ABSTRACT
         Many researchers recommend building community to promote
K-12 school improvement, noting the importance of teachers experiencing
community in teacher education. This paper examines the concept of a learning
community in the context of teacher education. It describes a 2-year
qualitative study of community in a master's degree program. The program is a
four-semester, cohort-based program of graduate study for practicing
teachers. Content is integrated over time rather than divided into specific
courses. The program begins with an initial retreat designed to build
personal and professional relationships. Participants work on negotiation,
consensus building, coaching, reflection, collegiality, participative
decision making, and celebration. Data collection involved two cohorts of
participants (university faculty and K-5 teachers), including observations of
events and processes, systematic written responses from teachers, interviews
with faculty, faculty ratings of teachers, and artifacts collected over 27
months. Results from the data analysis provide information on what community
is in teacher education, the role of community in teacher education, what
contributes to community, and what the struggles are in a community. Findings
suggest that learning communities in the context of a program based on
constructivist principles serve a variety of roles. (Contains 28 references.)
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Coming Together - Respectfully: Building Community in Teacher Education

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Abstract

A review of the literature suggests that many authors recommend building community to promote K-12 school improvement and the importance of teachers experiencing community in teacher education. This paper provides a focused look at the concept of a learning community in the context of teacher education. It is a two-year qualitative study of community in a master's degree program. The collaborative nature of this graduate program provides a rich environment for exploring the construct and practice of community, including university faculty and teachers' perspectives. Findings help define community in teacher education, the role of community in this context, and what contributes to and constrains community building.

Coming Together - Respectfully: Building Community in Teacher Education

Teachers face challenging situations in their schools and classrooms. Many of these challenges can be categorized into two areas: (a) transforming learning experiences and (b) promoting positive social relationships. The reform rhetoric implicitly and explicitly expects teachers and teacher educators to address both types of challenges. How can teacher educators meet these challenges and help teachers at the same time? Providing an environment and the experiences that build and facilitate community is one way teacher educators can help prepare teachers for their challenging. Current authors (Palmer, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1994) suggest that while the need for community is universal, it has particular relevance for schools and teacher education. Sergiovanni states, "It (community) lifts both teachers and students to higher levels of self-understanding, commitment and performance – beyond the reaches of the shortcomings and difficulties they face in their everyday lives" (p. xiii).

Community, collegiality, collaboration, cooperation, and connectedness have become frequent terms in the literature on improvement in schools, in higher education and in professional development. Authors discuss constructive communities (Lieberman, 1996), communities of difference (Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner & Slack, 1995), compassionate collegiality (Kelly, 1994), communities of truth (Palmer, 1998) and purposeful communities (Sergiovanni, 1994). Some authors construct elaborate definitions (Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993; Welch, 1998); others suggest problems defining the construct and the practice of community (Westheimer, 1998). Noddings (1996) and Westheimer argue the importance of studying both the concept and exemplars of communities. This paper provides a focused look at the concept of a learning community in the context of teacher education.

Relevant Background

Faculty in an early childhood department engaged in a collaborative process of program development (Guyton, Rainer & Wright, 1997) and developed a master's degree program based on principles of constructivism (Fosnot, 1996; Lambert, et al., 1995) and the work of Dewey (1938). The program supports teaching and learning as a social activity where learning is a "building process by active learners interacting with the physical and social world" (Fosnot, 1996, p. 30). The creation of the Collaborative Masters Program (CMP) involved interpreting constructivist theory for teacher education and developing methods to foster participants' construction of knowledge and application of that knowledge to their classrooms. It is guided by the following social constructivist principles advocated by Lambert, et al. (1995):

- ▸ Knowledge and beliefs are formed within the learner;
- ▸ Learners personally imbue experiences with meaning;
- ▸ Learning activities should cause learners to gain access to their experiences, knowledge and beliefs;
- ▸ Learning is a social activity that is enhanced by shared inquiry;
- ▸ Reflection and metacognition are essential aspects of constructing knowledge;
- ▸ Learners play a critical role in assessing their own learning; and
- ▸ The outcomes of the learning process are varied and often unpredictable.

The CMP moves beyond the bounds of traditional teacher education by forging a partnership between teachers and faculty - a learning community where each individual's impact is an integral feature of the whole. The collaborative nature of our graduate program provides a rich environment for exploring the construct and practice of community, including university faculty and elementary teachers' perspectives.

Current literature and research on the first year of implementation of the CMP program (Rainer & Guyton, 1998) support community as a foundational concept in a model of

constructivist teacher education. Research was designed to unpack the layers of complexity in a learning community. How is a community of learners defined in teacher education and in our programs? What are the characteristics of a learning community? How is community building facilitated in teacher education? What role does community play in teacher development?

Current Literature

A review of the current literature suggests that many authors recommend building community to promote K-12 school improvement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1994; Westheimer, 1998). In the context of teacher education, authors (Costa & Garmston, 1994; Palmer, 1998; Whitfield & Plumb, 1996) similarly argue the importance of community. This work provided a framework for our questions and our research. The ideas are organized by question and present global perspectives and then perspectives more specific to teacher education.

What is community?

The literature provides variety of definitions. Shaffer and Anundsen (1993 describe a spectrum of communities consisting of three types (functional, conscious, and deep) and two levels (community and proto-community). Their definition of community is a dynamic whole that emerges when a group: a) participates in common practices; b) depends upon one another; c) makes decisions together; d) identifies themselves as part of something larger than the sum of their individual relationships; and e) commits themselves to their own, one another's, and the group's well being.

In the context of education in general, Palmer (1998) proposes a model that he terms a community of truth, that is circular, interactive and dynamic rather than linear and static and emphasizes relationships among knowers with the subject as the connective core of the

relationships. Costa and Garmston (1994) suggest that a learning community performs certain functions, such as, a) questions itself and its purposes an processes, b) demonstrates care for its members, c) shares common set of norms, values and goals, d) displays a spirit of inquiry, and e) has core learning content.

In the professional development literature, Lieberman (1996) describes a constructive community as "a group of professionals engaged in a common struggle to educate themselves so that they can better educate their students" (P. 52). Lambert, et al., (1995) define a community as "part of a social ecological construct that might be described as an interdependent and complex web of reciprocal relationships sustained and informed by their purposeful actions" (p. 161). Sergiovanni (1994) identifies characteristics of communities as: focus, commitment to purpose, passion, risk taking, trust, respect, shared responsibility, open communication, and choice.

Westheimer (1998) reviewed the work of contemporary social theorists and identified five central features of community: interaction and participation, interdependence, shared interests and beliefs, concern for individual and minority views and meaningful relationships. In our initial research on the CMP (Rainer & Guyton, 1998), community is described as interdependence among participants. It is characterized by six interrelated concepts: collaborative relationships, common interests, voice, trust, support and joy. From the literature review, key elements of community emerge as interdependence, relationships, common purposes, and collaborative decision-making. Each element is essential for a group to define itself as a community.

What role does community play in teacher education?

Many authors believe that building community contributes to school reform. Lambert, et al., (1995) and Sergiovanni (1994) suggest that a new metaphor to describe schools, a community

of learners, has replaced the factory model that emphasized production and uniformity. Adams and Hamm (1997) argue that a common element in successful schools is a shared sense of community and a socially integrated sense of purpose. Peterson (1992) argues that our traditional approach to education is one-sided and does not address the complexity of teaching and learning and that the concept of community uncovers another possibility for understanding teachers' work. Westheimer (1998) states, "by attending to teacher professional communities, we gain an understanding of the ways in which teachers' relationships structure their work and their lives in schools" (p.9). Kelly (1995) suggests that collegiality "represents the most transformative mode of interacting with others" (p.72) and because our relationship with students is such a powerful dimension of teaching, it needs careful attention. Palmer (1998) argues that faculty talk to each other about their inner lives in the academic culture of higher education as a foundation for a "fabric of community" (p.11). For these authors, building community is not the purpose of education. It facilitates learning and provides a model for teachers to use in their own classrooms.

What facilitates building community?

Shaffer and Anundsen (1993) observe community development as a recurring cycle of five dynamic phases: excitement, autonomy, stability, synergy and transformation. They suggest that communities can enhance their development by having an awareness of these phases and the community's place in the cycle. Other skills that enhance the community-building process include attaining balance, communicating, decision making and governing, working with conflict and celebrating and renewing community. They propose that the tension between vision and reality propels the process.

Johnson and Johnson (1997) propose seven linear and finite stages of development in learning groups: becoming oriented, getting acquainted, recognizing mutuality and building trust, rebelling and differentiating; committing to and taking ownership; functioning productively; and terminating. The group leader plays an active role in the group's development but the key to success is the change of ownership from the leader to group members.

Darling Hammond (1997) suggests that successful collaboration requires careful structuring and guidance and a change in policies to promote the complex practice of collaboration. Brown's work (1994) in urban classrooms suggests that creating communities of learners requires a view of "students as researchers and teachers, partially responsible for designing their own curriculum" (p.7) and suggests strategies such as reciprocal teaching, independent and collaborative work, reflection and authentic assessment.

More specific to graduate teacher education, Whitfield & Plumb (1996) find that building community requires redefining leadership, sharing responsibility with students; and a rich and diverse repertoire of teaching strategies, e.g., problem posing; planned ambiguity; collaborative decision making; and an alternative assessment model. Breitborde (1996) describes successful teaching strategies that are experience linked; encourage individual reflection; foster a free exchange of ideas; draw on multiple modes of expression; and use authentic assessment.

The concept of community in the CMP is most like Lieberman's (1996) definition of a constructive community as a "group of professionals engaged in a common struggle to educate themselves so that they can better educate their students" (p.52). The characteristics of communities outlined above provided a framework for viewing our work, and the role of community suggests a rationale for building community. This study examines these constructs in

the natural context of a graduate teacher education program.

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Methodology

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Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Spradley (1980) propose that research proceeds through a series of phases, moving from a general overview with a broad focus to one in which there is a focus on a specific aspect that became relevant in course of research. Our initial research provided that general overview and generated our more focused interest in the concept of community. Viewing data over time provides an in-depth look at the construct.

Context

The features of the CMP program related to community are described as a context for this study. It is a four semester, cohort-based program of graduate study for practicing teachers (PreK-grade 5). Content is integrated over the 15-month period rather than being divided into specific courses. Two cohort faculty consistently coordinate, guide and facilitate the group's work. Faculty on retainer are content specialists who provide expertise as needed by the teachers. The program begins with an initial retreat designed to build personal and professional relationships among participants. Problem-solving, sharing, challenge and trust are emphasized through retreat activities. Shared norms and goals are developed from work at the retreat and govern the cohort's work throughout the year. Decisions about community, curriculum and assessment are made democratically. Programmatic activities include curriculum development based on participants' interests, democratic decision-making, deep exploration of content, action research, examination of classroom practice and collaborative assessment.

Structures and process are incorporated to extend and support the feeling of community developed during the retreat. Structures such as consistent cohort faculty, community meetings,

focus groups, classroom visits, and benchmark and capstone assessments provide opportunities

for learning as a community. Processes such as negotiation, consensus building, coaching,

reflection and celebrations work within these structures to promote the sense of community

among all participants. See Rainer & Guyton (1998) for an in-depth description of these

programmatic activities.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from two cohorts (CMP 97 & 98) of participants (9 university faculty

and 50 K-5 teachers) from June 1996 to August 1998. Multiple data sources included

observations of events and processes, systematic written responses from teachers, interviews with

faculty, faculty ratings of teachers, and artifacts collected over the 27-month period. Two

researchers took the role described by Wolcot (1988) as a privileged observer – "someone who is

known and trusted and given easy access to information" (p. 35). Participant observations of

events and processes in context were recorded as fieldnotes. For example, the initial retreat

provided a natural opportunity to observe the dynamics relating to community-building. Faculty

interviews were audiotaped and transcribed at two intervals during the program. They were

questioned specifically about the nature of community. Participants provided written responses to

open-ended questions at quarterly intervals. These written responses required the participants to

reflect on what was encouraging, frustrating, and significant in their programmatic work. A

specific question focused on the teachers' perspective on community. Program documents such

as benchmarks and capstones were also examined for teachers' reflections on community.

While data from a study of Cohort I provided a focus for data collection in Cohorts II and

III, we came to the data with an inductive approach and an open attitude, seeking what emerged

as important. The constructs generated from year-one data provided a mind map for constructing and extending our thinking. Initially, data were coded and entered into Lotus Approach to facilitate analysis. Then themes were developed using a thematic analysis process described by Ely (1991). Categories were generated to organize and make sense of specific data. Categories were then examined for significant patterns and for redundancy and overlap, especially in relationship to data from Cohort I. Participants' voices include teachers and faculty and are referred to by codes and dates to maintain confidentiality.

Findings

These finding are an analysis and reconstruction of observations and participants' perspectives on a learning community in the context of a graduate teacher education program, in particular, the nature and goals of community, the role of community, and what contributes to and constrains a sense of community. Participants' words are used to represent categories based on our analysis. We share a brief vignette to provide a gestalt of their perspectives.

> Sarah is one of four African American women attending the retreat. She is of average height and weight, and a few years older than most of the other teachers. She is a confident lady but she engages in the activities tentatively. Eight of us are grouped together for a problem solving activity (spider web) that requires determination and trust. All eight members are to cross from one side of the web to the other without touching the silk. Only one person is allowed to cross through each opening. As we planned our strategy, Sarah realized that the only way she would get to the other side was for her team members to lift her shoulder-high and pass her through the web. As she felt herself laid horizontally in her new friends' hands, Sarah's face showed the anxiety she must have felt. After one unsuccessful attempt (or in Sarah's humorous account "a near brush with death"), Sarah was standing on the other side of the web. She commented, "I didn't want to let you down, but this was beyond my comfort zone. An important part of extending myself was my commitment to our task and trusting you. I hope when I go back to my classroom, I can replicate these feelings in my children's world".

What is Community in Teacher Education?

Table 1 provides a framework for defining community. It is an analytic overview of the

findings incorporating symbolic categories (Spradley, 1980) and participants' perspectives. The

narrative that follows indicates the connectedness of these ideas.

Coming together - respectfully. This reconstruction of community in teacher education

includes two major components with multiple facets that define each of the components. The two

major components of a learning community are a) the group coming together and b) the respectful

environment. Coming together describes the characteristics of the group or the "what" of the

learning community and respectfully describes qualities of the environment or the "how" of their

work together.

> To me, a learning community is a group that is working together to learn and
> grow in an environment of respect. (Su97, 113)

Each component includes emphasis on the nature, goals, and roles of community. Qualities that

define each of these are identified as fluidity, participation, growth and change, sharing, voice,

respect, and support. One teacher's description provides a glimpse of this complexity.

> A learning community is one in which each member has a voice and actively contributes
> to the group as a whole. The community values each member's ideas and works together
> to find shared meaning. Individual differences and strengths are accepted and
> encouraged. The community offers a safe place where ideas can be shared and learners
> can grow and change. (Sp98, 101)

The nature of community. Our findings suggest the nature of community includes three

characteristics: the community as unique and thriving, individuals contributing to a whole, and the

community as continually changing and growing. Qualities promoting these characteristics

include active participation, fluidity (continual movement), and a commitment to growth.

> Each person actively and continually contributes in a variety of ways toward the
> development of the community and its members. I see not only the community growing,
> but I am also growing. (Su97, 130)

> It (community) is all the thoughts, experiences and relationships that each individual

brings that make up a whole collective group. That each one's personal life impacts the group makes it unique and thriving. (Su98, 122)

A learning community is a place where everyone actively participates in a journey-like process of growth, change, development of ideas, behaviors and attitudes. (Su97, 109)

The goals of community. Research indicates goals are an important component in communities (Garmston, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1996). Two characteristics of goals emerge. One emphasizes the importance of a commitment to shared goals for improving their work as teachers. The second characteristic indicates the cohort's dedication to helping individual members reach their goals. Important qualities implicit in these two characteristics include "sharing" - the exchange of information, questions and frustrations and "support" - the encouragement of others academically, socially and emotionally.

A group of diverse people with differing ideas and opinions that come together to form a group dedicated to a shared goal - that of bettering themselves and their teaching. (Su98, 117)

Together we have been frustrated and at the same time encouraged by each other to keep working toward our common goal. Everyone may get to the goals in a different way, but everyone makes sure we all get there. (Su97, 113)
(Su97, 110)

The roles of community members. One characteristic defines the roles of all participants; everyone is a teacher and a learner. However, participants identify two qualities that encourage these roles: having a voice in the community and having respect for that voice. Everyone is encouraged to participate in planning, sharing ideas and actively listening. There is not only recognition of, but also a respect and appreciation for diverse ideas and thoughts.

This cohort has learned a lot together, but mostly we teach and learn from each other. We support, encourage, question, listen to and stretch each other. (Su97, 116)

This (community) is a place where I can be the teacher or the student, actively sharing ideas and dialoguing about the classroom setting. (Su98, 107)

> We have a voice, a choice, and respect for one another that helps further learning and reflecting. (Su97, 108)

What role does community play in teacher education?

In order to determine if and what role community plays in teacher education, we analyzed the teacher and university faculty members' perspectives on the effects of the learning community. The initial coding indicated 20 perspectives over time. These were synthesized and collapsed to include two broad roles (supporting social and individual roles and facilitating growth and change), and four supporting roles (authentic learning, reaching goals, respect for others, and implications for my teaching). In other words, community functions to support social and individual roles and their connectedness, and facilitates growth and change through authentic learning, goal attainment, respect for others and connections to classroom practice.

Community Supports Social and Individual Roles and Their Connectedness. Related to the "individual contributes to the whole" nature of community discussed above, the role of community has an individual and a social component with a connectedness between the two. Teachers and faculty first describe the role of community as having a social component. When discussing their learning, growth, programmatic accomplishments and goals, teachers and faculty discuss them in the context of joint accomplishments and shared goals. They speak in terms of "we" and in plurals, such as "all learners" grow and change and "we all get there". At the same time, they describe the role of the community in individual terms. They perceive the community as "helping you see things for yourself". Teachers describe the effects of community on their classroom teaching more individualistically. For example, "it (community) helps me teach the way I am being taught...I can now build a learning community in my classroom" (Su97, 106 and 121).

One student summarizes the idea of the connection between social and individual effects, when she says, "Each individual adds to the greater whole" (Su98, 128). Another teacher comments, "the community has helped me find my own strengths...it is a group where my ideas can be developed, shared, encouraged and listened to" (Su97, 110). A faculty member summarizes this idea by saying "I describe this program as being all about a person's individual work done in a social way and in a social setting" (Sp98, Int. CF).

<u>Community Encourages Growth and Change</u>. Participants in the program view a second role of community as advancing their growth and change as teachers. Their responses suggest that the concept of "coming together in a respectful environment" provides the opportunity and conditions necessary to question each other, challenge themselves and support everyone in their growth and change. They view their growth and change as contingent on four supportive roles of the community: encouraging authentic learning, reaching goals, respecting others, and drawing implications for their classroom work. These four areas suggest that within the broad roles of community in supporting social and individual roles and encouraging growth and change there are also more specific roles. These roles are described in more depth in the following sections.

<u>Community Provides a Context for Authentic Learning</u>. One role of community is to increase learning and make learning more authentic. Participants indicate "community enhances learning and makes it easier to learn" (Su98, 107). One teacher claims, "In our community we are able to actively learn, share ideas, and dialogue about what is happening in education and in our classrooms" (Su97, 111). A faculty member comments, "I have read more books in the context of this program than in other years of my teaching courses". Teachers also speak of the

importance of learning in the context of real questions. One student reflects, "it (community) helps me make sense of my whole world, rather than learning in a vacuum" (Su98, 109). Another says, "community gives me support for real learning, learning with relevance for me" (Su98, 130)

Community Assists in Reaching Personal and Programmatic Goals. Participants see themselves as individuals learning in their specific contexts but also reliant on and responsible for learning together in the context of a community. Faculty and teachers state that they are better able to reach their goals with the support of the community. One participants states, "being a member of a community assists all of us in achieving our goals through different ways". She continues, "it (community) makes it safe for me to take risks, solve problems, be myself and reach new goals" (Su98, 120). Observations during the assessment process and analysis of artifacts indicate teachers are able to set and reach goals finding new strengths in the process.

Community Encourages Respect for Others. Teachers are clear in their view that a role of the community is to encourage and extend respect for others. They state, "they value other's opinions (Su97, 101), respect the differences in others (Su98, 121) and have developed a true appreciation for each other's perspectives" (Su97, 109). Observations of process discussions validate these perspectives. For example, faculty build in methods to ensure all members have a voice and teachers are observed encouraging those who are silent to share.

Community Contributes to Examining Teaching. Participants report that another role a learning community serves is to facilitate examining their teaching. In our definition of community, improvement in teaching is a common goal of the community. The teachers' perspectives indicate that participating in a community provides a model of effective teaching that then extends to developing community in their classrooms. One teacher shares "We are a group

dedicated to one goal - that of bettering ourselves and our teaching. Our community is one in which learning is prevalent, fostered and encouraged". She continues, "now that I see the role community serves in our program, I can implement it in my classroom" (Su97, 123). Teachers' reflections in benchmarks and capstone indicate they are observing the processes and effects of community in their cohort and are struggling to implement similar processes in their classroom. Many of their action research projects involve reflections on their practices of building community in their classrooms. Observations indicate that participants implement and share community-building practices among themselves and with colleagues outside the cohort. These reflections indicate that follow up in schools and classrooms is important to validate this role of community.

What contributes to community?

In the midst of a functioning community, we found it difficult to say a particular strategy or event contributed to or constrained community. In the process of looking back over two years and listening to participants, there are events, structures and processes that facilitated community and at the same time made it difficult. Teachers' written responses and faculty interviews indicate that teachers struggle to articulate what facilitates community for them. Structures such as the retreat are more obvious. It is more difficult for them to see the value in the processes. Looking at the data over time suggests that as teachers begin to translate the CMP community into their classrooms, they become more cognizant of the strategies that facilitate building community. Faculty with the responsibility for the community articulate explicitly the structures and processes that create a learning community. They see their responsibility as two-fold: a) building and maintaining community and b) facilitating learning and working together.

> There's work you do to build and maintain community, the safe place where there's equitable exchange of mine and ours; but it's also about everybody's individual work,

and the work we do together - my work, our work - work. Everybody brings his or her work to our work. Everybody brings something and take something away. (Sp98, Int. CF)

A full description of program structures and processes is beyond the scope of this paper.

However, Table 2 summarizes those identified as relating closely to the issues of the community.

Issue of belongingness: Building and maintaining community. Building and maintaining a learning community requires structures and processes that address the issue of "belongingness" (98, IntCF) or coming together in a respectful environment. Participants identified structures that facilitate continuity and a sense of community. The program structure of 15 months of continuous work allows for continuity and integration of coursework and provides an opportunity for community development. The retreat is an integral component for building relationships, trust and confidence. The group norms and agreements, and regular check-ins about community "suggest little ways to learn, play together and take care of each other" (Sp98, Int CF). Community meetings every few weeks bring the faculty and teachers together for academic and social purposes. Periodic get-togethers and celebrations provide time for continuing relationships, sharing concerns, and informal checking in with each other. Faculty report one of their roles as " keeping a barometer or a sense of what is going on in the group". (SP98, Int CF). They also indicate that teachers begin to take on this role as the program evolves.

Issue of collaborative work: Facilitating learning and working together.
Collaborative work or "our work as teachers and learners" (Sp98, IntCF) addresses the "learning" in learning community. Facilitating learning and working together requires some of the same structures and processes that address the issue of belongingness. However, participants also identify structures and processes that relate more to academic work. For example, calling to question the major concepts brings ideas to the surface for examination and reflection.

Negotiating content provides opportunities for dialogue and shared decision-making. Focus groups, classroom visits and action research projects are structures "we use to do our work together. They are a forum for "hearing peoples' ideas, eliciting responses, deciding which way to go, and learning deeply". (Su97, 111). Faculty visiting teachers in their schools provides time for one on one conversations: we talk about their issues, we are there to listen, question and reflect" (Sp98, CF). As teachers begin to translate their community experiences to their schools and classrooms, "they begin seeking out others to work with them for their knowledge, expertise and/or interests... They begin to feel comfortable sharing even the hard, insightful stuff" (Sp98, CF). Faculty believe collaborative work is facilitated by "being democratic, open, and honest (you take off the facade). You take time to discuss little issues and the big picture". (SP98, CF).

Participants specifically identify assessment structures and processes (consisting of benchmarks and a capstone within a collaborative and continuous progress model) as contributing to learning and working together. The assessment model provides opportunities for collaborative dialogue about assessment, sharing work and growth, and feedback from trusted colleagues.

What are the struggles in a community?

In looking at what contributes to community, ideas arose relating to what is difficult about learning in a community. While participants were optimistic and excited by the community-based program, they were also honest about the difficulties and frustrations. They acknowledged in written responses over the course of the program that time, conflict in group work, ambiguity, alignment with reality and to a lesser extent, personal inadequacy were difficulties that participants confronted. While these issues caused discomfort, the data suggests that they may or may not constrain community, and may even propel movement as suggested by Shaffer and Anundsen

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(1993). This is a point for further research.

Time. The issue of time relates first to the amount of time required for group processing. Participants agree that decision-making, negotiation and consensus are difficult because of perceived and real time constraints.

> Decision making within a group takes a long time! (Su97, 117)

> I get frustrated during decision-making. Are we taking advantage of a good thing? I am learning from this and I see us getting better at it. But it is time-consuming. (Su97, 99)

A second issue related to time concerns participants budgeting their own time and taking time to focus on what is important. Individuals are constantly sharing good ideas and participants have to stay close to what is important to them. Participants come to realize that they will continue to learn; it won't end with graduation.

> Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by all the information we are receiving. It is frustrating to realize how much I don't know. My head is constantly spinning with all the possibilities I now feel capable of. It is hard to say no to other good ideas but I have to so that I don't get overwhelmed. I will have time next year and the next. (Su97, 106)

> I tend to want to change everything right away - but I must realize that I need to take a step away - look critically - and take one step at a time. (Su97, 128)

Conflict in group work. Observations, and participants' reflections indicate that sharing and actively participating in a community brings out strong feelings and conflicting ideas or opinions and sometimes creates tense and argumentative situations.

> The most frustrating thing I can think of is really a personal issue that I struggle with. I am an emotional person in all that I do and that sometimes gets in the way in group situations. I can get my feelings hurt easily. My over-sensitive self can be both a good and a bad thing. My friends are helping me with this struggle. (Su97, 131)

> It is frustrating to hear conflicting ideas, but it is a good thing too. I need to work on being a part of the dialogue. (Su97, 111)

> It is hard to agree to disagree. I have strong feelings about teaching and learning. It

discourages me when others do not have equal passion. I have to learn to argue my point well. (Su97, 106)

Ambiguity. Participants, both faculty and teachers, freely discuss what they call the "unknowns in planning". Because curriculum and assessment are negotiated among all participants, there isn't a pre-determined schedule of readings or assignments. This openness and ambiguity is often new for teachers. Faculty in the program have had longer to adjust, but still find it difficult.

It is very frustrating for me not to know exactly what is happening next. It is hard for me to not plan everything because I don't feel like I have control. (Su97, 125)

I feel like I am procrastinating. I am ready to get to work and we are still making decisions. (Su97, 113)

Alignment with reality. All participants are members of bureaucratic organizations (K-12 systems and universities) and at the same time they are participants in a community-based program. Trying to align what they perceive as ideal with the reality of their occupations creates discomfort.

At times is it hard for me to dismiss what I have done in my teaching career, even for new (and possibly better) ways of doing things. There are times I feel like an outsider in my own school. I think that is OK because it means I am thinking, not just buying into something. (Su97, 116)

Sometimes the reality of our collaboration does not match the ideal. We have to continually adjust, wade through and determine where we are at this point. This can be both exciting and frustrating. (Su97, 101)

Personal inadequacy. Participants find being in a learning community a new challenge for them. Many have not had this experience in an academic context. They state that they trust the group and the process, but often doubt themselves.

I fear not trying hard enough. (Su97, 115)

Even though I made mostly A's in my undergraduate work, sometimes I wonder if I am smart enough, patient enough, articulate enough...I have to remind myself I can do this. I have to listen to my colleagues who say you can do this. I need the discussions to strengthen me. (Su97, 108)

Possibilities

Wolcott (1990) describes a tendency in qualitative research to end with a grand flourish and he cautions against going beyond reporting what is and making large pronouncements of what should be. In order to guard against making large statements based on small details, we suggest possibilities for teacher education.

This conception of a learning community suggests possibilities for research and program design and development in teacher education. Wrestling with the concept of learning communities also has implications for its participants: for faculty looking for ways to involve teachers in their own learning and for K-12 teachers who want a role in their own professional growth and development. Students need to understand and experience what it means to belong to a community (Noddings, 1996). Teacher educators need to design graduate work for experienced teachers that emphasizes teaching as collegial work (Tom, 1999).

Researchers can build on and extend our conceptions of learning community by examining other contexts in teacher education. Teasing apart the definition of learning community in teacher education offers suggestions about the nature, goals and roles of participants, (e.g., the importance of support, voice, and respect). A more in-depth look at each of these constructs can inform research and programmatic work. For example, our findings suggest that learning communities in the context of a program based on constructivist principles serve a variety of roles. Are there similar roles in programs based on other theoretical frameworks?

The structures and processes identified as contributing to community inform our continued research and practice and also offer possibilities to others contemplating programmatic reform. It is important to continue the discussion on what facilitates community as well as the struggles as both causing discomfort and encouraging growth and change. Time, conflict, and alignment with reality are inherent in education. Our working hypotheses are that: a) we can use struggles to our benefit and b) learning communities can provide the support to move participants through their struggles.

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Table 1. Coming together - respectfully: The nature, roles and goals of a learning community.

	COMING TOGETHER (Characteristics of the group)	RESPECTFULLY (Qualities of the environment)
Nature	The learning community is unique, shifting, and thriving.	Each persons' life impacts the group. It (community) is like any friendship. You have to keep checking in and changing to make it work. **(Fluid)**
	The individual contributes to the whole.	People are willing to make the community better by being an active participants. They take responsibility as members. **(Participation)**
	The learning community is continually changing and growing.	Its not only okay but essential to question each other, stretching ourselves.**(Growth and change)**
Goals	We are dedicated to common goals for improvement.	We share information, questions, processes, and frustrations to meet our goals. **(Sharing)**
	We make sure we all get there.	The group supports and encourages each other academically, socially and emotionally. **(Support)**
Roles	Everyone is a teacher and a learner.	Everyone has a voice and is encouraged to contribute. My ideas can be shared and listened to. **(Voice)**
		There is an appreciation/respect of diverse thought and ideas. **(Respect)**

Table 2: Structures and Processes that Strengthen Community

	Faculty and student structures	Faculty and student processes
Building and mainlining community	Cohort model Integrated coursework Retreat Norms and agreements Community meetings Celebrations	Developing trust Building relationships Providing time Sharing concerns Checking in with each other Keeping a barometer
Learning and working together	Faculty on retainer meetings Negotiated content Classroom visits Action research projects Dialogue journals Benchmark groups Capstone Focus groups	Calling to question major concepts Experimenting in classrooms Shared decision making Reflection Dialogue Continuous learning, progress Self-assessment Faculty and peer feedback

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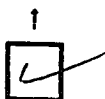
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