

COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM: AN APPROACH TO CURRICULUM AND  
INSTRUCTION AS A MEANS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT  
COGNITIVE, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN A HIGH SCHOOL  
CLASSROOM

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## Dedication

*“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” (Lao Tzu)*

To my mom and dad, Norah and Big Tom, who I have turned to for physical, emotional, and even financial support as I traveled along this seemingly never-ending path. I most certainly could not have gotten here without your guidance and love. From you I learned the importance of following your dreams and, more importantly, that you're allowed to ask for help along the way.

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### **Abstract**

This purpose of this qualitative research study was to document and analyze the impact of developing an intellectually safe classroom community of inquiry on student cognitive, social, and emotional engagement in a public high school setting on the leeward coast of O'ahu, Hawai'i. This study discusses the implementation of a student-centered curriculum that utilizes the Philosophy for Children (p4c) approach and is aimed at increasing student engagement and improving one's perception of self as a learner. A review of the literature for this study examines research in the fields of engagement, curriculum, inquiry, and teacher reflection. The combined research methods of case study and self-study were used to systematically examine ways in which learning occurred in my classroom in terms cognitive, social and emotional engagement. These qualitative methods were used to collect and analyze data from one class of 38 tenth-grade students over the course of a ten-month school year. Data were derived from multiple sources, including multiple student reflections, follow-up student interviews with five participants, and teacher observations of a critical incident. I coded each set of data for individual themes, and then in relation to one another to identify emerging themes. Implications are discussed in relation to schools, administrators, current educational politics, further research, and my future practice. The importance of fostering and developing student personal engagement in relation to the outside pressures of high-stakes testing and the upcoming implementation of the nationally aligned Common Core State Standards are also addressed. The findings of this study revealed that there is a strong connection between the level of student personal engagement and student academic and personal success. The results from this study can be used to inform

teaching and curriculum development by viewing the classroom as a social setting that allows for insights on how students learn. This dissertation concludes with teacher self-reflection on the process of completing this study, as well as on lessons learned and the development of my personal teaching philosophy.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Rather than cynically theorizing about the problems with schools today, this study explores a “realistic alternative to disengagement” (Zyngier, 2008, p.1773) through the discussion of a student-centered curriculum aimed at the development of student engagement and perception of self. The purpose of this study is to inform teaching and curriculum development by viewing the classroom as a social setting that allows for insights on how students learn. This first chapter of the dissertation presents the problem statements, outlines the purpose of the study, and provides information on the context of the problem.

### **Problem Statement**

In the age of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, curriculum is at risk of becoming something scripted, distanced and impersonal created by professionals outside of the classroom completely unfamiliar with students’ lives. Students’ learning will be limited when we empower the curriculum disseminators, evaluators, advocates and theorists (Schiro, 2008), particularly given that these outside professionals are not familiar with the way in which my particular students learn or with what they are interested in and curious to inquire about. With the educational reform of NCLB came a “shifting of control over public schooling away from the ‘public’ and away from the profession – and toward business-controlled accountability systems” (McNeil, 2000, p. 729). The result is the implementation of a curriculum that risks students losing their opportunity to learn within the classroom due to the fact that what they are being taught may not take into account their identity or interests; it may not fully engage them through cognitive, social, and emotional means. “[T]here can be little discussion of children’s development, of cultural relevance, of children’s contributions to classroom knowledge and interactions, or of those engaging sidebar experiences at the margins of the official curriculum where children often do their best learning” (McNeil, 2000, p. 730). Means-end mandates on curriculum, those focused on a single assessment instead of ongoing processes and growth over time, are becoming more common at the state, district and school levels in the age of NCLB legislation, leaving many teachers to feel unable, unauthorized, and *un*-empowered, in a sense, to include themselves or their students’

identities or interests in the curriculum; the only things that can be taught are those limited topics they are required to address in order to ensure success on the high-stakes test:

Many believe that this required standardized testing is changing the environment of schools and siphoning off time for instruction and enrichment. Instead of inquiring or innovating, children are spending classroom time preparing for the test. Consequently, it is possible to hinder education by considering it only a transmission of knowledge and evaluating all students based on a single standardized test. This leads to the question: Is the purpose of school to encourage learning and creativity? (Levitt, 2008, p. 50)

Furthermore, “teacher-proof materials” are often implemented to reduce the amount of discretion teachers can use to implement curriculum mandates.

The credibility of teachers as professionals in all countries is now being judged more than ever against the ability to deliver government results-driven reform agendas which emphasize success in terms of implicit cause-and-effect relationships between the quality of teaching and pupil achievement across a relatively narrow band of knowledge and skills at key stages in their school lives...Surprisingly, less attention has been given to the impact on learning of the values of school (Goodlad, Soder & Sirotnik, 1990), the relationships between teachers and students (Rudduck, Day & Wallace, 1997) and the quality of teachers’ long-term motivation and intellectual and emotional commitments. (Loughran, 1999, p. 216)

Research suggests (Glasser, 1993; Lipman, 1980; Noddings, 2003) that when students feel they are a part of a nurturing and safe community of inquiry they are more willing to emotionally engage themselves in the learning process. “When students feel safe to speak up in class and take on academic challenges and when they have peers and a caring teacher they can turn to for support, they are more likely to adopt school norms, follow rules, and apply effort in their classes” (Beland, 2007). School is a place where students should feel safe to willingly and actively engage intellectually, socially, and emotionally in the act of learning.

This study focuses on the development and implementation of curriculum that includes the essential establishment of an intellectually safe classroom community of inquiry as a means for allowing students' personal engagement to happen safely, regularly, and productively within the classroom community of inquiry. It is a means for me to systematically study my educational choices and the events in my classroom in order to more closely analyze and to improve my teaching and my students' learning. An additional objective of this study is to examine the ways in which the learning that occurs in my classroom contributes to the growth of my students' identities as learners. Finally, this study promotes the teacher simultaneously playing the role of curriculum practitioner, disseminator, evaluator, and advocate (Schiro, 2008) in order to deliver a more personalized and therefore effectively engaging curriculum.

### **Significance of Study**

Although the need to build community in the classroom has more recently become a common focus of educational research (Splitter, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1997) an aspect of teacher training programs, it is not regularly viewed as an essential part of the learning process. When discussing pre-service teachers in teacher preparatory programs, Heinrich Mintrop (2001) observed, "Eventually, attention to these 'small steps' towards classroom community ceased as planning the 'big unit' became an ever expanding preoccupation" (p. 223). Fostering community, for example, often comes after daily content objectives or test preparation. Furthermore, the idea that learning is an emotional experience, for both the teacher and student, is often ignored. My contribution to the field of education is providing research to support the creation of a community of inquiry as a valuable and essential part of teaching and learning.

Schools can no longer be about "disciplines and subjects, but about what they were originally meant to do—help the young make more sense of life, more sense of experience, more sense of an unknowable future" (Brady, 2006, p. 47). Through research, reflection, and documentation of the implication of my curriculum, I explore and promote the need for the creation of a community of inquiry in the classroom as a means for improved engagement, motivation, and ultimately learning.

The goal of a curriculum, of education, should be to create thoughtful, critical, curious, confident, personally aware, independent students. "Something must be done to

enable children to acquire meanings for themselves. They will not acquire such meanings merely by learning the contents of adult knowledge. They must be taught to think and, in particular, to think for themselves” (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan, 1980, p. 13). However, it is often difficult to take this approach to curriculum without being questioned as to the reasons why and without having to defend the fact that these skills are just as essential as, if not more so than, the basic demonstration of cognitive abilities on a multiple choice test or in response to a prompt that simply requires the regurgitation of content. Alfie Kohn (2004) addresses the focus on testing as a means of evaluating educational systems, practices, and outcomes:

These days almost anything can be done to students and to schools, no matter how ill-considered, as long as it can be done in the name of raising standards...Schools are being turned into giant test-prep centers, and many students – as well as some educators – are being forced out. (p. 41)

Kohn’s claim is a call to action, addressing the need to create classroom environments that focus on and value authentic learning over test preparation as a means of enhancing the learning experience for both the students and teachers.

### **Justification of Study**

Research (Costa & Kallick, 2008; Loughran, Berry & Mulhall, 2006; Goodlad, 2004) supports that the curriculum, as well as classroom environment, should aim to “create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to [engage] simply in a game of transferring knowledge” (Freire, 2001, p.49). Instead, NCLB has resulted in an educational environment in which a student’s individual score on one specific high-stakes assessment has become the focus in our country as the main indicator of learning. Such a curriculum is opposite to what the aforementioned scholars propose. They propose engaging the student in interaction with the content as a means to personally develop over time. This external pressure to align curriculum to external testing eliminates any encouragement to “develop individual differences, creative thinking, innovation, or individual potentials, some of the very things in our public education system that, in the past, have helped to make ours a great nation” (Gentry, 2006, p. 24). Individual cognitive growth is not considered in the broad sense; high-stakes tests examine which groups of students have met a specific score on narrowly

focused assessments in order to determine if the school has maintained Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):

A system of education that reduced student learning to scores on a single test...rules out the possibility of discussing student learning in terms of cognitive and intellectual development, in terms of growth, in terms of social awareness and social conscience, in terms of social and emotional development. (McNeil, p. 733)

Ultimately, children are deemed ‘educated’ if they have achieved the arbitrary test score on a single test. As teachers feel increasingly pressured to ensure their students pass the test, they have less time available to dedicate to purposeful and authentic learning experiences (Kohn, 2004, McNeil, 2000). Teachers must truly know and understand their students and the ways in which they learn and as a result, as Freire (2005) has suggested, classrooms can become institutions of oppression. He identifies the following attitudes and practices as being among those often present in the classroom to be reflective of oppressive society as a whole:

The teacher teaches and the students are taught; the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; ...the teacher talks and the students listen – meekly; ...the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; ...the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it; ...the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, which the pupils are mere objects (p. 73).

Rather, students need the tools to become critical thinkers who internalize and interact with the content, and then are provided opportunities to develop skills in order to actively engage in the learning process and make meaning from texts and events. However, the climate of NCLB favors rote memorization over inquiry; seldom is there room to personalize the curriculum in order to fully engage, motivate, and invite students to become active participants in the learning process. Instead, students memorize and repeat back without processing the meaning or making personal connections to content. This approach to teaching and learning “turns them into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher, and the more completely she fills the receptacles, the better teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better



students they are” (Freire, 1998, p. 71). Reducing learning to a series of test scores depersonalizes learning and teaching:

First, the individual scores ignore the social and collaborative aspects of learning. Second, in the reporting of scores, children are subsumed into depersonalized, often meaningless, aggregates...The accountability system likewise depersonalizes teachers, flattening any representation of their particular practice into the aggregate pass rates for their schools. (McNeil, p. 733)

This study explores the impact of using a community-centered approach to curriculum on student perception of self as a learner, as well as on their levels of cognitive, social and emotional engagement during the collective learning process over the course of the school year. Data were analyzed from all phases of community development, specifically on a community “break down” that occurred during the Emerging stage and threatened to prevent all learning, engagement, and further community development. Relying on the initial sense of community we had been able to establish prior to this incident acted as the stimulus for reflection and self-correction, as well as reminded students that their voices and feelings were valued within this environment. “Caring classrooms...enhance opportunities for student engagement by developing supportive relationships, increasing opportunities for participation in school life, and allowing for the pursuit of academic success” (Zins, et al., 2004, p. 62). The visual, physical and emotional establishment of a community provide the foundation of authentic learning, that which is significant and meaningful, to occur.

### **Operational Definitions**

#### **Curriculum**

The term *curriculum* is of Latin origin, coming from the French verb *currere*, meaning ‘to run’. “Translated to English, curriculum means, roughly, a course, as in *running a course*. Over time and for school purposes, it has come to signify a course of study” (Ellis, 2004, p. 3).

To the extent that curriculum is test-driven, as it is in current No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and other outcomes-based educational mandates on curriculum at the state, district and school level curriculum narrows to what is tested, and this presents a hurdle for teachers who aim to balance a reflective approach to curriculum with a

predictive one. The narrowed scope of test-driven curriculum often leaves teachers feeling like they cannot include themselves or their students' identities or interests in the curriculum; the only things that can be taught are those limited topics they are required to address in order to ensure success on the high-stakes test. Students' individual spontaneous inquiry is ignored, limiting their personal<sup>1</sup> engagement with the content and therefore restricting authentic, personalized learning experiences. Furthermore, Klein has stated that schools often require implementation of "teacher-proof materials...to minimize teachers' discretion in implementing curriculum mandates. In this view, the primary function of the classroom is the incorporation of critical basic skills into children who are seen as vessels to be filled" (Klein, 1991, p.183). A teacher's personal philosophy or professional judgment about students' needs may not be reflected in their curriculum due to constraining outside demands and expectations. Instead, classrooms become "an environment where results, not intellectual exploration, are what count" (Kohn, 2004, p. 32).

For the purposes of my teaching and this study, I use *curriculum* to describe a model that is a combination of both the prescriptive and descriptive models. Therefore, I use it as an all-encompassing term to define the plan for learning in terms of subject specific content, standards to be addressed, activities, skills, objectives, and assessments. Additionally I use *curriculum* to refer to those unplanned experiences that arise and redirect the learning based on both teachers' expertise and students' interests and needs. In such a curriculum there is time for encouragement of students' "initiative, exploration, individual and team efforts, creativity, differing interests, and multiple ways to learn" (Ellis, p. 13). As such, curriculum, as I define it in this study, is organic and dynamic in the sense that it is not delivered in a strictly pre-determined way, or over again in the same way. Content is explored and addressed with student interest and ability in mind, while also providing students challenges to think and act, and while promoting activity over passivity. "Only through the continual and sympathetic observation of childhood's interest can the adult enter into the child's life and see what it is ready for, and upon what material it could work most readily and fruitfully (Dewey, 1929, p. 22). Curriculum, as I

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term *personal engagement* to refer to the combination of cognitive, social, and emotional engagement.

use it in this dissertation, is also reflective as it responds to the inquiry and emotion of both the teacher and students.

### **Personal Engagement**

Student engagement can be described as “active involvement, commitment, and concentrated attention, in contrast to superficial participation, apathy or lack of interest” (Joselowsky, 2007, pg. 258). Dr. Thomas Jackson from the University of Hawaii at Manoa clarifies, “Total engagement incorporates physical, intellectual and emotional aspects” (personal communication, March 31, 2009). The acknowledgement and inclusion of all three in both the curriculum and classroom environment are necessary conditions for allowing students to feel comfortable taking educational risks; therefore, each requires an amount of individual vulnerability of both teacher and student. I refer to this type of engagement as “*personal engagement*”, a situation opposite of that in which students and teacher remain in a distanced and impersonal relationship with one another. For the purposes of this research, I use the term *personal engagement* to refer to the combination of cognitive, social and emotional engagements as a necessary environmental condition for authentic learning to occur. A classroom that aims for authentic personal engagement is one that primarily values self-disclosure, mutual trust, and provides opportunities to engage with invitations to participate. It is one that nurtures a deep interconnectedness among participants through a shared ethic of being cared for, supported, respected and valued (Noddings, 2003). When a student feels engaged in this manner they internalize content due to the fact that they feel a part of it. This type of environment is one that requires communication and thinking as a means to advance; as such, students develop a deeper level of cognitive ability due to increased willingness to engage as both their social and emotional safety enhances.

### **Community of Inquiry**

An ongoing goal of my curriculum is to foster a sense of community in the classroom, a feeling that goes beyond simply having a common goal with those who are in the same space. In this sense, *community* refers to a sense of belonging and truly knowing one another. With this comes a sense of obligation to inform, acknowledge, perform, and share ideas with one’s peers. “Learning isn’t something that happens to individual children — separate selves at separate desks. Children learn with and from one

another in a caring community” (Kohn, 2008). The purpose of such a community of inquiry is to “bring participants into deeper and more significant relationships, to shake them free of their complacency, their false convictions and to make them available for more comprehensive understanding” (Sharp, 1993, p. 340). Discussion of aspects of my curriculum that aim to create a sense of community in the classroom is included in Chapter 3.

### **Research Questions**

My qualitative research study will tell the *story* of my classroom, the journey of my students and establishment of relationships, in an effort to systematically study and respond to the question, “How does the development of a classroom community of inquiry impact students’ cognitive, social and emotional engagement?” I aim to explore the notion of authentic learning taking place through a curriculum that seeks to engage students cognitively, socially and emotionally in order to invite students to become active participants in their own learning as opposed to remaining passive recipients (Freire, 1998; Purkey, 1990).

During the early stages of this study I continued to negotiate my purpose (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in an effort to select a research focus that related to my personal beliefs about education. Ultimately I determined that my objective was to clearly and effectively explain my personal teaching philosophy as it is manifested in my curriculum and classroom environment as a means to explore the notion of personal engagement. Systematically studying my teaching and my students’ learning allows me to understand more fully student cognitive, social and emotional engagement through the implementation of an inviting curriculum. In order to fully explore the outcomes of this analysis, I created two sub-questions to also be addressed:

- In what ways does a reflective community of inquiry contribute to student self-awareness and perception of self as a learner?
- In what ways does a reflective community of inquiry contribute to teacher self-awareness?

The inclusion of these follow-up questions allowed me to explore evidence of changes in student engagement and self-perception, analyze student narrative reflections, and reflect

on parallels in my personal experiences in relation to the body of research on teacher self-perception.

### **Conclusion**

There are numerous expectations placed upon public school teachers with regard to job effectiveness. In the climate of NCLB, this effectiveness can be solely based on student performance on a single state assessment. Teaching practices may be brought into question if students are unable to ‘make the grade’. Teachers often struggle with the clash between personal teaching philosophy and outside expectations placed upon them. In order to successfully engage students, teachers must truly know and understand them and the ways in which they learn. If a student is not personally engaged, he or she will remain a distant participant in learning; education becomes something that takes place around them and happens to them as opposed to being an activity in which they choose to actively engage. Sadly, this often becomes quite a challenge due to the fact that though it falls within quality teaching methods, there may not be ‘room’ in the curriculum to thoroughly and effectively do so.

Often a teacher’s personal philosophy is not reflected in the classroom curriculum due to outside demands and expectations. “They have adapted to an environment where results, not intellectual exploration, are what count” (Kohn, 2004, p. 32). As a result, individual spontaneous inquiry is often ignored, limiting students’ personal engagement with the content, therefore restricting authentic learning experiences and often creating feelings of indifference and isolation for students. “Due to a variety of pressures, both internal and external, the typical classroom teacher does not appear to have time for children’s genuine wondering and questioning, from which structured inquiries can grow” (Jackson, 2001, p. 459). Frequently, they become institutions of isolation that discourage individual development in order to promote a common educational goal that must be equally met by all.

This study uses the qualitative research methods of case study and self study to examine the way in which the implementation of a curriculum that goes against this typical model of education that is not student-centered, focused on community development, or allows for individual inquiry, impacts student cognitive, social, and emotional engagement.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

A review of the literature for this study required an examination of research in the fields of engagement, curriculum, inquiry and teacher reflection. The purpose of this research is to explore student engagement by employing a combination of case study and self-study qualitative methodologies. Four themes emerged from my review of the literature in relation to my research question and sub questions: a) student engagement; b) curriculum; c) communities of inquiry; and d) reflective teaching. Each is contextually defined through an examination of the literature in the following sections.

### **Engagement**

Though the phrase “student engagement” is frequently used in educational environments, it is often too generally defined as a student’s participation in learning. Broad references to student engagement being a combination of behaviors and attitudes (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; Smerdon, 1999) cause difficulty for teachers who are expected to attain the objective of engaging students. Similarly, it is often used as an all-encompassing term to explain the reason why a student is performing below standards, expectations, and ability. Teachers frequently refer to a lack of engagement to explain a difficult group of students; they are just not willing to engage. “Many teachers who constantly see disengaged students put the burden on the student and lament that they could be better teachers and have better results if they had the opportunity to work with a “better” group of students” (2). Claims that students are simply unmotivated contribute to the view that they actively *choose* to be disengaged. However, “simply telling or encouraging students to engage themselves in their class work is seldom enough” (Jones, 2008, p. 1). Students show engagement by seeking out activities and displaying their curiosity, a desire to learn, and positive emotional responses to the process of learning (Newmann, 1992). Authentic, meaningful engagement, though observable, is an internal action.

It is often stated (Kohn, 2004; Lightfoot, 1985; Meier, 1995) and therefore believed that schools tend to be impersonal spaces that fail to individually and personally engage students. Often they become “institutions of isolation” (Delpit, 2006, p.179) that discourage individual development in order to promote a common educational goal that

must be equally met by all. As a result, students become disengaged with and distanced from the learning process. In order to provide an engaging learning environment that implements a curriculum aimed at improving both cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, opposed to a creating a classroom community of inquiry focused on rote memorization and student passivity, individual student interests must be taken into account.

“Intellectual interests...should be respected and promoted” (Noddings, 2003, p. 197). Students’ interest in learning is strengthened as their emotional needs are met, those beyond the basic biological level. The degree to which a student’s needs are met contributes to student engagement in school, which links positive feelings about school with academic success (Zins et al, 2004).

Abraham Maslow (1943) proposed that the extent to which our needs are met predicts how well we function, which he presented as *Man’s Hierarchy of Needs*:



Figure 1: This figure illustrates Maslow’s *Hierarchy of Needs*.

After one’s biological and psychological needs (i.e. breathing, food, water) are met, the next required to be satisfied in order to move up the hierarchy and reach self-actualization are those of safety, and then belonging and being loved. The acknowledgement and inclusion of one’s personal interests in the curriculum can result in these needs being met within the classroom environment. This leads to one’s need for a feeling of safety to be satisfied, thus allowing the student more willingly engage due to an increased sense of belonging.

Fred Newmann (1986) wrote, “engagement is difficult to define operationally, but we know it when we see it, and we know it when it is missing” (p. 242). In his noteworthy book *Student Achievement in American Secondary Schools (1992)*, Newmann identifies internal student attitudes that externally exhibit engagement, such as an intrinsic level of participation and interest in school; taking pride not only in grades, but in understanding and internalizing the material; and the “psychological investment in and

effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills, or crafts that academic work is intended to promote" (1992, p. 12). Engagement is a multidimensional construct that manifests itself in many forms within the classroom environment, and is not limited to the students. The teacher must also be an actively engaged participant in the learning who enters the classroom open to new ideas, questions, and curiosities presented by the students in order to actively make curriculum decisions aimed at fostering student engagement (Freire, 1998).

Lev Vygotsky (1978) defines one's *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* as "those functions which have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation... These functions could be termed the 'buds' or 'flowers' of development rather than the 'fruits' of development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.86). Roland Tharp and Ronald Gallimore (1988) elaborate to define the ZPD as, "the distance between the child's individual capacity and the capacity to perform with assistance" and discuss a teacher's means of assisting performance in order to move through the ZPD by utilizing the strategies of modeling, contingency management, feeding-back, instructing, questioning, cognitive structuring, and ultimately, interdependence (p. 30). These strategies are placed on a continuum, starting with modeling and ending with cognitive structuring; as a student moves along this continuum they are taking steps closer to becoming a self-regulated individual. The effective teacher continually negotiates students' interaction to assure that they move through their ZPD and ultimately become self-regulated individuals. Cognitive engagement is not the result of education happening *to* someone; it is a process that requires active participation as well as socialization. The role of the More Knowledgeable Other, one who has an understanding and level of ability higher than the learner, assists the student's growth and cognitive development. Although the implication is that the More Knowledgeable Other is a teacher, student peers may also play this role if a sense of community has been established and the curriculum is student-centered.

Jeremy Finn (1989) defines engagement as a combination of external behaviors in accordance with expectations and an individual's sense of identity in the educational setting. Finn presents a model of student engagement with two central components, *participation* and *identification*:



*Participation*, the behavioral component, includes basic behaviors such as the student's acquiescence to school and class rules, arriving at school and class on time, attending to the teacher, and responding to teacher-initiated directions and questions. Noncompliant behavior...represents a student's failure to meet these basic requisites. Other levels of participation include initiative-taking on the part of the student...and participation in the social, extracurricular, and athletic aspects of school life. *Identification*, the affective component, refers to the student's feelings of belonging in the school setting...and valuing the outcomes that school will provide...(Zyngier, 2008, p. 1769).

Similarly, David Zyngier (2008) reviews psychological definitions of engagement to identify it as a combination of student behaviors, emotions, and cognitive abilities:

Psychological definitions are commonly a mix of (i) *behavioural* aspects of the student as doing the work, following the rules, persisting and participating, while (ii) the *emotional* aspects centre interest, value and feelings (negative and positive) towards the school, the class the teacher and (iii) *cognitive* engagement (psychological investment) includes motivation, effort and strategy use of students. These views see student engagement as something students *do* and that teachers can *organise* for them. (p. 1769)

As a classroom teacher, I have been indoctrinated on the typical perceived values of student engagement, which include creating self-regulated learners, increasing motivation, facing fewer classroom management issues, and improving academic achievement. These are often considered to be the only positive outcomes of engagement; however, I argue that there are others. Therefore, the beneficial areas of engagement to be explored in this research study include student participation, interest, investment, willingness to take educational risks, and cognitive, social and emotional engagement.

### **Cognitive Engagement**

Cognitive engagement is often perceived as academic success documented by passing a test, earning a high grade, or receiving academic honors. Grades tend to emphasize “the acquisition of factual knowledge, primarily because it is what is most easily evaluated; moreover, it tends to emphasize correct answer, since it is the correct

answer on the straightforward examination that can be graded as ‘correct’” (Bruner, 2003, p. 66). However, the type and amount of participation in the learning process directly relates to the level of retention of content information; the deeper and more authentic the level of engagement, the greater the chance of long-term and meaningful retention (Freire, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 2003). If a student is not engaged in processing information, then an authentic investment is impossible. “To instill such attitudes [e.g. those supporting authentic investment in learning] by teaching requires something more than the mere presentation of fundamental ideas...it would seem that an important ingredient is a sense of excitement about discovery” (Bruner, 2003, p. 20).

Jean Piaget’s (1973) constructivist theory views learning as a result of a student’s activity and exposure to the world around them. From this perspective, learning is constructed from building new knowledge upon a foundation of prior knowledge. “To understand is to discover, or reconstruct by rediscovery, and such conditions must be complied with if in the future individuals are to be formed who are capable of production and creativity and not simply repetition” (Piaget, 1973, p. 20). Teachers incorporate this theory into the classroom by creating developmentally appropriate lessons, providing a foundation for ideas and opportunities for learning, and allowing opportunities for practice in order to internalize knowledge (Byrnes, 2001.)

Benjamin Bloom’s (1956) *Taxonomy of Cognitive Domain* classifies learning objectives in terms of acquiring knowledge and developing intellectual skills: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation. In theory, as a student moves up to the more complex levels of the taxonomy they are demonstrating a greater level of engagement. Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl (2001) revised Bloom’s Taxonomy to create their *Taxonomy of Affective Domain*, which is organized according to the principle of internalization. “Internalization refers to the process whereby a person's affect toward an object passes from a general awareness level to a point where the affect is 'internalized' and consistently guides or controls the person's behavior” (Seels & Glasgow, 1990, p. 28).

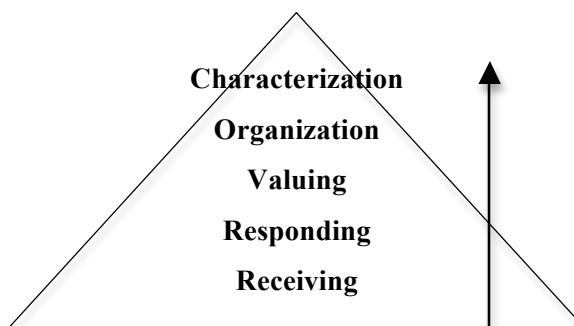


Figure 2: This figure illustrates Anderson & Krathwohl's (2002) *Hierarchy of Affective Domain*.

**Receiving:** Awareness of/sensitivity to existence of ideas and willingness to tolerate them.

**Responding:** Commitment to ideas by actively responding to them.

**Valuing:** Willingness to be perceived by others as valuing certain ideas.

**Organization:** Relating to the value to those already held and internalizing it as a consistent philosophy.

**Characterization:** Acting consistently in accordance with internalized values.

(Krathwohl, D.R., Bloom, B.S., and Masia, B.B., 1964)

To attain to the objectives of Krathwohl's model means that as teachers we encourage students to go beyond the basic receiving of information to respond to the content, to value it, to organize it, and ultimately to place themselves within that content. Whereas Bloom's objective was an external demonstration of skills, Krathwohl's is an internalization of an emotional connection with the content. Jean Piaget's (1973) constructivist theory views learning as a result of a student's activity and exposure to the world around them. From this perspective, learning is constructed from building new knowledge upon a foundation of prior knowledge. "To understand is to discover, or reconstruct by rediscovery, and such conditions must be complied with if in the future individuals are to be formed who are capable of production and creativity and not simply repetition" (Piaget, 1973, p. 20). Teachers incorporate this theory into the classroom by creating developmentally appropriate lessons, providing a foundation for ideas and opportunities for learning, and allowing opportunities for practice in order to internalize knowledge (Byrnes, 2001).

### **Social Engagement**

Social engagement refers to those instances when students willingly and actively contribute to the classroom community's inquiry. The concept of social engagement

aligns with Vygotsky's (1962) theory of constructing knowledge through social interaction with the goal of creating the self-regulating individual who has the "capacity to plan, guide, and monitor his or her behavior from within and flexibly according to changing circumstances" (Moll, 1990, p. 130). Research (Dewey, 1916; Lipman, 1993) supports the idea that cognitive gains do not occur when students work in isolation; social interaction is an essential aspect of learning that teachers can incorporate in the classroom environment to aid in the development of cognition. Vygotsky challenged the assumption of "thinking and learning as intrinsic to the isolated individual" (Bredo & McDermott, 1992, p. 31). Based on this perspective, a shared interaction among all participants sets the stage for meaningful learning experiences and exchanges. Dialogue allows thinking to become more than an individual, internal thought process. It also prevents loneliness and rejection through the inclusion of all students and creates a forum where the students can utilize and hone their good thinking skills and actively contribute to the learning community as a whole:

Very often, when people engage in dialogue with one another, they are compelled to reflect, to concentrate, to consider alternatives, to listen closely, to give careful attention to definitions and meanings, to recognize previously unthought-of options and in general to perform a vast number of mental activities that they might not have engaged in had the conversation never occurred. (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980, p. 22)

Tharp and Gallimore (1991) present the concept of instructional conversations, a strategy I believe to be essential in the classroom aimed at improving students' skills of inquiry and increasing personal engagement. Instructional conversations cognitively engage students with one another and the teacher through social means, fostering the classroom community of inquiry. During instructional conversations, "the teacher encourages expression of students' own ideas, builds upon students' experiences and ideas, and guides them to increasingly sophisticated levels of understanding" (Wilens, 1994). This structure is a less guided master-novice conversation that aides students in moving beyond what they think and inquire about on their own, ultimately enhances their movement through their ZPD. The teacher becomes a co-inquirer in the discussion, offering only facilitation as a means to enhance the level of thinking and discussion.

Because the constructivist approach relies on prior knowledge, it is essential that the teacher is aware of a student's existing knowledge and ability in order to encourage and assist them in increasing their level of understanding as they move through their ZPD. Byrnes (2001) concludes that this approach aids in increasing motivation and promoting higher-order thinking skills, as relevance has been linked to motivation and motivation has been linked to higher-order thinking.

As these social engagement theorists convey, teachers must create learning environments centered on classroom dialogue that is student-centered in order to contribute to a meaningful educational environment. In order to improve cognitive engagement, students' thinking processes must develop in conjunction with dialogue, not independent of it. This theory is traced back to Socrates who questioned groups of his students and encourage them to think a problem through to a logical conclusion together. This dialectic method came to be known as the Socratic method. (Phillips, 2001). Thinking has often been assumed to be individual and internal; however, in a safe public forum, good thinking depends on dialogue, just as dialogue depends on good thinking.

### **Emotional Engagement**

Emotional engagement refers to "one's emotional response while undertaking a particular task," which ultimately includes "positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to work" (Fredricks et al., 2004, p.123). Education is traditionally viewed as an individual task that creates a separation between those who can and those who cannot succeed. It is the intentional "manipulation of students toward predetermined ends and ignores the experience of the students themselves, viewing it as a contamination of the process" (Hopkins, 1994, p. 12).

Carl Rogers (1995) believes human beings have a natural tendency to learn, and that the role of the teacher is to act as facilitator of this learning. This includes not only creating a positive classroom climate, but also balancing intellectual and emotional aspects of learning, which he refers to as *empathic learning*: "To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another's world without prejudice" (p. 139). A large body of research (Dewey, 1895; Jasper, 2006; Ratner, 1989; Scheffler, 1977) supports the concept

of emotion being tied to cognition, and considers emotional experiences to be the core of rational behavior and thought. This theory can be traced all the way back to Plato's adage, "All learning has an emotional base" (Emmerling, Shanwal & Mandal, p. 161, 2008).

William Glasser's (1993) Choice Theory offers reasons for purposefully and intentionally integrating and inviting emotions into the curriculum:

Choice Theory explains that we will work hard for those we care about (belonging), for those we respect and who respect us (power), for those with whom we can laugh (fun), for those who allow us to think and act for ourselves (freedom), and for those who help us make our lives secure (survival). The more that all five of these needs are satisfied in our relationship with the manager who asks us to do the work, the harder we will work for that manager. (p. 24)

Glasser asserts that engagement is the result of internal emotional desires; when students view schoolwork as irrelevant to their needs, they become unmotivated to interact with the content. According to Glasser, an individual's behavior is never due to external factors but is rather a result of internal inspiration and desire to fulfill personal wants and needs with quality content. "All human beings have five basic needs: love, power, freedom, fun and survival...Quality, therefore, is anything we experience that is consistently satisfying to one of more of these basic needs" (p. 15). From this perspective, relevant teaching addresses students' most basic emotional needs in order to promote an environment that encourages behaviors that demonstrate a willingness to engage and result in personal engagement and authentic learning. The more these needs are satisfied in relationship to those around us, not just the one in charge, the more we are willing to work for the greater good. In the classroom, the 'greater good' is the community of inquiry; a student becomes more motivated to work towards the group's understanding, and to participate in the process of inquiry when they feel a sense of attachment and obligation to the process and not just to the teacher. Connecting back one's *Hierarchy of Needs*, Maslow argues we make decisions in order to guard ourselves against fear, such as the fear of actively participating, of verbally sharing, of being wrong, or of being vulnerable. If these fears can be reduced or even eliminated by

fostering a sense of community in the classroom, then students can put down their guard to more actively participate in the learning process.

Nel Noddings (1992), a leading promoter of the need to integrate an ethic of care in the classroom, defines a caring relation as, “a connection or encounter between two human beings” (p.15). Noddings argues that individuals cannot be complete if those around them are unhappy. Sadly, this is not a lesson our schools often teach or take into consideration when developing curriculum or classroom management plans; caring about another’s success is not the message often promoted in a classroom environment among students. The aims of facilitating the emotional engagement of students include fostering ties to the classroom community of inquiry that reflect and allow students to feel they are an essential part of the community’s learning, are responsible to participate in the learning experience of the entire community, and remain vulnerable and flexible in order to be open and receptive to the learning taking place. “As your students get to know you, they will, in turn, reveal more and more about themselves. As they do, you will gain much of the closeness that is needed if you are to satisfy the first condition of quality” (Glasser, 1993, p. 25). Authentic emotional engagement will not take place if the environment does not create opportunities or promote or value genuine student emotion and voice within a democratic, student-centered, trusting, reflective community. “There is no integration of character and mind unless there is fusion of the intellectual and the emotional, of meaning and value, of fact and imaginative running beyond fact into the realm of desired possibilities” (Dewey, 1933, p. 278).

### **Curriculum**

Broad definitions of *curriculum*, “assume that almost everything that goes on in schools can be classified or discussed in terms of curriculum,” and even that the term itself is synonymous with *education* (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988, p. 7). For the purposes of this study, use of the term curriculum expresses a learner-centered ideology, one that takes into account the “feelings, perceptions, and attitudes of individuals and groups that develop over time” (Ellis, 2004, p. 11). The purpose of my learner-centered curriculum is to stimulate personal engagement “by designing experiences from which people can make meaning, fulfill their needs, and pursue their interests” (Schiavo, 2008, p. 176).

Curriculum is often viewed as a “pre-existent artifact, pre-existent in the sense that it is completed, ready to go, and all that is lacking is implementation” (Ellis, 2004, p. 5). This type of *prescriptive* curriculum is most commonly found “in state or district curriculum guides, in textbooks and related materials adopted for school use in various subject areas” (p. 5). Prescriptive definitions of curriculum explain “what ‘ought’ to happen, and they more often than not take the form of a plan, an intended program, or some kind of expert opinion about what needs to take place in the course of study” (p. 4). Prescriptive models are most concerned with the ends rather than the means of a curriculum. In contrast, *descriptive* definitions explain what occurred when the planned curriculum was implemented:

[Descriptive definitions] provide ‘glimpses’ of the curriculum in action, although those glimpses are only occasionally based on systematic observation and empirical evidence from classrooms. Rather they tend to be descriptive in the sense that whatever one might happen to see occurring in classrooms is in fact the curriculum. The key term in descriptive definitions is ‘experience’. (Ellis, 2004, p. 5)

Arthur Ellis argues that a teacher must not choose one model or the other, but rather adopt a combination of both. “A purposeful school curriculum must be built on a foundation of freedom and opportunity on one hand, and responsibility and restraint on the other” (p. 13).

Educational reforms in the last decade have seemingly altered the term *curriculum* to refer to a framework created by a set of standards that must be met by all students on a state-mandated test. Ross Perot’s Texas school reforms, which began in the mid-1980s and spanned nearly a decade, initiated “copycat legislation in a number of states, where standardized testing of students is increasingly being used as the central mechanism for decisions about student learning, teacher and administrator practice, and even whole-school quality” (McNeil, p.729).

### **Communities of Inquiry**

Researchers contend that the creation of a community of inquiry “makes it possible for children to see themselves as active thinkers rather than passive learners, as discoverers rather than receptacles, and as valuable and valued human beings rather than



resources or commodities” (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 21). There is a clear, observable difference between the student engaged simply by listening to directions and completing the assignment, and a student internalizing the knowledge, connecting and relating to it, and expanding individual thought into collaborative inquiry. William Purkey and John Novak address Dewey’s (1929) notion of the importance of being a member of a classroom community:

[B]eing a unique member of a meaningful group is important for both the individual and the group...the more democratic a group is, the more the group experience builds on the unique perspectives and interests of its members, and this the more the group experience becomes a source of educational development for all involved. (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 50)

It is in a student’s best interest to engage in the learning process in order to improve the level of inquiry for the group. However, students seldom have this perspective when entering the classroom; therefore, it is a teacher’s responsibility to be aware of ways in which to create an inviting environment that frequently encourages students to do so in a safe way. Matthew Lipman (2003) identifies 15 features of communities of inquiry. The following three are most relevant to the development of a reflective learning community:

- a. *Inclusiveness*. Within a community no one is excluded from internal activities without adequate justification.
- b. *Participation*. Communities of inquiry encourage but do not require participants to participate verbally as equals.
- c. *Shared cognition*. In a private reflection, an individual will engage in a series of mental acts aimed at penetrating and analyzing the matter at hand. In shared cognition, the same acts (wondering, questioning, inferring, defining, assuming, supposing, imagining and distinguishing) are engaged in, but by different members of the community. (p. 95)

Additional indicators identify and explain what emerges and becomes more effective as the community of inquiry grows over time, but are not readily applicable or possible at the start. These characteristics include: seeks meaning, creates a sense of solidarity, promotes individual thinking, and is impartial, challenging, reasonable, reflective and curious through discussion.

Within a community of inquiry, students participate in intellectual and social engagement respectfully with one another. From a socially constructivist perspective, meaning is constructed as a result of “opportunities to determine, challenge, change or add to existing beliefs and understandings through engagement in tasks that are structured for this purpose” (Richardson, 2003, p.1624). A community of inquiry provides a forum for students to actively participate in the act of learning, moving it from an external act to an internal one. Such participation provides those without confidence an opportunity to gain it and fulfills the basic human need for identity and recognition (Noddings, 2003). “Through taking part in thoughtful, reflective discussions, children gain confidence in their ability to think on their own” (Lipman, et. al., 1980, p.131). As students come to understand and appreciate that there are few, if any, ‘wrong’ answers and possibly more than one ‘right’ answer, the community of inquiry provides them with a forum to safely exchange and develop ideas and come to value the ideas of others. The purpose of a community of inquiry is to “bring participants into deeper and more significant relationships, to shake them free of their complacency, their false convictions and to make them available for more comprehensive understanding” (Sharp, 1993, p. 340).

Jerome Allender (2001) contends that when students feel they are a significant aspect of the community of inquiry, their individual role as a community contributor is important, there are fewer behavior problems to distract from the act of learning. “Learners must be active participants in the creation of a caring classroom community” (Zins et al., 2004), and as such it is essential that the teacher create a curriculum that invites students to do so within a safe, inviting environment. These beliefs are reflected in my curriculum, as discussed in Chapter 3, and are therefore a focus of my study. I explore the impact a student’s emotional connection and responsibility to the group’s progress within a community of inquiry has on their level of cognitive and social engagement within that community.

### **Reflective Teaching**

The final aspect of this literature review is reflective teaching. The research of Parker Palmer, John Dewey, and Donald Schon contend that reflection is a crucial component of the teaching profession. If we choose to ignore the voice of our inward teacher, “it will either stop speaking or become violent... When we honor that voice with

simple attention, it responds by speaking more gently and engaging us in a life-giving conversation of the soul (Palmer, 1998, p. 32).

Dewey defines reflective action as “that which involves active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or practice in light of the reasons that support it and the further consequences to which it leads” (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 9). Dewey is considered to be “the first educational theorist in the United States to view teachers as reflective practitioners, as professionals who could play very active roles in curriculum development and educational reform” (1996, p. 8). As such, his arguments will assist in providing a history for theories of teacher reflection to support my claim that reflection is a significant aspect of teaching, as both an action that takes place in the moment as well as one that occurs after to allow the teacher to make decisions based on thoughtful analysis and self-talk.

Schon (1983) uses the distinction of *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. Reflection-*in*-action is the process that allows us to reshape what we are doing as we are doing it. Reflection-*on*-action is when we think back on what we have done “in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome” (p. 26). In terms of the classroom, reflection-on-action “occurs before a lesson when we plan for and think about our lesson and after instruction when we consider what occurred... While we are teaching, we attempt to adjust our instruction to take into account these reflections. (Zeichner and Daniel Liston, 1996, p. 14) Therefore, a truly reflective practitioner does not only wait until after the moment, but is able to remain insightful while facilitating in order to make adjustments to increase effectiveness. Such active, ‘live’ reflection allows for meaning making, problem identification, generation of possible reasons to explain the event, and self-correction.

Parker Palmer’s (1998) notion of *self-knowledge* argues that if a teacher does not know himself or herself they cannot know their students, which is an essential aspect of authentic teaching and learning:

Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in the mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject (1998, p.2)

It is only through self-reflection that a teacher gains self-knowledge.

### **Summary and Initial Conclusions**

Students' curiosity, inquiry, and natural sense of wonder need "a place to grow, breathe and make sense. [T]he authentic 'Aha!' experience requires risk on the part of the learner, and a climate of trust and safety is essential for all of these things to happen" (Bluestein, 2001, p. 210). Trust is a fundamental component of the inviting process, as students are "most likely to thrive in an atmosphere of trust... This involves maintaining a warm, caring relationship with students, one in which teachers can be 'real' with themselves and others" (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 50). Teachers in a constructivist classroom act as a guide in discovering areas where the student lacks understanding, has misunderstanding, or may need assistance. The utilization of a Philosophy for Children (p4c) approach is what allows me to create the type of intellectually safe community environment that I know is crucial to my students' cognitive, social and emotional engagements, and is therefore an essential aspect of their educational experience and growth. Only by investing time to develop an awareness of students' cognitive, social and emotional aptitudes can a teacher make the curriculum relevant, and therefore meaningful.

A challenge to creating such an environment is that students are not automatically invested in empathic learning in such a way, nor do all educational institutions value such investment. Often the curriculum does not invite, nor encourage students to participate in a way that generates willingness to care for others' experience or views. I argue that the feeling of emotional safety, being able to act, think and feel without fear, allows for intellectual safety, and that this safety is a necessary condition for engagement in learning within the classroom environment.

Dewey (1933) explains reflective thought as that which, "1) involves a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and 2) an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity" (p. 12). From Dewey's perspective, the act of reflection is not complete without action (Rogers, 1995). The completion of this research study will be the 'action' that results from my continued and intense reflection, ultimately shaping my perception of self as an educator. This study relies heavily on teacher reflection to

construct self-knowledge. This is mirrored in my curriculum as well, as it promotes student self-reflection as a tool for individual growth and development. As the teacher-researcher, this knowledge allows me to gain insight into my personal teaching practices. This is a parallel experience for my students; their reflection invites the creation of self-knowledge regarding their role in the classroom community. The following chapter provides an overview of the curriculum implemented over the course of this study, with discussion focused on those aspects that aimed at developing a sense of community in the classroom and enhancing student cognitive, social and emotional engagement.

### **Chapter 3: Curriculum for Community**

In this chapter I explain my philosophy and how it has been shaped by my experience and understandings of the literature in order to clarify the ways in which I incorporate these beliefs and theories in my practice. I provide a detailed explanation of the essential aspects of my curriculum, which involves my instructional approach to teaching and learning and demonstrates my personal philosophy. In the first section I present my personal curriculum theory, explore the purpose of schooling, and explain how my theory connects to my beliefs regarding schooling. Next I provide an overview of Invitational Education and Philosophy for Children (p4c), which establishes a combined framework for my theories of curriculum and learning. Finally, I discuss ways in which each learning theory is enacted in my curriculum through the implementation of four essential units. These units are introduced at various stages of classroom community development to clearly align my beliefs with my practice. I conclude with an explanation of the role of the teacher within the type of classroom described in this chapter.

#### **Personal Curriculum Theory**

Students typically enter a new classroom with a mental model of how the classroom works, as well as of their expectations of their role and that of the teacher. Often their assumption is that the teacher's role is to give assignments and the student's role is to complete them. My approach to curriculum challenges the traditional view of the classroom environment, one that is teacher-centered and involves students passively listening and learning individually. My view reflects a stance of critical pedagogy and student empowerment, as when Freire (2001) states, "When I enter a classroom, I should be someone who is open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to the curiosities of the students as well as their inhibitions" (p. 49). Key aspects of my classroom practice and environment allow students to link to prior experiences in order to make meaning in what they see or read, in turn inviting them to take ownership of new ideas as opposed to simply repeating information back. I have learned that through my practice that they come to value learning in this way. In my classroom I expect and allow students to play multiple roles, such as facilitator or co-inquirer in addition to the role typical of a student, which is often limited to responding to questions, completing tasks, and behaving. I want students to think for themselves, and not just in response to what I tell them. Our

communication is more of a dialogue than a teacher monologue. Here too, my actions reflect Freire's, "The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication" (p. 77). I expect students to contribute to discussions, share insights, and actively participate in their own learning. To provide a source of internal motivation I want the student to think, "I have a role, therefore I matter." As I reflect on my personal curriculum theory, I have identified five essential elements intended to engage students actively, so that they share their ideas, listen respectfully, take risks, and remain open to different perspectives:

1. *Foster a sense of community*: Learning is not an individual action (Kohn, 2008). I build into the curriculum regular opportunities for students to establish and develop a sense of community to allow for collaborative learning experiences and an increased feeling of belonging. This is a means to promote social engagement through the use of community inquiries and collaboration within an intellectually safe environment. For example, I provide opportunities for students to share journal responses, work in small groups, and participate in activities that promote awareness/tolerance of 'the other,' develop a collaborative community of inquiry as well as an individual identity. In short, I create a safe learning environment,, a necessary condition for inquiry to take place. Like other educators and scholars, I have found that "Establishing a sense of community in the classroom is as salient as teaching content and skills" (Rowland in Darling-Hammond, 2002 p. 186).
2. *Engage students using democratic inquiry*: This is the foundation of Matthew Lipman's (1980) Philosophy for Children (p4c) curriculum, which is strongly grounded in the democratic theories of John Dewey (1938). Participating in student-directed inquiry cognitively engages students by requiring use of those thinking skills necessary to make meaning. George Herbert Mead (1910) wrote, "so far as education is concerned, the child does not become social by learning. He must be social in order to learn" (p. 688). Elliot Eisner (2005) has supported the need to provide opportunities for students to "engage in challenging kinds of conversation," and for teachers "to help them learn how to do so. Such conversation is all too rare in schools" (p. 186). Students must be given opportunities to socially construct

- meanings together in order to create an intellectually safe collaborative community of inquiry and dispel the notion that school and learning takes place in a culture of correction.
3. *Student-centered*: I promote a classroom that is almost entirely student-centered, allowing students to explore their own needs, wants, questions, thoughts and ideas. Furthermore, I believe that the creation of this type of classroom allows for students to develop good thinking skills that they can use both inside and outside of the school environment. I believe students must be given choice, as well as power to direct their own learning. Similarly, Splitter and Sharp (1995) have said, “[C]oncepts and values will be meaningful to children only to the extent that they can relate them in some way to their own experience” (p.164). Students need to feel as though their experiences and curiosities have a place in the classroom and are a means by which they can connect to the content, as well as to their peers, thus fostering emotional engagement in addition to cognition. As a teacher I need to attend to the whole child, knowing that, as Carl Ratner (1989) has stated, “Emotions did not precede cognition, they are only developed in conjunction with cognition” (p. 216).
  4. *Reflective*: Reflection is the process of reviewing an experience in order to describe, analyze, and evaluate it, as well as to inform one’s future experiences (Reid, 1993). In order to make connections across content, reflection must be a regular part of classroom routines and something students value. Reflection helps to transform experience from an isolated incident into authentic learning by challenging students to personally connect to the content. Sharing these personal reflections fosters a sense of connection among the members of the classroom community. Reflection is also crucial for the teacher. As the teacher I must look at not only the concepts we as a classroom community discuss, but also what I do as teacher in the classroom, think about the reasons why I do it, and decide if it worked and if not, and how to improve my practice. Without reflecting on the events that took place, I may jump to incorrect conclusions about the reasons why things are or are not happening within the classroom environment.
  5. *Intentionally inviting*: I have found that the majority of students in my high school classroom will not regularly volunteer themselves to be a part of the conversation,



which includes responding to the general question, “Any questions?” Therefore, I use purposeful and intentional invitations to engage students and to signal that they are allowed and ultimately expected to contribute. I incorporate this practice regularly into the curriculum and the way I present content; an inviting attitude cannot just be turned on or off.

In order to establish this type of learning environment I not only model inquiry and reflection, but also a willingness to be vulnerable. Remaining vulnerable, open, and trusting of the students’ ability to guide the learning is essential. “When I enter a classroom, I should be someone who is open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to the curiosities of the students as well as their inhibitions” (Freire, 2001, p. 49). This teaching philosophy is reflected in my personal curriculum. My main goal is to create a learning environment that promotes students’ recognition of their ability to learn things of value and realize that they bring important prior perspectives and knowledge to the classroom to contribute and help others learn as well. Only then will they take the risk to communicate with and inform others, improving long-term dispositions regarding learning and their own abilities rather than just short-term skills (Kohn, 2008)

### **The Role of School**

Embedded into my philosophy of teaching and learning is my view that the school, not just the classroom, should be a place where students feel safe to willingly and actively engage in the act of learning. To foster such interaction, teachers must acknowledge the interrelatedness of the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of learning (Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011). However, school is often a place where students feel lost or alienated due to the fact that their needs and interests are completely ignored. As Linda Darling-Hammond has stated:

When students need close affiliation, they experience a large depersonalized school; when they need to develop autonomy, they experience few opportunities for choice and punitive approaches to discipline; when they need expansive cognitive challenges and opportunities to demonstrate their competence, they experience work focused largely on the memorization of facts. (1997, p. 122)

I aim to create a classroom environment that honors students’ thoughts and questions and provides them with an opportunity for expression and personal engagement.

### **Role of Teacher as Facilitator**

Teachers must be proactive in making the necessary adjustments to the classroom environment that would allow for authentic engagement to take place. “From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization...must be imbued with a profound trust...they must be partners of the students in their relations with them” (Freire, 1998, p. 75). Jerome Allender (2001) compares the teacher’s role to that of a play director:

I think of teaching as if I were directing a play – an improvised play in which there are no lines for the players to read...There is, however, a specific structure that allows for and encourages all of the players, the teacher and the students, towards goals...the teacher’s predominant role is that of director. (p. 5)

In addition to being a partner in inquiry, the teacher-facilitator has to continue to provide structure that offers opportunities for student participation and engagement with content. “[I]nvitations must be sent and received; they cannot merely be wished for. People do not reach their potential because others simply wish them well” (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 50). In such an environment, one that is focused on shared activity, “the teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher- and upon the whole, the less consciousness there is, on either side, of giving or receiving instruction, the better” (Dewey, 1916, p. 160).

Alfie Kohn (2011) describes the effective teacher as one who is “comfortable with uncertainty, not only to abandon a predictable march toward the ‘right answer’ but to let students play an active role in the quest for meaning that replaces it” (p. 28). A teacher must be willing to give up some control in order to allow students to take ownership, “which requires guts as well as talent” (p. 28). Offering opportunities to apply their own meaning to what is being taught allows students to internalize the material and *learn* it. “Children hunger for meaning, and get turned off by education when it ceases to be meaningful to them” (Lipman, 1993, p. 384). Teachers should be encouraged to promote students’ active learning by becoming “facilitators of students’ learning processes and to assist students in developing their own learning strategies” (Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011, p. 80). Teachers may do well to follow the advice of Jerome Bruner (2003) who contends, “The best way to create interest in a subject is to render it worth knowing,

which means to make the knowledge gained useable in one's thinking beyond the situation in which the learning has occurred" (p. 31). My teaching, reading, and reflection have led me to believe that only from the implementation of such educational experiences can we hope to create interested, independent, intellectually engaged members of society.

Upon entering the classroom, "I should be someone who is open to new ideas, open to questions, and open to the curiosities of the students as well as their inhibitions" (Freire, 2001, p. 49). The development of such understanding takes time, which means that the teacher must not abandon the approach or expect immediate success in creating this type of deep connection with students. Having stayed true to my role and purpose to become a trusted co-inquirer has often proved to be challenging. The struggles of developing a sense of community continue to be present. However, continued reflection and adaptation provided me with a renewed sense of purpose, persistence, and success.

Certain conditions have to exist for many students to be willing to become engaged members of the classroom. Factors such as a lack of self-confidence, poor self-concept, fear, and apathy can stand in the way. Participation threatens to alter one's view of oneself; students may be more frightened at the thought of their contribution being seen as trivial or incorrect by their peers. Franz (2004) has alerted educators that, "The child who sees himself as stupid will adhere to all perceptions that bolster this picture and refuse to see positive perceptions of ability" (p. 1). However, if students are not personally engaged, they will remain distant participants of their own learning; education becomes something that takes place around them and happens to them opposed to being an activity they chose to actively engage in. "Education is, or should be, a cooperative enterprise. An atmosphere of mutual respect and positive regard increases the likelihood of cooperation and student success in school" (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 43). In my classroom, invitations are sent in a variety of ways. For example, I routinely ask for thoughts or examples and allow for the quiet, awkward pause to give students time to think and reflect. Often this wait time is perceived as a lack of response instead of the creation of one, and as such is overlooked. Additionally, my classroom routines structure occasions for students to share through the use of journals or simply through open and safe discussion and interaction.

[T]he child always has something in his mind to talk about, he has something to say; he has a thought to express, and a thought is not a thought unless it is one's own. On the traditional method, the child must say something that he has learned. There is all the difference in the world between having something to say and having to say something. (Dewey, 2001, p. 35)

I establish invitational expectations and routine from start of the year in order to be implemented successfully.

Education is a social process (Freire, 1970; Dewey, 1897). “When education is based upon experience and educative experience is seen to be a social process, the situation changes radically. The teacher loses the position of external boss or dictator but takes on that of leader of group activities” (Dewey, 1998, p. 66). Taking on such a non-traditional role, especially in isolation, is challenging; it has demanded a lot of from me as teacher, especially when I was a novice, to stay true to promoting an educative experience and to my own beliefs about education. As teacher, I have worked to develop empathic understanding, in much the same way as Carl Rogers (1980) described it. Rogers initially noted that empathic understanding was necessary in a therapist-client relationship intended to facilitate psychological growth, but later he saw it as necessary in a teacher-student relationship.

When the teacher has the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, then again the likelihood of significant learning is increased...[Students feel deeply appreciative] when they are simply understood – not evaluated, not judged, simply understood from their own point of view, not the teacher's. (Rogers, 2002, p. 30)

### **Role of the Learner**

In a student-centered classroom students are expected to take a proactive role in the learning process, not to depend passively on the teacher for all information. In terms of peer relations, students in this type of classroom environment are willing to communicate with each other, valuing one another's contributions—and learning from them. “They cooperate, learn from each other, and help each other. When in difficulty or in doubt, they do ask the teacher for help or advice but only after they have tried to solve

the problem among themselves (Jones, 2007, p. 2). Expectations for students include the ability to:

- work alone, preparing ideas or making notes before a discussion, doing a listening task, doing a short written assignment, or doing grammar or vocabulary exercises;
- work together in pairs or groups, comparing and discussing their answers, or reading and reacting to one another's written work and suggesting improvements;
- work together in discussions or in role-plays, sharing ideas, opinions, and experiences;
- and interact with the teacher and the whole class, asking questions or brainstorming ideas. (Jones, 2007, p. 2)

I believe the establishment of a community of inquiry in the classroom relies on students' willingness not only to contribute their best effort individually, but also to contribute to a collaborative best. They have an intellectual responsibility to offer information, as well as to accept or respectfully question others' ideas in order to advance the community of inquiry's learning.

### **Role of the Reflective Community**

In order to engage in authentic learning, I believe students must go beyond acquiring facts; they must apply knowledge in order to demonstrate understanding of content and reflection of the ways in which it connects (Lambright, 1995). Dewey (1933) has defined reflective thinking as, "Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it intends" (p. 6). Reflective thinking is a higher order thinking skill, one that is left out of Benjamin Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy of Cognitive Domain. "Reflective thought involves acquisition of facts, understanding of ideas, application of principles, analysis, synthesis and evaluation" (Shermis, 1999). Peter Pappas's (2010) *Taxonomy of Reflection* mirrors Bloom's Taxonomy, but with a focus on the skill of reflection:

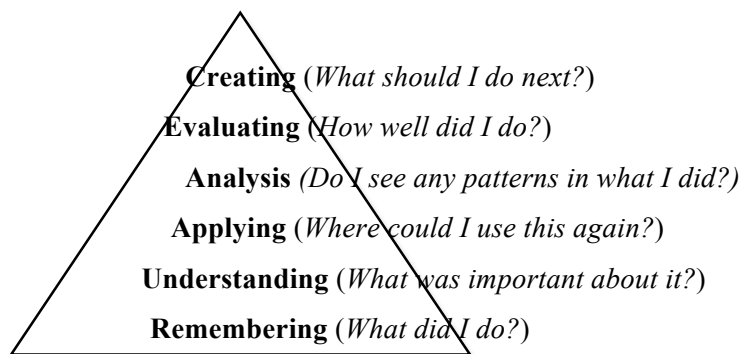


Figure 3: Pappas's (2010) *Taxonomy of Reflection*.

Pappas acknowledges that asking students to reflect can be challenging because it is not something that is fostered in school; typically students are told how they are doing. Most have the ability to tell what they have done, but are unable to think abstractly about their learning patterns, connections and progress. This view supports the need for guided reflection that includes prompts for students to reflect, as included in the curriculum implemented in this study. Students who are taught how to reflect through guidance and modeling effectively make progress. Fred Korthagen's *Onion Model* (2004), which is his adaptation of Robert Dilts's (1990) *Model of Neuro-Logical Levels* illustrates six progressive layers of reflection: environment, behavior, competencies, beliefs, identity, and mission.

I have adapted Korthagen's model, placing environment at the base and moving through the additional key aspects of classroom expectations, addressing student competencies as a means to promote self-concept, reflection as a means of establishing identity, and internalization of content and experience. My model begins with a focus on students' emotional engagement by assuring they feel safe in the classroom environment, but moves fluidly into a focus on social and cognitive engagements. Although there are layers of reflection, my model reflects the belief that cognitive, social and emotional engagement cannot be divided or isolated from one another if authentic learning is the objective. The following figure illustrates the layers of my reflection model, which is followed by an explanation of each.

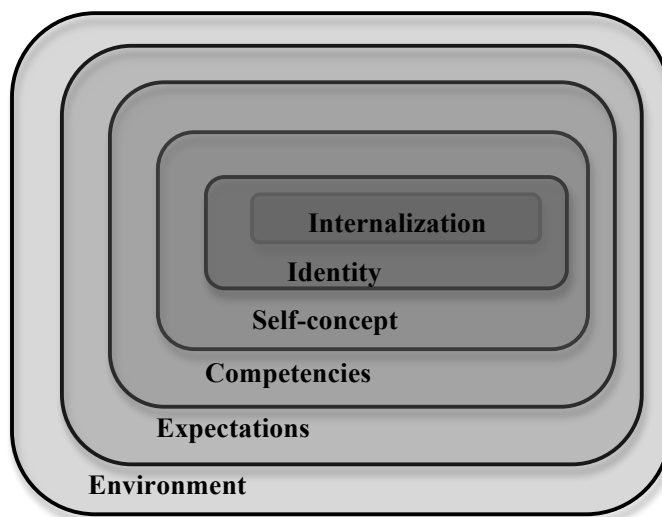


Figure 4: My reflective model.

**Environment:** At the initial levels of reflection the student is encouraged to engage through external sources, which are the classroom environment and clearly expressed expectations for behavior within that environment that have been established by the teacher. I strive to maintain a classroom environment of trust and safety.

**Expectations:** In addition to environment, expectations of behavior within that environment can prompt students to self-reflect. My belief in each student's ability is clear through the implementation of my curriculum, and students are expected not only to participate but also to honor and respect the contribution of others. This is not a set of rules posted on the wall, but a philosophy embedded into the way I teach. My belief in them is clear, and as a result they begin to believe in themselves.

**Competencies:** At the middle levels of reflection students are beginning to reflect on their role within the environment, how their own competencies and developing concept of self as a learner can add to this community of inquiry.

**Self-concept:** In order to get to the deeper levels of reflection, I create activities that invite the students to reflect on their individual growth as a learner in terms of cognitive ability and active social and emotional engagement with their peers within this classroom community of inquiry.

**Identity:** At the deepest levels of reflection, I have the students reflect as a means of internally connecting and personally relating with the content through both cognitive and emotional engagement.

**Internalization:** My objective is to guide students towards reaching this level of reflection. Students who can internally reflect are better able to empathize with one another as they think about others' experiences in relation to their own.

Another goal is for the students to internalize the knowledge and skills they have gained so they can apply them outside of the classroom.

This reflection model illustrates what I consider to be the essential ways in which I promote student engagement and identity through reflection, a key characteristic of a community of inquiry.

### **Invitational Education**

My beliefs have been shaped by invitational education (Purkey & Novak, 1996; Purkey & Stanley, 1991), a practice designed to invite students to be an active part of the learning process. "Its purpose is to make schooling a more exciting, satisfying and enriching experience for everyone involved...Its method is to offer a guiding theory, a common language of improvement, and a practical means to accomplish its stated purpose" (Stafford, 1990, p. 2). William Purkey and John Novak's (1996) theory of invitational education intentionally invites individuals to participate and work to the best of their ability. Invitations are defined as, "an intentional act designed to offer something beneficial for consideration" (Purkey, 1992, p. 111). Safe invitations to participate are extended in order to promote inquiry and engage students. Invitational educators operate on the four basic assumptions of trust, respect, optimism and intentionality:

1. *Trust*: Education is a cooperative, collaborative activity where process is as important as product;
2. *Respect*: People are able, valuable, and responsible, and should be treated accordingly;
3. *Optimism*: People possess untapped potential in all areas of human endeavors;
4. *Intentionality*: Human potential can be best realized by places, policies, and programs specifically designed to invite development, and by people who are



intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally.  
(Purkey, 1990, p. 2)

The effectively engaging educator “is one who artfully blends the four dimensions to sustain energy and enthusiasm for teaching, learning and living” (p. 4). An environment that invites participants to engage in the learning process “should be so intentionally inviting as to create a world where each individual is cordially summoned to develop physically, intellectually, and emotionally” (p. 6). Extending invitations asks for, and almost demands, student participation and works to counteract student apathy. Students come to view learning as a process they are directly involved in and as such, they take intentional steps to engage. In order to implement this approach, I develop a curriculum that incorporates the four fundamental aspects of an invitational theory within the classroom:

1. I view every student as a person who wants to be accepted and affirmed as valuable, capable, and responsible, and wants to be treated accordingly;
2. I convey to my students that they have the power to send positive messages to themselves and others; because they have this power, they have responsibility;
3. I encourage all students to know that they possess relatively untapped potential in all areas of learning and human development;
4. And I believe human potential is best utilized by creating places, programs, policies, and processes intentionally designed to invite optimal development and encourage people to realize this potential in themselves and others  
(Purkey & Novak, 1996).

An important consideration for implementing Invitational Theory is that it is easily inviting “when things are going well...but in times of conflict it’s time to get tough: to forget inviting and start demanding” (Purkey & Stanley, 1991, p. 42). I believe the presence of these elements in the classroom environment provides a foundation for the teacher to turn to in challenging times,.

I offer a specific, personal example that arose while conducting this study: bullying was occurring in one particular class period and creating a very intellectually unsafe environment. As a result, all learning ceased and tensions visibly increased. It was not until I went back to the foundational elements of trust and respect to invite all students to

open up to honestly (and anonymously) share how they felt in the classroom that students were able to self-reflect and correct their behaviors. I did not need to get tough and start demanding; in fact, any feeble attempt to do so was ineffective. I needed to maintain an optimistic view that the community of inquiry itself could change if given the opportunity to do so in a way that allowed students to demonstrate their perceived responsibility to the group, as both the bully and bullied. “In every person there is a tendency towards self-actualization and development so long as this is permitted and encouraged by an inviting environment” (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987). The creation of this inviting environment has remained an objective of mine from the very first day, drawing on the core principles of invitational education at the heart of my personal teaching philosophy.

Although the inviting classroom does not have any standardized form, it does have six basic characteristics: 1) respect for individual uniqueness, 2) cooperative spirit, 3) sense of belonging, 4) pleasing habitat, 5) positive expectations, and 6) vital connections to society (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 126). These aspects of an invitational approach to education may also help to counteract the fear of succeeding, which can be equally or even more powerful than the fear of failing. For some students it seems easier to succeed at failing; all they have to do is do nothing at all. However, to succeed means taking a risk and making an invested effort. The idea of doing all of the work and still failing is terrifying. Furthermore, the idea of possibly seeing themselves in a new way, of altering or losing their belief in their own self-concept, can make them more resistant to change. Individuals behave in ways that support their self-concept, regardless of how helpful or harmful such behaviors may be to oneself or to others (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987).

I have worked hard to get students to value relationships with others and to understand the way in which their peers view their role within the classroom community of inquiry. Creating opportunities for students to interact and participate helps to break down boundaries students put up between themselves when they enter the classroom and promotes students engagement with their peers, teacher, the content, and perhaps most importantly, their own ideas. Implementing the fundamental beliefs of Invitational Education has assisted me in the creation of a curriculum and classroom environment centered on active student engagement, which aligns with the other key aspect of my instructional framework: Philosophy for Children.

### **Philosophy for Children: Creating a Community of Inquiry**

Another important aspect of my teaching philosophy is Philosophy for Children (p4c), a curriculum pedagogy created by Matthew Lipman, professor of philosophy at Columbia University, as an attempt to “improve children’s reasoning abilities by having them think about thinking as they discuss concepts of importance to them” (Lipman, 1989, p. 145). p4c is a research-based (Dewey, 1933; James, 1890) pedagogy built on the assumption that learning is socially constructed and “based around the notion that [the students] must construct meanings for themselves, rather than simply accept those which are handed down to them” (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 99). Like this pedagogy, my curriculum aims to place student interest and independent thought before the presentation of content; students’ very concepts direct the content.

The teacher who adopts and implements a p4c approach plays a role different from that of the traditional educator:

The p4c facilitator sees her/himself as a co-inquirer with the children, as interested as they are in exploring philosophical concepts, improving judgment and discovering meaning. However, when it comes to the procedures of inquiry, the facilitator both guides the children and models for them--by asking open-ended questions, posing alternative views, seeking clarification, questioning reasons, and by demonstrating self-correcting behavior. It is through this kind of modeling that the children eventually internalize the procedures of inquiry.

(IAPC, 2003)

In terms of instruction, the p4c teacher-as-facilitator encourages students to discover meanings on their own. The use of a “gently Socratic inquiry” method (Jackson, 2001) allows for the teacher to develop relationships with students that go beyond the information-giver-to-information-receiver affiliation. “In such shared activity, the teacher is a learner, and the learner is, without knowing it, a teacher” (Dewey, 1916, p. 160).

Additionally, p4c, particularly as it has been developed in Hawai’i (p4c Hawai’i) values the creation of community as a means of developing the cognitive skills of critical thinking and is reliant on the community of inquiry to provide an environment in which philosophical dialogue can occur. (Makaiau, 2010). The p4c Hawai’i concept of

community changes and challenges the model of traditional teacher/student roles and relationships; the teacher moves from the information-giver to the co-inquirer, and the student has opportunities to play the role of the teacher or facilitator. I believe that the establishment and implementation of a community of inquiry impacts student cognitive growth, social development, and emotional engagement. The p4c Hawai'i approach begins where individual students are in their understanding and does not measure one against another. This philosophy aids in the development of a safe environment where all ideas are not only welcomed, but are seen as adding value to the total conversation. One of the goals of using p4c is to allow for all students to view the classroom as being one where they feel safe and respected, as well as excited to enter and eager to learn.

p4c Hawai'i is not a pre-packaged curriculum that can be simply duplicated and carried out in a prescribed way. In adopting, internalizing, and personalizing the core principles of p4c, we have created a curriculum with the objective of developing a community that values inquiry and intellectual safety, intellectual responsibility, structure, communication, care, and refinement of thought through listening, clarifying and reflecting. Through the use of tools, skills, and dispositions valued by p4c, we have created a student-centered environment that allows students to raise their own questions, discuss possible reasons with one another, listen to one another's responses, consider alternative points of view, and form their own ideas based on the evidence presented.

### **Role of Content**

Content is a key aspect of any classroom environment, although having a high level of content knowledge alone will not ensure a teacher is successful in educating students. According to Weimer (2007), "When teachers think the best way to improve their teaching is by developing their content knowledge, they end up with sophisticated levels of knowledge, but they have only simplistic instructional methods to convey that material" (p. 4). A teacher who is a master of content should also be an artist in interaction with it. "What we teach and how we teach it are inextricably linked and very much dependent on one another" (p. 4).

The best teachers are not always, not even usually, those teachers with the most sophisticated content knowledge. The best teachers do know their material, but they also know a lot about the process. They have at their disposal a repertoire of

instructional methods, strategies, and approaches—a repertoire that continually grows, just as their content knowledge develops. They never underestimate the power of the process to determine the outcome. With this understanding, content is not a barrier to teacher development. (Weimer, p. 4)

Like Weimer, I do not believe the teacher’s content knowledge is more important than everything else that he or she brings to the classroom.

Researchers (Roberts, 1998; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992) identify the importance of possessing a range of knowledge that goes beyond content. Teachers must also possess:

. . . . pedagogic content knowledge (how to adapt content to the learners), general pedagogic knowledge (e.g. classroom management), curricular knowledge, contextual knowledge (the context of teaching; community expectations) and process knowledge (learning skills, observation skills, etc). The ability to successfully marry the content and the process requires a sophisticated knowledge of both (Weimer, 2007).

Aligning my beliefs with my practice in the previous sections of Chapter 3, I have described the various dimensions of my approach to and philosophy of teaching, identifying sources I have learned from and internalized. The following sections discuss my actual teaching practice, referencing essential units, artifacts, and environments I have created in implementing p4c along with the Invitational Education. I have included one unit from each phase of my process of classroom ‘community development’ during the school year (i.e. beginning, middle, end). I also provide sample activities for each unit, which is not meant to be a comprehensive overview but rather an illustration of essential parts of my curriculum.

### **Unit 1: Establishing a Community of Inquiry**

Based on my experience, I have seen that ‘good’ thinking will not just occur on its own, no matter how much the student hungers for meaning or for voice in the classroom. “Learning isn’t something that happens to individual children — separate selves at separate desks. Children learn with and from one another in a caring community” (Kohn, 2008). In order to foster a caring community I began by creating an appropriate intellectually safe environment. The purpose of such a community of inquiry is to reflect

and to “bring participants into deeper and more significant relationships, to shake them free of their complacency, their false convictions and to make them available for more comprehensive understanding” (Sharp, 1993, p. 340).

The skills objectives during this first unit of the school year are interactive reading, oral communication, active listening, and providing and explaining reasons in writing and discussion. The curriculum is focused on having students move beyond recall towards inquiry, to collaborate and include others’ ideas, explain their thoughts in detail, and begin to build a community of inquiry. At this point in the school year, the ability to meet these objectives requires reflection. Students’ growth builds not only on the content but also on the environment and clearly stated expectations.

### **Classroom seating.**

In the traditional classroom, “the teacher is forced to pay more attention to orderliness and lack of noise than making learning a joyful experience” (Maslow, 1976, p. 181). Using the structures presented by p4c as described in the following sections, I have been able to progressively eliminate the need to focus on classroom management. Over time, the engaged p4c community of inquiry begins to manage itself. A circular seating arrangement promotes this self-regulation.

The circle allows all members of the community to make eye contact, to see each other. In the ensuing dialogue, students are better able to hear what others are saying and also to see how they are saying it; in other words, the facial expressions and mannerisms of those who are speaking. The circle also facilitates seeing the impact on each other of the interaction. (Jackson, 2001, p. 460)

I view the circular seating arrangement in my tenth grade classroom as being reminiscent of “circle time” in elementary school. There was something magical and automatically engaging about being able to sit together with my friends in a small circle on the floor to listen to a story or talk about our recent discoveries. Bringing this back to the high school day, although not on a reading rug in the center of the room, has provided my students with the feeling of participating in a discussion as opposed to listening to a lecture:

In circle time, the emphasis is on building effective communication and good relationships in the class and providing a forum for which problems can be

tackled constructively. Children are encouraged to explore feelings, to listen to each other, to take turns in speaking, and to seek solutions (Haynes, 2002, p. 11). Furthermore, sitting in a circle eliminates distance between students, which emphasizes the importance of their presence and impact of their absence. This physical closeness leads to a more social and ultimately emotional connection among students, supports engagement, and helps eliminate the fear often associated with ‘risky’ learning behaviors.

I still recognize the need to assign seats in such large classes, but I do so in a way that promotes communication, tolerance, and flexibility. At the start of the school year I allow students to select their own seats in order to increase their feeling of comfort and safety in a new environment. Additionally, I do not know anything about them at this time, so I prefer to have them sit where they feel most comfortable to increase the chances of them acting *true* to their self-perception. However, as students get more comfortable in the classroom they usually do not change their seats; their seat becomes *their* seat. I frequently change the seating arrangement to promote of a continued development of a safe community of inquiry. However, the seating chart does not always come from me. One way I share the authority with my students is to create parameters for them to pick their own new seat. For example, their new seat must be on another side of the circle from their current seat, be next to a person they have not yet sat next to, and be at least 3 seats away from the last person they sat next to. This strategy elicits trust and freedom, which are essential to continuing to develop a safe classroom community of inquiry.

Additionally, I incorporate lots of movement and student-to-student interaction into the lesson plans in order to allow the seating arrangement to become flexible. A method I have created is “The Four R Four-Square”. Students fold a piece of paper to create four boxes labeled React, Respond, Relate and Reflect. Prior to the whole class discussion students move around the room to find a partner for each stage of the activity, meaning they have a different classmate’s name in each of the four squares. After the whole class discussion or activity, students return to their partners and have a one-on-one conversation to elicit new understandings and ideas.

### **The community ball.**

The community ball is a tool developed to facilitate inquiry and discussion, as well as to encourage participation and engagement in a non-threatening way. To create the yarn ball, students are invited to contribute surface-level information about themselves. They create a community ball as carefully detailed in Thomas Jackson's (2001) article *The Art and Craft of "Gently Socratic" Inquiry*. Once the process of building the community ball is complete, I explain how it will be used to facilitate discussion: a) the person with the ball is the speaker; b) when that person is finished sharing, he or she passes the ball to whomever he/she wishes; c) if a person receives the ball and does not wish to speak, he or she has the absolute right to pass; and d) within this community, virtually any question/comment is accepted so long as it is respectful of the other members of the group (Jackson, 2001). The community ball is utilized for facilitating inquiry and discussion in a student-directed and democratic way. Correct implementation of the Community Ball allows for students' voices to be heard while others closely listen; active listening is promoted. Ultimately, the community ball becomes a symbol of the classroom community; it is built on the group's collective ideas, while simultaneously representing diversity of thought and of the participants (i.e. variety of string color and size). The ball is easily passed around the classroom due to the circular seating arrangement and way proximity. Additionally, use of the ball promotes discussion in a non-threatening way; use of the ball puts the 'power' of guiding the inquiry in the students' hands and allows the teacher to become a co-inquirer in the learning process.

In my classroom, the community ball replaces raising one's hand and is used as a tool for participating in discussion. When sharing a journal or collectively reading a piece aloud to extend an invite to each student students pass the ball; they pass the ball to those who signal that they have something to contribute or to those who they are inviting into the conversation and would like to hear from. This tool allows the classroom to become a democratic community of inquiry.

### **Intellectual safety.**

Lipman believes "children hunger for meaning, and get turned off by education when it ceases to be meaningful to them" (1993, p. 384). In order to promote and



develop a classroom environment where students are trusted, willing, and able to engage in responsible dialogue and inquiry in order to create meaning, “a particular relationship must develop among members to the classroom community that is quite different from standard classroom practice” (Jackson, 2001, p. 459). These relationships place more emphasis on listening, thoughtfulness, silence, and care and respect for the thoughts of others:

Essentially, the classroom needs to become an intellectually safe community; a place where students do not have to worry about being put down, belittled, teased or ridiculed by their peers or teacher when they offer their personal insight, experiences or questions, so long as these comments are respectful to all members of the community. Within this place, the group accepts virtually any question or comment, so long as it is respectful of the other members of the [community]...Intellectual safety is the bedrock upon which inquiry grows. (Jackson, 2001, p. 460)

Thomas Jackson describes an intellectually safe place as one that is free of put-downs, where no comments are made with the intent to “belittle, undermine, negate, devalue, or ridicule” other community members (p. 460). In order to create an environment where students feel secure enough to participate in inquiry, all members first need to trust one another with their personal thoughts and questions. To establish intellectual safety, I have created a classroom community of inquiry where students do not fear the response to their contribution; students know that in my classroom being teased by the teacher or other students will not be accepted. Kathy Greely (2000), author of *Why Fly That Way? Linking Community and Academic Achievement*, speaks to the importance of developing and maintaining a safe classroom community:

When students feel safe, when they feel respect from both their peers and their teachers, and when they trust the people around them, they become free to learn. They are able to engage in the practices that lead to authentic intellectual growth. They become more willing to say what they think, more willing to share their work and invite feedback, more willing to experiment and try new things, more willing to try again when they don’t get it right the first time, and more willing to

invest in their own learning. And, because of this, they become better readers, writers and thinkers. (p. xiv)

Students can only achieve when they feel safe enough to risk learning. “Students choose to learn, just as they choose not to learn in the face of ridicule, embarrassment, or coercion” (Purkey & Novak, 1996, p. 45). Without the intellectual safety element of a community of inquiry in place, students will not take educational risks and will not recognize the importance and benefits of doing so. It is not the building of a yarn ball and the circular seating arrangement that makes Philosophy for Children work. It is the establishment of an atmosphere that recognizes that learning is risky, and that what we are asking our students to do is often a more difficult thing than it was for us. It is the acknowledgement of the basic human need for positive recognition from others as well as from oneself (Purkey and Schmidt, 1987). Acknowledging the need for intellectual safety is central as it helps to prepare students developmentally for more verbal interaction. However, they come to the classroom without the essential skills of participating in such inquiry and “safety” issues must be assured first.

### **Community dialogue.**

From the first day of school I work to create a classroom environment where students are engaged, both on their own and with each other, through dialogue. I use the initial days of school to lay the groundwork for the development of an intellectually safe classroom as a means of encouraging students to take risks, ask questions, give personal insight, and share emotional connections. However, at this beginning stage of community development, the dialogue is mostly between students and teacher. I seldom raise questions to prompt inquiry or to have students relate to one another. That deeper level of inquiry comes at a later stage of development.

Lipman stated, “One of the best ways of stimulating people to think is to encourage them in dialogue” (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980, p. xv). Dialogue allows thinking to become more than an individual, internal thought process. It creates a forum where the students can utilize and hone their good thinking skills, as well as actively contribute to the learning community:

Very often, when people engage in dialogue with one another, they are compelled to reflect, to concentrate, to consider alternatives, to listen closely, to give careful

attention to definitions and meanings, to recognize previously unthought-of options and in general to perform a vast number of mental activities that they might not have engaged in had the conversation never occurred. (Lipman, Sharp, & Oscanyan, 1980, p. 22)

At the heart of philosophy is dialogue (Lipman & Sharp, 1978). In order to improve thinking it must act in conjunction with dialogue, not independent of it. Thinking has often been assumed to be individual and internal; however, in a safe public forum, good thinking depends on dialogue just as dialogue depends on good thinking. “The goal is not to persuade anyone to a particular answer, but rather for everyone to reach a deeper understanding of the complexity of the issues involved and a greater ability to navigate among those complexities” (Jackson, 2001, p. 460). Splitter and Sharp (1995) explain;

A philosophical discussion which begins with, and builds on, their ideas, provides powerful messages: that they and their ideas are important and valuable; that they stand to learn a great deal from their peers as well as from teachers and textbooks; that in the process of such learning they interact with their peers in ways quite different from those of the playground environment; and that as a result of such interaction, they develop and grow as persons who can think for themselves (p. 173).

I aim to create a classroom where students are engaged, both on their own and with each other, through communication. The classroom becomes completely student-directed, allowing students to explore their own needs, wants, questions, thoughts and ideas. “Within this place, the group accepts virtually any question or comment, so long as it is respectful of the other members of the [community]...Intellectual safety is the bedrock upon which inquiry grows” (Jackson, 2001, p. 460). In order to foster an environment where students are able to carry on responsible dialogue and inquiry, it is necessary “that a particular relationship must develop among members to the classroom community that is quite different from standard classroom practice” (Jackson, 2001, p. 459). Jackson goes on to describe that these relationships place more emphasis on listening, thoughtfulness, silence, and care and respect for the thoughts of others. Essentially, the classroom needs to become an intellectually safe community of inquiry; a place where students do not have to worry about being put down, belittled, teased or

ridiculed by their peers or teacher when they offer their personal insight, experiences or questions, so long as these comments are respectful to all members of the community:

The purpose, however, of a community of inquiry is to restore the tension between vitality and form, to bring participants into deeper and more significant relationships, to shake them free of their complacency, their false convictions and to make them available for more comprehensive understanding. (Sharp, 1993, p. 340)

The creation of this type of classroom allows for students to develop good thinking skills that they can use both inside and outside of the school environment.

### **Sample activities.**

Without the element of intellectual safety in place within a community of inquiry, students will not take educational risks and will not recognize the importance and benefits of doing so. I begin promoting the concept of intellectual safety at the very start of the year through modeling, extending low-risk invitations to share, and acknowledging all contributions as valuable. During the first few days of school we do not engage in a formal inquiry, however we discuss the topic of “community” and show the film *March of the Penguins* (Jacquet, 2005) to illustrate an example of what I mean by “community”.

Prior to watching the film we review the basic content terms of symbolism, simile, and metaphor in order to provide a skills-based purpose for viewing the film in connection to the subject. After watching the first portion of the film, students write a response to discuss ways in which our classroom could “march like the penguins.” Prior to individually writing, the class as a whole brainstorms ideas to review content terms and practice the skill of providing explanation for specific textual examples under the guidance of the teacher. The method allows those students who may be struggling to get ideas from collaboration with their peers, and also opens up the possibility for a variety of responses. At the same time, the key concept of community is introduced; its analysis becomes the content. Presenting content in such a way allows students to develop confidence in their prior knowledge in order to be willing to engage in the learning of new knowledge. It also highlights the importance of discussion in the learning (in this case, writing) process.

A second example of building an intellectually safe classroom community is having students regularly reflect on their perception of self as learners. During this study students completed three Student Personal Histories during the term. The purpose of this activity is to have students reflect on their learning behaviors and attitudes, as well as memorable prior experiences in school. Explanation and discussion of the Student Personal Histories is included in Chapters 4 and 5.

Through such processes, those which require reflection and thus allow for a range of responses, students begin to see and understand that their prior knowledge and new ideas are not only valued in this place, but are the focus of our learning. As such, they are more willing to contribute to a collaborative discussion instead of being fearful of not sharing the ‘correct’ response.

## **Unit 2: Inquiry**

The second essential unit introduces inquiry and allows students to safely practice using the tools necessary to develop their cognitive skills. “One responsibility of a good community is to educate its young in critical thinking so that they can raise the kinds of questions that help to keep the community good” (Noddings, 2003, p. 228). At this stage of community development, we move beyond “sharing” to engaging in actual connected/curious discussions.

I find it important to involve students in the conversation by making the inquiry accessible and relevant to them. However, students need to be provided with the tools necessary to actively engage in the community’s inquiry. To do this, I introduce Dr. Thomas Jackson’s Good Thinker’s Toolkit.

### **Use of the Good Thinker’s Toolkit (GTTK).**

After establishing an intellectually safe community, I set the parameters for classroom inquiry and dialogue. “Education must enable children to move beyond the confines of specific problems and disciplines to consider questions...” (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 2). Jackson developed a means to assist in this care for logical procedures through the creation of The Good Thinker’s Tool Kit. This is a heuristic device that aids the students in analyzing information on a deeper level, what Jackson has described as the ability to “scratch beneath the surface” of any topic during an inquiry. Additionally, the GTTK encourages student empowerment by providing the tools to refine thoughts.

The seven components of this toolkit harness aspects of cognitive behaviors: “Giving and asking for reasons (R), detecting assumptions (A), anticipating consequences (T [as in “Are these consequences true?”]), reflecting on inferences they draw (I), asking for clarification (W [as in “What do you mean by...?”]), and seeking evidence and examples (E) as well as counterexamples (C)” (Jackson, 2001, p. 463). In my classroom, students are taught and then expected to use the GTTK in order to interact with and analyze a variety of texts orally and through writing to effectively communicate their thoughts and feelings.

Students ask “why”, constantly questioning the point of doing something. They use the W (Clarification) tool regularly, so it is logical to start where the students are at and first introduce that letter in conjunction with A (Assumptions) and I (Inferences). Once the students become familiar and comfortable using those letters, I introduce the remaining letters: R (Reasons), T (Truth), E (Example), and C (Counter-example). This method of scaffolding by introducing a skill, practicing it, and then building on it by adding another skill allowed students to continuously stretch themselves and to continue to grow in their ability to be good thinkers. As the old adage goes, “Practice makes perfect.” Introducing the elements of the GTTK allows students to practice the skills of good thinking, therefore becoming better equipped to create meaning and interact with the “main” English language arts content. In my classroom, the content comes in various forms, the majority is typical of any English classroom (articles, short stories or novels), but I also include artwork, photographs, film and music. The students not only discuss the setting, character and plot, but then move to analysis, responding to open-ended questions, interpreting ambiguity, and “generating speculative and creative hypotheses about the nature of things” (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, p. 107). Essentially, this allows students to inquire into, communicate about and find meaning in a wide variety of texts.

### **Sample activities.**

I first introduce and allow my students to practice using the elements of the GTTK in scenarios presented in literature (mainly short stories), represented in photographs, and those that arise in discussion. For example, the students first make assumptions about people’s names, then about people in the photograph or story, and finally move on to draw inferences about the individuals or the surrounding events based

on these assumptions. This scaffolding allows my students to practice these skills in a variety of ways, building competency as we go, in preparation for the summative assessment. In other words, we “practice” for the “big game.”

An example of a reading that allows for the collaborative practice of the skills in the GTTK is Jamaica Kincaid’s *Girl* (1983). The author uses stream-of-consciousness to tell her story, which is a unique style for my students to engage with. Due to the lack of punctuation to signal the end of a sentence, students are unsure where one thought ends and another begins, which immediately creates curiosity and often confusion. We listen to an audio recording of the author reading her own piece, and then I begin our inquiry into it’s meaning by asking students to make an inference on who the speaker is and the occasion for this “speech” based on something in the text. They are reminded that any interpretation is welcome as long as it can be backed up with textual evidence that they can explain in relation to their idea. For example, students often infer that the speaker is talking to herself just before she is about to move out and get married. They support this inference by referencing all the household chores and instructions the girl is recalling that her mother has told her growing up. Other inferences regarding the speaker and the occasion for stream-of-consciousness “speech” are that the girl’s overprotective mother is lecturing her, a girl is mimicking her mother’s ongoing lectures to her, or that a maid is giving directions to the new household maid. Each inference is supported with multiple details and logically explained with assumptions and reasons. The freedom of this type of textual analysis encourages student participation and engagement with the text as well as with one another in discussion.

A second reading used to practice these skills of inquiry, as well as to eliminate a culture of correction and foster intellectual safety through discussion is Ernest Hemingway’s *Hills Like White Elephants* (1927). This story is presented in a way that makes the reader feel as if they are eavesdropping in on a couple’s conversation about an ambiguous topic. The same process for analytical discussion as is used with *Girl* is followed as students share inferences about the relationship between the two people and the topic they are discussing. Literary critics claim that the topic is abortion, however that is rarely the inference my students initially make (although it is eventually offered into the discussion). Student responses range, including inferences that the couple are

strangers, have been in a long-term committed relationship, are a father and daughter, or a kidnapper and his victim. Due to the fact that all supported responses are welcome the discussion often takes on a debate style where students begin to oppose and disprove their peers' ideas in an effort to strengthen and gain acceptance of their own interpretation. This method of reading and discussion is often used as brainstorming for written responses as it allows students to hear a variety of interpretations and chose one that they feel is best supported and will allow them to write a solid essay.

As mentioned, the main tool for inquiry in our classroom is the literature. After practicing the necessary skills on smaller pieces, such as poems, short stories and photographs, we begin reading Elie Wiesel's *Night*. This memoir of a holocaust survivor's experiences in concentration camps immediately initiates curiosity in students due to the incomprehensible topic. Now that the students have practiced using the skills of the GTTK, they are not only able to interact with and discuss the story, but are also prepared to question what they are reading and seek possible answers from the text or outside resources.

Inquiry allows us to build a bridge between philosophy and literature, bringing philosophy into the classroom which, in turn, equips students to make meaning from the content on their own, as opposed to being told the meaning by the teacher and then regurgitating the teacher's ideas on a multiple choice test. Ultimately, students become the directors of their own learning.

### **Unit 3: Exploration of Culture**

The objective of this third essential unit in the second half of the school year is to explore the various aspects of culture and cultural conflicts through the exploration of various cultural practices. At this point in the school year the objectives are not only content driven, but are also focused on the integration of student self-reflection and the development of individual perspective. Several texts are used over the course of the next two terms (second half of the school year) in order to examine and discuss ways in which culture shapes one's self-perception. Although this is not an exhausted list of possible texts, these are the ones I include in order to present a worldly perspective for us to explore this topic and essential questions such as, "*How do cultural differences*



*contribute to conflicts?” and “How might the cultural identity of a community be altered when it encounters new ideas and members?”*

Table 1  
Unit Novels

Title, author, Year of publication	Setting	Topic
<i>Red Scarf Girl</i> Ji-Li Jiang (1997)	Shanghai China	The Chinese Cultural Revolution (memoir)
<i>A Long Way Gone</i> Ishmael Beah (2007)	Sierra Leone, Africa	Child soldiers (memoir)
<i>Things Fall Apart</i> Chinua Achebe (1959)	Nigeria, Africa	Impact of Colonialism on culture
<i>Whale Rider</i> Witi Ihimaera (1987)	New Zealand	Gender roles in tradition; conflict and change

Table 1

Each story explores various aspects of culture, as well as specific conflicts that arise and threaten to change it. Reading these types of texts allows the discussion to move from a focus on cultural indicators (which is established in the beginning of each story) to an examination of conflict within a culture and the ways in which individuals’ self-perception are altered.

### **Sample activities.**

Although there are several key activities with each novel used in this unit, they all focus on two main objectives: a) having students engage on some level in the culture we are reading about, and b) having students identify and support their opinions on the cultural conflicts taking place. Several supplemental texts are used to explore the topic and meet these objectives, such as news articles and films. Examples to meet the objective of engaging in the culture when reading *Things Fall Apart* is to have students create an Igbo name for themselves and participate in a Naming Ceremony, to create tribal masks used by the elders in rituals, and to create a written representation of one of the stories handed down in the Igbo oral tradition and shared in the novel. Examples to meet the second the objective of identifying and supporting opinions of cultural conflicts is to have students write a response to a reading or film that shows the conflict of colonization in another region (e.g., *Hotel Rwanda* [2005], *Coexist* [2011], *Promises* [2004]), or to write narratives from the perspective of a participant on both sides of the

conflict. These activities also help to promote empathy, which is another goal of my curriculum.

#### **Unit 4: Identity**

The objective of this final essential unit in the school year is for students to explore the role that their culture plays in defining themselves as individuals. After completing the previous unit on cultural explorations, they are guided towards making connections between their culture and the culture of another time and place. This is facilitated through the exploration of essential questions such as, *“How do external factors affect one’s sense of identity?”* and *“How can cultural experiences shape, impact, or influence our perception of the world?”*

##### **Sample activities.**

All activities in this unit are focused on having student explore the notion of their identity in order to formulate their self-concept. The culminating project is to complete and present an individual *“Where I’m From”* poem. Although many teachers have student complete this type of poem at the start of the year as a type of getting-to-know-you activity, I believe it is much more authentic to do at the end of the year after students have explored the concept of culture and identity, and have also come to feel safer sharing their personal experiences. These poems are to be an exploration of several aspects of the student’s culture in relation to class discussions (e.g., language, food, struggles, name), as well as to present an expression of their self-identity.

##### **Intentionality**

When I implement p4c I have specific objectives in mind at all times: to foster ‘good’ thinking skills, to promote inquiry, to maintain intellectual safety, and to sustain a democratic classroom environment. Although discussion is a key instructional approach, discussion is purpose-driven and implemented with the intent of increasing student understanding by expanding the inquiry to include and involve all members of the community. Additionally, I use discussion at particular points in time, and in particular ways (i.e. whole class, small group), with clear intention. For example, the first two weeks of school are critical to building the foundation for relationships with and among students as well as creating a classroom environment where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas (Williams, Cross, Hong, Aultman, Osbon & Schutz, 2008). At this

phase of community development, whole class discussion is limited due to the fact that students may not yet feel safe enough to engage openly in discussion with forty of their classmates, many of whom may be strangers. Instead, I explicitly teach and model the skills of inquiry, and I provide opportunities to engage within smaller groups. Again, discussion is crucial but would be ineffective if only a limited number of students participated. “Safe schools are best realized by creating and maintaining inviting places, policies, processes, and programs and by people who are intentionally inviting with themselves and others, personally and professionally” (Purkey, 1999).

### **The Role of Assessments**

Children’s questions and thoughts regarding the content should be assessed; the ‘test’ should not simply be of their ability to repeat back what the teacher or textbook has informed them to think. Repeating back is not as valuable or engaging since we each think differently, have the ability to express these thoughts with one another, and respectfully acknowledge and learn from the differences between us. I seek to create a learning environment and methods of assessment I consider to be ‘authentic.’ I assess a student’s ability not only to relate to the content, but also to relate to one another as well.

### **Assessments “For” Learning vs. “Of” Learning**

Assessments *for learning* allow students the freedom to continue learning, as well as to tell me what they see or know. I accept a variety of responses as long as they can be explained and clearly supported. For example, *Plain Vanilla* (Jackson, 2001) is an assessment *for learning* because it relies on students to guide the discussion by creating questions they are curious to know about. Students follow steps, adopted from Dr. Thomas Jackson’s (2001) *The Art and Craft of “Gently Socratic” Inquiry*, to complete the activity to conduct a democratic inquiry:

**Step 1. Read** - A paragraph or two, a chapter, or a whole story. Alternatively, students could look at paintings, watch a video, read a poem, listen to a piece of music, or select a topic they wonder about.

**Step 2. Question** – Students write down a question (using the GTTK) they have about the text on the board. In larger classes, students may create a question with a partner.

**Step 3. Vote** - As a class, students vote for the question they would like to inquire into first. Keep a tally of this as you go around, then identify the top three questions.

**Step 4. Dialogue/Inquiry** - Inquire into the questions selected, starting with the one with the most votes and moving on as time allows.

**Step 5. Evaluate** - Reflect on the session. (Jackson, 2001)

Participation in this process gives ownership to the students and allows them to start the discussion where they are in their curiosity and understanding, not where the teacher is. The length of the discussion, amount of participation, topics covered, new questions raised, and insights gained are all indicators of the phase of community development within this classroom.

A second activity aimed at assessing *for learning* is a card sort. For this activity I create a set of index cards with content terms, concepts, and/or events. The vocabulary selected is not usually given in a list format but is consistently used throughout the unit. Therefore, successful completion of this task demonstrates knowledge of the term as well as connections students have been able to make through reading and discussion, as opposed to memorization of terms. To begin the activity, students form a small group and each group is given a deck of cards and time to arrange the terms in any order that illustrates some connection between them. I do not restrict them to a set order (e.g.: in a straight line, a circle, branching out), but inform them that they will be expected to be able to explain the connection that they see among the terms. This promotes acceptance of a variety of interpretations. Once the groups agree on their card formation, they are to write out their card sort pattern with complete explanations of the way in which the connections between the terms are formed. Groups then take turns coming up to the Elmo projector to present and explain their interpretation. After all groups have shared, I ask students to discuss the similarities and differences that they saw in presentations. Students then reflect on the collaboration of the groups and participation of the students in either a quick “thumbs-up/down/sideways” evaluation, or a more formal written response, depending on time. I usually give an assessment within the next two class meetings on the terms used in this activity to see how it impacted their comprehension.

In contrast, assessments *of learning* are aimed at evaluating students' cognitive development. For example, reading recall quizzes, department-wide common assessments, and the Hawaii State Assessment. Each of these assessments is graded using a standards-based four-point rubric and measures students' content knowledge. It is important to give a range of assessments, allowing students to demonstrate their knowledge and thinking in a variety of ways.

### **Assessments “For” Community vs. “Of” Community**

Assessments *for community* are those activities that move the group closer towards the objective of creating a community of inquiry in the classroom. These activities encourage students to work together as they develop skills or to increase their level of comfort by sharing personal experiences, questions, and insights. One example I use to foster the growth of community is to have students regularly share what they have written in their journals. During the early stages of community development, the number of students who participate and their willingness to share personal responses are low. Additionally, it is often difficult for students to remain attentive during the sharing time. However, as the year goes on and the community moves through the stages of development (emerging, developing, and mature), the majority of students will be willing to share, their willingness to share personal experiences that might alter their peers' view of them visibly increases, and students remain attentive during the sharing time as they have come to value sharing and listening as part of the learning process.

A second example of an assessment to foster community is completing the “Step Forward” activity (Simms, Vasquez & Sherover, 1990). This activity is designed to strengthen diversity awareness and build a sense of empathy among participants. Prior to the start of the activity, the following rules must be established:

1. The first rule addresses confidentiality. Nothing seen or heard in the exercise should be discussed outside the session.
2. The second rule addresses the importance of the non-verbal nature of the simulation. Participants have the option of responding to each statement by taking a step forward, but were asked not to verbalize.
3. The third rule pertains to choice. Participants are free to not to respond to any exploratory statement if they felt uncomfortable. (Simms, Vasquez & Sherover,

1990)

Once rules are established and the rationale is clearly explained, participants move to stand in a line. The teacher facilitator then reads a series of exploratory statements, such as “Step on the line if you have never had a pet.” Or “Step on the line if you have ever lived in another country.” After establishing a sense of comfort with the process, the possibility for personal disclosure increases with questions such as, “Step on the line if your parents are divorced” or “Step on the line if you know someone who has been to jail.” I believe it is important to conduct this activity at least two times during the school year, at the middle and end, in order to foster a sense of community and provide opportunities for students to engage on a more personal level. I also allow students to create the questions when we conduct this activity at the end of the school year to allow them to ask their peers about the experiences they are still curious to learn about.

Alternatively, assessments of *community* are those activities that assess the level of safety, the sense of community students feel within the classroom environment, and the stage of community development (emerging, developing, or mature). Although this relies heavily on student reflection, that is not the only way to assess the existence of community.

One example of an activity I used to help promote a culture of collaboration and reflect on the level of community in the classroom is to have students complete a research paper as a group. The rationale for this is to evaluate their level of responsibility to the group, as well as their ability to make a plan and work together to be successful. Students have to assign individual portions of the essay to the group members, but must peer edit and merge all parts of the essay together as a group. A second example is to create a forum, either in class or online, for students to share information from any research they conduct or related information they come across that would be helpful to the group’s understanding. Although this can start out as a requirement, a true assessment of community would be if students continue to post their findings when it is not required. For example, when we read the novel *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, students are assigned a motif from the novel to research. They were to post the explanation of its meaning in connection to the story in our class’s Facebook group online. Although this was a graded assignment, the activity promoted the importance of

shared responsibility and many students responded by saying it increased their interest in the book. In time, students began to pose questions to the group, whether it be about logistics of the class (e.g., due dates and help on an assignment) or information they discovered that related to our in-class discussions. This was evidence to support the establishment of community, as well as its extension outside the classroom.

### **Conclusion**

The curriculum that I have designed creates a classroom environment that contrasts sharply with this oppressive model. “By encouraging children to ask questions at every stage of the educational process, the meanings they are searching for can be made available at every state of the process” (Lipman & Sharp, 1978, p. 260). I purposefully ask stimulating questions and encourage reflection about the questions. Otherwise, I have learned that my classroom will be filled with passive students who simply accept my discursive explanations and answers to questions, in such classes, students do not have a right to pose questions in order to explore their personal curiosity about a topic (Freire, 2001).

I have observed numerous instances where students were asked to *learn*, rather memorize, information only to spit it back on a multiple-choice test and never return to it again. The information never related to their own life experiences, and their comments were seldom welcomed, especially if they asked questions that led the class off topic. The curriculum was organized with content as a first priority and student interests second; as long as the content was presented, students were expected to be able to repeat this information on a test to show that they mastered this material. As Freire (2005) described it, education was seen as “. . . an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 72).

Initially, many students are uncomfortable with the ambiguity and lack of a definitive answer that occur in my classroom. They have difficulty interacting with the text and one another when multiple answers are the aim. However, with time and practice, students begin to enjoy the freedom to make interpretations.

## **Chapter 4: Methods**

This chapter describes the methodology for this qualitative study, which combined the research methods of case study and self-study to systematically examine the ways students' cognitive, social, and emotional learning occurs in my classroom. I first provide an overview of qualitative methods. Next, I review case study and self-study methodology and describe the data sources collected specific to each aspect of the study. I then describe the setting and participants involved in the study, as well as the three-part research cycle that was followed. Data sources and procedure for collecting data are then discussed. Finally, I describe methods for assuring validity and trustworthiness, limitations of the study, and brief concluding thoughts.

### **Recapitulation of Research Question**

#### *Central Research Question*

How does the development of a classroom community of inquiry impact students' cognitive, social and emotional engagement?"

#### *Sub Questions*

- In what ways does a classroom community of inquiry contribute to development of student perception of self as a learner?
- In what ways does a classroom community of inquiry contribute to development of teacher perception of self?

### **Qualitative Research Methods**

This study is designed to provide insight on ways the establishment of a community of inquiry in the classroom contributes to students' and teacher self-perception. My qualitative research design details ways I, as teacher, remained an integral, guiding presence in the study. I provide a detailed, narrative analysis of the process of developing, fostering and using the classroom community of inquiry to enhance student and teacher learning experiences using a social constructivist approach. The goal of socially constructed knowledge is to "rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, p. 9), which in this case I will do by examining students' personal reflections and conducting interviews. Each data



source and the method for implementing each source is explained in the following sections, and sample data are included in Chapter 5.

Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive, meaning the researcher makes an interpretation of the data. This process of interpretation includes analyzing data for themes and meaning (Creswell, 2003). I chose to incorporate a multiple methods qualitative (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Grbich, 2007) research approach in order to examine both the student and teacher experiences in the classroom environment. Qualitative analysis “is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998 as cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 190). Documentation and reflective analysis of critical incidents, those considered significant and indicative of the establishment of a community of inquiry in the classroom or of student growth, are included to convey students’ development of cognitive, social and emotional engagement. As such events occurred, they become an integral part of the data.

John Creswell (2003) explains that the methods of data collection in qualitative research, “involve active participation by participants and sensitivity to the participants of the study” (p. 181). The qualitative researcher seeks involvement of participants in data collection and a builds rapport (Creswell, 2003), allowing for the investigation of a “relationship-driven classroom community [which] is an aspect of the social world in a school setting” (Divoll, 2010, p. 56). A combination of self-study and case study methods were used to examine the various aspects of my research within my classroom. Michael Patton (2002) clarifies that in this method of research, the researcher “makes first-hand observations of activities and interactions, sometimes engaging personally in those activities as a participant observer” (p. 4). In order to effectively conduct a qualitative study, the researcher must “become embedded in the context and responsive to what is happening in the context. There often is, and should be, a relationship between the researcher and the researched, which relationship reflects the passion that later becomes the research question” (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006, p. 1). Telling the story of my classroom by combining student and teacher reflections in order to highlight the significance of relationships in the classroom is a goal of my study. Therefore, qualitative methods were most appropriate.

## Case Study

Case study includes an overview of the project, field procedures, and questions the investigator keeps in mind during data collection, providing an effective means to explore in depth how a student learns (Bulough & Gitlin, 2001). Robert Yin (1992) has recommended using a case-study methodology as part of a carefully designed research project. Yin's model seeks to provide descriptions of events without imposing analysis, even though the researcher does maintain a clear set of objectives throughout the data collection process. Following these guidelines allowed me to provide 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) that allows my readers to enter into the world of my classroom to better understand the environment studied and draw their own interpretations (Patton, 2002) without imposing a pre-determined set of outcomes.

Case study methods allow the researcher to explore "a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals" in depth (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). I initially collected data over the course of the ten-month school year, from August 2009 to May 2010. This ongoing process allowed me to repeatedly reflect on my data, continually code my findings, and purposefully select five students to conduct follow-up interviews with during the following school year (May 2011) in order to tell the story of my classroom and respond to the research questions. Although all students in the chosen class period were considered participants in the study, case study methods were implemented in order to closely examine five students. Each participated in a follow-up interview that provided a more in-depth analysis of student experience in the classroom. Creating case studies for five specific students, as opposed to case studies for the whole class, allowed me to zero in on portraits that provide a more detailed description of conditions, interventions, and outcomes in the process of development of a community of inquiry in the classroom and promoted validity and authenticity in my findings:

The case study can focus on a classroom or school situation or on a particular student. When students are the objects of inquiry, the case study can help teachers learn to apply knowledge of development, learning, motivation, and behavior to specific children as they function in their family, school, and community contexts. (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 532)

The purpose of the interviews was to explore ways in which these particular students

came to know themselves while learning content and skills within the presence of an intellectually safe classroom community of inquiry. Utilizing a case study methodology allowed for a greater depth to my analysis; I selected each student to represent a ‘type’ reflected in the classroom, helping to show the wide range of ability and engagement.

### **Self-Study**

This research is also a self-study in the sense that I examined ways in which community was fostered and developed within my classroom as I experience it. Using a self-study method allowed me, as the teacher, to inquire about issues related to my practice in an effort to improve my own teaching (Samaras & Freese, 2006). As a method of research, Loughran (2004) has explained that self-study has been most frequently used in the field of education since the 1980s, although it “took almost another decade for teacher educators to see the importance of doing themselves what they were encouraging others to do – study their own practice” (p. 7). Self-study research is “a mode of scholarly inquiry in which teachers examine their beliefs and actions within the context of their work as educators” (Whitehead, 1993, as cited in Louise, Drevdahl, Purdy & Stackman, 2003, p. 150). Additionally, self-study occurs over a period of time and often in cycles; “the researcher engages in cycles of research, and systematically collects and analyzes data” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p. 28). Finally, self-study makes private experience public creating a sense of vulnerability for the researcher:

We may...be at our most vulnerable when studying closely our own persona as a teacher – the images others hold of us and those we hold of ourselves...we may be entering into processes by which we deconstruct some basic, historically rooted views of ourselves. In such processes our existing images of the professional self will be challenged, questioned, re-thought and re-shaped in some degree. (Dadds, 1993 as cited in Loughran, 1999, p. 228)

Each of these key elements of the self-study paradigm support my objectives as a researcher: 1) to ground my personal beliefs regarding the impact and importance of creating a sense of community in the classroom in the literature; 2) to examine student reflections to discover the influence of a community of inquiry on student identity and sense of self; 3) to reframe my view of student personal engagement in order to understand it through the act of reflection; and 4) to draw parallels between my

experiences in the classroom and those of my students in order to create my own identity as a member of the classroom community of inquiry.

### **Setting**

The setting of this qualitative research study was a public high school on the leeward side of Oahu, Hawaii. As of the 2009-10 school year there were 2,670 students in grades 9-12, making it the largest public school in the state. The extremely diverse school population as documented in the 2009-2010 School Status and Improvement Report (SSIR) is 44% Filipino, 16.4% part or full Hawaiian, 7.1% White, and smaller populations of Samoan, Black, Japanese, Hispanic, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, Native American and others. Approximately 41% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch during this school year, establishing the school as a Title 1 institution. An estimated 7% spoke English as a second language (ELL), and 15% received Special Education services. Additionally, at the start of the 2008 school year the school became the first public high school in the state to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) program; a worldwide, distinguished diploma program. The school continues to be a national Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) demonstration school and boasts a flourishing Advanced Placement (AP) program. The school ranks as one of the most diverse in the state, both in terms of student population and curriculum offered.

The specific setting of this study was one of the nineteen tenth-grade English classes, which was also one of five tenth-grade Honors English classes on campus. The school's honors program operates under an "Open Door Policy". There is no application or academic requirement, such as GPA, assessed reading level, or teacher recommendation. Although this means that students actively choose to be in a more challenging classroom environment, it also results in a great range of academic ability within the classroom. This particular group of students entered having previously tested with reading levels ranging from fourth grade to post-high school, and scores on their eighth grade Hawaii State Assessment (HSA) ranging from "well-below" to "exceeds". This range of ability required a greater amount of differentiation than in a typical Honors course, and also created some natural division among students.

### **Participants**

Participants of this study were the students who were in my classroom environment on a daily basis, meaning they were exposed to the standard classroom practices of a block schedule: 82 minutes each school day for the entire academic year (August 4, 2009 through May 26, 2010), with the exception of Wednesday's 62 minutes/class schedule. I chose one class to be the focus of my data collection and analysis for several specific reasons. Prior to the first day of school I knew that this particular class would be the largest class (43 students at the start of the school year, 38 by the end) and that it would have the widest range of ability based on the previously administered reading assessments. The combination of academic and social range among students in the class was the initial reason why I chose this class. I believed the wide range of academic ability would elicit a variety of responses due to the fact that the students were aware of their academic position and often acted in accordance with that perceived identity instead of taking the risk to alter it. Additionally there was an apparent conflict among students that occurred to some extent on a daily basis during the first half of the academic year, which, although I didn't anticipate in the planning of my study, it became a crucial part of my research. And finally, this class provided me with the most challenges, which caused me the most reflection due to the fact that it tested my personal teaching philosophy the most. For these reasons, focusing on this class was risky but could also offer the most significant and revealing data given the challenges it presented. Although my data collection initially included all members of my three classes, I chose to narrow my research focus to this one particular class period since there was a crucial event that occurred early on in the school year that tested the elements of community and intellectual safety within the classroom. I was curious to see how they viewed that event and the feelings it created for them in terms of the sense of community in the classroom and their individual role in it. Additionally, I later realized the importance of adding an additional layer of student reflection by conducting follow-up interviews, so I later selected five students to interview the following school year.

### **Data Sources**

Yin (1992) suggested using multiple sources of evidence to ensure construct validity. My sources of data include 1) student personal histories; 2) student reflections

of a critical incident; 3) follow-up student interviews; and 4) student scores on reading level assessments and state-mandated tests (those in accordance with NCLB legislation). Qualitative analysis, which is included in Chapter 5, provided evidence of personal engagement as it occurs over the course of the ten-month school year.

### **Student Personal Histories**

Student Personal Histories were purposefully collected from participants at three pre-determined points in the school year (September, February, May) as a means of identifying recurring themes and to provide indicators of the broad range of successes and struggles in the process of community development in accordance with my research question and sub-questions. Each Student Personal History was comprised of open-ended reflective prompts given to students enrolled in my Sophomore English course during the 2009-2010 school year.

Students were given time in class to complete their responses to each of the questions on the Personal History. Since I did not want to risk inauthentic responses and eliminate a response being written simply because a grade was attached, I informed students that although this was not a graded assignment they were expected to complete the reflection in class. I wanted students to write what they felt was a complete reflection without the extrinsic motivation or influence of a grade. Although this decision resulted in some students not completing the task, it did suggest that those completed reflections were more valid in terms of the students' feelings. These student reflections became an integral source of data regarding students' perspective of self as learners in relation to their own cognitive, emotional, and social engagement.

The three sets of prompts assigned at each stage of community development were created prior to the start of the research cycle:

#### *Student Personal History #1: "The Beginning" (September, 2009)*

1. Recall one negative and one positive critical experience/incident in your educational career that you consider to be memorable. What was the event? In what way did it impact your identity of yourself as a learner?
2. Who are you as a learner? In other words, describe yourself as a student. What are your interests, your learning habits (both good and bad)? What type of environment do you learn best in?

3. Reflect on the reason(s) why you elected to take this Honors English course.

*Student Personal History #2: “The Middle” (February, 2009)*

1. Recall one significant experience (positive or negative) that you have had in this classroom community. What was the event? In what way did it impact your identity of yourself as a learner?
2. Who are you as a learner in this classroom? In other words, describe yourself as a student within this classroom community. Is this the same type of learner that you are in all of your classes? If not, please provide reasons why you think your identity changes in different classrooms.
3. Reflect on your performance as a learner in this Honors English course.

*Student Personal History #3: “The End” (May 2010)*

1. What are the aspects of this classroom community that impact your experience (positive or negative) as a learner? Explain the element(s) of the community. Explain the way in which it helps/hinders your learning experience.
2. Reflect on your overall development (since the start of the school year) of yourself as a learner in this classroom? Describe yourself as a student within this classroom community. Is this the same type of learner that you identified yourself as at the start of the school year? If not, please provide reasons why you think your identity changed over the course of the year.
3. Briefly describe the way(s) in which you believe learning occurs in this classroom community.

Although the questions at each point in the year varied, they were essentially seeking the same information: student insight into the views of the classroom environment and a personal reflection of themselves as learners within that environment. Each set of questions prompted students to reflect on both themselves and this particular classroom. At the start of the year students did not yet have a sense of who they were in this classroom, so questions focused on school in general. However, as the year went on and students gained a sense of self within our classroom, the questions asked for details from my class in particular. In the end, the questions were prompting them to make an overall

reflection on the year. Coding of selected responses is included in the following chapter, with analysis in Chapter 6.

### **Critical Incident: “The Intervention”**

A second data source of this study is student personal reflections of a critical incident. A critical incident is defined as “an event that signals an important change in course, a shift in one’s thinking (Measor, 1985, as cited in Bullough & Gitlin, 2001, p. 26). Norman Denzin (2008) refers to similar events as turning points, which he calls *epiphanies*: “existentially problematic moments in the lives of individuals” (p. 145). According to Denzin, in moments of epiphany people redefine themselves; these moments are ultimately connected to turning points of one’s lived experience (Strauss, 1959). Patton (2002) elaborates, stating communities have parallel types of epiphanies. For example, in this study my students and I simultaneously navigated through ‘problematic moments’ in order to redefine expectations, roles, and relationships within our shared community of inquiry. Denzin (1989) clarifies that epiphanies can be positive or negative, arise from crisis or change, and may present in a variety of forms but receive their meaning retrospectively. Reflection of critical incidents allows me to interrupt my own history and bring my epiphanies into the open, in front of the ‘rear-view mirror’ for personal reflection and analysis (Denzin, 2011).

In the context of this study, a ‘critical incident’ refers to a moment in the classroom that threatens the sense of community and ultimately student personal engagement. This study examines one critical incident that occurred in one specific class period during the ten-month school year. This incident arose in response to a threat to the establishment of community and safety within the classroom. Student reflections completed during the critical incident provided data to highlight student cognitive, social and emotional engagement, as well as insight into various struggles and successes that impact the development of a community of inquiry in the classroom.

Because I stopped the progression of the class for a reflection on what I defined as a critical incident with the intent of turning things around, I call this lesson an



“Intervention<sup>2</sup>.” I allowed time for in-class written reflection in response to a clearly stated prompt. I used a series of PowerPoint slides to guide students through the reflection, giving the same prompts to each class. However, for my fourth period I included my personal feelings and observations about what was taking place in our classroom community of inquiry in order to model honest reflection. Coincidentally we were reading Daniel Keyes’s *Flowers for Algernon*, a controversial novel written in 1966 that chronicles a young man’s quest for knowledge. This literary work allowed me to draw parallels between the content of the novel and aspects of our classroom. The series of slides walked students through the reflective activity:

- (Slide 1) In *Flowers for Algernon*, Charlie is teased by others and never realizes that they are making fun of him or looking at him as being “different”. As he becomes smarter he gains an awareness of what others have thought about him and begins to get angry and embarrassed. However, those who ridiculed him or cast him aside as being “different” may or may not realize the implication of their actions on Charlie’s concept of himself in society.
- (Slide 2) We have been working on building a classroom community since the first day of school. However, I have noticed that there are factors standing in the way of our success of becoming an intellectually safe community. As I began to reflect, I observed:
  - Some students make fun of others who share answers by mocking them or making rude comments to their neighbor/friend
  - Some students laugh to their neighbor or out loud in response to a classmate’s idea.
  - Most students refuse to work with anyone “new” and keep only to their usual group. When mixed up, students complain and/or don’t put in their best effort.
  - Some students continue to talk, have side conversations, listen to iPod, text, etc...not being respectful to the class by being disengaged.

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<sup>2</sup> I referred to this event as “The Intervention” since we had recently discussed a new reality show on television with the same name. From this discussion, students understood the purpose of an intervention was to address a problem and stop the behaviors in order to eliminate the problem.

- (Slide 3) I believe that some of you are not aware of the way in which your actions impact others and hinder our development, as a group. What I can do to improve the level of intellectual safety in our community is to continue to have students reflect on the importance of community, the lack of community, their role in building/hindering community development, and do activities that promote working together in mixed groups.
- (Slide 4) HOWEVER, if you are unaware of how your actions possibly affect others in the class (positively and negatively), then you will not be aware of how you are impacting other's view of themselves in this group – like the bakers, Charlie's classmates and his mom.
- (Slide 5) Take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions. Please write down your responses anonymously for me to collect.
  - How do you feel in this class in terms of your Intellectual Safety?
  - What do you think some **reasons** might be?
  - What can you do today to help **increase** the intellectual safety?
  - *Without using names, explain a situation that caused you to feel intellectually safe or unsafe.*

I informed students that I would be sharing comments made in the reflections anonymously in class on the following day. I used selected student responses to guide the “Intervention” that needed to take place to allow our community to become intellectually safe and continue to develop. Results of this reflection are included in Chapter 5, and analysis is included in Chapter 6.

### **Follow-up Interviews**

Yin (1992) has cautioned, “interviews should always be considered verbal reports only. As such, they are subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation...[A] reasonable approach is to corroborate interview data with information from other sources” (p. 85). Since I had additional data sources confirming similar themes, the findings that arose from the interviews proved more reliable. The follow-up interviews (i.e. case studies with five students) completed the triangulation of my data and created more comprehensive findings representative of a variety of perspectives (Hays in deMarrais & Lapan, 2004):

Overall, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs. These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation. They can provide shortcuts to the prior history of the situation, helping you to identify other relevant sources of evidence. (Yin, 1992, p. 85)

After the Intervention I was curious to speak more with students representing the classroom community's 'key characters' to get their insight about the class as a whole since this class clearly had the most challenges developing a safe community of inquiry. I chose five students from various backgrounds to be the focus of my follow-up interviews and case study analysis because they represented the diversity of my classes in terms of gender, ethnicity, family backgrounds, and socio-economic status. Additionally, the five students, three girls and two boys, demonstrated specific behaviors that were typical of a significant number of students in that particular class period: low reading scores, high academic ability, lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, inconsistent academic performance and level of participation, and truancy. I identified five particular 'student types' and purposefully chose students based on the fact that they accurately represented one of them. The following chart provides details about each of the five students interviewed.

Name (pseudonym)	Student 'type'	Key student 'type' indicators <sup>3</sup>
<b>Heron</b> (male)	The <i>Absentee</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Ability</u>: Average</li> <li>• <u>Participation</u>: None/Little</li> <li>• <u>Performance</u>: Low</li> <li>• <u>Other</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Chronically absent</li> <li>○ Didn't take notes/study, but performed well on in-class assessments.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Eden</b> (female)	The <i>Paradox</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Ability</u>: Very high</li> <li>• <u>Participation</u>: High</li> <li>• <u>Performance</u>: Low</li> <li>• <u>Other</u>: Didn't take notes/study, but performed very well on in-class assessments.</li> </ul>
<b>Khayla</b> (female)	The <i>Inconsistent Goal Setter</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Ability</u>: Average</li> <li>• <u>Participation</u>: High</li> <li>• <u>Performance</u>: Low</li> <li>• <u>Other</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Self-reflective</li> <li>○ High parental involvement</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Alyssa</b> (female)	The <i>Confident Intimidator</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Ability</u>: High</li> <li>• <u>Participation</u>: Average/High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Extremely vocal, but often not in relation to topic.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Performance</u>: Average/High <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Regularly revised work to improve grade</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Other</u>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Self-reflective when forced</li> <li>○ High parental involvement</li> <li>○ Didn't hesitate to share personal opinions of others and their contributions, even if hurtful or inappropriate.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Keanu</b> (male)	The <i>Actively Average</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Ability</u>: High</li> <li>• <u>Participation</u>: Average <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Vocal, but often not in relation to topic</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Performance</u>: Low</li> <li>• <u>Other</u>: Didn't take notes/study but performed very well on in-class assessments.</li> </ul>

Table 2

<sup>3</sup> **Ability (Based on standards-based test scores)**: Below average (*below grade level*), Average (*grade level*), High (*above grade level*), Very high (*post-high school level*)

**Participation (Oral)**: None, Low (*seldom with group or peers, on topic*), Average (*regularly with group or peers, on topic*), High (*daily with group and peers, on topic*)

**Performance (Work completion/Grades)**: Low (*Completes some in-class work, D/F*), Below Average (*Completes some in-class/homework, C/D*), Average (*Regularly completes in-class/homework, B*), High (*Consistently completes in-class/homework, A*)

I planned to conduct only one interview with each student; therefore, my interview guide was formatted in accordance with Grant McCracken's (1988) "Long Interview Technique" model. The "Long Interview Technique" supports narrative inquiry by allowing participants to reflect on experience in a free-flowing manner. The approach divides the research into four sequential steps, from the perspective that the interview process actually begins with the review of the literature since compiling the literature review aids in the construction of the interview guide:

It begins to establish the domain the interview will explore...It helps to determine what the respondent should ask about and what he or she should listen for. By the end of the review, the investigator should have a list of topics for which questions should be prepared. (McCracken, 1988, p. 31)

Similarly, McCracken's interview technique continues beyond the actual interview and into the data analysis phase:

The four-step technique involves first, gaining an awareness of the relevant literature; second, introspectively understanding one's own awareness of the research question; third, conducting the interview during which research participants have an opportunity to tell their story; and fourth, conducting analyses of the interview data to identify emerging themes. (Tan & Hinter in Griffeth, Niederman & Ferrat, 2006, p. 152)

My review of the literature focused on the themes of student engagement, reflective teaching, curriculum, and communities of inquiry. Therefore, my interview questions were developed to align with at least one of these concepts. Creating a formal interview guide allowed me to see which topic areas were lacking questions so that I could continue to adjust my questions to correspond with my research questions and review of the literature.

McCracken also defines three types of interview questions, which I used as a guide for developing my interview questions in order not only to vary the types of questions I asked, but also to allow for a variety of responses from the students:

- *Grand tour* questions: General in nature and non-directive in manner.

- *Floating prompt* questions: Nature depends on the content of each interview; generally related to the researcher's decision to pursue a thread of discussion in more detail.
- *Planned prompt* questions: Asked near the end of the interview to address issues gleaned from the literature (1988).

I aimed to conduct a semi-structured interview in order to focus on key topics, but also to allow freedom for the students to elaborate and personalize their response or make connections to other experiences if applicable. In an effort to create this type of interview, I additionally considered Michael Patton's (2002) six types of questions to formulate my interview guide:

1. Experience and behavior (*"If I followed you through a typical day, what would I see you doing?"*)
2. Opinions and values (*"What do you think about..."*)
3. Feelings (*"How do you feel about..."*)
4. Knowledge (*Seeking factual information the participant knows about.*)
5. Sensory (*Ask what is seen, heard, touched, etc.*)
6. Demographics (*Best saved for last – age, education, SES, etc.*)

I conducted interviews with the five students in May of 2011, nearly one year after they left my classroom, to inquire about their current academic status and to facilitate a reflection upon their performance in our classroom the previous year. To arrange for the interviews, I located each student on campus, explained the interview process and my general reason for wanting to interview them, and provided them with letters of Student Assent and Parent Consent<sup>4</sup> that were pre-approved by the University of Hawaii at Manoa Institutional Review Board (IRB). I arranged a date and time with them and sought permission from their first period teacher to allow them to miss class to speak with me for approximately 30 minutes during my free period. On the pre-determined date students reported to my classroom and I conducted and recorded the complete interview.

To begin my interview I used what McCracken refers to as *grand tour* questions, those that are "benign, accepting, curious (but not inquisitive)" to establish myself as an

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<sup>4</sup> Copies of both letters are included in the Appendix.

eager and accepting listener (1988, p.38). Examples of these types of questions included, “How would you describe yourself as a student?” and “Which class(es) do you enjoy most?” I allowed for *floating prompts*, those that “emerge from testimony to prompt the respondent to say more about them”, to pursue an aspect of the conversation in more detail (p. 35). These questions varied based on what the interviewee shared, and also included asking questions I prepared for other students that suddenly seemed pertinent to ask. Examples included, “What do you mean by that?” or “Can you give an example?” I then moved to *planned prompts* to address aspects of the literature review that did not come up in the interview. McCracken explains that these prompts should come at the end of each interview, only when the others have been exhausted and terms gathered from the literature review have not yet been elicited. Having compiled such an organized guide allowed me easily to see which topics had not yet been addressed.

After completing the five interviews I personally transcribed them using Dragon Dictate word recognition software. I then read the transcripts several times and created initial codes used to tell not only the ‘story’ of the individual experience, but also the ‘stories’ that emerged across all responses to highlight the experience of our classroom; the blending of self-study and case study methods to personalize the study by providing specific examples and outcomes.

To connect with self-study methods, the interview transcripts were also read and coded by two colleagues, the ‘other’ necessary to complete the self-study process (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). In their book *Opening the classroom door: Teacher, researcher, learner*, John Loughran and Jeffrey Northfield (1996) document Northfield’s return to the classroom using three sources of data: teacher’s daily journal, student interviews, and student writing. An additional aspect of Northfield’s self-study, discussions with additional interested staff, “provided opportunities for reframing situations and experiences that could well have been missed or overlooked if the journal had remained a ‘personal’ closed book” (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p.11). Similarly, I used personal notes and reflections, as well as student interviews and writings as sources of data in my study. Additionally, I involved colleagues in the interview coding process in an effort to create and validate emerging themes. The work of Margaret Sellers and Paul Benco helped me to extend my analysis beyond a narrow and possibly

biased analysis. “Even though the term ‘self-study’ suggests an individual approach, we believe that effective self-study requires a commitment to checking data and interpretations with others (p. 13). I asked Margaret and Paul if they would be willing to read and code the transcripts due to the fact that they had some understanding of my teaching philosophy, and both had experience teaching and conducting research. I felt that their observations would be helpful due to the fact that they were knowledgeable but not biased. The inclusion of their codes during the data analysis process offered additional insight free from my analysis of their experience.

### **Test Scores**

Data are included from student scores on two state mandated tests in order to support the impact of the implementation of my curriculum and teaching philosophy on student cognitive, social and emotional engagement. Although test scores are traditionally viewed as an indicator of cognitive development, my approach to high-stakes testing relies on the establishment of the classroom community of inquiry and therefore requires student social and emotional engagement in the testing process.

The first source the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT)<sup>5</sup> and three scores reading were recorded: during the spring of 9th grade, start of tenth-grade, and end of tenth grade. The second was the Hawaii State Assessment (HSA)<sup>6</sup> and its scores from both their eighth and tenth grade years. These scores assist teachers in identifying incoming students who may need extra assistance, as well as those who may need the most assistance when it comes to taking and passing the HSA again in tenth grade. Scores are also used for placement; those students who perform well-below grade level are placed into the English lab class in order to receive assistance and time to focus on essential skills<sup>7</sup>. Analysis of my students’ test scores on each of these assessments

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<sup>5</sup> The GMRT is a group administered paper-pencil survey test designed to assess student reading level. It is given two times a year, fall and spring. Scores are readily available as the Scantron answer sheets are scanned.

<sup>6</sup> The HSAs are criterion-referenced assessments (math and reading) administered to students in grades 3 - 8 and 10. Criterion-referenced proficiency level scores are reported and used to determine a school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in accordance with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. At the time, students took the test in April over a period of seven days. Scores were not available until August, which was the following school year.

<sup>7</sup> This method of placement has changed since the 2009-2010 school year, and students are no longer placed based on test scores. All classes are fully integrated and teachers are expected to differentiate instruction to meet individual student needs.



allowed me to provide an overview of the range of ability in the classroom, their cognitive and social development over the course of the school year, and to compare and contrast the five students used for case studies in terms of growth over time. More importantly, students' tenth grade HSA results suggest a level of social engagement in addition to cognitive. Scores did not impact students' course grade, promotion, or graduation, so students who passed the test demonstrate a commitment to the process of learning as well as to the notion of remaining a community contributor and putting forth their best effort. Test results and are included in Chapter 5, with analysis in Chapter 6.

### **Procedures for Data Collection**

This study utilized a qualitative approach to data collection. Measuring the presence and level of student engagement provided many challenges, such as ensuring accurate documentation, the inability to visibly observe internal evidence, and students' inability to verbally express emotions. Therefore, this study will mainly assess student engagement through a series of student and teacher reflections.

I identified four phases of the data collection research cycle, which cover the three phase of community development (beginning, middle, end) during the school year and the follow-up phase (after) a year later. Each of the three Student Personal History reflections was assigned at the corresponding phase of community development (beginning, middle, end), which was the rationale for creating a cycle of research that was divided into parts.

Table 3: <b>Research Cycle</b>	
Year one	Year two
Phase 1: The Beginning <i>September 2009</i>	Phase 4: The After <i>May 2011</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Personal History #1</li> <li>• Initial teacher observations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow-up interviews with five students</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> <li>• Peer-review/coding of interview transcripts</li> </ul>
Phase 2: The Middle <i>February 2010</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Personal History #2</li> <li>• Teacher observations of a critical incident</li> </ul>	
Phase 3: The End <i>May 2010</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Personal History #3</li> <li>• Teacher reflection</li> </ul>	

Table 3

### **The Beginning**

The focus of the first stage in the research cycle was to gather information to document and examine purposeful methods of laying the groundwork for creating an intellectually safe classroom community of inquiry. This was the time for establishing classroom routines, setting expectations, introducing the idea of community, and gathering student personal information<sup>8</sup>. Data were open-ended at this stage, “developing an analysis from the information supplied by participants” (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). Students completed Student Personal History #1, a personal evaluation of their role as a student in school in general, during this phase. Responses were initially coded for recurring themes and held for later analysis as part of the collection of student reflections.

### **The Middle**

The focus of the second stage in the research cycle was the emergence of an intellectually safe community of inquiry within the classroom. At his halfway point in the year, I wanted to provide students an opportunity to reflect specifically on the development of our classroom community of inquiry and the ways in which it impacted their engagement with the content as well as with one another. Prompts for the student reflections focused on the presence of community by asking them to cite specific instances that either contributed to or detracted from their development. Students completed Student Personal History #2, which focused on their role as a student in this specific classroom at this midpoint of the school year. Responses were coded for recurring themes that previously emerged in Student Reflection #1, as well as for new themes that emerged. I began to conduct thematic analysis through a process of conceptual mapping at this point in the research cycle, providing me with “a neat and brief summary of the issues which are emerging” (Grbich, 2007, p. 32). To construct the concept maps I created diagrams to show the relationships among concepts and themes that I identified as I read. This allowed me to combine and connect themes, as well as visualize the relationships among student responses as a whole.

### **The End**

The focus of the third and final stage in the research cycle the emergence and maintenance of an intellectually safe community of inquiry within the classroom over the

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<sup>8</sup> A detailed discussion of the curriculum used at this point in the year was provided in Chapter 3.

course of the school year (10 months). Teacher and student reflections focused on the impact of a community of inquiry on their cognitive, social and emotional engagement. Students completed Student Personal History #3, which asked for specific evidence of community outcomes as part of their identity within the classroom. Responses were coded for recurring themes that emerged in the first two student reflections, as well as for new themes that emerged. Closer analysis of the themes created a core list of identifiers associated with the processes of community building and personal reflection; this list allowed me to refer to specific indicators of community and personal engagement, as well as to reasons for their non-existence if applicable. During this stage, re-storying of the participants began. Table 4 represents the themes that emerged, and is included in Chapter 5.

### **After**

Up to the time of this study, my students' test results on the Hawaii State Assessment (HSA) had consistently been the highest in the school and among the highest in the state. These results have given support to both my personal teaching philosophy and the theory that emotion is tied to cognitive development, allowing me to strongly argue for the need for the creation of a community of inquiry within the classroom. I believe the development and fostering of a community of inquiry within the classroom environment played a very significant part in this aspect of my students' success, however I did not want to operate on assumption. Data were collected in this study on students' performance, and these will be reported in Chapter 5. I interviewed students to ask them about why they think they scored higher than usual to test this theory and to gain insight into the topic of student motivation and test performance. These interviews provided a more personal and detailed reflection and evaluation on the role the community of inquiry played in individual learning experiences when they were removed from the classroom environment. Additionally, interviews allowed me to include my students' voices in the re-storying, in the analysis and not just the data collection. This reflects my teaching philosophy as well: I was not the sole source of information; the students had valuable insights to contribute in increase my level of understanding, and as such I invited them to do so.

### Procedures for Analyzing Data

My ultimate goal was to accurately present my findings in a narrative format in order to clearly describe the events that took place in my classroom, while at the same time making efforts to eliminate my personal biases. I chose to follow Vicki Plano Clark and John Creswell's (2010) process of qualitative data analysis model (Fig. 4) to code and analyze my data.

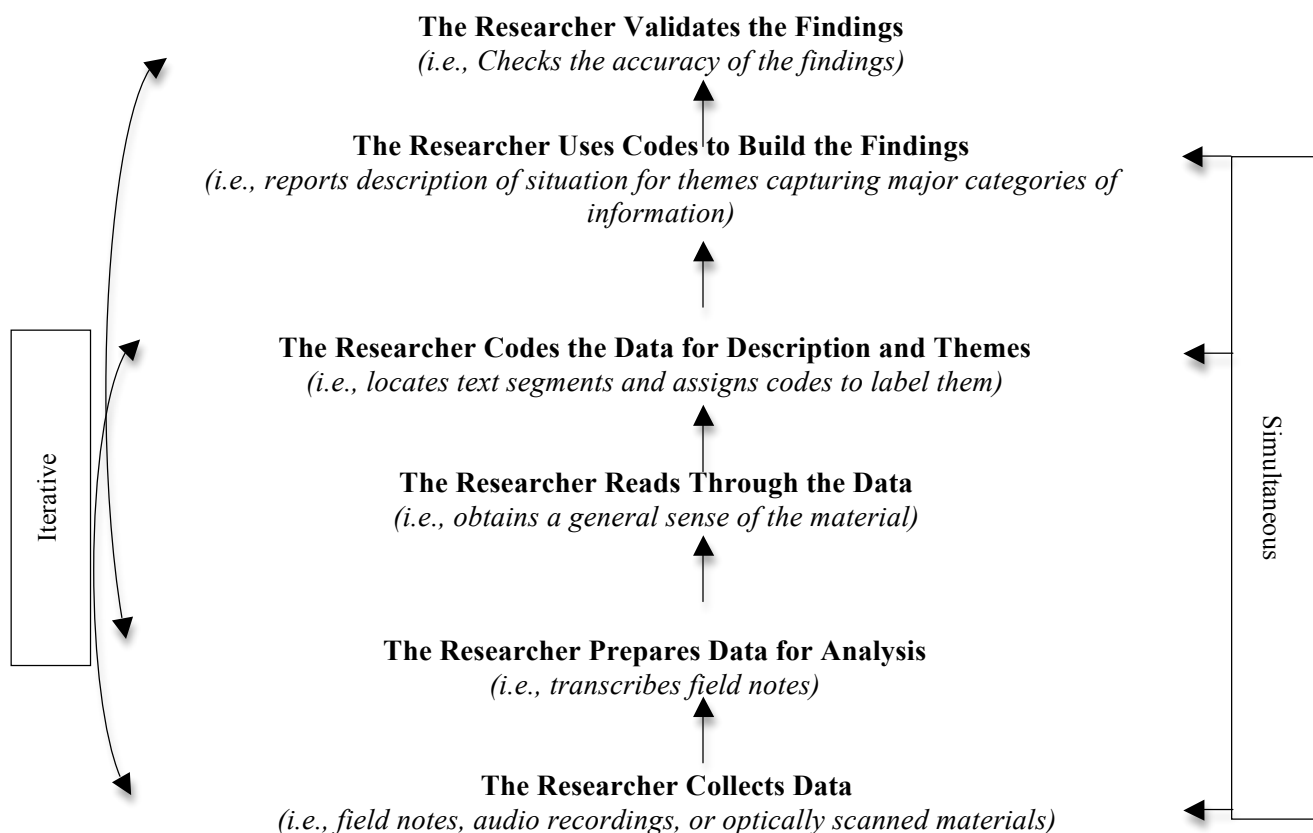


Figure 5. The process of qualitative data analysis. Adapted from Plano Clark, V., & Creswell, J. (2010). p. 278.

I continually analyzed all sources of data collected to look for recurring themes and indicators of emotional, cognitive and social engagement. Data analysis and interpretation “is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 190). During all stages of collection I conducted some level of analysis while coding the student responses and examining my own reflections. Coding (Grbich, 2007) of the responses allowed me to create categories and locate emerging themes in an effort to

identify aspects of individual engagement at each stage of developing community (initial, emerging, mature) as well as to reflect on and express my intent and philosophy.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness of Data**

Collecting data from multiple sources with multiple methods helped to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data used in this study. “The question of internal validity – the extent to which research findings are credible – is addressed by using triangulation, checking interpretations with individuals interviewed or observed, [and] staying on site over a period of time” (Merriam, 2009, p. 225). The different methods of data collection aided in the triangulation of data sources: interviews, observations and documents (p. 216). The addition of the follow-up interview with five students allowed me to check my interpretations and data analysis of student documents with my personal reflections. Additionally, I also had two colleagues help to code the interviews in order to do so in a way that was free from my personal bias.

Content validity refers to the degree to which questions and content reflect what the researcher wants to know (Suskie, 1996). The Student Personal Histories were designed to elicit student responses regarding their view of themselves as a learners over time, as well as thoughts on topics of community and engagement. The Interview Guide included questions regarding the same topics, as well as those implicitly directed at student reflection and overall reaction to having been in our classroom for a complete school year.

External validity “is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam, p. 2). Due to the limitations that exist for this study, the level of external validity is also limited in the sense that the exact findings cannot presumably be applied to other situations. However, the general results regarding the impact of a curriculum that acknowledges student identity and values their cognitive, social and emotional engagement likely has application to other classrooms.

### **Consent and Consideration of Human Subjects**

This study was initially approved by The University of Hawaii’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the Hawaii State Department of Education (DOE) in August of 2009. All required measures were taken to ensure confidentiality of the research participants involved in the study, which includes giving pseudonyms to student

participants. Participation was voluntary; students returned their signed student assent and parental consent forms only if they wished to participate. Informed consent forms indicated that the study aimed to examine the ways in which the creation of a classroom community of inquiry impacts student personal engagement. Students were not required to participate as a member of the class, their level of participation would not impact their grade, and if they chose to participate they could withdraw at any time without penalty. All students returned both the personal and parental signed forms. Due to the fact that I was going to conduct my student interviews nearly a year later, I had to obtain a second IRB approval. I completed a second application to The University of Hawaii's IRB committee in the spring of 2011 and was granted permission to conduct follow-up interviews with the five students who are the focus of my case studies. The DOE granted me permission to continue with my analysis beyond the initial one-year timeline as well as long as all findings were reported to them upon completion. My description of procedures for collecting and analyzing data, as well as for selecting participants, highlights ways in which my study remained ethical. A table illustrating this process is included in Appendix A.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study is not presented without limitations. Findings of this study are restricted to one classroom, with one teacher, in one public school in the state of Hawaii. Therefore, the findings are not generalizable. However, the findings of the study point to the importance of the establishment of an intellectually safe, reflective community of inquiry and also provide suggestions for further research. The focus of this study was important to this one teacher in particular, but may not be the objective for all classrooms on this campus, nor in this state or beyond that boundary. This may pose a challenge in terms of transferability due to the number of participants being limited to one individual class of students in one particular public high school. The dynamics of what occurred in this classroom are not the same as what occurred in other classrooms, and a comparison is not included. Although my positionality was that of the researcher, a final limitation stems from the positionality of the researcher as the teacher in the observed classroom. "To study one's own workplace, for example, raises questions about whether good data can be collected when the act of data collection may produce a power imbalance between

the researcher and the individual's being studied" (Creswell, 2007, p. 122). Serving as the central data collector and analyst created an obvious limitation, and I worked to maintain the message the student voices communicated by using their exact words.

### **Summary**

My qualitative research design details ways in which I remained an integral, guiding aspect of the study. My role as the researcher in this study was an active one. Primarily, I was directly engaged with the data collection due to the fact that it took place in my classroom with my students. I recognize that my personal background and connection to the participants influence my interpretation; therefore I have positioned myself in the research in a way that will allow me to acknowledge how my analysis of the findings is a result of my own personal experiences (Creswell, 2003). Due to the fact that I was the main instrument of this study of my classroom, I had to examine and describe my personal history with education and my personal philosophy.

Furthermore, I played the role of a participant observer who "employs multiple and overlapping data collection strategies: being fully engaged in experiencing the setting (participation) while at the same time observing and talking with other participants about whatever is happening" (Patton, 2002, p. 265). I am operating under the constructivist assumption that, "the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community"; therefore, my process was largely inductive as generated meaning from data collected in the field (Creswell, 2003). I am aware that my theoretical perspective has influenced how I analyze the data to examine the impact of a curriculum that I have created, implemented and reflected on over the course of my last six years as an educator. Due to the fact that this was a reflective self-study as well as a case study, there is an increased likelihood of teacher bias permeating the analysis of data. The triangulation of student personal histories and follow-up interviews, ongoing teacher observations and reflections, and coding independently done by two of my colleagues has helped to reduce the amount of teacher bias.

The methods used to conduct this study, as well as the research questions used to guide the study, have been described in detail to explain their appropriateness. Findings from this study are intended to inform my own understanding of engagement, more specifically the correlation between cognitive, social and emotional engagement, as well

as to add to knowledge base about the role of a community of inquiry in promoting student engagement. Results have informed my immediate colleagues and administrators, and other professionals in the field of education who are interested in exploring the notion of community in the classroom and the impact of fostering a safe community of inquiry.



## **Chapter 5: Findings**

As stated, the purpose of this qualitative study was to use the combined qualitative research methods of case study and self-study to systematically study how learning within a community of inquiry impacts student self-perception and cognitive, social and emotional engagement. The findings from the data analysis are presented in the following five sections. The first section addresses the themes that emerged from qualitative analysis. The second section examines Student Personal Histories that were collected at three pre-determined points in the academic school year as a means to support the qualitative reporting and provide “sufficient description to allow the reader to understand the basis for an interpretation” (Patton, 2002, p.503-504). The third section recounts a specific critical incident in my class that challenged my entire approach to curriculum and the level of overall student engagement in my classroom. In section four I provide profiles for each of the five students interviewed by sharing responses to interview questions designed for each of them specifically in order to illustrate unique insights from their individual role in the classroom. Section five presents the responses to questions asked of all interviewees grouped by the theme the question was created to address. In section six I present the test scores for the Gates-Macginitie Reading Test (GMRT) and the Hawaii State Assessment (HSA), two high stakes tests used for curriculum planning and academic placement. I conclude with a brief reflection of the purpose of this chapter.

### **Section One: Emerging Themes**

The greatest challenge of conducting qualitative analysis “lies in making sense of massive amounts of data. This involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (Patton, 2002, p. 432). In order to make sense of the data that emerged from each individual source, as well as to present a triangulation of the data in a meaningful way, I created codes for all student responses on the Student Personal Histories through an ongoing process. Such a process is iterative (Thompson, 1997). In the first stage I determined an understanding of each narrative so that in the second stage I was able to identify emerging themes, first within individual

interviews and then across a series of interviews. After each new set of student data was generated, I looked at it individually as well as in connection to the previous data. For example, I highlighted recurring themes in the set of Student Personal Histories #2, and then compared those to Student Personal History #1 in order to generate recurring themes. I also went back over Student Personal History #1 with the codes generated by Student Personal History #2 to ‘cross-check’ and see if I had missed something now that it was coming up a second time. This allowed me to continuously reflect on what the students were saying in relation to the themes I had previously identified and to assist me in creating new interview questions.

Maintaining an on-going process for coding allowed me to narrow my focus for analysis, as well as to inform my teaching over the course of the study. In their book *Opening the classroom door: Teacher, researcher, learner*, John Loughran and Jeffrey Northfield (1996) document Northfield’s return to the classroom. At the end of his data collection phase, Northfield reviewed and developed theme statements about teaching and learning which were then grouped into four sub-headings: nature of learning, creating conditions for learning, process of teaching and learning, and overall reactions to the experience. By categorizing the twenty-four theme statements into overarching themes, Northfield was able to streamline his findings to present a more detailed analysis. I adopted this method in order to narrow my findings and provide a more focused thematic analysis of my findings. After repeatedly looking over the data from the student responses and interviews, I identified six emerging themes, which I aligned to the three types of engagement I was studying. My efforts to engage a student emotionally and socially come first in order to allow them be willing to cognitively engage in the learning process.

Emerging theme	Type of engagement
1. Community/environment	Social and emotional
2. Relationships/social bonds	
3. Acceptance/recognition	
4. Perception of self as learner	Cognitive and emotional
5. Motivation	
6. Empathy	

Table 4

1. *Community/Environment*: This theme was identified by references to the specific elements of the classroom setting, which included both physical (e.g., classroom set up, artifacts) and emotional (e.g., internal feeling of safety, level of comfort) aspects. Responses that acknowledged a feature of the classroom or establishment of a community within the classroom were coded with this theme.
2. *Relationships/Social bonds*: Responses coded with this theme acknowledged the development of trusting relationships with peers and/or the teacher as a means for increasing engagement and learning.
3. *Acceptance/Recognition*: Student responses that referred to being acknowledged by peers and/or teacher for contributions, or spoke to the acceptance they received by peers who they did not know before coming to this classroom were identified with this code.
4. *Perception of self as a learner*: If a student wrote about an awareness of the type of learner they are or the new type of learner they have become as a result of being in this class, their response was identified with this code.
5. *Motivation*: Responses coded with this theme acknowledged either an internal (e.g, desire to improve, wanting a more challenging class) or external (e.g, parent request, looks good on transcripts) source of motivation for participating and/or completing class work.
6. *Empathy*: Recognition of feeling a sense of understanding for peers or being able to better relate to one another were labeled with this code. Most notable are those responses that related the development of empathy as a method of learning.

The ways in which these themes emerged in connection to the individual interviewee's responses are explained in the following sections.

## **Section Two: Student Personal Histories**

Student Personal History responses from students in the one class I selected were included in the coding process; however, not all students completed each of the three reflections. For most students this was the first time they were being asked to reflect in such a way. Many of them did not have the basic skills or understanding of the process in order to do so effectively from the start. Participation did increase with each Student Personal History, which seemed to indicate that students began to find more value in

completing the assignment. Described below are the codes that emerged at each stage of student reflection.

### **Student Personal History #1: Fall 2009**

The first Student Personal History was given in September, about five weeks into the year, and was comprised of three prompts aimed at having students identify themselves as learners in terms of prior school experiences. This was one of their first writing samples for class and was also the first time I asked them to share detailed personal information about their background and experiences.

The first question prompted students to recall one positive and one negative critical experience/incident in their educational career. In addition they were asked to explain the event and the impact it had on their perception of self as a learner. Numerous students commented on the positive feelings they had when they received special recognition:

- “My middle school had a nice ceremony and a little reception afterwards. My parents were proud of me and I got to experience it with my closest friends.”
- “I like when my teachers praise me for doing something good.”
- “My teacher, in front of everyone, stated that I was a good role model and used my assignment as an example to point out what she expected from all of us.”
- “In elementary school we were playing All Around The World. I beat everyone in my class. It’s a math game, so ever since then I have known that I am good at math. I’ve been doing very well in math ever since.”

Students’ most memorable experiences were related to having their contributions publicly and positively acknowledged. Although there is great debate over the value of extrinsic rewards versus that of intrinsic motivation, the students clearly valued being recognized in such a way within the classroom environment. Student responses indicated that a teacher’s attitude, positive or negative, was significant. Many students shared an experience with a specific teacher as being their most critical memory. Positive reflections included:

- “I love when teachers smile and display their love for children.”

- “In eighth grade I had a math teacher who was really cool. He made the class enjoyable and I actually enjoyed coming to class.”
- “In 8<sup>th</sup> grade my math teacher was awesome! His class didn’t feel like math at all. It was pure fun because he’d explain and everything was clear...”
- “I felt like he actually enjoyed teaching and cared about us, which made me look forward to coming to school.”

In contrast, many negative memories were considered to be just as, if not more, impactful to the student’s experience in the classroom. In fact, several students only shared a negative experience instead of a positive and a negative as the prompt asked. Responses include:

- “In pre-school I had a teacher who was very mean. I think she hated children!”
- “...In seventh grade I had a teacher who didn’t act like a teacher at all. He had no respect for us at all.”
- “I was yelled at and embarrassed by my teacher for not doing my homework assignment.”
- “When my teacher called on me I would blush with embarrassment, so my teacher thought it was entertaining so he made me stand in front of the class with the lights off to see if my face would glow like a beacon.”

The majority of student responses on this initial question indicated that the teacher was the main cause of both positive and negative experiences in the classroom. It is interesting to note that no student listed interactions with peers (ex: bullying, making new friends) as being a critical experience that impacted their learning. These responses support the link between emotion and learning, and highlight the need to acknowledge and value the emotional aspects of the learner. Additionally, the responses indicate the importance of prior experiences in school in relation to the shaping of one’s perception of self within the classroom environment.

The second question asked students to identify and describe themselves as learners. This question moved beyond the sharing of experiences and aimed to have students identify their learning habits and needs. Student responses included:

- “I’m lazy and I like to do everything in the last minute.”

- “I procrastinate a lot. This makes my work come in late or sometimes not at all.”
- “I like to work by myself because of past experiences where I was assigned a partner or group member and ended up doing all the work.”
- “I have a bad habit of procrastination. I work best when I’m alone because when I’m with other people I tend to get off track.”
- “People who call me smart don’t really know me. I do get bad grades...I really do like to learn, just as long as they make it interesting.”

Nearly all students identified themselves as *lazy*, including those who I would not consider to be lazy in any way (i.e. complete all assignments on time, make revisions, participate regularly in class, maintain good grades). Since this was one of their first impressions to me, I was surprised to see so many admit they do not do schoolwork. However, after reading over the responses several times and looking at the response to this question along with the others, it seemed that identifying themselves in this way from that start established the assumed identity a student is to adhere to and therefore the “cool thing” to say. In other words, the assumption of students is that they procrastinate and are lazy. Additionally, blaming one’s possible failure on laziness offers protection of one’s self-identity. I concluded that since it was the start of the year, they were indeed protecting their self-identity by saying negative things; if they say they aren’t the type to succeed, then they aren’t going to be held to some higher expectation.

Two follow-up questions were included to help students focus on their explanation since this type of reflection may be new to them. The first asked them to identify their learning habits, both good and bad:

- “I really like to talk and I love to read in groups.”
- “I’m self-directed and I am not afraid to ask questions.”
- “I play around, but I work best with people I know and like.”
- “I take a lot of notes when I need to...but when something is irritating me I zone out and don’t entirely pay attention.”
- “As a student, I’m an observer. I don’t like being the center of attention...I usually lay low.”

Most had difficulty pointing out their strengths and positive behaviors or recognizing the specific benefits of working with their peers. The ability to be social was recognized as a method that helped them to learn; however, the specific reasons why that helped weren't explained.

The second follow-up question asked students to describe the type of environment they learn best in. Responses representative of the emerging themes included:

- "I think I learn best in an environment where the kids are interactive and with each other, very social."
- "I like to be in a calm empty room with my music playing. I don't like to be distracted by people. I don't like to be with people who talk a lot so I stay focused."
- "I learn through groups, but also like to listen to music while writing. The environment that I learn best in is when I'm listening to music."
- "I feel like I concentrate more when I am in my room by myself with a little bit of music."
- "I work the best in complete silence, except for my iPod."

In terms of the type of environment students stated they needed to be successful, most valued being social but preferred working alone in order to be productive. There were a number of students who referred to their need to listen to music on their individual music player in order to be able to learn. These students seemed to view learning as an individual activity completed best in isolation and needed to tune out others and their surroundings to be productive. Additionally, this question introduced the concept of the classroom being an *environment*. Until this point we had only referred to the classroom as a *community*, but hadn't discussed the ways in which it is a learning *environment*. Being a community of inquiry meant there were certain behavioral expectations for each member in order to be successful as a group, which I had expressed on the first day. However, an environment was something external that may not be in their control. The classroom environment is often created for the student, whereas the community of inquiry relies on the behaviors of its members. This also led to the creation of the next question. I wondered if they saw the honors classroom as a pre-existing environment that

functioned regardless of their participation, or a community of inquiry that developed in response to their active involvement.

The final question prompted students to reflect on the reason why they elected to take this honors level course. The main reason given was because of their positive perception of an honors class, often based on assumption or second-hand information since this was their first time taking an honors course:

- "...to get away from people who don't take school seriously. Last year I was with people who had no interest in school and made trouble."
- "I love to dig into deeper details about things, and I love to learn."
- "I knew I'd learn better in an encouraging environment."
- "I knew I would get a better education and learn a lot more."

The majority of student responses indicated that they expected or assumed that a certain type of environment would be automatically created within a classroom labeled as "honors" and did not seem to believe this type of environment could exist outside of that model. Additional reasons included both internal and external motivations:

- "It shows I want to learn at an advanced level."
- "Honors was one of my educational goals that I feel will help me be successful."
- "My mom had me take honors classes so I could be ahead and do well in school."
- "Honestly, I shouldn't be in this class. But my parents wanted me to take honors."
- "When I take honors it reflects good on my transcript for colleges."

I was most curious to read their responses to this question due to the fact that our school has an Open Door Policy for enrollment in honors level classes. Although this policy encourages all students to challenge themselves, it also creates several challenges for both the teacher and the students. Mainly, the teacher must be sure to keep the level of content at the advanced level since students signed up for that; however, having students in the class who are not yet at or close to grade level complicates the ability to do that. Additionally, since a certain skill or grade level is not required a tension is often created among the students as they become more aware of and often intimidated by their



academic differences. This alone is a key reason for creating a sense of community within the integrated or inclusive classroom

### **Student Personal History #2: Winter 2010**

Students completed their second reflection in February as we passed the halfway mark of the school year. The series of questions on this Personal History focused on the students' sense of self within this classroom based on experiences and in comparison to their perception of self in other classrooms. There was a clear shift in their perception coming from interactions with their peers and not directly from the teacher as was indicated in Personal History #1. Students also included more details and explanations in these reflections compared to the first Personal History completed six months prior. This suggests a clearer understanding of writing expectations, an improvement of their writing skills, an increased level of comfort, and an overall development of a willingness to engage in the activity. Additionally, a total of 80 students in all three classes completed this assignment compared to a total of 47 who turned in the first Personal History. Although I only included responses from one class, this suggested that more value was placed on reflecting in order to complete the assignment.

The first question asked students to recall one significant experience, positive or negative, that they had in our classroom community of inquiry. They were prompted to explain the event and the way in which it impacted their perception of self as a learner.

Responses included:

- "...the activity where everyone had to write their thoughts in class because some people feel the way I did or at least close to how I felt. It impacted my identity by knowing that the way I felt was okay and I shouldn't be afraid to share my thoughts on what we are learning."
- "When I got the courage to share my journal. It was a very personal response that I shared out loud to the whole class, and the reaction I got from my peers was surprising. They were respectful towards my feelings and it showed that people do care and they do tend to listen to what others have to say. Since people were respectful and caring towards me, I thought it would be fair to give the same respect back. That's why I listen to what everyone says when sharing instead of talking."

- “When I shared my journal entry with the whole class. Everybody liked what I wrote and I actually felt like I could click with a lot of people after. That was a really awesome experience. I feel it impacted me as a learner because I felt much more safe and secure instead of timid.”
- “When we had to journal some of the hard things that we have to do and then compare...I think this impacted my identity because it showed me that everyone has something in common, no matter how different we are. It also showed me that in some situations I may not be as alone as I thought.”
- “When we talked I was surprised to find out that we all had everything in common. It impacted me to actually know more about these people, and the misunderstandings between on another. It made me feel comfortable to be me in class.”
- “I get to interact with my classmates who I never had spoken to. It was pretty surprised when I got responses from my group members saying they’re like me.”
- “Sharing journals with a group...because one person that I kind of dislike is so much like me...I never realized we had so much in common...My dislike completely went away and I really started to like her. It impacted me because it taught me not to judge a person because you never know how many things you have in common and realizing this could lead to a great friendship.”
- “The Step-on-the-Line activity. The question about parents being divorced or separated came up and seeing how many people stepped on the line with me made me feel not alone anymore and motivated because if they can deal with similar problems to what I’m going through and get good grades then I can too.”
- “The Step-on-the-Line activity was the only time when everyone in class opened up to each other, even if it was just our small problems. It helped us realize that we share common things. I think it made us more comfortable with each other even though we had been in the same class for the past six months.”

- “When we had debates in class it opened my eyes to see a way to go more in depth about certain topics. It helped me to think outside the box.”
- “Making the community ball...I was more comfortable with expressing myself in class. In the beginning of the year when we made the first ball I was more shy, and that first ball was a way to get to know everyone. The second time, I was more open and I wasn’t afraid to express myself. I was comfortable around my other classmates and that I could trust them.”

Responses indicated that it was not one specific classroom practice or isolated event, but a variety of activities focused on personal reflection and discussion with peers that enabled students to alter their sense of self, as well as their misconceptions of their peers in order to become more tolerant, accepting, and emotionally engaged. The recurring mention of breaking down social barriers in order to develop social bonds indicated that value was associated with doing so. It also highlighted the link between bonding with peers, comfort and security in one’s identity, and actively engaging in the learning process.

Question number two asked, “Who are you as a learner in this classroom? In other words, describe yourself as a student within this classroom community of inquiry. Is this the same type of learner that you are in all of your classes? If not, please provide reasons why you think your identity changes in different classroom?” Student responses included:

- “In this class I used to be shy and always keeping things to myself. But once I got used to my classmates I got into learning and expressing myself to others.”
- “I’m pretty talkative in all of my classes, but here I don’t get in trouble for it.”
- “I’m more comfortable in this class then in my other classes. We seem as more of a community, so I find it easier to talk – something that is a problem for me in all classes. My behaviors differ in each of my classes because of the different types of class and environment that each provides.”
- “I’m more open in here because this is my most open-minded class. We can easily say what we want, and don’t need to worry. We have trust. If I don’t know anyone in my other classes, then I don’t talk about things to them like I would in this class.”

- “In this class I would describe myself as open. In certain classes the teacher doesn’t care as much. I change my attitude in each classroom based on the teacher.”
- “In this classroom I’m more open, bubbly, and talkative because of the community. It feels safe and everyone can express themselves without being judged.”

Most students indicated a shift in behavior and participation across the multiple social worlds they find themselves in within the single school day, each with different expectations and levels of safety. When students felt comfortable with their peers, they were more likely to actively verbally participate to the discussion. Being able to talk in class was now being viewed and valued as a means of learning, which was more clearly explained in comparison to general responses in Personal History #1 about being able to socialize. This idea showed up again in the second question, which prompted students to reflect on their performance as a learner specifically in this honors English course.

- “I realize that I learn by discussing. This would probably be the only classroom able to discuss issues of one another freely, without being judged or ridiculed in the process.”
- “The people in this class have helped to create this positive learning experience and I like how I have changed as a learner.”
- “This class made learning fun for me. I learned that I can have fun learning...All the experiences in this class changed the way I learn and see myself as a learner.”
- “I never wanted to learn from other people other than the ones I (usually) talk to. Honors really changed the way I learn because it taught me that I should be more sociable with others so I can learn more and I can experience more positive things.”
- “I think I could have done better, but I keep trying. I do a pretty good job of pushing myself.”

Students’ responses reflected a deeper awareness of a new self-perception that was emerging, and acknowledged a collective identity of this class. When asked to provide

reasons why they thought their identity changed, nearly all students recognized the overall environment and being able to discuss as key factors.

### **Student Personal History #3: Spring 2010**

During the last week of school in May, just over three months after the previous Student Personal History was completed, students completed the final reflection. The first question on the final Personal History asked students to identify aspects of this classroom community that had an impact upon their learning experience, positively or negatively. They were to explain the element of the classroom community of inquiry and then the way in which it helped or hindered their learning experiences. Student responses included:

- “Being comfortable with our classroom community has definitely helped me do better because I can ask different people what they think of my work instead of just one.”
- “...it had a lot more group work. It helped with my learning experience because I found different people that I was comfortable with. Even if I wasn’t the smartest in the group, I still felt comfortable.”
- “The fact that this class always pushes us to speak in public has impacted my experience because I got more comfortable.”
- “Everyone in this classroom is like family...it made me feel appreciated and welcomed.”
- “From the beginning of the year we never knew anyone and that gave people the right to judge people on their appearance. Then, as of today, we learned to be more of a family and to be comfortable with one another.”
- “Sharing my journals showed me that a lot of people in class actually care about you and some have even been through the same things you have. I was really happy when I found that out.”
- “The work with groups. You get to share different ideas and help others who are confused. This helped me learn in a positive way.”
- “I feel the community ball has helped my learning experience because it encourages me to share my ideas and experiences.”

Students clearly valued feeling comfortable in the classroom and again related this to the positive experience of being able to develop relationships and interact with their peers as well as the overall classroom environment. No negative experiences were shared.

The second question asked students to reflect on their overall development as a learner in this particular classroom since the start of the school year. They were prompted to describe themselves as a student in this classroom community of inquiry and explain if this was the same type of learner they identified themselves as at the start of the school year. If not, I wanted them to provide a reason why they thought their identity changed over the course of the year. Responses included:

- “I’ve changed as a learner because before I never really wanted to share my opinions, but as time goes on I got more comfortable and I share more openly than I did before.”
- “I realize I share more often or input my ideas as well. I feel more confident when I speak to the class and more confident when I’m sharing something.
- “As a student I think I grew more emotional in my writing. In past years I was often afraid of expressing any emotions in my writing. Now I feel like I can express my feelings without being self-conscious or regretful.”
- “I feel really safe expressing myself in this classroom without having to worry about being teased.”
- “In this community I have developed a trust with everyone. I feel that I can say anything and people in the classroom won’t judge me or make me feel like I said something wrong. This has made me feel more comfortable with myself.”

All students identified change in some way, whether it was a cognitive, social or emotional change. Most students spoke to their increased level of comfort and safety due to a feeling of trust, confidence and overall security with their peers. Many indicated that they’ve become students who share often due to the development of rapport with their peers within this environment.

The final question asked students to briefly describe the way in which they believe learning occurs in this classroom community of inquiry.

- “This class is more hands on because we don’t just sit and take notes while you lecture, but we talk about things.”
- “I believe learning happens through discussions, and through discussions peoples’ ideas are pulled out and absorbed by everyone else.”
- “You don’t make us think inside the box! You make us go beyond and above, outside the box. That is what I love most. You didn’t make us average – everything we do in this class, we had to use a lot of creativity and unique things.”
- “I believe in this class, not only do we learn from you (Ms. Jones) but also from one another. Each of us contributes something that we know others can learn from.”
- “I believe that the majority of the learning that occurs in this classroom community comes from the students...we have learned about each other.”
- “I believe in this class we learn as a family where we all share ideas, learn from them, and apply them to our lives.”
- “Doing stuff in groups helped me learn more about my classmates that I never really talked to.”
- “You learn off of what people do and say. When you work together in a community, you learn about every person.”

In their responses, students identified learning as something that happens as a result of being socially and emotionally engaged with one another through discussion, thinking, and contributing ideas. Their view of the source of information and learning was not limited to the teacher, as most stated that learning was directed from student to student and was a collaborative action.

### **Summary**

A number of students did not complete the first Student Personal History, which I consider to be an indicator of their low level of ‘buy in’ to the concept of community, their lack of awareness of themselves as learners, their devaluing of the process of reflection, and/or their disconnection from the classroom and concept of school as a whole at this stage of the study. On the other hand, the responses from the students who completed the reflection showed how a teacher’s attitude and actions could impact a

student's willingness to engage. Several students shared memorable experiences with a teacher, both positive and negative, that directly impacted their level of excitement and confidence in the classroom. None reflected on an experience with their peers in response to the question asking them to recall one positive and one negative critical experience in their educational career. However, by the third and final Personal History eight months later there was evidence of their sense of belonging to a community. Students cited the establishment of a community of inquiry within the classroom as being essential to their learning and engagement. This suggests the importance of establishing a sense of community in the classroom fosters student engagement and a feeling of belonging.

Second, responses on the Personal Histories provided insight into why students chose to enroll in the honors class. The two main reasons were that there would be no disruptive students in an honors class, and that the curriculum was more challenging and therefore provided better preparation for college. From this perspective, simply being in a class labeled "honors" would eliminate these aspects of the classroom environment. However, responses on the second and third Personal Histories illustrated an appreciation for building relationships with those who one normally would avoid and socially relating to others as a means of learning.

Regarding student identity, student reflections on the first Student Personal History indicated a somewhat stereotypical student response to identity of self as a learner, which included being lazy, procrastinating, and working best alone due to a lack of trust of peers or to eliminate distractions. However, student responses on the second and third Student Personal Histories indicated a new awareness of the type of learner they became as a result of being in this classroom community of inquiry due their value of the learning process as a collaborative one. Responses on the third Student Personal History and follow-up interviews reflected a new identity, one that was developed in relation to interaction with others. All students identified an altered self-identity, and there was no mention of the need to isolate oneself in order to learn. It was very clear from responses on the first Student Personal History that students valued being acknowledged for their achievements in the classroom by their teacher. However, responses on the third Student Personal History indicated more value being placed on peer acceptance.



In terms of social engagement, responses on the first Student Personal History showed an appreciation for getting to talk with peers, but did not recognize the building of relationships as being a positive influence on engagement and learning. However, as the year went on and reflections continued, students began to acknowledge the importance of trusting relationships with peers and the teacher as a means for increasing engagement and learning. Data from the third Student Personal History and follow-up interviews revealed insights regarding the importance of discussion in the classroom as a hands-on activity and a means for learning. I view and value discourse as an educational tool, as well as a means for all community members to make their own meaning from the learning experience through collaborative means. Data from this study supports my personal theory that if students are given the opportunity to construct knowledge through social interaction, they will become more cognitively, socially and emotionally engaged in the learning process.

Looking at the three reflections as a whole, student responses moved through the levels of reflection to suggest various sources of engagement. For example, motivation was initially perceived in Student Personal History #1 as coming from the teacher and external sources. However, by the final reflection students acknowledged peers and internal reasons as sources of motivation and ultimately engagement. Although the levels of reflection and emerging themes continued to show up over the course of the three reflections, the way they were acknowledged altered to illustrate student growth and awareness of the learning process. These aspects of the classroom community, building relationships and being social as a means of learning, motivated students to engage and become partners in the learning process. It was no longer seen as the teacher's job to present a more challenging curriculum, but was instead the responsibility of all members of the group.

### **Section Three: Critical Incident – “The Intervention”**

To provide ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) that would allow my reader to enter into the world of my classroom to better understand the environment studied and draw their own interpretations, I include a critical incident that provides a window into the complex dynamics that can occur in classrooms. “Critical incidents or major events can constitute self-contained descriptive units of analysis, often presented in order of

importance rather than in sequence of occurrence” (Patton, 2002, p. 439). I define critical incidents in my classroom as those that successfully and positively alter behavior and/or perspective of self. In this case, I focused on one critical incident that caused me to examine my self-perception and challenged that of my students in order to draw parallels between our shared experiences.

The start of October 2009 marked the end of the first term of the school year. It was at this point that I began to see signs of trouble in the establishment of a community of inquiry with my rambunctious fourth period. Not only did I observe what I considered to be inappropriate and often rude behavior, but in comparison to my other two periods this group just didn’t appear to act in a way that promoted or valued maintaining community or any sense of safety. There was clearly a division growing beyond the normal type that naturally occurs at this early stage of community development; for example, the talkative and the quiet, the actively engaged and the passive, those who regularly do their work and those who struggle to complete assignments. What I was seeing caused more concern; a group of students was emerging as typical ‘bullies’ and were clearly impacting the learning experience, level of participation, feeling of safety, and confidence of their classmates. My initial reaction was to speak with the students I felt were causing the greatest threat to the community of inquiry’s intellectual safety. When the conferences proved to be ineffective I sought help from my colleagues, regularly debriefing with my student teacher after especially frustrating class meetings and speaking with other team teachers who had the same students. After reflecting on the need to re-establish safety and a sense of community in the classroom, I decided to create an additional in-class reflective writing assignment to address the issue that was arising in my fourth period, and then anonymously share responses on the board for students to read. This approach would put the problem solving in the students’ hands while acknowledging their role in the shared responsibility of creating a safe classroom community of inquiry. Additionally, I was modeling my trust for them by sharing control. Though this approach can be risky and often difficult, I recognize that a community of inquiry does not simply exist or sustain itself on its own. A community of inquiry is fragile and needs to be nurtured in order to develop and provide for its members.

At the start of November, one month after the beginning of the second quarter, I facilitated an intervention by leading students through a series of prompts that were displayed on the overhead projector. The first question asked students to identify how they felt in this class in terms of their intellectual safety, then to identify reasons for this feeling. Six students stated that they felt unsafe, six felt somewhat safe, and twenty-three felt safe. Student responses that indicated a feeling of safety and their reasoning included the following:

- “I feel good and accepted in this classroom...people who open up and ask me to be in their group causes me to feel this way.”
- “I feel safe because I don’t feel like I have to keep my opinions to myself.”
- “I feel safe. I don’t have anything to worry about and I can share my thoughts if I want to. I feel this way because no one in this class has made me feel inferior.”
- “I feel myself becoming more at ease...I feel I can share my thoughts when I am very confident with my approach.”
- “I feel very safe in this class...this is the class that I feel most comfortable in...I’m not afraid to voice my opinions and I feel like I can talk to anyone in this class.”
- “I feel safe in class because no one really makes me feel uncomfortable or dumb to share any answer I have.”
- “I feel safe because I can share my ideas freely.”

Students’ level of safety appeared to arise from either their pre-existing self-confidence or a developing level of comfort for sharing their thoughts aloud with their peers.

Although this level of safety was representative of the majority of students, the fact that another one-third of the class felt unsafe to some extent made the continuation and completion of this activity essential to the maintenance and further development of our classroom community of inquiry. I did not lecture or try to analyze the responses. I allowed the students to read and continue to reflect as I moved on to each set of response questions. My hope was that this “anti-lecture” would speak for itself. Student responses that indicated reasons for feeling somewhat safe included:

- “I’ve seen reactions of others when some people share and it’s unfair.”

- “I don’t work with a lot of different people because some people don’t listen or like to talk over you.
- “...people hold irrelevant side conversations while someone is speaking...If I’m about to share but everyone is talking, I won’t share if no one is listening or no one will hear it. Interruptions...belittle the person presenting the point.”
- “I do think some people in the class can be rude.”
- “I feel safe...There are a few times some made very mean comments about the person speaking. I hear it and think I wouldn’t like to share...”
- “I’ve never been intellectually unsafe, but I have seen people ridiculed by one another.”
- “Sometimes I don’t feel safe because my opinion wouldn’t be as good or will get brought down by someone.”
- “What keeps me from talking is the fear of sounding like an idiot if I don’t have my facts straight.”

The theme of acknowledgement came up again as it had two months prior in Student Personal History #1, however this time they were speaking to the lack of being recognized as the reason for feeling unsafe. Additionally, the fear of offering a response that was not as valuable or correct as their peers kept students from feeling safe. The environment had not yet become a place where they felt like all contributions were important, which may stem from their own insecurities or the Open Door Policy for honors classes.

Finally, student responses that indicated reasons for not feeling safe included the following:

- “When I say something, there is always someone ...making me feel stupid.”
- “Some people aren’t always paying attention and are rude to other people in class.”
- “...there are people who purposefully laugh out loud at what others have to say. They may not know it, but it’s really hurtful to others.”
- “I haven’t had the courage to share my opinions...because I have experienced someone talking about my opinions and I’m scared to do it again because I

don't like people bringing me down. I believe it's my opinion and people can agree/disagree instead of bringing me down."

- "I don't really feel like I can share anything with the class and not get ridiculed. Someone ridiculed me on my answer and now I do feel unsafe. I was told I was wrong and to stop talking, so I did...I have to think before I say anything and when I think I don't want to say it."

Students who felt completely unsafe did not mention an internal or pre-existing low level of confidence. Rather, all responses referred to actions by their peers that directly lowered their level of safety. They had specific, personal reasons and were able to effectively voice their feelings on paper. Had those feeling stayed just on the paper, then nothing would have changed within the classroom environment to improve their safety or alter the negative behaviors. As I shared these responses on the board, I explained that if just one person felt unsafe then we could not identify ourselves as a safe community of inquiry. In order to do so we needed to hear everyone's thoughts and reflect on the ways in which our actions may be impacting others' experiences.

The second question asked students to share ideas for what they could do today to help increase the intellectual safety in our classroom. The purpose of this question was to have students go beyond reflection upon their prior actions in order to be proactive about their future contributions and decisions. I wanted to remove their ignorance of the issue that arose in class and provide an opportunity to initiate change; however, the actual changes needed to come from the students directly. This was the final step in the fully student-centered reflection. Responses included:

- "Allow everyone to say their opinion without interruptions."
- "Enforce the ball rule. Make more use of the Community Ball."
- "Keep our comments to ourselves, or only speak when it's your turn."
- "Exercise the manners we've been taught from our parents and be silent when people are speaking."
- "Try harder to be aware of what we say and how we say it."
- "Not laugh at others' ideas and thoughts. Everyone should stop teasing each other."

- “Encourage others...Not be so rude...as a community we shouldn’t put others down.”
- “Mix groups more because I’m not comfortable with everyone. I don’t know a lot of people’s names.”
- “Try to understand what people say from their perspective.”
- “Respect that everyone has different opinions and ideas.”
- “Put selves in others’ shoes and imagine how it would be if others are teasing you and hurting your feelings.”
- “Be able to talk in a group to make people more comfortable to be around.”

I appreciated that the suggestions were not only for students, but also for actions I could take in order to help promote safety for all members of the classroom community of inquiry. Asking students to make suggestions for how to improve the class is often too much of a risk for teachers to take because they view it as giving up control. However, I believe involving students in the decisions and creation of expectations shares control and models effective community practices.

After I finished sharing all the anonymous responses on the board I reiterated that I had concerns, especially since approximately one-third of this particular class indicated that they felt at least partially unsafe. I clarified that I was not trying to point fingers at anyone, but that my goal was to change behaviors through personal reflection and hearing what others have to say opposed to a one-on-one reprimand or class lecture. I concluded the conversation by encouraging students to be proactive and think about their behavior in the room in terms of how it may affect others’ safety or hinder their learning. It was now their responsibility since they had been made aware of the impact their words and actions had.

My main objective was for students to become conscious of the hierarchy of acceptance<sup>9</sup> that existed within any community, and to actively take steps to move our classroom community further up in the levels of acceptance. I shared the *Hierarchy of*

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<sup>9</sup> Based on Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943).

*Acceptance*, which was created in a previous year's class as we read and discussed Elie Wiesel's (1982) *Night*<sup>10</sup>, to clarify understanding at the end of our discussion

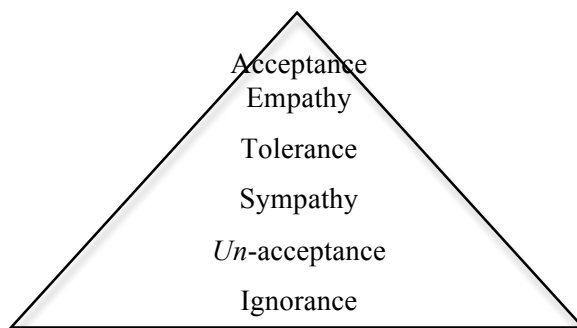


Figure 6: Hierarchy of Acceptance

Results of the student responses and discussion indicated that this class was stuck between the primary levels of ignorance and *un-acceptance*. Ideally the goal is for students within a safe classroom community of inquiry to move into the stages of tolerance and acceptance by the final phase of their community development and time together, which meant they should be developing empathy and tolerance for one another's experiences and contributions. Unless the students recognized the need for change and felt empowered to make those necessary changes, this community of inquiry risked remaining in the initial stage of acceptance and phase of community development for the remainder of their time together (over seven months).

Visibly, some students were uncomfortable, shocked, and embarrassed by the comments anonymously being displayed on the board. One of the students involved in the group initiating the most disruption briefly left the room during the exercise. At first I wasn't sure if he was feeling targeted (which would mean I was unintentionally threatening his safety), or was uninterested in this aspect of the lesson. However, his behavior changed instantly. This was not only observed by students, but included in their responses to Student Personal History #3<sup>11</sup>.

### Summary

Student reflections during "The Intervention" offer further evidence of personal engagement and acknowledge the lack of peer relationships and a safe classroom

<sup>10</sup> This class had not yet read *Night*, but since the topic was relevant I presented it as part of our discussion.

<sup>11</sup> This "Intervention" took place between Student Personal Histories #1 and #2.

environment as hindrances to engagement due to a lack of comfort. For example, if a student felt unsure about their peers' reactions to their ideas, they kept their thoughts to themselves and feared engaging instead of being a willing participant.

Reflective student responses during "The Intervention" often referenced having personal contributions acknowledged by the peers and spoke to the acceptance they received by peers who they did not know before coming to this classroom. Such reflections suggest that appealing to a student's emotions is an essential part of promoting engagement and confidence of self through the development of a positive self-concept. Additionally, student reflections during the intervention and interview responses support that the acknowledgement of effort, not just success, leads to a greater willingness to put forth effort to advance individual and community's understanding. Recognition promotes continued effort and ultimately, success.

#### **Section Four: Student Profiles**

I conducted interviews with the five students in May of 2011, nearly one year after they left my classroom, to inquire on their current academic status and to facilitate a reflection of their performance in our classroom the previous year. Five students from various backgrounds were chosen to be the focus of my follow-up interviews and case study analysis because they represented the diversity of my classes in terms of gender, ethnicity, family backgrounds, and socio-economic status. Additionally, the five students, three girls and two boys, demonstrated specific behaviors that were typical of a significant number of students in that particular class period: low reading scores, high academic ability, lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, inconsistent academic performance and level of participation, and truancy. I identified five particular student 'types' and purposefully chose these students based on the fact that they clearly represented one of them. The following student profiles illustrate various but reoccurring types of students in our classroom community of inquiry. To help identify the traits associated with each individual student, the interview guide included two questions created specifically for each participant that directly addressed behaviors specific to their role. Responses to those questions are presented first in the following sections to provide a brief profile of each student chosen. Coded analysis of the five student interviews is



included in a table format, along with the interview guide, in Appendix B. After this brief overview I will provide findings from the responses to all questions.

**Heron: “The Absentee”**

Heron represented an all too common type of student on campus: the chronic absentee. Due to his absences in the previous year, Heron did not earn all of his credits and was considered a repeating Sophomore instead of a Junior. It was not until our interview that I understood how much this fact bothered him. It didn’t seem to be something he intended to change due to the fact that at points in the school year he was absent for weeks at a time. Heron rarely completed a full week of school, let alone attended my class every day for an entire week. When he was present he remained silent but attentive. It was clear he was paying attention, but was just not willing to contribute orally to the discussion unless it was in a very small group. However, he was able to clearly demonstrate his basic understanding of class content on in-class assessments, often passing even though he had been absent from class. I first acknowledged this in our interview:

“[Y]ou had a high ability level but a low performance level. As a result, your grade didn't match what you could really do in class. I didn't worry too much about you because I knew you could do it. Some students don't come and then they fall behind and can't catch up. But you could always catch up. So I'm just curious as to what made you start skipping class in the beginning.”

I was puzzled by Heron’s attendance issues and wanted to get at the possible reasons why he did not attend class. Therefore, the first of two questions asked only of Heron specifically targeted his absenteeism. I stated that if his reason for skipping was too personal or something that he wasn’t willing to share, then that was fine:

“No, no. I’m fine. I trust you anyways. It was because, like, basically I felt angry because I came in my Freshman year the counselor is telling me that I could catch up and be a Junior my second year. That was the grade I was supposed to be in. So I was happy, I thought I could do this. So I was going to classes and all that stuff. Working hard. And when I came back I asked if I could be a Junior and she said no because I was missing a couple of credits from before. And I was mad because she should've told me that before and I would've gone to summer school.

I mean, I would have gone to summer school! So now I can't be with my regular class, which was this year's graduating class...I just gave up after that. I was like, 'I don't wanna do this.' But at the same time I just kept thinking about it. Why was I gonna blow my whole life on like...I mean, it's not that I can't graduate. I can, it's just not gonna be with my class. It would still have been totally awesome to do that with my class."

Additionally, I wondered if my assumption was correct that the reason he came to class was because we met so late in the day. However, Heron's reason was a mixture of social fears and an all-too-familiar excuse: laziness. I explained that I had noticed some days he would come only to our class or maybe one other and asked what his reason was for skipping classes. More specifically, what was the reason he would come to our class? He explained:

"Not because it was fourth period. If you had first period I would've come...I'm just lazy or felt too locked down...I know I want to talk, but at the same time I don't want to talk. I thought I don't really know these people, and how they're going to react to me talking...I know I want to talk, but at the same time I don't want to talk. So if I say something and it's different...I think that all the time."

It seemed that Heron's uncertainty about his peers combined with his internal laziness kept him from coming to class. I asked if he feared this happening in our class:

"Mmm, yea...Pretty much it was people I didn't know who pretty much all knew each other already...I didn't come enough to really get to know them."

It was a no-win situation; by not coming to class he was unable to develop peer relationships within the classroom community of inquiry, and the lack of confidence in his peer relationships then kept him from coming to class. His feelings support the need to foster such relationships within the classroom and suggest that a lack of peer relationships can not only isolate a student within the class, but also prevent them from coming back to that environment.

The second question asked only to Heron was in regard to homework. I acknowledged that he completed work in class and demonstrated that he was very intelligent and capable, but wondered if he had a reason for never doing any work outside of class. He responded:

“When I get home everything's there already. Like, like food and I can eat or my bed and I can sleep... And I have chores... Yeah, and my friends would want to go cruise. So I just think, ‘Okay, I'll do this later’.”

Clearly Heron had several distractions at home as well, and didn't seem to value schoolwork as being something he needed to make time for. This was reflected in his absenteeism and honest response.

By the end of his interview, Heron emerged as an insightful student who was very aware of his role in his academic and future success, as well as the teacher's role in assisting him. This was a side of him I had never seen, which I expressed to him in our conversation. He was more talkative and spoke in a way that seemed more mature and insightful. It upset me that I had not made the time to see this side of Heron in the previous school year. Heron offered insights related to the importance of being directly involved in the development of community in the classroom. No matter how strong the community of inquiry may be an “outsider” cannot just step into it. In fact, they may feel too intimidated by the social bonds that have been created without them. Instead of trying to do so on their own, which is risky, they resist. This caused me to reflect on the struggle to include absentee students in the development of the classroom community of inquiry. From experience I have learned that their lack of a connection to what takes place in the classroom, or in school in general, is what keeps them from showing up.

#### **Eden: “The Paradox”**

As many other students had done over the previous six years, Eden's inconsistent behavior baffled me. She was a pleasant, curious, insightful, capable, and respectful student. Her test scores indicated that she had a very advanced reading level, which was easy to observe in class. However, Eden repeatedly accepted a grade much lower than one indicative of her ability. She made little effort to complete any work outside of the classroom and never revised work to improve her grade. In class Eden was a leading contributor in both small groups and whole class discussions. She offered unique insights and demonstrated an advanced level of analysis, interpretation and thought. Additionally, she was respectful of all of her peers' contributions, even if they were clearly at a much less advanced academic skill level than she was. She was a self-contradiction, so I chose

to interview Eden because I wondered if she was aware of the paradox she presented and if so, could offer some explanation.

During the interview I acknowledged Eden's capability to earn an A with little effort, and asked what the reason was for her settling for a low C. The question actually came up in connection to another question about self-selecting to take an honors level course and yet doing poorly. She offered a very clear explanation:

"Because, like my Freshman year I got a 4.0 doing like the easiest work ever and taking regular classes. And I didn't think it was like fair that some people could go through all high school and get straight A's and then brag about it when they just take normal classes that are really easy. I mean, I got straight A's that year and it was the easiest thing ever. And I didn't really do homework that year either. I finished everything in class and turned it in. Like, I had Algebra 1 but I already took Algebra in eighth grade. It was easy... I just didn't think grades really mattered anymore. Just that I didn't want to fail because I didn't want to repeat any classes."

Eden's insights illustrated an altered personal opinion of the value of education due to a specific experience the previous year. She seemed to have reflected on the fact that since she didn't value people bragging about getting A's then she should not try so hard to get an A. To me, she was questioning whom the A was for and what made it so special if it was so easily earned. Interestingly, Eden didn't turn off completely and just settle for a passing grade. She showed up every day and regularly participated in ways that did not impact her grade. It was as if she actively chose to restrain herself from succeeding in the traditionally viewed way, grades, while continuing to grow and develop cognitively through social interactions.

My second question to Eden was about her regular active participation. I directly asked if she could explain the reason why she contributed so much in that way. Once again, she offered a very clear and honest response:

"It was very, very chilled out. Like, I knew that if I shared something that might be offensive because a lot of my views are pretty offensive, I knew a lot of people wouldn't really care that way... I didn't fear (my peers' response)."

This response supported my inferences about Eden's intentional choice to not succeed in terms of grades, and clearly indicated that she greatly valued the process of learning. She was open to learning and felt encouraged to do so by the nature of the learning environment.

Eden's interview revealed her awareness of the fact that she was not performing to her best potential, but also provided a very rational explanation compared to some of her peers who had no rationale. Eden's view of the school system and experience within it created a student who valued learning but not grades, who showed up physically and mentally every day purposely without her homework, who valued participation and discussion more than the completion of individual tasks. Instead, Eden now did what was required to pass the class and continue to move on in her academic career.

**Khayla: "The Inconsistent Goal Setter"**

Khayla also represented what I consider to be a below average student in terms of academic performance. Although she completed all of her in-class work, unlike Heron and Eden, she only turned in some of her homework and never made revisions to improve her grade despite repeatedly stating that as her goal. She had a routine she followed every term: set the goal of doing better, express commitment to that goal, and make no actual attempts to attain that goal. I chose to interview Khayla because she represented the most common type of student in my classroom, which was one who had the academic ability and could easily identify goals to improve but was lacking the follow through. I also selected Khayla specifically because of her parents' regular communication with me regarding concern for their daughter's grades.

The first of two questions asked of Khayla acknowledged these behaviors and directly asked, "What do you think is the reason why you didn't complete work to meet your goals?" Khayla's response on this day, nearly two years after her first day in my class, offered the same explanation as she did then on an informational sheet I had all students fill out about themselves on the first day of school:

"My procrastination. I mean, still to this day it's hard. I know I have a lot of potential and could do a lot. I set goals, I just haven't really gotten there yet."

Procrastination is a commonly self-identified characteristic causing a student's lack of academic achievements, and a trait even high achieving students often claim to struggle

with. Just as common, however, is a student's lack of initiative to make any changes to this behavior. Like Khayla, students are often self-aware and make plans to change but seldom follow through.

The second question I created only for Khayla's interview was about the frequent communication I had with her mom. Khayla's mom would call her teachers regularly to check on her daughter and express her disappointment in her grades and to clarify that it was Khayla's responsibility to make improvements. Her calls were to let teachers know that she was aware and was watching Khayla, but was allowing her to figure it out for herself. I was curious if this level of communication continued this year, or if Khayla had started to take more ownership of the responsibility for completing her work. Khayla explained:

"She's kind of let go a little bit because she wants me to be more independent because of Senior year. It's funny because in Freshman year she was on my case all the time and I don't know if that helped or made me just not want to do anything. But it kind of got less and less as the school years went on... I think parent involvement really helps. Because I know some students whose parents don't really care if they do well or don't do well. And, umm, I think it helps. I think it makes you want to achieve more."

Khayla was very self-aware, but had not yet seemed to take full ownership of her academic responsibility. Her view of parental involvement altered over the years; she appreciated it more as she got older. Her interview responses offered insights related to the importance of feeling cared for, both inside and outside of the classroom.

#### **Alyssa: "The Confident Intimidator"**

Alyssa represented what I consider to be an above average student in terms of academic performance; she completed her work to the best of her ability and often made revisions to improve her grade, which was largely due to her parents' expectations. Additionally, she was above average in terms of active participation. Alyssa often contributed in whole class discussions and regularly played a leadership role in small groups. Although I selected Alyssa because of her academic behaviors and unique amount of parental involvement, the main reason was because she was one of the students in the group I identified as 'bullies' who were having a negative impact on the

learning experience of their classmates. She was one of the more vocal students and had a pre-existing level of confidence that often negatively affected others' learning experience. I was curious to find out if she had any awareness about this since I noticed a change in her behaviors but hadn't directly spoken to her about The Intervention after the activity.

The first question I asked only of Alyssa acknowledged her as a vocal member of the class and asked her to explain if there were certain conditions that made her more vocal or if it was just her nature.

“Umm, I think I’ve transformed into a more social person because I wasn’t always like that. I used to be really shy. Yea, really shy. I took a long time to open up to people. It was bad. So, I dunno. I just think that now I realize that I’m gonna be out there soon as a college student and I’ll probably have to speak more anyway so I just opened up.”

Alyssa’s reflection indicated a purposeful change in behaviors based on her goals, which was to graduate from high school early. Unlike Khayla, Alyssa set this goal and remained focused on it in order to achieve it. She was also aware of the way in which altering her behaviors would assist her in the future, beyond this classroom environment.

I wanted to acknowledge the significant achievement Alyssa had made since leaving our classroom. She was officially graduating early, which was in about a week, after only three years of high school. The second question I created just for Alyssa’s interview asked about this accomplishment. I was curious as to what motivated her to want to graduate early.

“Believe it or not, I really don’t like school. Like I really don’t like school much, so I just wanted to get out. And when I had to make that decision there was all this drama going on as far as people and stuff and I was just like, ‘Oh, I can’t do this anymore.’ So I kinda buckled down and I looked at all my electives and all the credits I had and was like, ‘Oh, I only have one more!’ So I might as well make the best of the situation.”

Alyssa cited poor relationships and conflict with peers as a source of motivation for wanting to leave high school. Although Alyssa didn’t get into trouble at school related to

these conflicts, it was an environment that she was not willing to continue to be in once she realized she could move on from high school a year early.

During Alyssa's interview she offered insights related to motivation in a unique way. While I was asking questions aimed at finding out students' feelings about having strong relationships within the classroom, Alyssa supported the importance of that by explaining how a lack of those relationships motivated her to make changes. Although the changes in her behavior were positive, her insights do support the importance of establishing a safe environment that values peer relationships and do not suggest that she was aware of being perceived as a "bully".

**Keanu: "The Actively Average"**

Keanu represented a "below average student" in terms of academic performance due to the fact that he completed minimal in-class work and no homework. However his test scores regularly indicated he was at an advanced level in terms of reading comprehension and writing. Keanu would go off-task in small groups, however in whole class discussions he was an active participant who often contributed. I chose Keanu mainly because I was curious about who he was outside of the classroom, and what the reasons were for him not completing work he was very capable of doing. Academically he represented an all-too common type of student on our campus, which was one who was happy to just get by. However, the unique aspect of Keanu was that socially he was engaged and did more than just show up to class.

During the interview I recognized Keanu's attentiveness and contributions in class, then asked if he had a reason for not doing any work outside of the classroom. His response was simply, "I don't know. I just don't do it." Wanting to prompt him to explain more I asked if this was still the same situation this year. I wanted to know what, if anything, motivated him to do work. He replied, "Yea... I don't know, passing? And if I can be social. I'm social whenever I can be." This supported my original analysis that Keanu liked to talk in class, although he didn't necessarily do it in a disruptive way. It was as if he needed to be social, and completing homework individually did not necessarily allow him to socialize.

Despite these initial brief responses, my interview with Keanu was the longest mainly due to the fact that he opened up at the end of it to share some of his artwork with



me. This was a topic that emerged from our conversation, but not one that I explored during the formal interview. The responses to the additional questions did not offer as much insight as his responses to those questions that came up when we completed the questions on the Interview Guide. After I turned off the recorder Keanu was eager to keep talking about this interest. He took out his notebook to show me some of his drawings, which led me to ask about the types of movies and books he liked since each of his pictures represented futuristic action characters. He shared with me that he used to read a lot, and even read the dictionary nightly with his dad when he was younger. He told me that his parents both greatly value education, and his father often corrects his grammar or pushes him to use a more advanced vocabulary.

“My parents always had a good vocabulary. Like, my dad would read me the dictionary when I was little. And whenever I say a wrong word he would say, ‘That doesn’t sound right. That sounds dumb. You should use another word.’ And in like sixth grade I used to read a lot, like those fat books. Like those Eragon books. I read the first two in sixth grade and I got bored, so I stopped reading...I don’t know, in eighth grade I would read this series no one knew about. It was little books though, and I read all the way to the fifth book and then stopped to wait for the sixth one to come out. But it took too long and I never read it.”

Keanu then shared that he now has a lot of responsibilities at home, and just does not have time to read for enjoyment anymore like he used to. This was also his reason for not doing work, which he was not able to explain at the start of the interview:

“But then I have three little sisters, little little, all running around and screaming. It doesn’t get me in the mood to do work. So I try to do it in class. If not, oh well. If it’s interesting I’ll do it.”

Keanu offered insights related to the social aspects of learning and the importance of relationships within the classroom. This interview took place a year after he had left my classroom, which he was in for a full school year, and it was only now that I learned about his interest in reading and art. This interview supports the importance of teachers knowing their students beyond test scores, homework assignments, and in-class

behaviors. Additionally, it highlights the struggle to do so in such a large and diverse class.

### **Summary**

Student responses to those questions unique to their interview provide insight into each ‘type’ of student included to create a more detailed case study. Responses are a third source of evidence of personal engagement specifically related to those emerging themes I identified. Insights offered during this set of interview questions aligned with all six emerging themes, identifying influences of student engagement from the outermost observable aspects of learning to the innermost individual beliefs. This is not a surprising result due to the fact that this set of questions was created for the specific purpose of highlighting various sources of engagement from a varied group of individual students.

### **Section Five: Interviews<sup>12</sup>**

Conducting one-on-one interviews with students nearly a year after they left my classroom allowed for a less biased reflection that included their growth as both an individual and a student. In other words, the fact that students were no longer in my class eliminated, at least to some degree, their bias in responding to questions about the classroom. Additionally, the fact that they had grown and were able to compare other classroom experiences that had take place since they left our classroom community of inquiry provided an additional layer of insight that would not have been possible had I interviewed them at the end of our year together.

### **Coding of Transcripts**

In addition to coding the interview transcripts myself, I enlisted the assistance of two colleagues in order to conduct a complete analysis of the interviews in accordance with self-study methods:

It is through the involvement of others that data and interpretations can be viewed from perspectives other than one’s own and therefore be scrutinized and professionally challenged. The value of others becomes evident in practice and is well demonstrated when interpretations, conclusions or situations resonate with others who have had the opportunity to analyze the data independently. (Loughran & Northfield, 1998, p. 14)

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<sup>12</sup> All students were given pseudonyms.

Their directions were first to read through the transcripts for all of the interviews without making any annotations. I instructed them to then read back over and identify themes they saw come up repeatedly within each interview. Finally, I asked them to go back over all of the transcripts to identify themes as they emerged across all interviews. Agreement among colleagues gave support and validation to the researcher's findings since they were not given the list of codes that had previously been identified as emerging themes. I did not want them to have a list of things to look for, but rather to identify any recurring themes they noticed. This process meant that two types of codes would be created: initial and focused. Initial codes identified certain words, phrases, or patterns that stood out or showed up repeatedly (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1998) in each individual interview. As each colleague read over the transcripts as a whole they identified focused codes based on those initial codes that previously emerged in their first stage of analysis. These new codes were then aligned with the six I identified at the start of the data analysis phase: community/environment, relationships/social bonds, acceptance/recognition, perception of self as learner, motivation, and empathy.

The following responses are to key grand tour and planned prompts from the interview guide that were asked of all students. Responses are arranged by the question's theme, which aligns with the six themes identified at the start of data analysis. I chose only to include responses to those questions that aligned with the six themes I was now focusing on instead of all that were asked since not all questions were relevant. Interview question themes included environment, engagement, level of comfort, responsibility, community, high-stakes testing, and the critical incident. The analytical coding for this select sample of interview questions as completed by my colleagues and myself is included on a table in Appendix C.

### **Interview Question Theme: Perception of Self as a Learner**

To set the tone of the interview, the first question asked students to describe themselves as a student and to explain if they have always been that type of learner. Responses included:

**Heron:** "I think I'm quiet. I keep to myself...Pretty much in every class."

**Eden:** "Very lazy...I've always been pretty lazy."

**Khayla:** “I’d have to say I procrastinate a lot. I do that...Umm, Freshman year was kind of different. Transferring into high school I felt like I needed to prove myself because I was in Honors classes also in my Freshman year and I did pretty well. Once I hit Sophomore year I felt like it didn’t really matter because it’s kinda in between like Freshman and Senior. But I kind of continued it this year, the beginning of this year, too.”

**Alyssa:** “I would say I’m pretty well rounded as far as working with people and my confidence. I’m not that shy.”

**Keanu:** “Lazy. Works only when needs to. Yea. Social and stuff. I don’t know. I don’t really like doing work in class.”

As anticipated, the usual description of a “lazy procrastinator” came up. Only one student, Alyssa, identified herself in a positive way. Heron was later able to describe the role a student should take:

“Their responsibility is pretty much to use their time wisely and take in all the information you can because they’re there to help you. It’s only for you, not for anybody else. Teachers aren’t in the job for the money. You actually chose this job to help people be better in life.”

Heron’s insight suggested that students often know what expectations they should be meeting, but they are also quick to say they are too lazy to meet them. I followed up this question during only two interviews<sup>13</sup> by asking students to focus on our classroom and explain the type of student they were specifically in our class. Responses included:

**Heron:** “I was a timid student...Like, I really kept to myself because I came in and was like, “I don’t think I know everyone around here.” I knew them, but I didn’t. Not personally.”

**Khayla:** “I think I was really...I participated a lot in that class. More than in my other classes...It was just a really interesting class. And like the people didn’t criticize or anything. I think we went over that in the beginning of the year too about the whole safety.”

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<sup>13</sup> Discussion in the other three interviews veered off to a related question, but there was not a direct response to this question.

To conclude this theme of questions, I prompted students to explain what motivated them to do to their work. This was either asked directly or in a follow up to the question about a class they enjoyed. Responses included

**Eden:** “Like, I know it's going to be easier for me to do so I just do it because it's easier. But if it's really hard subject like math I'm like, ‘Oh, I'm not gonna do it’.”

**Khayla:** “Umm, just wanting to get to college and wanting to better myself and my education. And probably the teachers. They have a part too.”

**Alyssa:** “Well, for me I would say...well, if I had to stay another year I'd only have to take one class. So I didn't want to just be here for one class. And I didn't want to be in high school another year. I'm like so over high school. So I was like, ‘OK, I'll just double up on my English.’ All I needed was my Senior English.”

**Keanu:** “I don't know, passing....And if I can be social. I'm social whenever I can be.”

Alternatively, Heron explained his lack of motivation to complete work:

**Heron:** “[T]he work just makes me back off...But then when I think about it I think, ‘Oh, that's easy. I can do that later.’ So then I just plan to do it later. But I come back to it and I still don't want to do it. And then oh my gosh, it's the next day! But I'm tired so I just wanna go to sleep.”

Although responses were somewhat vague, students identified a range of sources of motivation in connection to their perception of self as a learner. For some, external sources influence them more than internal desires. Similarly, an external source (such as the teacher) could help to inspire and encourage them internally. Responses support the notion that cognitive, social and emotional engagement cannot be divided as students respond in different ways at different times in the classroom.

### Interview Question Theme: Environment

Students were asked<sup>14</sup> to identify what makes a class interesting. I wondered if they associated their level of interest with the teacher, their peers, the content, activities, or some other aspect that I was not considering. Responses included:

**Heron:** “Activities and group stuff.”

**Eden:** “Just interesting topics. You know, like last year when we did the whole country project. Learning about a different country was interesting. Like, learning a different way to do something was actually interesting. It was more than just putting a book in front of you and telling you to read about it... It's like, you know, getting to hear what other people think and not just what you yourself think. I like hearing about what other people think and I feel like I should contribute to it also since I actually like doing it.”

**Khayla:** “It could be the classmates, or mainly the teacher really...One that's I have to say that connects with students.... Just classmates you can work with really. I don't really care if my friends are in my class, it's just if I can get along with them and I can work with them in groups...My math class doesn't really encourage groups...I think it might be intimidating, but it would probably help.”

**Alyssa:** “I would have to say the environment. Some classes could be really boring and all they do is lecture and the kids are not as up beat about learning and stuff. Like, in here it was always fun and we did different stuff. And I liked most of the people in here too.”

**Keanu:** “It depends on what my peers are doing...I mean, I don't wanna talk if no one else is talking. I'll just be quiet and just be thinking to myself...[If someone says something] then everyone else starts talking too. But if it's a boring class then everyone will be quiet.”

Students repeatedly used the word “different”, which suggested that it was the variety of activities and content that interested them. No student simply stated that if they like the subject then they are interested. Rather, if the class offered a range of activities and ways

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<sup>14</sup> I did not directly ask Keanu this question, although he offered insight related to the topic during the course of his interview in response to other questions. We diverted slightly from the interview guide at this point, but then returned to follow its format.

to interact with their peers then they could be interested regardless of their pre-existing internal amount of interest in the subject.

To follow up, I prompted students to describe a specific subject or class they enjoyed the most.

**Heron:** “Probably art...because we get a chance to express ourselves.”

**Eden:** “That would probably be English...It’s my favorite subject, so I don’t have to be as lazy.”

**Khayla:** “Honors (11<sup>th</sup> grade) English...He’s hard but at the same time he can be, I don’t know. He’s a really good teacher. And I also enjoyed my Medical Terminology class. It’s a lot of worksheets and stuff, but we work a lot in groups.”

**Alyssa:** “I like English. I would have to say that’s my best subject. I’ve always been good at English. Umm, math and science not so much. Yea, I could do without it.”

**Keanu:** “I like your class, AVID and Hawaiian Language...I like the subject (Hawaiian Language), the teacher’s cool too...Because of all the people in [English].”

Reasons for enjoying a class related to the content itself as well as the way in which the content was presented.

The third question designed to address this theme asked, “What do you need from a classroom environment to be an active/productive participant?” I wanted to present the word “need” to begin to get at their perception of self as a learner. Responses include:

**Heron:** “Pretty much discussion and hands on type of stuff.”

**Eden:** “Just the class that isn't too heavy on everything...Like, you can give a hard assignment and then take a break right after and do something easy. Not something like... like in math where it's hard work after hard work. It's like, sit there and try to figure out that problem until you finally get it and then do another one.”

**Khayla:** “I think just like having discussions. There’s some classes where we just get handed worksheets, and I think actually going over the material and talking about it does help. You did that.”

**Keanu:** “It’s what we’re learning and stuff...just what we’re doing. It’s not the subject, it’s what we’re doing...I remember we read *Othello*. I remember we read a lot of books! And I liked that. Reading.”

Alyssa was stuck on this question, so I asked if there was a class that she wasn’t motivated to participate in. She explained the reasons for not wanting to speak out in Chemistry:

“If I feel like I don’t understand it fully then I won’t speak up because I don’t want to embarrass myself or not know what’s going on. As far as in English, I don’t really care if I answer wrong as long as I voiced my opinion... I feel like in English there’s not really a right or wrong answer because it’s just you and your creativity. In Chemistry you have to know formulas to get the right answer and get the problem done.”

In response to another question not asked of all participants, Eden explained:

“It helps you feel comfortable. If you’re able to share things you think it makes you feel more comfortable it makes you more open to like learning stuff. So it helps you learn in like a psychological sort of aspect. Not really from picking up from what you’re reading of what people are saying, it just makes you feel like you can import more things.”

Responses clearly indicated a need to be able to openly and safely discuss content, suggesting that invitations to participate and devoting time to discussion would increase the level of student engagement in the learning process.

The final question designed specifically to address the theme of the classroom environment prompted students to identify aspects of our classroom that satisfied any of the needs mentioned in their response to the previous question<sup>15</sup>:

**Heron:** “Oh yea. You always told us to look for stuff, that’s why. And then we’d talk about it.”

**Eden:** “It’s English so it’s easier for me to like write, period. I have a lot of stuff going on. And ya know, it’s not like in another subject where you just read about it and you look at someone else doing it and you just do it. It’s something you

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<sup>15</sup> I did not directly ask Alyssa this question because she offered an explanation in response to another question regarding the content, which is included in the question under the theme of Environment.



have to create on your own. You can write about that, like you don't have to have specific strict guidelines to do it. And the way you made us do it was pretty interesting."

**Khayla:** "The discussion part."

**Keanu:** "Oh yea, because I could always talk to Kristine, Jasmine or Mark...Oh yea. Because it was a really interesting class."

Clearly the social aspect of the classroom, participating in discussions, satisfied a need students had in order to engage in the learning process.

### **Interview Question Theme: Engagement**

The first question followed up by asking students to describe what an engaged student looked like in general. Most students shared the same basic answer, which was that engaged students are awake and completing their work. Alyssa offered a more specific description of an engaged student based on her personal experience, and Khayla offered an example from our class without being prompted to do so:

**Alyssa:** "Hmm...I've been both. I've been the type to sleep in class and the type to be involved. I would have to say it has to be exciting. It's the individual. I mean, if they're the type who wants to be engaged they will. If they don't, they won't...They're not sleeping, they're talking. They're, like I said, giving their opinions on stuff."

**Khayla:** "I'd have to say they speak up even when they're not encouraged. That, and they're attentive, listening, have eye contact with the teacher or whoever's speaking...Sometimes they're just listening. You can kind of tell by their expressions and stuff...Our ball encouraged a lot of people too. Like just having everyone express how they felt or help discuss the topic. It gave everyone one in class, not just a few people, their time to say whatever they wanted."

Considering this was a year after Khayla had left my classroom, her acknowledgement of this specific element of our classroom environment suggested that she valued this aspect of our community of inquiry. The response to the others' descriptions prompted me to ask a follow-up question regarding if they felt a student needs to talk in order to show engagement.

**Heron:** “No. Well, in a way, I mean, you have to respond. If [the teacher] asks you questions they wouldn’t know if you’re paying attention or not if you don’t respond.”

**Eden:** “Well, if it’s an actual discussion then yea you kind of have to participate in the discussion. But I mean, if it’s just the regular class work assignment then it’s that they’re actually awake and doing it. They can be talking around them, maybe asking for help. That looks like they’re engaged.”

**Khayla:** “Noooo! Sometimes they’re just listening. You can kind of tell by their expressions and stuff.”

**Alyssa:** “Well, not necessarily talking all the time. I know some kids that don’t speak at all but they get it. Like, they have good grades, they ace all the tests, and they understand what’s going on but they don’t always speak. I mean, it depends on the person really.”

**Keanu:** “It’s important I guess because if they think that I’m not engaged then I’d get in trouble. So I just answer a few questions here and there.”

This group of students did not believe that engagement was defined only by talking, and acknowledged the role of active listening in the learning process.

The second question under the theme of engagement asked students to share examples of ways they show they are engaged in class.

**Heron:** “I put my head down and do my work.”

**Eden:** “I’m always awake. And usually I have a comment to say about something, even if it’s just a correction.”

**Alyssa:** “Oh, I talk! I think it changed a lot since last year. Like last year was more social but I still got my work done. This year it’s like I contribute; I don’t really (side) talk that much.”

**Keanu:** “If it’s something I know I’ll just say it, and if I get called on and I don’t know I’ll just guess.”

In connection to their responses to the previous question, students offered behaviors other than talking to demonstrate engagement. In addition to talking, active participation was perceived as completing work and listening to peers.

### **Interview Question Theme: Level of Comfort**

Two questions directly asked about students' level of comfort in a classroom. The first prompted them to describe a classroom in which they felt comfortable and to explain what aspects of that class made them feel that way.

**Heron:** "I'm kinda the same [in every class]."

**Eden:** "I have a pretty good relationship with you...It's like, you're more open. Like in discussions with teachers you're not really connected with, you might never even mention [your ideas]."

**Khayla:** "Your class I felt pretty comfortable in. Like, because of how...I enjoyed the line activity. I think it helped a lot realizing that a lot of my other classmates went through the same things or had the same experiences as me. I think having that feel made it easier for me to connect with other people or even speak out in class."

**Alyssa:** "This one for sure. This was my favorite class, actually, out of all my classes last year. It still is my favorite class and I don't even have it!"

Keanu shared a relevant response at another point in his interview regarding what contributed to his high level of comfort:

"[W]e all knew each other and it made it easier to talk with each other and the teacher."

To follow up, the second question asked each student to rank their level of comfort in our class (high, middle, low) and to explain what contributed to it.

**Heron:** "I had a lot of comfort, but at the same time I felt like everyone would look at me. Like 'This kid never comes to class.'...When I think about it I'm like, 'Ah, I'm going to class. Everyone's gonna be like, 'Ho, this kid thinks he can come back and do whatever he like.'"

**Eden:** "It was pretty high."

**Khayla:** "In the beginning it was like in the middle. Towards the end it was more high. I don't know if...I think that was because of all the activities."

**Alyssa:** "High! Umm, I think [peers] kind of impacted the class for me...I don't think I would have spoke as much if they weren't in my class because usually I

feel more comfortable if I know people in the class. I think they had a good impact on my comfort.”

**Keanu:** “I think it was high...And no one really teased each other in that class, like serious mean. It was friendly.”

It was interesting that Heron said he had a high level of comfort, but was also intimidated by his peers’ perception of him. Additionally, Khayla was the only one who acknowledged a development in her level of comfort.

### **Interview Question Theme: The Teacher’s Role**

During the interview I asked one question related to the theme of the teacher’s role in the classroom, which prompted each student to describe the teacher’s responsibility in the classroom. Responses included:

**Heron:** “The teacher’s responsibility is to prepare the students for the real world. All these things, like coming in late and you gotta go grab a late pass, that’s your consequence for coming late. You can’t come late to work and just expect to go to work without nothing because they’ll be like, ‘Where were you? Why didn’t you call?’”<sup>16</sup>

**Eden:** “VPs and the Principal encourage you to go to class, but your teacher then has to engage you.”

**Alyssa:** “I think they think of different activities and stuff they think kids will be interested in while still learning at the same time. So I think it depends on the teacher...Some teachers feel you just gotta get it out there. If (students) learn it they learn it, if they don’t they don’t. The teachers don’t have to [make them feel comfortable]. Some teachers feel it’s better if the kid is comfortable then they might learn better...I mean, it helps. I think you did a good job at that.”

**Khayla:** “Kind of like to make it tolerable for the students to be in the classroom for that short period of time. I guess to umm, to make it, I guess, to establish just like a little relationship. [Make sure the students] are comfortable with one another, I guess.”

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<sup>16</sup> Following up to another of Heron’s responses, I directly asked him if he felt it was the teacher’s job to get the students to know one to another. He stated that it would help because then students talk more.

Khayla then went on to share an experience with a teacher not making an effort to have the students know one another, which helped to illustrate her concept of the teacher's role:

“It’ kind of hard because being in a classroom you learn from both your teachers and your classmates. And being in the classroom I was in it kind of made it hard for me to learn because although groups were kind of encouraged, I didn’t feel like I wanted to be in a group because I didn’t know the people and it was just really hard. And like, even though they knew the content I didn’t feel like I wanted to ask them.”

I asked the question slightly differently during Keanu’s interview, which was “What do you think the *school* does to try to get students engaged?” This led to a conversation regarding some teachers’ classroom management approach and the relation it has to engagement:

**Keanu:** “Referrals!”

**Tammy:** “You think that gets students more engaged?”

**K:** “No, not really. But teachers do it. My teacher just goes, ‘You! Not listening! Referral!’ Left and right!”

**T:** “Do you think that helps?”

**K:** “No ways! It’s exactly the same, maybe even worse.”

**T:** “What do you think they should do? ... If you were a teacher in class what would you do?”

**K:** “How you taught the class.”

**T:** “Which means what?”

**K:** “Like, if you’re teaching a class in a way that’s hard for people to understand then kids...I dunno...Because the way some teachers teach is weird.”

**T:** “So if the teacher makes it so you can understand it then you think that would be better for the discipline? Better than referrals?”

**K:** “Like, she teaches us one subject one day and the next day we do a test on it and we didn’t really understand it.”

**T:** “So you need to practice it?”

**K:** “Yea....One day she teaches it. And we just learned it and the next day she makes us do the test.”

Students shared various insights on their perception of the teacher’s role, none of which included simply giving student information. Engaging with a student led to a student being more willing to participate. Likewise, not building a relationship with the teacher seemed to ‘turn off’ a student’s willingness to engage.

### **Interview Question Theme: Community**

I wanted to prompt students to explain our classroom community without directly asking them to do so. I wrote the question in a way that made it about other students, and did not put them on the spot to tell me what they missed about our class: “Students often say to me, ‘I miss your class!’ Can you help me to understand what you think they mean by that?” Student responses included:

**Heron:** “Your class had more freedom I'd have to say. And like, the assignments you gave were related to what we actually cared about. Like music and going out and trying new things... Freedom of the assignments, and the answers. You gave us the chance to go work with other people and talk. Guaranteed people are gonna be happy when they can talk.”

**Eden:** “It’s really chilled out...I think a lot of people miss having a place to chill out at. Like, looking forward to a subject. Looking forward to a class or a teacher. Sometimes you don’t have that all year. You don’t have any class to look forward to. Every next class is like a drag.”

**Khayla:** “I think overall it’s the teacher. You were a role model for me in a way because you encouraged me to do well and also some teachers don’t like to do like fun stuff like you did.”

**Alyssa:** “That’s actually funny because last week me and Brandon were talking and we both said the same thing, that we miss this class. I think it’s because, I don’t know, we feel like you’re a more understanding teacher and you’re open. And this class was always just fun. Like you learn and it’s still fun at the same time. Now, my classes this year, it’s just like you gotta learn it. We’re gonna lecture you and that’s it. However you wanna learn, you learn. If you don’t, oh

well. It's not really like, 'What do you want to do?'. Like you were open about how we learn. Most teachers don't do that."

**Keanu:** "Your class is cool, that's why. No pressure. Like, I don't know. You weren't a mean teacher that's why. Most teachers get mad. I never really saw you get mad before."

Responses suggest that the teacher's attitude directly impacted a student's outlook on the class. Feeling a sense of freedom, encouragement, and being understood were referred to as being valued emotional needs fulfilled by the teacher.

### **Interview Question Theme: Critical Incident**

The following floating prompt (McCracken, 1988) was not intended to be asked of all participants. I wrote the question initially to ask Alyssa since she was one of the students whose behaviors directly led to "The Intervention". However, the topic came up in my first interview with Keanu, and I chose to ask each student about it to get different perspectives. The question was not asked in the same way or at the same time during interview to four<sup>17</sup> of the five interviewees, but sought to elicit responses about the activity. I first acknowledged the issue with each student (e.g, "There was a point when I had to address some of the negative things that people were contributing to the discussion") and then asked if and what they remembered about it:

**Eden:** "It was kind of random to me. I kind of like knew everyone in the class, like to a certain degree. I mean a lot of them were like, even outside of class they were like "moke bangahs", but in class they were nice to everybody usually... I think some people are just like that period. They kind of feel like they can't really share sometimes. I mean, it's just they way some people are. I mean, I thought there would be some. A modest amount, but not as many as there really were."

**Khayla:** "I kinda...no, not really actually because we went over it and we even did some activities where we kind of saw the similarities we had with others and explained how we felt...There were a lot of shy people in that class too and they kind of opened up after that... We had some quiet people in our class so you would have never known how they felt. So yea, that was good."

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<sup>17</sup> Since Heron was not present for the specific activity, He was not questioned about it.

**Alyssa:** “For me, I actually didn’t understand why everybody felt the way they did. Like I didn’t realize people felt like that, but when you put everyone’s feelings on the board and everyone understood where people were coming from then everything changed. And that was good... It helps. Like, because everybody’s personality is not going to click with everybody. But I think that it helps to get people to understand others more. I mean, everybody’s not gonna be friends with everybody and they’re obviously not gonna like everybody. But I think that was good. At least people knew, even if they weren’t gonna change anything, they know how people felt.”

**Keanu:** “I didn’t really know the quiet kids felt that way because, well, they were quiet! ...Teasing is like sort of what some people do for fun. I mean, when you’re not majorly teasing someone. I don’t mean to be mean if I tease people. It’s just playing around. It’s not serious, it’s just for fun...I wouldn’t want to tease somebody and make them feel bad. That’s mean.”

Most still had some level of ignorance in terms of their behavior in the classroom; however, each was very aware of the need for the intervention activity.

### **Interview Question Theme: HSA Testing**

Prior to the testing days, I pre-arranged for certain students to complete the testing in my classroom with me due to the fact that at the time they were the ones whose focus I was most concerned about. The reason why I was worried about them was not because of their capability, but because they might not have taken it seriously (e.g., not show up, sleep, rush to finish). To my pleasant surprise, each showed up every day, gave 100%, and received a passing score. Four out of five earned a score in the Exceeding range.

I included an interview question regarding the HSA testing process in order to gain insight as to their reason for staying focused and motivated during the seven-day testing period. I simply asked them to tell me about anything they remembered from the testing experience, either the preparation, the testing days, or their reason for taking it so seriously. A range of responses were shared:

**Heron:** “It was pretty much because it was a chance to make myself look better, like to look like I actually cared. Because if you're there because it's a grade, then



you're just there for the grade. But if there's no grade required, you know... Not really for the looks though. It's to make yourself feel better.”

**Eden:** “It’s really easy. And I mean, I didn’t even really care. I just read and was like, ‘Yea, that makes sense. That makes sense. That’s the answer.’ Like I got a 330 on the English, the reading part of the SATs...I could have put in more effort. If I did more effort I would have gotten a lot higher.”

**Khayla:** “Actually, the test was kind of easy because you did a lot of prep...And, umm, a lot of teachers were preparing us for the HSA. They were really enthused about the HSA, they were really engaged. I think that helped too...Because it was, like you explained to us, it wasn’t a grade or anything but it would help the school. I think it kind of made me want to show that I understood something because you’re a good teacher and I didn’t wanna make it so that the school or you looked terrible. It reflects our teachers, and our teachers are good teachers.”

**Alyssa:** “I definitely didn’t feel all that excited, you’re right. For me, I don’t like tests in general. I understood where they were coming from and why they wanted students to take it seriously. I mean, I took it seriously I just didn’t want to do it... I knew it was important in some way.”

Prior to his response, I commented to Keanu that he got a score of 360 on the test. He asked if that was good, so I explained that a 330 was in the range of Exceeds and he was 30 points beyond that. His thought: “It’s only 30 points though.” After telling him that he was actually one of my highest scorers, I then asked what he remembered about the testing. It appeared that Keanu was now making an excuse for earning such a “low” score (as did Eden):

**Keanu:** “...I think I was distracted in class actually. Like, I would look around and look at everyone else.”

Each student expressed a confidence in taking the test, and even in his or her ability to do better if he or she had tried harder. This was a very interesting response in relation to how most of them presented themselves in class and initially identified themselves at the start of this interview: a lazy procrastinator who only does work if it is interesting.

## **Summary**

Student interview responses are a fourth source of evidence of personal engagement. Insights offered during the interviews aligned with all six emerging themes. This was due to the use of an Interview Guide, which allowed me to focus my questioning to those themes that had emerged in the earlier phases of coding, as well as to allow for new themes to emerge.

In each interview students acknowledged the behaviors I identified as being unique to them. Their responses emphasized the way in which the community positively impacted their sense of self in relation to the ‘type’ of student they were within that classroom community of inquiry. This self-perception then supported their cognitive, social and emotional engagement with the content, their peers, and with me as their teacher. Additionally, their reflections offered insight for me in terms of how important it is to have these types of conversations with students as a means to foster relationships and gain insight into external influences coming from their lives outside the classroom. Too often teachers make assumptions based on students’ behaviors within the classroom without acknowledging external factors that may impact their learning. Becoming aware of these factors may help teachers counteract a student’s low level of engagement and negative perception of self as a learner.

## **Section Six: Test Scores**

Scores on the two state required tests given to students in the tenth grade, the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (GMRT) and the Hawaii State Assessment (HSA), offer evidence of student cognitive engagement in terms of students’ perceived academic ability in relation to their score. Student interview responses suggest scores also provided evidence of social and emotional engagement; they understood that it was important and knew their best effort to the community’s achievement was valued. In this way, test scores became a more authentic data source because it went beyond providing evidence of only cognitive engagement.

### **The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT)**

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (GMRT) is a group administered, paper-pencil reading survey test given to assess student achievement in reading (Riverside Publishing). At our school, students in all grades are given the test twice a year, fall and

spring, as a pre and post assessment of their reading comprehension. Regardless of passing the test, students are able to enroll in any level English course they choose the following year due to our Open Door Policy. However, those students who perform well-below grade level are placed into an additional English lab class in order to receive more assistance and time to focus on essential skills. Teachers are not required to include these scores with course grades, and students are not told their scores. Therefore, motivating students to try their best is often a challenge teachers face.

GMRT scores for students entering my class in the fall of 2009 presented a range from fourth grade to post high school (PHS). Scores for the same group of students in the spring of 2010 presented a range from 6.3 to PHS. Scores for the five students interviewed suggested that each was capable of scoring above grade level, and most above high school reading level. This contradicted their academic performance in class, which was not an accurate reflection of their ability.

Student	Pre-10 <sup>th</sup> gr. (Spring of 9 <sup>th</sup> gr.)	10 <sup>th</sup> gr., #1 (Fall of 10 <sup>th</sup> gr.)	10 <sup>th</sup> gr., #2 (Spring of 10 <sup>th</sup> gr.)
Heron	6.3 <sup>18</sup>	11.2	10.2
Eden	PHS <sup>19</sup>	PHS (13)	PHS (up)
Khayla	PHS	PHS (13)	PHS (up)
Alyssa	N/A	12	8.8
Keanu	7.3	PHS (13)	PHS (up)

Table 5

Using this set of scores as an example, at the start of the school year I could infer that I had two students entering with a reading level well-below tenth-grade level, two above high school range, and one who did not test in May of the previous school year. After I administered the test again in the second month of the following year, all scores improved, and the student who did not test the previous year scored at the twelfth-grade level. Due to the fact that I did not strictly go over reading strategies to prepare for this test and our time together had been so limited, it is unlikely that their scores improved so much as a result of my instruction. More likely is the fact that they had not taken the test

<sup>18</sup> The first number represents the grade level, and the second is the month within that school year. For example, 6.3 indicates the student reads at the level equal to the third month of grade six.

<sup>19</sup> Post High School level (PHS)

seriously in the previous year and their score was not an accurate reflection of their ability. Clearly they tried their hardest when I first administered the test<sup>20</sup>, which I believe was due to my approach to the test. I explained to students that their scores were a direct reflection of their ability as a whole classroom community of inquiry, and also reminded them that an extremely low score might result in being double-dosed in English the following year.

### **Hawaii State Assessment (HSA)**

The Hawaii State Assessment (HSA) is a standards-based assessment of the Hawaii Content and Performance Standards (HCPS). The reading and math tests are administered to students in grades 3-8 and 10. The results of the HSA are used in the evaluation of a school's Adequate Yearly Progress, which is a requirement of the NCLB legislation. At the time of this study, all tenth-grade students took the test in April over a period of seven school days. Scores were not available until August, which was during the following school year. Therefore, scores could not be considered as part of a grade and often students were never made aware of their score.<sup>21</sup>

For the 2009-2010 school year the percentage set for determining a school's status under No Child Left Behind was 58%, meaning 58% of all tenth-grade students needed to pass the assessment with a score of 300. The average score for my all of my students combined was 349, which was within the range of "Exceeds". According to the individual teacher score report, only 5% of classes similar to mine in the state (30% disadvantaged status, 2% students with disabilities) had a higher average score. Also included on the score report was the fact that 88% of my students met or exceeded the reading comprehension goal of a score of 300, while 64% of the overall school population did. Scores for all of my students presented a range from 286 to 416. Ninety-five students out of ninety-nine passed, which was divided up into twenty-five in the Meets range (300-335) and seventy in the Exceeds range (336 and above, including three were 400+). Scores for the five students interviewed suggested that each was capable of scoring above grade level, and most above high school reading level. This contradicted

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<sup>20</sup> Although two students' scores dropped from fall to spring of their tenth-grade year, overall the students represent a very capable group.

<sup>21</sup> The Hawaii DOE sends individual score reports home to students' families, but many never look at the report or are unsure how to read it.

their academic performance in class, which was clearly not an accurate reflection of their ability.

Table 6: HSA Scores

STUDENT	8 <sup>th</sup> gr HAS	10 <sup>th</sup> gr HSA
Heron	N/A	302/Meet
Eden	366/Exceed	374/Exceed
Khayla	341/Exceed	343/Exceed
Alyssa	N/A	339/Exceed
Keanu	333/Meet	339/Exceed

*Score range: 300-335 = Meets, 336+ = Exceeds*

Table:6

### Summary

Student test scores are a final source of evidence of personal engagement, and looking at this set of data along with the student reflections and interview responses suggested that improved test scores were a result of increased social and emotional engagement. Like most in the field of education, I have assumed that test scores offer data related to student cognitive engagement. However, there are a number of validity issues that plague the use of achievement tests as a measure of student performance, including that scores do not reflect what the student actually knows and limited evidence that scores relate to later success (Newmann, 1992). I do not support the emphasis on testing, yet I do recognize it as an outside reality imposed on my students. In today's schools there is an overemphasis on achievement in terms of scores and grades. Schools are forced to find ways to coerce their students into taking such tests seriously, as tests are often spread out over a series of days and have no direct impact on their academic record. Additionally, "teachers are reporting that the kind of test prep frequently done to raise test scores may actually hamper students' ability to learn to read for meaning...they frequently mark answers without reading the sample of text and simply look for key words in the answer choices (McNeil, 2000, p. 730). Motivation for this type of testing becomes complicated as students come to understand the test is not a part of their grade (the results do not come until approximately two months after the end of the school

year<sup>22</sup>), nor are they required to pass these tests in order to graduate. The challenge is to get students to do their best on a very high-stakes test that has little impact on their academic career. I address this challenge as part of the community building and as part of my belief in my students' ability to encourage their own self-confidence. This approach is not just a ruse but rather an authentic expression of my confidence in their ability to be successful on the test, which becomes clear within the development of a community of inquiry. Therefore, I approach the issue of actively engaging students individually in my classroom by working as a community, as a team, to prepare for and support one another through the long testing session. We approach the test as a challenge that we are more than prepared for and are not going to let defeat us. It is a group effort, and as part of the group each student comes to understand that he or she has to do his or her part. This approach, however, could never work if we had not previously focused on establishing our classroom community of inquiry since the first day of school seven months prior. Furthermore, I review test-taking strategies in terms of what students can do when they do not know the answer. These strategies increase their confidence of being successful on the test even if they are unsure of the content. I present the high-stakes assessment as a game, and these are the rules they need to follow in order to win. Based on student responses, this method successfully engaged them in the testing process.

### **Conclusion**

Presented in this chapter are the findings from this exploratory study, which employed self-study and case study methodologies to collect data. The purpose of this chapter was to present the study's findings from the primary data resources and begin to explore the emerging themes in relation to an established philosophical framework. Chapter 6 further discusses these findings and the process of completing this research.

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<sup>22</sup> The 2009-2010 school year was the last year for the paper and pencil version of the HSA test. It was changed to a one day, online test in 2010; however, students were given three chances to pass. Another key change was that scores were given immediately upon completion, so teachers could use the test as an assessment and students could see how well they did.

## Chapter 6: Discussion and Analysis of Findings

I begin this chapter by providing a recapitulation of the research questions and themes that emerged from the data analysis and were presented in the previous chapter. I then present an analytical discussion of my findings presented in Chapter 5 in relation to the original research question. Implications of my study are then identified, which are broken down into implications for teachers, schools, in relation to outside political influences, for further research, and my future practice. The final section provides personal reflection of this study to offer insights of the evolution of my personal teaching philosophy.

### Recapitulation of Research Questions

My qualitative research study aimed to tell the *story* of my classroom, the journey of my students and establishment of relationships, in an effort to explore and respond to the research question that guided this study: “How does a community of inquiry impact cognitive, social and emotional engagement of students?” I argue that these three types of engagement cannot be separated if authentic learning is to take place. Thus, the curriculum sought to engage students cognitively, socially and emotionally in order to invite students to become active participants in their own learning opposed to remaining passive recipients. In order to fully explore the outcomes of this study, I created two sub-questions to also be addressed:

- In what ways does a reflective community of inquiry contribute to student self-awareness and perception of self as a learner?
- In what ways does a reflective community of inquiry contribute to teacher self-awareness?

The inclusion of these follow-up questions was of great importance because they focused on how students view their roles as learners in the classroom. The inclusion of these questions also allowed me to reflect on parallels in my personal experiences in relation to the body of research on teacher perception of self.

### Review of Thematic Findings

As discussed in the previous chapter, I identified six emerging themes after repeatedly looking over the data from the student responses and interviews, as well as the codes that my two colleagues identified in their analysis:

1. Community/environment
2. Relationships/social bonds
3. Acceptance/recognition
4. Perception of self as learner
5. Motivation
6. Empathy

This chapter presents a discussion of these themes in relation to the original research question, followed by implications of the findings in multiple contexts.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The following sections present a discussion of the study's findings in relation to the concepts presented in the initial research question and sub-questions: community, student self-perception, and teacher self-perception.

#### **Establishment and development of community**

Student responses on the Student Personal Histories and follow-up interviews indicated that the establishment of a classroom community contributed to their positive perception of self and level of cognitive, social and emotional engagement. I found that the safe community of inquiry provided a place for students to gain confidence and to feel valued as a result of being accepted and recognized for their contributions to that community. Such responses suggest that regular student contribution and collaboration with peers aids in the development of positive relationships, which is key to the establishment of a safe community of inquiry.

My findings demonstrated how the classroom community was also used to address issues together, which empowered students and promoted their confidence as a result of my trust in them to solve problems together. The data showed that my belief and recognition of them as a valued part of the community empowered them to make changes to improve the level of safety in our classroom community. Students found strength in being in a community, as we are all in it together and were therefore able to support and help one another. Student reflections recognized that as a community of inquiry they worked together and shared different perspectives in order to co-construct and co-inquire as a learning community. Responses on the final Student Personal History



and follow-up interviews clearly showed the importance and value of this collaborative aspect of a classroom community.

Finally, the data demonstrated that the establishment of an intellectually safe classroom community of inquiry empowered students to negotiate the external pressures that impact them as learners. Specific aspects of our classroom, such as reflection, discussion, collaboration, and the promotion of deeper thinking enhanced the quality of engagement of students in the learning process. Student reflections acknowledged the relational aspects of teaching, such as the importance of having relationships with the teacher and each other in the classroom. The recognition of social and emotional engagement in addition to the traditional focus on cognitive engagement helped students to have a sense of value and responsibility to one another, which motivated them to do well on tasks and not let the rest of the community down. A prime example of this sense of responsibility promoting engagement was seen during HSA testing; students clearly put forth their best effort since they valued the community and their ability to contribute to its success. Student test scores and reflections promoted the need to establish and develop community in the classroom as a means to promote engagement with the ongoing process of learning, and not just the individualized content topic.

### **Student Perception of Self as Learner**

In this study I found that a student's perception of self as a learner emerged as he/she enacted the role of student through their sense of responsibility, goals, performance, and achievement. This perception impacted whether a student chooses to engage or disengage in school. A range of sources, such as teachers, peers, and prior experiences, can create the formation of a student's self-perception. Such sources can work towards and against the development of a positive self-perception. However, there are also factors that can hinder student engagement in learning and student perception of self as a learner. For example, the internal factor of self-confidence, prior academic experiences, labels placed on them by peers, school or society, and feeling marginalized from the school environment. Students who enter the classroom with a negative self-perception of himself or herself as a learner will continue to adhere to this identity, often resisting change for fear of having to modify their self-perception. However, a negative student self-perception can be counteracted by aspects of a classroom community of

inquiry such as consistent teacher guidance, positive encouragement from teacher and peers, reflection, collaboration, intellectual safety, and cognitive, social and emotional support. The results showed that students with a positive self-perception felt affirmed in their goals and are motivated to achieve. Their feeling of purpose and directions supported them, allowing them to come to the classroom feeling as though he/she could contribute to the classroom community of inquiry. If a student feels a strong sense of self, he/she will be more open to the learning process. This was clearly shown by the end of the school year, and again in the follow-up interviews, when students referred to their feelings of being a part of the community and feeling as though they had become a contributing member of the learning community. Students evolved in their understanding, perception of self, and self-confidence as a student and a member of this classroom community of inquiry. Student responses also indicated a sense of empathy with their peers, which also improved their willingness to engage with one another as an aspect of the learning process.

Classrooms are complex spaces that become more complex when attempting to share the power that exists there. However, the study indicated that allowing students to take on responsibility empowers them to move beyond their own expectations and to reach goals they may not have even set for themselves. Student responses reflected their value of being trusted by the teacher and their peers, as well as a change in themselves as a member of our classroom community. As a result of this study, I believe that student self-perception is not fixed, and continued reflection allows them to adjust their perception of self as a learner in relation to the environment, one that is reliant on them. I believe that the curriculum is the framework, but the students and their commitment to the community are the critical element of engagement.

### **Teacher Perception of Self**

Similar to the importance of forming a student self-perception, I discovered that forming a teacher self-perception is an essential part of being a teacher. However, this is not automatic or easy. I found that to do so required that I become more self-confident and gain a sense of empowerment. It means that I needed to be firm in my beliefs about teaching and learning, and commit to practicing what I believe. I found this to be a very challenging process, which highlighted the need to continue to critically reflect in order

to become more self-aware and empowered by this awareness of my teacher identity. During the course of this study I constantly engaged in critical self-reflection, which affirmed my own sense of self and supported my efforts to go against the traditional approach to curriculum and instruction. Through this systematic study I addressed the importance of my teacher identity in terms of how essential it was for me to have a strong sense of self, self-confidence, competence and belief in myself to make the right decisions, and the content knowledge to implement a pedagogy that involved these critical elements. These aspects of my perception of myself as a teacher helped empower me to make decisions within the classroom in order to effectively engage my students.

Perspectives on students' abilities are unique to the teacher, and as such, teachers need to feel a sense of empowerment to make the right decision regarding the most appropriate and effective way to educate that child in that particular environment at that moment. Furthermore, as a teacher I must be encouraged to play the role of advocate in order to promote what I believe would be most beneficial for my students' learning. As such, I often plan the specifics of my lessons on a day-to-day basis due to the fact that I prefer to react to what takes place in the classroom each day and incorporate it into the next day's lesson; to plan such details too far in advance, which I am often asked to do, goes against my personal, philosophical approach to teaching and beliefs about learning. It would not allow me to react to and include those spontaneous aspects of student inquiry that I consider indicators of authentic learning, such as student generated questions and unplanned discussion. My pedagogy and knowledge of students' ability based on personal experience should underlie my curricular decisions. The ongoing development of my teacher identity empowered me to make the curricular and pedagogical decisions that I made over the course of this study. The methods of curriculum and instruction examined in this study are a reflection of my beliefs aligned with my practice. My teaching method challenges the standard and is a means to an end, but is no way a scripted, one-size-fits-all solution.

### **Becoming a teacher.**

Over the years I have struggled with the clash between my personal teaching philosophy and the expectations placed upon me. For example, I strongly believe in the need to establish community within the classroom, not only because it makes the

environment more conducive to education but also because it allows the students to feel safe, in turn allowing them to risk learning. Results of this study have revealed to me that the skills required to build community are clearly not those being assessed on the high-stakes standardized test. This tension between building community and curriculum concerns not only created a professional conflict for me, but it also presented a personal one. I constantly had to balance external objectives with personal ones, blending an imposed timeline with one that I knew was more effective and reasonable for my students. However, I consider myself to be one of the lucky ones who feels empowered to make the right decisions for my students since I, not someone outside of the classroom, am the one working with them and seeing their growth (or lack thereof) on a daily basis.

My personal experiences have had a significant impact on my philosophical beliefs about education, schooling, learning, and teaching. Most significantly, the concept of promoting self-confidence and opportunities to reflect has since become a key part of my personal teaching philosophy. According to Joseph Jastrow (1931), “The origin of thinking...begins with natural curiosity” (p.1). Agreed. But what is to be said about the high school student who has apparently lost that natural, basic, educational curiosity, or those who fear venturing out into uncharted waters because they will have only themselves to rely on? Their lack of confidence in their own ability is often a key factor standing in the way of their participation in an intellectually safe, community-based, curious learning environment. To counteract their uncertainty I put myself in their shoes, take the same risks, model the same activity that I ask them to do. This, in turn, allows them to see that though I was unsure of my response before I entered the classroom, I trusted them enough to allow myself to be vulnerable.

My interest in exploring the notion of confidence in the classroom was most certainly the result of my own experiences in the classroom environment as a child; I would not jeopardize my academic stability until I became confident in what I was being asked to do. Taking academic challenges with an uncertain outcome seemed too risky. Furthermore, insecurities in areas outside of the classroom impacted my performance and hindered my willingness to participate. “Whenever a pupil is in a situation where he might learn something which goes against a view of himself to which he is strongly committed, his defenses will come into play, even if such learning might potentially

improve his way of life” (Jersild as cited in Franz, 2004). As an adult, such defenses remained; once I was confident in my ability, personally, academically or professionally, I felt more confident that I would succeed and would then take risks to advance. I required personal assurances along the way, revising my plan as they occurred in order to take a step closer to my ultimate goal. In the case of teaching, it was not until I had attained some level of success and therefore confidence in myself as an effective and skilled teacher that I took risks to advance to the next level professionally. This increased confidence resulted in changes to my teaching; I became more assertive and self-assured when discussing the needs of students as well as the topic of education in general. Though the decision to take on these professional challenges was “risky”, my successes along the way acted as assurances and eliminated much of my hesitation with each opportunity. I became empowered by the successes, and I have realized the importance of mirroring such experiences in my classroom by providing invitations to participate and an encouraging learning community for my students.

As I’ve gained more experience in my own classroom, including both successes and challenges along the way, I have developed a strong sense of my personal teaching philosophy due to constant reflection. My teaching philosophy is comprised of personal beliefs about the type of classroom environment, interactions, and teacher dispositions a student needs in order to be ‘successful’ in a variety of ways. Although this philosophy has been altered slightly as I continued to gain experience and reflect on my practice, there are certain aspects that remain at its core: creating a sense of community is priority; recognizing successes beyond grades or test scores enables and encourages students to take risks to achieve; students benefit when teachers offer safe invitations to participate; personal and group reflections act as prompts to self-correct; and teachers can promote students’ confidence acknowledging any level of contribution. I have gained these insights not only through practice, but from looking back on the events of my classroom on a daily basis in order to make decisions on how to best advance or, if required, go back and address a concern or challenge.

There are significant insights that I gained from this research. At the beginning of my career as a teacher I wanted a script to follow, a guide that would allow me to focus less on curriculum and more on classroom management since that seemed to be the cause

of most of my troubles. It did not occur to me that the curriculum itself could act as a tool for management; engaging and challenging students in a way that is relevant to them promotes active participation and an interest in learning. Therefore, I aim to establish a classroom community through the implementation of a curriculum that promotes inquiry, reflection, and collaboration as a means for fostering and developing student engagement and a positive perception of self as a learner.

### **Implications of Study's Findings**

This dissertation systematically examined my experiences over the course of a school year. Cognitive, social, and emotional factors influencing and supporting student perception of self were explored. Results of this study yielded significant insights for teachers and schools, as well as presented an argument for future research in this specific area of curriculum and instruction in the field of education. The following sections present numerous implications of this study.

#### **Implications for the Classroom**

Findings from this study provided support for the need of teachers to foster a sense of community in the classroom in order to impact students' perception of self and improve their personal engagement and learning experiences. As such, teachers need to develop a sense of empowerment to make the right decision regarding the most appropriate and effective way to educate that child in that particular environment at that specific moment. Additionally, findings supported the need for teachers to create a classroom environment that empowers students and engages them in the learning process.

The understanding and development of such classroom practice takes time, which means that the teacher must not abandon the approach after not having immediate success in creating this type of deep connection with students. Having stayed true to my role and purpose, to become a trusted co-inquirer, often proved to be challenging due to the fact that struggles of developing a community of inquiry were present at the same time. However, continued reflection and adaptation provided me with a renewed sense of purpose and aided in my success. Taking on such a non-traditional role, especially in isolation, is challenging; it demands a lot of the teacher, especially a novice, to stay true to the process and to her own beliefs about education. This is perhaps the main reason

why continuous reflection is a necessary condition for engagement of both the students and the teacher.

Further implications for the classroom included the need for a teacher to not just hope for student relationships to develop, but to make the time to promote relationships in order to create a classroom culture that value and rely on students being partners in learning. During this study, the regularity and length of our interactions allowed students to form bonds with one another, as well as with me. However, it also created an environment in which challenges could quickly develop into ongoing management difficulties if not addressed properly. With the pressure to cover content, teachers often don't stop to address such issues if they require a "time out" of sorts in the planned curriculum. Results from this study supported the need to implement reflection, flexibility, modeling, and to acknowledge importance of student experiences in the shaping of one's perception of self within the classroom.

### **Implications for School Administration**

Findings from this study also provided support for the need of administrators and teacher educators to encourage teachers to take steps needed to create a sense of community in the classroom in order to increase student personal engagement. Complexities of the classroom require concerted effort to address the establishment of relationships and creating bonds among students and between the teacher and her students. In the age of No Child Left Behind there is so much talk about how to improve test scores and raise student achievement, but the solutions are often focused on giving more tests or singling out low-achieving students to offer one-on-one assistance. Learning has become defined by basic skills mastery, performance on standardized tests, or learning outcomes designed by people far removed from the classroom. Teachers must reflect if they are going to develop a sense of self, and likewise they must invite their students to reflect in order to have an awareness of himself or herself as a learner.

Means-end mandates on curriculum have become more common at the state, district and school levels in the age of No Child Left Behind legislation, leaving many teachers to feel unable, unauthorized, and *unempowered* to include themselves or their students' identities and interests in the curriculum; the only things that can be taught are those limited topics they are required to address in order to ensure success on the high-

stakes test. Furthermore, ‘teacher-proof materials’ are often implemented to reduce the amount of discretion teachers can use to implement curriculum mandates in order to increase student success on the high-stakes tests. Often, a teacher’s personal philosophy is not reflected in their classroom curriculum due to outside demands and expectations. As a result, individual spontaneous inquiry is often ignored, limiting students’ personal engagement with the content and therefore restricting authentic learning experiences and often creating feelings of indifference and isolation for students.

Top-down decision-making processes can intimidate teachers, discouraging them from voicing their own thoughts. Furthermore, teachers can easily get stuck in routines of practice that discourage collaboration ultimately eliminating opportunities for interdisciplinary connections as well as supportive relationships among colleagues that would provide an empowering sense of support, encouragement and guidance. For this reason alone, schools must be structured in a way that provides support and feedback to teachers at all stages of professional development in order to allow them to view themselves as professionals in spite of struggle. In the traditional culture of schools, teachers are expected to be self-reliant; however, without promoting peer collaboration, consideration of all ideas, and an ethic of care to foster feelings of empowerment, schools risk becoming isolating institutions for teachers as well as students.

### **Political Implications**

There are numerous external expectations and constraints placed on school administrators, teachers and students by outside policy makers and government agencies. The main areas that this study creates political implications for are school communities, nationally implemented standards, and teacher preparatory programs.

#### **School community.**

High-stakes testing is a reality that all public schools in our country face today. Student reflections included in my study supported the importance of student motivation and self-confidence in one’s ability to succeed, in addition to the creation of an intellectually safe classroom community to support student success on such a high-stakes assessment. Although such confidence may be internally derived, it more often stemmed from interactions with peers and the teacher.



In relation to high-stakes testing are curriculum standards, specifically the recently developed Common Core State Standards. This set of language arts and mathematic standards is an educational reform initiative aimed at aligning education in each state across our country through their creation, implementation, and assessment. Although these standards are not yet being fully implemented, they appear to stress and assess cognitive skills over content knowledge, which is a significant change from current state standards. Students will be expected to interact with and move beyond a text using processes of inquiry, opposed to decoding a text to find information within the it in order to identify the correct multiple-choice answer. To prepare our students to be successful in terms of these newly revised standards and assessments, the fundamentals of teaching and schooling have to change. This study supports the importance of fostering and developing a student's emotional engagement in conjunction with their cognitive and social engagement within the classroom community as the key to success on such high-stakes assessments.

The final piece of the political implication trifecta is teacher evaluation. There has been a lot of discussion and legislation (Florida, Indiana, Idaho, Nebraska) in recent years regarding teachers being rewarded with merit pay, which would primarily be based on their students' scores on high-stakes tests. This raises numerous concerns, mainly regarding the ways in which this new method will be standardized. For example, how will outcomes in art be measured against those in math? How will a teacher in a grade that is tested by the state be weighed against a teacher in a non-tested grade? What are the expectations for a teacher of an advanced class compared to a special education class? And the concerns go on and on. Such a system would shift the focus away from student learning onto teacher performance, ignoring authentic student engagement and creating a more punitive educational environment. In her book *The Death and Life of the Great American school system*, former Assistant Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch (2010) recognized that her previous thoughts about standardized testing were wrong. She acknowledges her disillusionment with the approach she once believed would improve education in our country. She writes:

What matters most is for the school, the district, and the state to be able to say that more students have reached "proficiency." This sort of fraud ignores the students' interests while promoting the interests of adults who take credit for nonexistent improvements. (p. 159)

In relation to Ravitch's thoughts, student reflections from this study provided evidence of motivation to succeed on such a high-stakes test being related more to a student's sense of obligation and responsibility created among their community of peers and less to sources outside of the classroom. Although teachers do need to recognize such outside expectations, the ways in which teachers and schools approach high-stakes testing and curriculum standards is what needs a reform. There must be a shift to view testing as a collaborative task than an individual one. Similarly, reading, writing, and recall are not the only ways for students to demonstrate knowledge of content.

#### **Teacher preparatory programs.**

There is often a clash when first-year teachers directly out of a preparatory program enter the school environment; the desire to stick to a clearly laid out lesson plan discourages the allowance of those spontaneous moments of student inquiry, and therefore only seems to encourage active participation in a way the teacher finds most meaningful, not the student. Furthermore, it is rare for new teachers to feel a sense of empowerment simply by the definition: "a process whereby school participants develop the competence to take charge of their own growth and resolve their own problems. Empowered individuals believe they have the skills and knowledge to act on a situation and improve it" (Short, 1994, p. 488). It is difficult to gain a feeling of authority and confidence in one's ability to act instinctively without having ample experience having to do so. This is further compounded by the fact that beginning teachers have not had ample time to implement their lessons and ideas, but rather have had just enough time to plan them out. It often takes a considerable amount of trial and error to gain the slightest sense of empowerment on one's own.

#### **Implications for Further Research**

Further research is needed to investigate additional ways and benefits of creating a student-centered, self-directed classroom environment in order to promote student cognitive, social, and emotional engagement. The main direction I see for future research

is to conduct longitudinal studies to follow students who have had at least one teacher who has fostered teacher-student relationships that made them feel they are a significant part of the classroom community of inquiry to determine if such relationships have a long-term impact on students. As many students indicated on the Student Personal Histories and in the follow-up interviews, positive prior learning experiences encouraged them to participate more and set higher academic goals due to the creation of a positive perception of self as a learner. Therefore, additional research on the impact positive teacher-student relationships have on students with negative prior experiences could offer insight on the ability for such teacher-student relationships to reverse some of the negative perceptions that negative personal histories can have on students.

Future contributions to this study include creating this type of reflective classroom environment with a different grade. For example, replicating this method in a ninth grade class could possibly impact and provide insight on retention rates. Likewise, creating an intellectually safe classroom community of inquiry in a twelfth grade class could also provide insightful reflections from students at a transitional point in their academic career who did not have this type of classroom environment before. Often high school seniors' attention and retention rates lower as the year goes on. However, student reflections from this study showed that the establishment of an intellectually safe classroom community had the opposite impact of student engagement, motivation, retention, and even attendance. Additionally, replicating this study with a focus on various subgroups, such as chronically truant students, English Language Learners (ELL), low performing and/or repeating students, and students in an inclusive classroom environment (both Special Education and General Education) would also produce various insightful results about the ways in which becoming a member of an intellectually safe classroom community impacts student personal and academic success.

Finally, it seems logical to replicate this study with a cohort in a teacher preparatory program since teachers need to be the ones to initiate change and have the potential to have the greatest impact on a student's increased personal engagement. However, currently this is not a focus or value of teacher preparatory programs. Therefore, I strongly believe that the impact on students' learning would be even greater if such program regularly prepared for the classroom in such a way that this study urges

them to through the modeling of such a classroom environment by their university professors. This would not only educate teacher candidates about the importance of fostering and developing an intellectually safe classroom community, but would also allow them to see and feel the impact such an environment has on their own learning.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

The completion of this study has had a significant and lasting impact on my personal teaching philosophy. Most notably is my increased awareness of emotional engagement being the most difficult type of student engagement to measure, while at the same time being the most important to provide a forum for in order to develop. In light of the upcoming implementation of the Common Core State Standards, results from this study suggest that promoting student personal engagement with an emphasis on the emotional aspect is the essential means to a successful end.

Over the course of the study and in the time since its completion I have become more sensitive to indicators and opportunities for emotional engagement, which mainly come through student self-reflection. Early on in the development of an intellectually safe and responsible community of inquiry, reflection focused on topics removed from the classroom in order to eliminate the fear of sharing while at the same time continuing to practice and develop the skills of reflections of sharing. Through this study's implementation and analysis, as well as my continued reflection of my findings I was also able to provide data to support the importance of student reflection on learning and the classroom community being systematic and periodic. Otherwise such a change in perception of self as seen in this study is not possible.

### **Conclusion: Final Personal Reflections**

During the early stages of this study I continued to negotiate my purpose (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in an effort to select a research focus that related to my personal beliefs about education. Ultimately I determined that my objective was to clearly and effectively explain my personal teaching philosophy, as it is manifested in my curriculum and classroom environment as a means to explore the notion of student engagement and self-perception. Providing the details of my classroom allowed me to illustrate ways in which I aimed to increase student engagement, as well as to counteract students' negative perception of self as a learner.

Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin (1988) developed a narrative view of experience in which professionals engage in narrative inquiry on their own practices in order to tell, retell, and relive their knowledge in re-storied ways. “By doing this, professionals can become aware of their tacit knowledge, as *knowledge expressed in practice*. They can then refashion their knowledge by reflection, and perhaps, if need be, change their practice accordingly” (p. 271). I found that the continued reflection forced me to alter my behavior and self-perspective. I modified my curriculum and management plans, as well as my philosophy of teaching, in order to find a solution to the problem that was threatening to eliminate all sense of safety and community in the classroom. Additionally, I was challenged to find new ways to deter the disruptive behavior without drawing negative attention to the group and possibly making the issue worse. I re-worked my curriculum on a daily basis to include more occasions for flexible grouping, meaning students regularly met in groups but the group members changed. This aimed at promoting tolerance, as well as engagement and participation by more members of the classroom community of inquiry.

I view curriculum as a means for teachers to connect with their students, for students to connect with the content, as well as for students to develop interconnectedness with one another and engage in a self-discovery of their own self-perception; it is what the students walk out of the door knowing and who they become because of what they have experienced as a result of being in a classroom community of inquiry. The curriculum I presented challenges students to go beyond, to ‘think outside the box’ in order to explore their own sense of wonder and natural curiosity, and to create their own meanings in relation to the information provided. As the teacher, I had to be proactive in making the necessary adjustments to the classroom environment that allowed for such improvements to take place if I wanted my students to develop cognitively, socially and emotionally. In order for this type of learning to occur, my classroom had to become a place where students feel emotionally safe and therefore elect to actively engage, both cognitively and socially, in the educational process. The classroom environment provided the setting to allow all members of the community of inquiry, including the teacher, to foster relationships, promote inquiry, and to socially and emotionally engage with the content and one another in order to learn. This level of engagement is not

limited to only the students, and I view it as a type of symbiotic relationship between the teacher and the students. Ownership of one's learning and development increases an individual's desire to move towards mastery. Therefore, creating curiosity and internal motivation in the learner is a function of the classroom community of inquiry that relies on the teacher's willingness and ability to seamlessly move between the roles of facilitator, co-inquirer and source of information.

Although experience is often said to be "the best teacher", it is lost without reflection. As I have gained more experience in my own classroom, including both successes and challenges along the way, I have developed a strong sense of my personal teaching philosophy due to constant reflection. Upon completion of this reflective study I have developed and increased understanding of the importance of establishing a community of inquiry in the classroom, awareness of opportunities for emotional engagement, and level of commitment to the creation of my curriculum. My story speaks to the importance of self-study and reflection, of both teachers and students, and a means for teachers to improve the learning experience for themselves and their students, specifically through the fostering of a sense of community in the classroom. "[K]nowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. In fact, knowing myself depends heavily on self-knowledge" (Palmer, 1998, p.2). I consider this study to be a continuation on my path of self-knowledge and education, as well as a contribution to and expansion on the existing research on the impact of the establishment of a classroom community as a means to increase student personal engagement.

## Appendix A

### *History of the IRB and DOE Approval Process*

On July 27, 2009, IRB approval was granted for one year (#17289). Additionally, Department of Education (DOE) approval needed for conducting research with the Hawaii State DOE was also granted on August 14, 2009. On May 26, 2011 IRB approval was granted to conduct follow-up interviews with five students (#13874). Next, on July 11th, 2007, IRB approval was granted for another year (#19092). Finally, on May 22, 2012, IRB #19092 was officially closed.

Research Phase	Approval	Approval Date	Duration of Approval	Approval Number
Data collection; case study	IRB Approval, University of Hawaii, Manoa	July 28, 2009	July 27, 2009 – July 27, 2010 (1 year)	CHS # 17289
Follow-up Interviews	IRB Approval, University of Hawaii, Manoa	May 26, 2011	May 23, 2011 – May 22, 2012 (1 year)	CHS #19092
Data collection; case study	DOE Approval	August 14, 2009	2009 – 2010 DOE School Year	N/A

Figure 7. History of human subjects approval

The following pages include Student Assent and Parental Consent forms required for both phases of the IRB approval process (2009 and 2011).

**Ms. Tammy Jones**  
**Research Consent Form: Parent/Guardian**

August 2009

*“Community in the classroom: An approach to curriculum and instruction as a means for the development of student personal engagement in a high school classroom”*

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As part of the requirements for a doctoral degree at the University of Hawaii, I will be conducting research on the ways in which students cognitively, emotionally and socially develop within our particular classroom environment during the course of this school year. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to allow your student to participate in the present study.

Upon your approval, your child will be asked to give their assent to participate as well. No student will be included in the study without both parental/guardian consent and individual assent. Please be aware that both you and your child are free to decide not to participate or withdraw at any time. Participation will have no influence on course grade, and your child will remain in the class regardless of the choice to participate or not.

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which the creation of a classroom community impacts student *personal engagement*. *Personal engagement* is defined as a type of engagement that values self-disclosure, mutual trust, nurtures a deep interconnectedness among participants through a shared ethic of being cared for, supported, respected and valued. Personal engagement promotes self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-identity. The curriculum that will be used for this research study is the same one that I have implemented for the previous five years in my tenth grade English classes at James Campbell High School.

Procedures for collecting and interpreting data are qualitative. Documents (student work and assignments) from the course and transcriptions from video recordings of class discussions will be used as the main sources of data. Other sources of data include teacher observations of critical incidents, student self-identity reflections, and standardized test scores. Data for this study will be collected at various points during the school year to analyze student cognitive, emotional and/or social growth at various stages of community development. Data collection will involve regular participation in classroom activities and assignments. It is possible, that the researcher may want to do follow up assignments, reflections or interviews, beyond those initially specified; if this is the case you will be contacted for your consent.

I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed. However, names of students who participate will remain confidential; their identity as a participant will only be known to me, the researcher. All students will remain in the class, regardless of their participation, and will be expected to fulfill the requirements of the course regardless if they participate as research subjects. The expected personal benefits associated with student participation in this study are cognitive, social and emotional development, as well as an increased level of personal sense of identity due to your opportunity to reflect on your self-concept in a safe environment.



Please sign your consent with full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. If you agree, sign and return the second page to the investigator and you may keep this page for your reference.

If you have questions about this research you may contact Ms. Tammy Jones on *Webgrader* or at [TammyEJones@mac.com](mailto:TammyEJones@mac.com). If you have questions about your rights (or the rights of your child) as a research participant, you may contact the University of Hawaii Committee on Human Studies at 956-5007 or [uhirb@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhirb@hawaii.edu)

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*“Community in the classroom: An approach to curriculum and instruction as a means for the development of student personal engagement in a high school classroom”*

I agree to allow my child to participate in the research project on student personal engagement.

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Name of Parent/Guardian (print)

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Student name (print)

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Signature of Parent/Guardian

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Date

*Tammy Jones, MEdT, University of Hawaii, Principal Investigator*

Ms. Tammy Jones  
*Research Assent Form: Student*

August 2009

*“Community in the classroom: An approach to curriculum and instruction as a means for the development of student personal engagement in a high school classroom”*

Dear Participant,

As part of the requirements for a doctoral degree at the University of Hawaii, I will be conducting research on the ways in which students cognitively, emotionally and socially develop within our particular classroom environment during the course of this school year. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or withdraw at any time. Participation will have no influence on your grade, and you will remain in the class regardless of your choice to participate or not with the same expectations to complete course requirements.

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which the creation of a classroom community impacts student *personal engagement*. *Personal engagement* is defined as a type of engagement that values self-disclosure, mutual trust, nurtures a deep interconnectedness among participants through a shared ethic of being cared for, supported, respected and valued. Personal engagement promotes self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-identity. The curriculum that will be used for this research study is the same one that I have implemented for the previous five years in my tenth grade English classes at James Campbell High School.

Procedures for collecting and interpreting data are qualitative. Documents (student work and assignments) from the course and transcriptions from video recordings of class discussions will be used as the main sources of data. Other sources of data include teacher observations of critical incidents, student self-identity reflections, and standardized test scores. Data for this study will be collected at various points during the school year to analyze student cognitive, emotional and/or social growth at various stages of community development. Data collection will involve regular participation in classroom activities and assignments. It is possible, that the researcher may want to do follow up assignments, reflections or interviews, beyond those initially specified; if this is the case you will be contacted for your consent to participate.

I would be happy to share my findings with you after the research is completed. However, your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Your identity as a participant will be known only to me, the researcher. The expected personal benefits associated with your participation in this study are cognitive, social and emotional development, as well as an increased level of personal sense of identity due to your opportunity to reflect on your self-concept in a safe environment.

Your signature indicates your willingness to participate in the study, agreement to allow me to use your data for my personal use, and full knowledge of the nature and purpose of the procedures. However, no student will be included in the data collection without both the consent of parent/guardian and personal assent. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep. If you have questions about this research you may contact Ms. Tammy Jones on *Webgrader* or at [TammyEJones@mac.com](mailto:TammyEJones@mac.com). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Hawaii Committee on Human Studies (956-5007, [uhirb@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhirb@hawaii.edu)).

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*“Community in the classroom: An approach to curriculum and instruction as a means for the development of student personal engagement in a high school classroom”*

I **agree** to participate in the research project on student personal engagement.

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Name of Student (print)

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Signature of Student

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Date

*Tammy Jones, MEdT, University of Hawaii, Principal Investigator*

## University of Hawai'i

### Parental/Guardian's Consent for Child to Participate in Research Project

March 2011

*Community in the classroom: An approach to curriculum and instruction as a means for the development of student personal engagement in a high school classroom*

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As part of the requirements for a doctoral degree from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, I have conducted research on the ways in which students cognitively, emotionally and socially develop within our particular classroom environment during the course of a school year. My first phase of data collection took place during the 2009-2010 school year when your child was in my English class. Data collection involved regular participation in classroom activities and assignments. I am now entering the second phase and have decided to do follow up interviews with five students from that class. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to allow your student to participate in the present study.

**Project Description - Activities and Time Commitment:** The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which the creation of a classroom community impacts student *personal engagement*. *Personal engagement* is a type of engagement that values self-disclosure, mutual trust, nurtures a deep interconnectedness among participants through a shared ethic of being cared for, supported, respected and valued. If your child participates, I will interview him/her once during first period in my classroom. The interview will last for about 30 minutes. I will record the interview using an audio-recorder so I can later type a transcript, which is the written record of what we talked about during the interview. If your child participates, s/he will be one of a total of five students from last year's 10<sup>th</sup> grade English class who I will interview individually. One example of the type of question I will ask is, "How would you describe yourself as a student?" If you would like to see a copy of all of the questions that I will ask, please contact me via the phone number or email address listed at the end of this consent form.

**Benefits and Risks:** I believe there are no direct benefits to your child for participating in my research project. However, the results of this project may help me, other teachers, and researchers learn more about high school students' perspectives on the importance of creating a sense of community in the classroom environment. I also believe there is no risk to your child in participating in this project. However, if your child becomes uncomfortable or stressed by answering any of the interview questions, we will skip the question, take a break, stop the interview, withdraw from the project altogether. Additionally, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Confidentiality and Privacy:** During this research project, I will keep all data from the interviews in a secure location. Only my University of Hawaii advisor and I will have access to the data, although legally authorized agencies, including the University of Hawai'i Committee on Human Studies, have the right to review research records. After I transcribe

the interviews, I will erase the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project and in my typed transcript, I will not use your child's name or any other personally identifying information. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for your child. If you would like a copy of my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this research project is voluntary. Upon your approval, your child will be asked to give their assent to participate as well. No student will be included in the study without both parental/guardian consent and individual assent. Deciding not to participate will have no affect on any class grades or academic standing. Please be aware that both you and your child are free to decide not to participate or withdraw at any time, which will have no impact on their academic standing.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this project, please contact me, Tammy Jones, via phone (808) 689-1200 ext 2350 or e-mail ([TammyEJones@mac.com](mailto:TammyEJones@mac.com)). You can also contact my advisor at the University of Hawaii, Dr. Anne Freese, at (808) 956-3996 or via e-mail at [Freese@hawaii.edu](mailto:Freese@hawaii.edu). If you have any questions about your rights, or the rights of your child as a research participant, you can contact the University of Hawai'i, Committee on Human Studies (CHS), by phone at (808) 956-5007 or by e-mail at [uhirb@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhirb@hawaii.edu).

*Community in the classroom: An approach to curriculum and instruction as a means for the development of student personal engagement in a high school classroom*

**Please keep the first page of this consent form for your records.**

If you consent for your child to participate in this project, please sign the following signature portion of this consent form and return it to **Tammy Jones**.

**Signature(s) for Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I give permission for my child to participate in the research project entitled, *Community in the classroom: An approach to curriculum and instruction as a means for the development of student personal engagement in a high school classroom*. I understand that, in order to participate in this project, my child must also agree to participate. I understand that my child and/or I can change our minds about participation, at any time, by notifying the researcher of our decision to end participation in this project.**

**Name of Child (Print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Parent/Guardian (Print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Guardian's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Tammy Jones, MEdT, University of Hawaii, Principal Investigator*

## University of Hawai'i

### Student Consent to Participate in Research Project

March 2011

*Community in the classroom: An approach to curriculum and instruction as a means for the development of student personal engagement in a high school classroom*

Dear Participant,

As part of the requirements for my doctoral degree from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, I have conducted research on the ways in which students cognitively, emotionally and socially developed within our classroom environment. My first phase of data collection took place in our class during the 2009-2010 school year. I am now entering the second phase and have decided to do follow up interviews with five students from your class. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in this phase of the study. I would now like to add your voice to the findings by conducting an interview.

**Project Description - Activities and Time Commitment:** The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which the creation of a community within the classroom impacts student engagement and development. If you participate, I will interview you once during first period in my classroom. The interview will last for about 30 minutes. I will record the interview using an audio-recorder so I can later type a transcript, which is the written record of what we talked about during the interview. If you participate, you will be one of a total of five students from last year's 10<sup>th</sup> grade English class who I will interview individually. One example of the type of question I will ask is, "How would you describe yourself as a student?" If you would like to see a copy of all of the questions that I will ask, please contact me via the phone number or email address listed at the end of this consent form.

**Benefits and Risks:** I believe there are no direct benefits to you for participating in my research project. However, the results of this project may help me, other teachers, and researchers learn more about high school students' perspectives on the importance of creating a sense of community in the classroom environment. I also believe there is no risk to you in participating in this project. However, if you become uncomfortable or stressed by answering any of the interview questions, we will skip the question, take a break, stop the interview, withdraw from the project altogether. If you become agitated during the process, I can refer you to our school nurse or your counselor; they will be informed of the interviewing. Additionally, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Confidentiality and Privacy:** After I transcribe the interviews, I will erase the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project and in my typed transcript, I will not use your name or any other personally identifying information. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for you. I will keep all data from the interviews in a secure location. Only my University of Hawaii advisor and I will have access to the data, although legally authorized agencies, including the University of Hawai'i Committee on Human Studies, have the right to review research records. If you would like a copy of my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this research project is voluntary; you are free to decide not to participate or withdraw at any time, which will have no impact on your academic standing. Deciding not to participate will have no affect on any class grades or academic standing. No student will be included in the study without both parental/guardian consent and individual assent.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this project, please contact me, Tammy Jones, via phone (808) 689-1200 ext 2350 or e-mail ([TammyEJones@mac.com](mailto:TammyEJones@mac.com)). You can also contact my advisor at the University of Hawaii, Dr. Anne Freese, at (808) 956-3996 or via e-mail at [Freese@hawaii.edu](mailto:Freese@hawaii.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the University of Hawai‘i, Committee on Human Studies (CHS), by phone at (808) 956-5007 or by e-mail at [uhirb@hawaii.edu](mailto:uhirb@hawaii.edu).



**Please keep the first page of this consent form for your records.**

If you consent to participate in this project, please sign the following signature portion of this consent form and return it to **Tammy Jones**.

**Signature for Consent:**

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**I give permission for my interview to be included in the research project entitled, *Community in the classroom: An approach to curriculum and instruction as a means for the development of student personal engagement in a high school classroom*. I understand that in order to participate in this project my parent/guardian must also give permission. I understand that my parent/guardian and/or I can change our minds about participation, at any time, by notifying the researcher of our decision to end participation in this project.**

Name of Child (Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Tammy Jones, MEdT, University of Hawaii, Principal Investigator*

## Appendix B

### Follow-Up Student Interview Guide

TO ASK OF ALL 5 STUDENTS								
QUESTION	Academic perf.	Self-identity	Needs	Cognitive engagement	Social engagement	Emotional engagement	Reflection	Community
1. How would you describe yourself as a student?	✓	✓					✓	
2. Which class(es) do you enjoy most? Why?			✓				✓	
3. Which class(es) do you enjoy least? Why?			✓				✓	
4. What makes a class interesting?			✓					
5. What motivates you to complete your work?	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
6. What type of student do you think you were in our class?	✓	✓					✓	
7. What do you need from a classroom environment to be an <i>active/productive</i> participant?			✓				✓	
8. Were there any aspects of our classroom that satisfied any of these needs you just mentioned? - If so, have these needs <i>continued to be</i> satisfied this year? Explain.			✓				✓	✓
9. What does an engaged student <i>look/sound</i> like?				✓	✓	✓		
10. What are some examples of things <i>you</i> do to show you're engaged in class?		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
11. What are things your <i>teachers</i> do to encourage student engagement?				✓	✓	✓		✓
12. What are examples of things <i>school</i> is doing to promote student engagement?				✓	✓	✓		✓
13. Describe a teacher with whom you have a good relationship.			✓					✓
14. Describe a classroom in which you feel comfortable. - What about a class makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable?			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15. What was your level of comfort in our class (high, middle, low) and what contributed to it?			✓				✓	✓
16. Describe a student's responsibility in the		✓					✓	

classroom.

17. Describe a teacher's responsibility in the classroom.	✓	✓
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18. During HSA you tested in my room. Tell me what you remember about that experience (prep, test day)?	✓	✓
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QUESTION	Academic perf.	Self-identity	Needs	Cognitive engagement	Social engagement	Emotional engagement	Reflection	Community
19. You attended testing every day and passed. What motivated you?	✓	✓					✓	✓
20. Honors courses in our school are open to all students. You self-selected to take Honors English. What was your motivation or reason for that? - Did it meet your expectations?	✓	✓	✓				✓	
21. Students often say to me, "I miss your class!" Can you help me to understand what you think they mean by that?							✓	✓

#### **KN (male): In-class summative assessments only**

1. You basically did no work outside of the classroom, but paid attention and often contributed in class. What is the reason for that?	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
2. Is that still the same this year? Explain.	✓	✓	✓				✓

#### **H.M. (male): Chronically truant**

1. You had attendance issues, though I noticed that some days you would come only to our class or maybe one other. - What is the reason why you would skip classes? - What is the reason why you would come to our class?		✓		✓			✓	
2. You completed work in class and demonstrated that you were very intelligent and capable, but you never did any homework. What was the reason for that?	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓

#### **E.K. (female): Leading participant; inconsistent academic performance**

1. You were very



Appendix C  
Student Interview Transcripts

**Interview #1: Heron**

1	T: You told me earlier that “lazy” would be a word to describe you as a student. Are there any other words?
	H: I think I'm quiet. I keep to myself.
5	T: Are there certain classes or subjects where you talk more, or in every class are you pretty quiet?
	H: Pretty much in every class.
	T: Okay, which subjects you enjoy the most? Or class, maybe not subject. Is there a class in all of high school so far that you have enjoyed?
	H: Probably art.
10	T: Art. Okay. And why do you most enjoy that class?
	H: Because we get a chance to express ourselves.
	T: Do you find that you don't get that in other classes?
	H: I mean, I do but...the work just makes me back off.
	T: Is it because you find the work difficult? Is hard work for you?
15	H: No. But then when I think about it I think, “Oh, that's easy. I can do that later.” So then I just plan to do it later. But I come back to it and I still don't want to do it. And then oh my gosh, it's the next day! But I'm tired so I just wanna go to sleep.
	T: And art is work that you enjoy doing versus writing an essay or doing math problems.
20	H: Yes!
	T: I get ya. Okay, what about the class that you enjoy the least. Is there a subject or class that you enjoyed least?
	H: That would be Hawaiian.
	T: Is that this year?
25	H: Yeah.

30	<p>T: And so why is that? Is it difficult?</p> <p>H: I just can't seem to get the pattern to the sentences.</p> <p>T: So you have had classes you enjoy and classes you don't. What makes class interesting to you? What would make you want to be involved in a class or participate?</p>
	<p>H: Activities and group stuff.</p> <p>T: How about in our class? Do you remember last year, in English, what type of student you were?</p>
35	<p>H: I was a timid student.</p> <p>T: Timid? Why do you think you were timid?</p> <p>H: Like, I really kept to myself because I came in and was like, "I don't think I know everyone around here." I knew them, but I didn't. Not personally.</p>
40	<p>T: So do you think it's a teacher's job to make sure students know each other? Do you think that would've helped you in our class? It was a big class. We had 42 students.</p> <p>H: Yeah, it helps. You talk more.</p>
45	<p>T: So what is it that you need from a classroom environment to be productive? For example, you just said having group work helps. What else would help? What are some other things that might help you be active?</p> <p>H: Pretty much discussion and hands on type of stuff.</p> <p>T: Did we have any of that in English?</p> <p>H: Oh yeah.</p> <p>T: Usually people think English is just reading and writing.</p>
50	<p>H: You always told us to look for stuff, that's why. And then we'd talk about it.</p> <p>T: So you consider discussion a "hands-on" activity?</p> <p>H: Yes. Yup.</p> <p>T: I find that interesting because you said you were timid. You didn't talk too much in discussions.</p>

55	<p>H: I know, but I took in all the ideas.</p> <p>T: Yes, I remember you paying attention and sometimes writing but not talking too much. This leads right to my next question. When you're sitting in class and you're looking around your classmates, how can you tell a student is engaged? For example, if they're not engaged they may be sleeping.</p>
60	<p>H: When they're not (side) talking. If they're looking down at their paper and following along.</p> <p>T: So do they have to be talking to being engaged?</p> <p>H: No. Well, in a way. I mean, you have to respond. If they asked you questions they wouldn't know if you're paying attention or not if you don't respond.</p>
65	<p>T: So engagement isn't just following along?</p> <p>H: No. No.</p> <p>T: How do you show you're engaged in class? You already said you're kind of quiet and keep to yourself.</p>
70	<p>H: I put my head down and do my work.</p> <p>T: So you follow along to participate. Is there any class you speak out more in? Do you speak more in art because he like that subject?</p> <p>H: No, not really. Maybe math. I hate it, but I'm good at it. And if I need to know what the formula is, I'll ask.</p>
75	<p>T: What do you think the school does to try to engage students?</p> <p>H: In class? I don't really know, I can't really think of anything.</p> <p>T: Do you think it's the school's job, or is it the teacher's job?</p>
80	<p>H: I think it's pretty much everyone's job. It's like you're coming here to learn, right? And you need to feel some comfort, right? Like you're learning in somewhere that you'll remember forever. Your high school years are the ones you'll take with you your whole life, and you'll tell your kids about it to. It'll be like," When I was in school it was like this, or like this. We had so much fun."</p> <p>T: Do you think the school tries to get students involved in more school spirit things?</p>

85	<p>H: Yeah, they do. But, I don't know. Our school's been losing a lot of school spirit. Because when my cousin them came here...I think they graduated in year 06. I looked at the yearbook and I see all the pictures and stuff. There is so much clubs. And they look all happy and everything.</p> <p>T: Do you play sports? Do you get involved in clubs?</p>
90	<p>H: I wanted to go out for football, but when I went it was too late.</p> <p>T: Do you think you'll try next year?</p> <p>H: Yeah, but I think basketball or volleyball instead.</p>
95	<p>T: That's good. That's really good. I think maybe that would help you with the enjoyment factor. You know, if you enjoy school more maybe you'd enjoy class more and participate. OK, have you had any teacher who you feel you have a good relationship with?</p> <p>H: Oh yeah, I've had a couple. Mr. P. and Ms. Y.</p> <p>T: Those teachers were both Freshman year, correct?</p> <p>H: Yup.</p>
100	<p>T: So what does it mean to have a "good" relationship with a teacher?</p> <p>H: I don't know. Pretty much... I don't know how he did it.</p> <p>T: Mr. P. described you as a class clown. Not in a bad way, just always talkative and social. And I was surprised. I never saw that side of you. I didn't know what happened, if it was the environment or something going on with you.</p>
105	<p>H: Mr. P my first year here. I never knew anybody in that class. And everyone was like, "You're new, huh?"</p> <p>T: Oh, you didn't go to intermediate with them?</p> <p>H: No. So when I came over here everyone was just looking at me. They said, "Ho, you got a big afro."</p>
110	<p>T: So do you think having a good relationship with your teacher helped?</p> <p>H: Yeah, I was a little bad. Not trouble trouble. Like talkative all the time.</p> <p>T: Okay, good. What about a classroom that you felt comfortable in? Are there classrooms you feel more comfortable in than others? Ya know, where you can</p>



115	<p>relax and be yourself versus feeling uncomfortable. Or are you the same in every class?</p> <p>H: I'm kinda the same.</p> <p>T: How about in our class. Would you say you had a high level of comfort, middle level or low level?</p>
120	<p>H: I had a lot of comfort, but at the same time I felt like everyone would look at me. Like, "This kid never comes to class."</p> <p>T: Okay, so how does that affect you? You think that students always think that about you?</p> <p>H: Oh yea.</p>
125	<p>T: Does it make you not want to come because you think that if you show up they're going to say, "Where have you been" or...</p> <p>H: Pretty much does. When I think about it I'm like, "Ah, I'm going to class. Everyone's gonna be like 'Ho, this kid thinks he can come back and do whatever he like'."</p>
130	<p>T: But you still go. So then what do you think a student's job is in the classroom? What's a student's responsibility?</p> <p>H: Their responsibility is pretty much to use their time wisely and take in all the information you can because they're there to help you. It's only for you, not for anybody else. Teachers aren't in the job for the money. You actually chose this job to help people be better in life.</p>
135	<p>T: So then what's the teacher's responsibility?</p> <p>H: The teacher's responsibility is to prepare the students for the real world. All these things, like coming in late and you gotta go grab a late pass, that's your consequence for coming late. You can't come late to work and just expect to go to work without nothing because they'll be like, "Where were you? Why didn't you call?"</p>
140	<p>T: It seems that you get all this. You understand it. But then you're not coming to class on time, or at all.</p> <p>H: Yea, that's something that I gotta learn.</p>
145	<p>T: Yeah, because you don't want to be here forever either. But you passed all your classes, so you're on track.</p>

	H: Yeah, I just have to catch up.
150	T: I know you're capable, and you have the intelligence. I know you do. And you get it all, you get everything that's happening around you. You just choose not to apply yourself. This idea leads to my next question. Last year when we had HSA, you tested in my room and you showed up every single day and you were on time. What made you want to do that, to show up every day for that test that wasn't a grade and didn't count? Plus, it was eight o'clock in the morning. It wasn't fourth period like usual.
155	H: It was pretty much because it was a chance to make myself look better, like to look like I actually cared. Because if you're there because it's a grade, then you're just there for the grade. But if there's no grade required, you know...
	T: So you think to show up when it doesn't count for anything makes you look better.
	H: Not really for the looks though. It's to make yourself feel better.
160	T: And you passed too. I don't know if you got your score, but you got a 305. You came in, you did what you do, and you passed.
	H: I did? I never knew.
165	T: Yea, you're more than capable. This gets to the next topic. Honors classes here are open; if you want to be in Honors, you get to be in honors. There's no test, no requirement of grade. So what made you want to be in Honors English? Was that your only Honors class last year?
	H: Yea, that was my only one.
	T: So what made you want to take it?
	H: Mr. P. said I could do really good, so I figured why not try.
170	T: How did you do in his class?
	H: I did really good. And he would say I needed to go to Honors. I should be in Honors. And so I just said, "OK Mister."
	T: And you had a relationship with him, so you trusted him.
	H: Yup.
175	T: OK, a lot of students come back to me and they say "I miss your class" or "I

	miss this class.” Not that you have to feel that way, but why do you think students might say that? Can you help me to understand what they might mean?
180	H: Your class had more freedom, I'd have to say. And like, the assignments you gave were related to what we actually cared about. Like music and going out and trying new things.
	T: “Freedom” meaning in the assignments?
	H: Freedom of the assignments, and the answers. You gave us the chance to go work with other people and talk. Guaranteed people are gonna be happy when they can talk.
185	T: It sounds like that’ something you really enjoy in class. You said a couple times already that you like working with other people. It seems that you work better that way, so it's good that you're aware of that. That way, if you have a chance to work with other people you know to take it. Okay, so getting back to the questions.
190	Those are the questions I asked everybody, and I have two more specifically for you. The big thing I noticed about you was your inability compared to your ability. What I mean by that is you had a high ability level but a low performance level. As a result, your grade didn't match what you could really do in class. I didn't worry too much about you because I knew you could do it. Some students don't come and then they fall behind and can't catch up. But you could always catch up. So I'm just curious as to what made you start skipping class in the beginning. You don't need to get into detail, I mean if it was something too personal.
195	
200	H: No, no. I’m fine. I trust you anyways. It was because, like, basically I felt angry because I came in my Freshman year the counselor is telling me that I could catch up and be a Junior my second year. That was the grade I was supposed to be in. So I was happy, I thought I could do this. So I was going to classes and all that stuff. Working hard. And when I came back I asked if I could be a Junior and she said no because I was missing a couple of credits from before. And I was mad because she should've told me that before and I would've gone to summer school. I mean, I would have gone to summer school! So now I can’t be with my regular
205	class, which was this year's graduating class.
	T: So you would've graduated. So that whole experience made you angry, or made you want to shut down.
210	H: It was just more of a downer. I just gave up after that. I was like, “I don't wanna do this.” But at the same time I just kept thinking about it. Why was I gonna blow my whole life on like...I mean, it's not that I can’t graduate. I can, it's just not gonna be with my class. It would still have been totally awesome to do that with my class.
	T: Well, it's still your class. This is a class that you entered high school with. So

215	<p>was it that feeling, being bummed about school, that and made you not want to come sometimes?</p> <p>H: Yes. Yup.</p> <p>T: I noticed that sometimes, since I had you forth period, I would go to mark you present and you'd be marked absent in your other classes. Or you'd only be present in one other class and mine, like second and fourth. Your attendance wasn't even</p>
220	<p>consistent. Was there a reason why you came to forth period? Or that you came to some classes and not others?</p> <p>H: Yeah. I would think about it. Like, even if I miss this class I still had another class. So there's more time in the day, why waste it just chillin' out? I have to just at least do something.</p>
225	<p>T: So when you weren't in class you were around here, you were on campus? And then you thought you might as well go to class and not waste your whole day.</p> <p>H: Yea.</p> <p>T: So did you come to our class more because it was fourth period? Like, was it because it was your last chance in the day to go to a class?</p>
230	<p>H: Oh no, no. Not because it was fourth period. If you had first period I would've come.</p> <p>T: So it wasn't the time of the class?</p> <p>H: No, I'm just lazy or felt too locked down.</p> <p>T: What you mean by that?</p>
235	<p>H: I know I want to talk, but at the same time I don't want to talk. I thought I don't really know these people, and how they're going to react to me talking. So if I say something and it's different... I think that all the time.</p> <p>T: Were you afraid of that in our class?</p> <p>H: Mmm, yeah.</p>
240	<p>T: Was it because it was a big class, or because there were people you didn't know?</p> <p>H: Pretty much it was people I didn't know who pretty much all knew each other already.</p> <p>T: But you had some friends in there, right?</p>

245	H: Yeah. But I didn't come enough to really get to know them.
250	<p>T: Okay, this is my last question. We already sort of talked about this, but I remember when you did do work it was very well done. You're very intelligent. You wouldn't take many notes and you'd miss classes, and then you do so well on the test because you listened in order to be engaged in the discussions and activities. And that seems to be the way that you learn. I could always tell that you were paying attention because on the test or quiz you would do well. And I think, if I remember correctly, you liked to read. So that helped you because when you would miss class you would borrow book and quickly catch up.</p> <p>H: Yeah, I really liked <i>Night</i>.</p>
255	<p>T: But you would rarely do homework, meaning you would do everything in class but nothing outside of class. Do you know why that is?</p> <p>H: When I get home everything's there already. Like, like food and I can eat or my bed and I can sleep.</p> <p>T: So you get distracted at home. Do you have chores at home too?</p>
260	<p>H: Yea, and I have chores.</p> <p>T: You have a little brother, right? Do you have to do anything after school to help take care of him?</p> <p>H: He's not with us right now. He's living with his friend.</p>
265	<p>T: Oh. But last year he lived with you, right? I remember him at the meetings with your mom.</p> <p>H: No, that's my little cousin. But he's like my brother too. Yeah, some days I would watch him. I'd always want him to hurry up so I could get downstairs and do my thing.</p>
270	<p>T: So at home, outside of school, there are distractions and other obligations you have.</p> <p>H: Yeah, and my friends would want to go cruise. So I just think, "Okay, I'll do this later."</p> <p>T: So you said you could catch up this year, right?</p> <p>H: Uh-huh.</p>

275	<p>T: Is that your goal?</p> <p>H: I want to, yeah. I don't want to be alone with nobody after next year.</p> <p>T: Just be sure to talk to your teachers, approach them about what you can do to finish strong this year. Even talking to you now, I mean, this is more than we have ever talked!</p>
280	<p>H: Yea (laughs).</p> <p>T: And the way that you speak, ya know, you're very clear. You understand. You're insightful. And if we didn't sit down and talk I might not ever know that about you because in class you were so timid. I knew you were intelligent and sometimes you would talk here and there with whoever you are partnered with, but</p>
285	<p>you're very well spoken and have good ideas. And I get that you feel sort of peer pressured by your friends; they skip, you skip. But then the more you skip the harder it is to come back. What I'm trying to say is that you could easily catch up. It won't be hard for you to meet your goal, as long as you continue to come to class. I wish you the best of luck.</p>
290	<p>H: Thank you, Miss.</p>

**Interview #2: Eden**

1	<p>T: Overall, how would you describe yourself as a student?</p> <p>E: Very lazy.</p> <p>T: Yeah, you think so? Have you always been that way?</p> <p>E: Yea, I've always been pretty lazy.</p> <p>T: But you still get decent grades, right?</p>
5	<p>E: Yeah because of tests and graded class work.</p> <p>T: So if there's work outside of class you don't do it?</p> <p>E: I don't do homework.</p> <p>T: Okay. Then which class or subject do you enjoy the most? It doesn't have to be this year; it could be throughout your high school years.</p>
10	<p>E: Umm. That would probably be English.</p> <p>T: Why do you think that is?</p> <p>E: It's my favorite subject, so I don't have to be as lazy.</p> <p>T: What you mean?</p>
15	<p>E: Like, I know it's going to be easier for me to do so I just do it because it's easier. But if it's really hard subject like math I'm like, "Oh, I'm not gonna do it."</p> <p>T: In that case you don't even try?</p> <p>E: No, I don't even try.</p> <p>T: So then is math the subject you enjoy least?</p> <p>E: No. It's art.</p>
20	<p>T: Really? I thought you were pretty artistic?</p> <p>E: No, I'm not artistic in the least.</p> <p>T: Are you taking art now?</p> <p>E: No, but I've never liked it.</p>

	T: So what about in classes that have art-related activities?
25	E: I can't draw worth crap.
	T: Oh, I know what it was. You're musical. That's what I was thinking of.
	E: Yeah.
	T: So for you, what makes a class interesting?
30	E: Umm, just interesting topics. You know, like last year when we did the whole country project. Learning about a different country was interesting. Like, learning a different way to do something was actually interesting. It was more than just putting a book in front of you and telling you to read about it.
35	T: So for you it's something more, something different beyond just reading about it. Like an activity in class. You seemed to be into discussions a lot. I remember when we had discussions in class you would always contribute. Is that another aspect of a class that makes you enjoy it?
	E: Yeah. It's like, you know, getting to hear what other people think and not just what you yourself think. I like hearing about what other people think and I feel like I should contribute to it also since I actually like doing it.
40	T: Are there other classes that you had that allow time for students to discuss? For example, stereotypically, in math there's not a lot of discussion. Do you feel you don't learn as well in those subjects or do you just learn differently?
	E: I pick a lot of things up quickly, so it's not that I don't learn it it's just that it's really boring.
45	T: And if it was less boring do you think you'd be more likely to do the homework?
	E: Yes. Yes.
50	T: We sort of discussed this already, but what motivates you to complete your work? You said you're a lazy student and usually don't do anything outside of class, but there has to have been some times when you did work outside of class because you haven't failed any of your classes.
	E: Sometimes it's like the major part of your grade. So I'll be like, "Okay, fine" and I'll do some of it.
	T: So the effect on your grade is pretty much the motivator. What about if it's a group thing? Does that motivate you a little bit more?



55	<p>E: Yeah because I don't like having my grade or my work reflecting me dependent on other people.</p> <p>T: So you prefer not to be in groups?</p> <p>E: Yea, I prefer not to be in groups.</p>
60	<p>T: What do you need from a classroom environment in order to be a productive participant? You already said that if others contribute then you'll contribute, so I take that to mean that if a classroom is open to student participation then you'll be productive. Is that what you're saying?</p> <p>E: Yea.</p>
65	<p>T: Are there other things that you can think of in terms of type of environment or classroom that...</p> <p>E: I don't know. Just the class that isn't too heavy on everything.</p> <p>T: What does that mean?</p>
70	<p>E: Like, you can give a hard assignment and then take a break right after and do something easy. Not something like... like in math where it's hard work after hard work. It's like, sit there and try to figure out that problem until you finally get it and then do another one.</p> <p>T: So the variety of things too, level and type of assignments, helps?</p> <p>E: Yea.</p>
75	<p>T: Were there any aspects of our class that made you participate and be active? Well, I already said that you participated a lot, so what aspects of our class encouraged you to do so? I don't recall you being a D student. I always knew and even talked to you about your ability to do more than what you did, to go beyond that. But you didn't fail and I wouldn't consider you a D student. There are some things that you didn't do, but what made you participate? For example, was it the subject? Was it your peers?</p>
80	
85	<p>E: It's English so it's easier for me to like...it's easier for me to write, period. I have a lot of stuff going on. And ya know, it's not like in another subject where you just read about it and you look at someone else doing it and you just do it. It's something you can create on your own. You can write about...like you don't have to follow specific strict guidelines to do it. And the way you made us do it was pretty interesting.</p> <p>T: Can you explain that?</p>

	E: Journals and the different types of things that we did. I don't remember specifically anymore, but there were lots of different ways.
90	T: So then do you think maybe other subjects should make sure that they allow students to write or talk? Even math? Even art?  E: Yea, I think so.
	T: What would that do for you, you think, in your math class if there was a journal? For example, if there was time to journal about how you felt about doing math?
95	E: It would probably make me more open to doing stuff outside of class if it was more interesting to me because I could be able to talk about it later. Like, I could write something and then the next day they could ask, "How did you feel about that?" and I could say, "That was a pain in my ass."
100	T: And maybe you'd find out that you're not the only one who feels that way. You might find out that other students felt that way.
	E: Yea. If it was more fun then it might trick me into thinking that maybe this homework might be easier and I'd actually do it.
105	T: When you sit in class and look around the room, how do you know a student is engaged? What does an engaged student look like? And I don't mean just you, but students in general.
	E: They are awake. They look like they're not bored, they don't have their head down.
	T: Do they have to be talking, or raising their hand to talk?
110	E: Well, if it's an actual discussion then yea you kind of have to participate in the discussion. But I mean, if it's just the regular class work assignment then it's that they're actually awake and doing it. They can be talking around them, maybe asking for help. That looks like they're engaged.
115	T: How do you show that you're engaged in class? You already said that if there's discussion and your peers participate then you'll participate. But what else do you do? For example, are you always awake in all of your classes? Are you always listening?
	E: Yea, I'm always awake. I don't think I've ever slept in class. And usually I have a comment to say about something, even if it's just a correction. Like if the teacher's PowerPoint is wrong.
120	T: Does that bother you?

	E: Yes, it is a pet peeve when a teacher has a PowerPoint and there's something wrong in it.
125	T: I've done that. I just did that the other day. I used the wrong "whether" and a student pointed it out. And you know what, I left it because I knew that someone in each class would point it out and feel good about being able to correct me. Ok, what have you seen that your teachers have done to try to engage students or try to encourage students to participate?
130	E: Well, they try to embellish things to make them easier. Like the labs we do. We made a hovercraft and rode on it, and a Popsicle bridge. I mean, it's fun so you learn from it. And you learn the same thing as if you were to just read it in a book.
	T: So, doing hands-on things?
	E: Yea, but doing hands-on things that are fun. You could do hands-on things that are completely boring. But, I mean making a hovercraft! How many people have made a hovercraft?
135	T: So is Science a subject you consider yourself good at or are just interested in?
	E: Yea, both.
	T: So then do you do work outside of class for that subject?
	E: No.
	T: Is that an AP class?
140	E: No, it's Honors.
	T: You told me you had AP testing. What subject was that for?
	E: Umm, English and Government.
	T: I didn't know you took two AP classes. Cool. Ok, what do you think the school does to try to get students engaged? Like, outside of the classroom.
145	E: I don't really think the school does anything. They just like buy books for you, give you a classroom to work in.
	T: Do you think it's the teacher's job then to get students engaged?
	E: Yea. Like the VPs and the Principal encourage you to go to class but your teacher then has to engage you.

150	<p>T: Ok. Are there any teachers who you have felt you had a good relationship with?</p> <p>E: Yea. I mean like, I have a pretty good relationship with you. Like on Facebook.</p> <p>T: Yea. So what does that mean, a “good” relationship?</p> <p>E: It’s like, like you’re more open with them. Like in discussions with teachers you’re not really connected with you might never even mention it.</p>
155	<p>T: So if you had a thought or idea in class you might not share if you didn’t feel you had a “good” relationship...</p> <p>E: ...like, if they were like Mr. “X”.</p> <p>T: What does that mean, to be “like Mr. X”?</p> <p>E: If the teacher’s really stern and a hard ass, and an ass in general.</p>
160	<p>T: Meaning if you said something you might get shot down?</p> <p>E: Yea, yup.</p> <p>T: Ok, you had him this year for English and you said English is your favorite subject. Did you not participate as much in that class because of the personality of the teacher?</p>
165	<p>E: I did, but it was just for amusement. Like you would share things then he would call you an idiot. It was very entertaining. So then we would try to share about the most obscure things so he would like it! Like, one girl suggested we wrote poems about a single dismembered leg and that entertained him.</p>
170	<p>T: Interesting. Ok, getting back to feeling comfortable in a class – what was your level of comfort in our class? Was it a high level, middle, low?</p> <p>E: It was pretty high.</p> <p>T: Yea, ok. And there was a point in the year when I noticed there were some people who felt uncomfortable in class and I made everybody write about how they felt in class. Do you remember that?</p>
175	<p>E: Yea.</p> <p>T: I know this was a while ago, but do remember at that point how comfortable you felt? The issue was that I could see that some students were sort of bullying other students, or being a threat to their participation. And so when I had students write about how they felt and put it on the board it showed students’ feelings about being</p>

180	<p>in that room. So do you remember how you felt at that time? Were you one of the ones who felt unsafe or totally fine?</p> <p>E: I'm not the type that can be bullied.</p> <p>T: Right, ok. So did you notice that happening, or was that whole activity random to you?</p>
190	<p>E: It was kind of random to me. I kind of like knew everyone in the class, like to a certain degree. I mean a lot of them were like, like even outside of class they were like "moke bangahs" but in class they were nice to everybody usually.</p> <p>T: Granted it was a long time ago, but did it surprise you that some people felt unsafe or completely shut down?</p>
195	<p>E: Yea. I mean, I think some people are just like that period. It's like they're, umm, that way. They kind of feel like they can't really share sometimes. I mean, it's just they way some people are. I mean, I thought there would be some. A modest amount, but not as many as there really were.</p>
200	<p>T: Yea, it was surprising to me too. I noticed it for a while and that was why we did that activity. OK, another instance last year was HSA. If you remember, we had a prep week and then a test week. Actually, it was a week and two days of testing. You tested in my room and you got an exceedingly high score, a 374. I don't know if you knew that. Exceeds was above 330, so you were way above the cut off. I believe you were my second highest score last year. So you've identified</p>
205	<p>yourself as "lazy" and as a student who doesn't put in effort unless the work counts for a grade. This didn't count for a grade, so what do you think motivated you to put in this level of effort?</p>
210	<p>E: Yea. It's really easy. And I mean, I didn't even really care. I just read and was like, "Yea, that makes sense. That makes sense. That's the answer." Like I got a 330 on the English, the reading part of the SATs. And I didn't really care either because I'm a Junior and I know I'm going to take it again. Last year I read like six chapters out of the 35 for Mrs. T's (AP World History) class and I got a four (out of five) on the exam.</p>
215	<p>T: Wow, you did? Great! You see what your potential is? If you only tried and applied yourself you would do even better than that!</p> <p>E: (Laughing) True.</p> <p>T: So the fact that it was easy and the fact that you like English made it worth your time to try?</p> <p>E: Yes. Like on the HSA and on the SAT my weakest part was math. I mean it</p>

220	wasn't that far behind, but it wasn't as good.
225	<p>T: It was interesting because you showed up everyday, on time, and obviously tried your best every day for something that meant nothing. Well, I mean it meant something personally perhaps, but had no impact on your grade. It wasn't a graduation requirement, your score couldn't hold you back in tenth grade. Yet you obviously, to me, put in a lot of effort. But you're saying it was easy.</p> <p>E: I could have put in more effort. If I did more effort I would have gotten a lot higher.</p> <p>T: I agree. OK, next question. Honors is "open door" at our school. Were you in Honors in ninth grade?</p>
230	<p>E: No.</p> <p>T: No? So then what made you want to go into Honors in tenth grade?</p>
235	<p>E: In ninth grade I was surrounded by people who were very annoying and I'd have to sit through class while my teacher would yell at them. My teacher would come to the back and tell me that the lecture didn't relate to me and that I was a good student. I was pretty much her favorite student because I was well-behaved.</p> <p>T: Did you do work for her?</p> <p>E: Yea, I did. I got straight As my Freshman year. And then I stopped caring.</p> <p>T: Why did you stop caring? What does that mean?</p>
240	<p>E: Because, like my Freshman year I got a 4.0 doing like the easiest work ever and taking regular classes. And I didn't think it was like fair that some people could go through all high school and get straight As and then brag about it when they just take normal classes that are really easy. I mean, I got straight As that year and it was the easiest thing ever. And I didn't really do homework that year either. I finished everything in class and turned it in. Like, I had Algebra 1 but I already</p>
245	<p>took Algebra in eighth grade. It was easy.</p> <p>T: So then what do you mean you stopped caring if you didn't really do work then either?</p> <p>E: I just didn't think grades really mattered anymore. Just that I didn't want to fail because I didn't want to repeat any classes.</p>
250	<p>T: So that comes back to what motivates you. If it gets to a point where you might fail you will do the work to pass.</p>

	E: Yea.
	T: So is that what your grades are like now? Do you have Cs and Ds?
255	E: Yea, they're mostly Cs and then I have those two classes that are like GPA boosters that I can get an A on. Like band.
	T: But band is like your hobby too.
	E: Not anymore. Not since the new teacher came. Sometimes I just don't show up.
	T: That's interesting. So the teacher changed your interest in the subject?
260	E: He didn't change my interest in the subject, he just changed my interest in the class.
	T: Meaning you don't try as hard?
	E: I like the subject, but the way he does it I don't like.
	T: So you're still in band, you just don't enjoy it.
	E: Yea.
265	T: Ok, next question. I often have students come back to me and tell me that they miss my class. Not that you feel that way, but can you help me to understand what that might mean?
270	E: It's really chilled out. Like, compared to AP classes it's really chilled out. The biggest thing in your whole year is the HSA, which is really easy. So it's really easy. I think a lot of people miss having a place to chill out at. Like, looking forward to a subject. Looking forward to a class or a teacher. Sometimes you don't have that all year. You don't have any class to look forward to. Every next class is like a drag.
275	T: OK, I have some more questions and these are specifically for you. We already sort of talked about how capable you are, how capable I think you are. So one of my questions was about why you think you settled for the grades that you did when you could easily have done better. But I think we kind of hit on that already, about how you don't really see the value of grades anymore and what motives you is when the content is interesting to you.
280	E: Yea. I think in college I won't be forced to take classes that I don't like. I mean, there will be credits that I need but it's like one year of that.
	T: So you do want to go to college. Do you know what you want to study?

285	<p>E: The only test I've really ever studied for in my entire life was the AP World History test. I mildly studied for the AP Government test. All I did was skim through the book looking at my weakest point and that was it.</p> <p>T: And did you feel confident taking the test?</p> <p>E: I did. Well, I didn't take that one yet. I take it tomorrow.</p> <p>T: Oh, OK. So do you feel confident?</p>
290	<p>E: I do. Some of my friends told me it's hard and some said it's easy. I brushed up on some specific points.</p>
295	<p>T: Is that something you do or don't enjoy, like when there is a right or wrong answer to a question? In History you have to know specific dates and names for the test. Either you know it or you don't. Whereas in English, I mean there's some things you need to know but there are more open areas. Is that something that makes you enjoy that subject more? And make those types of test easier?</p>
300	<p>E: It makes it harder if it's wrong or right. I mean, it's harder on tests because sometimes you don't know the answer and so you can't just write a bunch of stuff. I mean, so like the essay questions on the AP test and stuff, I mean if you just write and you get it wrong you can still get like a 7 on it even though you're wrong. But some people find it hard to write so much about something they don't know.</p>
	<p>T: Yea. Are you taking AP next year as well? Are you doing any IB?</p>
	<p>E: Yea, AP. No IB. I dropped out of it.</p>
	<p>T: And why was that?</p>
	<p>E: Because I'm moving this summer, so...</p>
305	<p>T: Oh, really? Where ya going?</p>
	<p>E: Florida.</p>
310	<p>T: Ok, my last question. Again, I sort of touched on this already as well. You actively participated in class discussion a lot. I probably heard you every day or almost every day. You shared personal things, you shared questions, responses. You acknowledged other people and maybe added on to that. And so I'm curious as to the reason why, if you know, you contributed so much in class. You already said that if you hear your peers then you'll share. Is there anything else about our specific class that made you active?</p>
	<p>E: It was very, very chilled out. Like, I knew that if I shared something that might</p>



315	<p>be offensive because a lot of my views are pretty offensive, I knew a lot of people wouldn't really care that way.</p> <p>T: Are you saying it was OK to be controversial or different?</p> <p>E: Yea.</p> <p>T: So you didn't fear my response or your peers' response?</p>
320	<p>E: Yea, I didn't fear that.</p> <p>T: Do you think that's a good thing for learning, discussion? Or for you, does that help you learn, being able to talk?</p> <p>E: It helps you feel comfortable. If you're able to share things you think it makes you feel more comfortable it makes you more open to like learning stuff. So it helps you learn in like a psychological sort of aspect. Not really from picking up from what you're reading of what people are saying, it just makes you feel like you can import more things.</p> <p>T: Yea. Well thank you so much for talking with me, Eden. You have good insights and that was really helpful.</p>
330	<p>E: No prob.</p>

**Interview #3: Khayla**

1	<p>T: So we're just going to go through those questions I sent you, that you wanted to see, and then we'll do the two that I wrote just to ask you. OK?</p> <p>K: OK.</p> <p>T: As a student how would you describe yourself?</p> <p>K: I'd have to say, umm, I procrastinate a lot. I do that.</p>
5	<p>T: Have you always done that in high school?</p> <p>K: Umm, Freshman year was kind of different. Transferring into high school I felt like I need to prove myself because I was in Honors classes also in my Freshman year and I did pretty well. Once I hit Sophomore year I felt like it didn't really matter because it's kinda in between like Freshman and Senior. But I kind of continued it this year, the beginning of this year, too.</p>
10	<p>T: So it's changed since the beginning?</p> <p>K: A little. I'm kind of improving. Like, because I know Senior year is right around the corner so I'm worried.</p> <p>T: Why is that? You're not failing anything, right?</p> <p>K: No. I just know I could do better.</p>
15	<p>T: OK. Are there any positive words you'd use to describe yourself as a student instead of just the negative? (pause) For example, I'd say you were active. Like you talked in class and you contributed. Is that the way you are in all of your classes?</p> <p>K: Pretty much. Umm, well when encouraged.</p>
20	<p>T: Oh, OK. So you'll stay quiet unless there's an opportunity?</p> <p>K: Yea.</p> <p>T: Which class or subject have you enjoyed the most?</p> <p>K: I'd have to say my Honors English with Mr. "X".</p> <p>T: Really?</p>
25	<p>K: Yea. I don't like, like he's different. He's hard but at the same time he can be...I don't know. He's a really good teacher. And I also enjoyed my Medical</p>

	Terminology class. It's a lot of worksheets and stuff, but we work a lot in groups.
	T: That's the area you want to go into in college, right? So is that part of why you enjoyed the class you think? Because you enjoyed the topic?
30	K: Yea.
	T: And those classes are both this year, right? You have them both this year?
	K: Yes.
	T: OK. What about a class or subject you've least enjoyed?
	K: Umm...I'd have to say my math class.
35	T: Is it always math?
	K: Actually, no. It was last year. Oh, and this year. I guess it's because I don't understand. I mean, I understand vaguely. Like, some lessons. But other than that it's kinda tough.
40	T: Yea, I get that. That's how I was too. I had a tutor all through high school because I just couldn't get it. My brain just didn't work that way. What math are you in now?
	K: I'm in Trig. It's hard.
	T: What about what makes a class interesting to you? You already said working in groups and the content. Anything else?
	K: It could be the classmates, or mainly the teacher really.
45	T: The teacher. OK, so what type of teacher?
	K: One that's I have to say that connects with students. Kind of, I dunno. I don't know how to explain it.
	T: Maybe like they don't just lecture you?
	K: Yea, yea.
50	T: OK. You also said classmates. Do you mean like if your friends are in the class?
	K: Just classmates you can work with really. I don't really care if my friends are in my class, it's just if I can get along with them and I can work with them in groups.

55	<p>T: Do you have any classes that don't ever allow groups? Not "allow" but more like...</p> <p>K: My math class doesn't really encourage groups.</p> <p>T: Do you think that would maybe help you, to have groups, or intimidate you since you don't really like the content?</p> <p>K: I think it might be intimidating but it would probably help.</p>
60	<p>T: I asked that because I know for me I was always more likely to ask my friends or peers for help than to raise my hand and say that I didn't understand and risk looking stupid.</p> <p>K: Yea, totally.</p>
65	<p>T: OK, so what motivates you to do your work? You already said that right now it's because you're coming to Senior year. Are there other things that motivate you?</p> <p>K: Umm, just wanting to get to college and wanting to better myself and my education. And probably the teachers. They have a part too.</p> <p>T: Yea? How so?</p>
70	<p>K: Sometimes my teachers are always on my case mainly because of my mom probably.</p> <p>T: I wanted to get to that. Is she still communicating with your teachers a lot?</p> <p>K: Actually no. She's leaving me to be more independent with Senior year coming around.</p>
75	<p>T: And then sports motivate you? Do you still play sports?</p> <p>K: Umm, no. This year I didn't because I figured I needed to work more in my classes.</p> <p>T: Wow. Do you think you're going to play again next year?</p> <p>K: I'm probably going to join more clubs, not sports.</p>
80	<p>T: Does it take up too much of your time?</p> <p>K: That, and dramas. But that's a whole other story.</p>

	T: So the people on the team?
	K: Yup.
85	T: OK, let's get back to the questions. What type of student do you think you were in our class?
	K: I think I was really...I participated a lot in that class. More than in my other classes.
	T: Why do you think that was?
90	K: It was just a really interesting class. And like the people didn't criticize or anything. I think we went over that in the beginning of the year too about the whole safety.
	T: Ya know, I didn't think to ask you about that but I did ask some of the others I interviewed specifically if they remembered that. Obviously you remember.
	K: Yea.
95	T: OK, so let's talk about it. When I asked how people were feeling in the class, did you think that was a random thing or did you notice any of that. For example, some students said they didn't get it and it seemed random. But others said they totally understood why I asked that. Where do you think you were? Did you see a need for that discussion?
100	K: It was just a really interesting class. And like the people didn't criticize or anything. I think we went over that in the beginning of the year too about the whole safety.
	T: Did you notice it in this class?
105	K: I kinda...no, not really actually because we went over it and we even did some activities where we kind of saw the similarities we had with others and explained how we felt.
110	T: It's interesting because there were students who felt completely different from one another in the same class. And so the people who thought it was random didn't really understand why we needed to talk about it, while the others who didn't feel safe seemed grateful that we did because they felt attacked. I didn't have those questions for you because I felt that you were in the middle; you weren't a recipient and didn't feel unsafe because you were an active participant, and I never noticed that you were doing anything to make others feel unsafe. I considered you sort of neutral, so I'm surprised and glad you brought that up. That was our biggest class too, at the beginning.

115	K: There were a lot of shy people in that class too and they kind of opened up after that.
	T: Yea, we had a lot of shy and then we had some very vocal...
	K: ...very outgoing! Extremes.
120	T: So what do you need from a classroom environment in order to be active? Because you were active in our class, so what made you want to talk or to do work?
	K: I think just like having discussions. There's some classes where we just get handed worksheets, and I think actually going over the material and talking about it does help. You did that.
125	T: Oh good! So that gets me to my next question which was if there was anything from our class that made you feel that way...
	K: ...the discussion part.
	T: OK. So when you sit in class you can see which are your peers are engaged and which aren't. So what does an engaged student look like?
130	K: I'd have to say they speak up even when they're not encouraged. That, and they're attentive, listening, have eye contact with the teacher or whoever's speaking.
	T: Does an engaged student always have to speak?
	K: Nooooo! Sometimes they're just listening. You can kind of tell by their expressions and stuff.
135	T: Like you said, they're looking at the speaker for example. So then what are some things you've seen your teachers do to encourage engagement?
140	K: Calling on a person or just...Oh, that ball! Our ball encouraged a lot of people too. Like just having everyone express how they felt or help discuss the topic. It gave everyone one in class, not just a few people, their time to say whatever they wanted.
	T: Good. What about the school. Do you see anything that the school tries to do to promote engagement?
	K: I think it's more in the classroom.
145	T: OK. Are there any teachers who you would say you had a good relationship with?

	<p>K: I'd have to say my AVID teacher because I've had him since my Freshman year. We've discussed a lot of things whether it be school or personal issues.</p> <p>T: Do you think that's part of why you have a good relationship? Because you've had him so long.</p>
150	<p>K: Uh-huh. But at the same time he's easy-going and easy to talk to. I think it's his personality.</p> <p>T: Do you think it's important for teachers to try to establish a relationship beyond just "I'm the teacher, you're the student"? Do you think that's important to help students learn?</p>
155	<p>K: Yea. I think so. I think it'll help students outside of the classroom in the regular world. Like, umm, some students I know have a hard time whether it be at home or just overall with their peers. And I think having a teacher or someone around school to talk to would help that one person, with their academics even.</p> <p>T: OK. Describe a classroom that you felt comfortable in.</p>
160	<p>K: Your class I felt pretty comfortable in. Like, because of how...I enjoyed the line activity. I think it helped a lot realizing that a lot of my other classmates went through the same things or had same experiences as me. I think having that feel made it easier for me to connect with other people or even speak out in class.</p>
165	<p>T: I'm glad. OK, so you said you were comfortable in here. What you would say your level was? Was it a high level of comfort, middle, low? Did it change over the year, if you remember?</p>
	<p>K: In the beginning it was like in the middle. Towards the end it was more high. I don't know if...I think that was because of all the activities.</p>
170	<p>T: Do you think, because I'm just thinking that in Sophomore year most of your classes are a full year. And then you have Mr. X for a full year, right? You have Honors to AP?</p>
	<p>K: I dropped his class.</p>
	<p>T: Aww, but you said how much you liked it!</p>
175	<p>K: I did. Him as a teacher really helped. But the content and the criteria I had a hard time with.</p> <p>T: So in that case even though you liked the teacher you dropped the class because of the content. That's interesting. Because what I was thinking was that, ya know,</p>

180	<p>wondering if you think it's good to have a class for a whole year. Not that you want math for a full year, but for Freshman year and Sophomore year you do and so you have time to make those bonds. Because you just said in the beginning of the year you felt middle comfort and then over ten months you felt a lot more comfortable. And you don't get that in the upper grades unless you take AP or IB courses. And then that's not every day. Do you think that helps learning?</p>
	<p>K: I think it does, in a way. Because there's so much time with people.</p>
185	<p>T: What do you think a teacher's responsibility is in the classroom? What's their job other than to teach you the content?</p>
	<p>K: Kind of like to make it tolerable for the students to be in the classroom for that short period of time.</p>
	<p>T: What do you mean by that?</p>
190	<p>K: I guess to umm, to make it, I guess, to establish just like a little relationship. Not relationship, but I don't know.</p>
	<p>T: Among the students? It's the teacher's job to try to make sure the students are...</p>
	<p>K: ...are comfortable with one another, I guess.</p>
195	<p>T: OK. Have you had an experience when a teacher didn't do that? Or have you noticed that as you get older that happens less? You don't have to tell me who, but I'm just wondering if you've had that experience of a teacher not making an effort to have the students know one another.</p>
200	<p>K: Yea. Umm, actually yea. I've had one this year. It's kind of hard because being in a classroom you learn from both your teachers and your classmates. And being in the classroom I was in it kind of made it hard for me to learn because although groups were kind of encouraged, I didn't feel like I wanted to be in a group because I didn't know the people and it was just really hard. And like, even though they knew the content I didn't feel like I wanted to ask them.</p>
205	<p>T: That's a great point. OK, next. For HSA last year you tested with me in my room. What do you remember about the HSA experience? Anything at all about it.</p>
	<p>K: Actually, the test was kind of easy because you did a lot of prep. And...</p>
	<p>T: Do you remember what your score was? Do you remember getting it in the mail?</p>
	<p>K: No, I don't know what it was.</p>



210	<p>T: Well, 330 is exceeds and you got a 343. So you were beyond the cut off for exceeds. So for you to say it's easy, it was easy! So you were saying it was easy because we did a lot of prep, and...</p> <p>K: And, umm, a lot of teachers were prepping us for HSA. They were really enthused about the HSA, they were really engaged. I think that kind of helped too.</p>
215	<p>T: You guys had seven days of testing, and now they only have one day on the computer. But they get three chances to pass now. OK, and you came to school every day on time. I mean, attendance was never an issue for you. But you came to testing every single day, you obviously tried your best because you got such a great score. But it wasn't a grade and it has nothing to do with graduation. So do</p>
220	<p>you know why you tried your best for something that didn't have a major impact?</p> <p>K: Because it was, like you explained to us, it wasn't a grade or anything but it would help the school. I think it kind of made me want to show that I understood something because you're a good teacher and I didn't wanna make it so that the school or you looked terrible. It reflects our teachers, and our teachers are good</p>
225	<p>teachers.</p> <p>T: So would it be OK to say that you felt a responsibility to do your part?</p> <p>K: Yea, yea.</p> <p>T: OK, Honors classes. You said you were in Honors Freshman year and Sophomore year and still now?</p>
230	<p>K: Yea, my Trig class is an Honors class.</p> <p>T: So it's an Open Door policy here; if you want to be in Honors, you're in. So what made you want to be in Honors classes? For example, is it you, is it mom, is it peers?</p>
235	<p>K: Since Freshman year it's pretty much me. In intermediate we didn't have Honors classes and I felt like the students are different in an Honors class compared to a regular class and being in an Honors class I feel that I can connect to students more just on an academic...like an intellectual level.</p> <p>T: So last year and Freshman year you had all Honors classes, so you were on the Honors team and moved with the same group of kids?</p>
240	<p>K: Umm, yea.</p> <p>T: But this year you're split, right? You have some Honors and some regular classes, so do you see a difference between those classes?</p>

245	K: Umm, yea. Because you choose your Honors classes and so a lot of the students pretty much know the content. They're more engaged because they want to be in that class. And there is a big difference. (Laughing)
	T: Meaning there's a big difference between those students who want to be there and those who have to be?
	K: Yup.
250	T: OK, the last question I'm asking everyone is about what students come back and say to me. I often hear, "I miss this class." Not that you have to feel that way, but can you help me to understand what that might mean?
	K: I think overall it's the teacher. You were a role model for me in a way because you encouraged me to do well and also some teachers don't like to do like fun stuff like you did.
255	T: Alright, now for my two questions just for you. You often told me that your goal was to improve your grade or, "My goal is to be on Honor Roll." And not that I doubted that you could do it, but you didn't follow through a lot. And so, my question is what are the reasons why you think that happened?
	K: Oh gosh!
260	T: You did say earlier that it was that weird middle year that doesn't count as much as the others. Were there any other reasons?
	K: My procrastination. I mean, still to this day it's hard. I know I have a lot of potential and could do a lot.
265	T: So then what is it about a class that makes you do the work? For example, is it if the work is easy or if you like the content?
	K: I think I do work first for classes I enjoy, that I show more of an interest in.
	T: Is that the same this year? Do you still set goals?
	K: I set goals, I just haven't really gotten there yet.
	T: Goals for the same thing, like academic? Like for GPA and Honor Roll?
270	K: Yea. (Laughing)
	T: OK, OK. Last question is about your mom. Last year we talked a lot, mostly through email. And I was always impressed because she wouldn't want to step in a lot and force you. I mean, we talked a lot but she left your grades to be your

275	responsibility. She would say it was your job and up to you, but she wanted your teachers to know that she was aware and watching you. Is that still the same this year? Does she still communicate a lot with your...
280	K: ...at the beginning of the year of it was like that because I had a lot more Honors classes. But she's kind of let go a little bit because she wants me to be more independent because of Senior year. It's funny because in Freshman year she was on my case all the time and I don't know if that helped or made me just not want to do anything. But it kind of got less and less as the school years went on.
	T: So you said Freshman year your grades were better. Do you think, I mean, you're older though now so you probably don't want her on your case as much. But do you honestly think it would help?
285	K: I think parent involvement really helps. Because I know some students whose parents don't really care if they do well or don't do well. And, umm, I think it helps. I think it makes you want to achieve more.
	T: So you have one more year. Are you taking any Honors classes next year?
	K: I'm planning on it. Probably English and Science.
290	T: Is there another medical type of class you can take to keep your interest in the field?
	K: No...umm, Psychology I guess.
	T: There's not something after your terminology class? Is that the last one?
300	K: I think so. I haven't really decided which major I want yet. I'm split between two. I know that I want to go to the east coast though! (Laughing)
	T: Why is that? I know you've never been.
	K: It's far and like, it's different. The people and stuff. I dunno, haven't been to the mainland at all. (Laughing)
305	T: Big change! Well, thank you so much for talking with me! You gave me a lot of great insights and this was fun!
	K: Yea, no problem.

**Interview #4: Alyssa**

1	<p>T: Just in general, not only in my class, how would you describe yourself as a student?</p> <p>A: I would say I'm pretty well rounded as far as working with people and my confidence. I'm not that shy.</p> <p>T: And you must be a pretty good, focused student to be graduating early.</p>
5	<p>A: Uh huh.</p> <p>T: How about the class or subject that you've enjoyed the most. Either or. It might be a class but you don't enjoy the subject.</p>
10	<p>A: I like English. I would have to say that's my best subject. I've always been good at English. Umm, math and science not so much. Yea, I could do without it. (Laughing)</p> <p>T: OK, so why math and science? What is it about those subjects?</p> <p>A: Umm, it takes me a little while to understand it and grasp it. I mean, I get it after a while but it takes a little longer. More so than in English, which I get pretty quickly.</p>
15	<p>T: Have you ever had to do tutoring for those subjects in order to get ahead, like you are now?</p> <p>A: Yup. I've gone to Sylvan for math.</p> <p>T: Did it help?</p> <p>A: Yup.</p>
20	<p>T: So in order to graduate early did you have to double up on any math?</p> <p>A: Nope, I took my three. I dropped Trig this year.</p> <p>T: Oh, OK. So in your opinion, what makes a class interesting?</p>
25	<p>A: Umm, well, let's see. To me what makes a class interesting? I would have to say the environment. Some classes could be really boring and all they do is lecture and the kids are not as up beat about learning and stuff. Like, in here it was always fun and we did different stuff. And I liked most of the people in here too.</p> <p>T: Do you think that you found that in general more in English classes than in math class?</p>

30	<p>A: Probably, because my English now I really like too and it's like the same. Like, the chill vibe and everybody gets along with everybody.</p> <p>T: OK, so the next question I am really curious about with you because it's about what motivates you to complete your work. And I know that last year, which seems so long ago, you were motivated most by your parents I think.</p> <p>A: Yea, uh-huh.</p>
35	<p>T: So now that you're graduating early, was that still a big motivation? Did they push you, or encourage you, so that you finished early?</p> <p>A: Well, for me I would say...well, if I had to stay another year I'd only have to take one class. So I didn't want to just be here for one class. And I didn't want to be in high school another year. I'm like so over high school. So I was like, "OK, I'll just double up on my English." All I needed was my Senior English.</p>
40	<p>T: So was it seeing the end that motivated you?</p> <p>A: Yea. Uh-huh. Yup.</p>
45	<p>T: OK, so what do you need from a classroom environment to participate? You were pretty vocal, at least in my class. Maybe you're not in all classes. But what is it about a classroom environment that will make you raise your hand to contribute or ask questions?</p> <p>A: Umm, what makes me motivated to speak? (Pause)</p> <p>T: Well, are there classes where you don't speak out?</p> <p>A: Yea, Chemistry.</p>
50	<p>T: OK, so maybe we do the opposite. What about that class keeps you from speaking in class.</p> <p>A: If I feel like I don't understand it fully then I won't speak up because I don't want to embarrass myself or not know what's going on. As far as in English, I don't really care if I answer wrong as long as I voiced my opinion.</p>
55	<p>T: Why is that, you think?</p> <p>A: I don't know. I feel like in English there's not really a right or wrong answer because it's just you and your creativity. In Chemistry you have to know formulas to get the right answer and get the problem done.</p> <p>T: Is that the class you're struggling with most now? Well, not struggling with but</p>

60	<p>have maybe difficulty with?</p> <p>A: It's my lowest grade.</p> <p>T: What does an engaged student look like to you, when you're in the classroom? How do you know your peers are engaged?</p>
65	<p>A: Hmm...I've been both. I've been the type to sleep in class and the type to be involved. I would have to say it has to be exciting. It's the individual. I mean, if they're the type who wants to be engaged they will. If they don't, they won't.</p> <p>T: So what does that look like?</p> <p>A: They're not sleeping, they're talking. They're, like I said, giving their opinions on stuff.</p>
70	<p>T: Do you think a student has to be heard in order to show they're engaged? Like, could a student be engaged and not be talking?</p>
75	<p>A: Hmm. Well, not necessarily talking all the time. I know some kids that don't speak at all but they get it. Like, they have good grades, they ace all the tests, and they understand what's going on but they don't always speak. I mean, it depends on the person really.</p> <p>T: How do you show you're engaged?</p> <p>A: Oh, I talk!</p>
80	<p>T: Do you talk, umm...See, I saw both sides of you. I saw you talk socially and you also contributed. As the year went on you became more of a contributor. And are you still like that, or do you see yourself as more of a social talker? Are you a distraction?</p> <p>A: I think it changed a lot since last year. Like last year was more social but I still got my work done. This year it's like I contribute, I don't really talk that much. It's school, you gotta get it done.</p>
85	<p>T: Do you feel like now that you're technically a Senior but you're in your usually eleventh grade year that your peers aren't your peers anymore? You're not with the same people you have been with.</p>
90	<p>A: I don't really hang out with the same people anymore, or I don't really hang out with that many people at all. Like last week I had exams the whole week and nobody seen me. I was in my class, I came to school at 6:45. Yea, I was in my class from the morning, during lunch and after school the whole week.</p>

	T: And is that because there's no one who was in ninth grade and tenth grade with you that is with you now?
95	A: Yea. Uh-huh. Because I kind of like passed everybody. We started out together and then we aren't.
	T: Can you imagine if (your cousin) Jaylin was still here?
	A: We probably would have been in the same boat.
	T: Really? You think she would have come up too? You wouldn't have just stayed in eleventh grade?
100	A: Yea. Well, maybe if she was here I wouldn't have pushed as hard to graduate early.
	T: I'm just curious. It's kind of going off topic though. OK, back to questions. What do you think the school does to help engage students? Rather, do you think the school does anything or tries?
105	A: I don't really think it's the school. I think it's more so the teachers because the school can only do so much.
	T: OK, so what do teachers do then?
110	A: Umm, teachers...I think they think of different activities and stuff they think kids will be interested in while still learning at the same time. So I think it depends on the teacher.
	T: So does that variety of activities help you...
	A: ...Oh yea! Definitely.
	T: Do you have, or have you had, a teacher that you have a good relationship with?
	A: You!
115	T: Me?
	A: Yea!
	T: What does that mean then, a "good" relationship?
	A: I feel that away from school stuff I could talk to you about anything. Most of my teachers I couldn't really do that. I feel we have a pretty good relationship.

120	T: OK. You asked me to write you a letter, and I'm sure you had to ask other teachers too. Did you ask teachers based on personal relationships, or was it more academic? Did you ask teachers who knew you beyond...
125	A: Well, I mean all of my teachers gave good reports. They said things like I get all my work done and stuff. But it wasn't really like, "She's a good person" and all that stuff like you did. You wrote like a long letter! And it was more academic from them.
	T: Yea? Did you get responses from that letter?
	A: It was just for (my) PTP (portfolio).
130	T: Oh, you didn't need to send it? Oh yea, you aren't taking any loans or scholarships. I remember your dad telling me that last year.
	A: Yea. (Laughing).
	T: OK, tell me about a classroom environment you felt comfortable in. Or that you currently feel comfortable in.
	A: Now or last year?
135	T: Anytime in your high school career.
	A: Umm, a class that I felt comfortable in. Hmmm. This one for sure. This was my favorite class, actually, out of all my classes last year. It still is my favorite class and I don't even have it!
	T: (Laughing) I appreciate that.
140	A: Let's see. First period, no. Second period? I like my second period, my British and American Lit class. It's pretty chill and we watch a lot of movies.
	T: So both of them are English. Both of them did a variety of things, right?
	A: Uh huh.
	T: So is that what made it comfortable, or was it...
145	A: Probably. I know I came to that class late because I started the year off as a Junior and they bumped me up. So I was late and I didn't know anybody. So just getting comfortable with the class and the variety is probably what helped.
	T: Is that all Seniors in that class?



	A: Yea. There's one Junior.
150	T: OK. How about, OK. You said in this class that you felt comfortable. Would you say it was high or medium comfort? Because I assume it's wasn't low since you said...
	A: High!
155	T: What amount of that do you think had to do with your peers? You had two really close friends, one of which was your cousin who you lived with. Actually, you had more than two.
160	A: I had three. Umm, I think they kind of impacted the class for me. I don't think I would have...hmm. I don't think I would have, in the beginning of the year I don't think I would have spoke as much if they weren't in my class because usually I feel more comfortable if I know people in the class. I think they had a good impact on my and my comfort.
	T: OK, what about the teacher's responsibility to make you feel comfortable? Do you think...I mean, what is the teacher's responsibility? Was it my job to make sure you were comfortable? Is that part of what teaching is, in your opinion?
165	A: Some teachers feel you just gotta get it out there. If (students) learn it they learn it, if they don't they don't. The teachers don't have to. Some teachers feel it's better if the kid is comfortable then they might learn better.
	T: What do you think?
	A: Yea, I mean it helps. I think you, you did a good job at that. Yea.
170	T: Thank you. OK, next topic is HSA. During testing you tested in here. Actually, I made sure you tested with me. I made sure all of you who were in here tested with me because at the time you were the ones I was worried about taking it seriously.
	A: (Laughing). Got ya!
175	T: The reason why I was worried about you wasn't because of your capability, it was that you may nod off or just not be into it.
	A: Yea, uh huh!
	T: But you showed up every day, you gave 100%, you got an exceeding score. You got a 339.
180	A: Wow! Woo-hoo!

	T: The cut off for meeting was 330, so you were above that.
	A: Oh, that's good!
185	T: So my concerns may have been silly in the end. But what do you think? What do you remember about that testing period? For example, anything about the test or the preparation for it. Maybe how you felt taking it.
	A: I definitely didn't feel all that excited, you're right. For me, I don't like tests in general. I understood where they were coming from and why they wanted students to take it seriously. I mean, I took it seriously I just didn't want to do it.
190	T: And you did it exceedingly well, which I think says a lot. I don't know if you ever knew what your score was.
	A: No, I didn't.
195	T: It was the same with all of you who I am interviewing. I had each of you test with me for different reasons, and you all showed up and delivered for something that really didn't have any significance for you in terms of grades. It didn't even count. So is it fair for me to say that you took it so seriously because you understood the purpose?
	A: Uh huh, yea.
	T: Did you think it was like, your responsibility?
	A: Yup. I knew it was important in some way.
200	T: OK. Let's talk about honors. Honors courses here are open enrollment. So why did you choose to take Honors? Did you choose, or were you pushed?
205	A: Umm, I've always been in Honors since my Freshman year. At first my teacher recommended me and then my parents said I should do it. But they didn't really push me. But I was like, "OK, it's Honors. I guess I'll go for the challenge and see how hard it is." Ya know, it's not really that hard. AP on the other hand! I mean, I make an A in the class and it's challenging. I mean, Honors is pretty good preparation.
	T: So you remained in Honors all three years and now took AP. How many AP classes do you have this year?
215	A: One. Only one.
	T: Oh, I thought maybe you had more since you said you had tests all last week.

	A: Oh not, that was just my Chemistry test and my AP exam that I was prepping for all last week.
	T: How do you think you did?
220	A: For the most part I think I did pretty good. It was just really long writing the three essays.
225	T: OK, this is the last question I asked everyone and then I have two more just for you. A lot of times students come back to me and say, "I miss your class." Can you help me understand what they may mean by that? Not that you have to feel that way, but why do you think they may say that?
230	A: That's actually funny because last week me and Brandon were talking and we both said the same thing, that we miss this class. I think it's because, I don't know, I guess with us we feel like you're a more understanding teacher and you're open. And this class was always just fun. Like you learn and it's still fun at the same time. Now, my classes this year, it's just like you gotta learn it. We're gonna lecture you and that's it. However you wanna learn, you learn. If you don't, oh well. It's not really like, "What do you want to do?". Like you were open about how we learn. Most teachers don't do that.
235	T: So do you think that after tenth grade it's kind of like "the real world" of high school?
	A: Yeeeeeah!
240	T: (Laughing). OK. So those were the questions I asked everyone. I have two more for you. As we already said, you were a very vocal member. And I saw that definitely change over time in a very good way. We sort of already addressed this, but are there certain conditions that you feel encourage you to be more vocal in one classroom compared to another or is that just how you are? You already said if you feel comfortable you will, and if you don't know the topic you won't.
	A: Uh huh.
245	T: So would I be correct if I summarized what you said to be that if you don't know the topic or you think you're going to make a mistake you'll be quiet. And if you feel comfortable and like your friends are there or in English where there's no right or wrong answer you'll be more vocal. But is it also just who you are? I mean, outside of class do you think you're a really vocal person?
250	A: Umm, I think I've transformed into a more social person because I wasn't always like that. I used to be really shy. Yea, really shy. I took a long time to open up to people. It was bad. So, I dunno. I just think that now I realize that I'm gonna be out there soon as a college student and I'll probably have to speak more

	anyway so I just opened up.
	T: Really? Wow! And you should feel pretty confident graduating early.
255	A: Oh yea, that gave me a lot of confidence!
	T: So did you see that confidence impacting you in the classroom?
	A: Oh yea! I remember thinking it's almost over and I'm graduating in three years, not four, so I might as well take it seriously.
	T: Did it put pressure on you?
260	A: At first because my parents said I had to get good grades. The school said they usually don't do that. Like, they usually don't start you as a Junior and then bump you up a grade. So they were like, "You have to pass these classes or you'll be a Senior again next year." And my dad, he put a lot of pressure on me about that. I was just like, "OK, I gotta do this."
265	T: Yea, and you did! OK, there was a point in the year where something was happening in forth period. Something I thought was bad. Not bad, but that created some negative feelings. There were some people, I don't want to say "cliques" but there were groups of people in the big class that were forming. And there was a certain point were I just stopped everything and said, "Write about how you feel in
270	this class." Do you remember that?
	A: Uh huh, yea.
	T: OK. And then I put up on the screen what everyone said, and in my opinion it was like a light switch went off. Everything changed the next day. Do you...what do you remember about that activity? Do you just remember doing it, or can you
275	recall anything beyond that? For example, how you felt at the time or what you remember about how anyone else said they felt.
	A: Umm. For me, I actually didn't understand why everybody felt the way they did. Like I didn't realize people felt like that, but when you put everyone's feelings on the board and everyone understood where people were coming from then
280	everything changed. And that was good.
	T: Do you think that sort of thing is good to do in a classroom? I'm sure at some point in your school years you've been in a classroom that was kind of disruptive or had behavior problems.
	A: Oh yea. Uh huh.
285	T: And so do you think that it's important for a teacher to address in such a way, in

	front of the whole class, how people feel? Or maybe that it helps, or is even not necessary.
290	<p>A: It helps. Like, because everybody's personality is not going to click with everybody. But I think that it helps to get people to understand others more. I mean, everybody's not gonna be friends with everybody and they're obviously not gonna like everybody. But I think that was good. At least people knew, even if they weren't gonna change anything, they know how people felt.</p> <p>T: Right.</p> <p>A: I think that was good.</p>
295	<p>T: I thought it was good to do also because sometimes you don't realize that what you say and do affects other people.</p> <p>A: Exactly! We had some quiet people in our class so you would have never known how they felt. So yea, that was good.</p>
300	<p>T: OK, last one. What made you say, "Yes, I want to graduate early!" I mean, you already said that you only had one more class. But why the rush? Some students in your position would just take a bunch of electives and cruise Senior year. Some people don't want to leave high school or don't have any plan when they do.</p>
305	<p>A: Believe it or not, I really don't like school. Like I really don't like school much. So I just wanted to get out. And when I had to make that decision there was all this drama going on as far as people and stuff and I was just like, "Oh, I can't do this anymore." So I kinda buckled down and I looked at all my electives and all the credits I had and was like, "Oh, I only have one more!" So I might as well make the best of the situation.</p>
310	<p>T: So you don't like school but you're ready to go to college. You want to go to college.</p> <p>A: Yea.</p> <p>T: You're not being pushed to go to college. Well, you are? (Laughing)</p> <p>A: To a certain extent. (Laughing)</p>
315	<p>T: So what are you gonna study?</p> <p>A: It's ironic because I'm going to study law. Pre law.</p> <p>T: Oh, I could totally see that! Man, I'm so proud of you!</p>

320	<p>A: Thank you!</p> <p>T: Well I thank you so very much.</p> <p>A: You're so welcome!</p> <p>T: See you at graduation!</p>
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### Interview #5: Keanu

1	T: So I'm just going to ask you about last year in our class. And I picked you because you were one of the students who was really engaged in class and would participate in class, but outside you would do no work.
	K: Oh, yea!
5	T: And so I just wanted to see...I mean, you'd put effort into discussion and you paid attention but then you'd do zero homework.
	K: I don't know. I just don't do it.
	T: Is that still the same?
	K: Yea.
	T: In all your classes?
10	K: Yea.
	T: So then how are you passing all your classes?
	K: I don't know. I guess my teachers are just...I don't know.
	T: So you must have in class work that you do?
	K: Sometimes. (Laughing.)
15	T: OK, so I'm just going through my list of questions and we will just see what comes up. Is that OK?
	K: Sure.
	T: OK. How would you describe yourself as a student in general? Not just last year or in our class. More like overall.
20	K: Well, hmm. I don't know. Lazy. Works only when needs to.
	T: Has it always been way?
	K: Yea. Social and stuff. I don't know. I don't really like doing work in class.
	T: When you say "social and stuff" do you mean like you'll talk about and with what's going on, or that you talk to your friends about other stuff?
25	K: Both, depending on how far away the teacher is. (Laughing.)

	T: OK. (Laughing.)
	K: It changes, depending.
	T: So you're more social in different classes? Do you mean you contribute more in some classes and you cause or are a distraction in others?
30	K: Yup. Depending on how the teacher is I guess.
	T: Does it depend on your peers at all? Or who sits around you?
	K: Oh, who's around me too. It just depends. But most of the people around me I'll just talk to.
	T: Do you ever move to get away from people who distract you?
35	K: When I do they just come with me. (Laughing.)
	T: What class do you like most, or have you liked most in high school.
	K: Just this year?
	T: No, whenever in high school.
	K: I like your class, AVID and Hawaiian language.
40	T: I didn't know you're in AVID.
	K: Not anymore. Only in ninth.
	T: Is this your first year in Hawaiian language in high school?
45	K: Uh, it counts as my second year right now but I've only been there half the year. You know how you take a language class half year? So I'm taking another one now.
	T: Oh, so you took Hawaiian I in the fall?
	K: Yea, and Hawaiian II now.
	T: Got ya. And so what happened with AVID if you liked it so much? Was it because of your grades?
50	K: Yea, it was.
	T: But you liked the class?



	K: Yea, and Mr. E liked me too. He comes back to me very year and says, "Keanu join my class!"
	T: You don't want to go back?
55	K: I don't know. It's hard! And people keep saying it's getting harder.
	T: Yea because you're getting closer to graduation and it takes some effort to get there.
	K: I was thinking of joining next year though for scholarships. Ya know, be there for the first year, skip two, go back the fourth. (Laughing.)
60	T: They give you SAT waivers too, I think.
	K: Yea, as many times as you want.
	T: So you want to go to college?
	K: Yea.
	T: And so why do you like Hawaiian language?
65	K: I just like the subject. And, I don't know, the teacher's cool too.
	T: OK. And what did you like about this class?
	K: Because of all the people in here.
	T: You had a lot of friends in here. Do you still see many of them in any of your classes this year?
70	K: None of them! I see Kristine during lunch though.
	T: What about the least. Which class or subject do you least enjoy?
	K: Math. Every year.
	T: What math are you in now?
	K: Algebra II.
75	T: At least you don't have to take math next year, right?
	K: Yea, I do. I'm gonna fail that's why. I just can't understand her. She just came here and she has a really strong accent.

	T: So is it not understanding her or the subject?
	K: Both.
80	T: OK, so then what makes you participate in a class. Like, is it the students, the teacher, the subject?
	K: It's what we're learning and stuff.
	T: So it doesn't have to be one of the classes or subjects you like?
	K: No, just what we're doing. It's not the subject, it's what we're doing.
85	T: So then what do you remember about what we did last year in our class?
	K: I remember we read Othello. I remember we read a lot of books! And I liked that. Reading.
	T: You like reading?
	K: Yea.
90	T: Are you reading anything in English now, or no? It's Expos Writing, right? So you don't read.
	K: Nope. All writing. I don't really like that.
	T: OK, so you said you don't ever do any work outside of class. So then what motivates you to do work in class?
95	K: I don't know, passing?
	T: So it's just to pass?
	K: And if I can be social. I'm social whenever I can be.
	T: Do you have any goals to do more than just pass? I mean, there's nothing wrong with that; that's all you're supposed to do. Anything else is just going beyond.
100	K: Umm. Not really. I guess when graduating because it looks good on my resume.
	T: OK, next. What do you need from a classroom environment to be active? I know you said your peers or being allowed to be social. Is there anything else? Maybe think of the opposite since you're so social. Is there any class that you never speak in?
105	

	<p>K: It depends on what my peers are doing. Like, if they're engaged too. I mean, I don't wanna talk if no one else is talking. I'll just be quiet and just be thinking to myself.</p> <p>T: So if someone else says something...</p>
110	<p>K: ...Yea. Then everyone else starts talking too. But if it's a boring class then everyone will be quiet.</p> <p>T: That's funny because you are very social, yet if no one else contributes then you won't talk either.</p> <p>K: Yup. I won't.</p>
115	<p>T: So did you feel that way in our class? Like, that you could talk?</p> <p>K: Oh yea, because I could always talk to Khayla, Kristine or Mark.</p> <p>T: Yes, but I mean did you feel you could add to the discussion not just talking on the side.</p> <p>K: Oh yea. Because it was a really interesting class.</p>
120	<p>T: So how do you show in class that you are engaged? For example, if you're getting a D or an F and you don't do any homework then how does a teacher know that you're paying attention or understanding?</p> <p>K: If it's something I know I'll just say it, and if I get called on and I don't know I'll just guess.</p>
125	<p>T: Do you care if they know you're engaged? Does it matter to you at all if your teachers think you don't do any work and don't pay attention?</p> <p>K: It's important I guess because if they think that I'm not engaged then I'd get in trouble. So I just answer a few questions here and there.</p>
130	<p>T: So it seems that you do what you need to do in order to pass and not get in trouble. Is that correct?</p> <p>K: Yea.</p> <p>T: You're social, but you're not a troublemaker. At least, I never saw that side of you. I mean, you were very chatty but you were never disrespectful and always stopped when I made it very clear to you that you needed to.</p>
135	<p>K: Oh no, no. Not disrespectful.</p>

140	<p>T: What do you think the school does to try to get students engaged?</p> <p>K: Referrals.</p> <p>T: You think that gets students more engaged?</p> <p>K: No, not really. But teachers do it. My teacher just goes, “You! Not listening! Referral!” Left and right!</p>
	<p>T: Do you think that helps?</p> <p>K: No ways! It’s exactly the same, maybe even worse.</p> <p>T: What do you think they should do?</p> <p>K: Ummm.</p>
145	<p>T: If you were a teacher in class what would you do?</p> <p>K: How you taught the class.</p> <p>T: Which means what?</p> <p>K: Like, if you’re teaching a class in a way that’s hard for people to understand then kids...I dunno.</p>
150	<p>T: Our class was hard?</p> <p>K: Oh, no!</p> <p>T: Oh, I got ya.</p> <p>K: Because the way some teachers teach is weird.</p>
155	<p>T: So if the teacher makes it so you can understand it then you think that would be better for the discipline? Better than referrals? (Laughing).</p> <p>K: Like, she teaches us one subject one day and they next day we do a test on it and we didn’t really understand it.</p> <p>T: So you need to practice it?</p>
160	<p>K: Yea. She gives us...we’re on our fifty-something “I-Can”. One day she teaches it. And we just learned it and the next day she makes us do the test.</p> <p>T: If you don’t pass the “I-Can” test do you to go back, or does the class just keep</p>

	moving on? I don't know how that works.
	K: You have to go to Saturday Credit Club and retake it until you pass.
	T: And the class keeps moving on?
165	K: Yea. And we have homework on the new stuff when we still don't understand the old. And you try to learn that one from before and the new one at the same time.
	T: Do you go to Saturday Credit Club?
	K: I have to.
170	T: Why do you have to?
	K: Because I'm failing her class. I have to pass to grad.
	T: Let's get back to the questions. Is there or has there ever been a teacher in high school that you feel you have a good relationship with? Maybe one who you went to if you needed help with work or...
175	K: I don't really ask for help.
	T: OK. Or help with anything, like outside of class or school stuff.
	K: I don't talk about my problems. To anyone.
	T: It's interesting because you're very talkative and social, but not with personal stuff. What about a class or classroom that you felt comfortable in or that you could be yourself?
180	K: I don't know. All of them.
	T: Really?
	K: Yea. I'm myself. I guess if there was a class that I didn't know anyone I wouldn't be comfortable. Like, I would just sit there and I wouldn't talk. But I never had that.
185	T: Do you think that it helps that you guys are all on teams in ninth and tenth grade? Does the fact that you stay in a group helps to ensure that you know each other in class, which helps you to feel comfortable?
	K: Yea.

190	<p>T: And do you think...like, you said before that you're more likely to talk if someone else talks in a room where you know everyone. Do you think you'd be more likely to ask for help if you felt like you knew everyone?</p> <p>K: Oh yea. For every class we all knew each other and it made it easier to talk with each other and the teacher.</p>
195	<p>T: How about your level of comfort in our class? Would you rank it high, medium or low?</p> <p>K: I think it was high.</p> <p>T: Why is that?</p> <p>K: I don't know.</p>
200	<p>T: OK. Did you feel any threat?</p> <p>K: No.</p> <p>T: Did you feel like the work was too hard?</p> <p>K: No. Wait. No. (Laughing.)</p> <p>T: And you knew people.</p>
205	<p>K: Yea. And no one really teased each other in that class, like serious mean. It was friendly.</p> <p>T: OK. I'm actually asking some of the others about that. Because there was a point...</p> <p>K: Yea, I remember!</p>
215	<p>T: I wasn't going to ask you because I didn't think...</p> <p>K: It was really just the quiet people.</p> <p>T: Yes, but there was a group who were very vocal and who I felt intimidated other people. And...</p> <p>K: Really? Who's that? Was that me?</p>
220	<p>T: No, it wasn't you! But that day I had you guys write down how you felt in the classroom, I don't know if you remember.</p>

	K: Oh, yea!
	T: And the next day I put some of the responses up on the screen. And some people said...
225	K: "I don't feel comfortable." Yea, I remember that.
	T: And it wasn't you. You weren't the bully and you weren't the uncomfortable one, which is why I wasn't planning on asking you. So you're saying you weren't aware of it at all?
230	K: I didn't really know the quiet kids felt that way because, well, they were quiet! Actually, I thought it was more the people who sat on the back side over there.
	T: I saw it. I mean, I saw kids, not like bullying, but making jokes and comments about others to be mean. And then I noticed some people stopped talking altogether. So I wanted to make sure...
	K: Really? Oh.
235	T: It's interesting that you were in the room, and physically sat right in the middle of the two main groups and...
	K: I didn't really notice.
240	T: Yea. I think the people who were on both ends, the people who did the teasing and the people who were teased, saw a change. I mean, I don't know but that's why I am asking them about it. It seems like you weren't at all affected by it and so you didn't even notice.
	K: Teasing is like sort of what some people do for fun. I mean, when you're not majorly teasing someone. I don't mean to be mean if I tease people. It's just playing around. It's not serious, it's just for fun.
245	T: Would you or do you tease people for fun that you don't know in class?
	K: No. No.
	T: So you joke with people who you know know you are kidding?
	K: Yea. Or, like if they knew I was kidding even if I didn't know them. I wouldn't want to tease somebody and make them feel bad. That's mean.
250	T: Yea, and that's what I thought was happening. OK, I'm glad we talked about that and that it came up. Let's get back to the questions. We have been talking for quite a while! Remember HSA testing and testing in my room?

	K: Oh yea!
	T: Well, on that test you scored an exceeding score. You scored a 360.
255	K: What! Really? Is that good?
	T: Yes. 300 is what you have to get to pass. 330 is Exceeds. You were 30 points beyond that.
	K: It's only 30 points though.
260	T: Which is a lot on that test! You were one of my highest scores! And you came every day and obviously put in 100% effort since you did so well. Do you remember why you worked so hard on that? I mean, you say you're lazy and don't do homework. But that was seven days of testing for a test that meant nothing to your grade or graduation.
265	K: It was seven days? I mean, I think I was distracted in class actually. Like, I would look around and look at everyone else.
	T: OK. But at some point you must have focused to have done so well.
270	K: My parents always had a good vocabulary. Like, my dad would read me the dictionary when I was little. And whenever I say a wrong word he would say, "That doesn't sound right. That sounds dumb. You should use another word." And in like sixth grade I used to read a lot, like those fat books. Like those Eragon books. I read the first two in sixth grade and I got bored, so I stopped reading.
	T: You said earlier that you like to read.
	K: Yea, I have good reading comprehension.
275	T: But you don't like to read books now? What type of books would you read now? Like what do you like to read about?
	K: I don't know, like action. Fictional. I don't know, in eighth grade I would read this series no one knew about. It was little books though, and I read all the way to the fifth book and then stopped to wait for the sixth one to come out. But it took too long and I never read it.
280	T: So last year we read four or five books. And this year you haven't read a novel in English right, since you're in Expository Writing?
	K: I was in the lab and I took some vocab test on the computer at the beginning of the year and the teacher told me, "You barely got any wrong! What are you doing in this class?" So I took some other elective and went into the regular English



285	class.
	T: So you see how you're so capable, but then it looks like you're not because your grades don't reflect your ability.
	K: Yea, yea.
290	T: So then you wind up in classes you don't belong in. Do you think work would be easier for you, but you just don't do it? I mean, do you not do it because it's difficult?
	K: I just don't do it. I feel like I don't have time, but I do.
	T: I remember you talking about how when you went home you had a lot of family things to take care of. Lots of responsibilities.
295	K: Yea, I don't like doing work at home because there's a lot of yelling. They all yelling.
	T: You're the oldest, right?
300	K: No, my sister. She's 22. But then I have three little sisters, little little, all running around and screaming. It doesn't get me in the mood to do work. So I try to do it in class. If not, oh well. If it's interesting I'll do it.
	T: I remember you telling me that last year. In ninth grade you were in Honors, right?
	K: No, but my teacher recommended me. Ms. S. She's not still here, right?
305	T: No, she moved. So how did you do in her class. Do you remember what you got?
	K: A D I think.
	T: A D. And then you picked Honors.
	K: I did?
	T: Well, you came into my class.
310	K: I didn't take it, they just gave it to me because my teacher said. For some cosmic reason I am always absent on that registration day and I just get whatever classes my teachers pick I guess.
	T: Did you register for next year?

315	<p>K: No. I don't have it at all. I was thinking of taking British and American Lit. That's it, right?</p> <p>T: Yup, but there's no Honors. You'd have to take AP or IB. I think you'd be more into IB.</p> <p>K: IB? What's that?</p>
320	<p>T: They are both challenging, but there's more discussion in IB and you talk about the things you read a bit more than AP.</p> <p>K: Really? They don't write any stuff?</p> <p>T: They do, but AP is more essay writing and practice tests. I think since you like to talk more and can definitely keep up with the reading if you put your mind to doing the work outside of class, then you'd do well in IB.</p>
325	<p>K: Oh yea. The only time I would join that class is if someone was asking me to join. In another class that happened.</p> <p>T: I'm not exactly sure who from your class would be going into IB, but I'm sure there would be some because the majority of my students go into AP or IB. So there would be at least one or two people you'd know for sure!</p>
330	<p>K: They all went to AP.</p> <p>T: I think you might be bored by that type of class and environment.</p> <p>K: Yea, I walk by and they're all quiet.</p> <p>T: (Laughing). Yea, but in IB they talk more. OK, so moving on. A lot of times students come back to me and say, "I miss your class."</p>
335	<p>K: Oh yea!</p> <p>T: Can you help me to understand what they mean by that? When I ask why they say that they just do. And I want to understand more about what they mean.</p>
340	<p>K: Your class is cool, that's why. No pressure. Like, I don't know. You weren't a mean teacher that's why. Most teachers get mad. I never really saw you get mad before.</p> <p>T: Do you feel pressure in other classes?</p> <p>K: Yea, some classes. Like Expos Writing and math.</p>

	T: I know why in math, but why Expos?
345	K: Well, 'cause I don't write. I was thinking in the beginning that I could pass because I got Ds. But then I started talking to people and it went down.  T: So you're very aware of this...  K: Yea. Class is boring, that's why.  T: So if the classroom was a more social place... Like, if the class discussed things do you think that would make you more willing to write?
350	K: Yea, yes. Talking about something and then writing is easier. It's boring. There's no fun in that. Like, you're just writing.  T: So I just have two more questions, and you pretty much already answered them. I was curious about the fact that you were active in class but did nothing outside of class, and wanted to ask you what was the reason and if it was the same this year.
355	And you pretty much said it is and that you only do work for math because you have to go to Credit Club or the ones that you are actually failing.  K: Yea. Or, I think I did do work for Expos because it was easy.  T: What about your Hawaiian language class. You like that.
360	K: Oh, that's easy. Until I started not doing my work. All you need to do really is know how to speak pidgin and know the Hawaiian words and put it together. (Laughing.)  T: Do you have a background? Did you know Hawaiian before?
365	K: Not really. Like a little bit. My grandma knows Hawaiian but she never really taught me. She taught me some words. I think it's easier because I speak pidgin all the time. I find it interesting too because my family speaks Hawaiian. My grandma always tries to speak to me but I never understand.  T: I hear you saying that is the subjects or school was more interesting to you then you'd be more likely to do the work. And that you feel like you're lazy or have a lot of responsibilities at home, which is another reason why you don't do it.
370	K: Yea.  T: Do you see any of that changing? Do you care to change any of your habits for Senior year?  K: Maybe. Probably.

	T: What is your goal? Do you want to go to college?
375	K: College but I don't know what for. Maybe...graphics.
	T: Oh yea? Do you have graphics class now?
	K: No, not that kind. I'm into, what's that? Animation.
	T: Oh really. I didn't know you draw.
	K: Really?
380	T: I don't think so.
	K: Really?
	T: Maybe doodling, but you never did an assignment or anything where I could really see your drawing. Maybe I didn't give you an opportunity for you to do that. Do you have opportunity in other classes, like with projects?
385	K: Projects? I don't do those! (Laughing.)
	<i>Keanu and I continued to talk about his artwork and he pulled out a tablet he carries with him in his bag at all times. He flipped through each picture and explained his style. We then talked about him getting back into the AVID program in order to help him apply for colleges. The interview concluded with me thanking him for talking with me.</i>

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