our class is.

About the kickball.... you know, I’d go over the rules, role play some situations, and let everyone know that if the “disagreements” can’t be worked out I’d be happy to hold a “kickball etiquette” class during lunch recess for everyone who needs it. We’ve had to have a few friendship classes, because our girls have a lot of residual problems from last year, and they seem to work. We even came up with a TWIRL acronym to help remind the girls (& we did share it with the boys) about what to do in a bad situation. We review it regularly, and it has helped (although we still have some problems pop up). (Email, November 11, 2008)
Melanie sent this valuable suggestion: “Would any of the kids like to be a ref? You could have that as a job to apply for” (Email, November 9, 2008). This emailed conversation was beneficial for me, and I believed that such exchanges could help to bond the group. Although Holly sent a funny YouTube video in November and a copy of her phonics sorts with an encouraging note in January, ejournaling did not otherwise catch on as a means of support for the members of our group. The other emails we exchanged concerned scheduling or other details, as this exchange in October between Tammy, Holly, and me demonstrates.

Hi Leah,
Are we still meeting Saturday? I’m just trying to plan...let me know.
Thanks!
Tammy (Email, October 21, 2008)

Hi Tammy,
Since Holly is the “hostess with the mostest” this time, I’ve been waiting to hear from her. She’s so clever to send out the “Change” YouTube video! It was a riot! Anyway, I plan to be there, and I’m counting on bringing something to share! Hope you will bring your song and any other of your ideas that I might share!
Take care,
Leah (Email, October 21, 2008)

Hi Ya’ll
Hope all is going well. I am hanging in there. I am looking forward to seeing you all out at my place on Saturday. Please let me know if there is anything you are looking forward to seeing and I will make it happen. You all rock!!
Thanks
Holly (Email, October 22, 2008)

Ejournaling proved to be a minor tool for our group to gather data during our collaborative inquiry. However, those emails that were generated evidenced the easy relationship we developed as we became a community of adult learners through the collaborative inquiry process.
Although it did not become a well-developed part of the process, ejournaling did provide another type of artifact in our collaborative inquiry. The one written above I sent because I needed the help but also with the hope that it might stimulate others to use this method to bring up issues in writing between our sessions. My reaction and reflection journal entries before and after that time revealed my mixed feelings and thoughts.

**Reaction:** Today, I sent my first group email asking for help and sharing an idea I had. It felt good to start the ejournaling process that I used successfully in my pilot studies. We established and met the minimum three exchanges then, and I hope we’ll exceed that over the next months, although this time we didn’t state a number requirement. There’s so much going on in our work lives, I feel guilty for asking for another bit of time, but what’s written will be a valuable type of artifact. I’m excited to know what the other members’ responses will be. (Journal Entry, November 8, 2008)

**Reaction:** I’ve heard back from everyone, and each person’s comments were interesting and valuable. I was surprised at the detail Tammy wrote because I know how impacted her schedule is. Having their ideas in writing to supplement the transcriptions of our discussions is reassuring to me for my dissertation. Now I hope others will pick up on ejournaling. (Journal Entry, November 13, 2009)

**Reaction:** No one has sent any group emails since I did it, and I’m disappointed. We’ve emailed to verify meeting dates, and we did do several emails to work out and arrange the class visitations, but that’s been the extent of it. If I can find another issue, I wonder if I should try to generate a second ejournal exchange of ideas.

**Reflection:** At our last two sessions, our group members have seemed even more pressured. Tammy asked that we meet twice in January and not in February because of her impacted schedule. She flies to Boston over Spring Break for the history program, so April will be heavy for her also. Because we’ve had difficulty in agreeing upon the value and the logistics for the class visitations, I think it’s better if I let go of the ejournaling. If someone else generates the exchange, that will be great. (Journal Entries, March 21, 2009)

As I look back on my decision to let go of the ejournaling as a major artifact, I still think I made the right call. Throughout our collaborative inquiry process, I was concerned
about not overwhelming the group members. In the back of my mind was the knowledge that they were free to discontinue participation at any point, and I needed to remain sensitive to that possibility.

**What Class Visitations Added to Our Collaborative Inquiry**

Making visits to classrooms for the purpose of collecting data is not included as part of collaborative inquiry group studies (Bray et al., 2000). In fact, Yorks (1995) chafed at the fact that his core collaborative inquiry group was required to add an observer at each session to substantiate the feeling tone and conduct of their sessions. His core group found it problematic to arrange for this extra person and also believed the dynamics of their study might be changed by having him or her in the background. Similarly, scheduling and implementing the half-day visitations in each of our classrooms was difficult for a number of reasons. As novice teachers, our members were also involved in other induction or professional development programs that required us to leave our students under the care of substitutes. We hesitated to add other substitute days, believing that novice teachers experience difficulties with student behavior and parent support if they are gone from their students very often.

Moreover, despite the fact that the visitations did replace the session scheduled for the month of April, it involved two school days, rather than a 2-hour commitment on a nonschool day. In addition, we were docked a specific salary amount and required to use one and a half personal days per member despite the fact that I requested of the superintendent that our experience be considered as professional development.
Nevertheless, the group understood that adding class visitations was necessary for me to obtain approval of my dissertation proposal, which caused the members to acquiesce to my request. Furthermore, my Major Professor, Dr. Scott Hunsaker, authorized the use of university funds to reimburse my collaborative inquiry colleagues for their loss of pay, mileage, and incidental costs associated with our collaborative inquiry, which was much appreciated by all.

Despite the difficulty in scheduling and personal concerns, class visitations were conducted in a quality manner. Each member brought her laptop computer and took copious notes, all of which became part of our discussion with copies forwarded to me to become part of my data. The visitations were conducted the last week in March, the last activity preceding our final session in May, which provided on opportunity to synthesize in our minds the community building relationships and strategies we had discussed at prior sessions. As was intended, the experience of being in one another’s classrooms validated that the concepts we discussed during our sessions and the artifacts we shared with one another were, in fact, part of the community building strategies we implemented with our students.

Productive observations were made by three of us watching the fourth member as she worked with her students. References as to how each of us novice teacher’s actions related to community building were sprinkled throughout our notes, and I have selected a representation to demonstrate that our group members noted the strategies we had discussed in our sessions. In Holly’s first grade classroom, Tammy commented on a portion of Morning Meeting.
As they [students] are doing their greeting activity, the kids are all involved and excited. I don’t see anyone who isn’t enjoying the activity. When the kids begin to get more restless, she regroups and encourages good behavior before going on. Her transitions are quick, and the students respond well. She is supportive and encouraging to all of the students. When she corrects a student, it is done caringly, and she moves on. (Field Notes, March 31, 2009, p. 10)

Tammy also made reflective comments about community building strategies while visiting Melanie’s kindergarten class.

When the kids transition to the tables, they have a harder time staying on task. She [Melanie] asks one student if he is “helping his table,” and the student moves on to the activity. This statement also encourages community involvement and student support. (Field Notes, March 26, 2009, p. 13)

Melanie recorded the feeling tone that was created through teacher-student interactions and student self-responsibility while in Tammy’s fifth-grade classroom.

Kids are laughing and playful as they get started. They seem to feel comfortable. She [Tammy] is attentive to the child talking, nodding, [with] responsive facial expressions. The kids seem comfortable sharing their thoughts and connections about their book. The child led in the small group. Kids who are not involved in the small group know what to do and are on task. (Field Notes, March 31, 2009, p. 4)

During Holly’s visitation to my fourth grade classroom, she noted, “Students are allowed to change their minds which creates community because children feel safe.” (Field Notes, March 26, 2009, p. 5)

While in Holly’s first grade classroom, I was impressed to comment about her caring relationship with students.

She gets down on the same level into the circle with the children and says, “Remember that when we make a circle, we want to make room for everyone so that no one is left out... She makes encouraging comments to individuals ...She gets down on their level and looks directly into their eyes to discuss problems or to reprimand. (Field Notes, March 31, 2009, p. 4)

The primary task that was completed by each member during all the visitations was to take plentiful field notes, which I explained means to observe and record as much
information as possible about all facets of the environment and what happened within it. The purpose of our visitations was to corroborate that the community building strategies and artifacts we discussed during our sessions were, in fact, operative in our classrooms. Among the abundant field notes, it is encouraging to discover that each member made comments validating the common use of strategies we discussed and artifacts we brought to our sessions, demonstrating that our goal was realized.

Arranging and implementing the class visitations represented one of the most challenging aspects of our collaborative inquiry. First, it was a requirement added during my proposal process so my participants had to be convinced, after the fact, that it was a necessary activity during the weeks prior to the spring test administration when most teachers, especially novice teachers, feel unusually pressured. Second, the initial question voiced by my group members was about what the value to them would be for visiting classrooms of teachers at grade levels so disparate from theirs. Third, obtaining the visitation days involved each person giving up 1.5 of her personal leave days and paying for part of the substitute cost, which created a sensitive situation. Once all of these difficulties had been resolved, the class visitations went forward in a positive manner. My reaction and reflection entries during that period provide evidence that this was the primary point at which our group’s cohesiveness was tested.

Reaction: Today I felt unusually pressured during our session. Not because I was leading—that was a great opportunity to “take a temperature reading” with everybody as we completed the organizer I brought. It’s because I had to approach two ideas that I was very uncomfortable about. First, I needed us to extend the monthly session dates we scheduled in August for the rest of the year if my group was willing. Meeting four times from October to January just hasn’t been enough. I hated to give up the time schedule that I had to finish my dissertation by the end of summer, but it was totally unrealistic for this study.
Anyway, I was so grateful at how readily they agreed to continue. I know how great a dissertation need I have for these sessions, but it continually surprises me to what degree it meets a need for them. Second, I needed to bring up the subject of class visitations, which I knew would be a harder one to “sell.” They were open to the idea, but getting dates was hard so we tabled that ‘til later. Also, I had to tell them that they’d have to use personal days and partially pay for the subs but that I’d reimburse them somehow. The bottom line was that I told them it was a requirement for my study, and they acquiesced. I still feel almost as uncomfortable about the situation now as I did earlier today.

Reflection: I need to trust the fact that this collaborative inquiry meets valuable needs for the other members. They keep reaffirming that whenever I ask, so I need to have the confidence not to be apologetic. Getting them to work together through the end of the year was the easy part. Now, I’ve got to get the kinks in the plan for the class visitations worked out so we can agree on more session dates and to help that become a valued part of what we’re doing in our collaborative inquiry. Since we’re supposed to be equals, it’s hard to press this issue. (Journal Entries, January 3, 2009)

Clearly, I was not at my highest level of effectiveness at this point. To ask for more of my group member’s time for any reason was difficult, but to request that they complete a task that would cost them money, personal days, and for something they felt might not be essential to them, caused discomfort for all of us. When my major professor, Dr. Scott L. Hunsaker, authorized the use of university funds to reimburse their expenses, I felt much better about asking for the added support for class visitations, and the group members were also most appreciative. My journal entries before and after the days we spent clarify the cost and reward of adding the class visitations to our collaborative inquiry.

Reaction: After a series of emails over several weeks, we’ve worked out the finances for visiting each other’s classes, and the gals are willing to give up their personal days. The dates are at the end of this month before Spring Break and CRT testing, so that’s about the best time. Other than feeling guilty to ask for sub prep time, travel time, and completing field notes, a strategy none of them has done before, I guess we’re “good to go.” I’m surely glad that no one quit our collaborative inquiry over this situation. Maybe they’ve forgotten that they are free to stop participating at any time. I haven’t.
Reflection: There I go again with the guilt thing. I have to believe that all the parts of our study are of value so that they, in fact, become of value to the group. Because I’ve taken two semesters of qualitative research classes with her, I know why Dr. Marx recommended that we triangulate the collaborative inquiry with field notes from class visitations. But these gals totally trust that everything we say in our sessions is accurate and honest, so it’s harder for them to want to spend the time substantiating that. Anyway, it’s set up, and I will do everything I can to help them value the experience. (Journal Entries, March 21, 2009)

Reaction: We just completed the second day of class visitations today, and I felt they were of value, at least to me. The group members took lots of field notes, but there was no time to debrief about the experience each day. During lunchtime, we traveled to another classroom and at the end of school, everyone wanted to get back to their classrooms to plan for the next day. Personally, I wanted to be relaxed when they were visiting me, which usually includes my using humor with students. I had students work in small groups that were up and around the classroom in math, plus the students tried to make a small group decision during their westward expansion simulation. I felt good about math, but some of the simulation’s “families” had difficulty making a responsible decision, so it took more time and seriousness than I’d hoped. I wanted to model the community building strategies I’m using. As is often the case with me, when I’m not meeting my own expectations, I lose my relaxed way with students and my “down-home” humor goes. (Journal Entry, March 31, 2009)

Reflection: They sent me their notes, which were really interesting. At first reading, I think that the gals did an excellent job of noticing much of what occurred throughout the classrooms. Our notes were similar when I was one of the observers, and the feedback they gave me about what went on during my observation showed a perceptiveness that concurred with my self-assessment of that afternoon. The goal for the class visitations was definitely accomplished although I didn’t have the chance to get their perceptions of how it met or didn’t meet their expectations. (Journal Entry, April 12, 2009)

Any lengthy debrief about the class visitations never happened. We didn’t meet formally again until our final session, and the time constraints to create our statements of truth prevented my asking my group members for feedback. Again, making class visitations was not formally part of the collaborative inquiry process, and, although the activity was fruitful from the perspective of my dissertation, discussing it further was not a high priority for anyone else, it seemed, for no one stated such a desire.
Group Determines Our Truth During the Final Collaborative Inquiry Session

The room set up is complete; everyone has arrived. We have met for six 2-hour sessions on Saturdays and two full visitation days within our various classrooms, for a total of approximately 30 hours. Each of us has also spent an unidentified number of hours in member checking the transcriptions and preparing her portfolio. It is time to use our phenomenology-in-several-voices to formulate our statements of truth, the conclusions gleaned from our group cycles of action and reflection. Today promises to be a demanding yet productive experience, which will be important to tell in our own words. I press the space bar on my laptop to start the transcription recording, and we begin our final session’s process.

To synthesize our experiences from the entire year, I planned several steps that I hoped would result in a successful closure experience. Each of us has an 8½” x 11” sheet of paper, which lists my three dissertation questions with space for each of us to do individual brainstorming of ideas that may be included in the group’s answers. Following several minutes of silent thought and writing, the next step is to transfer key phrases or words from the brainstorming sheet, written large onto three 20” X 26” newsprint sheets, one for each question. When finished, the newsprint sheets were taped to the whiteboard in front of us for sharing with one another. To initiate this part of the process, I stated,

As novice teachers, what do you believe are the essential qualities for community building? What words, what phrases, out of everything you’ve done, if you were to distill it, what’s absolutely essential, that without it you’re not going to be able to have a community? There might be some nice-to-haves and there might be some absolute needs. If you’ll put your thoughts down here, then transfer onto the
bigger paper, so we can all see it, what you want on the paper. Then we’ll put ours up there, and we’re going to be looking for common words, common ideas, and that would then, I think, be able to come together and create our definition.

And secondly, what do you think about how you, as a novice teacher, were able to create classroom community this year? What helped you do it and what prevented you? I think we’ve kind of talked about that off and on. I know some things I want to say. Things that have been hindering me, and some things that really helped me. That’s the second question.

Then the last question is this collaborative inquiry. What are your thoughts about it as a process and a process for brand new teachers? So those three things. I gave you the little paper to kind of brainstorm in your head and jot things down and then I thought if we used the pens to put whatever you want to put them in big letters, then we can put them up and we can deal with each question and arrive at our common writing or whatever we want to say. Does that make sense to you?

(Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 3-4)

When the newsprint papers had been taped up, each of us took a turn to explain what she had written. Holly was our first presenter about defining community building, and she made a number of descriptive comments.

It’s a feeling or attitude of being here because I am missed when I am gone, and its excitement. If you don’t have excitement in an early grade then there’s no reason to be there. I just know that if learning’s not fun, if the teacher’s not excited about what she’s teaching then the children aren’t excited about what they’re learning and you’ll get those students who zone out right away because they just don’t care about what you’re talking about. I’m a loud person so I’m always happy and bubbly. I just think excitement is part of building a community. If you’re excited to be in that community and be a part of that community, then you’ll want to create more of that community and want to be more a part of that community.

It’s also the fact that we’re all trying to create this classroom. Not just me. It’s not just my classroom. It’s everyone’s classroom. So they get a say in what goes on the walls and they get a say in what we’re doing that day. I’ll give them a choice. And me, I make it exciting. I won’t lie; I make it exciting.

It’s a lot of outside work that I put on myself that I’ve learned I don’t have to do but it does create more of a community feeling, like, those weren’t kids from my regular class. I bought colored chalk for their art experience. That’s a different medium that’s not usually in the classroom anymore. So that, I thought, would
build excitement. Then I will go to the bank and get just the money that they wanted for my math unit. When they went back to their regular class, they were asked, “Who was in Ms. R’s class when they learned about money?” Every single hand went up. Not all of them were there but they all felt like, you know what, she’s my teacher. So they all feel like they’re a part of my class. The whole first grade feels like they’re a part of my class because I’m not only willing to go out of my way for my class but for others as well. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 6-7)

Next, Melanie added her perspective on community building, which is similar in some respects and yet is different from what Holly expressed:

Well, I think it’s important for the teacher to start out with a vision, then reflect on that and see how it’s going. And for the whole class to, like in class meetings and stuff, reflect on how we’re doing. In my class we do that a lot. “Are we being good friends?”

Then, for everybody to know what the expectations are. For the teacher to know and the kids to know what the expectations are and to share in that. Then, the teacher is the leader and not the boss. I have to remind myself of that.

I put shared failure, shared success, shared sorrow, and shared joy. Concern, responsibility, ownership, shared vision, and then I put knowledge of outside school life just so everyone knows what’s going on outside of school. So we do mini shares. It builds empathy for each other. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 9)

Tammy made her statements quickly, sharing a number of single words she had written on her newsprint sheet.

All right, I put that you have to have consistency. Organized, I do think you need to be somewhat organized, not neurotic but without that you don’t have time to do the community building and it’s chaotic. Positive. Honest. Adaptable to whatever’s going on.

You have to be reflective, to look back and see what’s working, what’s not working, be reflective.

I think there has to be a level of caring that, even when you’re correcting, that they still have to know that you care. Nurturing. Respectful.

Everyone buys into or plays a role in that community and everybody feels valued.
There has to be a level of trust and the ability to take risks and to fail at that, too. That’s okay. I want to make sure they see me making mistakes. I love it when they correct me. And they love it and it’s okay. They have to feel like you’re not perfect and that it’s just a learning process—that we’re all in this learning process together. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 14)

I made my comments last. I found that I had included fewer concepts and had written them in longer phrases.

Okay, I thought choice was really important for the kids to buy in as much as possible, even a little, tiny choice. It doesn’t have to be lacking in organization or anything but they have to have buy-in by choosing something. There has to be some element of choice, I think.

Learning beyond the desk, being able to get up and outside your desk and sitting on the floor or, like, I bought three beanbags on sale because then they can have “baggie reading” once a week. Getting out and realizing there’s a world beyond these four walls. We went outside to do some artwork, to do sketch work of the mountains, and just thinking outside the classroom walls.

Service to each other—we have secret servers that they draw out a name each week. They haven’t done anything huge for each other but it’s still promoting the idea of serving, getting outside yourself to serve others.

Turn learning concepts into questions. I’m a big believer that if you ask a question about it you can rope somebody into the learning rather than if you tell. So I try to ask a lot of questions.

Create an environment of mutual respect. Actively listening so kids know you really hear what they’re saying and maybe what they aren’t saying but they’re communicating through body language. Teacher caring.

And then the curriculum, I just said captivating curriculum. I think simulations, games to reinforce concepts, using the arts. There’s a lot of research that’s coming out that says that the arts affect cognitive development and yet those are the things we’re cutting out of the curriculum. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 17-18)

The next step in our process of creating our statement of truth regarding community building was to work as a group to agree upon what we, novice teachers, believe are the essential elements of creating a community of learners. What follows is
part of the flurry of comments made by various members while I attempt to record the features of community building that we agree upon.

Holly: I think I like the way Leah used created because every time we do something I try to create it in a real world situation because that’s what they need. They don’t need inside the walls teaching all the time or learning. They need real world situations where they can take it out into the world and apply what they’ve learned or use it and be effective, contributing members of society.

Leah: Yah, and I think that really grabs kids. So, what do you see up there that you really like that you think might be our definition of community, what you have to have to have a community?

Melanie: There’s different wording but caring, overall.

Holly: Respect.

Leah: So, would you all, the idea here is that we all mutually agree upon whatever it is that’s going to be written down. So, would you agree with a sense of caring. Then, you said mutual respect? What do you think? Um, you know, I didn’t write down the sharing of sorrow, joy…but that’s really very cool because bearing one another’s burdens and joys really does create a bonding. But, I don’t know, what do you guys think? Trust building? Risk taking?

Holly: I think risk taking is an important aspect of the community. To be able to know that you can take a risk and not feeling like you failed or if you did not succeed that was okay. It’s just another chance to try again, see if you can actually get it.

Tammy: It’s a learning process.

Melanie: And that trust is still, like, you can get through and it will be okay.

Holly: Expectations, I think is important. They know what their expectations are and what your expectations are.

Tammy: And expectations don’t change, that they are consistent. So I think putting those two together consistency and expectations.

Leah: Would you be willing to say consistent high expectations? Because I think if they’re higher that’s better.

Holly: Well, and the higher you set them, the more they start to reach for those
high expectations because you expect more out of them. You expect them to be more contributing.

Tammy: Amen.

Holly: I feel like a feeling of belonging is important because if they feel like they don’t belong they won’t want to take risks.

Melanie: And they won’t want to be there.

Tammy: They feel like they’re a part of what’s going on.

Leah: Like you said, you’re missed when you’re not there. How do you do that? Well, I guess we’re not saying how you do any of them.

Holly: I just know every time we have a student gone they always welcome back, and I didn’t always do it right away, but they always welcomed them back every time. “We’re so excited you’re here.”

Melanie: We missed you!

Leah: I’m putting down shared success, joys, sorrows, and what was the other thing? Oh, vision.

Melanie: I think it’s important.

Leah: What about self-responsibility, self-discipline?

Melanie: I was just looking at that, the ownership, responsibility.

Leah: Anything you want to say about the curriculum?

Melanie: That it needs to be exciting. I thought that was a good one. How you were saying, all-inclusive, outside of the classroom.

Tammy: Engaging.

Holly: And I think some of the curriculum is student-oriented. If they do it themselves they’re more a part of it.

Tammy: Yah, ideally, but really when are your students going to come up with the curriculum?

Holly: Part of the curriculum, yes, but not all of it. Like, I could say a topic and
they could go off of what I say.

Tammy: But really what does that look like in a classroom. I want to see that applied. How are you doing that? Are you giving them choices of what to do with, say an activity? I just don’t see going, “Alright, we’re doing questioning. Go ahead and create that.” How that would really play out effectively in a classroom?

Leah: I think at the beginning of a unit or anything. I have done this at the beginning of the year to brainstorm with them, because we’re all given the core, we all have requirements. But even giving them the chance to provide input.

Tammy: Brainstorm what they know?

Leah: Well, you could brainstorm what they know, what they’d like to do. It’s that K-W-L thing, but really I did, a couple times, ask them, “What would you like to do?” We weren’t able to do everything they had on the list but they had that buy-in, you know….

Tammy: That makes sense. That I can see. I just wasn’t sure.

Holly: That’s what I was talking about. Just giving them, we made a list of things we’d like to learn about animals then we all took a part of it and then they all became the teachers to teach us what they became an expert in.

Leah: You know [Tammy], just as you were describing them putting their desks in a certain way. Just you giving them the freedom to do that, to do the thinking and the arranging and the experimenting. Don’t you think that that in itself is a good learning experience?

Tammy: They drew out plans. Unless it was this way I don’t see how it would work.

Holly: And when they drew the plans and did it, that’s possibly when they saw, “That’s not gonna work.”

Tammy: Yah, I didn’t say. I said, “Go for it. If you can figure a way to do it we will sit that way.” And they did. They worked and worked on it.

Leah: Okay, so right now I have: Sense of caring, Mutual respect, Risk-taking, Failure is okay, Consistent high expectations, Feeling of belonging, Shared successes, joys, sorrows, visions, Ownership, Self-responsibility, Engaging curriculum, Student planning options in curriculum. Student planning options in learning?

Holly: Yah, options in learning. Because you’re still giving them the curriculum.
You’re just giving them the option of what they’d like to learn in that curriculum.

Leah: So, like, shared planning? Okay, anything else? If not, let’s move on to our other two questions. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 20-25)

The exchange of ideas during this conversation was exciting because it represented the synthesis of each group member’s ideas. There was the need for clarification and elaboration at several points, but, generally, consensus of what we believed was that the essence of community building was easy to reach after our many hours of previous individual reflection and group reflective discussions during the school year.

Next, we tackled the challenge of determining what degree of success we novice teachers achieved in creating communities of learners among our students this first year. Each of us indicated that she had made progress in reaching her goal although there were definitely areas of desired improvement. Melanie commented, “I think I have done a reasonable good job. I have gotten the impression that my kids feel like they are missing out when they aren’t at school.” I wrote, “I was able to develop and implement a number of the strategies that I had in mind to create bonding among my students and with me.”

(Individual Record Sheet, May 23, 2009, p. 1) Holly exuded a self-confidence that grew throughout the year when she wrote,

There were many attributes to my ability to create a classroom community in my first year. First was my students and their love for their teacher, classmates, and their learning. The second was my own confidence in my ability to say that we will care for each other. Last is my prior work experience in early childhood building communities of teachers. (Individual Record Sheet, May 35, 2009, p. 1)

Tammy’s statement really summed up what we all thought about what was necessary for us to succeed.

It takes daily, consistent effort. I realized that creating a community does not
happen in a 20-minute block. It is integrated throughout the day in everything we do. I also believe that it takes activities outside of the mandated curriculum to achieve this. However, those activities can be short, but meaningful. (Individual Record Sheet, May 23, 2009, p. 1)

In addition to our written comments, we agreed upon those factors that we believed inhibited or enhanced our ability to create a community of learners over the entire year in our own classrooms with students for whom we were ultimately responsible. Tammy felt particularly strong about factors that influenced her degree of success.

I have a lot to say on this one. I felt like my obstacles were that there’s so much to teach in so little time. There was always a time factor.

Extreme personalities was also a big obstacle. It’s hard to create community when you have a mentally challenged kid who got suspended on Friday. We had a lot of naughty girls and we spent a lot of lunches [with them]. It was something that had to happen outside our regular class because some things don’t need to involve the entire class to help some kids learn how to be part of a community.

And I felt like that was a huge obstacle for me was learning new curriculum on top of creating a community. I only have so much brain storage, ability to think and so much of it was spent on trying to create engaging lessons. And the community gets kind of tied into that but I felt like that was an obstacle, for me at least.

Supports, I had a great coach/mentor, lots of ideas and a collaborative team and this team. Our whole team was just, we had a big fifth-grade team kind of community because we’d heard that this group coming up was kind of emotionally immature for their age and there were a lot of problems. A lot of problems. So we took the proactive stance of, “We’re gonna hit this head on and just make it a whole fifth-grade wide…” so that was helpful. Really, really helpful. If I had to have kids in here for lunch, the little naughty girls, the whole team was here, not just me. Or if they had problems, because they’d had them in their classrooms, we’d just all do it together. It was really helpful. Because sometimes they’d say some things in a way that I wouldn’t have said it and it was perfect so it was nice to have that. Plus we all thought we’d be supportive, be a united front, that no matter what classroom you’re in, these are the expectations. They gave me ideas and were helpful. It was helpful that my coach, I’m teaching in her classroom so she knows the school, this is where she’s been, this is what she’s familiar with, she knows what the procedures are. So she piggy-backed on that and helped me. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 24-25)
Holly agreed with Tammy that time was a great obstacle, “Not enough time to put it all in your head and try to work it all out and get it all down,” and that her grade-level team and district-assigned coach were positive supports. However, she indicated that her students and parents provided excellent help in creating her community and that district programs created difficulties.

My students were a big support. They always helped me remember things and reminded me of when we didn’t have a morning meeting. We always had to have one because it made our classroom go smoother and they noticed that so they were a good support there.

My parents were a big support in the fact that they were always willing to come in and help me or do things at home and help their kids when we had issues. They were always willing to come in and work it out with me as their teacher.

The district has been an obstacle with all their new programs they’re trying to feed you and all the meetings you had to go to and you had to miss so much school and you felt like you wanted to be there [at school]. So the district was an obstacle and the school was an obstacle with all the new programs they’re trying to get us to do and know. They have a reading program so we have to learn it and do it next year. So that’s making huge problems because I’d rather just be able to create my own reading program because I had no one below level and that is, like, amen. So the new school programs, everything they kept trying to give us. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 27)

Melanie agreed with all that the other two group members had said but added,

And for obstacles I put social development of kindergarteners because they are still very egocentric and trying to get them to think, “How do you think this made someone else feel?” and things like that. That was an obstacle. That’s probably my biggest obstacle. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 28)

I added my agreement with what has been said, but comment on the additional pressure on community building that testing programs provide, with which Tammy, the other upper grade novice teacher, agreed.

Leah: The emphasis, especially toward the end of the year, on the tests coming
up. I read this research that says when you’re under pressure, you revert to default mode of ordering rather than facilitating and I watched myself. I knew it, but I watched myself do it anyways because I wanted to at least make sure that they knew how to bubble in, and that they knew what was coming up, and I knew what was coming up. It was just really an interesting thing because I felt myself kind of panic the last two or three weeks before they took the test about, ‘Are these kids, from [the difference of] my vision of how kids should learn, are they going to do well on these tests?’ I watched myself revert to where I was giving a lot more orders and lots more papers to fill out and do, which was not something that I would ever have intended, but I did it. We all did it, and I did it.

Tammy: It’s huge. The week of testing, everyone decides to be sick. I had so many people legitimately sick. I had them tested for swine flu. I had some really sick kids that week. Those two weeks were just really… The pressure of getting everybody ready… And then the Iowa testing. This grade has a lot of testing. Yah, and MARS testing, too. [I went over it] with my kids. I wanted it to be a more reflective thing not an, ‘Oh, I sucked,’ or, ‘Ew, I’m horrible at math.’ At first when I gave it to them, they looked at it real quick, and I saw kids just shutting down and I just thought, ‘Oh, this is a waste.’ But we started talking, and it turned into a nice discussion, and I realized that they were being more reflective, or maybe the discussion helped them be more reflective than being down on themselves because they didn’t do really well. So, in the end I felt positive about it. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 28-29)

I found that I had written down during our discussion the supports we had agreed upon which were: (a) district coach/mentor involvement, (b) collaborative inquiry group participation, (c) grade level collaborative support, (d) self-reflection; while the obstacles we agreed upon were: (a) time constraints, (b) lack of student maturity, (c) curriculum demands, (d) district test prep emphasis, and (e) school program interference.

Our task next became to resolve our beliefs relative to the third question as to what we thought about novice teachers being involved in a collaborative inquiry group, something that was rarely done according to my literature review. Tammy immediately took the lead on this issue as well, making a brief comment, “It was good to get a fresh perspective and new ideas when I’m struggling. A con is, it’s just time consuming. It just
Amen to that. For mine the pros were a small group of all grades discussing and sharing ideas gave me a fresh perspective. And it was from all grades rather than just mine so I might get an idea from Melanie for my lower kids because I’ve got some who are functioning at a kindergarten level. Then, another pro was that it was outside of my grade or my school team so I could discuss children by not using their names and you wouldn’t know who they were unless I used their names. In cons, I didn’t have enough time to think but it is time-consuming, but I don’t know what else to do with my life. I’m sorry but I’m an evil person who works all the time and I love it. I love work. It keeps me busy. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 30)

Melanie added, “Mine were pretty much the same. I put that it was really supportive and just a chance to reflect and evaluate. And, yah, time. It’s just another thing to do.” My comments were more specific as were Holly’s, perhaps because I had done the greatest amount of research into collaborative inquiry.

I put that it caused me to keep thinking about community building and keeping it in the front of my mind. And that you knew there was a group you could go to and you could talk about whatever and it’s not like being in the teacher’s workroom or the teacher’s lounge and having that negative kind of thing. One of the things that I felt was a con is that I didn’t know if I did a very good job at helping us understand what the elements of collaborative inquiry are supposed to be. And then also just too much. Is it too much added onto everything in your first year to really handle that? The depth of experience that we have is the least that it will ever be because of it being our first year. And each person has their own past personal experience of teaching or being involved with kids. It’s still, with the idea of collaborative inquiry’s intent being that you’re going to change your practice changed upon this analysis, it’s really rigorous. (Group Transcript, May 23, 2009, pp. 31)

In summary of our discussion, I recorded our consensus that the benefits were: (a) supportive small group outside of grade level team; (b) cross grade levels give fresh perspective/new ideas about community building; and (c) good time for self-reflection/evaluation; the primary negative we agreed upon was that novice teachers being part of a
collaborative inquiry group was quite time consuming, especially during the first year of teaching.

The final step in creating our truth about community building is to formulate our phrases into comprehensive statements, which can be published and shared with others in the teaching profession. Unfortunately, our agreed upon time limit of 2 hours had been reached, and we could not complete this necessary part of the process today. The school year is over in 4 school days, and there was no convenient time for us to continue this session in person. We agreed that I would email a rough draft statement for each of the three questions to our group members to edit during the summer. We would meet again to edit the statements and to sign off that each of us agreed that the final drafts represented our beliefs. I took the newsprint sheets, the 8½” x 11” sheets, and agreed to finish the transcription before completing the rough drafts.

In addition, I collected everyone’s portfolio binders, which included the artifacts each of us had gathered from our sessions, as well as any other artifacts our group members agreed would be of value for me as I completed my dissertation analysis. With that step completed, we concluded our final session of collaborative inquiry for the year. It had been a very enlightening experience with much food for thought running through my head, and, I hope, through the minds of each member of the group.

After the school year was over I prepared a four-page document with instructions entitled, “Collaborative Inquiry Rough Draft ‘Truth’” for each Dissertation Question: (Please edit the Rough Draft Statements below as appropriate to your thinking.)” It included the three dissertation questions, each of which was followed by a list of the key
statements every member wrote on her newsprint sheet. Listed below the individuals’ statements were the shared common essences we agreed upon during our final collaboration session, together with the rough draft statements I had written for their consideration. I hoped that this information would rekindle the thinking in each member’s mind so that she could edit the statements in an effective manner. We met for dinner on June 24th to review and discuss their recommended changes, which were relatively minor and simple to alter. The group members indicated that I adhered closely to the vocabulary included in our shared common essences for community building. We discussed options for presenting our collaborative inquiry group learning experience together with our truth statements at upcoming conferences in order to fulfill the final goal for collaborative inquiry groups. We agreed to consider applying to present at the Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association Annual Conference as well as the local state teachers conference in 2011. Our members left, promising to remain in touch during our next years of teaching because we had participated in an exceptional experience that had engendered a unique relationship among us.

**Statements of the Essence of Community Building Derived from Our Collaborative Inquiry Group Process**

Below are the final statements of truth regarding the essence of community building and our experience with collaborative inquiry reached via consensus by our group members. Each statement is written in response to one of my dissertation questions. Following the statement is the list of the common essences from which each statement of truth was formulated.
Question 1: What are the shared perceptions of novice teachers about what constitutes community building in a classroom?

Orchestrating a community of learners in an elementary classroom, regardless of the age and grade level of the students, involves five key features. First in importance to community building is to foster a sense of caring among all class members whether they give specific compliments, participate in a class cheer, or receive correction for an inappropriate choice. Giving service and showing empathy for one another are consistent practices. The teacher is willing to devote whatever time and energy are necessary to enthusiastically show evidence of her caring. Second is to establish a feeling of mutual respect and belonging. When students have been absent, the teacher and other children demonstrate the absentees were genuinely missed. Class members actively listen to one another during frequent pair sharing and small group interactions. Students and the teacher share in everyone’s joys and sorrows because opportunities are provided to know one another well. Third is to set high expectations for both the teacher and students, understanding that failures are only bumps on the road to success. Seeking personal best is the rule, although it is understood that a person’s best is not the same each day nor in every skill area. Celebrating individual and mutual success is characteristic among the group. Fourth, is to actively involve class members in creating and maintaining the classroom environment for learning. The teacher delegates as many duties to students as they are able and willing to accept. Being responsible for the care and management of the classroom gives rise to a sense of mutual ownership and self-efficacy as well as the desire to practice self-responsibility. Fifth, the teacher collaborates with students to provide engaging curriculum that includes options and student choice. Daily learning experiences range from answering essential questions to participating in simulations to teaching one another, to experiencing authentic learning individually or in cooperative groups, all of which motivate focused attention and fix concepts in the memory of class members. These five ingredients, measured and mixed appropriately to fit the teacher’s personality and the students’ qualities, result in a recipe for learning outcomes that exceed what anyone might have imagined possible.

Shared common essences from individual comments (agreed upon at final collaboration session): sense of caring, mutual respect, risk-taking, failure is OK; consistent, high expectations; feeling of belonging; shared success, joys, sorrows, vision; ownership/self-responsibility; engaging curriculum; shared planning/options in learning. (Collaborative Inquiry Rough Draft ‘Truth’ Sheet, p. 1)

Question 2: What are the shared perceptions of novice teachers about how the
process of collaborative inquiry supports the development of a classroom community?

Participating in a collaborative inquiry group provides a positive opportunity for novice teachers although it is challenging with respect to the time involved. One advantage is that novice teachers become part of a small, supportive group that is outside of their grade level team. Moreover, if novice teachers are not involved in school collaborative groups that address issues like community building, the collaborative inquiry group can fill that vacuum. The ideas and fresh perspectives the cross-grade level collaborative inquiry group of novice teachers provides are helpful in the initial years of teaching. Meeting periodically for group reflection that focuses upon a common question causes self-reflection to occur within novice teachers during one of the busiest times of their career. This time for self-reflection helps novice teachers to focus on improvement and successes when it might be easier simply to do what is necessary to get by. Such interaction and reflection also facilitate the efforts of novice teachers to remain focused upon their personal teaching goals. Novice teachers who are willing to devote the time and effort to participate in a collaborative inquiry group can find it a positive benefit as they become accustomed to the necessities of daily life in their classrooms.

Shared common features from individual comments (agreed upon at final collaboration session): Pros = supportive small group outside grade level team; cross grade levels gives fresh perspective/new ideas about community building; good time for self-reflection/evaluation; Cons = time consuming, especially for the first year of teaching. (Collaborative Inquiry Rough Draft ‘Truth’ Sheet, p. 2-3)

Question 3. What are novice teachers’ shared perceptions about their ability to create a community of learners among their diverse students during their first full-time year of teaching?

Creating a community of learners during the initial years of teaching is a challenge for novice teachers although a number of scaffolds make success in this endeavor attainable. First, the district’s teacher induction program needs to include the advice and mentoring of transition coaches. Second, the district needs to state the importance of building school community. Third, collaboration with grade level colleagues can provide positive ideas that encourage novice teachers in the community building process. In addition, the novice teachers’ personal experiences, self-confidence, and strong belief that creating a community of learners enhances student achievement are other critical factors. Depending upon their priorities, administrators, district personnel and parents can provide support for or opposition against using the time and strategies necessary for community
building. Moreover, time constraints generated by extensive, unfamiliar curriculum to teach, the necessity for test preparation, as well as the need to participate in school and district required programs further complicate the priority and time novice teachers feel they can give to community building among their students. Nevertheless, the strategies employed throughout the school day to orchestrate a feeling of community between novice teachers and their students, as well as among the students, is profitable because learning is more effective and novice teachers are more productive.

Shared common themes from individual comments (agreed upon at final collaboration session): Supports: district coach/mentor involvement; support of principal; collaborative inquiry group participation; grade level collaborative support; self-reflection; Obstacles: time constraints; differing parent expectations; lack of student maturity; curriculum demands; test prep emphasis; school program interference. (Collaborative Inquiry Rough Draft ‘Truth’ Sheet, p. 4)

Reactions and Reflections of the Researcher about Reaching Truth Through Phenomenology-in-Several-Voices

Preparing the experience for our final session was a welcome challenge. I was excited for our collaborative inquiry finally to reach closure, and I feel sure that my group members looked forward to its culmination as well. We met on Saturday before the final week of school, a time when we were busy packing up our classrooms and planning fun closing activities for our students. Having only two hours, I wanted our experience to be as organized and productive as possible. With my prior experience as a professional development presenter, I had a distinct vision of what I believed our steps should be. My journal entries before and after this event reveal my enthusiasm.

Reaction/Reflection: It is good to have this month of May to prepare for our final session. We’re in the middle of CRT testing so I have less planning to do and can use that time. I have a plan in mind to use a cooperative learning structure like Think-Pair-Share except ours will be Think &Write-Present to Group-Create Group Consensus. For the first step, I need to make a sheet with the three questions I need to answer for my dissertation—those were automatically adopted as the collaborative inquiry’s questions from the start. That will be our first task—
for each of us to think about our entire experience in community building this
year through collaborative inquiry and write your individual answer to each
question. (Journal Entry, May 7, 2009)

Reaction/Reflection: The next step will be to transfer ideas from each answer on
the Think & Write paper—key phrases, words, sentences, pictures of artifacts,
icons—onto large newsprint sheets using brightly colored marking pens. Each of
us will then complete the second stage, Present to Group, where we present our
key ideas, artifacts, etc. to the group including any personal examples or
explanations to clarify our thoughts. When all group members are finished
presenting their ideas, we will complete the final stage for each question, Create
Group Consensus, where we clarify and reach agreement on the elements we all
believe represent our truth regarding the essence of community building. Those
elements reached by consensus will be used to create statements of truth for each
of the questions, which all of us must agree represent our beliefs about our
collaborative inquiry experience. I think this is a plan that will work! (Journal
Entry, May 12, 2009)

Reaction/Reflection: Today we met and completed the plan just as I had
formulated it in my head and on paper. Everyone was focused and cooperative so
we used our time effectively. I facilitated synthesizing everyone’s main ideas
written on their large newsprint papers for each question and clarified more than
once that there was agreement on each of the ideas we’d incorporate into each of
our statements of truth. I wish we’d had time to write them together in our
session—that would have been ideal. But we ran out of time and everyone was in
a hurry to start their holiday weekend so we couldn’t extend our session. It would
have been good if different group members offered to write up one of the rough
draft statements, but no one did. I know we are all so busy wrapping up the end of
the school year that there’s not time for one more thing. I will be very careful to
incorporate those elements reached by consensus into rough draft statements to
send to everyone for their editing. (Journal Entry, May 23, 2009)

Reaction/Reflection: We met at Costa Vida this afternoon to go over our edited
versions of the rough draft statements to get consensus on what each final
statement should say. No one had any major concerns, but we included an
addition to the third question that Melanie suggested and one correction I asked
for on the first question. Everyone signed off on her sheet that she agreed that the
edited rough draft statements could become the final statements. Hooray, we are
really finished with our process! Now I have much work to do to put it all on
paper for my dissertation… (Journal Entry, June 24, 2009)
Essences of Community Building the Researcher Described from
Analyzing Collaborative Inquiry Session Transcriptions

Although our collaborative inquiry group’s task was to create a shared meaning about classroom community building by novice teachers, for my dissertation research, which we did at our final session, I was uncomfortable if none of our work in prior sessions was formally analyzed. Therefore, I desired to seek, as an individual, to find whether there was evidence of community building in our members’ descriptions of classroom events and interactions throughout our sessions. In order to accomplish this belated goal in a rigorous manner, I needed to understand better how it might be accomplished within the phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Patton (2002) explained that phenomenology maintains a Focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning...how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others.... It is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through. (p. 104).

In reviewing further the literature on phenomenology, I found that van Manen (1990) states, “Phenomenological research is the study of essences” (p. 10), which Patton (2002) defined as “the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced” (p. 106). Gearing (2004) suggested that bracketing can help the researcher “focus in on the essences and structure of the phenomenon to...understand the underlying universals of that phenomenon” (p. 1433). Furthermore, Gearing indicated that bracketing necessitates the researcher “setting aside presuppositions and rendering explicit the studied phenomenon,” which necessitates acknowledging the start and end
points of the bracketing experience (p. 1433-1434). Being steeped in the literature about elements of community building, I elected to employ reflexive bracketing, which acknowledges that “it is improbable for the researcher to hold in abeyance their suppositions...[but they] can acknowledge...and become aware of their influence on the phenomenon under investigation” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1449). Therefore, I determined to remain aware as much as possible of my preconceptions about classroom community building as I employed reflexive bracketing to seek possible essences of community building that emerged from our conversations. This exercise was accomplished over a week-long period as I carefully reviewed the conversations within each session where we discussed the various topics that were chosen for action/reflection as well as the other issues that came up. First, I developed a list and color coded the elements of community building that I had researched throughout my review of the literature. Next, I reread each transcription and highlighted dialogues that seemed particularly rich interactions, using one or more colors according to the elements that each dialogue might exemplify. Subsequently, I reread each of the highlighted portions of text with the goal of finding essences that might be suggested by the conversation.

For a number of reasons, I completed this process after our final truth finding session, and I did not share the information I gleaned with the other group members as we completed our final editing process. First, determining essences using reflexive bracketing was for my dissertation analysis, and this process was not part of the required criteria for the collaborative inquiry process (Bray et al., 2000). Furthermore, I never considered asking my group members individually to perform such a time-consuming
activity; it was beyond what I might seek from novice teachers, especially considering their lack of experience in qualitative research. Moreover, to share my solitary interpretations might unduly influence our final step of the process of collaborative inquiry—the statements we, as equals, would reach through editing. Finally, one of my dissertation questions was asked in order to shed light upon the effectiveness of collaborative inquiry group participation in helping novice teachers to develop or change their practice. We had chosen collaborative inquiry as our phenomenological method for gathering information and determining our group’s truth, and I had not included bracketing as a strategy for that process. Nevertheless, the exercise of reflexive bracketing to shed light upon possible essences of community building was an important step for me, as a researcher. It enabled me to compare my findings with the statements of truth we developed using the collaborative inquiry approach of phenomenology-in-several-voices at our final session. In that spirit, I decided to include in this chapter as part of the results of my dissertation study the essences that I believe emerged, together with representative portions of dialogue, so that the reader might make similar comparisons.

The Researcher’s Findings Suggest the Essence of Teacher Carer/Cared for Relationships

The all-important caring attitudes we developed for each of our students were apparent throughout all our session discussions whether explicitly mentioned or implicitly inferred. Moreover, we discussed the importance of our understanding the bread and depth of thoughts and efforts to meet their specific needs in order for the carer-
cared for cycle to be successfully completed (Noddings, 2002) as well as our demonstrating respect for each student. Establishing those boundaries became an explicit topic of discussion during the first reflection session.

Leah: I’m being just me and not worrying about it because I guess that is part of caring. When you stop to think about it, with your own kids you show strictness and being real. So I just have really relaxed about it, but I’m trying to remember to say it’s because I care.... It’s not true for everybody, but I’m making more progress. It’s just amazing how long it takes to make the progress.

Tammy: But, if you talk about your mom, if your mom gets mad at you, she still loves you. It’s the same way, you know. Sometimes we just have to rein it in and that’s OK.

Melanie: Especially at the beginning of the year… I have to be so strict, and rarely ever be lenient. Especially in kindergarten to train that this is in school, we don’t lie down, we don’t throw our backpacks.

Holly: I still have that in first grade. It’s the same way, you know.

Tammy: Some of these kids are a little more of a handful than others. One thing I’ve remembered that has helped me that a fifth grade teacher shared with me when I was student teaching last year. She just said that you will have bad days and your kids will have bad days. The best thing you can do is sometimes you just have to, you can just see the bad days kind of snowballing, you just have to stop it and turn it around and let it go with those kids that are driving you crazy and give them a second chance and let it go within you so that it doesn’t turn into this huge fiasco.... I have a couple of boys like that and they’re best friends. That’s helped with them still knowing that I care and that I’m not just riding them because I’ve pegged them as being my hard kids.... My whole point to that was I had to work really hard at giving those boys a little bit of extra attention at times and balancing that with them still knowing that I care about them. And that is a hard thing, because they are two kids that it would be really easy just to write off or put on my hit list for the rest of the year. It’s a conscious thing—OK I’ve got to like them just as much as I like the easy ones that are so sweet. (Group Transcript, October 25, 2008, pp. 8-9)

Although on occasions such as this one we used the term teacher-student caring, the concept of teacher caring was implicit throughout all the references provided from our discussions in the sense that the teacher becomes totally immersed in her students’

During our sessions, the additional effort, creativity and patience required of a novice teacher to demonstrate teacher caring toward students with extreme needs and to promote respect for them among other students was typically a topic of discussion, together with the students’ impact upon our ability to make our classrooms “a place that will produce students who will be respectful to others and participate in class appropriately and with confidence” (Allen, 2000, p. 24). Students with serious behavior difficulties, non-English speakers, as well as those with physical handicaps provided a dilemma for novice teachers trying to promote “belongingness, common identity, consensus, intimacy, solidarity, shared values, and unity” (Franklin, 2010, p. 4). Holly first mentioned a situation at our initial session that promoted bonding among her students: “I do believe it develops community. I have a little girl that’s special needs and they are so concerned with her. I do believe it benefits her, because they all want to know if she’s OK, if they can help her.” (Group Transcript, October 25, 2008, pp. 8-9) On the other hand, in the same session, Melanie was stymied as to how to help her most difficult kindergarten student to be equally valued in the respectful, caring community she wanted to create.

And his parents just tell me to make him do pushups. That’s the only thing that works for them. Well, I said that I’d try it. I said, ‘C., 10 pushups,’ and he said, ‘I don’t want to.’ But by then he would get down and do 10 pushups, and he actually would start listening for a little bit. But I can’t be telling him to do 10 pushups every time there’s a problem. Now every time he’s doing something all the other kids say, ‘Teacher, he has to do pushups.’ Or ‘Teacher, C. is over playing with the centers or he’s doing this.’ They all know he’s the hard kid. They’re better about it than I would expect them to be, because it’s almost like in a caring way. And
when he’s not there, they say, “Where’s C.?” But still it interrupts the flow of the classroom. As far as classroom community, I don’t know. . (Group Transcript, October 25, 2008, pp. 12-13)

Tammy’s comment at that same session was a nugget that communicated precisely the necessity sometimes of making a conscious determination to care about difficult students.

Some of these kids are a little more of a handful than others.... I have a couple of boys like that and they’re best friends. That’s helped with them still knowing that I care and that I’m not just riding them because I’ve pegged them as being my hard kids.... My whole point to that was I had to work really hard at giving those boys a little bit of extra attention at times and balancing that with them still knowing that I care about them. And that is a hard thing, because they are two kids that it would be really easy just to write off or put on my hit list for the rest of the year. It’s a conscious thing—OK I’ve got to like them just as much as I like the easy ones that are so sweet. (Group Transcript, October 25, 2008, pp. 9)

She expressed a need that all of us shared because everyone had one or more students with whom it was especially difficult to create or maintain a positive relationship.

On another occasion, I discussed my preemergent English Language Learner, with virtually no English, as being our “let’s all help” person. I sought ELL training through our district and arranged weekly meetings with the ESL Specialist in order to learn more about how to help him gain greater success. As a result, in addition to daily individual work with me, to develop a greater feeling of belonging, H. became part of a guided reading group to sit, hold a guided reading book, and read the English words he had learned during our one-on-one time. I also purchased a Spanish-English dictionary for him, as well as several Spanish picture books to read in class. I also encouraged him to write his autobiography in Spanish on our laptop computers and created individualized seatwork to promote his development of English. When H. was able to read simple Dr. Seuss books, several students offered to listen to him read aloud each day. Despite the
extra energy I expended on his behalf, I could sense the frustration he experienced from feeling like an outlier in our classroom. At a later session, the others discussed at length the struggles they experienced to facilitate caring and community building with their ELL and ESL students.

Tammy: One of my boys who is ELL; he just weird. He is an interesting kid. All of my ELL kids are weird. I don’t know if it’s the language barrier. He speaks English fine but there are things that he doesn’t understand. He feels comfortable enough with me right now to come up to me and say Hey I don’t get this word, what is this? But also, he has a weird personality in that he is very literal, in fact he is funny when he doesn’t know he’s being funny and people will ask because he’ll say, he’ll ask a question.... Number one, he’s made progress in his reading, which is great. But, he had, it was amazing like he’s been working really hard on this hero report but I was a little worried because of the fact that he… that there is some disconnect. But we celebrated for that kid. I was like this is amazing. This is amazing work. And he’s like really. And he couldn’t… you don’t really see him smile that often he’s just kind of a different kid….

Leah: What is his culture?

Tammy: He’s Mexican. He’s Hispanic. But the one, and there are both some words they don’t understand. But, he’s just an interesting little...Yeah. But, he works. He works real hard and he speaks just fine. But he… I don’t know what it is. I think it is a combination of his personality and the language.

Holly: He is an ELL then. Not an ESL. There is a difference. You should know that difference when they come to get audited.

Tammy: He is ELL. But, he is far enough along that he doesn’t qualify.

Leah: He is like a monitor only or something.

Tammy: Yes, yes.

Leah: Yes. That is what I thought. I had two ELL girls that were monitor only and aren’t even a part of [the program] anymore. And Initially I had thought, well, they are just fine. I won’t worry about them, but that is not true. Because there is a lot of language, more sophisticated language or whatever that they don’t get.

Holly: The academic language.
Tammy: He questions. He is very literal and him asking questions and him not really understanding that it is funny what he is saying. Like one day I said in ten seconds something is going to happen and then I usually count down. And then a little bit later I heard him under his breath saying, “It’s been longer than ten seconds”. He just couldn’t understand because … I looked down at him and I said “Brian I know it’s been more than ten seconds” and he looks up at me and says “It’s okay.” His Mom didn’t come last time to Parent Teacher conferences. I wish she would.

Holly: What do you do with that? Because I had a few that I even called them and they never came and I was like eh.

Tammy: My other boy, his mom doesn’t speak very good English, but she brings the sister and it’s okay. This one though I asked the boy and he says she works, she works.

Leah: I talked to one girl yesterday because I was trying to schedule the conferences. I said to her, “Do you know when can they come?” And she said, “You know my dad and my mom work from in the morning until late at night.” I said, “You mean like after seven or eight o’clock?” and she said, “Yes.” So I asked, “Where do they work?” She said, “Mom far away, my Dad close.” I asked, “You know, do you think she has a dinner hour where she works?” and she said, “I don’t know.” I said, “If she does, do you think she could come over?” and she said, “No, because she doesn’t have a car.” So dad must take her to work, drop her off. She works at a donut place, then goes to work himself. The kids, I don’t know who takes care of them. It seems like she has a tiny baby at home. It may just be that my girl is not so aware, but I didn’t see them in the fall and I’m probably not going to see them this time either. But, if the situation is truly like that, how can I expect the conference to happen? I would have to go to the donut shop. “Could you take a little break?” I guess I wouldn’t mind doing that if it is not too far.

Melanie: All my parents speak really good English. My ELL kids, I really don’t worry too much about them at all because their parents are so on top of it. They read like 200 minutes a week. One of my kids, who is at a level ten—that is our cap—and he is an ELL kid.

Leah: One of my top readers is an ELL girl, but she has that blank stare when you say things that are kind of colloquial. So we made up this long list of idioms. I find that I use idioms all of the time because I am aware of it now. I know when I said it, and I say, “Oh that is an idiom.” When I don’t remember it, some kid in the class will say, “Oh that is an idiom, or is that an idiom?”. Then in scholastic, last time they had a package of three books and one was a whole book of idioms. There is a whole book of idioms, which I bought and am keeping it right up at my
Our ignorance about what their language and actions actually revealed, as well as our confusion about what exactly to do most effectively meet the needs of this unique population, became clear during this discussion. Although we cared for our ELL students and wanted them to become valued students within our classes, what appeared to be prejudiced comments, in reality, revealed that our knowledge of how best to facilitate their success was sorely lacking. One preservice class on diversity and the help of day-long trainings given by the district ELL Specialist did provide us novice teachers with the refined skills we needed during our initial year of teaching.

Considering other students with special education needs, Holly and Melanie discussed the dilemma that occurred when parents in both of their classes had difficulty with their children being labeled with ADHD and refused medication early in the year. Holly described how her student’s behavior influenced her ability to create a caring, physically and emotionally safe learning environment for all the students in her classroom community.

Holly: What do you do with a child who’s been diagnosed with ADHD and this is where my problem comes in. He has been taken off his medication and he wanders everywhere. He’s never on task and it wasn’t like this last year. And he was OK for the first week which is why, when we first met I was, like, ‘This’ll be great,’! But not now. He laughs out loud at nothing, just hysterically laughing. He thinks it’s funny. And I’m, like, ‘Okay, right now your job is to do this.’ And his stepmom said, ‘You can be mean.’ And I’m, like, how can I be mean? It’s not in my nature to be mean. He can’t read for 15 minutes in his book nook. His [book nook] has become that chair because he cannot focus so I’m reading with my group over here, he’s reading over here and I’m paying attention to both because he just cannot regulate himself at all.... See, he does not direct himself. Even when I give him, “This is your responsibility.” There’s nothing.
Melanie: And with kids like my C [discussed previously], I have a hard time finding consequences that are effective because it’s not really their fault, like, they can’t control it. I don’t know how you give them consequences because it’s not their choice.

Holly: It’s not really their fault. He can’t control not learning right now because his mind is going a million…like, when he’s reading over here and I have that group he’s, like, “Oh wait, I don’t have that book. Am I supposed to have that book?” And I don’t want him there because it does distract him but he can’t sit anywhere else in the room. That’s just my one problem with my community; he disrupts my community. He doesn’t mean to. He wants to be a part of the community. He wants to feel a part and he does, he is. I love him but he just doesn’t have the self-restraint or the self-maintenance. (Group Transcript, November 15, 2008, pp. 10-11)

It became clear that these sorts of challenges affected our ability to act as facilitators of positive community building in our classrooms; as my research indicated could happen, there were situations where we each resorted to dictating what was and was not acceptable behavior in our classrooms rather than collaborating to facilitate group decision-making. For instance, Tammy remained concerned about a number of behaviorally immature fifth graders and lamented,

I feel like, with community, we have done so many things to try to help build community. I have done so many things and we still, from what the teachers have told me, have a really high amount of really emotionally immature kids. Oh gosh, the stuff that’s going on is so crazy. So I’m kind of at a standstill of how to help them, what to do next, what is the next step to help them get along and to interact and to solve their own problems and learn to let things go and not escalate them to some of the things that have been happening and not to have to come to the teachers for every little thing that’s going on. Learning how to have coping strategies. How to help my little young man, if he is having a hard day and he does get in trouble to not completely feel like his whole day is down the toilet and act accordingly. I really don’t know what to do. We spent a whole half hour yesterday talking about role-playing and we still had some big problems the other day and I don’t know what to do…. (Group Transcript, November 15, 2008, pp. 23-24)

Although our collaborative group brainstormed ideas at length and made suggestions of
programs, strategies, and resource persons to help one another, perhaps one of the best supports we provided was to be empathetic and encouraging listeners as each of us attempted to deal effectively with the challenge of meeting individual difficult students’ needs throughout the year while promoting a cohesive, peaceful group experience. Progress was celebrated as we discussed these students at later points in the year, because we helped them make the necessary progress that promoted successful incorporation into the class communities.

The Researcher’s Findings about the Essence of Student Belonging and Mutual Respect

Achieving a successful community of learners is definitely influenced by novice teachers showing respect to students as part of their caring, but it is equally important for students to demonstrate respect for each other, which is a more daunting task for novice teachers to bring about. This was a recurring topic in our discussions, which is represented by the conversation below.

Leah: I don’t know if I told you guys this, either, but I went back and read my research ...about how you can show caring. Because, you know, I’ve read all about the caring and the articles say it’s love and it’s this…and I came across an article by another author who said it’s really respect—mutual respect. You can be even not that close to a kid so I am being warm to my kids but I’ve told them a number of times, I’ll do whatever it takes to get you to learn at the level where you need to learn.

Melanie: And making them more responsible is, I think, is being respectful of what they can do.

Leah: Well, and I find myself saying things in class that I want to change, and it’s hard to do that. I’m defining caring in a very broad way at this point.

Holly: I think something else that brings respect into my classroom is I call everyone Mr. and Miss, which I probably mentioned before, but they actually call
each other Mr. and Miss now which gives them respect to each other because they’ll notice I call them Mr. and Miss, as well. So they’re respecting each other and I’m respecting them and they’re respecting everyone in our school community. I’ve created a school community as well by talking about our school community and we go and visit our school community, the principal and the vice principal. It scares them sometimes because when they walk in just to observe I’ll be, like, “Good morning,” even when I’m in the middle of a lesson and they’re, like, “What are you doing?” It’s just weird. But it shows the kids that I respect them and they’re important people—a part of our community. (Group Transcript, November 15, 2008, pp. 23-24)

Including strategies for developing mutual respect and belonging within our daily procedures was one effective way to build a stronger community of learners. Problem solving when mutual respect was not forthcoming was also a topic of discussion. Tammy’s discussion with me of her situation typified the lengths to which we went to help students build community.

Leah: I’m just not being proactive in that way and reactive at putting out a fire and I don’t know how you ever get on top of it if you’re just putting out fires being reactive, rather than being proactive.

Tammy: I mean, I had a girl come to me in tears yesterday because, “They’re really good at basketball…” and her friend’s really good at basketball and they were making shots and her friend was making shots and celebrating so this girl saw it as rubbing it in her face and, “I’m so much better than you.” Well, I know this girl, they’re both in my class. She’s just this little timid Native American girl that’s been adopted and no way would she do that in her face but, of course, the girl took it that way and just could not even cope. Bawling, sobbing is a good word. Really? I’ll have my girls in all next week because I feel like that’s a set amount of time where can sit—it’s not a punishment so much as it gives us time to really talk about those things that we can’t do in an extended period in the classroom. And so, my goal next week when I have these girls in for lunch [is] having them gain strategies for how to interact with each other and talk with each other and learn those things.

Leah: What happens to you in the meantime? I spend every lunch in my class preparing things. I guess I’m just not that efficient but for me to have a whole week where that’s what I’m doing completely during lunch.

Tammy: I kind of feel like, on the other hand, if I don’t do something it’s going to
blow up. Especially with this one little girl who’s really a ring leader, that if I can’t help her to be a positive role model, you know, will affect other classmates on the grade level because it’s intertwined with the two other classrooms that we’re going to be dealing with this all year long.

Leah: Diversity is huge, like you said, it can be somebody on the autistic range or it’s somebody who has special needs in social areas. Its way, way broad. But I think that all of that affects your ability to have a community where everybody really cares about each other and where they wouldn’t do something like that because they care.

The idea of using the week of lunch half hours might appear to be a time consuming way to promote a sense of mutual respect among a group of struggling students. However, it enabled Tammy to collaborate with students and was a good example of the “qualities that must characterize the classroom community: the give and take of joint problem solving and welcoming conflict” (Allen, 2000, p. 24).

The Researcher’s Findings about the Essence of Student Service and Cooperation

Some students have already learned to compromise and others to provide daily service before entering school, while others still need to be taught such skills. The concept of cooperating in groups and providing service to others is magnified when the teacher models and provides cooperative learning and structured service opportunities on a day-to-day basis in the classroom. However, this type of service and collaboration is different from the formal cooperative learning processes (Johnson et al., 2000), and service projects (Billig, 2000), which were described in the literature. No one in our group reported generating a large-scale service project during her initial teaching year, and formal cooperative learning group experiences were not brought up voluntarily during our sessions. However, the following exchange did occur when I structured our
January review and planning session to promote discussion on topics that were included in my literature review.

Holly: Formal cooperative learning is a little more difficult in first grade than I’m sure it would be in fourth or fifth grade. It’s just not the same because you would have to teach each job and then teach it again because they are just not at the ability to think well this is my new job this month. Okay this is my new job this week. It is too much for them. But, there are times when I’m, like, so I have a little boy who’s struggling and a girl who’s not so I’ll put them together and they’ll buddy read and they know that the last 5-8 minutes everyone’s going to buddy read. I did that right before we left for Christmas, we had a read-a-thon, and they loved it and they sat together and they took turns and everyone was loving it.

Leah: I’ve done partners and talk at your table, and even the literature circles, you know, everybody has a job everyday and I did that when they were doing surveys in math. So I had each table work as a group, and they each had a particular job, and we had a social goal, which is what is supposed to be there with cooperative learning. I hadn’t really been doing that. Then in social studies we’re doing groups for studying Native Americans in Utah and there’re enough groups that they can have four to a group and they each have a particular job with that, too.

Melanie: For cooperative learning, it’s difficult to get kindergartners to work in groups, but I do need to do more partner work. Then, I put this in the cooperative learning, especially during January I want to focus on sharing books and have a show-and-tell of just their favorite book so they can bring in their favorite book and summarize it.

Tammy: Yes. I think I use a lot of cooperative learning. Well, I think I use some cooperative learning and some group work. Because in cooperative learning each person has to have a specific job, and sometimes [in my class] it’s more like “turn to your neighbor and talk amongst yourselves” kind of thing, but I have done some jigsaw and I think that it has done good. Sometimes it has to be scaffolded because they don’t get along as well. There are some personality problems, but I think that it is good for them. (Group Transcript, January 3, 2008, pp. 15-16)

Ways in which we encouraged our students to work effectively with one another also included performing acts of service for one another. Our discussions indicated that service, for the most part, was built into our daily procedures. However, during one session, the conversation turned to the possibilities provided by a Secret Server procedure
my students and I had started in January.

Leah: Actually I did do something, I sort of fell into it before the holiday. I think I told you that the last three days before the holiday, we did Secret Server. And the kids said they wanted to keep doing it after. So they are picking a name out each Monday and Friday we take about two minutes to see can anyone guess who their Secret Server was this week.

Holly: Have the kids write something about it. This week I Secret Served so and so and this is how it helped me.

Melanie: And this is how it made me feel…

Leah: I think that is a great idea because that would also be a teaching device. Ask the kids to write down how they’ve been good friends.

Melanie: Then it will also help them mentally process and identify their feelings.

Holly: What have you done to help build a relationship with someone in the class? It can’t be surface. It can’t be like I gave this kid a pencil, because that is very surface level. And you want, well mine would probably be I gave this kid a pencil because that is where they are at.

Melanie: I pushed in his chair.

Holly: But yours could probably go deeper. Yours could go to well Joe left our class and then he came back and I was really nice to him and we became friends. That’s a little deeper than I gave him something.

Leah: Yeah and what we’ve done with Secret Server—a lot of little sticky notes. I have asked what can you do beyond that? Well someone was absent and the other person cleaned out his desk for him.

Tammy: Oh, that is nice.

Leah: Yeah, he cleaned out his stuff and left a little note. Look inside your desk and see…. (Group Transcript, January 31, 2009, pp. 51-52)

This discussion appeared to generate an enthusiasm among our group members to begin their own version of this informal kind of service. Although we valued both concepts, it would appear that implementing time consuming, lengthy, formal projects was beyond
the scope of our novice teacher group’s ability to envision. However, sharing of artifacts often resulted in the group’s brainstorming and each member’s adapting the idea in a way that could work for community building with her students during our first year of teaching.

The Researcher’s Findings about the Essence of Mutual Responsibility for the Environment

Each of our group’s members, whatever our grade level, realized the importance to community building of our students sharing in the responsibility for the classroom environment. Each of us set up procedures that allowed every student to take a leadership position for which he or she alone was accountable. Despite the fact that we might have accomplished the tasks more quickly ourselves and had to be patient with each child remembering, his or her self-esteem was visibly strengthened as the responsibility was consistently fulfilled. The conversation below illustrates how even our group members who worked with early grades dealt with this challenge.

Holly: Another form of delegation in my [first grade] classroom, and I talk about this with the kids all the time. “I’m the teacher and there are a million things that I’ve got to do so you need to help.” So our job chart has become a big part of my delegation to them. They trade every week. I’ve added jobs, I have 17 jobs because I have 17 kids, so everyone has a job. I don’t ever have to let a child go without a job.... Then they feel important and part of the community because they’ve got this big, important job. Everyone’s a manager of something and that’s an important word for them, I guess. Because it means something big so everyone’s a manager of something. No one’s, like, a sub or a pencil sharpener. It would be the pencil manager. The plant manager.

Melanie: Yah, [in kindergarten] we have our jobs and they’re good at their jobs. We have our lid person, that they go around and make sure all the markers are closed and chair person that makes sure all the chairs are happy and pushed in.

Another time, Tammy, Holly and I discussed the positive outcomes when they gave
major responsibility to the students for managing their economic unit designed to meet
the fifth-grade core requirement to understand the free market system.

Leah: I heard Rafe Esquith, *Teach Like Your Hair’s on Fire*…. I just didn’t want
to get into the pay part of it but I’d like to hear how it works for you…I’m
working real hard to stay away from rewards and punishments but it’s darn hard
to make things work.

Holly: Do you use your pay as a punishment?

Tammy: Yes.

Holly: I don’t use mine as a punishment. They get paid; I don’t take it away.

Tammy: My cooperating teacher did it and he didn’t use the punishment unless
you really got in trouble, but it wasn’t like I do. But the kids loved it still. They
got paid for their jobs; then they had an auction. I’m having our first auction on
Monday and they can buy their desk.

Leah: And they pay rent…

Tammy: They have to pay rent on their desk. They can buy it and it becomes a
condominium. They can buy other people’s desks, then they have to pay property
taxes but it’s never as much as their rent.

Leah: Who handle’s that because that sounds like a lot of work…

Tammy: The bankers. There’s no paperwork. The only thing I keep track of is if
they pay rent. If they’re late they get fined $5. That’s the only thing I keep track
of and they do the banking. Central Bank donated all the check registry stuff so
they’ve got the deposit slips and all, so I also see it as very much a money thing.

Holly: Math.

Tammy: Yes. I have four bankers and they keep track; everyone has the same
bankers. It ran really smoothly yesterday. It was payday, and I didn’t have to
worry about it.

Leah: And what do they get paid for?

Tammy: Just their job. They apply for their job and they get paid for it. If they
don’t do their job, they do get fined, or if they’re not doing their job well.
Leah: How much do they get paid for a job? Is that enough to pay your rent?

Tammy: They get paid anywhere from $25-$31 every two weeks.

Leah: How much is rent on a desk?

Tammy: $45 a month. It’s $150 to buy it but they have to pay rent that month too, so it’s $195 to buy it.

Leah: So there’s no downside to it that you see?

Tammy: The kids love it. Parents love it. (Group Transcript, November 15, 2008, pp. 1-2)

There were times when one or another of our group showed doubts about other members’ strategies, which was when spirited exchanges like the one above occurred. What worked for community building in one novice teacher’s classroom did not need to be adopted by all of us. Both Holly and Tammy believed their payment system provided students the opportunity to simulate the free market economy of our country while Melanie and I remained devoted to the belief that our students should perform their classroom duties because of the shared responsibility we had for our common environment.

The Researcher’s Findings about the Essence of Student Self-Responsibility

A great amount of time was spent by each of us to help students desire and gain the skills to take charge of their own learning. Again, the effort involved on our parts might be greater, but the results from students developing lifelong learning skills were definitely satisfying. The conversation below demonstrates how the process applied to students’ personal reading.

Tammy: But I also think that their love of reading or their interest in reading can be jump started by you, by your loving to read. I’ve noticed that in my classroom
with my kids. I do a lot of book talks right now.... I think it’s really important, but I, gosh, have seen the kids—boys and girls—get on fire about some of the books that I’m recommending.... And one of the girls came up and she said, Mrs. H., this is the first book that I’ve really finished in so long. And it’s one of the books I recommended, and a lot of my girls are reading these books. She says, “Usually I get half way through the book, and I never finish it.

Holly: The “Just Right” book, that’s all they talk about in 1st grade and kindergarten is the Just Right book. What is a Just Right book for you? I’ve got my posters over there.... I’ve got one that says, it’s a little rhyming one, it says, “0-1: A vacation book,” so it’s too easy, it’s just something I take on vacation. “2-3: Just right for me. 4-5: Way too hard.” So 2-3 is the one they want to think about. If I can only miss 2-3 words it’s a just right book.

Leah: And then they’re testing themselves. The only question I have about that is, I have a couple of readers that are picking books that are too hard but if they’re doing it on their own, the 5-finger test and they don’t know they’re missing a word. I have Harry Potter going through my class and not everybody in my class is ready to read Harry Potter and this boy is not.... Somebody helped him, probably his mom, to find an easier fantasy book. It’s got the dragons on the front. So he seems to be okay with that but this boy, I’m feeling pretty sure that he does not know what words he’s missing.

Tammy: I had to break two girls from Junie B. Jones in 5th grade. I said, “Uh uh. If those were your just right books for you two that would be just fine but they’re not. Do you want to become better readers? You do not get to be a better reader by reading books that are too easy, you become a better reader by reading just right books.” They’ve been coming and asking, “Is this a just right book?” I’m, like, “You tell me.” I don’t want them bringing me every single book. If everybody needs to ask you what they can do personally all you’re doing is answering questions all day and you’re not able to really teach them, but if they can do it themselves...

Leah: It’s part of my program to have kids be responsible for themselves. And I think, in the long run, when they move on, how does anybody get to be a thinker, a thoughtful citizen if they’ve never been asked or given the opportunity to have responsibility? So again, same reason, the more they can do, I see them being prouder of themselves. (Group Transcript, October 25, 2008, pp. 26-28)

The dilemma of discovering what each student’s capability was and helping him or her fulfill that potential remained a challenge. The fact that we endeavored to work collaboratively with each student to determine his or her personal best rather than taking...
on the entire challenge ourselves was an important aspect of our community building efforts.

The Researcher’s Findings about the Essence of Curriculum Organization and Choice

Throughout our initial year, we, novice teachers, gained an understanding how to implement our curriculum so that our students elected to cooperate and willingly accepted part of the responsibility for their learning. Examples of how we used curriculum for community building is demonstrated by conversations during our sessions. One of the topics we discussed was how to build choice into integrated studies.

Leah: Would you tell about your hero unit? Because I wanted to share some thoughts I had and get your input on it on creating your own curriculum on it.

Tammy: Yeah it’s something that we do. It’s a Social Studies and Writing unit where they pick an American hero, you know someone who they think is an American hero. They have to get three sources, one can be the internet and two have to be a book and they have to be American born. Then, they start on the writing part and you teach them how to get the notes. We have this Tarzan and Jane talk where the Tarzan talk they have little squares where they have to put their notes on...Then they cut them up and then they sequence them where they want to go in their story. Then they turn it into Jane talk, which is putting them in complete sentences.

Leah: I started from day one with Investigate Your Interest, so each one is doing non-fiction reading during reading time and investigating an interest, and I’m going to teach them how to do research, the steps of research. They can choose their topic and their resources. It seems to be something they like. We did shadow boxes as a way of sharing. There’s no huge quality yet, but I brought one to show you. He was studying wildfires, so he did this and it turned out kind of cute.

(Group Transcript, January 31, 2009, pp. 1-2)

At another point, we discussed establishing literature circles as a means for our upper grade students to become responsible for their own reading groups.

Tammy: Yes, I’m starting literature circles. I’m teaching my kids right now the
different jobs. We’re going through a story as a whole class so I can teach them the jobs. We’ll be done this week with it and then they will start with books.

Leah: Because that’s what it is as you read about literature circles; that is the way that they are supposed to be. The kids are supposed to be able to do it on their own. But, I don’t know. I think you learn an awful lot having them come to you. Like I had them do read-alouds. We do break-in read-alouds where if you are reading and you want to break in, you can so maybe I get to hear a paragraph or so where each kid reads aloud. Well that gives me enough.

Tammy: How do they decide who is going to break in; like what do they do? Is there a saying or something if they want to read?

Leah: They just do it. They just start to read and the other person fades out. And if you’ve read one time and you both start and the one who has already read is to drop out. It seems to work pretty well. They don’t do it for a long time but I can hear them read aloud enough. Plus, I made a little card and I just put four things on it; Chunking, Expression, Reading the Exact Words and Observing Signals. So before they do the read aloud, as they come into their group, I just say “What are you going to work on today when you are reading aloud? Is it going to be chunking?”, and it’s helped their fluency a lot I think. I hear them all reading aloud better. (Group Transcript, October 25, 2008, pp. 10-11)

A final example of how we involved our students as collaborators in integrating the curriculum was a discussion that occurred as Holly explained how she worked with her first graders.

Holly: Right now we are studying cultures. I have them take home a little writing assignment for a culture in their family so it’s writing with the cultures and then they bring it back and present it to the whole class. My class is really good at presentations because we’ve been doing them since the beginning.

Leah: Good! So when they do a presentation is it 2 minutes, 3 minutes?

Holly: It’s a minute and a half. Then this upcoming week we are doing national symbols so we are going to start studying our national symbols and we’ll talk about that during reading time because I have a lot of books on national symbols like the statue of liberty and the liberty bell things like that. So we are crossing that over into reading time and then writing time as well because I have a little book that goes along with that.

Leah: So then will they do another oral presentation about that or is that kind of a
cycle you do?

Holly: I don’t know if I’ll do a writing assignment this time, because then we need to start our research projects. I probably will have them research and pick a national symbol instead of going home and having mom or dad help you with it you have to research it on your own to find a book in the library and look in the library and research a symbol. (Group Transcript, January 31, 2009 pp. 60-61)

It was clear that we used many collaborative strategies to facilitate our students’ autonomy and interest in the core curriculum, which are community building elements, regardless of our grade level or the subject areas.

The Researcher’s Findings about the Essence of Fulfilling High Expectations

Helping each child determine and fulfill realistically high expectations was directly related to their willingness to accept responsibility for their own learning. The conversation below demonstrates how important helping students discover and achieve their personal best, whatever their ability level, was to building a successful classroom community.

Leah: Any thoughts about delegating?… I just read the first part of this article and I thought it was so interesting because it’s reading about self-efficacy and self-regulation, which is what you were talking about…. But it talks about in here how, by your willpower, by your self-efficacy, by self-regulation that you can scholastically set goals…. If a kid has self-efficacy they think they can and if they’re self-regulating, that allows them to actually do it.

Tammy: That’s true, I’m just thinking, I have a kid that’s really bright, my kid that they think is defiant. I had him out talking to him and said, “Let’s do something else again,” and he said, “Mrs. I’m just a jerk! I’ve been this way since the first grade. Nothing but art and reading.” I said, “Hogwash. Do not pull that baloney. You are smart.” Because he is smart and I think it’s just that he aims so low that, because, probably because he doesn’t…

Holly: Well, probably because that was accepted. Some teachers don’t set the expectations very high.
Tammy: Well, and he’s always been known as the bully since the beginning of time. But he is really smart and when he wants to do something he’ll do it well.

Leah: Dweck (2006) has done 30 years of research and it talks about telling kids what great effort they’re making and not telling them that they’re smart. Did I share that with you? Her point is, and her research says, that when you’ve been told you’re smart you need to protect that smartness so you take fewer risks because you’ve got to hang onto how smart you are. And if you’ve been told what great effort you’re making and what a hard worker you are that you’re ready to take on that risk because you want to make an even greater effort.

Holly: I can see that in some of my kids because some of my kids who are the lower level, they are the lower end. I don’t tell them they’re smart, I tell them, “Oh, you made great “r’s” today.” I do that during writing all the time. And one actually came over to me specifically, found me in my room, tapped my shoulder and said, “Today I wrote two sentences. I’m trying my hardest.” I’m, like, “Good for you! You did write two sentences.” So he was willing to take that risk because I always compliment him on his one sentence. “You wrote a capital. You did a period. Good job on that one sentence.” So he was willing to take that risk, rather than hearing, “Oh, you’re so smart,” he was willing to more of a risk. So I’ve seen that in my classroom. It does work.

Leah: Yah, and just think, for somebody like [Tammy’s] smart kid. I’ve had them over the years. I have one kid in my class who’s always been very bright but he doesn’t do his work, and I just wonder. I just wonder. And I wonder how many kids I did that to over the years, without even recognizing it. My own kids. So I can look back and think, wow, there’s really a lot of truth to that. How you roll the clock back on somebody like that and get them to buy into… I’m trying to correct that in myself. I’m trying not to say, “You’re smart,” to the kids in the class. It’s darn hard for me. Because some kids, this kid, is not making a huge effort but he is very smart, so how do I get at, I mean, I can’t tell him he’s making great effort when he’s not. So I guess it’s just the small, little things, that you’ve done this well or you’ve done that well. (Group Transcript, November 15, 2008, pp. 32-34)

Helping students believe in themselves and encouraging them to put forth the effort to achieve their personal best remained a challenge to developing a community of learners.

At another session, we discussed the importance of our ability to teach subject matter in a way that students with different learning abilities could believe in their abilities was also critical to our efforts at community building.
Leah: What we do in our subject matter, I think, affects community building. I have one girl in my class who is really bright. She’s one of my top readers. I figure she’s got to be one of my top thinkers but she’s not. If I even put a math assignment up she’s just in tears and I really want to work with her on… stopping and taking a deep breath. And maybe just because it’s math. “Can you figure out, I wrote it on the board and it shows you and can you find it in the book?” and it’s just so atypical for somebody… Do your top readers not tend to be your top thinkers?

Melanie: I wonder if it tends to be just a parenting thing because my kindergarteners…I have one little boy that, like you said, he’s really smart. He’s right there ready to read and everything like that but if I explain something to the whole class he comes up in tears afterwards and he’s like, “Teacher, I don’t know how to do it. Tell me how to do it.” I really think it’s just because some parents just do everything for their kids. “Oh, this is hard, let me do it for you. Let me take you through it step by step.” That’s what I’ve always assumed is that it’s a parenting thing but still, in school it’s frustrating.

Holly: My top readers are my top thinkers and I can write something on the board and they’re fine…. No, I don’t experience that. We’re in school, we’re here to learn. If you need assistance I can help you but I’m not gonna do it for ya. I can read the problem to you. You have to think about it. So, yah, I don’t hold their hand. I don’t hold anyone’s hand. Even my lower kids, I don’t hold their hand.

Melanie: It’s frustrating too, the opposite. I have some kids that I’ll explain things to and they’ll go off and do it and I’m, like, “Oh good, they’re doing it.” Then I’ll go over and I tell them to write something that begins with an “n” and they’re drawing and apple tree and I ask “What starts with ‘n’?” and it’s “Oh, I drew a house and my family,” and the thought process isn’t there but they’re working by themselves.

Tammy: I heard a teacher once when I was at professional development and she said with kids to “work with what you know.” Because sometimes, especially in math, kids tend to see a word problem and totally shut down. It’ll be just addition but it’s a word problem. So I’m trying to help these kids to just go “Okay, let’s take a deep breath. What do you know here?” and help them feel like they have some strategies and that we don’t have to freak out every time an assignment’s put on the board.

Leah: So, to relate it to community building, when math time comes I’ve got kids that…I don’t want to move too fast because then I’m losing those kids that want to understand but I know I’m moving too slowly. And I’m just tearing my hair out and it affects how my caring comes across to them and it affects their feeling about each other because I’m the fast, fast and you’re the slow, you know. I have
several kids in my class that just aren’t with it and I can see how the class feels about them. They’re not saying anything out loud, but I see the body language.... I don’t know, that’s something that I would like to be able to do better, so I’m throwing it out there. Maybe it’s something we might think about and talk again, keep experimenting. But I’m not where I’d like to be.

Holly: We work on strategies a lot. Like, math strategies, we always name our strategies to begin with, “What are some strategies I can use?” and yah, they come from my highest kids but their strategies are there, I write them on the board, then the lower kids understand what they’re supposed to be doing because the higher kids are teaching them as well. So they’re teaching each other. (Group Transcript, November 15, 2008, pp. 35-37)

Reactions and Reflections of the Researcher about Suggesting Essences from Analysis of Group Session Transcriptions

Participating in a collaborative inquiry truly was an adventure—perhaps a bit like riding a roller coaster, which is not one of my activities of choice. As has been demonstrated in other journal entries, facilitating the sessions while reconciling myself to group dynamics and decisions promoted varying degrees of discomfort and satisfaction throughout the experience. As a result, how I reached the decision to complete the step as well as the process of individual analysis I performed to uncover essences of community building that might be suggested in our session discussions proved to be one of the more comfortable, although tedious aspects for me, as is made clear by reviewing the series of my journal entries.

Reaction/Reflection: I believe in collaborative inquiry that we are supposed to reach our truth at the close of our sessions, but I’m bothered about all the information from so many pages of transcriptions and field notes we won’t use except that we member checked them to verify that’s what we said or wrote. It doesn’t make sense, and I feel like I must be missing something. I need to take some time to review my sources on the collaborative inquiry process. Spring Break will be a good time. (Journal Entry, April 5, 2009)
Reaction/Reflection: I’ve read Yorks’s entire dissertation chapter about his collaborative inquiry group—not the core group where they reached consensus about what makes a collaborative inquiry—but the one he did with his colleagues at the college where he works. They met monthly for a whole year but spent the first several meetings agreeing on exactly what their question would be and the last few meetings trying to make progress toward answering it. They did come up with a project for change at the college that was their artifact. Reading it didn’t help me too much except that Yorks acknowledges how he resolved his concerns about needing to facilitate and be actively involved more in leading the group than he wanted. I’ve had the same concerns about me, and feel good that he resolved the issue as I did. (Journal Entry, April 14, 2009)

Reaction/Reflection: I reread the collaborative inquiry book that Yorks and his group wrote, and I found a couple of ideas I’d highlighted during my first reading that I think will help me. In their core group, the members used bracketing and the approach of hermeneutical phenomenology to find themes they eventually agreed by consensus defined the collaborative inquiry process. What they did sounds similar to the coding themes like I did for my ethnography pilot studies. I need to read more about this. (Journal Entry, April 16, 2009)

Reaction/Reflection: I found a paper from Sage online at the library that defines bracketing, and I reread the part of Patton’s book about qualitative research that explains phenomenology and hermeneutics. It’s interesting how much more I understand about what he says than I did when I first read and highlighted parts during my Qual II research course. I’ve decided to do one more part to my study using reflexive bracketing! (Journal Entry, April 17, 2009)

Reaction: Man, why did I make myself do this task! Especially after transcribing and writing up the statements to send out to my group members. The whole process takes forever and is so tedious. Plus it’s not easy to know if I’m really setting aside my “presuppositions” about what constitutes community building. I guess I don’t have to try to do that completely since I’m doing “reflexive bracketing” which acknowledges that I can’t wash all that I know out of my brain. I hope I’m looking at what we said with fresh eyes and not just wasting my time and those who have to read my dissertation. However, I’m afraid NOT to do it!

Reflection: I think, just like Dr. Marx asked us to do field notes during class visits, none of us entirely believes that the collaborative inquiry process can be the whole method by itself—not even me. Doing this process feels right, if only as another form of triangulating the data—or quadrilateraling the data (if there is such a thing? :0) Regardless of the time it takes, I will pursue the task. (Journal Entries, June 16, 2009)

Reaction: I have finished the task of seeking possible essences of community
building in our prior sessions! The transcriptions are quite colorful now, often with overlapping colors because the dialogue didn’t always clearly reveal a single essence to me. I believe that I’ve found representative comments for the areas my past research, and that of others, has suggested. But there are some new ideas as well. (Journal Entry, June 23, 2009)

When I finished the bracketing and finding of possible essences of community building suggested by our prior session discussions, I had a distinct feeling of satisfaction—and an even greater appreciation for the collaborative inquiry process. My findings paralleled our statements of truth about community building by novice teachers, supported by collaborative inquiry process, while inhibited by a number of factors that constitute the world of the novice teacher’s classroom.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to place into context the experience of participating in our collaborative inquiry in a way that helps the reader understand how the truth of community building was created by the group’s members. Patton (2002) stated that hermeneutics reminds us that what something means depends on the cultural context in which it was originally created as well as the cultural context within which it is subsequently interpreted.... hermeneutics challenges the assertion that an interpretation can ever be absolutely correct or true. The meaning of text, then, is negotiated among a community of interpreters, and to the extent that some agreement is reached about meaning at a particular time and place, that meaning can only be based on consensual community validation. (Italics added; pp. 113-114).

The italicized statement describes exactly what we novice teachers accomplished through our collaborative inquiry process. We completed a series of planning/action/reflection cycles that helped us both develop and examine the practice of creating a community of
learners. It was a challenging time period to choose to participate in such a daunting process, but the concepts we had studied in school or believed from our past life experience became crystallized through our interactive discussions. For each of us, the essences of community building became the warp and weft that create the fabric for learning in a classroom of diverse 21st century students.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF NOVICE TEACHER COMMUNITY BUILDING USING COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY

During this final chapter, I intend to complete a deep critique of several aspects of my dissertation study. First, I will evaluate the efficacy of the collaborative inquiry method as it applied to my dissertation study of novice teacher community building. In addition, I will analyze each of the features delineated in our statements of truth, examining what was consistent and inconsistent with the review of literature on community building I completed in Chapter II. Finally, I will examine the session transcription excerpts from our sessions, included in Chapter IV, to determine what intended and unintended messages might have been revealed about the attitudes of our collaborative group members toward individuals and groups of children, since our comments may have significance for novice teacher community building. For clarity’s sake, I will include each statement of truth in its entirety at the beginning of the discussion, and, following each analysis, I will close with implications for further study.

Discussion of Novice Teacher Participation in Collaborative Inquiry Groups

The statement of truth developed by our members about the viability of novice teachers’ participation in a collaborative inquiry group during their initial year of teaching is listed below. In it is defined what we, as novice teachers, found were the advantages and disadvantages of such an experience.
Participating in a collaborative inquiry group provides a positive opportunity for novice teachers although it is challenging with respect to the time involved. One advantage is that novice teachers become part of a small, supportive group that is outside of their grade level team. Moreover, if novice teachers are not involved in school collaborative groups that address issues like community building, the collaborative inquiry group can fill that vacuum. The ideas and fresh perspectives the cross-grade level collaborative inquiry group of novice teachers provides are helpful in the initial years of teaching. Meeting periodically for group reflection that focuses upon a common question causes self-reflection to occur within novice teachers during one of the busiest times of their career. This time for self-reflection helps novice teachers to focus on improvement and successes when it might be easier simply to do what is necessary to get by. Such interaction and reflection also facilitate the efforts of novice teachers to remain focused upon their personal teaching goals. Novice teachers who are willing to devote the time and effort to participate in a collaborative inquiry group can find it a positive benefit as they become accustomed to the necessities of daily life in their classrooms. (Collaborative Inquiry Rough Draft ‘Truth’ Sheet, p. 2-3)

From the above statement, the reader may correctly conclude that group members’ believed that participation in the collaborative inquiry process was advantageous in a number of ways, which bear discussion. However, from the point of view of the researcher, the experience was problematic, and this, too, is important to analyze.

**Advantages from the Members’ Point of View**

First, there is such confusion during the initial year of teaching and so many demands made upon novice teachers that it would have been easy to allow our personal goal to create a community of learners to slip into the background. We could have implemented one element of community building, Morning Meeting, for example, and been satisfied for our first year (Kriete, 2002). We could have focused closely upon any one of a number of areas in our teaching and not reflected upon the overriding goal of community building. It was the fact that we had committed to the group to consistently
take action and to follow the action with personal reflection that made us choose a different path (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2006). We knew we would meet with one another sometime during the month and needed to be ready to discuss our thoughts and feelings (Bray et al., 2000). We were aware that others shared our vision of community building and would offer suggestions and encouragement to accomplish our goal of community building.

Second, at our sessions, each of us was able to discuss in a frank manner with colleagues who would keep what we said confidential. It helped to know that we could readily admit our failures, self-doubts, as well as successes to colleagues not from our school or grade level. We profited from being able to ask questions and state our concerns regarding some of the professional development experience we had, for example, without fearing judgment (Evelein et al., 2008).

Third, because we worked across the grade levels, our collective perspective was broader than our grade level colleagues’ view could be. It was beneficial for us, upper grade teachers, to hear the somewhat different points of view of primary teachers and vice versa. We also found many commonalities—options for community building that were effective regardless of the age and grade of the children. We maintained a willingness to share whatever we found or developed about community building for others to adopt or adapt. Thereby, each of our efforts had the potential to, and, in a number of instances, did benefit the entire group, which made the overall experience a positive one from the standpoint of developing practice.
Disadvantages from the Researcher’s Point of View

As the researcher and group member most familiar with the collaborative inquiry method, I believe that its disadvantages outweighed its advantages for use as my dissertation method for our particular group of novice teachers. First, the other members’ preservice program had included only short-term, self-examinations of their practice, completed for various fieldwork experiences. I had supervised other students during their 20 weeks of fieldwork over 2 years and had firsthand knowledge of the simplicity of their requirements. Thus, in reality, our collaborative inquiry group was these women’s initial experience in extended research, a factor that might have made preferable a simpler, more delineated form of action research rather than the “often random, messy, and divergent ambiguity [that] is intrinsic to an inquiry conducted by equals” (Bray et al., 2000, p. 62).

Second, due to my impacted doctoral schedule, we were unable to conduct our organizational meeting until August, when I provided each group member with a one-page synthesis I wrote about the essence of the collaborative inquiry method. Included were the need for conflict resolution due to the likelihood of divergent views and the fact that tools for reflection would be necessary to provide important artifacts to record the group’s thinking and construction of meaning during the repeated cycles of planning and action. I asked, but could not require, that they carefully read and digest the ideas in this document. Because of the imminence of the start of the school year with its initial teacher trainings and myriad of pressures, the essential requirements for a collaborative inquiry group may not have had sufficiently internalized. Evidence of this likelihood was
apparent in that the depth of reflection necessary to challenge one another about ideas occurred rarely amongst our group members, and I was the only member who designed artifacts to use for self-examination of our practice when I was the designated session leader for two meetings.

Moreover, at our mid-year session, where we talked about what we had yet to accomplish with our communities, it was mentioned that perhaps our commitment to 2-hour sessions was longer than necessary. No one pressed the issue, and we maintained the designated time that had been established in our constitution, for which I was thankful as the transcriptions of these periods of reflection provided the bulk of my dissertation data. In addition, at our last session, when our group members concluded about what made participation in collaborative inquiry difficult, the element of the time involved was emphasized together with some discomfort at not having sufficient knowledge of what should be included in the portfolio, the primary artifact that members had agreed to complete.

Third, other than the requirements for the meeting structure that were listed in our constitution, the remainder of our collaborative inquiry process emerged during our sessions, which, as the researcher, was initially quite difficult for me to accept. I had studied the collaborative inquiry process in great depth and was aware of the basic expectations and criteria defined by Bray and colleagues (2000). When the majority of the group members elected not to create the list of artifacts we would complete to bring about change in our practice, I felt especially uncomfortable, yet powerless to achieve a different outcome. My discomfort led me to seek further knowledge about the
collaborative inquiry method, and I read the dissertation of Yorks (1995), where he recorded how the method was developed by the core group of collaborators. As he worked with his extended collaborative inquiry group of experienced educators, Yorks delineated difficulties similar to mine that he experienced: (a) resolving scheduling conflicts, (b) moving the group forward without taking too much control, and (c) achieving conclusive evidence of the group’s progress toward achieving consensus.

At last, I was able to better reconcile myself to our situation. From my reading and reflection, it became clear that what was difficult for experienced educators to achieve in a collaborative inquiry group could not realistically be expected of novice teachers. I recognized that novice teachers might not create conflict in the collaborative inquiry process to the same degree as experienced teachers because they were still developing much of their practice rather than refining it. Furthermore, even if novice teachers were able to identify appropriate artifacts to analyze their practice, with the excessive stress involved in their initial year of teaching, it might be unrealistic to expect them to willingly add further requirements to their workload. In fact, the collaborative studies involving novice teachers were completed with groups still involved in their preservice courses where the professor could require that specific assignments be completed (Doyle, 1997; Kitchen & Stevens, 2004; Moran, 2007; Nelson et al., 2008; van Zee et al., 2002), a factor that had not occurred to me when I considered selecting collaborative inquiry as a possible method. Finally, I reached the conclusion that, from the other novice teachers’ perspective, our collaborative inquiry’s purpose was to support the implementation of their initial efforts at community building, and I must work within
those parameters.

The concept of achieving and maintaining equality among the group’s members also created distress for me. Although I had worked in a variety of collaborative settings over the years, I was either clearly the one in charge (as in my principalship) or clearly an equal (as in my grade level teaching group). I was able to assume with comfort the role of leader or follower. During this collaborative inquiry experience, however, because it served as my dissertation method and because of my prior teaching experience, I consistently felt the tension between the need to maintain the status of an equal member of the group to honor the method and to assume the leadership that would ensure that sufficient, pertinent data was collected for my dissertation. I felt that I spoke too often or too much—that I was trying too hard to facilitate our discussions. I also hesitated to pressure the group to do more or behave differently because the fact that any of the group’s members could opt out at any time loomed in the back of my mind.

I became more reconciled to my uncomfortable role in our collaborative inquiry group during my reading of Yorks’ (1995) dissertation where he discussed having similar doubts during his extended collaborative inquiry group process participation. His concerns were allayed when he was reassured by one of his mentors to feel comfortable with whatever level of involvement he found necessary, and I was reassured by reading of his experience. I was further comforted during our final session as each group member was able to confidently delineate her conclusions about the essence of community building, the degree of success she had achieved, and the value of the collaborative inquiry group experience. Moreover, when the collaborative inquiry group members
debriefed at our final summer meeting to finalize our statements of truth, I asked each one if she felt she had had sufficient time to speak during our discussions. Everyone acknowledged that, although the amount of time each of us was involved in conversation varied with the topic and the session, each was satisfied with her overall level of involvement. Finally, when I completed the bracketing experience of seeking the essences of community building that were evidenced during our sessions, I found that each of our members had, in fact, represented her thinking about the various topics we discussed. Nevertheless, the persistent concern I experienced, with so much riding on the success of the collaborative inquiry method, is not a feeling to be easily forgotten.

Our collaborative inquiry group achieved satisfactory results with regard to answering my dissertation questions, I believe, because of our established relationship with one another and the group’s persistence. However, the challenges the experience presented to me, as the researcher, were sufficient that I would not recommend the collaborative inquiry method be used by others as their dissertation method with novice teachers, especially for whom it is their initial action research experience. On the other hand, if action research experiences were incorporated throughout their preservice coursework, novice teachers might thrive in such a situation because deep self-reflection had become simply a positive, customary aspect of their professional duties. Those responsible for novice teacher induction programs might then profitably involve their inductees in collaborative inquiry groups to provide a more instructive transition into the Professional Development Communities (PDCs) currently so common in districts throughout our nation.
Implications for Further Study about Novice Teacher Participation in Collaborative Inquiry Groups

More studies involving such groups as ours would be beneficial with a major goal to analyze the adjustments that need to be made in the collaborative inquiry process itself when completed with novice teachers. Another fruitful area of study would be to begin such focused collaborative inquiry groups during preservice programs so that novice teachers begin to reflect earlier upon their practice. My experience in teaching at the college level revealed more fragmentation and less integration than is beneficial for novice teachers to experience (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Although these neophytes may be assigned to cohorts for their entire experience and are given group assignments to complete in most of their courses, repeated cycles of action and reflection over an extended period within supportive groups did not occur. It was the sort of support and guidance inherent in the collaborative inquiry process that I hoped to generate during the final classroom management course I taught. That level of reflection was too much to expect for most novice teachers to achieve in a one-unit course during their final preparatory semester. However, I believe the goal of completing deep reflection on their practice might well be achieved if the collaborative inquiry process became part of the comprehensive preservice education program, and I suggest that more research be done to shed greater light upon this promising method.

Discussion of Community Building in the Elementary Classroom

The statement of truth developed by our collaborative inquiry group focused upon
five features, which are listed below and defined what we, as novice teachers, believe constituted the essence of our first-year community building experience.

Orchestrating a community of learners in an elementary classroom, regardless of the age and grade level of the students, involves five key features. First in importance to community building is to foster a sense of caring among all class members whether they give specific compliments, participate in a class cheer, or receive correction for an inappropriate choice. Giving service and showing empathy for one another are consistent practices. The teacher is willing to devote whatever time and energy are necessary to enthusiastically show evidence of her caring. Second is to establish a feeling of mutual respect and belonging. When students have been absent, the teacher and other children demonstrate the absentees were genuinely missed. Class members actively listen to one another during frequent pair sharing and small group interactions. Students and the teacher share in everyone’s joys and sorrows because opportunities are provided to know one another well. Third is to set high expectations for both the teacher and students, understanding that failures are only bumps on the road to success. Seeking personal best is the rule, although it is understood that a person’s best is not the same each day nor in every skill area. Celebrating individual and mutual success is characteristic among the group. Fourth is to actively involve class members in creating and maintaining the classroom environment for learning. The teacher delegates as many duties to students as they are able and willing to accept. Being responsible for the care and management of the classroom gives rise to a sense of mutual ownership and self-efficacy as well as the desire to practice self-responsibility. Fifth, the teacher collaborates with students to provide engaging curriculum that includes options and student choice. Daily learning experiences range from answering essential questions to participating in simulations to teaching one another, to experiencing authentic learning individually or in cooperative groups, all of which motivate focused attention and fix concepts in the memory of class members. These five ingredients, measured and mixed appropriately to fit the teacher’s personality and the students’ qualities, result in a recipe for learning outcomes that exceed what anyone might have imagined possible. (Collaborative Inquiry Rough Draft “Truth” Sheet, p. 1)

Many features delineated in our truth statement about community building are described individually in other studies; yet, our experience was different because we arrived at our synthesis over a year of cycles of reflection and action. We experienced our first year with one another through first-hand interaction rather than second-hand reporting and realized different dimensions from those about which I read in my review of literature.
REFERENCES


VITA

LEAH G. WELTE

Address: 744 East Sunrise Drive
          Orem, Utah 84097

Telephone  Home:  (801) 224-1108
            Cell:  (949) 677-3420

E-mail address: leahwelte@gmail.com

EDUCATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University/College</th>
<th>Fields of Study</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utah State University</td>
<td>Curriculum &amp; Instruction:</td>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional Supervision,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gifted Education,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California, Irvine</td>
<td>9-12 Credential, Social Studies Emphasis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California State University, Los Angeles</td>
<td>Special Education/ Gifted Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California, Los Angeles</td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University/College</th>
<th>Field of Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpine School District Teaching American</td>
<td>Social Studies Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History Grant Colleague, 2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California at Irvine, 2002</td>
<td>Social Studies Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Various Colleges/Universities/ Organizations, 1970’s - Present</td>
<td>Gifted Education courses/seminars; Literacy/mathematics seminars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PROFESSIONAL LICENSING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Professional License</th>
<th>Year Expires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utah Professional Educator License – Level 2</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative/Supervisory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Education (Pre K-3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Elementary Education (1-8)
Gifted Endorsement (Pre K-8)

**California Professional Credentials**
California Administrative Life
California Supervisory Life
California 9-12 Teacher Life
California K-8 Teacher Life

**PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpine School District</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>2008-Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Valley State College</td>
<td>Adjunct Professor/Lecturer</td>
<td>2006-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigham Young University</td>
<td>Researcher/Writer</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education in Zion Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddleback Valley Unified School District</td>
<td>K-8 Teacher</td>
<td>1973-2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K-12 District Administrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>K-6 Principal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COLLEGE COURSES TAUGHT**

Curriculum Design & Assessment
Differentiation for Special Populations
Classroom Management
Early Childhood Guidance
Elementary Leadership – Gifted Education
Special Education of the Gifted
Educational Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Credit/Sections/Semester/Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utah Valley University</td>
<td>EDEL 3350 Curriculum Design</td>
<td>3 credits, 5 sections, F, Sp, 2006-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EDEL 4620 Differentiation of Special Populations</td>
<td>3 credits, 1 section, F 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EDEL 4230 Classroom Management</td>
<td>1 credit, 4 sections, F, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EDEC 2610 Child Guidance</td>
<td>3 credits, 1 section, Sp, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EDEL 4700 Educational Leadership</td>
<td>1 credit, 4 sections, Sp, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California State University</td>
<td>Elementary Education: Special Education of Gifted Students</td>
<td>3 credits, 1 section, F 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at Fullerton</td>
<td>University of La Verne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>3 credits, Sp, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education of Gifted Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMITTEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpine School District</td>
<td>Gifted Advocacy Committee</td>
<td>2009-Current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Valley University</td>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>2007-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddleback Valley Unified School District</td>
<td>Adoption Committees; Principals Hiring Committees</td>
<td>1970’s - 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GRANTS

- Advanced Writing through Technology: Unfinished Application
- A Cultural Crisis: Reverse the Decline in Literary Reading: 2008, not funded
- Secondary Gifted Student Shadowing Program: Funded, 1990-3

SCHOLARLY WORK

- Cognitive Skill Development through Virtual Software: Study in Progress
- Identifying Young Gifted Children with Extremes in Development: A Way to Avoid Underachievement?: Study completed, article Ready for submission, Gifted Child Quarterly
- Caring, Connectedness, and Cooperation: Components for Classroom Community-Building: Study completed, article submitted, Teacher and Teacher Education
- Multiple Intelligences Performance Assessment: Search and Support for Extremes in Diverse Preschool Children: Study Completed
- The Concept of Challenge: Boon or Bane to the Learning of Gifted Elementary Students: Study Discontinued
- The Gifted Brain: What Do We Know and What Can We Do?: Research article in process
- Challenging the Gifted Child, Teacher Created Materials: Published Book

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association
- Utah Association for Gifted Children
- National Association for Gifted Children
- Brainy Bunch Professional Consultants Group
RECENT PRESENTATIONS

2005-2010
National Association for Gifted Children – 2008, 2009
Utah Association for Gifted Children – 2008, 2010
Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association – October, 2008
Utah State University, Education 4200, Guest Lecturer – 2007, 2008
Utah Valley State College Preschool Parent Series – 2008

Multiple presentations made to teacher and parent organizations and at conferences in prior years

RECENT CONSULTING

2005-2010
GAP Conference, Tempe, AZ; breakout sessions
Indian Oasis-Baboquivari School District 40 – two-day presentation
Provo Freedom Academy – three-day presentation
Granite School District Department of Gifted Education – Program Evaluation – five-days
University of California at Irvine Writing Program Fellows – one-day presentation

CONFERENCE ORGANIZER

California Association for Gifted Education State Conference Committee Chair
Orange County Council for Gifted Education County Conference Chair (three times over ten years)

RECOGNITION

Golden Apple Award Winner (School Level, at present; to be forwarded for chapter competition)
Golden Key International Honour Society Member
Mortar Board National Honor Society Secretary, Member
California Association for the Gifted Teacher of the Year, Orange County
Top Ten Orange County Women of the Year Honored Member

SERVICE

Utah Conference on Undergraduate Research Moderator
Utah History Day Judge
Utah Republican Caucus Member