TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP AND THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLING IN AFFLUENT COMMUNITIES

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract
Since its earliest incarnations, the American public school system has represented an illustrative microcosm of the political tensions that lie at the heart of our philosophical understanding of democracy and constitutional authority. These tensions—between the idealism of Thomas Jefferson and the realism of Alexander Hamilton, between democratic politics and capitalist markets, and between public good responsibility and private good expectations—combine with the ever increasing list of normative requirements of the school leadership role and represent common, challenging phenomena experienced by school leaders across the country. The tensions are even more astutely present in affluent communities where homogeneous populations of upper-middle class Whites enjoy and appreciate the comfort of the status quo, while presuming the public school’s responsibility for the provision of private sector success, and these complex issues coalesce into a nuanced problem that provided the basis for this study. As the role of the school principal becomes increasingly challenging and complex, and the predominant social construction in affluent school communities focuses almost exclusively on private good outcomes for students, and ignores the public good responsibility of citizenship training, principals become situated at the heart of this tension. In order to learn more about this complicated and nuanced problem I undertook a critical phenomenological study that sought to explore how principals in affluent communities experience, understand, and address the tensions that exist between private good expectations and public good responsibility for schooling. This study addressed the following sub-questions:

- How do principals in affluent communities describe their work (especially in regard to their beliefs about public good outcomes or private good outcomes for students)?
- What influences and pressures shape their beliefs regarding their work?
- What influences and pressures shape their practices?
• Is there any congruence or conflict between those beliefs and pressures, and their practices?

It is important to note that this study was undertaken with a critical lens which was constructed upon a theoretical framework of transformative leadership (Shields, 2010). This justice-oriented approach to educational leadership requires that educators focus on notions of power and privilege and on the deconstruction of knowledge frameworks that prevent inclusion and equity and their reconstruction in more inclusive ways.

To carry out this study I sought the participation of seven elementary school principals in affluent school communities and had multiple co-intentional conversations with each participant. Through the use of a qualitative, phenomenological methodology (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Moustakas, 1994) and a co-intentional meaning-making process (Duarte, 2000), I learned that these principals do indeed find themselves at the heart of the tension between public good and private good purposes for schooling, and that the influences and pressures that shape their beliefs and practices are largely constructed around dominant, hegemonic values that require them to focus almost exclusively on private good outcomes for students.

The results from this study should prove valuable to a variety of stakeholders, namely practicing school leaders in affluent school communities, those who train aspiring educational leaders, and scholars intent on further advancing the causes of justice, democracy, and transformative leadership. Key recommendations include a call to conduct further research regarding the public good/private good tension, school leadership in affluent communities, and the notions of justice and transformative leadership within that affluent context. Furthermore, the findings and discussion demonstrate that principals in affluent communities need a better understanding of the public good/private good tension, the powerful role that hegemony and
social construction play in the shaping of beliefs and practices, and the role that transformative leadership can play in addressing these challenging issues.
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# Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction.................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter 2 Review of Literature .................................................................................................. 13

Chapter 3 Methodology ............................................................................................................. 61

Chapter 4 Findings .................................................................................................................... 81

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusions .................................................................................... 156

References .................................................................................................................................. 204

Appendix A Interview Guide ...................................................................................................... 212

Appendix B Interview Consent .................................................................................................. 214

Appendix C IRB Approval .......................................................................................................... 216
Chapter 1

Introduction

For as long as groups of people have organized themselves into political, economic, and civic associations, an inherent tension has provided the foundation for a political discourse that pits the rights and achievements of the individual against the benefits and well-being of collective society. Nearly 250 years ago Rousseau (1762) wrote of the challenges associated with this tension explicitly, noting the difference between the general will and the will of all. While the former represents the collective needs and desires of civil society the latter represents the conflagration of needs and wants from each individual within that society, and this structural and political tension represents a conflict that still exists between public good and private good expectations from governmental institutions. Today, as even the most peripheral glance at the corner newsstand would likely suggest, the American public’s relationship with government continues to be complicated, nuanced, and tenuous, and nowhere is this relationship more thorny or complex than with our philosophical understanding of the role of America’s public schools (Ravitch, 2010).

Since its earliest incarnations, the American public school system has represented an illustrative microcosm of the political tensions that rest at the heart of our philosophical understanding of democracy and constitutional authority, and as appears increasingly relevant today, we seem at once to be both incarcerated within and thrust away from these historically discordant roots. As citizens, it often seems that we have come to believe in a government that can at once provide a foundation for equitable and egalitarian societal structures while somehow simultaneously encouraging the stimulation of the individualistic meritocratic ideals that our society values, and as much of the current reform rhetoric surrounding schooling clearly implies,
the modern public school system seems to have become a primary stage, a forward area as it were, upon which this conflict is to be waged. As Labaree (1997) astutely suggested, “schools, it seems, occupy an awkward position at the intersection between what we hope society will become and what we think it really is” (p. 41), and this position—between the idealism of Thomas Jefferson and the realism of Alexander Hamilton, between democratic politics and capitalist markets, and between public good responsibility and private good expectations—represents a common, challenging phenomenon experienced by school leaders across the country.

The tension between public good responsibility and private good expectations for schooling belies the seemingly ever increasing list of normative requirements of the school leader, and this normative context, one that puts almost continuous strain on the school leader, works to reinforce the way that principals experience this tension. This tension influences principals’ abilities to carry out their professional responsibilities in a cyclical, self-reinforcing fashion, and as Hallinger (2005) noted, although school principals have historically been responsible for myriad roles and responsibilities today in, what some have termed the accountability era, the tensions noted above only add to the “nearly impossible” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003) normative structures of the job. In his discussion of school leadership, Starratt (2004) noted that school leaders “function in an environment of nearly continuous turbulence challenged by concerns and pressures that compete for their attention and resolution. The turbulence is inescapable” (p. 30), and this turbulence represents a very real challenge faced by school principals, made all the more confounding and complicated by the requirement that principals not forget the public good responsibility inherent in the tension noted above. In his study of principals and social justice, Theoharis (2007) noted this requirement explicitly,
suggesting that leadership for social justice is exponentially complicated by society’s social construction of power, privilege, and the maintenance of the status quo, and this challenging normative structure requires constant attention from often encumbered principals.

While the dichotomous, public good/private good tension that rests at the heart of America’s social construction has clearly permeated the normative functioning of the school principalship, it is interesting to note that some of the communities in which that conflict may well be most salient, upper class affluent communities, are also ironically locales where the tension has received limited, if any attention. Goodman (2001) suggested that the dominant social construction in America today, that of a White, Christian, middle-class, heterosexual construct, has become the point of reference against which people and structures tend to be judged, and this construction clearly exists in the affluent community’s relationship with public schools. As Brantlinger (2003) suggested, “the actual American educational system slants the field to give the best chances to those who are already advantaged” (p. 191), and many “educated middle class parents . . . do not think beyond their own children when they interact with schools” (p. x). Today, in affluent school communities across the United States, homogeneous populations of upper-middle class Whites both enjoy and appreciate the comfort of the status quo, often without recognition of their own societal hegemony, and by presuming the public school’s responsibility for the provision of private sector success, these families are (often unknowingly) working to undermine the foundation of the American school system. As West (2004) suggested, “the consolidation of elite power was the primary object of democratic revolt [and] this will to transform corrupted forms of elite rule into more democratic ways of life is an extraordinary force” (204). If in some respects democracy portends to wrest power from the few into the hands of the many, then clear implications exist for principals in affluent communities who constantly
cope with the needs and desires of affluent, power holding members of society, and the shared experience of this phenomenon clearly requires a salient theoretical lens through which to contextualize the tension. As shall be addressed further, the theory of transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) clearly fits the bill.

**Problem Statement**

The complex issues noted above, the political tension between public goods and private goods, the significant shape that tension takes in our schools, the demanding normative expectations of the principalship, and the social construction of affluent communities, all coalesce into an unambiguous and nuanced problem facing the American education system today, and it is this problem that provided the basis for this study. Explicitly stated, the problem statement for this study was: *The role of the school principal is increasingly challenging and complex, and the predominant social construction in affluent school communities, one that focuses almost exclusively on private good outcomes for students, ignores the public good responsibility of citizenship training in a democracy, and situates principals at the heart of that tension.*

There are several important reasons that establish sound rationale for considering this problem and conducting a study regarding it. In one respect, our understanding of the purpose of schooling clearly represents one of the most crucial and fundamental notions that a contemporary school leader must consider. This understanding directly impacts practice at numerous levels of the schooling structure and thus, an understanding of it is critical. Interestingly, although this understanding seems implicitly vital to our overall ability to address systemic issues within our schools a clear irony exists in the fact that multiple aspects of this problem are not holistically
addressed in the extant literature. As Creswell (2007) suggested, “the strongest and most scholarly rationale for a study . . . comes from the scholarly literature: a need exists to add to or fill a gap in the literature or to provide a voice for individuals not heard in the literature” (p. 102), and in this respect the impetus for this study seems clear. Simply put, enhancing our understanding of three aspects of this study, the public good/private good tension, the ways that principals experience that tension, and the relationship between school leadership and the confounding role that affluent communities play in that tension, have, I believe, contributed greatly to the field by adding to our knowledge about subjects that have not fully been addressed in the literature. Ultimately the addition of this knowledge in what seems to be an increasingly polarized world represents sound motivation and justification for this study.

**Purpose Statement**

To address the problem noted above I have conducted a study with the following purpose: *The purpose of this critical phenomenological study was to explore how principals in affluent communities experience, understand, and address the tensions that exist between private good expectations and public good responsibility for schooling.* This study addressed the following sub-questions:

- How do principals in affluent communities describe their work (especially in regard to their beliefs about public good outcomes or private good outcomes for students)?
- What influences and pressures shape their beliefs regarding their work?
- What influences and pressures shape their practices?
- Is there any congruence or conflict between those beliefs and pressures, and their practices?
Theoretical Framework

The theory of transformative leadership represents an ideal philosophy for critically contextualizing the public good/private good tension as it is experienced by principals in affluent school communities. This theory, which finds its foundation in the concepts of critique and promise, focuses on righting wrongs and deconstructing injustice, and as such, it seeks to create inclusive learning environments that aim to break down existing societal barriers that perpetuate inequity. The work of Shields (2005, 2009, 2010) greatly informs our knowledge of transformative leadership as a distinct leadership theory, and her framework provides a valuable lens through which to view the public good/private good tension. Shields (2010) defined the theory as:

leadership grounded in an activist agenda, one that combines a rights based theory that every individual is entitled to be treated with dignity, respect, and absolute regard with a social justice theory of ethics that takes these rights to a societal level. (p. 571)

She also (2010) noted that, “it is the essential work of the educational leader to create learning contexts or communities in which social, political and cultural capital is enhanced” (p. 572), and to “address issues of power and privilege” (p. 571). It is through this transformative lens that education can be seen as a tool for emancipation, a lever for justice, an instrument of organizational improvement, and most importantly, the impetus for true societal transformation. Ultimately though, for all of these actions to occur the theory of transformative leadership requires an engaged, activist educational leader who must ask fundamental questions, “about the purposes of schooling, about which ideas should be taught, and about who is successful” (Shields, 2010, p. 570), and thus it can greatly inform our understanding of the public good/private good tension as it is experienced by principals in affluent school communities.
Methodology

As noted above, I used a critical phenomenological approach to this study that helped me to better understand and gain perspective regarding how principals experience the phenomenon of the public good/private good tension within schooling. The practice of phenomenology is greatly influenced by the work of Moustakas (1994), and I also turned to Creswell (2007, 2009) and Duarte (2000) to help inform the methodological approach of this study. Simply put, the purpose of phenomenology is to gain in-depth and nuanced perspective on a shared, lived experience: a unique phenomenon whose essence is deeply described by the researcher. As Creswell (2007) noted, “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” (p. 58). By taking a critical perspective I positioned myself in the study in a co-intentional fashion (Duarte, 2000; Freire, 2000), thus using my knowledge, experience, and theoretical perspective as a basis for communicating with research participants. In a phenomenological research study the inquirer collects data by conducting extended and in-depth interviews with a number of participants who have experienced the phenomenon in question before then developing a composite understanding of both what the participants experience and how they experience it (Moustakas, 1994).

As Creswell (2007, 2009) and Moustakas (1994) both noted (and as should be obvious based on the description and philosophical approach of phenomenology), it is essential that all participants in a phenomenological study have experienced the phenomenon being studied, and for this reason, criterion sampling represented the first crucial step in the site selection process. Based on the nuanced understanding of the phenomenon noted above it was clear that each participant must meet at least two important criteria: they needed to be school principals and they needed work in affluent communities. In an effort to ensure that both of these criteria were met I
undertook a multistep process for finding participants that began with a reputational approach to site selection. For this purpose I began by communicating with educational leaders from across the state of Illinois in an effort to find school districts that have a reputation as wealthy and/or affluent. Upon gathering this information, I then further narrowed the pool of perspective participants by applying a matrix that consisted of multiple economic factors, the Equalized Assessed Valuation (EAV) of the perspective districts, and the reported percentage of free and reduced lunch students at the school level. This multistep approach provided me with a list of 27 perspective participants who I then solicited for participation by sending letters and emails with the ultimate goal of narrowing the participant list to about 7 to 12. Ultimately seven principals agreed to participate in this study, and I conducted multiple, in depth interviews with each of them.

**Definitions**

As I begin to explore the concepts noted above I recognize the importance of defining some critical terms that will be used regularly throughout the remainder of this document. I will begin by providing my own basis for highlighting the criteria that will be used methodologically to define what constitutes an affluent community. Then I will define three important terms whose understanding will be critical both for me as I interview participants and analyze the data, and ultimately for readers who deem the final document worthy of reading. It is important to note explicitly that the critical philosophical lens of this study is built upon a post modern paradigm that presupposes a subjective view of truth and knowledge. For this reason the definitions provided below are presented within this foundational subjectivist context.
Affluent Community

For the purposes of this study the definition of an affluent community will be based upon the Fordham Institute’s (2010) report, America’s Private Public Schools. Here affluent schools will be defined as communities in which the public schools are, “effectively closed to poor children” (Fordham Institute, 2010, p. 3). As the Fordham Institute’s report on America’s Private Public Schools suggested:

These institutions—generally found in wealthy urban enclaves or well-heeled suburbs—educate many of the children of America’s elite while proudly waving the “public school” flag. But they hardly embody the “common school” ideal. In fact, by exclusively serving well-off children, they are arguably more private—certainly more exclusive—than many elite private schools, which, after all, generally offer at least some scholarships to low-income students. (p. 3)

For the purposes of their study, the Fordham Institute defined these schools as those where low income students (defined by eligibility for the National School Lunch Program) make up less than 5% of the population.

Private Good

To state it as simply as possible, the term private good equates to private rights and individual gain. Politically speaking, a private good is any good afforded to an individual solely for her/his benefit, be it, an object (property, a car), a benefit (a job, health insurance), an opportunity (travel, a college education), or otherwise. In terms of education a private good could be defined as any one of these items, and it is important to note explicitly here that the modern school is expected, in some sense, to provide private good results as an outcome for students. To be sure, as has been clear since the era when Tocqueville traveled the early American frontier, many components of what we as American citizens believe to be synonymous with our capitalist democracy represent private goods, and it is important to note explicitly that it is not my intent to subjectively give the term private good a negative connotation.
Public Good

While the term private good is most closely associated with individual gain and personal rights, the public good is much more concerned with the commonweal and the interconnected well-being of the collective. Again, to address the issue in political terms, the public good is associated with things like majority control, political equality, and democratic justice, and it requires a type of shared commitment and collective action that is absent in a purely private good realm. In regard to education then, a public good commitment requires a shared understanding regarding the common purpose of public education, an obligation to justice and equality, and a focus on that which provides students with the skills needed for a successful role as a citizen in a democracy.

Public Good/Private Good Tension

Throughout this dissertation I have referred to the public good/private good tension (or the public/private tension, or simply the tension), and when I do so, it will be in reference to the natural conflict that occurs when two, generally opposing notions end up in opposition to each other. The tension as it can be understood in the context of this paper pits two, often disparate, expected educational outcomes against each other in such a way as to put stress on both the overall system and on individual members of that system who are required to act and make decisions within it. For example, to be concerned about equitable programming for students is quite different than being concerned about individualized programming for a particular student. Throughout this paper I have addressed how the relationship between these two opposing notions has drastically shifted toward the latter in recent years, and it is my supposition that this arrangement places our philosophical approach to schooling on very precarious grounds.
Limitations and Delimitations

One of the greatest challenges of the methodological approach of phenomenology, or any qualitative methodology for that matter, is the requirement that the researcher refrain from allowing her/his personal biases, expectations, and preconceived notions to interfere with the analysis of data and meaning making. As noted above, I took a critical phenomenological approach to this study and thus purposefully utilized both my own experiences and theoretical and conceptual knowledge as a resource for further contextualizing the findings in this study. In short, I recognized from the outset that everyone brings certain biases and individual perspectives to every situation, and thus what was important in this regard was not the purposeful exclusion of my own perspective but rather the assurance that neither my bias, no anyone else’s, distorted the data that was collected.

It is also important to note explicitly that I delimited the pool of participants in some substantive ways. First and most obviously, I limited this study to principals in affluent communities, and while this clearly connects directly to the purpose and problem statements of my study I must also acknowledge that this narrowed the perspective of the phenomenon being explored. If my assertion that the public good/private good tension does indeed represent a subject worthy of study holds true then the experiences of principals in a variety of communities could certainly provide meaningful and rich data. In addition, I limited the participating principals to the state of Illinois. This delimitation allowed me as a researcher to narrow the frame of the research and provide more specific understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Ultimately similar studies may well need to be conducted in other communities across the country. Finally I note here that I chose to delimit the participant pool to elementary school principals in these affluent communities. While it seems supremely likely that principals at other
levels experience the public/private tension, I delimited the pool in this study not only for the sake of consistency and continuity, but also due to the numerous extenuating circumstances that including secondary schools could induce regarding site selection and participant identification. As with the other delimitations similar research at the secondary level may well become a future recommendation.

**Significance of the Study**

I believe that this study, conducted properly and meaningfully, contributes to the field in some substantive ways. First, and most broadly, I believe that this study sought to meaningfully address some of the most fundamental and basic questions about the purpose of schooling from a practitioner level. Much of the literature regarding the purpose of schooling is both conceptual and academic in nature, and I believe that a distinct connection between this subject and the local level where practitioners carry out the daily responsibilities of educating students can provide some real value. In this regard it is important to acknowledge that practices are directly influenced by goals, intent, and underlying purposes, and as such, an understanding of these concepts will be truly significant for school leaders who experience this phenomenon. Finally, I also believe that this study represents an emerging research agenda for social justice and more specifically, for the theory of transformative leadership. As I have noted, much of the work in this area focuses on schools with large proportions of minority and low socioeconomic students, schools where injustice and inequity are already blatantly conspicuous and where society’s power imbalance is already all too obvious. If the goal of transformative leadership is true societal transformation then all areas of society must be understood and approached, especially affluent communities where power and privilege already represent the status quo.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

American public education faces a continued crisis of purpose that exemplifies the disparity in our political and social policies. In one regard, public education represents the one truly egalitarian ideal of our society—free, universal public education—yet conversely, staggering inequity belies our meritocratic belief in the power of the individual. How can a system designed as a public good, exist in a society that increasingly expects individual results? How can a society focused on private good results foster collective need for civic and democratic virtues like justice and equity? In this chapter I seek to deconstruct the American social construction of the purposes of schooling—specifically focused on the often dichotomous prospects of the private good/public good tension—by focusing on three specific components of our educational system: the philosophy, the pedagogical and curricular content, and the processes of educational implementation. I will then highlight how these three notions lead specifically to the construction of desired outcomes of schooling in affluent school communities, and after addressing that social construction, I will seek to deconstruct this perspective in a new section. This section will utilize the lens of Shields (2010), who draws heavily on Freire’s (1970, 2000) notion of critical consciousness, or conscientization to describe the important transformative steps of awareness, critique, and action. In this section I will seek to highlight the specific components of Shields (2009, 2010) transformative leadership framework that can actively support school leaders as they work to contextualize, understand, and balance the tensions between private good expectations and public good responsibility for schooling. The concluding section of this chapter seeks to point a way forward for considering transformative leadership in affluent school communities.
American Schooling: Private Good or Public Good?

In the United States, both historically and practically speaking, citizens maintain a nuanced, complex, and often downright complicated relationship with our schools (Guttmann, 2001). Public schools seem at once to be perceived as both the root cause of and the ultimate solution for our seemingly ever increasing pile of ills (Bush, 1994; Giroux, 1995; Obama, 2010), and it is no surprise that this tenuous relationship resides at the most basic and fundamental understanding of the purposes of formalized schooling within our public education system. Guttmann (2001) suggested that the tension between our understanding and belief in individual rights and meritocracy and the counter conception of civic virtue and egalitarianism poses a significant burden for educating Americans, and these prevailing, dichotomous social norms greatly influence our cultural understanding of the purpose of schooling while simultaneously representing a significant challenge for school leaders in a pluralistic society. Thus, it is crucial that we consider the diverse systemic expectations that we hold for our schools if we are ever going to find ourselves in a position to truly effect significant and lasting societal change, both within the system and outside of it. I will analyze the purposes of schooling broadly, focusing on the philosophy, the content, and the method of implementation to schooling. Within each section I will address the tension that exists for principals and other school leaders as they attempt to lead schools and find a balance between society’s ever increasing private good expectation for schooling and their own equally fundamental public good responsibility for it.

Educational Philosophy

Ever since Thomas Jefferson composed the Declaration of Independence the American dream has represented a clear juxtaposition that counters the public good of collectivism against
the private good notion of individual attainment. The egalitarian values at the heart of this document provide the underpinnings of our country’s democratic philosophy, and they exemplify the inherent strength of the American ideal by encouraging collective freedoms as a means for achieving individual attainment. Throughout its history, America has embodied both opportunity and capability, with these values representing the foundation upon which many of our beliefs are grounded. Yet, embedded within these values is a clear irony that contrasts our egalitarian values with our beliefs about what they mean for us as individuals. Here in America we champion the common individual while simultaneously seeking to be uncommon, constantly striving to achieve greater success rife with the knowledge that we are afforded that opportunity by our American egalitarian philosophy: *I believe in your right and ability to reach whatever goal you may have, I just believe in mine a little more.* We continue to be mired in a conflict that is at once surprising and wholly accepted—an environment that pits our egalitarian public good roots against our meritocratic, private good heritage—and nowhere is this conflict more present or relevant that within our public education system. In the remainder of this section I will analyze these two opposing philosophical views.

**Egalitarian Commitment**

In one respect, the philosophical basis of the American educational system is broadly egalitarian, and this historical understanding has become synonymous with our understanding of American history. As Mathews (1996) suggested, most American citizens believe that “public schools were as much a foundation for American democracy as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights” (p. 11), and the historical lessons taught to us by the likes of Thomas Jefferson and Alexis de Tocqueville consistently reinforce this notion (Dotts, 2010). Tocqueville (1835) wrote of the importance of developing an “apprenticeship of liberty” (p. 251) in American civil society,
and Jefferson supported this claim with his own assertions regarding the importance of an educated citizenry in a democracy. While other founding fathers, including Alexander Hamilton, sought to keep common men from the political arena, Jefferson recognized the importance of the link between democratic self-sufficiency and educated citizens (Barber, 1997), and his recognition permeates the American ethos to this day. As Barber (1997) suggested, “Jefferson knew well enough that liberty is acquired and that . . . without citizens, democracy is a hollow shell” (p. 27). Simply put, an educated populous is requisite for democracy, for without citizens there is no democracy, and without public schooling, there can be no citizens. This notion undergirds the American understanding of schooling still today. As McMannon (1997) suggested, although complex diversity and ever-shifting social constructions reinforce some serious inequities and differences, “what all schools have in common . . . is an underlying belief that educating the young is a task that simply must be done” (p. 4). Ultimately, the history of public schooling in the United States is a storied one, and that story is rooted in a public good, egalitarian ethos that strives to provide opportunity for all.

The core of American understanding of the egalitarian purpose of schooling is constructed upon three basic themes, collectivism, civic virtue, and equity, and each of these broad themes reinforces this claim. The first and broadest of these themes, collectivism, rests upon the supposition that America is a country founded upon the broad ideals of supporting the collective. As Westbrook (1996) noted, “democratic public schools are ostensibly . . . schools that educate every student for the responsibilities and benefits of participation in public life” (p. 125), and these two notions, responsibility and participation, are critical to our understanding of public good education and collectivism. Responsibility implies caring and commitment toward others, a shared belief in the unity of society, and an understanding of the importance of
what Rousseau (1762) termed, the general will, a collective consensus of the combined needs and interests of society. Dewey (1976) highlighted the importance of this responsibility noting that “what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all if its children” (p. 5). This public good approach to educational responsibility leads directly back to participation and Jefferson’s notion that the shared responsibility of public education provides “for the preservation of a due degree of liberty” (Center on Educational Policy, 2007, p. 10). Ultimately, this collectivist approach is critical to the egalitarian philosophy of public schooling.

The civic engagement noted above leads directly to another critical component of the egalitarian philosophy of schooling: civic virtue that strengthens social life (Putnam, 2001). Although Americans believe many things and hold many values in relation to their own understanding about democratic responsibilities, we do share a belief in robust democracy based upon strong relationships and devotion to civic interests and causes (Goodlad, 1996). The key notion here is that civic virtue implies more than engagement in political causes or self-governance but instead goes further by fomenting collective action that honors specific ideals. When citizens stand together to protest injustice, share perspectives on a community blog about the importance of local infrastructure, or, as Putnam (2001) noted, join choral societies, they are doing more than building friendships or finding common ground; they are fostering legitimate and rigorous relationships that strengthen the community and public life. Mathews (1996) noted that this strengthening of the public, writ large, represents a fundamental, and necessary, prerequisite of societal independence, and as the public good approach to education would suggest, this step is vital.
Of course, for the public to be strengthened in the manner noted by Mathews (1996), equity and opportunity are requisite, and these important notions represent the third aspect of the egalitarian philosophy of education that fosters the public good. Green (2001) suggested that the notion of egalitarianism is founded upon “outrage at the disparity between the lives of those who possess an immense superfluity and of those many millions more who lack even bare sufficiency” (p. 176), and this outrage, pointed toward inequity and injustice represents the fulcrum for action that is so vital in public good centered institutions. The public good philosophy of schooling exists because we, as a society, have both the willingness and the desire to ally ourselves with one another, and this critical understanding allows the democratic school to become, “an institution which aims to promote the ideal of ‘free and equal’ by taking proper account of individual differences and by reliance on the principle of community living” (Bode, 2001, p. 95). Thankfully, it would seem, the public good ethos of egalitarianism is alive and well in our society’s understanding of the purpose of schooling.

**Meritocratic Ideals**

Although the egalitarian philosophy clearly represents a strong and salient voice for public good, it also is apparent that an equally vibrant private good perspective exists in the meritocratic ethos of the American Dream. While many perspectives of educational history demonstrate this egalitarian ethos, each of these perspectives can be connected directly to an equally meritocratic philosophy that also represents a conception of American schooling, and those conceptions shine through to this day. As the Center on Education Policy highlighted (2007) Jefferson believed in an educated citizenry (as long as those citizens were “bright” and “males”), Mann worked for a universal system of common schooling (that would help, “disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich,” and progressives sought schools that would improve
society (by creating tracked curricular programs that leveled students). Even today, our liberal, community-organizing president, Barack Obama, seeks to reform our school system by creating competitive grants and charter schools that focus on individual achievement (Obama, 2010). Ultimately it seems clear that the philosophy of American schooling is mired in the private good/public good dichotomy, and the remainder of this section focuses on the private good perspective, noting three meritocratic aspects of this philosophical tension: individualism, competitiveness, and tracking.

In one respect, a rampant and widespread sense of individualism permeates the American ethos and our collective understanding of the purpose of schooling, and this notion clearly reinforces the private good philosophy of schooling. While Tocqueville’s egalitarian notions of democracy certainly infuse our current understanding of schooling (Dotts, 2010), it also is incumbent upon us to recognize that the democratic system that Tocqueville observed and discussed was largely founded upon a rugged sense of individualism that undergirds much of our perception about the founding of American democracy (Torres, 1998). For Tocqueville (1835), the heart of American democracy could be observed in the fierce work-ethic, belief in individual rights, and spirited economic system that persuaded citizens to work hard and commit themselves to self-improvement, and this perspective can still largely be observed in our philosophical understanding of democratic schooling today. When most Americans think about our “founding fathers” and the democratic ideal we picture the likes of George Washington or Benjamin Franklin almost as caricatures; hard-working, determined, self-made men who forged the foundation of our political and economic freedom in their own hands, and in this view we conceptualize a place for ourselves as citizens. In so doing we unknowingly construct inaccurate models for what we think democracy means and thus, how we think we ought to support its
development. We see, as Goodlad (1996) noted, “a kind of individualism that eschews self-transcendence and the making of a democratic polity; . . . [we see] my life, my liberty, my pursuit of happiness” (p. 95), and we thus focus our democratic lens of the private good of individualism. Clearly this perspective represents a critical component of the tension within our understanding of the purpose of schooling.

As we consider the meritocratic philosophy of schooling in greater depth, it becomes clear that the strong American ethos of individualism relates directly to an equally assertive private good construction: the philosophy of competition. While an understanding of the competitive nature of our approach to schooling will be more fully developed later in this chapter, it is important here to address it in relation to our meritocratic philosophy of schooling. Mann (1848) called schooling, “the great equalizer of the conditions of men” (p. 88). This perception of equality may well have begun with an eye toward equity and the public good by requiring universal access and equitable structures, but it has, over time, shifted the American conception of schooling toward approaches that are not only presupposed to support meritocracy, but that in fact construct more private good focused schools. Labaree (1997) highlighted this philosophical construction of the shifting competitive nature of schooling, noting that the desire for social mobility and attainment shifts the societal construction of schooling into the role of a commodity: a social system that provides “individual students with a competitive advantage in the struggle for desirable social conditions” (p. 42). The empirical work of Matthews (1996) and his colleagues reinforces this notion with its findings that suggested “that people [don’t] talk voluntarily about public schools playing any role beyond preparing their own individual children for the future” (p. 19), and this competitive philosophical approach to schooling has led to an
educational structure that has, for the last hundred years or so, worked to meet the private good needs of students who have matriculated through the system.

The continuing drive for individual achievement represents a final aspect of the private good philosophy of schooling that will be addressed here. The notion of tracking, an educational structure that stratifies and categorizes students into levels that supposedly best meet their individual academic and intellectual needs, typifies this drive for mobility that presupposes some sort of meritocratic purpose to schooling (Giroux, 2005; Houston, 2003; Sirotnik, 2004). Interestingly, this type of tracked educational system, with remedial programming, Advanced Placement courses, and gifted programs often is sold as a public good approach to schooling: a system intent on meeting individual needs as function of collectivism and societal improvement. In truth though, what often occurs philosophically speaking is an expectation that the system be designed as a hierarchy, with personal attainment and individual advantage representing its most salient feature (Labaree, 1997). Schools themselves it seems have not just become a breeding ground for a meritocratic society, but also places of competition themselves, edifices in which we become so entrenched in the opportunities that school will provide for us, that we often lose sight of the goals we can achieve together. Still, this drive for individual achievement permeates the current philosophical construction of the purpose of schooling in America. In the end the tension between private good expectations and public good expectations for schooling seems clearly based in our philosophical understanding of the purpose of schooling.

**Pedagogical Content**

The philosophical tension that provides the foundation of the American public school system clearly leads to the next critical aspect of schooling that must be considered, the
pedagogical and curricular content. As Americans struggle to balance the philosophical underpinnings of our approach to schooling that struggle translates directly into our schools through the curricular content that is presented to students, and it is this diversity of content that represents the focus of the following section. Orr (2001) suggested that “the goal of education is not mastery of subject matter but mastery of one’s person” (p. 236), and yet we would be foolish to ignore the role that subject matter and content play in achieving that personal mastery, for it lies at the heart of the private good/public good tension. The American school system seems to find itself at a constant tipping point regarding what material is important enough to be taught to our students and what can and should be left out of the curriculum. Goodlad (1994) summarized this tension succinctly, noting that parents find it difficult to choose between academic, personal, social, and vocational goals for the schooling of their children. The nuance here presents an intriguing consideration for the school leader intent on balancing the tension between private and public good expectations for schooling because as Bode (2001) suggested, “the school . . . has the obligation to clear away the vagueness or obscurity which prevents us from seeing straight” (p. 98), and yet society’s dichotomous and often conflicting understanding of what can and should be presented as content in our schools often reinforces the obscurity rather than clarifying it. In this section, I will consider two generally divergent perspectives regarding the pedagogical and curricular content that is presented in our school system. In one respect American society seems to expect a broadly democratic, public good curriculum, while in another, the expectation seems to rely on an efficient and solely academic approach.

**Broadly Democratic Curricular Content**

As has already been noted, the philosophical understanding of the purpose of schooling is largely grounded in the ideal of the freedoms provided by American democracy and the educated
citizen, and in one sense it seems clear that this critical public good must be represented within our schools by society’s desire for a broadly democratic curriculum. Barber (1997) explicitly noted this desire, suggesting that “the rights and freedoms of all Americans depend on the survival of democracy. There is only one road to democracy: education . . . the first priority of education must be the apprenticeship of liberty” (p. 31). Simply put, if this “apprenticeship of liberty” does in fact represent a critical aspect of schooling then this ideal clearly requires the inclusion of democratic content in schools. As Darling Hammond (1997) suggested “we cannot sustain our society if we do not seek to invent system-wide supports for schools that allow for high-quality, intellectually challenging, democratically grounded education for all children” (p. 52), and the presence of these supports highlights the critical democratic components. The following section suggests three such components that currently represent the democratic content of schooling: citizenship training, character development, and curricular diversity.

As educators work to prepare schools for students we must consider what content is most important for the burgeoning of structures that support our societal ideals, and as has already been suggested, citizenship training clearly represents one critical element of a democratically engaged content for schooling. For a democracy to flourish, it is requisite that citizens not only have the knowledge required to ensure society’s continued success but also have knowledge of the possible and probable pitfalls that could ultimately deter them. As Spring (1996) astutely and plainly asserted, schools must, “help students to understand the political, economic, and social forces that affect their lives and the organization of society” (p. 57), and in order to provide students with this support, schools must ensure the inclusion of democratic content that fosters citizenship. But what, exactly, does this mean? What this means, simply, is that “school goals need to mirror broader societal goals; otherwise, school life is conducted not as a laboratory for
anything in particular . . . but as an end in itself” (Parker, 1996, p. 184). As Parker asserted (relying extensively on the work of Dewey), if schools fail to foster democratic ideals and broad societal goals then schooling itself becomes meaningless, and it undermines the very notion of democracy that constitutes the public good purpose of schooling. Educational leaders must ask themselves an if/then question: if our democracy requires democratically engaged citizens then what institutional structures exist that can support that aim with explicit content? According to Houston (2003) the answer is simple: “since our forefathers created the republic there has been only one answer and there continues to be only one answer—public education” (p. 10).

In addition to citizenship training, character development represents another requisite component of the content of democratically engaged school structures. While one could certainly argue that the rhetoric surrounding schooling has shifted away from character building in recent years, it seems clear that citizens and educators alike still recognize the important role that character development plays in education practice. Democracy, simply put, is no easy thing, and while the general approach to citizenship training noted above is vital, it cannot succeed alone in fostering a productive society. What is needed, if democratic practices are to take hold, is a moral understanding of the purposes of a functioning society and the wherewithal to foster it. As Dewey (2001) suggested that successful democratic institutions are not predestined, they are not inevitable outcomes of human nature, but rather they represent moral propositions about what could, and should be. Buber (2001) reinforced this notion more explicitly, suggesting that education of character is requisite in a democratic society that is constantly changing and requiring of adaptation. What character provides, Buber noted, “is revealed whenever a situation arises which demands of him a solution of which till then he had perhaps no idea” (p. 110). Thus the public good approach to schooling requires that we provide students with the ability to, “set
intelligence free for the improvement of human life” (Bode, 2001, p. 99): a proposition clearly denoted by Guttmann (2001), who suggested that the democratic schools must simply ensure a nonrepressive and nondiscriminatory content. In other words, a public good approach to democratic schooling requires a content of character that meets the high ideals of democratic practice.

The importance of both citizenship training and character development in democratic educational practices requires a certain level of curricular diversity that supports the public good content of schooling. A just democratic society is built upon the rights and responsibilities of its citizens, and as Soder (1997) suggested, “surely we can agree that if we want children to learn their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democracy, it makes little sense to place them in authoritarian, fascist, top-down environments” (p. 93). The world in which we hope our students will ultimately be successful is one of ever shifting expectations where an individual’s choices can make the difference between collective societal success and chaotic failure, and as such, the public good perspective requires that our curriculum be “noisy, irreverent, and vibrant” (Giroux, 1995, p. 299). Glass (2000) concurred with this supposition, noting that, “curriculum should not be prepackaged and separate from the interests and needs of students, but instead intimately associated with them” (p. 277). Ultimately, lock-step notions of academic rigor do not foster the public good notion of democratic citizenship, and thus the public good content of schooling must have its lens clearly focused on broadly democratic goals of society.

**Efficiently Academic Curricular Content**

It seems clear that American citizens hold some explicit public good expectations for democratically engaged content in schooling, and yet we must also recognize that modern society holds expectations for a more efficient and exclusively academic approach to schooling.
Since Sir William Curtis coined the famous (or infamous) phrase, “the three Rs—reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmatic” in the early 19th century, the public conception of schooling has largely been that of an academic institution tasked with the responsibility of imparting explicit academic knowledge to students, and this conception continues to hold sway in contemporary society to this day (Meier, 2000; Ravitch, 2010). A quick perusal of any recent edition of *Education Week*, would certainly reinforce this perception (Klein, 2011). Today, educators talk about *The Common Core*, national educational standards that represent requisite achievement benchmarks for schooling; we talk about Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programming that encourages specific academic coursework for all students; and in general, our system prescribes extremely explicit assessments of content knowledge for students starting in the early grades of elementary school. And amidst all of this rhetoric rests the tacit agreement of American citizens who continue to encourage the explicitly academic approach to schooling. Ultimately, this efficiently academic approach represents a private good perspective of the purpose of schooling in that it presents academic outcomes as the sole force for individual success. In the remainder of this section I will highlight three components of educational content that reinforce society’s desire for an explicitly academic approach to schooling: the desire that students be taught explicit content knowledge, a continued effort toward standardization and curricular homogeneity in the public school curriculum, and an expectation that these measures ensure some level of systemic efficiency in our public school system.

In one sense it is clear that American society maintains explicit expectations for the presentation and cultivation of content knowledge in schools. Indeed, if we return yet again to some of the earliest conceptions of American democracy and schooling, it is apparent that Jefferson and Tocqueville recognized the importance of explicit academic content in schooling.
Barber (1997) noted that Jefferson so believed in the importance of education that he considered his founding of the University of Virginia to be one of his most significant accomplishments, and while this accomplishment certainly contributed to the efficacy of our democratic republic, it also plainly represented the value that American citizens place on the knowledge acquisition aspect of education and the shift that this value has made toward private good outcomes. Labaree (1997) highlighted this perspective, noting that the social mobility goal of education in effect turns content knowledge into a type of commodity that reinforces societal stratification. Within this structure, parents and students alike both desire and expect the presentation of specific content knowledge in schools so that it may either increase or reinforce their standing in society; the current rhetoric surrounding schooling and educational reform focuses almost exclusively on this conception of academic attainment of these private good notions (Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Lewis, & Schaps, 1999). Ultimately, as Good (1999) plainly noted over 10 years ago, “students’ mastery of academic content . . . has been and will continue to be an important performance expectation for public schooling in America” (p. 383), and it seems clear that this expectation has only become increasingly significant since the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act.

This shared societal expectation for private good content in schooling leads to the development of efficiency-focused bureaucratic structures that are specifically designed to provide this private good-oriented content. Darling Hammond (1997) noted that the efficient administration and management of large numbers of students provided the impetus of the bureaucratic school system that was created at the turn of the 20th century (and that still largely exists today), and this structure still reinforces the private good approach to efficient school structures today. The prospect of fostering diversity and justice in the curricular content of
schooling is seen as a challenging, messy notion to some, one that would not only require a radical rethinking from our current approach to public education, but that would also make our structures less consistent and academically focused. For these reasons we narrow our conception of schooling and convince ourselves that pure academic content represents its own form of efficient educational virtue. As Murphy (2007) suggested, “only when the acquisition of information and skills is combined with proper desire for true knowledge do we begin to acquire intellectual virtue” (p. 659), and as citizens consider the content that they desire for schooling this recognition of the importance of intellectual virtue and efficient academic content in schooling clearly symbolizes our private good expectations for schooling.

The private good conception of efficient academic knowledge presentation as a major purpose of schooling is so universal and pervasive that it naturally guides the American educational system toward a more narrow and standardized understanding of the purpose of schooling, and this systemic tapering requires consistent and shared academic expectations for students, which thus requires the presentation of more specific and narrowed content (Labaree, 1997; Meier, 2000; Ravitch, 2010). In simple terms, a recurring cycle works to constantly reinforce itself as the private good expectation of schooling increasingly calls for a solely academic curriculum that more and more citizens feel compelled to access. As larger and larger numbers of citizens seek out this supposedly rarified status, the stakes continue to increase and the academic nature of schooling plays a larger and larger role in our conception of schooling, which then encourages more and more citizens to strive for attainment of it. What we get, according to Labaree (1997) and Apple (2005), is an understanding of schooling as an extrinsic, commodified exchange value, a system that supplants the desire for actual learning with the desire for credentials whose, “value derives not from the useful knowledge they symbolize, but for the
kind of job for which they can be exchanged” (Labaree, 1997, p. 55). The bottom line resides in the fact that the desire for purely academic content in schooling is not just representative of the private good focus of schooling but is in fact at least part of the impetus for it. As shall be addressed further, this has striking implications for leaders seeking to balance the tension between public good and private good expectations for schooling.

**Processes of Educational Implementation**

As the last section suggested, the tension in America’s philosophical understanding of the purpose of schooling makes its way into classrooms through the content that is presented to students, and it is important to note that the tension becomes more complex and nuanced as I highlight the various and sometimes dichotomous ways that the this content is presented to students. For just as the content itself is often in tension, so too is the method used to present it. As I further address the method or approach to education and its relationship with the purpose of schooling, I shall once again note two dichotomous perspectives that rest in tension with each other. In one sense there is a recognition that education in a democracy must rely on civic engagement because, as Mathews (1996) suggested, educators must make choices together so they may then act together. In another sense a completely opposing view must be recognized; one that “defines schooling as an important tool for protecting the nation [from] . . . fierce economic competition” (Kerr, 1997, p. 76). In either case what is most striking about the tension between private good and public good expectations for schooling is the nearly universally agreed upon supposition that whatever the expectation, the school *must* play a role. Here we return to Dewey (2001) who noted that, “neither competition nor cooperation can be judged as traits of human nature. They are names for certain relations among the actions of individuals as the
relations actually obtain in a community” (p. 164). They are, in other words, the responsibility of an external structure to support and foment: they are the responsibility of the school. In the following section I will highlight this responsibility through the two competing lenses of engagement and competitiveness.

**Education as Civic Engagement**

Civic engagement is a requisite component of democratic society. It is, as Putnam (2001) suggested “what makes democracy work” (p. 25), and this function of democratic society clearly represents an appropriate method for engaging students in educational content. As Barber (2001) suggested, public schooling represents, “our sole public resource: the only place where . . . we try to shape our children to live in a democratic society” (p. 20), and for this reason it is clearly incumbent upon educators to approach schooling with this notion in mind. While purely public good minded educators could possibly chose to ignore the economic implications of educational practice it also is important to recognize that whatever the goal, civic engagement represents a vital approach to schooling. Darling-Hammond (1997) noted that even if educators consider economic perspectives as an educational purpose it is incumbent upon them to “educate in ways that enable people to participate actively in an inclusive social and political life” (p. 44).

Educators must, in other words, educate students through a method of civic engagement if society is to find its own success, however that success might be defined. In the remainder of this section I will highlight specific ways that school leaders can recognize the public good method of educational practice by fostering collaboration, ensuring dynamic learning spaces, and supporting broad societal goals.

Most explicitly, the notion of civic engagement as a method for approaching educational practice is founded upon the concept of collaboration: the idea that members of a democratic
society must live and work together based on some common interest. This notion presupposes critical interactions between citizens who are seeking to improve things, both for themselves, and for society, and it thusly requires explicit exposure to such practices that must occur in some systemic fashion, namely in the school. The work of Putnam (2001) is salient to highlight here as he suggested that the key to democratic action is social capital—“networks and norms of civic engagement” (p. 30) that foster collaboration and strong democratic and societal success.

Westbrook (1996) concurred with Putnam, noting that, “democracy does not leave citizens alone; it brings them together to deliberate on and act in their common interests” (p. 126). Ultimately, the supposition is a simple one: “the sustenance and renewal of socially democratic communities requires the existence or creation of a considerable amount of social capital in citizens” (Goodlad, 1996, p. 104). This plainly requires that schools support and foster collaboration as a means for ensuring that the method of civic engagement supports democracy.

The presence of dynamic and vibrant educational spaces represents another public good requirement of the methodological approach of our educational system. In some sense we could consider Freire’s (1970, 2000) notion of critical pedagogy, which requires a level of student activity and engagement to which many educational bureaucracies are unaccustomed, as analogous to this notion, although entire books could be and have been written on the subject without doing it full justice. Here I note the critical understanding that requires educational institutions to provide, “not only experiences that develop serious thinking but also access to social understanding, developed by personal participation in a democratic community and direct experience of multiple perspectives” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 47). For students to be prepared for the active and collaborative world in which schools hope to propel them, they must
be afforded the recognition that public action is more organic than linear (Mathews, 1996), and this recognition requires that students are educated with a method of dynamism.

It is also important to note that society’s public good expectations for schooling are constructed around broad societal goals that focus on the good of the collective. These goals, notions such as unity, justice, democratic virtue, and dialogue are neither naturally nor easily acquired, and the expansiveness of these civic purposes requires educational methods that explicitly support them. Calling upon the work of Dewey, Glass (2000), supported this point beautifully, arguing that:

Free, open, critical dialogue among the greatest diversity of groups or points of view possible, in a context of shared commitments that promote capacity for such dialogue, provides conditions for the possibility of warranted knowledge and knowledge and participatory democratic life. (p. 277)

If our educational structures are to support our broad democratic goals then these goals must be more than addressed, they must be embedded within the methods that educators use to engage students in participatory contexts. As Bode (2001) powerfully asserted, “the school . . . is clearly under the obligation to show that democracy is a way of life which breaks sharply with the past. . . . [it] is peculiarly the institution in which democracy becomes conscious of itself” (p. 100), and it is only through the public good recognition of society’s broadly democratic goals, and thus through a methodological approach to education practice that this consciousness can be achieved.

**Education as Institutionally Competitive**

While civic engagement clearly represents an important conception of educational practice, I would be remiss if I did not recognize that the current American construction of democracy clearly and inextricably links itself with capitalism and neoliberal economics (Apple, 2005; Giroux, 1995, 2005), and this philosophical perspective, one that most closely aligns itself
with the private good function of schooling, represents another basic approach in our understanding of the method and implementation of schooling. Giroux (2002) explicitly noted that the American conception of democracy has come to rely on an understanding of neoliberal competitiveness that, “collapses the imperatives of a market economy and the demands of a democratic society” (p. 1141). In other words, he more specifically and succinctly noted elsewhere, “democracy has become synonymous with the free market” (Giroux, 2005, p. 9). This conception of democracy as capitalistic notion has significant implications for understanding of the purpose of schooling, which, in the eyes of most Americans, is responsible for supporting and fomenting the continued economic dominance of the United States. Americans tend to view schooling as an instrument for supporting a better, stronger, and more vibrant economy (Houston, 2003), and this notion clearly foments competitive-based private good methods of educational practice. This section will highlight three of them: our focus on achievement and educational accountability, the explicit use of school structures that utilize Freire’s (1970) banking model, and ever narrowing conceptions of educational success.

American society’s current preoccupation with the market and the competitive ethos that is requisite within it is certainly nothing new. Again we only need return to Tocqueville to see how deeply the veins of capitalism run through our conception of democracy. What continues to shift, though sometimes on a seemingly monumental scale, is the role that our schools play in that market-based apparatus. Today the culture of assessment and achievement permeates the American understanding of the purpose of schooling like few other concepts, and this notion, according to Apple (2005), portends the creation of an entire educational system that bases itself on the assessment and measurement that we presume to presuppose our understanding of the democratic role of schooling. He noted that “the widespread nature of these evaluative and
measurement pressures, and their ability to become parts of our common sense, crow out other conceptions of effectiveness and democracy” (Apple, 2005, p. 15). The private good construction of educational measurement becomes infused with our understanding of democracy and, thus materializes in our approach to educational practice.

The audit-based culture noted above is inextricably linked to Freire’s (1970) banking model, and this notion highlights another component of the competitively focused method of educational practice. As Houston (2003) noted, the contemporary school system currently is built upon the access paradigm of the industrial model. With its regimented daily schedule, tracked curricular programming, and traditionally focused curriculum, our current model of schooling is predisposed to lean towards the notion of social efficiency and the market. Freire’s banking model, which requires silence and reinforcement of the status quo, exemplifies this notion as students become receptacles that simply absorb information from teachers, and are, in effect, discouraged from questioning the system, challenging authority or railing against the status quo. Although in some sense this approach seems atypical of competitively-oriented structures, it actually reinforces it by discouraging engaged discourse that could shift the system away from the status quo. In effect, what the current fascination of Freire’s banking model suggests is a system that uses traditional educational methods to reinforce hegemonic societal structures that lead to narrow conceptions of educational success.

Just as the public good notion of educational practice suggests an ever-broadening conception of the methodological approaches to schooling, the counter-prevailing private good notions delimit the approaches that can be taken and strive to narrow conceptions of educational success. Educators hear a lot these days about the crisis of American competitiveness and in educational rhetoric our understanding of that crisis translates into methodological approaches to
education that presumes explicit educational and academic attainment represents a cure for society’s ills. In fact, any number of works could be cited here (Apple, 2005; Giroux, 1995, 2005; Torres, 1998) that highlight the explicit notion and narrowly defined understanding of schooling as market preparation. This residual notion from the industrial model of schooling means that schools are often content to “reinforce passivity and compliance rather than independent thinking” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 44), and thus ensure consistency rather than creativity. As Lummis (1996) powerfully asserted, we are prone to this thinking because we believe that our methodological approach fosters progress, and our faith in this progress allows us to be idealists and dreamers—always hoping that the current, narrow approach can reinforce private good success. The competitive ethos of a private good methodology of schooling reinforces a system of winners and losers, and the intriguing notion here is not that there are those who support such a system, but that there are those who prefer it.

**The Purpose of Schooling in Affluent School Communities**

As I have already suggested, the American conception of the purpose of schooling can often be understood in complex, nuanced terms that pit an egalitarian ethos of collectively democratic improvement against a meritocratic ideal of individualized academic competitiveness, and this conflict poses legitimate implications for educational leaders. Leaders in any field are tasked with the responsibility for achieving particular outcomes, and as our conception of the purpose of schooling becomes increasingly murky, so too can the effort toward achieving particular outcomes. Thus, it is important to explicitly consider the purpose of any endeavor from the outset, and obviously the development of a critical and explicit definition of the purposes of schooling is critical in this regard. Interestingly, as Anyon (1980, 1981)
suggested, educational goals and outcomes are generally stratified based upon social class, economic background, and parental demographics, and this differentiation of expectation indicates that goals for schooling must be considered and analyzed based upon these specific issues. It is critical to understand the purposes of schooling the belly the normative functions of schooling in affluent school communities. This analysis will be based upon the affluent social construct that exists in contemporary America and will suggest that affluent school communities focus their attention almost exclusively on private good outcomes for schooling. Figure 1, which outlines the broad constructs of the private good/public good tension as described above, suggests that the social construction of schooling in affluent school communities focuses on the private good philosophy of meritocracy, a strictly academic content, and a competitive approach that reinforces class structures, and the remainder of this section will consider those perspectives.
Figure 1. Construct of the public good/private good tension in schooling.

The Affluent Construction of Meritocracy

In philosophical terms, affluent American schools focus predominantly on the meritocratic perspective of schooling, and one of the clearest and most salient notions that demonstrates this assertion is the concept of privilege and power. Labaree (1997) noted that the
meritocratic philosophy of education fosters the development of a zero-sum mentality that seeks to provide individual educational distinction to students, and he further suggests that this mentality is:

especially true for families from the upper middle class, whose experience demonstrates the enormity of the potential benefit that can accrue from education and whose privileged starting position means that they also have a long distance to fall if the educational outcomes do not turn out in their favor. (p. 56)

Wildman and Davis (2008) highlighted this privileged position further, noting that privileged groups define societal norms and avoid oppression based on their socially constructed status, and they note that this privilege becomes normative: “This normalization of privilege means that members of society are judged, and succeed or fail, measured against the characteristics that are held by those privileged” (p. 113). Affluent community members, people who are generally white, well off, and who represent the top of society’s status structure, are thusly encouraged to support a meritocratic philosophy that maintains their privilege.

It is important to note that the notion of power and privilege that so clearly aligns itself with the private good focus on school outcomes in effect works to reinforce social class stratification and create a societal structure that maintains current levels of status. Affluent school community members; citizens who generally represent the upper echelons of class structure—thus greatly appreciate the meritocratic goal of schooling, as it allows them to maintain their position at the top of society’s class structure. As Brantlinger (2003) succinctly noted, “professionals put forward members of their class as models to emulate” (p. 10), and this modeling simultaneously provides distinct advantage for themselves and disadvantage for people from other backgrounds.

Interestingly, affluent school communities clearly support the meritocratic philosophy of schooling and yet it must be noted that their support often is based on judgmental notions and
misguided assumptions about the relationship between achievement, attainment, skill, and effort (Ayon, 1980, 1981; Brantlinger, 2003; Labaree, 1997; Rothstein, 2004). Clearly stated, affluent community members tend to support the meritocratic philosophy of education because they often believe that they and their children represent more intelligent, more dedicated, and more hard-working members of society, and this belief reinforces their opinion that meritocracy works. As Wright (1993) suggested, members of the upper-class regularly make assumptions that people from lower socioeconomic levels are less intelligent, less knowledgeable, and less motivated, and they thus allow themselves to believe that their own societal success and class status represents proof that meritocratic notions of schooling are true. This deficit-oriented perspective thus encourages a belief in a meritocratic philosophy that, as Brantlinger (2003) suggested, creates a false consciousness of the dominant class, that not only causes members of non-dominant status to, “lose out in power relations and material distribution but also in the negative aspersions about their intellectual attributes” (p. 35). Thus, the philosophy of the meritocratic purpose of schooling represents the first step in a self-reinforcing structure in affluent school communities.

**The Affluent Construction of Academic Curricular Content**

Just as the philosophy of schooling in affluent communities leans toward the private good ethos of meritocracy, the curricular and pedagogical content of affluent communities focus almost exclusively on academic notions of achievement and attainment that similarly reinforces the private good status quo. In America it seems that schools constantly strive to *get back to the basics*, to ensure an academic curriculum that reinforces a traditional, conservative worldview in which “successful learners are to learn and retain prescribed subject content and literacy skills and demonstrate their knowledge and skills on standardized tests” (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 61). As
Apple (1992) argued, members of the upper middle class tend to support a “visible” curriculum that is subject-centered, academic in nature, and tightly controlled. Anyon (1981) further noted that this academic focus on achievement is visible at the very earliest stages of schooling in affluent communities. In her study of social class and school knowledge Anyon found that even from a very early age students in affluent schools recognize the importance of knowing existing knowledge and of being able to verbalize it quickly. Excellence, she suggested, is the dominant theme in affluent school communities and this theme is based largely in a traditional understanding of academic knowledge that leads toward achievement and attainment in the social structure.

This private good focus on academic educational content has led to an ever increasing focus on credentialism that “results in an emphasis on individual status attainment rather than the production of human capital” (Labaree, 1997, p. 51), and Labaree suggested that this focus on credential attainment encourages citizens, especially affluent ones, to treat education as an exchange value: an extrinsic motivator that seeks to leverage academic attainment for private gain. In the contemporary American affluent community the rhetoric of educational attainment permeates the discussion regarding the content of schooling as families who represent the top of society’s social structure seek to maintain their status within the system (Anyon, 1980, 1981; Brantlinger, 2003). In this milieu the conception of curricular content begins to revolve around very traditional academic structures that represent the requisite content and cultural benchmarks for membership with society’s normative structure. Goodman (2001) highlighted this notion explicitly, noting that this privileged normative conception leads not only to a sense of superiority but ultimately to a privileged social construct from which affluent citizens benefit. By focusing on standardized tests, AP classes, college placement, and ultimate residency at the top
of society’s social hierarchy, parents in affluent communities seek to broker the academic content of schooling into a system that intends to allocate, “status on the basis of a formal educational voucher of individual merit—that is, hiring persons because of their educational credentials rather than their ascribed characteristics” (Labaree, 1997, p. 61). Thus, this shift toward credentialism reinforces the private good focus on academic curricular content.

Ultimately it is important to note that both the privilege afforded affluent community members by their societal status and the credentials that got them there help to contribute to an ever narrowing conception of the curricular content that reinforces the individualistic aspects of the private good/public good tension. Stated explicitly, if the members of society who maintain the power (as the affluent community members certainly are) work to construct the system in such a way as to ensure that what is valued is what they already have, then the structure of schooling becomes a self-reinforcing system that harbors the narrow confines of academic attainment as the only appropriate or desired content of schooling. A report authored by Alexander and James (1987) for The National Academy of Education put it this way:

Those personal qualities that we hold dear—resilience and courage in the face of stress, a sense of craft in our work, a commitment to justice and caring in our social relationships, a dedication to advancing the public good in our communal life—are exceedingly difficult to assess. And so . . . we are apt to measure what we can, and eventually come to value what is measured over what is . . . unmeasured. . . . In neither academic nor popular discourse about schools does one find nowadays much reference to the important human qualities. The language of academic . . . tests has become the primary rhetoric of schooling. (p. 51)

For members of affluent communities, the narrow academic confines of tradition work to reinforce their own societal hegemony, and thus reinforce the private good motive for schooling.

The Affluent Construction of the Competitive Implementation of Education

Falling directly in line with the meritocratic philosophy and academic content, the method of educational implementation in affluent communities is most assuredly built upon a
competitive construct that seeks to differentiate levels of social class and maintain private good results for students. Affluent communities expect their schools to be representative of the competitive, neo-liberal, market-based structure that fosters a system of winners and losers, and as the requisite winners, affluent community members consistently seek to ensure that this perspective is hegemonic. Brantlinger (2003) noted this tendency explicitly and suggested that in a competitive environment, affluent parents, “readily judged schools with high-income clientele to be best” (p. 46). These parents recognize that as with any social system, resources flow toward power, and if they want to maintain the power, they must also maintain their grasp on the resources. Labaree (1997) noted that within this system, what parents seek most is the opportunity to gain advantage, and this advantage can only be attained if the system itself is skewed to provide different resources to different stakeholders. Ultimately, affluent parents seek to foment a competitive construct because they already have the advantage that is necessary to win the competition and by constructing a system in which members of society are measured against their own privileged characteristics this competitive approach to the process of education can work to reinforce their own hegemony.

The competitive ethos that undergirds the implementation of educational practice in affluent communities often can be perceived as reinforcing a system that focuses on tradition and discourages innovation, and this traditional system, which in one sense would seem to represent the antithesis of competition, actually works to support affluent community members as they seek to exist within a competitive system and maintain their privileged status. Anyon (1981) suggested that this traditional approach reinforces the competitive ethos by legitimizing and reproducing “the ideology of production for consumption” (p. 34). Brantlinger (2003) concurred, noting that affluent citizens, who, “are neither oppressed nor marginalized . . . [but rather]
extremely competent at self-advocacy” (p. 28), work hard to freely advocate for the traditional approach to education that provided them with the means to attain status in the first place. For affluent parents who have already achieved this level of success “the aim is to hold onto an already attractive position and try to transfer this advantage to their children through the medium of education” (Labaree, 1997, p. 54).

Interestingly, as the discussion surrounding education in America continues to focus on back-to-the-basics efforts and traditional academic practices, the rhetoric also continues to strike a chord of fear among citizens who see the global influence of countries like China and India as a frightening and legitimate threat to their own societal status. I would be remiss in my discussion of competitive educational perspectives if I failed to recognize that talk of rising Asian powers has only worked to influence the competitive nature of affluent school communities in recent years. While the subject of globalization and education is far too nuanced to address in any meaningful way here (see Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), it is important to recognize the effects that globalization has already had, and note that it will continue to make a lasting impact on the American understanding of our education system. As Zhao (2009) noted, although America has not lost yet, a sense of fear regarding our ability to compete globally remains prescient in the minds of many. Affluent community members, who in some sense have the most to lose should the global competitive landscape shift, thus maintain an even more determined and focused view of the importance of a competitive approach to schooling for their children. In the end, this perspective reinforces others that I have noted throughout this section, and it seems clear that the dominant social construction of affluent school communities in the United States is one that focuses almost exclusively on private good outcomes.
Transformative Leadership and Freire’s Notion of Awareness, Critique, and Action

The naturally dichotomous tension noted above represents a truly complicated path that a school leader must navigate, and s/he must have a framework for understanding and contextualizing that tension if s/he is to have the opportunity to address it meaningfully. Thankfully the theory of transformative leadership represents an ideal approach for contextualizing and managing this tension. The theory of transformative leadership is founded upon strong ideals of social justice, democracy, and equity, and as Shields (2010) suggested, it holds “the most promise and potential to meet both the academic and the social justice needs of complex, diverse, and beleaguered education systems” (p. 562), by linking, “education and educational leadership with the wider social context within which it is embedded” (p. 559). In the tradition of Freire (1970), a transformative leader, Shields suggested, must ask questions about the purpose of schooling, work to engage citizens in dialogue and conversation about such important topics, and use reflective critique and analysis as an educative conductor that leads to critical action. Ultimately transformative leadership necessitates that the essential work of the educational leader [is] to create learning contexts or communities in which social, political, and cultural capital is enhanced in such a way as to provide equity of opportunity for students as they take their place as contributing members of society. (Shields, 2010, p. 572)

What follows is not so much an analysis of the purposes of schooling as viewed through the lens of transformative leadership but rather an attempt to consider how the lens of transformative leadership can support a school leader in both understanding the tensions and maintaining a balance between private good expectations and public good responsibilities schooling. But first I must turn for a moment to Freire’s (1970, 2000) notion of critical consciousness, or conscientization, as it provides a valuable lens through which to consider the relationship between transformative leadership and the purposes of schooling. Figure 2 provides a model for
understanding how the concepts of awareness, critical analysis, and ultimately action, can provide a basis for using transformative leadership practices to address the private good/public good tension in our schools.

Figure 2. Conscientization, transformative leadership, and the purpose of schooling.

The basic structure of Freire’s (2000) notion of conscientization, which calls on the educator to foster awareness, facilitate reflective analysis, and ultimately foment action against injustice, provides a valuable lens for analyzing the inherent tensions in our school system, and this notion will provide valuable perspective as I use the framework of transformative leadership as a tool for dissecting the private good/public good tension. Calling upon Freire, Shields (2009) noted that “critical awareness becomes the basis for critical reflection, for critical analysis, and finally for activism or critical action against injustices of which one has become aware” (p. 5). The remainder of this chapter is organized around this critical continuum and will utilize the
notion of *conscientization* to consider the inherent tensions in our understanding regarding the purpose of schooling through Shields’ (2010) framework of transformative leadership.

**Awareness**

Contextualization and balance of the tension between private and public good expectations for schooling must begin with the critical notion of awareness. As Freire (1970) suggested one cannot act without first developing an underlying basis of knowledge and understanding that can foster critical thinking, and critical thinking is vital to the principal’s responsibility for balancing the inherent tensions in our understanding of the purpose of schooling. A pure private good understanding that focuses on individual achievement and competition naturally falls in conflict with a pure public good approach that encourages civic virtue and the growth of civil society, and as such, this is a natural venue for a school leader to begin contextualizing critical awareness. According to Shields (2010), the basis of transformative leadership is recognition of material and social realities that foster inequity and marginalization. Transformative leadership, she noted “begins by challenging inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and injustice” (p. 564), and this recognition and awareness represents a critical step on a path toward finding a natural balance between these seemingly disparate goals. The tensions inherent in the struggle between public good and private good expectations for schooling relate directly to these broader social realities that exist in our society, and a principal must readily and openly acknowledge those realities if s/he is to legitimately address them (Quantz, Rogers, & Dantley, 1991; Shields, 2010). The significance of this understanding and its relationship to transformative leadership cannot be underestimated. While many forms of leadership seek to affect and influence the mechanisms of the organization, transformative leadership ultimately seeks to affect that change outside of the

It is important to note that, as much of the literature related to democratic education and transformative leadership suggests, educators are all too often predisposed to buoy their own ignorance by denying the challenging realities noted above (Lewis & Macedo, 1995; West, 2004; Westheimer, 2004). This ignorance takes on several different forms, from basic denial, through lip-service, to actual fortification of the generalities that lead to marginalization and, as shall become clear, these varying, seemingly passive degrees become active encumbrances to transformative leadership approaches.

The most striking and dangerous passivity lies in the blatant and abject denial of realities that many of our educational institutions reinforce. Much of the rhetoric regarding formal schooling today revolves around the subject of reform, as schools are increasingly blamed for the economic and social ills that face our modern civilization (Apple, 2005; Giroux, 1995, 2005; Ravitch, 2010). Interestingly though, educators somehow fail to connect the idea of change with the fundamental responsibility of recognizing the root cause and foundational structures upon which these challenges are constructed. In the modern world, people have become technologically proficient at deducing causes of structural problems. If my car, with its thousands of moving parts, does not work quite right I can take it to a mechanic around the corner and have faith that s/he can determine and fix the root cause, and yet, we tend to take a less systematic or robust approach when addressing society’s most pressing problems. As Macedo (1995) noted, true reform is impossible without a legitimate understanding of the material and social realities that exist within our society. We must address, he suggests, borrowing Kozol’s (1992) term, the savage inequalities that “generate despair of poverty, loss of
dignity, dehumanization, and hopelessness” (p. 44). The tension embedded in our understanding of the purpose of schooling will not ever be fully addressed without proper diagnosis.

As I address the importance of critical awareness I turn to Shields (2004) notion of “pathologizing” the lived experiences of students, for it greatly contributes to our understanding of the private/public good tension in our schools. The awareness component of transformative leadership theory requires that a school leader work toward recognition—both for her/himself, and for society at large, and as Shields (2004) suggested, amidst this struggle for awareness we are all forced to face the inordinate, inappropriate and misguided assumptions that undergird our ignorance. By ignoring these realities members of our society are afforded the privilege of convincing themselves that they do not actually exist. Without knowledge and recognition of these realities in a legitimate context these assumptions can easily lead to deficit thinking; “not simply as an individual problem but as a structural and societal one, requiring new approaches and enduring change if it is to be overcome” (Shields, 2004, p. 112). Theoharis (2007) concurred, maintaining that nearly all aspects of our current system contribute to this construction, with our structures, bureaucracies, resources, and regulations all contributing to our lack of understanding. Without opportunities to recognize the material and social realities that exist outside of our organization, schools tend to become places where individual cultures develop and understanding becomes more enclosed and circuitous. Once the loop is closed and “pathologization” occurs, it becomes nearly impossible for a school leader (or members of the school community for that matter) to even acknowledge the private/public good tension, let alone work to address it. Ultimately if a principal faced with the tension between private good and public good expectations has fostered the important role of awareness in the transformative
framework, s/he must then take the next critical step of ensuring critique and reflective analysis occur.

**Critique and Reflective Analysis**

Clearly awareness of the material and social realities that exist within our society can only help a principal balance the conflicting construction of the purpose of schooling if, as Freire (1970) noted this awareness is channeled toward action, for knowledge must be reflected upon if action is to be achieved. This reflective analysis requires committed and challenging work from the school leader and as Shields (2010) demonstrated, this work is not value-neutral but rather explicitly tied to conceptions of equality, respect, and absolute regard, and in an ever-shifting critical landscape a transformative leader must build relationships and foster reflective dialogue if critical *conscientization* is to occur (Freire, 1970, 2000; Shields, 2004, 2009, 2010). As Cooper (2009) suggested a collaborative ethos is requisite for transformative leadership to occur, and Bennis (1986) concurred noting that true transformation is supported by “the ability of the leader to reach the souls of others in a fashion which raises human consciousness, builds meanings, and inspires human intent” (p. 70). As will continue to be clear, critical dialogue and the strong relationships that facilitate it are necessary components of the complicated process of deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks that represent a critical component of the analysis phase of *conscientization*.

As a school leader moves across the critical continuum of transformative leadership, s/he must use the knowledge gained through reflection as a tool for analysis and critique of the private good/public good tension. The specific processes of transformative leadership require deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks that justify power and generate inequity, and this shift can help propel a school leader toward a more balanced and equitable
approach to leadership (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1996; Shields, 2009, 2010; Taylor, 2006). A principal embedded within the private/public tension in schools must work at the challenging task of deconstructing and reconstructing society’s understanding of both the purposes of schooling and the larger and more significant societal inequities that undergird them, and this work must occur at multiple levels with both faculty and students (Cooper, 2009; Davis, 2007; Mezirow, 1996; Shields, 2004, 2009, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). At the first level, a principal must begin the work of deconstruction with faculty. In his study of school principals, Theoharis (2007) noted that the role of the school principal itself is tremendously challenging and complex even without the additional burden of working to develop socially just mental frameworks and structures, and that principals may use this as an excuse for ignoring the material and social retaliating noted above. However, he also noted that socially just principals, those intent on making our society more equitable and democratic, work hard to begin the process by working with faculty and staff and “addressing issues of race, providing ongoing staff development focused on building equity, developing staff investment in social justice, hiring and supervising for justice, and empowering staff” (p. 235). A transformative leader must help her/his faculty breakdown and rebuild these knowledge frameworks if s/he is to move this process to the next level.

Of course the vital processes of deconstruction and reconstruction cannot truly lead to systemic change if educators, once engaged themselves in the process, do not help their students do the same (Freire, 1970; Quantz, et al.,1991; Shields, 2002, 2009, 2010). Shields (2010), highlighting the work of Davis (2006) on transformative learning, demonstrated the importance of “disruptive” educational practices—learning the reflectively reshapes deeply held ideas, philosophies, and concepts. Mezirow (1996) noted this significance as well, highlighting the crucial step of helping students become more reflective by actively working to change their own
frame of reference. This reflection can then provide a venue in which change can occur that is based upon a significant progression in the social and mental construction of our daily lives (Shields, 2010). Cooper (2009) reinforced this notion as well, noting the importance of ensuring that students are taught to challenge the status quo and deficit thinking through active engagement of social deconstruction. If we do not help our students mentally deconstruct the fundamental basis of power and privilege and deficit thinking we will miss our opportunity to fully address the tensions inherent in our system within wider society. Ultimately, if a school leader intends to support faculty and students as they face these tensions s/he must consider what type of knowledge frameworks represent the foundation of transformative leadership: power and privilege or critique and promise.

A transformative leader intent on working through this process with both students and faculty must find her/himself a place to begin, and the extant literature on democratic schooling and justice suggests that the first step must be the deconstruction of power and privilege that reinforces private good expectations and systemic inequity (Dantley, 2003; Shields, 2010; Torres, 1998). While highlighting the importance of democratic educational structures Houston (2003) suggested that preparing schools “for kids requires a complete rethinking of what education is and how it should be delivered” (p. 12). In Torres’ (1998) mind this requires that educators concern themselves with subjects of power and domination, and Dantley (2003) concurred, noting that, “transformative leaders are ‘called’ to . . . propose ways to resist the strictures of undemocratic practices, [and establish] policies and procedures that recognize and demystify asymmetrical power relations” (p. 10). It seems clear that this social construction is most closely connected to society’s ever-increasing private good expectations for schooling, and
this construction must be deconstructed if progress is to be made balancing the inherent tension in the system.

With the philosophy of deconstruction firmly established, a transformative leader faced with conflicting educational expectations must work toward reconstruction of knowledge frameworks that foster equity, justice, and inclusiveness (Shields, 2010). The tension between private good and public good expectations for schooling presents a unique and complex milieu for the justice-oriented school leader in that the conflict implies an either/or solution. The critical requirement of this stage of the critical transformative continuum is the actualization of a philosophy of critique and promise that represents the foundation of transformative leadership, and active, critical reflection represents the door through which a transformative leader must guide her/his community (Cooper, 2009). We must, as Shields (2009) suggested in calling upon Green (1999), “awaken students to the society of unfulfilled promises” (p. xiv) so that they may then continue down a path toward systemic and legitimate change. Those opportunities simply cannot be awoken if true reflection is not nurtured.

Through the use of reflective practice a school leader can work toward this awakening. As Shields (2010) noted, the understanding of transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy, and with a “promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others” (p. 559). Questioning, is the key notion here, for, as with any formidable undertaking, awareness is only as powerful as the critical action that it foments, and thus a principal faced with the tension of private and public good expectations for schooling must use the foundation of recognition and acknowledgement as a lens that encourages thoughtful questioning and a belief in the hope and possibility of democracy. Quantz et al. (1991) reinforced this notion, noting that, “a commitment to democracy assumes that those who
are to exercise responsibility must be able to critique the present order and must believe that change is possible” (p. 105). It is the possibility of this change that represents the true and legitimate foundation for dissolving the tension amidst our societal expectations of schooling, and if change is to represent our cause, then a school leader must take the final critical step of the critical transformative continuum: action.

Action

Ultimately the key, critical, and unique aspect of transformative leadership is that it provides the impetus for legitimate action that can foment change in an unjust order, and this critical action embodies a significant and necessary apparatus for balancing the complicated tensions amidst the varying perspectives of the purposes of schooling. Action, in the context of transformative leadership means more than the implementation of simple strategies or ideas, but rather, as Quantz et al. (1991) suggested it requires, “understanding how [transformative leadership’s] adoption would affect the historically bureaucratic structure of schools and the traditional functionalist discourse used to describe them” (p. 98). It requires, as Astin and Astin (2000) suggested that the value ends of leadership; concepts like justice, equity, opportunity, diversity, and democracy, take firm hold, not just in the school, but in society at large. As Shields (2004) noted “educational leaders will work to create school communities in which educators take seriously their accountability for advancing the ‘value ends’ noted above” (p. 113) and requires that action occur not just on the part of the leader, but for all members of society. Democratic action requires engagement with wider society, and it is this engagement that can truly support a transformative leader as s/he works to balance the tension between public good and private good expectations for schooling. Simply put, “Democracy can never be achieved from the top down” (Quantz, et al., 1991, p. 108 author’s emphasis).
A transformative leader seeking to balance the tension between public good and private good expectations for schooling must understand the importance of the political role that s/he plays in the community; s/he must take risks and form alliances, and be willing to attack power and privilege at its core, and if legitimate critical action is to take place then a transformative leader must play a crucial and activist role (Cooper, 2009; Freire, 1970, 2000; Shields, 2009, 2010; Theoharis, 2007; Weiner, 2003). Plain and simple, this requires that s/he live with tension and take an activist stance against injustice (Freire, 1970, 2000; Shields, 2009, 2010; Weiner, 2003). The transformative societal goals that are embedded within the concept of conscientization and transformative leadership are daunting to enact, and as Bogotch (2002) suggested they must be embedded within the context of educational leadership and approached with a morality of power that views progressive societal change as an ethical imperative. Glanz (2007) noted the significance of this principle, suggesting that, “the courage to remain steadfast in one’s beliefs is a moral leadership imperative” (p. 128). Ultimately, the action phase conscientization “calls for leaders to be activists rather than clerks of the status quo” (Davis, 2007, p. 13), and a leader that truly answers this call will be well on the way toward balancing the tension between public and private good expectations for schooling. By developing an understanding of the tenuous and conflicting purposes of schooling through Freire’s (1970, 2000) notion of conscientization, a school leader can build a framework for developing transformative leadership practices as normative functions in affluent school communities.

**Moving Forward**

Up to this point in this chapter I have highlighted three separate but compelling notions. In the first section I dissected the American understanding of the purpose of schooling as defined
by the dichotomous conflict between private good and public good expectations. In this section I analyzed the philosophy of schooling, the curricular content, and the processes of educational implementation, and in each case I noted how the tension between private good and public good expectations represents an inherent conflict in our understanding. In the section that followed I noted how each of those categories manifests itself within the social construction of affluent American communities, and I described the ways in which affluent communities lean toward the private good expectations of schooling in each case. Finally, I explored the theory of transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) and utilized Friere’s (1970, 2000) theory of critical consciousness, or conscientization, as it provided a valuable lens through which to consider the relationship between transformative leadership and the purposes of schooling. This section represented an attempt to consider how the lens of transformative leadership can support a school leader in both understanding the tensions and maintaining a balance between private good expectations and public good responsibilities schooling.

What follows is my effort to bridge the preceding three sections in such a way as to provide a way forward: an explicit direction to guide the questioning and analysis as I looked toward the prospect of conducting empirical research. While the extant literature certainly addresses the public good/private good tension to some extent, it does not explicitly address the tension as it is experienced in affluent school communities, and furthermore, while the body of research regarding transformative leadership is certainly growing, the role that the theory can play in affluent schools has yet to be addressed. By analyzing the literature regarding the purpose of schooling and affluent social construction through the theoretical lens of transformative leadership I intend to provide a context for exploring the private good/public good tension as it exists for leaders in affluent school communities. The diagram in Figure 3 suggests that specific
criteria for further exploration can be found by merging our understanding of the conflicting expectations for schooling in affluent school communities (the center triangle from Figure 1) with the understanding of the purpose of schooling as viewed through the lens of transformative leadership (the top triangle from Figure 2). That criteria—recognition, investigation, appreciation, connection, action, and transformation—is briefly described below.

Figure 3. Transformative leadership in affluent communities.

**Recognition**

I call the first important step for using transformative leadership to contextualize the private good/public good tension in affluent school communities *recognition*. In channeling
Freire’s (1970) notion of awareness, Shields (2010) suggests that the starting point of transformative leadership must be an awareness, or recognition, of the material and social realities that exist within our society. As I have already noted, the specificity of this subject has yet to be studied empirically to any great extent and in this regard, it is fundamentally important to consider whether or not school leaders do in fact recognize those realities and the influence that those realities have on their practice.

**Investigation**

*Investigation*, or inquiry, represents the second important concept that must be considered when seeking to contextualize the affluent construction of the private good/public good tension as it exists in affluent communities. By investigation I mean a willingness to question, wonder, and explore ideas that may well not be popular, easily understood, or even readily accepted. As noted above, a school leader in an affluent community often works within a normative structure that takes many things for granted, and s/he must be ready and willing to explore what makes those notions normative. As Shields (2010) simply stated, “a fundamental task of the educational leader in [the] transformative tradition is to ask questions” (p. 570).

**Appreciation**

Once a school leader has demonstrated both a willingness to recognize and question existing realities, s/he must then be willing to take another step and seek to develop an appreciation, or a nuanced understanding, of the normative context. While the difference between recognition and appreciation may be subtle, it is also profound and complex, and the normative conception of the complicated and multi-faceted ideas that contribute to the private good/public good tension must be approached with great care. In a sense, this notion of appreciation requires a certain dualism, a willingness to understand concepts from a critical and
theoretical perspective while simultaneously being willing to refrain from judgment or acting with disdain. For example, consider a school principal in an affluent community who must be able to recognize the dominant normative notion of private good expectations for schooling while simultaneously considering the ways that the social construction of affluence contributes to community members’ perceptions and ideas. As Goodman (2001) noted “people in a stage of dualism . . . are attached to their views and don’t know how to deal with the complexity of issues” (p. 50), and this process of appreciation, seeks to place school leaders in a position to contextualize this challenging dualism.

Connection

A school leader intent on exploring these complicated issues in an affluent community must also recognize the importance of connection, or relationship building, if s/he is to truly make progress in addressing these important issues. As Grumet (1995) noted “connections are not merely motivators . . . [they] are the sources of the questions that support research, of the desires that seek expression, [and] of the choices that constitute values” (p. 20), and these connections represent the most basic processes of educational practice. In order to explore the nuanced relationship between private and public good expectations in affluent school communities a school leader simply must foster relationships that support dialogue and conversation. Clearly this may not always be easy. As Weiner (2003) noted a leader must “democratize” her/his power; for only by connecting and working on common ground can one be truly transformative.

Action

It is only after connection has been legitimately established that a school leader can then take the critical transformative step of action, for it is the requisite relationships and dialogue that
can truly foster democratic and just action that rest at the core of transformative leadership. By *action* I mean to describe both the internal or conceptual development that comes with changed perspectives and the subsequent concrete deeds that are taken by educators and their students to redress injustice. A transformative educator in an affluent community must recognize that the *action* process requires the disruption and deconstruction of cultural and social constructs that support an imbalance between private and public good outcomes, while simultaneously working toward legitimate action against that imbalanced approach. As Quantz et al. (1991) suggested, transformative leadership is about contextualizing leadership in democracy and taking action both in the development of a conceptual understanding of democratic practice, and in the development of symmetrical relations build leadership at all levels of an organization.

**Transformation**

Ultimately, the final component in the transformative leadership framework for understanding the private good/public good tension is the goal of *transformation*. Clearly the step of *transformation* is inherent in the term transformative itself, but it is important here to specifically note the unique characteristics of *transformation* in a transformative context. Explicitly speaking, transformative leadership seeks societal transformation as its ultimate goal, and this external goal, one that goes beyond the individual and the organization, represents the fundamental concept that differentiates the transformative leadership framework from the more elementary notion of transformational leadership. As Shields (2010) notes:

> It is the essential work of the educational leader to create learning contexts or communities in which social, political, and cultural capital is enhanced in such a way as to provide equity of opportunity for students as they take their place as contributing members of society. (p. 572)
Ultimately it is this type of *transformation* that a school leader must work toward as s/he seeks to balance the tension between private good and public good expectations for schooling in affluent communities.
Chapter 3
Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how principals in affluent communities experience, understand, and address the tensions that exist between private good expectations and public good responsibility for schooling. This study addressed the following sub-questions:

- How do principals in affluent communities describe their work (especially in regard to their beliefs about public good outcomes or private good outcomes for students)?
- What influences and pressures shape their beliefs regarding their work?
- What influences and pressures shape their practices?
- Is there any congruence or conflict between those beliefs and pressures, and their practices?

The remainder of this chapter addresses how I sought to find answers to these research questions and focuses on the qualitative methodological approach of phenomenology, the processes of data collection and analysis, the ethical considerations, and the authentication criteria that provided the basis for determining the trustworthiness of the data.

Research Design

Choosing the appropriate research design represents a crucial requirement for any research study, and this complex decision, one based on nuanced perspectives, intricate philosophical assumptions about the world, and the nature of the research problem itself must be made with appropriate forethought and induction. The choice of an appropriate research design is often, most broadly speaking, broken down into the categories of quantitative, and qualitative forms (with the mixed methods approach representing a hybrid approach), and as Creswell
(2009) suggested, even though the distinctions between them are often presented in simple black and white terms (numbers vs. words, closed-ended questions vs. open-ended), a researcher must recognize the relationship as a much more subtle gradation. Krathwohl (2004) suggested comparing and contrasting quantitative and qualitative designs in the same way that one would compare multiple choice questions and essay questions on a test: both seek to determine if a student has learned the intended content; but each method approaches the goal in a different way and seeks to make that determination based on different criteria. For these reasons it is fundamentally important that the research design of a study be directly connected to “the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed, the researchers’ personal experiences, and the audiences for the study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 3).

As I considered the research problem and the philosophical underpinnings of the purpose of this study I recognized the fundamental importance of understanding my own philosophical worldview as it relates to the questions that I set out to answer. Burrell and Morgan (1979) suggested that different ontologies, epistemologies, and beliefs about human nature naturally incline researchers to consider different methodologies as appropriate. These perspectives, which generally fall into a subjective versus objective dimension, indicate whether a researcher holds a more deterministic or voluntaristic view of the world, and they play a major role in the ultimate determination of research design. Specifically, Burrell and Morgan suggested that a subjectivist belief in the individual’s power to create social reality requires, “an understanding of the ways in which the individual creates, modifies, and interprets the world in which he or she finds himself” (p. 3). Creswell (2009) suggested that qualitative research is generally used as a method for exploring this subjectivist view of social construction and the ways in which an individual interacts with and understands a human problem while a quantitative approach is generally used
to test specific objective theories, and Krathwohl (2004) concurred, noting that social construction plays a critical role in qualitative research that intends to understand, “how the world looks to the people being studies and how those people act on that information” (p. 237).

As the purpose and research questions noted above suggest, this study was designed to understand how individuals (in this case school principals) experience and understand a specific, particular phenomenon, and for this reason I determined that a qualitative approach represented the ideal method of investigation, and chose it for use in this study.

Armed with recognition of the subjectivist lens that undergirds this study, I focused on a more specific strategy of inquiry to provide me with the best opportunity to answer my research questions. As can be noted from the presentation of extant literature in the previous chapter, the experiences of principals have not been fully considered in relation to the private/public tension and thus I recognized that an important step could be taken by seeking to determine the true essence of that experience. For this reason in this study I utilized the research approach of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2007) which is a philosophy laden approach designed to provide a composite, thick description of how a particular group or person experiences a common, specific phenomenon.

Phenomenology is a deeply philosophical approach to understanding human experience. In his seminal work on the subject, Moustakas (1994) devoted over 100 pages to the philosophical and theoretical perspectives that represent the basis of this approach. In defining phenomenology he relied heavily on the work of philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl, and he highlighted that the method “emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and provides a systematic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge” (p. 45). As described by Moustakas this definition of transcendental phenomenology
as a process that studies the lived and conscious experiences of participants by seeking to develop thick descriptions of those experiences represented the basis for three philosophical processes that supply phenomenology’s philosophical basis. These processes, Epoche, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, and Imaginative Variation, begin with Epoche, the Greek work meaning to refrain from judgment, According to Moustakas this stage should require that a researcher seek to bracket out her/his own experiences and beliefs so that s/he can observe the essence of the phenomenon as it naturally occurs. As I will address in greater detail shortly, the stage of Epoche represents a less advanced, non-critical perspective of qualitative research, and it is important to note explicitly that while I certainly sought to refrain from making inappropriate judgments, I actually worked to purposefully include my own perspective in this project. In the next step, Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction, “the phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality, in a fresh and open way” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34), so that Imaginative Variation, contextualization of the phenomenon, can occur. Each of these processes leads to the final step, synthesis, which represents, “the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (p. 100). In the end these philosophical perspectives foster a methodological approach that, “does not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships . . . [but rather to develop] careful, comprehensive descriptions, vivid and accurate renderings of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105).

In practical terms, a phenomenological study must begin by interviewing participants (Creswell, 2007, suggests between 5 and 25) about their experiences with the phenomenon. This process requires great care and attention to detail and thus multiple interviews with each participant are required. Once participant experiences are noted the researcher should then go
back to the data and identify significant statements about the phenomenon made by each participant. These significant statements are then clustered into what Moustakas (1994) calls “meaning units”—emerging themes that provide meaning and understanding of the experienced phenomenon. These concepts then are used as the philosophical basis for creating the textural description (what actually happens), the structural description (the context surrounding the phenomenon), and finally, the composite description (the true, invariant essence of the phenomenon as experienced by these individuals). This specific process represents the approach that I used in this study to ascertain the true essence of the participants’ experiences.

**Site Selection and Participants**

While it seems implicit, it is important to note that in phenomenological research it is essential that there be consistency of participant characteristics in that all participants have actually experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994), and for this reason it was important for me to approach the participant selection process with very specific criteria that would ensure this consistency. As noted, I intended to understand how elementary principals in affluent communities experience the tension between private good expectations and public good responsibilities for schooling. In addition to the delimitation to the state of Illinois that I noted in Chapter 1, this purpose required consistency in the following three additional areas: the participants needed to be elementary principals; they must have experienced the private good/public good tension; and they must be employed in affluent school communities.

The most challenging of these criteria to define and contextualize was the conception of an affluent school, and for this purpose I originally began by turning to a report released by the
Fordham Institute in early 2010. The report, titled: *America's Private Public Schools* set out specific criteria for identifying affluent public schools (schools where low income students—defined by eligibility for the National School Lunch Program—make up less than 5% of the population), and provided a list of schools that meet this criteria in the United States. Originally this report seemed to provide an ideal, objective source for determining what schools are considered affluent, but upon closer inspection the methodological structure of the report appeared flawed in some critical areas. Although it is not important to highlight the flaws here, I identify this report from the Fordham Institute because I ultimately chose to use their measure of <5% of students receiving free or reduced lunch as one component of the definition of affluent in my site selection matrix. This criterion, which I obtained from the Illinois School Report Card for the 2010, was certainly explicit, but it provided two challenges to me as a researcher. Firstly, it created a very large list of possible sites and secondly it seemed to me as a researcher to be an overly narrow definition of affluence.

As I pondered the possible methods of site selection I came to the conclusion that my critical approach to this study would rely heavily on the social construction of the term affluent, and thus I chose to use that paradigm as an asset by taking a reputational or snowball sampling approach. Krathwohl (2004) noted that snowball sampling is used to find study participants who exhibit characteristics that may not be easily or quantifiably identified, and in this study the conception of affluence represents just such a complicated notion. Simply put, what one person considers affluent another may not, and thus by using a reputational approach I believed I would be able to narrow the participant pool to a smaller sample size that was more representative of the socially constructed definition of the term. My belief proved corrected. I began by communicating with public school educators and university researchers from across the state and
asked for any suggestions regarding what school districts might be appropriate choices for a study of affluent elementary principals. As I asked more and more people I was able to refine my list of perspective sites further and cross-reference it with my list of schools that educated less than 5% free and reduced lunch students.

In the interest of triangulation I ultimately added a third important criterion, the Equalized Assessed Valuation (EAV) of each perspective school district. For this study I used the EAV as reported on the 2010 Illinois School Report Card. Fritts (2008) defined the EAV, or the tax base, as, “a property’s valuation after county and state equalization are performed. The term is applied to both individual properties and the total property within a school district or unit of government” (p. 9). As Fritts further described, the EAV is determined by multiplying a property’s assessed value by an equalization factor that “equalizes” property values before taxation occurs. In general the EAV of a school district represents a value roughly one-third of the typical property value in that locale. It is important to note that EAV is a district reported number, and thus, because property taxes are collected at the district level the number is computed based on aggregate district property values. This information is important because property wealth can clearly vary by neighborhood within any given school district, and consequently the reported EAV may not be completely representative of a specific school’s population (for example, a school could be located in a wealthy neighborhood in a relatively less affluent district and thus have a lower EAV than it would if based solely on that neighborhood’s population). Ultimately, by using this number as another indicator of a school district’s wealth I was able to characterize the notion of affluence more contextually.

After beginning with a snowball sampling method and triangulating that information with the EAV of the local school districts and the percentage of free and reduced lunch students in
attendance at that school, I compiled a list of 27 elementary schools, all within the greater Chicago-land area that represented appropriate sites for this study. These schools, their associated EAVs, and the percentage of free and reduced lunch students appear in Table 1 below.

Table 1

*Prospective Schools, E.A.V., & % Low Income*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>265,167</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>265,167</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School C</td>
<td>271,402</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School D</td>
<td>271,402</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School E</td>
<td>271,402</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School F</td>
<td>300,886</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School G</td>
<td>345,081</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School H</td>
<td>345,081</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School I</td>
<td>345,081</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School J</td>
<td>378,483</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School K</td>
<td>399,125</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School L</td>
<td>399,842</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School M</td>
<td>420,530</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School N</td>
<td>436,299</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School O</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School P</td>
<td>577,631</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Q</td>
<td>577,631</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School R</td>
<td>577,631</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School S</td>
<td>577,631</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School T</td>
<td>631,318</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School U</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School V</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>School W</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School X</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Y</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Z</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School AA</td>
<td>770,509</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the definition of affluence the other two delimitations noted previously represented straightforward steps in the site selection process. My purposeful delimitation that required me to focus my research exclusively at the elementary level led me to only invite elementary school principals to participate in this study. Also, as suggested in the literature review, the private good/public good tension represents an a priori phenomenon that is embedded within both the general conception of schooling and the normative structures of the public education system. Thus, each and every person involved with the system, including principals, experiences the tension whether they are aware of its existence or not. Ultimately, armed with a clear definition of affluence, and an understanding of the delimited factors regarding, region, level, and the a priori presence of the public/private tension, I was able to reach out to all of the 27 principals in Illinois who met this criteria. I emailed each of them with a letter inviting them to participate in this study and followed up with emails until I garnered participation of seven principals whose schools fell in the list above. Each participant is identified below in Table 2.

Table 2

*Participant Schools, E.A.V., & % Low Income*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School A</td>
<td>265,167</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School I</td>
<td>345,081</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School J</td>
<td>378,483</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School M</td>
<td>420,530</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School T</td>
<td>631,318</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School U</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Z</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection Procedures

In this study data were collected through one main qualitative process: interviewing. I began with the intention of conducting semi-structured initial interviews of approximately an hour in length with each of the participants in the study. After these initial interviews were completed I conducted a preliminary review of the data and then returned for another interview with each participant in which we explored some concepts in greater depth. This process provided me with an opportunity to conduct member checking and ensured the accuracy of the collected data. The collection of data in a phenomenological study requires the researcher to conduct multiple, in-depth interviews, and those interviews certainly represented a powerful and meaningful way to understand the lived experiences of others (Bogden & Bilken, 2007; Creswell, 2007). McCracken (1988) noted this power:

The long interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory. For certain descriptive and analytic purpose, no instrument of inquiry is more revealing. The method can take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can also take us into the lifeworld of the individual, to see the content and patter of daily experience. The long interview gives us the opportunity to step into the mind of another person, to see and experience the world as they do themselves. (p. 9)

A phenomenological approach to research requires exactly that the researcher have exactly this kind of opportunity, and thus using interviews as a primary means of data collection represents an ideal approach.

The interviewer must approach a qualitative interview with recognition that the process is an interactive, interpersonal endeavor, one which must be approached organically and with great care (Kvale, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore as an interviewer I approached these interviews with just such a casual, relaxed approach. Moustakas (1994) noted that the phenomenological interview should begin with a social conversation that helps to create a comfortable atmosphere and should then seek to provide the participant with opportunities to focus on the experience
being studied before being asked to describe it as fully as possible. It is important to note that the concepts upon which this study was constructed are complicated and nuanced and I foresaw having some difficulty ensuring that participants understand those larger issues. This is one of many reasons that I chose to take a critical perspective and sought to identify my own ideology and perspective up front, “as a basis for identifying the parameters of the investigation” (Shields, in press). Shields noted that this is not only possible but rigorously appropriate, and she further suggested that critical researchers can utilize their own understanding to conduct research that ultimately advocates for meaningful and structural change.

Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007) both suggested beginning by developing a semi-structured interview guide constructed of very general questions that could, in some sense, be asked about any phenomenon. Questions such as, *how did this experience affect you, how does this experience make you feel, what thoughts stand out to you*, can all be asked. Specific to this study I began the initial interviews by asking questions such as:

- In your opinion what are the overall purposes/goals of schooling?
- Do you think that there are other ideas out there about the overall goals and purposes of schooling? (if applicable) Is there any conflict or tension between them?
- In your current position are there any influences or pressures that shape, contribute to, or work against those goals?
- How well do you think the current system address those purposes? What about your school specifically?

These questions provided a framework for rich discussions with the study participants in the first round of interviews and they guided our conversations in such a way as to support deeper understanding of the lived experiences of these principals. After conducting the first round of interviews and conducting an analysis of the first round data, I returned to the participants for further conversation about their beliefs and experiences. By relying on the data collected in the
first round, I was able to develop a list of similar questions surrounding the general phenomenon and the shared experiences described in our conversations. Some of those questions included:

- Do you think students here get a better education than students in less affluent schools? Can you define what “better” means? Should they? Is that the intent of the system?

- Do you think parents here believe that their children receive a better education than children in less affluent schools? Do you think they believe they should?

- Can you talk about some of the characteristics that define this community?

- Can you describe some of the characteristics that define a wealthy or affluent community?

- Talk about some of the specific issues about which you feel political pressure in your job.

- Do you feel pressured to believe certain things or behave in certain ways?

**Data Recording Procedures**

I created and utilized a semi-structured interview protocol for recording the experiences as shared by the participants (this document can be found in Appendix A), and I also recorded the interviews with an electronic recording device for the purpose of transcribing. Clearly, the use of an interview protocol with strong notes taken by the interviewer can provide rich and meaningful data from the participants, however, the nuances and intricacies of an interview can often be lost if hand written notes represent the only documents (Bogden & Bilkin, 2007; Kavale, 2009, McCracken, 1988). The recordings and transcriptions, which were maintained in a safe secure location both throughout the duration of the study, will also be appropriately secured afterwards for five years.
Data Analysis Procedures

The first formal analytic step in Moustakas’s phenomenological research, which he (1994) calls Epoche, requires that the researcher “Bracket out” her/his own experiences in an effort to ensure the phenomenon is approached with a fresh perspective and without prejudgments and biases. As I suggested earlier, it is important to address the specific and explicit ways that my approach to phenomenology diverged from Moustakas’s model. Moustakas’s phenomenology is constructed upon the theoretical and philosophical assumptions of Husserl (1859-1938), who worked at a time when a positivist perspective maintained sway over the empirical world. Duarte (2000), notes that, “the aim of Husserl’s phenomenology is to reach a fundamental understanding of pure consciousness” (p. 180), and from the positivist perspective this requires that the researcher seek to explicitly exclude her/his perspective. However, when considering Husserl’s term, intentionality, Duarte turned to Freire and deconstructed his notion of co-intentionality, defining it as, “a dialogic experience, . . . an encounter between people” (p. 180). Duarte suggested that a researcher intent on approaching a study with a critical perspective must actually seek to include her/his own perspective so as to “collapse the two into one: when a plurality of subjects meet and dialogue happens, they produce a singular, unified and common reflection” (Duarte, 2000, p. 186). Thus in this study I chose to purposefully explore these nuanced concepts with participants in a co-intentional approach that aimed to provide systematic clarity to both the research process and the results.

The co-intentional approach to critical phenomenology requires a knowledgeable researcher who can contribute both practical and theoretical knowledge to the process, and I feel confident that my personal experiences as a principal in an affluent school community, as well as the theoretical and conceptual knowledge I have obtained as a doctoral student were invaluable
in this regard. Of course, I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the important role that the theory of transformative leadership played in this process. By meshing aspects of Shields’s (2010) framework for transformative leadership with an understanding of the affluent social construction of the purpose of schooling I believe that several criteria emerged that were most certainly consistent with understanding participant experiences. That criteria, recognition, investigation, appreciation, connection, action, and transformation, was critical for understanding participant perspectives, and I focused on it throughout the process.

After conducting interviews with participants with co-intentionality as suggested by Duarte (2000) I then turned to the data from participant interviews and began the process of formal analysis. In Moustakas’s (1994) phenomenology, once data collection is complete the researcher must systematically analyze the entire data set and highlight “significant statements” as shared by the participants. According to Creswell (2007), these significant statements should be “sentences or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon” (p. 61). Moustakas called this process *horizonalization* and suggested that it requires not only the development of this list of statements, but also the deletion of statements, topics, and questions that are irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping, thus leaving only the *horizons*. In traditional qualitative evaluation Moustakas’s processes most closely resembles the practice of constant comparison analysis (CCA), which Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) describe as chunking the data into small meaningful parts that are labeled and continually compared with each other. In CCA once all of the data is coded it is grouped together by similarity into themes that are documented. This thematic construction is what Moustakas described as, “clustering the horizons” (p. 97), and it represents the final step of Phenomenological Reduction. In addition, it is important once again to turn to Duarte’s (2000) co-intentionality and recognize the truly
important role that a reflective researcher must play in a critical phenomenological study. As I worked to analyze this data, it was incumbent upon me to do so with a critical eye, and a focus on my own insights as the researcher as tools for truly contextualizing the findings. In the end these qualitative data analysis procedures provided the necessary information for development of the textural description and the structural description, each of which guided me as the researcher to a true understanding of the essence of the phenomenon of the private good/public good tension as experienced by the participant principals. It is that essence that is synthesized and presented in the following chapter.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues regarding the safety and well-being of participants must be considered and addressed thoroughly and thoughtfully before undertaking any research study, and issues such as the welfare of vulnerable populations, anonymity, and accuracy of data interpretation must all be considered. As I have already noted, school principals who work in affluent communities were invited to participate in this study, and while it would have been naïve to suggest that none of the likely participants would be people who sometimes find themselves in precarious situations, as power-holding leaders in affluent communities, they certainly did not fit the criteria necessary to be considered members of a vulnerable population. I ensured participant anonymity by taking appropriate precautions, such as allowing the participants to choose pseudonyms, by making all due effort to de-identify the participants, and by seeking their formal consent to participation (the interview consent form can be found in Appendix B). In this regard it is important to note that the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved the research plan for this study (the IRB approval letter for this study can be found in Appendix C).
In addition to consideration of the experiences of the human subjects involved in this study, I also recognize the crucial ethical consideration that must be given to the accuracy of the data interpretation and representation. Krathwohl (2004) suggested that inexperienced researchers often choose to undertake a qualitative study with the misguided notion that it is easier and less complex than the mathematical and statistical calculation required in a quantitative study, only to discover that qualitative research requires tremendous skill as well. What this can lead to, he suggested, is the drawing of inappropriate conclusions from the collected data, and as a researcher it was important that I recognized this obstacle from the outset and worked to ensure that I approached the evidence in a thoughtful and nuanced manner.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of research findings represents a critical and important aspect of the research methodology in any study. As should already be evident, this qualitative study is firmly rooted in a subjectivist, constructivist viewpoint that goes beyond positivism and post-positivism as a paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1985, 1989, 2007) suggested that the paradigm of positivist science is constructed upon ethical and political fallacies, and that these perspectives significantly limit the researcher’s ability to discover deep, meaningful, contextual data. Specifically they noted:

> When science’s claim to be value-free failed to survive close scrutiny, so that the intimate relationship of inquiry and values was exposed, it became apparent that, since not all sets of values could simultaneously be served, *every act of science was also a political act*, one that structured power relationships in a particular way and served to maintain them as the status quo. When science’s claim to have warrant to pursue the truth wherever it led was successfully challenge on the ground that not all scientific acts could be constructed as ethical . . . it became apparent that the positivist belief system opened the door, however slightly, to ethically questionable practices. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 118).
For these reasons Guba and Lincoln developed alternative, unique criteria for trustworthiness that meet the needs of the qualitative, constructivist paradigm, and these criteria, fairness, ontological authentication, educative authentication, catalytic authentication, and tactical authenticity, represent an ideal method for judging the trustworthiness and authenticity of this study. The remainder of this section delineates how those criteria are to be used to assess the trustworthiness of this study.

**Fairness**

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985, 1989, 2007) first criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiry is fairness. In addressing this notion Lincoln and Guba suggested that value-bound research conducted in a value-bound society will inevitably generate the discovery and emergence of certain social constructions and value structures. The problem, they suggested, lies in the fact that research conducted with a social agenda (which all research does) may be naturally inclined to empower one particular agenda or perspective over another, and this imbalance of power can lead to inappropriate analysis and representation of data as well as incline stakeholders to view the process as biased. “The provision of fairness or justice,” they suggested, requires, “the ascertaining and presentation of different value and belief systems represented by conflict over issues” (Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 20), and this requirement must be addressed in a constructivist study. In this study the theoretical framework of transformative leadership clearly represents key values like democracy, equity, and justice, while the social construction of the affluent communities that I studied values perspectives such as competitiveness and meritocratic attainment. In striving to meet the criteria of fairness it was incumbent upon me as a researcher to present a balanced view of both constructions and the values that undergird them.
Ontological Authentication

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985, 1989, 2007) second unique criteria for determining the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiry is ontological authentication. The trustworthiness criteria of ontological authentication calls on the method of constructivist research to raise the consciousness of persons involved in the process in order to help them, “achieve a more sophisticated and enriched construction” (Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 22). The subjectivist paradigm presupposes that each person’s reality is socially constructed and ontological authentication embraces this construction by first, recognizing that each individual’s reality is constantly changing and developing, and second, by seeking to contribute to the improvement of the individual’s conscious experience of the world. Again, the theoretical framework of transformative leadership, with its critical process or deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge frameworks, represents an ideal notion in this regard. By addressing the competing constructions inherent in the private/public tension I believe that this study met the criteria of ontological authentication, if only by simply increasing an, “appreciation of some set of complexities previously not appreciated” (p. 22).

Educative Authentication

Lincoln and Guba (1985, 1989, 2007) suggested that while the raising of consciousness is clearly important in the constructivist approach to research, it is simply not enough. The criteria of educative authentication takes a decisive step past raising consciousness and seeks to both ensure appreciation for other constructions and foster an understanding of the value systems upon which they are rooted. Although they note that this is no easy task, especially within the confines that surround the research process, they did suggest that, “stakeholders should at least have the opportunity to be confronted with the construction of others very different from
themselves, for, among other things, the chance to see how different value systems evoke very
different solutions” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 249). In this study, the dichotomous foundations
of the purpose of schooling represent two constructions that are often at odds with one another,
and the dialectic interview process of phenomenology most assuredly provided me with the
opportunity to foster this appreciation and understanding.

Catalytic Authentication

The penultimate criteria for trustworthiness of subjectivist, qualitative inquiry as denoted
by Guba and Lincoln (1984, 1989, 2007) is that of catalytic authentication. The term catalytic is
critical here, as it suggests stimulation and motivation for moving forward, and the step of
catalytic authenticity requires that the knowledge and understanding developed by previous
criteria stimulate action. It seems clear that research, especially research conducted within the
constructivist paradigm, ought to aim toward the stimulation and support of some type of
decision making or, even more purposefully, some type of critical action, and this action must be
based on the requisite underlying understanding of the constructivist paradigm—now that we
have learned this we should go do something about it. Again, I must turn to the theoretical
framework of transformative leadership, which itself seeks to foment systemic, societal change
as a true parallel to catalytic authenticity in this study, and note that the ultimate trustworthiness
of this study will be determined by the ways in which the findings provide other educators who
have experienced this complicated phenomenon with the impetus to move forward and take
action against injustice and undemocratic practices in education.

Tactical Authenticity

The final criteria for trustworthiness of this study, tactical authenticity, takes catalytic
action one step further to its final, logical resolution and seeks to ensure not only that action can
occur, but also that said action empowers those who may have a stake in the findings. Ultimately, as Lincoln and Guba (2007) suggest, “the evaluation of inquiry requires other attributes to serve this latter goal” (p. 24). In this regard the critical outcomes of this study must be embedded within a value-focused context that seeks to compel both study participants and other educational leaders to take authentic action against injustice.

**Summary**

The qualitative research methodology of phenomenology represents an ideal method for investigation of the ways in which principals in affluent communities understand and experience the tension between private good expectations and public good responsibilities for schooling. In this study I used this phenomenological approach to conduct co-intentional dialogical interviews with seven participant principals who have experienced this phenomenon and I am confident that the findings presented in the next chapter will ensure that this study has met the appropriate authenticity criteria.
Chapter 4

Findings

The development of this research study began with recognition of a nuanced and complex dilemma that has, unfortunately, gone largely unnoticed and unaddressed, both in academia and amongst practitioners. As stated in Chapter 1, the role of the school principal is increasingly challenging and complex, and the predominant social construction in affluent school communities focuses almost exclusively on private good outcomes for students; this ignores the public good responsibility of citizenship training in a democracy and situates principals at the heart of that tension. In an effort to learn more about this complicated issue, the foundational research question for this study asked how principals in affluent communities describe their work (especially in regard to public good outcomes or private good outcomes for their students), and it is their responses to this question that represent the substantive core of this chapter. This chapter is about the participant principals’ experiences. It is about the ways that they described their own sense-making regarding this complex phenomenon. It is about their hard work, dedication, commitment to excellence, and the pressures that they face every day as they work hard with their colleagues, families, and students to do what is in the best interest of students. It is about all of this and about their abilities and struggles with contextualization of these complex notions.

As I begin this chapter it is important to once again explicitly note the important connection between public good outcomes for students and the powerful subtext of transformative leadership that undergirds this study. Ultimately, as shall be addressed in chapter 5, this study is about whether or not the participants feel as though they are afforded the opportunities to fully engage in transformative leadership practices, and as such, the findings presented in this chapter are critical to that understanding.
This chapter will begin by introducing the participants, and after these introductions and some brief clarification regarding the structure of the chapter I will move on to presentation of the critical and contextual themes that arose in this study.

**Participants**

As I described in chapter 3 I began my search for participants by using a reputational approach to site selection. Once I developed my list of 31 possible participants, I began seeking their participation, first via email and then with follow-up telephone calls. After several weeks of communicating with the respondents in various ways I ultimately found myself with a participant pool of seven elementary principals. It is important to note here that of while roughly one-third (10 of the 27 principals) of the prospective participants on my original list were male, my final applicant pool of seven principals was comprised of all female school leaders. While there could be numerous reasons for this it would mostly require pointless conjecture on my part to explain. In simple terms it is important to note that my focus on the elementary level (where a vast majority of the teaching population is still female) likely contributed to the fact that the entire participant pool was female. In addition, while this study does not directly address issues of gendering it seems likely that upon further exploration such issues would be powerfully relevant. Suffice it to say that I had the opportunity to learn from seven impressive women who lead affluent elementary schools in the suburbs of the greater Chicagoland area. In addition to all being female, the seven participants in this study were all Caucasian and have all been teachers at one point or another in their professional careers. Some basic identifying characteristics of the participants appear below in Table 3 (for a point of clarification, all participant names, community names, and other identifying information have been changed to protect the
anonymity of participants). Note that I have defined experience level in three general categories, novice (less than 5 years), moderate (between 5 and 15 years) and veteran (over 15 years).

Table 3

Participant Principals and Experience Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Educational background</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Experience in public education</th>
<th>Experience in administration</th>
<th>Experience in this community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Thompson</td>
<td>Doctoral student</td>
<td>Danbury</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Patricia Hepler</td>
<td>Ed.D.</td>
<td>Edison</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela Rosen</td>
<td>Doctoral student</td>
<td>Trenton</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Novice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Jones</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>Long Beach</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Willix</td>
<td>Doctoral candidate</td>
<td>Torrington</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Novice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Miller</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Bronson</td>
<td>A.B.D.</td>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outside of these basic characteristics, the participants presented fairly diverse backgrounds. Some had been administrators for many years while others had much more recently begun their work in the administrative ranks. Some had worked at the central office and university level while others had always worked in a school building. Several participants had furthered their education towards a doctoral degree (one has earned a doctoral degree), and all had various backgrounds both in and out of the educational field. It is also important to note that some of these participants have worked in a variety of schools and communities while others have maintained the majority of their experience in affluent communities like the ones in which they currently work. As shall become increasingly clear throughout the remaining two chapters, each of the factors noted in this paragraph likely played some role in the ways that these educators contextualized their professional experiences and then communicated about them with me.
Table 4 briefly highlights the participants along with some numerical information regarding their school communities (including E.A.V. and the percentage of low income students that were more fully described in the previous chapter), and the size of the individual school districts. In the following section, I will briefly highlight each of the participants and describe some of the important characteristics that more fully illuminate them as people and participants in this study.

Table 4

*Participants and Community Information*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie Thompson</td>
<td>Danbury</td>
<td>4 /elementary</td>
<td>345,081</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>$108,867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Patricia Hepler</td>
<td>Edison</td>
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<td>631,318</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$79,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela Rosen</td>
<td>Trenton</td>
<td>4/elementary</td>
<td>378,483</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$67,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Jones</td>
<td>Long Beach</td>
<td>17/unit</td>
<td>265,167</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$108,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen Willix</td>
<td>Torrington</td>
<td>9/elementary</td>
<td>420,530</td>
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<td>$83,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Miller</td>
<td>Union</td>
<td>9/elementary</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$114,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Bronson</td>
<td>Union</td>
<td>9/elementary</td>
<td>690,243</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$114,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>State of Illinois</em></td>
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<td>868/K-12</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>$50,046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stephanie Thompson**

Mrs. Stephanie Thompson grew up in what she poignantly described as, “a sundown town”: an overtly damning reference to Loewen’s (2005) book about generally small, mostly rural communities (or affluent suburbs) that were by force or custom typically occupied by an all Caucasian population. Her hometown community, which was of course mostly white, was not by her definition, affluent. “I grew up . . . where, you know, Wal-Mart was the main shopping location in the town,” she shared while describing a childhood that was, “vastly different . . .
from what’s wealthy.” Before high school graduation Stephanie moved to the suburbs and after graduating from high school in the mid-1990s she attended a large Big 10 university and earned a degree in education. Upon graduation from the university Stephanie was hired to teach middle school in the affluent community of Danbury (which remains her current place of employment). While teaching middle school in Danbury Mrs. Thompson worked toward and completed her master’s degree in educational administration and moved up the ranks to become the assistant principal at the same middle school. She then transitioned into her current position as an elementary principal a few years ago and this year she has began coursework in a doctoral program at a large, well-respected university. Stephanie described her current position as her, “first venture into the elementary world” and specifically and intriguingly identified her current district as her, “only formal district, which is interesting.” When I asked her why she would say that, her response was reflective:

I think Danbury is a very unique place. Specifically, I have several friends obviously who are in the educational arena in various places, and through my current graduate work have been exposed to . . . a lot of different varieties of school districts. And I think this place, because it’s so small, because tradition is embedded strongly . . . I can do probably what I want, when I want, in relation to the direction in my particular building . . . . It’s just Mayberry . . . and there are probably several examples that seem very normal to me that people would say, I can’t believe that that happens here.

As shall become clearer throughout the remainder of this chapter, Mrs. Thompson’s thoughts regarding the unique cultural milieu of her school community, her reference to tradition, and her use of the term Mayberry to describe the community are all representative of the experiences of her peers.

**Dr. Patricia Hepler**

Dr. Patricia Hepler is a veteran educator in the Chicago suburbs who has been successful in a wide variety of communities and positions during her career. Patricia was an elementary school teacher for nearly a decade in Edison, which she somewhat reluctantly described as an
affluent community. After teaching in numerous grades at the elementary level she became a part-time assistant principal for a few years before starting her first elementary principalship in a less affluent school where she, “stayed for two years because it was me and 550 students and one secretary and it was just overwhelming.” From there Patricia moved to a slightly more affluent district, one that she described as, “in the middle” and worked there for several more years before making a move back to the affluent district of Edison where she began her career as a teacher. After working in that district for a few more years she was approached with an opportunity to take an assistant superintendent position in a very affluent community: one that she described as, “way up there!” Dr. Hepler worked in this position for only a year, describing the position as “the loneliest job I ever had” due to the small central office and a divided administrative team. Fortunately for her an opportunity arose in her former district and she returned to an elementary principalship, “back in my district that I loved, and have spent most of my career in.” When asked to describe an affluent community Dr. Hepler noted:

To me it’s people with that background that they have a desire to know things. And I say that whether they’ve gotten the education or not, they are people who make informed decisions, I think is the best way. You don’t necessarily have to have that education to make those informed decisions, but we’ve all been in those communities where people will do their research and come back to you with information in order to back up what they’re thinking or what they’re saying. And I think that’s what you find in an affluent community, that you better know what you’re talking about, because more than likely people have done their research and they come equipped, not just I have a question, but I have a solution that I’ve thought out and this is why.

Interestingly, Dr, Hepler chose to define affluence in terms of knowledge and attitudes and she avoided any reference to financial means. As I will demonstrate, Dr. Hepler’s characterization is fairly representative of her fellow participants.

**Pamela Rosen**

Ms. Pamela Rosen is a fairly recent transplant to the Chicago area and she brought probably the most unique and eclectic life experiences to the small suburban community of
Trenton where is currently an elementary school principal. Ms. Rosen grew up, “in a very small farming town” where she, “didn’t have a lot of exposure to different cultures.” After obtaining her college degree and, “intrigued by all the things I didn’t grow up around,” Pamela joined the Peace Corps and lived in Asia for a few years before returning to United States and the Southwest and earned a master’s degree while teaching middle school in what she described as, “an inner city school” by day and teaching at an alternative high school at night. Ms. Rosen described these experiences as, “pretty intense” and after working in that environment for a few years she decided that she, “wanted to come to the Midwest and sort of have that experience.” Upon moving there, Pamela again taught middle school, this time for a very short time in large, diverse district that she, “just adored” before becoming a curriculum coordinator and then shortly thereafter an assistant principal at the elementary level. After working in that school for a short time Ms. Rosen made a thoughtful and reflective decision to seek a job in Trenton, and she discussed that experience in a somewhat guarded, nuanced, and ambivalent way that is representative of the complicated relationship that the participant principals recognized regarding their own understanding of affluence and the purposes of schooling.

I wanted to see what it was like on the other side of the tracks so I specifically chose this school. Not that it’s—I don’t think of it as being an affluent school by any means, but you know, middle class families. We have stay at home moms. I mean what a luxury, right? So we’re very lucky. . . . So I really came here for that reason, to try to figure out what works in this school that maybe I could carry back into an inner city school.

It is important to note that here in one statement Ms. Rosen was able to somehow describe her community as affluent (the “luxury” of stay at home moms, and the fact that her school is on “the other side of the tracks”) and middle class. This dichotomy was espoused by participants throughout their involvement in this study.
Susan Jones

Mrs. Susan Jones was the most veteran educator to participate in this study, embarking on the interview process with me just days before her official retirement as a principal of an affluent elementary school in the large and fairly diverse suburban school district of Long Beach. Mrs. Jones taught elementary school for several years in a very large, urban district after graduating from college in the late 1960s, and then chose to stay home with her children after the birth of her first child. Susan, whose husband is a retired superintendent, described her years out of the education field as, “really good,” and, “a good example of what women’s lib. was all about.” As her children grew, Mrs. Jones began to work occasionally as a substitute teacher and eventually after some soul searching found her way back into a classroom teaching position, this time at the middle school level in Long Beach. From there she followed a somewhat representative career path: first becoming a team leader and then an assistant principal before being offered the elementary principal position in Long Beach which she has held for the last five years. Susan followed this career path all the while raising two highly successful children who attended prestigious east coast universities, earned multiple degrees, and became highly successful professionals in their own right. This background certainly related to Mrs. Jones’s regard for academic rigor and engagement in school demonstrated by the multiple instances in which she described her concern for ensuring that kids have access to programs that “challenge” them. “I’ll work my tail off to get a kid in that. . . . I will do back flips, get them the best thing I can get them.” She further noted:

So I’m always saying, one of my things is, we still need to make memories with kids. That when they look back at their education they’re not going to say, I remember the math lesson Mrs. Jones taught me when I was in third grade. They’re probably not going to remember that. But they probably will remember the field trip downtown Long Beach where they met somebody important or they had some experience. For me it was the big outdoor thing I used to do and all that stuff. And when I run into adults who were my
students and I say, what do you remember about sixth grade?...You know, they’re in their 30s, you know, and they remember everything about it and it was really using all the skills they had as human beings and students putting it all together. So I just always say, you know, remember that you’re building citizens, people. You’re not just building little students.

In some respects this regard for academically talented students contrasted with her description of broader educational goals, and highlighted a dichotomy between both public good and private good outcomes for students that was representative of her fellow participants.

Karen Willix

In contrast to Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Karen Willix took part in our first interview just 30 days into her first principalship. Still, while she humbly described herself as a new principal who was, “still learning,” Mrs. Willix is actually a veteran educator who has worked for nearly two decades in both public and private schools in the Midwest. Karen began her career teaching at a private school in a wealthy neighboring community that she described as, “loaded. . . . They are bajillionaires!” and these formative experiences certainly helped to shape her beliefs and experiences. After working for a few years, Mrs. Willix sought out a teaching position in a public school because she really, “believes in the model [where] we take every student in,” and after becoming a fourth grade teacher in a neighboring community she quickly developed herself as a teacher leader by seeking out initiatives and becoming a staff trainer and curriculum developer in numerous curriculum and mapping initiatives within her district. In a few short years Mrs. Willix was offered the opportunity to become an assistant principal and not long after that she was asked to move up the ranks to the central office and become the director of curriculum in that district. Karen indicated that, while it felt right at the time, it took about two years for her to realize that she missed the kids and the energy of a school building, and so she sought out this new position as an elementary school principal in the affluent suburb of
Torrington. Karen described Torrington and compared it to other neighboring communities thusly:

We don’t have as much poverty and we don’t have as much challenge as they do. And I think that’s part of it. We have good cherries, so we make good cherry pie. We have great cherries walking in the door.

As our conversation about wealth continued she described Torrington as “blue collar” and “middle class.” When I asked her to define wealth for me she pointed to a former district and described these characteristics:

I think of that where they have houses all over the country and I didn’t even teach in December because they were all traveling or on cruises. This seems normal to me probably ‘cause I grew up in a normal upper class neighborhood.

In our conversations Karen and I discussed perceptions of wealth, income, and status as they relate to the context of public schooling here in the United States, and as shall become clearer her frank, candid and sometimes contrasting descriptions highlighted an undercurrent that also embodied the thoughts and descriptions of her fellow participants.

**Jane Miller**

Mrs. Jane Miller is a veteran educator from the suburbs who brought the important perspective of a special educator to our interview process. Mrs. Miller taught special education classes for over fifteen years and worked in various self-contained and resource capacities. During this time Jane also earned her administrative credential at a local university and parlayed her varied background and experiences into a brief stint as an educational consultant. At the time, as she described, “we were really big into inclusion,” and Jane had the opportunity to work in several suburban school districts as they worked through the transition to a more inclusive approach to special education. One of the districts in which Mrs. Miller consulted was the small, affluent community of Union where her consulting experiences helped her to build connections that eventually led to an offer to fill an elementary principal’s maternity leave position.
According to Jane she, “just loved” the experiences of the elementary principalship in Union and upon the principal’s return she set out to obtain her own elementary principalship. Union, however, only wanted principals with experience and so Mrs. Miller left the district and worked as both an assistant principal and a principal in a larger, neighboring school district before returning to Union where she has worked as the elementary principal for the past six years.

While Mrs. Miller clearly enjoys her position, and in fact made a conscious decision to seek it out many years ago, she was also frank about some of the challenges that it presents. Specifically, Jane and I discussed the social pressures of the job in great detail, and she shared several insights regarding the pressure to act in certain ways and believe in certain things. “You can’t let your hair down ever,” she noted, adding that, “you have to think of anywhere you go you have the potential of seeing a family.” Later, Mrs. Miller candidly discussed how she feels compelled to prepare her teenage daughter before they go out in public together. Jane tells her daughter:

You’re not going to be screwing around because somebody sees you with me and all of a suddenly that impression may be different. . . . You end up shifting the way—you think, when does that ever stop?

As I will explore in greater detail later in this chapter, Mrs. Miller’s descriptions reflect the extensiveness to which these types of pressures end up permeating the beliefs and experiences of elementary principals in affluent communities.

Ashley Bronson

Mrs. Ashley Bronson is a colleague of Jane Miller and a fellow elementary principal in the affluent community of Union. While Mrs. Bronson did do a little bit of moving early in her career working as a classroom teacher and a curriculum coordinator in various districts she has maintained much more longevity in this one community than her colleague, having worked as an administrator in Union for over two decades. When I asked Ashley what took her to Union at
that time she noted the community’s demographics explicitly, remarking that, “the district was a match to the prior districts I’d been in . . . affluent districts,” in other parts of the country. She also noted the district’s reputation for high achievement and the opportunity to work with a highly respected superintendent as further enticing factors. When I asked Ashley to describe the purpose of schooling she used words like, “inspire,” “passion,” “motivation,” and “confidence,” while also highlighting the importance of using content knowledge across different contexts to help get students to those places. She suggested that a core purpose of public education is to give, “the children all a taste, a little bit of everything so you can tap on—this child might be passionate about poetry or clay or painting or reading or math.”

Mrs. Bronson’s strong belief in the importance of content knowledge is at least part of what inspires her very strong passion in the importance of quality teaching and sound curriculum development. During our conversations Ashley repeatedly addressed her feelings regarding the vital role that these components of schooling play in student success. “Teachers need to be very thorough in why we do what we do,” she noted, later adding that the very involved parents in her community, “think they’re getting a top education for their children” because of these types of processes. As this particular conversation progressed Mrs. Bronson and I discussed the varying influences that wealth and affluence may have on this goal and on her students’ abilities to achieve it. Mrs. Bronson believes that her district provides a top-notch education for students:

Not because we’re wealthy, but because we hired really good people, really good teachers, really good central administration. I think we have a really good curriculum model. . . . It’s not a matter of being affluent. It’s a matter of being focused and looking at research and looking at what our kids come knowing and not knowing—and teaching and staff development and curriculum development.

Mrs. Bronson’s strong opinion regarding these substantive issues was telling, and it represented a general theme expressed by several principal participants of this study that will be further illuminated later in this chapter.
The Public/Private Tension, Acknowledgement, and Co-Intentionality

As noted above, in this study I set out to learn about the experiences of elementary principals in affluent school communities as they relate to the tension between private good expectations and public good responsibilities for schooling. In this regard I crafted subordinate research questions that sought to discover contextual understanding of the pressures and influences that shape the complex perceptions of the participants, and thus I not only set out to learn what they think, feel, or do, but just as importantly, I set out to learn why? This question of why is fundamentally important to address explicitly because, simply put, while participants may well be able to describe their own experiences, thoughts, and opinions, they may not be able to unambiguously acknowledge the reasons or contextual factors that provide their foundation. For example, as shall be demonstrated throughout the remainder chapter, the public/private tension largely exists and permeates much of the data as described by participants, however, it also often goes largely unacknowledged in their own voices and sometimes only barely acknowledged when addressed by me in our conversations. As I considered this lack of acknowledgement, the important research questions that sought to answer the question why, and the ontological, epistemological, and methodological underpinnings of this study I recognized that Duarte’s (2000) co-intentional approach could help to play a crucial role in presenting more richly contextual data. Thus here I have described how I use this approach in the remainder of this chapter.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, I undertook this study armed with a critical lens and prepared to utilize a co-intentional approach to deconstructing and contextualizing the experiences of participants. In this respect I relied heavily on both the foundational work of Moustakas (1994) and his focus on the reflectivity of the phenomenological researcher. By
digging deep into the data, finding significant statements, reaching the “horizons,” and conducting constant comparison between participant descriptions I was able to identify key themes that arose and emerged in my co-intentional discussions with the participant principals, and I have presented those themes here in this chapter. However, in addition to Moustakas I also relied heavily on the critical work of Duarte (2000) who noted that, “philosophical dialogue mediates an experience in which multiple cogitos experience the same stream of consciousness” (p. 185). Duarte suggests that true reflectiveness in a researcher requires explicit philosophical dialogue: both an intention and an ability to play a role in the meaning-making process of phenomenological research, and thus here as I present the findings of this research it is vital that I play that active in meaning construction, acknowledge that role, and ensure that it is clear to the reader where I have and have not inserted my own philosophical dialogue.

As the problem statement for this study suggests, school principals, especially those in affluent communities, find themselves at the heart of a complicated tension that bolsters a powerful undercurrent in our philosophical understanding of the role of schooling. When this undercurrent is considered in relation to the foundational research question in this study that sought descriptions of principal experiences regarding that tension it becomes clear that these descriptions may themselves be incomplete, and it thus becomes incumbent upon me as the co-intentional researcher to more thoroughly depict and contextualize and complete those descriptions. Not only does this mean that I spoke a great deal and contributed my own thoughts and perspectives during the interview process, but it also requires that I purposefully contribute my own voice here. Thus in the remainder of this chapter I have not only shared what’s there (the common themes that clearly arose in the voices of the participant principals), but also what’s missing (the important underlying subtext that may have eluded the participants or me during our
conversations). I have, at various points throughout the remainder of this chapter, changed the font and right-justified the text to indicate that I have stepped away from the hard data and included my own philosophical dialogue regarding what may well be missing from the participants’ descriptions. This approach is intended as a visual representation of my purposeful inclusion of philosophical dialogue which is included in an effort to more fully and reflectively present a more complete picture of the lived experience of this phenomenon.

**Community Generalizations**

Before probing further into the common themes that arose in my dialogue with participants I believe it is important to describe some of the generalizations that can be drawn about the makeup and social construction of the affluent communities that are represented in this study. Throughout the entire co-intentional process of meaning making in this study, the participants (myself included) noted several basic characteristics that seem fundamentally representative across these communities and it is important to note some of those larger generalizations here at the outset, as they certainly contributed to our understanding of the milieu in which we were collaborating. What follows is a generalized, composite description of the affluent communities in which the participant principals lead schools. While individual examples obviously represent specific communities, they all, in effect, contribute to a composite understanding of the lifestyle and cultural context that exists in these locales.

As an interesting way to begin this description I share a brief anecdote regarding my visits to each of these school communities. When the principals represented here formally agreed to participate in this study I immediately arranged interviews where I could visit their schools and I offered to bring each of them their drink of choice from Starbucks (the ubiquitous coffee shop famous for its upscale feel, yuppie flair, and relatively expensive coffee-based beverages). I
originally made this offer as a gesture of gratitude but soon realized that it actually contributed to the meaning making in this study, for not one school represented in this study was further than a 5 minute jaunt from a Starbucks coffee shop. Each time I set my Global Positing System (GPS) to a school’s location and then sought a Starbuck’s on the map it seemed that there was one located right around the corner, usually in a quaint little downtown type area or an upscale suburban shopping mall. Thus I realized that access to upscale retail and expensive coffee represented just one simple component of the requisite social construction in these communities. As one participant succinctly noted, “white people like Starbucks.” This tongue in cheek comment about expensive coffee buoys another important characteristic of these communities: their racial homogeneity. Each of the communities represented in this study is largely Caucasian in racial make-up, with the two most diverse schools being roughly 75% White, with Asian and Hispanic students making up the majority of the non-White population. In these communities participants described parents who “value the importance of education” and who themselves are “highly educated” and “successful.” They described these educated and successful parents as “strong advocates” for their children, and they all noted that parents are very active in the school community and regularly present in the building. In addition to these characteristics the participants also interestingly described some similar personal characteristics of the community members, such as mothers who show up to drop their children off, “with Prada bags and yoga pants” or “wearing $200 jeans.” In addition participants described a generally ubiquitous presence of other various lifestyle luxuries within these communities, such as children and parents wearing expensive, fashionable clothing, students with access to the latest technology, and families with luxury cars, second homes, or, at the least, regular vacations outside of the local area.
In these communities the vast majority of students live in large, single-family homes, and in each of these locations participants shared with me that “tear downs” exist (a “tear down” is an upscale suburban or urban phenomenon where someone purchases a home, typically—though not always—a smaller traditional home, in a desirable community and then demolishes it and rebuilds a much larger one on the property). In addition to these “tear downs” (which were certainly much more conspicuous in some communities than in others) participants described traditional housing and neighborhood communities where students live close by on quiet streets. Interestingly though, each of these communities exists within a unique pocket of suburbia where the school seems to somehow simultaneously exist in a quiet and peaceful neighborhood, all the while being minutes away from upscale retail, restaurants, and commercial property. In any of these school communities parents can leave a peaceful neighborhood with mature landscaping and empty streets and in minutes be driving down a main thoroughfare filled with organic grocery stores, luxury and ultra-luxury car dealerships (I not only drove by Lexus, BMW and Mercedes dealerships, but I also passed both a Ferrari dealership and a Bentley dealership in my travels to these schools), and numerous other luxuries that do not exist in many rural, urban, or suburban locales.

As a final point I believe it is important to highlight the physical nature of the schools themselves. It is interesting to note that with one exception (Susan Jones’s school in Long Beach) each of the schools I visited was either an older, traditional school building or, even more interestingly, one that was built to appear old and traditional. Several of these school buildings are older and have been in use for many years (as one would likely expect in an older, established community) but interestingly, some of the schools themselves followed the tear down model noted above, where the older school buildings were knocked down and replaced with new,
state of the art buildings, that were designed to have a traditional appearance that “fit the community.” That fit, a focus on traditionalism mixed with a strong desire for the latest and greatest, seems a fitting end to the description of these affluent communities and a perfect segue into the principals’ beliefs and experiences regarding the purpose of schooling.

**The Purpose of Schooling—The Dichotomous Experience of the Public/Private Tension**

This study is grounded in an effort to more fully realize how principals in affluent communities understand and describe their own perceptions regarding the purpose of schooling, and to further attempt to discern their perceptions regarding the complex relationship between private good expectations and public good responsibilities. Interestingly (although certainly not altogether unsurprisingly), I found that the principals who participated in this study acknowledge both public and private good purposes in their professional lives and that these experiences intricately and often dichotomously connect to their individual beliefs regarding those same fundamental purposes. As the participants described their own thoughts and experiences they regularly bounced back and forth between descriptions of private good and public good purposes of schooling. Sometimes these descriptions were separated in conversation and context, and sometimes they occurred in the same breath, further highlighting the tenuous and complicated nature of the relationship. What follows is a deep description of the participants’ experiences regarding both the public good and private good purposes of schooling. These experiences are described through the unique lens of the affluent principalship and are constructed upon the beliefs and experiences that principals shared regarding their own understanding of the purpose of schooling. The next several sections illuminate these beliefs and experiences through key themes that arose in our co-intentional conversations.
Public Good Belief Systems

In describing their own beliefs regarding the purpose of public schooling every principal participant described specific facets of their own belief system that focused on some form of public good responsibility. As Karen Willix explicitly noted early in our first conversation, “I really believe in [the public school system]. I believe in the model. Everyone—we’ll just take every student in.” This belief in the public good philosophy of public schooling was displayed throughout my conversations with participants and demonstrated what I perceived as a genuine belief in the collective philosophy of our education system. One way that participants described this responsibility was in their view regarding the important responsibility of the public school in the development of productive citizens in a democracy. For example, Pamela Rosen noted the importance of citizenship explicitly in relation to the school’s role in developing civil society:

The whole piece for public schools, I guess is just to promote kind of . . . civility in our society and have at least a basic understanding of functioning skills that we need in math and reading and those types of things, how to treat people, how to engage socially with people. Hopefully it’s bigger than that and it’s about setting goals and looking to the future and thinking about the whole of the world and how to keep it healthy and take care of each other, take care of the earth, those kinds of things which we’re going to have to come to understand pretty well just as people.

Stephanie Thompson further echoed this sentiment and addressed the context of citizenship building in a similarly nuanced tone:

I would like to see the purpose of schools to be something far broader than where we’re at. And I think part of that comes into the idea of social justice and bringing up uncomfortable topics and being accepting different ideas and different values and not trying to make people the same, but recognizing those differences. And even moving, you know, here most of our kids have the basics, and most of our kids frankly are going to be successful regardless of how we are as teachers and if they have a great teacher or not, because they come so prepared and their parents are going to put the time in to make sure that they’re—you know, this image of success or however we define that. So I suppose for me I would like to see schooling more about problem solving and moving into real world applications and saying . . . yes we established this basis for what kids know, not let’s take them outside of their box and put them into some sort of tangible opportunity to do something bigger than learn math.
Mrs. Thompson’s frank observation here regarding the likely private sector success of her students based upon the current hegemonic context of success in the United States seemed tremendously insightful and underscored a fundamental experience for all the participants: “most of our kids frankly are going to be successful regardless of how we are as teachers.” Interestingly though, while the participants recognized this basic fact and similarly recognized that citizenship-building represents one of their public good responsibilities as a school leader, they largely failed to acknowledge the next fundamental step—actually taking action to address that issue within their system. When it was addressed, participants generally noted the challenging political environment within which they work. Mrs. Thompson expanded in this way:

This is a political place, and the game must be played in that way. And I think the big picture for our district right now is actually to move in that direction, but there are a lot of T’s that need to be crossed and I’s that need to be dotted. And I think we need to assure the baseline success of the basics first. And the basics meaning that regardless of who you are coming into this school, that you are going to be successful by these unfortunate standards, or fortunate, depending on how you look at them. So those building blocks have to come in play.

As we explored this notion in greater detail, I came to understand Stephanie to be saying that citizenship training in a democracy is important, and it is something that she personally values. However, she ultimately recognizes that in her community success is still largely measured by the hegemonic social norms of academic success and status, and thus, like her peers, she feels that her capacity to affect that change is limited.

Again, it is important to highlight here that Stephanie’s representative perspective is, in my opinion, intuitively accurate and it also highlights an obvious catch 22 in the system—if the school is the institution with the responsibility for building citizens but the school feels as though the current cultural norms and social constructs disallow that, then how can that cycle ever be reversed if that process does not start in the school?
In addition to the purpose of citizenship training, participants also expressed their beliefs regarding the public schools’ responsibility for ensuring that all students are provided the opportunity to work to their fullest potential. Mrs. Jane Miller made the argument this way:

I feel like we’re here to give them the best opportunity to be successful in whatever avenue they choose to do. So exposing them to reading, writing, math, the fine arts to, you know, just to be lifelong learners for their career and having it be as successful as possible at that elementary experience, having it be pleasant, having it be, this is a fun place to be. This is something that I enjoy the memories of so that they can grow upon that when they leave us is kind of my thinking of why we’re here.

In expanding on this thinking, Dr. Patricia Hepler shared her perspective by articulating her belief in education as a fundamental right that supports students in a variety of ways—not just in academic terms:

I think our goal is to give everybody access to education because education is power. And I really believe that everybody has a right to that, and that’s one way that you can get in [the system] and you can grow.

When I asked her to expand on her use of the word “power” she went on to say:

I see that social aspect and building leaders. . . . So the bigger thing is, we talk about the whole child. And I really do believe that’s what we’re in charge of, that whole child, not just that education, but looking at the social/emotional well being of them, [and] . . . how do we help them help themselves to figure out what’s in the community? What are those resources? And I know that was not that way when I went to school. It was you go in, you get your lesson, you go home. . . . And now we really surround families and kids with anything we can think of.

Mrs. Susan Jones also addressed this notion regarding students having the opportunity to work to their fullest potential and she highlighted the important role that differences play in that process:

I think our goal is to give human beings the skills they need to be successful in the world and meet the challenges they’re going to face. Probably all kids some things, but it’s going to be different for kids. And so you hope that as they get older, education meets their needs for whatever those needs are and that we recognize talents and limitations of people and we lead them in the right direction and we provide them with the tools they need. And you know, responsible, respectful adults. And we model that for them and we talk about those things, and we work through problems.

It is interesting to note here that while Mrs. Jones explicitly highlighted the important notion of differentiation and recognition of individual student
talents and needs, much of our conversation focused on the academic notions of success and the requisite program needs for that success. For example, after a long conversation regarding the accelerated program in her district and her passion for ensuring that qualified students have access to that program I asked her if she felt as passionate about ensuring similar programs in the arts or humanities. Her response was to note that, “it is different because it is more of a qualitative talent than a quantitative talent,” and to further suggest that in elementary school our role in those areas is to provide a purely foundational experience so those talents can be nurtured later in the students’ school careers. This dichotomy, it seems, underscores the notion that even when participants may feel as though they are supporting the public good purpose of schooling their tendency (for numerous reasons) may well be to lean toward more private good contextualization of those goals.

It is important to note here that in each of these instances the participants were explicitly discussing their understandings and opinions regarding the public good purpose of schooling as they related to their own context working in these affluent communities.

Ultimately, it is important to note here that although the participants in this study clearly expressed their feelings and beliefs regarding the public good purpose of schooling they were much less likely or able to describe specific experiences that reinforced those beliefs. While they may well believe in what they perceive to be legitimate and powerful public good responsibilities for schooling, the context within which they work often seems to require a different focus on tests and test scores and individual academic achievement.

As the next section will demonstrate, their described experiences were dominated by private good expectations of the principals, their teachers, and their students.

**Competitiveness at the Systemic Level**

Broadly speaking, while the principals who took part in this study shared a strong rhetorical and philosophical belief in the public good purpose of schooling, the experiences that they described were overwhelmingly focused on private good expectations for students. In one
way or another, these principals all shared the feeling that private good expectations come at
them both overtly, in the form of pressures from colleagues and community members, and more
surreptitiously, in the form of structural or societal expectations that in one sense or another
influence and shape their practice. Throughout this section I focus more specifically on some of
the pressures that principals described regarding the competitive aspects of the private good
purposes of schooling, but before that it is important to address some of the general perceptions
and experiences that participants described in this context. In broad terms participants identified
a strong competitive ethos at the heart of their experience with private good expectations for
schooling and these notions arose in at two distinct levels. The broadest level, which I will
describe first here, is the societal level where participants depicted their practices in relation to
the broader societal context of competition and what that means for students. What follows are
the participant principals’ explanations of their experiences regarding the societal level of
competition that maintains a private good expectation that expects their students to be afforded a
competitive advantage and given the opportunity to get ahead in the system by either achieving
or maintaining status in society at large.

Adroitly, several participant principals noted explicitly that the private good desire for a
competitive advantage for students starts at the very beginning: the original choice that parents
made to live in these communities. For example, multiple participants discussed their
experiences giving building tours or discussing their building’s characteristics with prospective
families who were considering moving into town. Dr. Hepler’s experience is representative in
this regard:

I get tons and tons of people, it seems like more every year, they read what’s in the
newspaper as far as your ranking. They know that you’re a high achieving school, and
they walk in and they want a tour. And I always take the time. The secretary is always
really nice. And they’ll come to see other schools, too. And I think they pride themselves on that they’ve chosen us, because it really says a lot.

Susan Jones echoed this sentiment noting that:

They want the very best for their kids. They moved to this neighborhood to be here. And I can’t tell you how sure I am of that, because practically every new family I meet says we’ve picked you out. My wife said I had to get a house here—moving from Texas. . . . I would say they definitely want what they feel from reading the statistics and everything it is the best place for their child.

As our discussion continued and we returned to the topic of this competitive ethos and parental expectations that the school inoculate it into their students Mrs. Jones astutely addressed the expectation in relation to the parents and their personal experiences regarding this competitive perspective.

And you know what else, they didn’t just get here by accident. I mean, we’ve got people who are driven, they have goals, they want their kids to be the same way. And it’s not—they work hard. Most of them work hard. And you can’t really fault them for wanting the best. So I relate to that.

It is fundamentally important here to address two separate subtle yet powerful portions of this exchange as they speak volumes regarding the professional experiences of these principals. These issues will be addressed in greater detail later but for now it is simply important to recognize them. First, as Mrs. Jones highlighted the private sector achievements of these parents she briefly stopped, took a subtle pause, and casually but purposefully shifted the direction. “It’s not—” she stated before making a simple statement about the positive qualities demonstrated by parents. It was as if she had more to say and she recognized that she was about to frame it in a negative context: it’s not that they are small minded, or selfish or what have you. What Mrs. Jones did here was to subtly shift her language to speak in the affirmative, a trait and practice that, as shall be addressed further, was demonstrated by her colleagues throughout these discussions.

In addition, Susan’s last comment is equally important. Susan relates to this belief in achievement and rigorous standards, and the belief that these kids deserve the best, and she further suggests that she understands this
fundamental experience of the affluent parents in her community. These are two equally powerful observations.

Interestingly, while the participants in this study made it clear that parents and community members express a strong desire for what Jane Miller simply described as “the best,” they also noted that in many cases parents and community members do not even know what that is—they just know that they want it. Again, as Mrs. Miller suggested in one discussion: “they wanted to have excellent schools, you know, top performing schools and they knew they had them, but they didn’t know how to get even further ahead.”

The notion of further ahead is critical to note here in terms of its representativeness of the competitive ethos that participants described.

The perspectives of Susan Jones are again salient to note here, as she further highlighted this notion about societal competitiveness:

They don’t necessarily know what the best is. They’re trusting that you will know, and that you will know what it is for their child, and that you’re not going to limit their child. Like this is the way it’s done. My child needs such and such. . . . It’s not all for one, one for all. In many cases it’s [just] all for one.

Note the focus here is not only on the fierce desire for provision of a societally competitive advantage, but also on the individualization that parents presume can help foster that. The focus on individualization will be highlighted later in this text.

Finally, I turn to the canny perspective shared by Karen Willix regarding this desire for societal competitiveness. As Karen and I discussed this notion, she shared a somewhat contradictory message by simultaneously saying that parents do not care about the school’s reputation (in this instance in regard to public acclaim and notoriety), but also do care that their students receive “the best.” Mrs. Willix noted that this lack of clarity regarding “the best” is due in part to parents’ “simple” expectations for her school.
Parents want their school to do well. They want—parents hear about who their kids’ teachers are. They want a good teacher. They want a teacher with a good reputation. They don’t care if, you know, two counties over people are talking about Torrington. I think they want to come from a place that’s a great school, but that’s kind of PR stuff that we care about as administrators because we know we want that reputation.

It is highly interesting to note the dichotomous experience that Mrs. Willix describes here. By suggesting that parents desire good teachers and successful schools she is in one sense affirming the desire for a competitive advantage. However, in the same breath she is simultaneously acknowledging that parents may not recognize what the fundamental components of that advantage may be. Here Karen is highlighting three key issues that will be further illuminated in this chapter: a focus on the narrowly academic definition of success, the struggle that principals in affluent schools face in cultivating a vision (even one that reinforces the possibly hegemonic perspectives of parents), and finally the challenge of propelling a vision that may well be counter to the traditional mores of an affluent community.

In a sense, all of these participants described not only the structurally competitive nature of their experiences regarding the purpose of schooling, but also the rigid pressure that they themselves feel to help their students achieve within that system. Here it is important to highlight how participants described their experiences and beliefs regarding the important role that public perception plays in this respect. At various points in our conversations, each of the participants noted the important status ascribed to test scores both within the local communities and in greater society at large with multiple principals noting the important role that media plays in the reporting of academic scores to the public. For example, Dr. Hepler noted that parents find themselves most concerned with the information that is reported in various local newspapers:

It’s what everybody sees. It’s not that, boy, kids really get along there, and there’s not a lot of playground problems. And it seems like they’ve got a pretty good self worth. And it’s not all that stuff, because that’s the stuff that you don’t see. It’s the, I’ve got a test score and I can see that, and I can measure that. How do you measure how much a kid loves to come to school and can’t wait to see their teacher in the morning? There’s no measure for that. And so to me, and I tell my staff members, people don’t care what you
know until they know that you care. And so I think I said that before, you’ve got to get those relationships.

It is important again to recognize how the participants (in this case Dr. Hepler) feel torn. Patricia’s belief system compels her to focus, at least in part, on the public good purposes of schooling but there is significant tension in her voice here as she relates the balancing act that she feels she must endure to keep that focus.

Similarly to Dr. Hepler’s experience, Mrs. Jones, discussed the ranking that her school received in that same publication based on last year’s state assessment data; Mrs. Miller addressed the challenges of not being ranked number one in a local magazine article; and Ashley Bronson even discussed how a parent in her community might be compelled to report that information in her role as a television news anchor. In addition, several of these schools either have earned or are working toward earning a National Blue Ribbon Schools designation from the Federal Department of Education, a recognition that maintains a strong focus on academic achievement on state sponsored assessments. This designation itself comes with a great deal of pomp and circumstance and much public attention. Ultimately in any of these instances of the private good, it is clear that societal pressures regarding competitive advantage and private good success often work to force their way into the experiences of these principals. Fittingly, Pamela Rosen noted this pressure, and her experience regarding how it maneuvers its way from the outside in:

The school board, they want to know what the scores say. I think they’re good people, and they too value good citizens, that we’re teaching the kids the difference between right and wrong and those kinds of things. You know, I think they value that, but what’s more important is, yeah, are you meeting AYP? Did the kids make the growth they need on math? Do they—you know, those kinds of things. And we sort of get a mixed bag, cause even just recently, in recent administrative meetings this year, the superintendent might share, it’s not about the test scores, it’s not so much about it. But then yesterday I got yanked in a room, here’s your AYP scores now, you know, by a different administrator. I thought the emphasis was not on test grades. These scores are awesome, what are you talking about? 98% met—well, what about the 2?
Emphasis is required here to address the nuanced and secretive undertone that this pressure exudes on principals. If we again return to their beliefs regarding the public good purpose of schooling we can see here that they are not alone and that in formal settings these public good philosophies are shared and expounded upon. However in private, the pressure mounts further, as with Pamela’s experience of being “yanked in a room” to address assessment scores.

Ms. Rosen’s experience truly reflects that of her participant peers who feel the societal pressure to focus on competitive advantage and the ways that it works its way into their system.

**Academic Focus**

As the competitively focused private good purposes of schooling noted above are understood at the systemic level, the principal participants described a strong pressure to maintain a robust and almost exclusive focus on academic expectations for students. Throughout our conversations all of the principal participants discussed Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) scores, they all discussed the perceived importance of traditionally focused curricula, and most importantly they all discussed a link (whether perceived or legitimate) between student success beyond the classroom and academic indicators within it. For these participants each of these notions translates into a profound impetus for structuring school in mostly academic terms.

At the most basic level, participants described the pressure to perform academically in relation to the ISAT and the scores that their students obtain on this annual assessment. As described by the participants themselves, these principals maintain a somewhat complicated relationship with the ISAT and the accompanying results that are communicated as markers of progress to administrators and community members. Karen Willix’s casual, off the cuff description of her building’s ISAT results is fairly representative of her fellow participants’ approach to the assessment. “We are high performing,” she noted before going on to add, “we won the Blue Ribbon Award. This year we have 100% on three categories in ISAT. It’s a high
performing school so overall the kids do really well.” Other principals made observations about the ISAT in similarly nonchalant terms, and generally speaking, the participants’ focus on ISAT was shared in an effort to highlight the success that the participants’ schools have demonstrated in developing this competitive vision of educational attainment. For example, Mrs. Bronson addressed ISAT scores as a unit of comparison by not only highlighting the scores in her building, but the relationship between those scores and the scores achieved in other nearby communities. After sharing her opinion regarding the lack of articulation and coherent curriculum mapping in a neighboring district she plainly noted that, “They’re doing some powerful things . . . but their ISAT scores aren’t where we are. If you look at ISAT—which lots of people do.” It is important to highlight Mrs. Bronson’s nod to the systemic pressure for academic attainment and its important role in supporting institutionally competitive structures that are so plainly present in the lived experience of these principals.

Somewhat ironically, as noted by Pamela Rosen at the conclusion of the previous section, each of the schools highlighted in this study perform very well on this assessment and yet somehow they feel nearly constant local pressure to improve that performance. Mrs. Stephanie Thompson noted the experience this way:

I think our tendency in this district is to, you know, we have these high achievers. You know, for state testing . . . often times in many categories we have 100% of our student population meeting these ISAT test—very low standards, but whatever. Our current practice is this singular mindset, is let’s get those low, the outliers who are underperforming up and not thinking about . . . the context for all kids. . . . There are outliers in all different kinds of contexts who could be brought along and not through the function of success on the state test but in different context. And I think that we have this singular focus of how can we make kids into this mold of what we need them to be because this is what we know is successful.

Dr. Hepler described very similar circumstances in her position:

And I just think in general the district we’re in, it’s a high achieving district. The expectations are there. If you’re at 95%, why aren’t you at 100%? If you’re at 96% why
aren’t you—okay, that’s good, but what else? So feeling that pressure I know the teachers feel the pressure, too.

I believe that a compelling notion arises here in relation to all of these comments about ISAT scores. All of these comments are important to consider in relation to Karen’s other comments, shared earlier in this chapter about her school having “good cherries, so we can make good cherry pie.” The casual and nonchalant tone that participants used to discuss these assessments is of critical importance to consider in relation to the pressures that they seem to feel regarding the scores. In several circumstances the participants in this study brought an air of providence, a kind of presumed destiny if you will, to their understanding of student academic success. Throughout our conversations it seemed clear that participants perceived a certain level of inexorability to their understanding of the academic attainment of their students. Ironically though, while the participants seem to believe that because of their background, their students are in some way predestined to succeed, they somehow simultaneously fear doing something that could affect that outcome.

The drive for ISAT results and the related pressure to maintaining the breakneck level of achievement contributes to another important experience that these principals share regarding the systemic pursuit of competitively focused instruction: that of a strong push for maintaining a traditional curriculum. Throughout the course of our conversations participant principals often discussed the traditional aspects of their communities (much of which will be addressed later in this chapter), and one key notion in this regard was the expectation that instructional practices and curricular materials focus on traditional educational models. In essence, the participant principals described a general demand that the students in their schools focus on traditional academic skills. Karen Willix noted that even though her district has a 21st century vision for learning which requires that students learn about globalization and study Mandarin, parents still come to her with a voice that says, “[I] don’t get it. Why? It’s so good here, why would you change?” Dr. Hepler made similar observations noting that her passion for social/emotional
learning and the development of a warm, nurturing environment is often overrun by “most parents [who] think that schooling is A’s and those grades and the high GPA.” Stephanie Thompson echoed that sentiment in a similar fashion, noting that while at times she may feel compelled to propel her school in a different direction, she recognizes that “you couldn’t say you might not get an A, and then go on this alternate path. You’ve got to ensure the A!” Ultimately Ashley Bronson perceptively concluded this challenging dichotomy with this astute observation:

You know, I think innovation excites us as a staff, but it better be well founded and researched. As a parent, don’t be creative with my child and then six months later tell me that innovative teaching style was too innovative and my child made no progress. So, you know, I would say conservative, a very conservative community, and they’re open to innovation as long as it’s well founded and well researched. I think it goes back to again best practice. What’s traditional? When I was in school this is how we were taught, and look how successful I am. Again, don’t try things just for the sake of trying it. It needs to be well researched and founded to have a positive impact on children. . . . Teachers need to be very thorough in why we do what we do. Teachers probably feel challenged. And perhaps it’s not that the parents are trying to challenge them, but it’s more of, you know, traditional education worked for me. Why won’t it work for my child?

There are two key factors that I believe are important to address further here. One is that, yet again, it seems clear that participants are struggling to balance their public good beliefs with the private good expectations within their communities. Each of these principals above noted, in one way or another, the importance of innovation and having a willingness to adapt and change things. However, at the end of the day they each struggle to find a balance between propelling their building forward and maintaining a happy milieu of the status quo.

Just as importantly (although somewhat further beneath the surface) within this evidence lays another important notion, that of the hegemonic values that are clearly so powerfully ingrained in these affluent communities. As described by these principals, their school communities are firmly anchored in a traditional paradigm that is self-centric, homogenized, and ultimately views success in narrow academic terms. What these principals’ comments suggest, yet again, is that each of them in one way or another feels inhibited from propelling their true vision forward. This is invaluable evidence of the tension that exists in these communities between public and private good purposes of
schooling. Ultimately, all of this focus on narrow definitions of academic success rests upon a systemically broad assumption that participants clearly described as existing within their communities. This assumption, that traditional academic approaches to schooling are requisite for future success in adulthood, undergirds much of the experience that principals shared regarding the societally(?) competitive approach to schooling.

**Competitiveness at the Local Level**

The pressure that principals feel regarding the impetus for success outside of the confines of the public school system obviously holds serious implications for their work at the local level and thus harbors strong influence at the community and building level. As Ashley Bronson noted, “If we’re not educating children and preparing them for middle school and high school and they’re not successful, I’d say we have to take some blame. They were here for six years,” and thus as principals experience this external pressure they naturally feel compelled to address it within the confines of their unique circumstances by considering certain issues that are relevant locally. While the previous section focused on the notion of competitiveness at the systemic level this section narrows that focus to consider the more localized implications for participants, their colleagues, parents, and students at the local level. Closer to home at the student level, participants described private good purposes of schooling in terms of the strong pressure to implement, foster, and support individualized programming for students and the next section will address this thematic experience.

**Individualization.** One of the most universally shared experiences among the participants in this study was the pressure that they described feeling to provide individualized education to students in their schools. In this case, individualization—namely a focus on the providing specific educational experiences for unique individual students rather than for all students—represents yet another shifted expectation for principals who may be compelled by
public good beliefs about the purpose of schooling but who feel pressure to address private good expectations: exceedingly individualized academic programming for students. The notion of academics is critical here because the academic focus of this notion provides the impetus for a subtle yet powerful shift from the public good focus of differentiating instruction to meet students’ individual needs that was noted earlier in this section. In short, differentiating to meet the individual needs of all unique learners represents a public good, while shifting programming to provide advanced or enriching opportunities to a select group of students falls in the private good realm. In our co-intentional discussions principals discussed expectations in relation to individualized outputs that contribute to particular notions of status in society, and while they believe that they ought to support systems in which individual student skills and abilities are nurtured, they shared that they often feel compelled to focus on a very narrow band of those skills in their work, namely the band that focuses on academic achievement and status attainment in society. Ashley Bronson was outspoken in addressing this particular notion, and she intuitively addressed it in the context of the structure of public school system.

We have very supportive parents. That’s good and bad. They’re very supportive, but they’re also very active in coming to us and wanting more and more and more. So I think the pressure to make sure we’re addressing the unique needs of children. I think some want individualized education when we’re in a public setting. We can’t give an individualized education. But be it for special ed, gifted or all kids, you know, the big question is, is my child getting everything every other child is getting and more from the teacher.

Mrs. Bronson’s colleague, Jane Miller shared a similar experience and noted the powerful role that parents play in building that private good expectation in her affluent school.

I think the expectations of parents that you have to deliver excellence all the time, every day, every minute of the day, is a tough thing to be able to sell. We have parents in the building all day long. I mean, there isn’t a moment that we don’t have parent volunteers here. So as much as I tell teachers, you know, you’re on, you know, they’re looking in your room whether they’re volunteering in so and so’s room, don’t think that they just didn’t watch you walk those kids down the hallway. And if you didn’t have control over that, they know it. And I think that can be very tough, because that’s a high thing. And
even the lower average kids, of how are you meeting the needs of my child? What are you doing for them? And how do you make electricity happen for them just as much as it happens for everybody else? I think it’s a tough thing.

It is important here to note Jane’s description of the private good purpose of schooling revolves around either actual experiences with parents or constructed experiences regarding community expectations in the school building and it exists as an outcropping of their expectations for her and her teachers. It is not that Mrs. Miller does not believe in differentiation or meeting individual student needs, but that she experiences significant pressure regarding the need to do that in a way that parents perceive as delivering excellence.

I also conversed with Susan Jones about these issues and she echoed the sentiments of her fellow participants by noting that she has experienced parents in her community projecting very specific individualized expectations for their children on the school. When I asked Susan what these parents might say she said, “they would say that the school is supposed to make it perfect for their child. It’s our job to make it perfect.”

**Accelerated programming.** As principals shared their experiences, another theme clearly emerged in relation to both the strong pull toward competitively academic achievement addressed in the previous section and the private good concerns for individualization and competitiveness at the local level. Simply noted, participants described their own shared experience regarding the strong desire expressed by parents for their children’s inclusion in gifted, enrichment, and/or accelerated programming. Before delving further into this shared experience, it is important to explicitly note two key pieces of critical information. The first is simply to point out that throughout the remainder of this section I will use the general term “accelerated programming” to describe philosophically similar but often structurally different programming models that exist within each of the participants’ schools. Simply put, accelerated programming is not mandated, statutory, or explicitly funded and as such, school districts
generally have a great deal of autonomy in terms of developing their own programs that are thus likely to look different from one another in practice. I share this information upfront in an effort to highlight the fact that the experiences noted in this next section are not intended to describe specific programming models or to suggest that these schools all follow the same model, but rather to illustrate that as participants addressed the pressures that they feel in relation to this type of accelerated programming for students, they were, in essence, all referring to the same conceptual idea—a programming model that seeks to provide additional and/or unique curricular and instructional models for academically high achieving students. Furthermore, it is important to clearly note that I am not suggesting that these particular communities (or affluent communities in general) are alone in providing these types of opportunities for high achieving students. Clearly there are numerous public school districts both in the greater Chicagoland area and across the country that provide this type of academically accelerated programming for students. The point here, of course, is to address the specific pressures that participants described feeling in relation to the existence of this type of program in their own affluent school communities. Ultimately, Ashley Bronson, highlighted this general notion well when she stated:

In affluent communities where you have a lot of successful business people or bright people, affluent or not, you think of your child as being gifted. I think we hear a lot that parents are sending us a wonderful product to work with. And I think when you look at the top 2 to 5% in this population, you have more competition if you have a bright population of children coming. And so when you look at the top 2 to 3% or 1 to 2%, it gets competitive. And you’ll hear parents say, well if I lived anywhere else but here, my child would be in a gifted program. And that might be the case.

When I interjected, “But they chose to live here,” Ashley responded thusly:

But they probably didn’t know what the gifted identification was when they chose to live here. And they’re going to—they’re articulate, and they’re passionate, and they’re going to advocate for their child. So I think there comes a lot of challenges.

Ashley’s colleague Jane Miller addressed this unique aspect of the tension this way:
For us I know you can be in another community and have a specific intellectual ability and considered gifted and come to Union, and when your average IQ is like a 115, you have to be at the very top of your game to be in our gifted population. And so you’ll find parents who can afford to go get their kids tested outside. And absolutely great scores, and then having us to try to defend that yes, your child is extremely bright and we’re not arguing that. But they’re not bright enough to go into our gifted population. That is a huge pressure when you’re sitting there with a parent who has this private [evaluation] that they’ve paid thousands of dollars for, and the student has like a 128 to 130 IQ, and you’re going, they’re not smart enough to be in our gifted program because you need a 140 to be there. It’s a bit of a challenge. And I mean, how do you say to your kids, you’re a smart kid, but you’re not smart enough. That is a huge issue.

This challenge, the compulsion to distinguish oneself amongst an already distinguished group highlights the complex experience that participants described regarding their accelerated programs. As previously addressed, even without the presence of an acceleration program participant principals described the pressures that they feel in regard to competitively focused and academically rigorous programming for students, and they further described the strong pressure that they feel to individualize programming for students that, as Jane Miller described, “can give them an edge.” In broad terms principal participants spent a great deal of time describing these challenging propositions in the context of their school’s accelerated program for students, and interestingly, they often (unknowingly I believe) addressed this desire in terms of an underlying dichotomy that rests at the heart of the public/private tension—the inherent conflict between providing for the collective or providing for the individual. Again here I briefly turn to the notion of individualization addressed previously.

In my conversations with Jane Miller, we spent a great deal of time discussing individualization and differentiation of instruction, and as we discussed this pressure, Jane noted that “from middle to high to low to everybody in between, you’re treated as if you have an individual plan of your own [in our school],” and she noted that she works hard to, “push the teachers to do their very best.” In this respect Jane was clearly proud of the work that her staff does to differentiate instruction for students and she noted that is observed and generally
appreciated by parents. Dr. Patricia Hepler noted similar experiences regarding the positive steps her staff takes to meet the individual instructional needs of students, as did Susan Jones who echoed these sentiments noting that parents are thankful for the school’s efforts at ensuring individualization and achievement and that, “all [she] hear[s] is, Great Job!” Susan pointed out that even when students are not identified for the accelerated program in her school she and her staff work to ensure, “that they have every benefit . . . [and] they’re still going to be challenged, and they’re still going to get what they need.”

Interestingly, even with these shared positive experiences regarding differentiation for students these principals also described a strong desire from parents for their child’s admittance into the accelerated program. In that same discussion with Mrs. Miller we had a dialogue about accelerated programming in which she addressed this intense by noting that, “I think people end up feeling like if they move their child to this affluent community, that giftedness comes with that.” Susan Jones noted the pressure too, and she described it in no uncertain terms: “they’re {parents} very concerned about getting into the academically talented program.” Dr. Hepler was similarly unequivocal, simply stating, “they want their child to be in there!”

In my mind these notions seemed at odds, and so in each case I probed deeper. With Jane Miller I did so by asking, “If all your teachers are so well trained at differentiation and making sure that each kid is getting what he or she needs, then why do you think this gifted thing is so darn important to parents?” Jane’s answer was simple, insightful, and poignant, and it was echoed by the majority of her colleagues:

Because it’s exclusive. So being exclusive in some fashion, for some, is a big deal. You know, they get on a bus, they go to a separate school. They get the gifted specialist to give them instruction. The gifted teacher is available in their building to help them with whatever their social/emotional needs are being met and that avenue—and they may not be meeting their social/emotional needs in a regular classroom because you have a wide range of needs.

Susan Jones shared a similar opinion that began with one simple word:
Status. And some of them feel their children, even though it is a rigorous education here, they feel like their kids are not challenged enough. . . . So it’s a totally vertical acceleration and is not depth. And so it is a feather in your cap.

Stephanie Thompson shared the same sentiment in even more blunt terms, noting, “Parents die over whether or not their kid gets in,” and Pamela Rosen spoke of this tension in even more explicit and provocative terms having just worked through a transition that made her schools accelerated programming more inclusive.

It really is about status. And you know, even going through this we found the parents just felt like it was a punch in the gut. . . . I think a lot of it comes down to the label. Oh I can’t say my kid’s in gifted anymore. And then the other part, and I don’t want to shortchange them either; they thought they were getting a higher level of education. And they just doubted that we could deliver that higher level of education back in a classroom where the teacher is differentiating for them. Or in [our] case we actually opened the doors up to more kids with the program we’re using now. That’s not elitist, because now other kids are in there, too. And you’re going faster, and you’re learning a curriculum and you’re ahead, but now anybody can get in there. It’s not that anybody can, but that’s the feeling. I was special before, you know.

It is important here to note the tenor of the conversation and the powerful nature with which some words were used in these conversations. Pamela’s response particularly addressed the complex nature of the existence of accelerated academic programs in high achieving communities and here I must acknowledge that the sentiment was clearly one of frustration. As noted earlier, Ms. Rosen is a progressive educator with a diverse background, and this particular conversation sprang out of an effort to make the accelerated program more accessible to more students. Pamela used words like “elitist” and “special” in a way that carried a significant amount of gravity in this dialogue and that gravity must be noted here as part of the meaning making process. The overall sense of frustration cannot be overlooked here.

Ultimately the general feeling that arose in my conversations with participants was that parents in their school communities constantly feel compelled to seek out advantage for their children and that in many cases the accelerated program represents that competitive advantage at the local level. As Dr. Hepler astutely surmised:
I have one fourth grader who gets on the bus all by his lonesome once a week and goes [to take part in a gifted program in another building]. That’s it out of my fourth, fifth and sixth, one child. Is that status? You better believe it is!

**Harvard.** As a brief concluding example that illuminates participants’ experiences regarding the thematic elements noted above: public good belief systems, societal and institutional competitiveness, desires for individualized attention, a focus on academic achievement, and a strong aspiration for accelerated programming, I focus here on a kind of composite anecdote: on one word that, at least for these principals in their experience seemed to subconsciously encapsulate the private good purpose of schooling—*Harvard.* As the oldest body of higher education in the United States and an institution with a well established reputation as one of the most prestigious universities in the entire world, Harvard maintains a position in the cultural lexicon that few other institutions could likely realize. Whether or not Harvard’s reputation is appropriately deserved is not an issue of discussion for this paper. What is important to note is that throughout my discussions with these principals of affluent public schools, Harvard University was repeatedly highlighted as a beacon, a kind of litmus test for marking an appropriate level of private good success for students. To conclude this section I will highlight a few of the participants’ statements that explicitly used Harvard as a contextual reference.

For example, Stephanie Thompson made mention of Harvard in relation to parental desires for placement in her school’s accelerated program. She suggested that parents feel so strongly about it, “because now we’re talking about high school entry, and Harvard is out of reach if you’re not in advanced math in sixth grade.”

Ashley Bronson brought up the university in a conversation about the school’s responsibility for ensuring success in the broader world. As I highlighted earlier in this chapter, when I asked her if she feels that her school bears the responsibility for private sector success in
life she noted, “If we’re not educating children and preparing them for middle school and high school and they’re not successful, I’d say we have to take some blame. They were here for six years.” When I asked her if that meant they could be successful at a junior college or at Illinois State University she conceded, “Yeah, no, I see your point. And there are parents who are here, and they’re preparing the child to go to Harvard.”

Pamela Rosen made the reference in a similar context, noting that:

I have a pretty realistic view of the world. I really don’t think, you know, there’s a small percentage of people that go to Harvard, and there’s a lot of people that are successful. So I really don’t think your happiness really hinges on Harvard. But that’s hard to say that to a parent. How do you say, listen I mean, the end all and be all is not Harvard. And if that’s the case, you’re probably going to be pretty disappointed, because a small percentage of kid go to Harvard or Yale or UCLA Berkeley. Let’s be real. But that’s their goal, and who am I to question their goal. That’s fine. I don’t think that’s the end all be all by any stretch of the imagination.

She brought it up again later as she was describing her belief in the public good purposes of schooling and the tension provided by the sometimes differing views of parents:

But you know, really, like I said, I’m most proud and I say this to the parents, we are a building of good people. . . . They treat each other well. If someone falls, they’re going to stop. They’re going to help you. If someone looks confused, they’re going to stop. They’re going to help you. If there’s a fight with the kids, we teach them to stop, take care of each other, look out for each other, report, help somebody move away from an instance that doesn’t look safe or they’re being mistreated, those kinds of things. And that’s what I would want for my own kids. Not everybody is going to agree with me. The mom down the block might want to smack me and say, no, it’s about Harvard. That’s why I bring them to music lessons and karate lessons and piano lessons and swim lessons all in the same day. And that’s why I want them to take AP and that’s why I want them in gifted.

Pamela’s comments represent a valuable insight with which to close this section. Before transitioning to provide some important information about the context within which these participants work it is important to note unambiguously that while they each describe the purpose of schooling as both public good and private good depending on context, the majority of their descriptions and experiences revolved around the private good functions of schooling. What this
means, essentially, is that the shared experiences of these principals provide a posteriori evidence that supports the existence of the public good/private good tension. This is vitally important to acknowledge because the principalship in these affluent communities is constructed upon its own unique context, and in the remainder of this chapter I will focus on a few of the unique aspects of that context that clearly arose as themes in my conversations with participants. Ultimately Stephanie Thompson succinctly identified the dichotomy of the public good and private good tension as it exists in affluent school communities best, noting that, “I think [parents] are completely fine seeing the schools as a public good as long as the public good is serving them individually to their needs.”

**Context and Experience Shaping**

Up to this point in this chapter I have tried to recount particular participant experiences as they relate to structural themes that emerged around the research questions in this study. In general those themes have all surrounded the participants’ experiences regarding the purpose of schooling and the pressures and tensions that they feel in that regard. For the remainder of this chapter I plan to focus heavily on the contextual level of information that so profoundly contributes to this meaning making in a critical sense, and to use my own philosophical dialogue to provide richer meaning and relevance to the findings in this study.

In other words, while the specific findings addressed above certainly provide powerful and relevant information in terms of the research questions, there were also other themes that emerged in my dialogue with participants that more fully illuminate the context in which those themes emerged. Thus here I make a shift and highlight some key themes that, while not directly pointing to specific questions about the purpose of schooling, do provide powerful contextual evidence regarding the principals’ experiences and the influences and pressures that shape their thoughts and actions.
There are three broad themes that make up the remainder of this chapter, and they can be described as follows.

- **Mayberry**: the general feeling that these schools exist in hegemonic communities that hold very traditional white, middle class values.

- **Inequity and Acknowledgement**: which highlights two distinct ways that participants and community members seem to contextualize their own place in the social and economic fabric of society.

- **Purposeful Diplomacy**: the way that participants both described and demonstrated an adept and unique political skill that seems to afford them the opportunity to guide a conversation, address challenging issues, and to somehow use the communicative process and skills at their disposal to dissolve and disengage any tension that could arise.

The first contextual theme that will be addressed is Mayberry.

**Mayberry**

Mrs. Stephanie Thompson was one of the first participants with whom I had the opportunity to engage in dialogue as I undertook this study and it took less than five minutes for her to explicitly use the term Mayberry to describe her school community, noting that, “Danbury is a very unique place. . . . I think this place—because it’s so small, because tradition is so strongly embedded . . . it’s just Mayberry.” Mayberry, as the reader may likely know, is a reference to the 1960s television program *The Andy Griffith Show*, in which a small town southern sheriff, his bumbling deputy, and a host of local citizens seemed to breeze through a peaceful, not *quite* rural life, while learning lessons about friendship, morality, kindness, religion, and a host of other predictable and traditionally hegemonic post-war pursuits. On television Mayberry was a homogeneous community where politeness was high, crime was low (the sheriff famously left the keys to the one jail cell hanging next to the lock) and where *traditional family values* were shared by neighborly citizens like the local barber who always seemed to know what was going on in every corner of the community—only in the most healthy
and appropriate way of course. In Mayberry, Sheriff Andy’s son, Opie, sat in a straight row at school with his feet flat on the floor and he only spoke when spoken to. In Mayberry, fathers were breadwinners, mothers were homemakers, children knew their place, and most importantly, complex moral or ethical problems could always be solved in a 30-minute episode. Ultimately while the participants in this study used a variety of terms and allusions to describe their traditional and hegemonic communities (Norman Rockwell, and Leave it to Beaver were also mentioned), the use of the term Mayberry by multiple participants seemed to best encapsulate their descriptions in this regard. What follows is a brief list of some of the Mayberryesque characteristics of these studied school communities as described by the participants.

Generally speaking, a sense of nostalgia seems to permeate the school communities where these participants work. Multiple participants noted that either they themselves or parents in their communities like the feeling that school is like it was for them as children. Several of the school buildings that I visited for the study were old buildings in old neighborhoods. Interestingly, some of the other buildings visited are actually very new buildings that were purposefully constructed to look old from the outside, with traditional design components and building materials that “fit the community.” In addition, several of the participants described building-wide activities or practices that exist largely to their own disdain. Karen Willix noted that she was shocked to learn that kids in her school still got traditional grades and received zero’s for missing homework; Pamela Rosen discussed how challenging it was to convince her school community that the door should be locked during the school day or that the day-long spring picnic was not a safe activity for students. Dr. Patricia Hepler shared a similar anecdote about the challenge of changing the name of her school’s Holiday Sing to Winter Sing. In each of
these cases participants were generally describing an important subcategory of the
aforementioned traditionalistic structure, in this sense of nostalgia and longing for the past.

Of course it is important to note that these communities are largely homogenous in terms
of race and income. As the information at the beginning of this chapter noted there are a few
schools represented in this pool that have a very small percentage of students who receive free
and reduced lunch support, but the vast majority of students at these schools are not poor, and
furthermore, just like Mayberry, they are all mostly white. Interestingly, when asked question
about the homogeneity of their student population, the participants tended to take two
approaches. One approach, like Karen Willix took, was to speak in broad terms that avoided
specificity. As Karen and I discussed the demographics of her school community I asked her if
about ethnicity. Her response was, “all the people here are pretty similar.” As I pushed her
further on this topic she acknowledged that ethnicity is certainly part of her school community’s
homogeneity, but that there is also a level of homogeneity in habits and personal characteristics.
Karen described parents in her community as driving similar cars, carrying the same types of
Prada handbags, and wearing the same, “mom yoga pants.” Other principals described some
similar characteristics as well, noting, in general, that lifestyle choices are important in their
communities.

In addition to Karen’s approach other participants sought to approach the homogeneity
conversation by identifying the existence of their minority populations in broad, general terms,
only to clarify the very small percentage of the population that they represent later after further
questioning from me. For example: Jane Miller described her school as, “the most ethnic” in the
district. When I asked a clarifying question, “You’re the most diverse?” she replied by saying:
Right. You have a few Asian kids and a few—but I think that’s the part that I miss a lot of, because that really brings such richness to a school that you don’t—that there’s a whole learning behind that.

Note that Jane highlighted a small number of Asian students and then she was about to say something else. Instead she paused and noted the importance of diversity and why she appreciates diversity as part of a school community.

Unsatisfied with her response and in an effort gather explicit knowledge I asked a factual question. “What percentage Caucasian?”

Jane responded to that question by telling me her school was 98% white and that there are two African-American families in the community. It is important to note here that Mrs. Miller’s approach was not uncommon. On multiple instances participants begin conversations about their school’s homogeneity in an almost apologetic tone, only acknowledging the small percentage of non-white students after further discussion.

While the homogeneity of the schools in this study represents one aspect of their Mayberryesque nature, another thematic element in that category revolved around the various characteristics of their communities. The participant principals in this study regularly highlighted the traditional nature of their communities and the family structures within them, and they described this nature in a variety of general ways. For example, Karen Willix, Pamela Rosen, and Stephanie Thompson all noted a large percentage of stay-at-home mothers in their schools and Stephanie, along with Ashley Bronson and Jane Miller noted that they still have students go home for lunch every day. Karen Willix described this aspect of the Mayberryesque nature of her school in a way that several of her fellow participants did.

It’s like what it was like when I went to school [around] here. Kids go home for lunch. Moms stay home. . . . Blue collar-y dads, but in professions that—like they might own a landscaping company. Do you know what I mean? But it’s kind of like that blue collar, mom stays home, traditional family. You would be shocked by the amount of parents that come and pick up every day. They walk here and wait. I mean, it’s loaded. They’re all home. That’s so—it kind of blew my mind the first time I came. It’s like going back to
like the 70s or the 80s where moms are at home and their role is to take care of the kids and study.

Dr. Hepler made some similar assertions about using the term Mayberry:

Yes, I might have used it. Because it is small. Everybody knows. It helps sometimes with even those tough things where a child is not getting along with another, and the parents know each other, and they’ll say, I’m just calling so and so. I’ve had more families say, we had an issue over the weekend. I just wanted you to know, but we walked to their house and we rang the doorbell and we talked about it with the kids. And so it’s more like I grew up in some ways. It is. Parents are watching out for each other’s kids. They’re really taking things in their own hands and saying, something happened over the weekend. . . . They’re dealing with it. And I really do appreciate that, because that face to face and that more “we’re in it together” coming from parent to parent I think is power.

Jane Miller noted these traditional notions as well:

Well, I think that the community itself thinks of that as kind of a Mayberry. They isolate themselves from even their neighboring community. . . . But there is certainly a sense of safe, secure, you know, homey. We like that neighborhood feel of things. Everybody pretty much knows everybody.

She went on to address the role that parent’s participation at school plays in developing this social conception:

Their neighbors, you know, they socialize with them. They do things with them. And they like that feeling. They get a feeling that they can come here at any time. You know, it doesn’t matter what, we’re going to address their questions instantly. It’s not going to be later. It’s going to be right then and there. If we have a question, we don’t like what you’re doing, we’re going to tell you about it and you’re going to change, because we kind of pay your salary and we kind of oversee what’s going on in the schools. So you do get a lot of parent involvement.

Stephanie Thompson addressed some similar themes regarding parental involvement:

You know, parents come any time they want and they have pretty much immediate access to anything that they need, very responsive. Sometimes they might call you on your cell phone, you know, if they have a concern, if it’s a pressing concern.

It is interesting to note here that in terms of their descriptions of their communities as Mayberryesque the participants generally used the term parent involvement with more of a negative connotation than a positive one.
In the end I believe it is interesting to introduce a word used by multiple participants to describe their school’s Mayberryesque nature. Both Karen Willix and Ashley Bronson described their school communities as “a bubble.” As Karen noted succinctly in one of our conversations, “this might be a nice little pocket, but that isn’t the world. And you only grow when you learn more about other people.”

Again I feel compelled to note that this whole section about Mayberry significantly contributes to the critical, postmodern assumptions regarding the construction of social reality in the context of affluent school communities that undergird this study and provide a compelling framework upon which the public/private tension is constructed. In fact, it is the lack of such critical reflection in these communities that seems to reinforce some of the hegemonic beliefs and practices that principals have described regarding their experiences.

As the next section will further demonstrate, that structure clearly works to shape the beliefs and practices of both the participant principals who took part in this study and on their school communities.

Inequity and Acknowledgement

In the final minutes of my co-intentional interviews with participants I asked a short series of four questions to which I asked each of them to reply as briefly as possible. These questions, which focused the fundamental purposes of schooling and the context of these particular communities, were intended to illicit a type of summative conception from each participant that could more fully frame the context of this study, and they were included at the end of the interview process so as to allow the co-intentional conversations that we had had up to that point to more fully frame the participants’ conceptual understanding of the topic. The four questions I asked were:

- *Do you believe that students here receive a better education than students in less affluent schools?*
Do you believe they should?

Do you think that parents here believe that their children get a better education than children in less affluent communities?

Do you think that parents believe that they should?

While the level of brevity in participants responses was certainly somewhat relative, and while (as shall be explored later in the final section of this chapter) some of the participants had a harder time explicitly verbalizing their answers than others, in the end they all gave the same four replies: yes, no, yes, and yes, respectively. In other words, all participants believe that students in their buildings receive a better education than less affluent students, all participants believe philosophically that this is wrong, and yet all participants believe that parents in their communities both acknowledge AND expect that elevated degree of opportunity from them and the schools that they lead.

I highlight these responses here in an effort to frame the context of this section, for it seems clear in these findings that parents in these affluent communities recognize the privileged social reality that their economic status provides, and that they recognize, and indeed expect, that this social construction provides their students with a socially competitive advantage. As Susan Jones representatively noted in a candid yet politically astute response to my question about parent expectations: “They must [believe the education is better] or they wouldn’t buy a house here. So I would infer that yes. I’d make that inference.” However, the process of meaning making that undergirded this process illuminated two common, shared experiences that are, I would suggest, fundamentally connected to this stark recognition, and here I intend to more fully explore these two complicated notions. In simple terms these two concepts represent answers to two powerful questions: how do members of these school communities acknowledge the part that they themselves play in our inequitable education system, and what do they do in response
to that acknowledgement. In short, they become very philanthropic, and they downplay the significance of their own wealth and status in society.

**Philanthropy.** As participants described their experiences leading affluent school communities each of them in one way or another addressed a profound level of philanthropic activity that occurs in and around their school communities. Often *(and I believe this is a fundamentally important point to make)* it is important to note that much of the discussion about philanthropy arose at times during our conversations that we were discussing systemic inequity. For example, when Dr. Hepler and I were discussing the importance of academic achievement and test scores, she shifted the conversation to philanthropy mid-answer. When I asked Pamela Rosen about the relatively small number of minority students in her building and the level to which social justice issues are addressed in regard to those students experiences, she also shifted the conversation to philanthropy. The same shift occurred when I asked Susan Jones about the level of benefit that she believes her students receive because of their affluence—in one sentence she was talking about the results parents expect based upon the level of their property taxes, and in the next sentence the conversation shifted to philanthropy.

The context within which these conversations shifted is fundamentally important to address here. As a co-intentional researcher I feel that I must consider why, in so many instances, our conversation shifted to philanthropy at the exact moments we were discussing inequity of opportunity within the school system, and I can only deduce that, at least in part, this shift in topic represents not only a type of defensive response on the part of the participants who felt compelled to highlight the kindness and generosity that exists in their school communities, but also (though this is a much larger leap) a type of absolutist behavior on the part of parents who are more than happy to accept the benefits that systemic equity provides them (and have no desire to see that change), while giving back something to those who are less fortunate.
In general the philanthropy and generosity described by the participants fell into two broad categories, within the local community, and outside of the local community, and here I will briefly highlight each one in greater detail.

The first and most obvious level of philanthropic activity that participants described occurs within the walls of their own schools. Interestingly, school-based philanthropy, while on one level is the most basic, is on another level the most complex in terms of the public/private tension and it’s relation to systemic inequity. For example, much of the school based philanthropy that participants discussed related to their building Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) and the great deal of money that those organizations raise and distribute at the local level.

While this type of philanthropy presents at least some level of generosity, it is important to note explicitly that it is generosity intended to support and maintain the private good status that these students already hold.

Stephanie Thompson described her school’s generous PTO, noting that:

Our PTO had $15,000 of extra money that they didn’t spend that they budgeted for last year, and so they bought us 25 iPads. And we’re remodeling the lounge to make it prettier. . . .—you know, another example, the junior high just had the basketball court, the gym court redone by an anonymous parent. He didn’t like the way that it looked, so he donated $15,000 to the school.

Dr. Patricia Hepler highlighted a similar experience with generous parents who may not understand the intricacies of school funding, but who know that they want the best for their child’s school.

They think that the money’s got to be somewhere and don’t quite understand how much and the legalities of it. Can’t I just go out and buy this for you? You get that in an affluent community. You need a Smart Board? Oh I’ll just go get it. Well, you can’t do that. It’s got to be purchased through technology. They don’t understand, because if you needed it in your home you’d just go buy it.
Ashley Bronson had a similar experience as well: “I’d say the PTO raising funds for the playground equipment many years ago or raising funds for smart boards or technology, cameras, sound systems.” As our conversation continued, Ashley highlighted other ways that the PTO and the local community demonstrate their generosity through philanthropic activities that were certainly representative of her fellow participants:

But also the PTO doing outreach, book drives that are community run like we had on Sunday with Wellness and the Rotary. You know, supporting children who don’t have the funds for school supplies or to come to special events, you know, the angel fund, things like that. Your school supplies, you know, we probably have six children who can’t afford the school supplies. I mean, that could be $500 right there. Band instrument, I would say the last three or four years we’ve supported two children every other year perhaps.

In a conversation about her building’s clientele (who she described as, “lots of business, lots of CEOs. You’ve got people who own their own companies, physicians, whatever.”) Jane Miller noted a similarly profound level of generosity from parents in her building:

And then you’ll have families who are extremely generous. I have a family group that during the holidays their goal is to shop for gifts. And they just buy tons of gifts and they drop them off here at our social worker’s door and say, please give them to the kids wherever they need to go. And they will lavishly give those kids computers, I mean, whatever they need, so that that family can function in the school. They don’t want to be named, and they don’t want that, but very generous families. But I think they have a generous heart and they would do that for anybody.

Dr. Hepler described this level of generosity amongst her community as well:

Here’s a great example. Every year we do lots of different types . . . of charity things. And in the fall, you should come back in December, in the winter, just before the holidays we put out a Christmas tree, just an evergreen tree here. We don’t put anything on it. We call it our giving tree. And parents are asked to donate hats, scarves, mittens, coats, games for kids, toys. You can’t walk through this hall. It’s right here against my window. First of all, it’s covered. You don’t even realize there’s a tree underneath there, because people have donated so much. Then we take it to the food pantry. We take it to all these local agencies. We also do for our Open House, if you come in and you bring a canned good, you get a ticket for an ice cream at our ice cream social, too. This hall is lined with boxes and cans because people bring those things. It’s just unbelievable the stuff that they will donate and give. And then I have families whose kids don’t have coats, so I go under the tree and I grab a coat. And I say which mittens would you like? Which hat would you like? You know, I give to those families, but not as many as the
ones who bring the things. I had a parent one year said, I know you have kids without coats. She went out and she just bought like six or seven coats. She said here you go, keep them on hand these new coats, different sizes, so when kids need them.

As these representative responses suggest, the participants in this study clearly recognize a level of generosity and philanthropy that occurs at the local, school level.

Before continuing there are two key notions to more fully illuminate here. The most obvious of course is that while PTOs and their associated philanthropy certainly represent a level of generosity and giving, these organizations also spend the predominate amount (if not all) of their funds on the students in their own schools who, as participants readily acknowledge, are already privileged by their level of systemic advantage. The second important point is the simple, though explicit recognition that much of this local philanthropy (giving trees, lunch bags, etc.) while certainly generous and beneficial to the recipients, does nothing to counter the systemic inequity that often leads to the development of these needs.

In addition to the large amount of local level philanthropy described by participants, I also learned about a lot of philanthropy that goes to support causes that are outside of the area. Across the board participant principals discussed a strong desire on the part of parents to teach their children about making a difference. Principals described school and family trips to work at pantries or in support of organizations like Feed my Starving Children (a non-profit Christian organization that packages and sends meals to developing countries). Jane Miller described the experience at her school this way.

You have at least from my perspective, a great number of parents who are concerned. And they want their kids to get the most out of life and they do family philanthropic things. Families have done, you know, Feed My Starving Children. They’ve set up their whole business does that. And the kids come and they do that. And then others I would say are a little, you know, they’ll be happy to send their money in if you’re going to send it off, but they don’t necessarily need to get involved. So you really have a big diverse kind of group. And I think that, you know, depending on which group, and I think how other people have lived their lives will make a difference. Some are active in their community, churches in their community, and they’ll do all sorts of things for others.

Ashley Bronson noted similar practices at her school as well:
Then there’s also the kids care club and the outreach to children in Chicago or Africa and raising funds for improving education in areas that we might choose. So I see it both through the PTO, and I see it through student clubs that we host. The food pantry in Union, different activities. And we may do it as a club, but we may also do it as a classroom. We adopt 20 to 30 families for the holidays and putting gifts under their tree and seeing what they need. We do a Thanksgiving dinner for families. . . . both as the school and as parents through our outreach that’s hosted by PTO through our kids care club.

In general participants described philanthropy for the larger world as an important notion in their school communities and in the remainder of this section I turn to a word used by Ashley in our conversation above: adopt. As I shall note further, several principals used the word adopt in reference to people outside of their own community that they have chosen to provide some type of financial or social resource.

I highlight the word adopt here as it relates powerfully to the context of meaning making for this study. The verb adopt has several contextual meanings in the English language (Adopt, n.d.). It can mean to follow a particular course, to vote to accept, to chose as a standard, or, most commonly, it can mean to take on the role and responsibility of parenting (in the interest of full disclosure I must share that this word carries a powerful connotation in my own life, as my son is adopted), and it is this last meaning that I believe not only fits the most in the conception of this study, but that carries with it the most baggage. As I highlight the adoption that participants described in our conversations I do so with full acknowledgement of the paternalistic undertones that the word ascribes, and I hope to highlight the powerful way that this type of philanthropy reinforces the social construction of affluence in these communities.

One striking finding that arose in regard to philanthropy that occurs outside of the school community in these locales is not only the fact that multiple participants used the term adopt in reference to philanthropic activities but that three of the participants described how they in their school community adopt another school; a high poverty, high minority urban school from inner city Chicago where they “support them in educational materials. We’ve given them books.
We’ve given them supplies for their kids every year.” These are Jane Miller’s words and while multiple participants discussed this activity of school adoption Jane was the most candid and forthcoming, and thus I focus mostly on her words in this section as representative of her colleagues. It is important to note that I will quote liberally here as I feel the full frame of Jane’s words are important to read for contextual meaning making. Jane Miller describes the experience of adopting a school further in this way:

[It is] PTA funded but sponsored throughout the building. Like we’ll do a [coat] drive. And that coat drive is specifically for delivering coats to their school and people will buy brand new coats and boots and whatever. And those are dropped off there, and the principal there is able to say, okay, Johnny, it looks like you don’t have anything. Come over here. Look at these brand new things. Pick one, whatever. And then we once a year have their fourth and fifth grade kids come to our building. And we’ve talked about going [there] where they are, but I don’t think that parents would be as receptive as having our kids go on a bus to the city.

I thought that Jane’s last statement was interesting so I asked her to explain it further.

Just some parents would have a hard time with that. But they’re okay for the kids to come here. And amazingly, the kids are usually of African American descent, but by the time they leave, there is no difference in color when they walk out the door. It’s when they walk in you notice, and then by the end our kids just don’t see that anymore.

After this I asked Jane if she believes that this experience provides the students in her building with some recognition of systemic inequity. Her response:

I don’t think they see it unless they actually have the opportunity to talk to some of those students. And that’s why as much as we’ve talked about do we continue doing this, it’s been really a good experience, because the kids go—so you can go out on the playground, and they go, uh-uh, because we’re going to get shot at, so we can’t go outside. So their kids never have an outdoor recess. And they go, wow, you’ve got really nice walls and you have books and all this other stuff. And I think that they take that for granted that all those things are here. And they realize that when they finally have those conversations with other kids that don’t have those things.

At one point I asked Jane to discuss her thoughts regarding the feelings and perceptions of the students that come to visit her school, and I asked her if she perceives any negative consequences of those visits for them. She candidly said:
You feel bad because I think the kids come in and go, wow you have so much and we don’t. And they all want to stay, and you hope that one day that they would have those opportunities to say I can live in any place that I want to live, and I can go to a school of my choice.

Later I probed Jane further and she made some powerful statements:

You think about it, okay, for one day here is this totally African American school that comes to your school, and they see people live in great homes. You don’t have to be afraid to stand outside. You get recess. You can stand outside, and you’re not going to get shot at or whatever. The kids leave with one day of hope of maybe that will happen to me one day. But realistically, is that real for them? Or are you just rubbing it in their face to say, this isn’t what you’re going to face. I don’t know. The possibility for some kids, it does give them hope and they’ll rise to that occasion. For others it makes them angry. . . . But it’s one day of their life. And they need to see that more often than just that one day. And is it fair to say one day this is going to make a difference? It’s a great feel good. Our kids love it. Their kids love it for the day that they’re here. They form friendships, but that’s it. It’s for the day. They don’t necessarily—there’s no pen pal exchange thing on a long term basis. They’re not gonna look each other up when they graduate.

Jane clearly used a lot of strong words here and seemed to have some strong underlying feelings about the type of disempowerment that this practice could be causing for these students. When I asked her if she felt compelled to address some of these complicated issues openly and frankly, whether with students or with parents she shared these comments:

I’ve brought it up, but we’ve got a real passionate PTA who felt like at least we’re giving them the one day of hope and whatever. And if we can give them that, we’d give them one day more than they would have somewhere else. . . . It would definitely be an interesting conversation. I’m not sure that they think about that very often and how fortunate they are. . . . Their kids don’t go out for recess. You know, and your kids go out for recess everyday to see the sun. They don’t. Their parents are both working and supplying all their stuff. Oh, okay, well tell me what financial things I can help with. But truly I don’t know if they’d be willing to switch roles to say, I’ll send my kid down there for a length of time so that they can experience that same thing.

Ultimately I asked her to address this further and I asked her opinion regarding whether or not parents in her community would be willing to give up some of the benefits that their students have if it meant improving things for the students in their adopted school in Chicago. Her response was straightforward and factual. “No. They’ve specifically set out where they’re going to be.”
I believe that there are two very powerful points to make as I conclude this section. Firstly, it is important to note the level of disempowerment that this “philanthropic” practice of school “adoption” likely causes for the students that visit from these other schools. What is even more compelling and important to note here is that as a principal and an educational leader Jane recognizes and acknowledges the imbalance of power that this situation likely reinforces, and yet, she maintains the practice and supports her school as they continue to carry out these activities because of the strong pressures that come to her from the “passionate” parents in her community.

Furthermore, I end this section by noting some of my own thoughts that contribute to the meaning making of these findings. The philanthropy aspect of these principals’ experiences is powerful in the sense that, I believe, it provides the members of these affluent communities the opportunity to maintain a balance in their minds regarding their own wealth and the privilege it provides them. This philanthropic activity represents a kind of tacit acknowledgement of the systemic inequities that provides these participants with some level of absolution and that likely, assuages guilt that could manifest itself in regard to the place that they stand in the system. As noted above principals seem to feel this and they also seem to describe their school communities as feeling this. In short, this philanthropy is a way to both acknowledge and absolve the power they have other others.

We are (not) the One Percent. In addition to the common experience of philanthropic activity, another clear theme emerged in my co-intentional conversations with principal participants that is, I believe, tangentially yet profoundly related to their own and their school’s ability to acknowledge systemic inequity. This theme, which as a researcher I must confess came as quite a surprise to me, arose in every one of my conversations with participants who, to varying degrees, shared both their own and experiences and beliefs about the construct of affluence as well as their perceptions regarding the beliefs of their community members. In short, when asked to describe their school communities and to discuss any economic implications regarding those experiences the participants all described, in one way or another, the ways that
their school community is not affluent. I will write that again due to the significance of the revelation and the clarity with which it must be understood: **Participants in this study generally tried to describe both their own perceptions and the perceptions of their community members in relatively non-affluent terms.** Sometimes these observations were made subtly and deferentially by participants who seemed uncomfortable plainly acknowledging the level of affluence in their own community, as when I blatantly asked Ashley Bronson if members of her community believe themselves to be wealthy and she simply stated, “I don’t know. I don’t care. They’re the public that we deal with.” Other times these assertions were made more tangentially, such as when Jane Miller suggested that members of her community “are maybe not quite as wealthy as [their neighboring community].” And still other times the assertion was made outright, such as when Pamela Rosen noted that, “I don’t think of it as being an affluent school by any means,” or Stephanie Thompson who stated that, “this isn’t a rich district in the sense that there’s not a lot of industry. There’s not a lot of money coming into this place.” Whichever route was taken, the clear end result was that amongst the participants there is a hesitancy to acknowledge their own affluence as it relates to schooling and systemic inequity.

Before I continue I feel compelled to note that I chose to title this section **we are (not) the one percent**, in reference to the Occupy Wall Street Movement, a protest movement that focuses on social and economic inequality, and that formally began in September of 2011 (in the interest of clarity I must also share that the movement was only just beginning as I finished the last few interviews in my data collection). One of the slogans for the movement, **we are the ninety-nine percent**, refers to the fact that a very large share of our country’s economic wealth rests in the hands of a small fraction of the population—namely, the wealthiest one percent who hold an inordinately large percentage of the countries assets. This slogan represents an interesting comparison for the selected communities in this study who were specifically chosen based upon both reputational and economic indicators that identify them as wealthy. While it is important to note that as a whole these school communities do not
all fall in the top one percent, they were all chosen precisely because they represent certain characteristics of affluence.

It is important to note here that, as with all of the experiences shared thus far, what follows is not a description in absolute terms but rather an acknowledgement of an underlying dichotomy that reinforces the public good/private good tension. Clearly, each of these principals recognizes that at some level their school resides in an affluent community and each one of them acknowledged that truth on several occasions during the course of our ongoing dialogue. The point of this section however is not to acknowledge the fact that these schools are all affluent, (one only need read the methodology chapter to discern that), but rather to highlight the ways that participants experience that affluence, which, again to my surprise, is largely done in a way that seems to attempt to diminish its significance.

In general, participants’ lack of acknowledgement of affluence fell into three broad categories. The first and most basic step in the process for most of the participants was to compare up, or identify the affluence of their own school community by contrasting it in relative terms with some other place or experience. The practice of comparing up was overwhelmingly used by all of the participants in this study, who time and again when discussions of affluence arose, would refer to the relativity of the notion by comparing their local school community to some higher standard that exists in the cultural experience. These descriptions are the easiest to identify and share here, and they ultimately fell into two categories: comparing to other places, or comparing to other levels of perceived affluence in their mind.

Again, the first and most obvious example of comparing up was carried out by participants who readily described their community as less affluent than somewhere else. For example, Karen Willix compared her school community in Torrington both up and down, first by naming several relatively poor communities and saying, “well, we’re not [those places], you
know, I mean—it’s not [X].” Jane Miller made a similar comparison when I asked her about the level of wealth in her community and the perceptions of parents, noting that:

When you compare us to maybe a school in X, some of the parents would say well, that school is richer than ours because the parents in that community tend to have bigger homes available to them in their actual homes. . . . Cause I mean, you could drive down the streets and there are very modest homes. And then you’ve got homes that are large and expensive. And I think you’ve got a lot of different professionals that live in the community. And so some will say yes. And then some will say no.

Dr. Hepler also compared up, comparing her school to a neighboring community (interestingly, to the community of Danbury where Stephanie Thompson works) by simply noting, “well we’re not really affluent compared to—well, I was in Danbury, okay, so Danbury is way up there!” Interestingly, even though Dr. Hepler compared her community to Danbury, not to be left out, Mrs. Thompson also compared up:

Well I can say, given that my best friend is an assistant superintendent in [X], and has a very similar sized school district or a little bit larger, and their budget is twice that of ours. I think there are a lot of things that this district doesn’t have as compared to those kinds of places, and predominantly it’s certainly not test scores. It’s personnel. They have twice as many assistants and people and divisions of central office. There are just a lot of resources in terms of personnel. That seems to be a predominant difference structurally.

Stephanie went on to make a powerful point:

Here we hold that with pride, that we have limited means as compared to other schools, whoever those other schools are, [X], and that what we’re able to do achievement wise with significantly less money for people. We’re below the state average for people here in our expenditures. So it’s like it’s a source of pride. Like, what can you do with your dollar?

I went on later to ask Stephanie about whether or not she believes that the community members in Danbury perceive themselves as affluent and she astutely noted that:

I think they think this is what middle class life is like. And maybe that’s because a lot of people who live here grew up here and have always experienced this. And you know, they expected to have something similar to what they knew. And I think in combination with that, they probably have not had too many experiences outside of what they knew. And so they either had this vision of what they don’t have that they want, because everybody always aspires to have more, and they lack the reality of what other people’s circumstances are like. And therefore, they assume that this is what I’m entitled to. This
is how it should be. This is average. You know, we’re still both working in a lot of situations here. We have two working parents. Yes, we may have two summer homes in various places and a nanny and a cleaning lady and all those other services, but we work pretty hard. We are educated, so this is what is deserved.

In this regard I pointed out to Mrs. Thompson that I drove by both a Bentley dealership and a Porsche dealership on my way into the neighborhood. I spoke rather adamantly about this, noting that, “You could walk there from here. . . . People know, right, that most people could not buy either of those things? Right? They know that, don’t you think?” Her response was to the point. “I guess. I mean, I would like to think that. But I think it’s just like kids with the have’s and have mores.”

I believe that Stephanie’s experiences here represent one of the fundamental reasons that participants and their community members compare up. This type of comparing up provides a level of justification for success that could otherwise seem to be afforded to their status and privileged place in society rather than to their hard word or dedication. Powerful!

As a natural next step from the approach taken by Stephanie above in which she began addressing specific dollar amounts of taxes and spending, the other approach that participants took to comparing up was to frame the conversation around some specific dollar amount either in terms of home values, property taxes, or income. In the interest of full disclosure, this type of comparing up often occurred in response to direct questions from me as the interviewer when participants seemed to be struggling to specifically define why they felt their school was not all that affluent. For example, Pamela Rosen noted that, “we don’t have million dollar homes by any means.”

Rather than addressing home values, Susan Jones spoke about income level, in an interesting conversation that clearly exemplifies the importance of the co-intentional approach to this study, noting that:
to me, rich is a whole different league of wealth. Monetary, if we’re talking monetary . . .
I think of that as people making in the millions of dollars a year. I mean, to me if I were
making $300,000 a year I would think I was—

It is important to note here that Susan just stopped and did not have the next word to say. When I
interjected, “I’d be rich?” she struggled again saying, “but I guess the definition—I would
think—?” I then asked her if there were families in her community with that type of income. She
responded, “definitely.” I then followed up by asking if they think they are rich. She responded,
“I can’t get in their heads.” Finally she made this point: “If they were rich or thought they were
rich they might want to live—and they might send their kids to prep school or something like
that. Maybe not a public school”

I believe it is important to note how hard I had to push to get Susan to define
affluence and further to come to grips with that definition. Susan’s approach
was fairly representative in that it often felt to me like the participants in this
study had, for whatever reason, a strong aversion to acknowledge the affluence
within their school community.

The experiences of Ashley Bronson are similarly appropriate to note here. In my initial
conversation with Ashley I asked her to describe her school community:

I’d say this is a real area. It’s not the most affluent. It has—yeah. It’s an affordable area.
People who care. People who stand behind and support education and have a passion for
education and support us professionally are very involved physically and financially
giving support. It’s an active PTO. You’ve got diversity, but minimal in this community
and in this district. We have some minorities, but very few. We have some reduced and
I’d say, what, 3%.

I was struck by Ashley’s use of the terms “real” and “affordable” here so I asked her to describe
what that meant. Her response was, “less than a million—$600,000.” So I clarified. “The average
home is less than a million bucks?” She responded, somehow tacitly acknowledging that this
seemed like an awfully high standard:

But I also think that people who are quite affluent don’t express it. . . . The people here,
and there are people who open enroll to come here that live in a more affluent area,
because they feel like the influence of money on their children is minimal here compared to where their home is.

In sum it seems fitting to end with Ashley’s point as it represents the shared feeling that recognizing one’s own affluence is somehow negative. As Ashley describes things here, people want the resources that come with their affluence without having to explicitly or formally acknowledge the influence of money on their children.

In addition to comparing up, the participants in this study also took another approach at identifying the relativity of their school community’s affluence by presenting a level of rationalization—a yeah, but type of explanation that suggested that perhaps their school community is not as well off as it would appear.

This notion is important to highlight in terms of my co-intentional approach to this research study because, as I have addressed before, I was not shy about inserting my own voice into our conversations. I note this here because the notion of justification often arose in response to some type of assertion or leading question from me about the community’s wealth. What follows are several examples of such instances.

One form of justification that participants displayed was to specifically highlight aspects of their school community that would not be perceived as affluent. For example: in one of my discussions with Jane Miller she was describing her school as the least affluent school in her district. When I asked her to explain more specifically she noted, “sometimes you just get populations of kids that, you know, like we have a small population of apartment kids, so we end up to be the school that has more free and reduced lunch kids.”

Note the use of the term “apartment kids” as a descriptor, and the negative connotation that seems to come with it, as well its use as a proxy for less affluent.

When I dug even deeper and asked how many that meant she responded:
Fifteen, compared to zero. But that’s a big deal. You know, I mean because those 15 kids in the district size add up with, you know, maybe the 10 that are at the middle school, and then all of a sudden you have a subgroup that might be a little lower.

Of course lower subgroups refer to the competitively academic benchmarks that are required under NCLB and to a somewhat lower score on the mandated standardized tests. Interestingly, Mrs. Miller was not the only participant to bring up “apartment kids.” Karen Willix also made reference to students who live in apartments as opposed to single family homes.

We have a very small pocket of kids that are on free and reduced lunch. . . . It’s bigger than it has been, yeah. And I think this school and maybe [another local school] probably would have your biggest numbers, only because we have apartments within our area. . . . There’s no Section 8 housing, but you’ve got renters. And then you’ve got people that have lived here, their grandparents have lived here. You know, that more traditional, grew up in Torrington. But we do have apartments down this way, as well. And those are actually condos now, so that even elevated it probably a little bit. But I know I’ve had like maybe problems associated with lower socioeconomics coming out of that area. . . . Not being able to pay for things. Not being able to pay for folders. I had a grandma come in and say, I can’t afford any of this, and she had just taken the child in. So we bought them the supplies to try to help out.

Note that Karen used the word “problem” as a relative descriptor for students that reside in apartments.

At another point in our conversation when Karen and I were further exploring the relative affluence of her community, I again noted the general wealth of her school community she was quick to point out: “You know, this is the poor side of town. Did you know that? Have you heard that?” I asked her to explore that further and she did, noting:

I didn’t realize this, because again, from [X]—different. But south I guess is really the wealthy side. They have better houses, they’re bigger, like those really old colonial houses and the principal there—I’ve heard it’s a lot more demanding. Parents in your face, expectations are really different. I know it’s just different.

In addition to these types of practices principal participants also justified in ways similar to Stephanie Thompson’s use of comparing up noted above. For example, Ashley Bronson used the practice of justification to highlight the relative affordability of her school district.
You know, I think they see Union schools . . . scoring well on state report cards, children doing well, going to college and graduating. They also see that their expenditure, you know, what is our expenditure per child is lower than most of our neighboring competitive districts spending more money. So they’re getting a good bang for their buck.

Again, here the level of justification is profound and seems to represent a desire to project an aura of success and accomplishment. In other words, our school is not great because we are affluent—in fact, look, we actually spend way less than others—we’re just really successful!

Ultimately, the experiences of comparing up, and rationalization contribute, I believe, to a startling perception that was shared by some of the participants in this study. Simply put, by not acknowledging the opportunity afforded to them by the level of affluence in these communities multiple principals were able to draw a powerful conclusion—that the affluence of their school community is irrelevant to their practice or their ultimate success. Two powerful anecdotes further illustrate this notion.

Earlier in this section I highlighted a conversation I had with Susan Jones regarding the relative and perceived affluence of her school community. As I have noted throughout this chapter Susan and her peers demonstrate strong skills in terms of voicing politically nuanced responses to questions and so, as our conversation about wealth and affluence progressed my questions became increasingly pointed—much like a lawyer with a hostile witness. As this conversation about wealth’s influence on success progressed I bluntly asked Susan to tell me whether or not students in her school get a better education because of their wealth.

Boy. It’s hard to say, because I think they got an excellent education at that school. But I don’t know that I could say that it was better within the school district, because the curriculum is the same, everything is the same. But if I really am honest, I feel that the quality of instruction of teachers is top notch and it might be not exactly the same as other schools in the district. But I don’t know if we can really base it on the diversity factor.

I pushed her further, and she responded:
But you never know what people have to deal with and how much they have to spend time on the things that maybe the teachers at [this school] do not have to spend time on. So I don’t know that I could really say that. I don’t really want to beg the question, but I think it’s an excellent—I think the education was excellent. And probably superior to many places.

It is important to notice that even in the end Mrs. Jones did not come out and say explicitly that this education was better because of affluence. Instead she addressed the teaching, the materials, and the curriculum before recognizing that in her district, where her school is the most affluent one, she could not in good conscious admit that success had nothing to do with affluence.

Ashley Bronson had some similarly strong opinions regarding success in her school, and, thanks in part to her school district’s lack of less affluent neighbors, she was able to draw a somewhat different conclusion to share with me . . . that her school’s success is generally unrelated to the community’s affluence. What follows is a brief section of transcript from one of our conversations with some superfluous content cut out for the sake of clarity:

Interviewer: Do you think—so then let me ask you this. Do you think that it’s true, I mean, do you think kids here get a better education than kids in a not so distant neighboring community?

Interviewee: Uh-mm. I think our curriculum is stellar. I think hands on learning, I think educated teachers.

Interviewer: Do you think kids here should get a better education?

Interviewee: I think it’s just the nature of this district. I wish my children got the same education, and I live just a few miles away. My secretary who lives the opposite way, same thing. What we expect our children to do and what they come in knowing and learning is amazing. It’s been a sound—I think we had a really solid curriculum office. I think we have some really good instructional practices. We give our children lots of opportunities, not because we’re wealthy, but because we hired really good people, really good teachers, really good central administration. I think we had a really good curriculum model.

Interviewer: So you think you could have that exact same stuff in a much less affluent community?
Interviewee: Absolutely, yep. Hire bright people, yeah. It’s not a matter of being affluent. It’s a matter of being focused and looking at research and looking at what our kids come knowing and not knowing and teaching. Staff development, curriculum development.

Interviewer: I mean, I’ll ask this candidly. Do you think there are places that—don’t you think there are places that are doing all that stuff but not getting the results you’re getting?

Interviewee: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Interviewee: I wonder if it’s the collaboration and the vertical alignment from grade to grade to grade. I’ll talk about a neighboring district where my children are. When I sat on the strategic plan, fifth to sixth grade, I see how curriculum is the same year after year after year. It’s a lack of communication, articulation. The sixth, seventh and eighth grade doesn’t know what the health curriculum is in the primary grade, in the K5. It’s one district, one building district. That’s poor communication and poor vertical alignment. Their ISAT scores I think should be higher. I think they have educated parents as well who value education. So for me I look at that and say, where’s the articulation and the curriculum development and communication, because they’re feeding into a really strong high school and they’re one on one computers. They’re doing some powerful things. Talk about student engagement.

Interviewer: Where your kids go?

Interviewee: Right. But their ISAT scores aren’t where we are. If you look at ISAT, which lots of people do.

Interviewer: Well, it’s in the paper.

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: So, still, though, the neighboring community that you live in, and I don’t know where that is specifically. It’s not this community, but you know, you’re still likely comparing schools within the top quintile in terms of the top 20%, probably top 15 to 10% in terms of the average income distribution. So do you think that, and I mean clearly this is just your opinion, but I mean, I know you know a lot. I know you’ve seen a lot. Do you think that there are schools that may be really at the median that are doing all of those things, and in a school with the median income distribution, a school where the average family makes 50 grand not 150 grand. Can they do all the things you’re talking about and be as successful as you’re suggesting?

Interviewee: I think if you have a very focused administrative team collaborating with teachers and listening to teachers on what children come in knowing and not knowing. And we look at that in our curriculum development and in our staff development and focus our teacher time across—think about the elementary setting where we teach all subjects. How do we focus our attention on here’s what we know our children know and
don’t know? And here’s what we could do to improve student achievement. How do we focus that through curriculum and staff development? I think it doesn’t matter the income of the parents. It’s the drive and the focus of our school district to look at that and where do we need to address our attention to help children to be more successful.

Later, toward the end of our conversation I pointed out to Ashley that there are plenty of schools and communities out there that are not as successful as hers, and I asked if school leaders in districts like hers ought to care about that. Her response seems a fitting end to this section:

Yeah. I think that we can offer input. That was part of the blue ribbon status, having people come in and observe in the classrooms and talk to teachers with how we’re doing things. I think it’s our duty to share. I think that’s part of our professional obligation to host student teachers and college students who are trying to put in service hours.

Before addressing the powerful meaning making that these conversations generally suggest I believe it is important here to note a clear dichotomy that was present in this conversation with Ashley. Multiple times in this conversation Ashley shared her opinion that students in her school community come to school knowing more (with more skills and more background knowledge than students in other communities). Interestingly Ashley pointed this out twice and yet somehow seemed unable to acknowledge the significance of this fact as she repeatedly emphasized the role that the school plays in the achievement and success of students.

Ultimately it seems clear to me that these conversations with Susan and Ashley, represent a substantive reason for the complicated relationship that the principal participants seem to have with inequity and acknowledgement, and while clearly, the connection I draw in this final assertion is based largely up on my own interpretations and context building in relation to the evidence collected in this study, to be blunt, I would not have included it unless I believed strongly that there is in fact a connection between these two experiences. Still, in the end, what is most important is that I have not only shared the principals experiences regarding the context of affluence (namely their desire to rationalize its presence) but have also conveyed the pride and quality with which these participants feel they provide in educating students. As I work to further interpret these findings in the following chapter both of those issues will surely be relevant.
Purposeful Diplomacy and Self-Censorship

As a final aspect of context and experience shaping in this chapter I turn to a profoundly subtle yet powerfully compelling revelation that arose in my co-intentional dialogue with participants.

As I have presented findings throughout this chapter I have attempted to highlight multiple instances in which an underlying dichotomy provides a foundation for the public/private tension as experienced by the participants in this study. Whether I was highlighting their beliefs, their personal experiences, their perceptions regarding their community, or the pressures that those composite notions reinforce, I hope that I made a compelling argument for the existence of the tension that I believe provides a hidden challenge to schools, and affluent communities in particular. What I also hope is that at various points in this chapter I have appropriately captured the subtlety with which some of these notions arose. As a co-intentional researcher I am of the belief that brief pauses, abrupt shifts in topic, and rationalizing dialogue can provide profound evidence or underlying information, and I hope that I have done well to present that information accordingly. To that end I move into this final section to address a finding that I believe not only represents as fundamental experience shared by these principals, but also highlights the reason that so much nuance was required in the presentation of these findings.

In identifying this final powerful finding I turn to Mrs. Susan Jones and share here a brief anecdote from one of our conversations.

At one point during our dialogue I paused for a moment to gather my thoughts, and I stopped our conversation. Throughout my conversations with Susan (and indeed my conversations with all of the principal participants) I repeatedly found myself amazed as I was somehow both in awe and frustrated by the level of diplomacy that she brought to our dialogue. Susan, again like all of her peer participants, was very open and candid. She was humble, and strong, and assertive, and meaningful, and clearly smart as a whip. Why then, one might ask, would I as a researcher find myself frustrated with our conversation. To be honest, I couldn't help but feel that Susan’s answers were too perfect, too appropriate, and too politically astute. I felt myself wanting her to lay it on the
line and blow her top. I felt myself wanting her to be inappropriate and loud and full of vitriol as she voiced her own frustrations with the public/private tension. Susan however did no such thing and neither did any of her fellow participants. These principals were always appropriate, and even when they expressed frustrations they did so with a voice that openly recognized the thoughts, perspectives and feelings of those with whom they were frustrated.

After I paused I expressed my thoughts about this to Mrs. Jones and I then asked her what she thought regarding this feeling. I asked her explicitly if she recognizes that appropriateness in her professional dialogue and whether or not she engages in that way intentionally. Her brief yet poignant response provides the foundational statement for the remainder of this chapter: “Oh, I think I speak with a purposeful diplomacy. That's decorum, I mean, that's the way you should do it. Professional and diplomatic.”

Susan’s term, purposeful diplomacy, perfectly encapsulates a range of skills and behaviors displayed by the participants in this study. During our co-intentional experiences the participants both described and demonstrated an adept and unique political skill that affords them the opportunity to guide a conversation, address appropriate and sometimes challenging issues, and to somehow use the communicative process and skills at their disposal to dissolve and disengage any tension that could arise. In the remainder of this concluding section I will describe multiple aspects of the practice of purposeful diplomacy based upon the described and observed experiences of the participant principals.

I feel compelled to note at this point that the co-intentional approach to meaning making and the necessary requirement for philosophical dialogue is critical in understanding this final finding. Were I to simply use these pages to repeat words shared by participants the powerful context of their lived experience would not and could not have been as fully explored and understood. It was only after engaging in ongoing and meaningful philosophical dialogue with the interview transcripts that the full realization of this powerful finding could emerge.
The most explicit way to understand this notion of purposeful diplomacy as practiced by participant principals is the purposeful act of self-censorship. Throughout this chapter I have highlighted several instances in which participants displayed self-censorship, and I will highlight just a few more explicitly here in an effort to build greater context. By self-censorship I mean not only to describe occasions when principals purposely choose their words in an effort to provide a more diplomatic response or gently changed the subject or tenor of the conversation, but also times when the principals simply refused (deftly and diplomatically of course) to engage in dialogue regarding a particular issue. In the latter instances self-censorship was fairly easy to spot, as when Jane Miller declined to further address parent perceptions regarding visits to their adopted school, when Ashley Bronson described her PTO’s assembly choices but clearly stopped short of telling me she overruled them, or when Susan Jones described her district’s gifted policies and her general lack of concern for the qualification system and the way that it excludes some children. When I pointed out that Susan’s husband was a former superintendent and asked her if she would have ever felt compelled to advocate for change in that type of policy she responded thusly:

Well, I don’t know that I would be micromanaging. I would be talking about it with people and trying to come up with the best thing, researching or whatever. . . . You know, we don’t necessarily agree on everything, but we’re pretty in sync. He is very kid centered, very much—we’re very much in line. He’s been a big influence in my career. He’s encouraged me to, you know, if I had to do things. I mean, what would he say if he heard me say—he would probably say, he’d warn me of the pitfalls.

In another interesting interaction Karen Willix and I discussed the traditional nature of her community and the pressures she feel regarding ensuring student success. At one point she literally stopped—just stopped mid sentence. After a long pause I probed by saying, “seems like you have more to say about that.” She responded simply, “No.” Only after about five more minutes of conversation about the shared experience of other participants who seemed to practice
self-censorship was Karen able to, at least in hypothetical terms, go about generally describing her thoughts. She noted:

Well, I think in order to work in a job where you’re on the front lines, you deal with many different people, many different stakeholders, yeah, definitely you have to know how to talk to people. My friends are principals, and we talk about how we never have that—teachers can blow up at you, parents can blow up at you, people can get really made at you, but you don’t have that luxury. You have to be contemplative. You have to keep the peace. You have to choose your words wisely in order to keep things professional. So, probably.

While the blatant refusal of these participants to address these particular issues presented a fairly clear cut example of self-censorship, it is also important here to address a more nuanced form of the practice. In this respect participants did refuse to engage in dialogue explicitly, but rather they subtly shifted the context of the conversation in an effort to change the tone or direction of the discussion.

Interestingly, I began to recognize the notion of self-censorship as I worked through the first round of interviews, and I truly uncovered the phenomenon while analyzing and coding the data between stages in the interview process.

For this reason my observations of self-censorship are based more on observation and interpretation in the first round of interviews. When I returned to meet with participants I was armed with the knowledge of this phenomenon and thus was able to more explicitly engage in dialogue regarding it when the need arose. To use a cultural and literary reference, when those moments arose I sought to *pull back the curtain* and see if I could convince the great and powerful Oz to describe and explain what happens back there in these circumstances. That being noted, what this ultimately means is that some evidence of self-censorship from our earlier conversations is more interpretive and contextual while latter evidence is based on the thoughts and perspectives shared by participants. Many of those examples, have been shared throughout this chapter.

One example of this early contextual evidence of purposeful diplomacy occurred in a conversation with Jane Miller who was discussing their *adopted school* and the importance of
role models for students in the school and the community. Jane discussed how important it is for students to “find the route” to college and career success later in life, and she suggested that “sometimes kids find that route on their own and sometimes you need to lead them.” When I asked if this meant that she thinks the kids in the adopted school don’t have that experience she responded thusly:

I don’t think they necessarily have—I think that what they do have are strong educators in their building who are great role models for the kids to say, you know, this is something I can aspire to. You know, and I think that that connection that teachers make with kids is an important one when we talk about that’s something you need to do. Make those connections with kids because you never know your influence with anybody.

Note the brief pause in her response and the subtle way that she shifted to the affirmative by noting what they “do have.” She then went on to compliment the teachers in those schools and end by skirting over her original point. This is a typical example of the way that participants subtly exhibited the skills of purposeful diplomacy.

Ultimately it is important to recognize that at a basic level these principals practiced self-censorship in an effort to purposefully change the subject, to avoid a topic, or to address that topic in a politically astute way that is pleasing to affluent community members. What is important here is to not just recognize the existence of this practice but to also determine some of the fundamental notions that compel participants to use it, and the co-intentional approach to this process provided just such an opportunity. After much discussion several principals opened up about their use of self-censorship. For example, Jane Miller described the practice this way:

I think it’s a skill you have to have. Cause I think if you were blunt with some folks, that would not go over very well of, you know, we’re not going to tolerate that behavior from you. We’re not going to tolerate that from our principal. Kind of saying we want someone who—I think we’re looking for somebody that’s that positive person all the time. . . . I think you have to carefully wordsmith your words to say it in a positive way when you’re disciplining, when you’re talking to parents, when you’re talking to teachers. I think all of that, you have to carefully critique or say the right thing depending on your audience. Because I do think that, again, the eyes are closely watching everything you say and do, and it could be misconstrued to the point of you’re either
being disrespectful to them, you know, you’re not understanding them. I mean, there’s a whole sense to that.

Her colleague Ashley Bronson shared similar thoughts:

I do think we have to watch what we say. I think saying the wrong thing too many times can just ruin our reputation, and I have had staff who have not been well received by parents and have been great with kids, they were the soccer field talk, and about lost the reputation even though they were the best. And I had to work long and hard to get them to be well received by the merits.

Interestingly I think Ashley was, at least on some level, referring to herself as much as to her teacher colleagues.

Here I also highlight a conversation that I had with Stephanie Thompson who, after some pushing, was willing to pull back the curtain and describe her actual thought process behind the use of purposeful diplomacy. Interestingly, it is important to highlight here that this is not a nonchalant practice for her but rather something about which she (and a colleague who also works in an affluent district) has given a lot of thought:

I reference my friend; we spend a lot of time together. But one of the things we’ve toyed with is writing a book entitled, “Reading, Writing and Arithmetic: Teaching the Rich,” just as a kind of a guide book for what you need to know. And one of those chapters, chapter two is: always affirm that the other person is correct, any idea that they may have, and then guide them to the right answer. Just the secondary feature. And I think that is exactly how I try, and probably do it even second nature now to phrase any conversation I have with parents. You know, start positively. Listen to what they have to say. And that’s not to say that they don’t have valid points, because we have very good parents. And oftentimes they’re just as helpful as we need them to be in a given situation. But the message you communicate needs to be one that is, you know, gosh, I don’t know, sensitive to the environment where we work. So yes, there’s me guarding my words. And I think possibly, too, there’s also in each of these questions that you ask, I mean, there’s the reality of the life that I live as compared to the life that I work. And I’ve said before, the life that I live is not so different than the life that I work. So self-reflection is important.

Mrs. Thompson’s description here is powerful and it definitely illuminates the practice of purposeful diplomacy as exhibited by the participants in this study.
Ultimately, the feelings behind this purposeful diplomacy were beautifully portrayed by Pamela Rosen who shed light on the practice in relation to some of the larger philosophical tensions that undergird this entire chapter. As Pamela and I were discussing some of the systemic inequities that confound our educational system, I asked her if she felt those things could ever change, and if she felt that someone in a position like hers could contribute to that change.

There’s hope to change it, but I don’t know how much we can change it. But I think we have to better understand that it exists. We have to be honest that it exists before we can change it. And that’s what I don’t see a lot of suburban schools being honest about . . . [but] that probably won’t put any principal in a good position either, because they don’t want to see that. You know what I mean? Because inherently, there’ll probably be some power loss on their end when we start to make that shift. People know that. Just social dominance type of thing, I mean.

The presentation of these descriptions from Stephanie Thompson and Pamela Rosen clearly highlights the powerful subtext that provides the foundation for the practice of purposeful diplomacy. Simply put, these participants use the practice of purposeful diplomacy to communicate about challenging issues as they relate to the purpose of schooling, political tensions, and issues of inequity.

Conclusion

After introducing the participants and providing some basic generalizations about the communities in which they work, I began this chapter by noting the strong feelings that the participants shared regarding the public good purpose of schooling. Each of the principal participants in this study shared their opinions regarding the importance of educating all students and of providing them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities that they need to be successful in life. However, they also spent much of our conversation time discussing the specific private good pressures that they feel in their jobs and the fact that ultimately, much of their practice revolves around the private good structures that competitively stratify our society in economic terms.
These principals live these experiences in communities that seek to simultaneously focus on traditional notions of academic and economic success and as such, the principals seem to feel a profound pressure to avoid challenging such notions. In sum, while the participants in this study clearly work to maintain a complex balance between their own understandings of the purposes of schoolings and their professional practices in these affluent communities, that balance is often (if not always) tipped in the direction of private good notions of individualization and attainment. This tension has clear implications for their own professional practice, for the practice of other educational leaders, and for those that train educational leaders. In the following and final chapter I will further discuss these implications and provide recommendations for moving forward the important notions of transformative leadership and social justice in affluent communities like the ones presented here.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Since its earliest incarnations, the American public school system has represented an illustrative microcosm of the political tensions that lie at the heart of our philosophical understanding of democracy and constitutional authority. These tensions—between the idealism of Thomas Jefferson and the realism of Alexander Hamilton, between democratic politics and capitalist markets, and between public good responsibility and private good expectations—combine with the ever increasing list of normative requirements of the school leader and represent common, challenging phenomena experienced by school leaders across the country. The tensions are even more astutely present in affluent communities where homogeneous populations of upper-middle class Whites enjoy and appreciate the comfort of the status quo, while presuming the public school’s responsibility for the provision of private sector success.

The complex issues noted above coalesce into a nuanced problem facing the American education system today, and it is this problem that provided the basis for this study. As the role of the school principal becomes increasingly challenging and complex, and the predominant social construction in affluent school communities focuses almost exclusively on private good outcomes for students, and ignores the public good responsibility of citizenship training, principals become situated at the heart of that tension. In order to learn more about this complicated and nuanced problem, I undertook a critical phenomenological study that sought to explore how principals in affluent communities experience, understand, and address the tensions that exist between private good expectations and public good responsibility for schooling. This study addressed the following sub-questions:

- How do principals in affluent communities describe their work (especially in regard to their beliefs about public good outcomes or private good outcomes for students)?
- What influences and pressures shape their beliefs regarding their work?
- What influences and pressures shape their practices?
- Is there any congruence or conflict between those beliefs and pressures, and their practices?

To carry out this study I sought the participation of seven elementary school principals in affluent school communities and had multiple, co-intentional conversations with each participant. Through the use of a qualitative, phenomenological methodology (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Moustakas, 1994) and a co-intentional meaning-making process (Duarte, 2000), I learned that these principals do indeed find themselves at the heart of the tension between public good and private good purposes for schooling, and that the influences and pressures that shape their beliefs and practices are largely constructed around dominant, hegemonic values that require them to focus almost exclusively on private good outcomes for students. In the remainder of this chapter I will discuss these findings as they relate specifically to the research questions and provide further analysis and critique where appropriate. Namely, I will further illuminate how the beliefs and practices of these participant principals are shaped by various pressures and influences, and the degree to which there is congruence and/or conflict between those notions.

It is important to note that this study was undertaken with a critical lens which was constructed upon a theoretical framework of transformative leadership (Shields, 2010). This justice-oriented approach to educational leadership requires that educators focus on notions of power and privilege and on the deconstruction of knowledge frameworks that prevent inclusion and equity and their reconstruction in more inclusive ways. The relationship between these important concepts and the findings in this study are critical to present in the broader discussion. Thus in addition to addressing the points above I will explicitly focus on the relationship
between transformative leadership theory and the findings before moving on to the recommendations and conclusions that emerge from this dissertation.

Beliefs, Practices, Pressures: Conflict and Congruence

The research questions that provided the foundation for this study focused on the beliefs and practices that participant principals described in their work and the influences and pressures that contribute to the formation of those beliefs and practices. As the findings emerged in our co-intentional conversations it became abundantly clear that the relationship between all of these complex notions is complicated and multifaceted with each of the concepts overlapping the others in myriad ways. The intertwined nature of these findings, and the intricate connection between the beliefs of the participants, their professional practices, and the influences and pressures they face in their jobs left me inclined to analyze them together, rather than using a more fractured or compartmentalized form of analysis, and appropriately my final research question provided just such a lens for further analysis. Thus I will use this final question as the basis for the discussion in the initial portion of this chapter. My final research question asked whether participants in this study experience any congruence or conflict between their beliefs about the purposes of schooling, the pressures that they face in the normative context of their work, and the practices that they ultimately perform as educational leaders in these affluent schools. It is with this question that I begin the process of formal analysis.

Perceived Conflict

As I begin this section and continue to reflect on the co-intentional approach that shaped the methodology of this study, I believe it is important to note a challenge that I faced in developing the discussion portion of this chapter. That co-intentional approach provided me with
some powerful tools in approaching the findings, but I make it perfectly plain here in noting that I have relied heavily on my own perspective during my initial efforts at analysis regarding the question of conflict or congruence. Although my own philosophical dialogue represented a fundamentally important tool for the meaning making in this study, I recognize now that my initial foray into data analysis was over reliant on my own personal insights and experiences, and this over reliance lead me to some initial conclusions that were overly simple and inappropriate. Simply put, I began analyzing and interpreting the findings in this study based upon the presumption that the participant principals experience profound conflict between their beliefs, pressures, and practices, only to realize upon further analysis and reflection that the conflict was mostly mine and that, in general, these principals experience rather consistent alignment between these factors. Thus in the remainder of this section I will provide further analysis regarding this alignment. I will begin by addressing the presumed existence of this conflict and highlight the espoused beliefs that participants shared regarding the purpose of schooling. I will then go on to describe several dichotomies that revolve around pressures that participants experience and propose that while the participants certainly feel pressure in their work, the pressures and influences are so deeply hegemonic and representative of normative cultural structures that they generally work to reinforce views that the participants and their constituents already maintain. Thus, as participants carry out their duties they do so in a way that largely reinforces those cultural norms and that suggest at least tacit congruence between beliefs, pressures, and practices. In short, these participants are generally so enculturated into these communities that their espoused beliefs are, in actuality, significantly different from the beliefs that their practices suggest they actually hold.
Espoused Beliefs

As noted in the previous chapter, when asked explicitly to describe their beliefs, the participants in this study generally described the purpose of schooling in public good terms, and it is these espoused beliefs that provide the basis for analysis here. As I noted in Chapter 2 the philosophical basis for the public good purpose of schooling rests on a belief in an egalitarian notion that requires us to educate all children in our society about a life lived together (Dewey, 1976; McMannon, 1997; Westbrook, 1996), and the participants in this study clearly described their beliefs in this regard. During the interview process, participants described their personal beliefs about the egalitarian notion of schooling and the idea that all children ought to be educated and learn how to be members of a community. Karen Willix addressed this notion when she shared her belief in a model that requires us to “take every student in” and Stephanie Thompson echoed this sentiment noting that she, “would like to see the purpose of schools to be something far broader than where we’re at . . . being accepting different ideas and different values and not trying to make people the same, but recognizing those differences.” While this notion will be more fully addressed later in this chapter it is important to note here that by and large participants only described this egalitarian philosophy when asked direct questions about the societal purpose of public schooling, and that generally speaking, their descriptions of their own practiced understanding of the purpose of schooling clearly seemed to fall in a much more private good focused mold. Still, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that these identified purposes certainly align with the egalitarian public good purpose of schooling as described by scholars such as Dewey (1976, 2001) and Goodlad (1994, 1996, 2004).

In addition to their descriptions about the egalitarian purpose of schooling the participants also described their beliefs about the purpose of schooling in terms of the broad curricular goals
that they feel represent an important component of the public system. Again, when asked to
directly describe that which they value most about the curricular content in their schools the
participants took pains to indicate that they not only develop the social/emotional well being of
students, but that they also seek to ensure that education is about more than scores on academic
tests. Throughout the interview process participants such as Pamela Rosen and Dr. Patricia
Hepler described the importance of character development, civility, and social emotional growth
in their schools, and as Buber (2001) suggested, this education of character is vital to the public
good purpose of schooling. In addition, participants also shared a view that schools ought to be
responsible for the development and maintenance of a rich and diverse curriculum and this belief
further supports the public good purpose of schooling. Ashley Bronson described the importance
of giving students “a taste” of everything so they can find their passion, Susan Jones highlighted
the importance of “making memories” for students, and Jane Miller highlighted the importance
of the “fine arts” and characteristics of “life-long learning.” In each case these participants were
highlighting ideas put forward by scholars such as Giroux (1995) and Glass (2000) who
suggested that broad curricular content is vital to the public good purpose schooling. It is
important to note here that upon deeper analysis these espoused beliefs represent what I perceive
as an early unintentional nod toward the private good purposes of schooling. In these instances
participants seemed to hear themselves addressing the public good ideals that are embedded
within a broad curriculum but were also simultaneously focusing those ideals on individualized
outcomes for students. Upon further analysis this private good lead shall become increasingly
clear.

Participants in this study also discussed the public good purpose of schooling in terms of
the importance of citizenship training in a democracy, and as Barber (1997) clearly suggested,
this represents another important aspect of the egalitarian philosophy of schooling. As highlighted in great detail in Chapter 2 the notion of schools as institutions of citizenship training in our republic has been part of the cultural milieu since our country’s earliest days (Barber, 1997, Mann, 1848, Tocqueville, 1835). This notion was clearly highlighted by participants like Susan Jones who specifically highlighted her responsibility for developing citizens and by Pamela Rosen who addressed the importance of promoting “civility in our society.” The production of educated citizens in a democracy and the requirement that civil society represent the foundation of that democracy is fundamental to our understanding of the purpose of schooling, and the participants in this study clearly demonstrated their knowledge and belief in this notion when asked to describe their own thoughts and experiences in this regard.

Before moving on it is important to acknowledge all of the concepts highlighted in the context of both the participants’ experiences and the co-intentional dialogue that helped unearth those experiences. When I asked these participants to describe the purpose of schooling they did so largely in the public good terms noted above. They highlighted citizenship training, and diverse curricular content, and the importance of character development and civil society, and they did so, I believe, as representatives of the American public who have largely convinced themselves that they hold these ideals for public schools. Here I turn to Mathews (1996) who suggested that most of us believe in public schools as a foundational component of American democracy, and to McMannon (1997) who concurred by noting that even though we may have vastly different personal expectations for our schools we all believe that public schooling should provide the foundational experience for youth in our society. Even if many people do not know what Rousseau (1762) wrote about the general will, what Tocqueville had to say about the philosophical ethos of American democracy, or what Horace Mann did for the founding of the
public school system, there seems to be at least a tacit understanding in our society that these public good notions should be requisite components of our educational system. These components highlight an interesting dichotomy in the analysis of the evidence presented here because they represent the foundation for the normative context that situates principals at the heart of the public good/private good tension. As I shall demonstrate further, while these espoused beliefs clearly seem to represent some important structural and societal understandings, they did not, at least in this study, track with the actual beliefs that participants demonstrated regarding the purpose of schooling.

**Complicated Pressures and the Shaping of a Dichotomous Experience**

The findings in this study certainly present a clear picture regarding the espoused public good beliefs of the participants, but the evidence also clearly suggests that private good expectations permeate the culture in their schools. Although the participants clearly described public good purposes of schooling as foundational to their belief systems they almost exclusively described their school communities as places that demand near constant private good means of production and individualized outcomes for students. They espoused an egalitarian philosophy but described an environment that expects meritocratic results; they suggested that they value broad curricular content, but discussed the curriculum in their schools in almost exclusively academic terms; and while they highlighted their beliefs in the importance of collaboration and citizenship training, they depicted methodological educational structures constructed in profoundly competitive terms. In short, the public good ideals they described when asked explicitly about the purposes of schooling seemed to all but evaporate when the discussion turned to the influences and pressures that shape their practice. Here I will briefly highlight those private good pressures as described by the participants.
Philosophically speaking, despite the fact that participants described an important egalitarian ethos as the basis of their educational philosophy they also described their school communities as cultures in which meritocratic structures guide the majority of practices. As describe by the participants, the affluent school systems represented in this study embody a meritocratic philosophy that fosters individualism over collectivism, personal achievement over collective participation, and a commoditized notion of educational attainment. Goodlad (1996) described this type of philosophical individualism as a notion that “eschews self-transcendence and the making of the democratic polity” (p. 95), and it is exactly this kind of private good pressure that participant descriptions illuminated. As participants described their experiences, they repeatedly noted expectations in their communities that students be provided with opportunities that will propel them to excel outside of the educational system. Jane Miller representatively described this as, “the expectations of parents that you have to deliver excellence all the time, every day, every minute of the day,” and the recurring expectations about educational attainment and the repeated references to Harvard University made this private good expectation intriguingly clear. Ultimately, the meritocratic pressures that are present in these communities align most closely with the notion of education as a commoditized, exchange value that represents a financial investment from which these constituents expect to receive future dividends (Apple, 1992; Labaree, 1997), as parents in these communities recognize that this focus slants the meritocratic field toward themselves. As Wildman and Davis (2008) suggested, parents in affluent communities like these recognize the already privileged position that their children hold and they thus advocate for a system that reinforces that privilege, and when principals described the competitive nature of their school communities, the expectations that parents hold regarding individualized and accelerated programming, or the fact that parents
openly acknowledge that they moved to these communities to obtain an advantage they were highlighting this complexity. Ultimately the private good nature of these pressures is abundantly clear.

In addition to the profoundly meritocratic expectations noted above, the participant principals in these affluent schools further described environs in which the curricular content is addressed in purely academic terms. Apple’s (1992) description of a “visible” curriculum that is content-based, academic-focused, and exceedingly narrow was well represented in these affluent communities where the participants repeatedly discussed the pressure that they feel to maintain these very narrow confines. Throughout my discussions with the participant principals they described the pressure that they feel for their students to excel academically as a nearly constant focus. ISAT scores and Blue Ribbon Awards came up repeatedly as participants described, “a singular focus” on academics and attainment that pushes them both overtly and subversively. Pamela Rosen’s experience of being pulled aside in a private meeting to discuss why every single child in her school was not meeting standards highlighted Apple’s (1992) notion of a powerful audit culture that exists in these affluent communities. Clearly these private good expectations are firmly rooted. Importantly, not only do the pressures in these communities tend toward purely academic outcomes for students but they also require that those academic opportunities be traditional in nature. For these principals content knowledge and academic testing are not only requisite considerations, but they are the foundation of a traditional worldview that believes successful students really need only retain a traditional knowledge focus and regurgitate it on standardized assessments (Brantlinger, 2003).

The traditionally academic worldview noted above is directly related to a fiercely competitive ethos that represents another critical aspect of the private good pressure in these
affluent communities. As Anyon (1981), Brantlinger (2003), and Labaree (1997) all suggested, a traditional approach to academics and curriculum suits the stakeholders in affluent communities because such approaches put affluent children in the best position for future success within a system that is already slanted to provide social and economic advantage to those who already hold it. It is for this reason that the participants in this study described such powerful pressure to support competitive notions of education. Specifically speaking, a perfect example rests in the intense pressure that participants described regarding accelerated programming in their schools. This pressure perfectly denotes the intense focus on status attainment that Labaree highlighted as important in affluent communities. In almost every conversation I had with participants the community’s concern for placement in accelerated programming models, and the status and opportunity that those placements provide represented a powerful pressure that they identified as commanding significant amounts of their professional time.

Ultimately private good pressures surrounding educational philosophy, curricular content, and educational implementation clearly exist in these affluent communities, and these complicated pressures, when highlighted against the backdrop of the participants’ espoused public good beliefs influence participant practices. Later in this chapter I will further address that influence and the practices that participants ultimately perform because of them, but before I do I will analyze some complex assumptions that seem to undergird the beliefs and practices of participant principals. In the remainder of this section I will elucidate and describe several complicated dichotomies that exist within these communities, and after addressing these notions and assumptions I will go on to suggest that their presence works to further enculturate the participants into holding the same hegemonic values that are thrust upon them by their school communities.
Tenuous assumptions. It is important to begin this section by briefly but explicitly addressing some prevailing assumptions that clearly exist within the socially constructed context of these affluent communities as these assumptions provide foundational understanding for the dichotomous experiences these principals face. The first assumption, which I have already highlighted to some extent, focuses on the hegemonic belief that traditional academic pursuits, (Apple’s [1992] “visible” curriculum) represent the key to private sector success, social mobility, and individual attainment (Labaree, 1997). This notion clearly underscores some of the thinking in these affluent communities where participants described parents and community members as having a strong belief in such approaches and where participants who may feel compelled toward innovative approaches tend to instead look backward instead of forward. It is further important to acknowledge that the social construction in these communities is built upon a paradigm that presumes the public school to be responsible for the individual private sector success of students. In other words, as Giroux (1995, 2005) suggested, a strong belief exists in these communities that school represent a form of market preparation, and this presumption certainly permeated the experiences and beliefs of principals who described pressures regarding notions like accelerated programs and full admission to Harvard. Ultimately these two assumptions are important to consider here as they represent a line of reasoning that undergirds the dichotomies that will be further developed below. Simply put, if members of this affluent context believe that traditional approaches are vital to private sector success and if they further believe that the school is responsible for that success then a belief in traditionalism and narrowly defined education becomes foundational to the experiences of principals. These principals, in effect, are so embedded in the neoliberal framework of educational attainment that what at the outset seems to be conflict between beliefs and practices actually represents an explicit level of congruence.
This congruence, and the associated fundamental belief in traditional, narrow approaches to education is clearly hegemonic and must be acknowledged.

**The bubble.** Another notion that requires further exploration regarding conflict and congruence connects directly with the theme of Mayberry that arose in the previous chapter. As I addressed in great depth, one of the most profound and illuminating findings to arise in this study was the theme of *Mayberry* and the hegemonic and socially constructed focus on traditional notions of middle class community that permeate the cultures in these school communities. The theme itself certainly provides profound evidence regarding the socially constructed context of affluent communities as described by Anyon (1980, 1981) and Brantlinger (2003), and it also provides compelling contextual evidence of an interesting dichotomy that undergird the public/private tension in these affluent communities. Here I turn to comments made by Karen Willix and Ashley Bronson, two participant principals who explicitly described their school communities as, “a bubble.”

In our discussions about the socially constructed context of their affluent school communities the participants generally acknowledge the *bubble-ness* of their school communities and demonstrated a clear recognition that the affluent context of their communities provides them and their constituents with a relatively non-representative experience. As Karen Willix noted, “this might be a nice little pocket, but that isn’t the world.” I present this recognition here as it provides the foundation for an interesting paradox that these participants seem to live within. Comments like Karen’s about “the bubble” clearly identify the post modern context in which these participants’ experiences exist, and they suggest that these principals recognize that such experiences do not represent reality in many school communities. This recognition is vitally important to acknowledge because it implies that participants know full well that they do not, by
definition, understand the full context of the broader world, and yet, while they can acknowledge the unique context of their own experience they also fail to acknowledge that this unique experience may well provide them with an illogical and unfounded understanding about the reality of public education and the tension between public good and private good purposes for schooling. The post modern paradox of “the bubble” almost certainly plays a vital role in the ways that participant principals experience the congruence and conflict between their beliefs and practices because, in short, while their acknowledgement of “the bubble” would seem to represent a compelling impetus for the participants to feel conflict, they themselves are also so encased within “the bubble” that they are much more likely to develop congruence. Clearly this paradox is fundamentally important to understand going forward.

Success for the successful. In relation to “the bubble” another interesting dichotomy emerged regarding the post modern context of the affluent communities that were explored in this study, and this dichotomy further advances the notion of congruence between beliefs and practices for participants. As described previously, participants discussed their espoused beliefs about the purpose of schooling in public good terms that require them to work to meet the needs of all students. Overall the participants suggested that they believe it is their responsibility to help ensure that every student be successful, but, as their acknowledgement of “the bubble” presupposes, these principals also recognize that by and large most students arrive at their school’s doors with the skills they already need to be successful (Brantlinger, 2003). Throughout the interview process participants like Stephanie Thompson described students who, “have the basics, and [who] are going to be successful regardless . . . because they come so prepared and their parents are going to put [in] the time [to ensure their success].”
As participants described their experiences with already successful students they were, in effect, highlighting a dichotomy that is largely exclusive to their own affluent context. In essence, principals described the challenging proposition of functioning within competitively achievement-focused culture where, in general, everyone is already very successful, and this environment, where highly successful parents send well prepared students to school to receive a traditionally academically rigorous education, provides the basis for yet another dichotomous tension that paradoxically leads to congruence rather than conflict about the purposes of schooling. Ultimately this tension reinforces the traditionally narrow academic approaches noted above and the principals work to maintain a system that simply allows winners to keep winning. Like a marathon runner who gets to start 10 miles into the course, the students in these affluent communities generally begin so far ahead of the pack that they simply only need to maintain their lead rather than fight for it. Thus, in simple terms, Freire’s (1970) banking model generally represents the desired method of education in these communities where students already arrive so far ahead of the game that they must only maintain their lead to achieve ultimate private sector success. Nearly all of the principal participants noted that in general these parents are not at all shy about expressing their opinion regarding their children’s achievement, but they further noted that these conversations about individual students are made all the more complicated by the fact that so many students are high achievers. Ultimately they described their approaches in their schools as matching these desires.

**Societal stratification.** The notion of success for the successful underlies yet another important dichotomy that further suggests that participants maintain a strong level of congruence between their beliefs and practices. Ultimately it is clear that the participants and the schools in which they work are perceived to be responsible for the private sector success of their students,
and, as the previously aforementioned dichotomies suggest, that success is likely to be both more attainable and significantly higher than many students in other communities. As Apple (1992) and Labaree (1997) suggested, the unique components of the affluent background and life experiences that these students maintain are likely to contribute a level of societal success that far surpasses many public school students, and, as noted above, the participants clearly acknowledged that fact throughout this study. When Karen Willix compared her students to “good cherries” that allow her to make “good cherry pie” she was voicing a representative understanding of this notion that acknowledges the deep and advanced set of knowledge and skills that affluent students arrive at school with. Yet interestingly, while the participants clearly recognize the high level of attainment to which their students are already predisposed, they still feel pressure to push higher and higher. What this continued push does, according to Apple (1992) and Giroux (2005), is work to further stratify society in neoliberal terms that ensure those who are already most likely to be successful are also those who continue to receive the most opportunity. In a sense, what the participants describe in this regard is a dichotomy that works to construct a type of self-fulfilling prophecy. Participants can look at their traditional structures and their espoused beliefs regarding the egalitarian philosophy of education and believe that they are simply working to help ensure that each child reach his or her fullest potential, all the while ignoring the endemic realities that continue to provide the students in these communities with more and more opportunity for private sector success. In effect, what this dichotomy fosters is a natural acceptance of the tacit responsibility for the stratification of society and for the greater private good rights of these children as compared to others.

Recognition, denial, and absolution. The tacit acceptance of social and economic stratification that I highlighted above is directly connected to one final unique dichotomy that
clearly emerged in the analysis phase of this study. It seems clear at this point that participants seemed to find ways to simultaneously recognize and deny the inherent inequities in our educational system, and nowhere was this dichotomy more obvious or relevant than in participant descriptions of the wealth and status of their schools and communities. As I explored in detail in the previous chapter, the participants in this study clearly demonstrated a complicated relationship with economic inequality and their own ability to recognize and acknowledge that inequality, and this dichotomy certainly requires further analysis.

The findings surrounding philanthropic activity and the ways that participants struggled to acknowledge the affluence of their school communities represent an intriguing notion here, made all the more compelling by both the perceived level of conflict and underlying level of congruence these behaviors suggest. As noted in chapter 4, many participants discussed the overall generosity and high level of philanthropic activity that exists within their school communities, and it is important to reiterate here that many of the conversations about philanthropy arose at moments when the discussion had turned to the subject of systemic inequity. Interestingly, while the participants took care to discuss the generosity of their affluent schools and community members they also seemed to work equally hard to deny the level of affluence in their own communities. The intriguing paradox here of course is that, simply put, one cannot be generously philanthropic without first being financially established enough to do so. It seems rather unlikely that similar notions would arise in similar ways in the conversation were I having it in high poverty school. As Wildman and Davis (2008) noted, both our culture in general and privileged groups in particular seek to suppress conversation about privilege and view even basic fundamental needs as individual rather than collective responsibilities. Ultimately, the complicated relationship that participants maintain regarding the affluence in
their school communities supports this assertion and makes it relatively clear to me that in these environs philanthropic activity represents a tool for absolution and a means by which participants (and their community members) can mitigate the perceived level of benefit that they receive from the inequitable system.

**Bias of self-efficacy.** Each of the unique, socially constructed dichotomies noted above clearly works to situate the principals in these affluent communities at the heart of the tension between public good and private good outcomes, and, in my analysis, these tensions repeatedly force the participants into a type of philosophical corner. In short, these principals clearly recognize the importance of public good purposes of schooling and they feel compelled to consider those public good purposes as the foundation of the practice, and yet, the private good dominated pressures that they face and the unique socially constructed worlds in which they are so deeply embedded propel them in another direction. These opposing forces, the natural tensions between public good responsibility and private good expectations, require these principals to construct a type of framework that participants apply unconsciously in an effort to contextualize and balance these complex notions and in this section I will highlight this idea as I have conceived of it through reflection and analysis. I call this notion the *bias of self-efficacy.*

The bias of self-efficacy is a type of strategy utilized by the principals in these affluent communities to help them balance the dichotomous tensions noted above. It is a method of mental coalescence—a tool that participants use to help construct congruence out of apparent conflict so that they can carry out the normative functions of their jobs while believing that the vastly divergent perspectives they experience can actually coexist. Before highlighting some key notions of the bias of self-efficacy it is important to provide some background regarding the term and its presence in the educational lexicon. The term self-efficacy was coined by Albert Bandura
(1997) and can be generally defined as a person’s belief in her or his own capacity to accomplish a particular task or to apply influence in her/his own life. Bandura’s notion of self-efficacy has developed over the years and has become an increasingly significant topic for educators as they work to help students become successful. In short, Bandura argues that the ability to exercise control over one’s own life and the pride and ownership that goes along with that ability can work to greatly improve both external performance and social emotional well being. As educators consider the notion of self-efficacy we generally work to help students develop intrinsic motivation, pride in their work, a sense of accomplishment, and a confidence in their own skills and abilities, all of which, according to Bandura, lead to happier, more successful, and more productive lives.

As the research regarding affluent schools suggests members of affluent communities are far more likely to demonstrate characteristics of self-efficacy than those in less affluent environs (Anyon, 1980, 1981; Brantlinger, 2003), and the participants in this study indicated that their school communities are no exception. As Susan Jones plainly suggested, “these people did not get here by accident.” Susan and her fellow participants repeatedly noted the level of confidence exhibited in their communities, the drive that students and parents demonstrate in working towards goals, and their willingness to take on challenging tasks. In short, members of these affluent communities have a deep interest in their own personal success and do in fact demonstrate the characteristics of self-efficacy, and while there is clearly nothing pejorative about that distinction it is, I believe, vitally important to recognize as it relates to the abilities of the participants to contextualize some of the dichotomous experiences the face in their communities.
With full recognition of this background it is important to provide more explicit analysis and highlight what I call the bias of self-efficacy. By bias I mean to add the nuance of perception on the part of the principals and acknowledge a type of perceived or constructed confidence in one’s own ability to achieve a particular outcome. This bias, which can be centered on the school as a whole or on students more specifically, provides the foundation for a belief system that generally allows the principals to ignore systemic inequity and instead view their students’ success as either a result of their own strong skills and abilities or those of their educators who carefully align the curriculum and guide student learning. In either sense, by holding this bias and making presumptions about the success of students in their school communities these principals are able to ignore the public/private conflict as it exists in their lives and believe that their work is simultaneously helping them to foment a public good responsibility while supporting the private good expectations of the system. As noted, in the experiences of these principals this bias acts as a catalyst in two seemingly opposing ways to achieve the same result, and I will review each of those notions in greater detail here.

One aspect of the bias of self-efficacy is based in a naïve ignorance (willful or otherwise) of the systemic inequity that undergirds society, and this notion is constructed in such a way as to recognize student success as a nearly exclusive result of the strong skills and educational production of the school faculty and staff. In some circumstances during this study the topic of societal stratification arose and the participants and I discussed the influence that these pressures exert on them and their practice. While various examples could be highlighted here the most compelling was my conversation with Ashley Bronson in which she repeatedly failed to acknowledge that wealth and affluence might be playing a role in the strong academic success of her students. Ashley noted the great teachers, strong curriculum mapping, coherent articulation,
and focused administrators, and while I pushed the subject several times she concluded that portion of our conversation by noting simply that, “it doesn’t matter the income of the parents. It’s the drive and the focus of our school district.” Ultimately this form of the bias of self-efficacy clearly works to reinforce stratification and systemic inequality while effectively ignoring it.

In seemingly contradictory terms the other notion of the bias of self-efficacy is actually rooted in acknowledgement of systemic inequity and focuses more on students than staff. In these circumstances participants readily acknowledged some of the systemic inequities that they perceived as providing their schools with an advantage and were thus, it seemed able to more freely dismiss any contribution to inequity of societal stratification that they or their school could be fostering. In other words, by highlighting that “smart,” “hardworking,” “good cherries” come into their schools every day participants were seemingly able to minimize (again, purposeful or otherwise) the sense that they and their school work to reinforce structural inequity and exclusively private good outcomes for schooling. They were able to say, look, we can’t help that we have smart, rich, white kids coming in the door every day. We teach who we get and that’s that. In this sense the bias of self-efficacy is really the bias of student-efficacy, a belief in the perceived inevitability of the ultimate private sector success of the students in these schools that somehow absolves them from the complicated notion of redressing inequity.

As we consider these two seemingly divergent notions of the bias of self-efficacy and its role in providing participants with a form of mental coalescence that helps them build congruence out of potential conflict it is important to recognize that in either circumstance the participants were able to draw the same conclusion and build a mental model that supports their belief that their school is playing its part and fulfilling its role in the public good context. The
bias, whether based in open acknowledgement or willful ignorance of systemic inequalities achieves the same result: a perception that the students in these affluent communities are, to some extent, destined for particular roles in this life and thus these principals feel it is their primary responsibility as educators to foster that outcome. In the end the bias of self-efficacy works to absolve participants from taking a more activist-oriented approach to addressing inequity and injustice which, simply put, reinforces the status quo while undermining the capacity of the school community to think about or address those systemic imbalances.

**Enculturation, Congruence, and Demonstrated Private Good Beliefs**

As I reflected upon the dichotomous experiences of the participant principals and the natural tensions that undergird them I came to the conclusion that my initial interpretation regarding the perceived conflict between their beliefs and practices was at a minimum unsophisticated, and more explicitly, just plain wrong. In the end, each of the dichotomies presented above and the underlying hegemonic pressures that influence them combine to establish an experience of enculturation for these principals who, due to that enculturation, actually demonstrate congruence between their beliefs and practices. Before offering specific analysis regarding the enculturation of participant principals in these affluent communities it is important to provide a specific definition of two important terms: hegemony and enculturation. Here I will briefly define these terms.

According to Lears (1985) the notion of cultural hegemony is most closely associated with Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci who defined the term as, "the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Lears, 1985, p. 568). In a cultural context hegemony is a powerful tool for the status-holding members of society whose perspectives, values, and general
ideological concerns become so recognized as normative that they not only become the status quo but ultimately come to be held by all members of society. While I could certainly address this notion further here it seems sufficient to signal its relevance. What is important to recognize is that hegemony is not value-neutral and that in fact, although the values of the dominant class ultimately come to be held by the majority of systems those values are in fact constructed around the benefit of the dominant.

The term enculturation is also important to address specifically and it is important to consider in the context of hegemony. Here I turn to the work of cultural anthropologist Kottak (2009) who described enculturation as a kind of hegemonic process whereby individuals are taught (either implicitly or explicitly) the shared norms and values held by members of a given group. Through the process of enculturation individuals work to become accepted members of a given community and they also learn the boundaries within which they must behave in order to retain that membership status. In short, the process of enculturation works not only to shape the behaviors and actions of individuals, but also inevitably to shape the underlying belief systems that influence those actions. It is important to note here that enculturation in this context is not benign or value neutral, but rather a process by which the values of the dominant class come to be accepted by other members of society. In the remainder of this section I will demonstrate how the process of enculturation works to shape the beliefs of the participant principals in their affluent communities and how this process thus provides the basis for congruence between their beliefs and practices.

First, it is clear in reviewing the findings of this study that participants are provided more than ample opportunity to learn the accepted belief systems and behaviors in their school communities. These opportunities, as described by the participants exist mostly in the form of
the influences and pressures that participants experience in their jobs and just as Kottak (2009) suggested, the participants clearly described these *opportunities* as both explicit and implicit. The explicit processes of enculturation that work in the lives of these participants exist largely in the form of formal pressure that is placed upon them by parents, community members, and superiors. When participants described their bosses and a required focus on ISAT scores, shared stories about parents and the pressure to provide individualized and accelerated programming, or the specific conversations that they have had regarding the philanthropic activity they were describing just such explicit steps of enculturative practice. That being noted, it was clear that participants experience enculturation in many implicit ways as well. In many respects the principals provided general descriptions regarding the cultural norms in their communities and these descriptions certainly represent a product of the implicit enculturation. For example, the powerful descriptions that participants provided regarding the traditional normative context of their school communities and the Mayberry-esque milieu of their school communities certainly represent a type of unspoken expectation to which these principals strongly feel they must adhere. It is important to recognize here that by specifically addressing the notion of Mayberry in context the participants were demonstrating that at least at some level this adherence to the cultural values of the community is not an unconscious act. Rather they are identifying with the hegemonic values of the dominant class (in this case the constituents in their communities) and purposefully adhering to them. In the end these practices, whether overt and purposeful or implicit and generalized clearly lead the principals to behave in ways that are perceived as culturally appropriate in these affluent communities.

In addition to describing numerous experiences that highlight the strong pressure they feel to become enculturated into their school communities participants also described (again both
explicitly and implicitly) personal behaviors that indicate their own level of enculturation. Several of these explanations described overt circumstances in which they demonstrated their own efforts to behave in such a manner as to appear that they share the values of the community. For example, when Jane Miller shared advising her child to behave a certain way in public due to the fact that they could possibly see community members she was describing this enculturative pressure. Similarly when Stephanie Thompson pulled back the curtain and described the methods that she uses when communicating with parents, she too was describing this overt effort. Of course while behaviors such as these demonstrate that some of this enculturative behavior is certainly purposeful, it is also keenly important to acknowledge that in other circumstances these types of behaviors were so established, so normative, and so well ingrained as to truly demonstrate hegemonic structures to which the participants clearly adhere.

The practice of purposeful diplomacy and the descriptions that participants shared regarding the relative affluence of their school communities represents a clear and powerful example of the hegemonic process and the lengths to which participants will go to reinforce them. As noted, clear themes emerged during this study regarding the ways that principals both shaped and guarded their words, and other instances arose in which they purposefully described their communities as not relatively affluent, and the nature of the interview process suggests that when participants took these actions they were not doing so for demonstrative purposes. Rather, the participants were communicating in such a way as to reinforce the enculturated hegemonic values of their school community. This notion is powerfully important to acknowledge because it indicates a genuine level of enculturation. Simply put, the participants were not saying this to ingratiate themselves to a community member or to purposefully become well regarded members of the community, but rather, they did so because they themselves actually hold the same beliefs
and values as the affluent members of their communities. Thus it is clear that living with these
demands and in cultures where these expectations are so hegemonic contributes to an
environment in which participants become enculturated and come to believe in the same values,
philosophies, and expectations as the members of their school communities and to ultimately do
their jobs in such a way as to further reinforce the private good purpose of schooling. In the end
it is clear that whether conscious or subconscious, these actions fit the hegemonic mold
described by Labaree (1997) and Wildman and Davis (2008) and serve to perpetuate and
preserve the inequities in the status quo.

Ultimately, all of these underlying dichotomies and enculturated practices represent clear
evidence of the public good/private good tension and the powerful implications of that tension as
it exists in affluent school communities. While participants could clearly describe the important
public good notions of egalitarianism and citizenship training it is clear that in practice they
rarely stray from private good notions of meritocracy and competitively focused traditional
structures. These findings have clear implications for practitioners and researchers alike and of
course I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the important role that the theory of
transformative leadership can have in developing further understanding of the important steps
that can be taken by scholars and practitioners who are armed with this knowledge. In the next
section I will consider these implications as they relate to the framework of transformative
leadership that was presented in Chapter 2, and I will further explore the ways that this
framework could positively influence education in these communities and communities like
them.
Conclusions, Implications, and Transformative Leadership

As noted previously, the final research question that framed this study asked about the level of congruence or conflict between participant beliefs, influences, and practices, and this research question clearly provides a powerful subtext that is important to acknowledge here. Simply put, while I undertook this study with the intent of ascertaining the level of congruence of conflict between these complicated issues I acknowledge here that I must also ask two other important questions: should there be a different balance struck between beliefs, pressures, and practices, and more importantly, what are the implications of leaving this congruence unchallenged? Ultimately, if my authenticity criteria (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) seek changed perspectives and more thoughtful, post-modern understandings, then as part of my analytical process I am required to consider whether or not that change in perspective is possible and how that change could be attained. Clearly the theoretical framework of transformative leadership indicates that there should be a different balance between these complex issues while also providing a meaningful structure for fomenting that change (Shields, 2010). In this regard, I will use the transformative leadership framework to describe the means by which principals in affluent communities can further advance transformative practices and work to address public good purposes of schooling. At the conclusion of Chapter 2, I presented six stages for principals to follow for successful implementation of transformative leadership practices in affluent communities and in the remainder of this section I will use those six stages as a method for addressing the dichotomous experiences of principals presented in this chapter. In addressing these stages I will highlight the degree to which the principals’ described experiences meet these criteria, before describing some ways that principals could work to further advance the important public good notions that are so strongly embedded in the transformative leadership framework.
Recognition

The foundational step of recognition represents the first important stage of the transformative leadership framework as applied in affluent school communities. As described by Shields (2010), this initial stage requires an explicit acknowledgement of the material and social realities that exist in our society and that influence and reinforce inequity, and it requires principals to thoughtfully and purposefully extend their vision beyond the social construction of their own school communities and consider the broader implications that their own experiences may have in the larger world. Based on the data gathered in this study, there is certainly evidence to suggest that participants and members of their school communities have at least some basic, though often implicit, recognition of these realities. Foundationally speaking, it is clear that participants recognize some of the unique features of their socially constructed reality that likely do not exist in other locales. For example, their descriptions of the Mayberry social construct represent one salient feature of this recognition. A review of the evidence presented in the previous chapter demonstrates that participants recognize that the traditionally-focused, affluent communities in which they live and work are generally not representative of the broader population. For example, when they acknowledged the fortunate backgrounds and strong skills that the majority of their students bring with them to school they were certainly demonstrating recognition of material realities. In addition, the descriptions of philanthropic activities that participants interjected into our conversations about systemic inequity provide further evidence of the stage of recognition, for in choosing those moments to highlight the strong level of philanthropic activity in their schools they most certainly acknowledging a level of inequity in broader society. This stage of recognition clearly presents yet another unique duality for participants who most certainly recognize that their students are positively affected by inequity,
and who thus, at least at a basic level, demonstrates at least tacit recognition of this inequity in the first place.

While the evidence clearly suggests that participants have some recognition of these powerful underlying inequitable material and social realities there is also some rather overwhelming evidence that indicates that they would rather not. Simply put, over the course of the interview process participants made regular attempts to, at best, minimize the level of disparity that is present in our society and at worst, to outright deny its existence. When participants repeatedly labored to describe their communities in non-affluent terms they were clearly avoiding the notion of inequity and working to diminish its significance. In addition, several of the instances in which the participants practiced purposeful diplomacy also demonstrated their desire to avoid the stage of recognition. As noted previously, many of the experiences of purposeful diplomacy occurred during conversations that were intended to address the material social realities that must be recognized in more socially just environs, and by deftly and carefully shaping their words around complicated issues participants were clearly trying to avoid the stage of recognition that is vital to the practices of transformative leadership.

In the end if transformative leadership practices are going to truly support these participants or any other principals in affluent school communities, then this critical stage of recognition must become more overt and transparent. Presently it seems that while participants do recognize material and social inequities, they also seem to wish that they did not, and by taking steps like denying their own affluence or framing their language in such a way as to minimize the reality of those inequities they are, in all actuality, working to devalue and delegitimize the power of the inequity. Only by reversing that system can principals begin the important work of redressing inequality and inequity.
Investigation

The second stage of the transformative leadership framework in affluent school communities is the stage of investigation. This stage requires that a principal move past mere recognition and demonstrate a keen interest and willingness to question and challenge some of the basic notions of the normative structure that they have previously acknowledged. Investigation provides the backbone of the process functions of transformative leadership and supports the fundamentally basic requirement that a transformative leader work to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that sustain power and privilege (Shields, 2010). While there is some evidence to suggest that participants do maintain this willingness to question and challenge some of the basic normative notions that undergird the status quo, the data suggest that by and large, these principals not only generally fail to do that questioning, but also in some cases actually seek to embrace the normative culture. On the one hand they did generally acknowledge both differences in opportunity and the public good purposes of schooling, and in so doing, they were contrasting those notions with the largely private good milieu in which they work (at least with me rhetorically and within themselves internally). However, this acknowledgement is clearly complicated by the intense pressure that is thrust upon the participants from the normative structure itself which seeks to reinforce the status quo. Simply put, it is clear from the descriptions of the participants that hegemonic norms are very powerful in these communities and that there are significant pressures on leaders to maintain the status quo, not question it. The external forces that push for traditionally competitive and academic programming clearly maintain a strong influence on the behaviors and beliefs of the participants in such a way as to ultimately inhibit the important stage of investigation. Ultimately it seems that the pressure to maintain the status quo is so powerful that it likely inhibits the participants
efforts (whether consciously or unconsciously) and even their desires to investigate at all. In the end this leads them to work in such a way as to support the status quo and reinforces their efforts to foment private good outcomes.

Transformative leadership requires that educational leaders work to foment deconstruction of knowledge frameworks that undergird inequity and inequality and for that process to occur leaders must be both able and willing to question the discordant roots upon which those mental frameworks are constructed. It seems clear in the circumstances studied here that the hegemonic influence of the status quo is simply too powerful for the principals themselves to overcome. In the end investigation will only occur through tough effort and intentional work that will require participants to look past the pressures they face in support of the status quo. By stepping past their own isolation and joining forces to purposefully investigate the hegemonic underpinnings that guide much of their normative practice principals affluent communities can truly engage in the investigative process and work toward transformative change.

Appreciation

The third stage in utilizing the transformative framework in affluent school communities is appreciation. This stage requires school leaders to take a step past the sheer willingness to question and actually necessitates that they use the knowledge gained through that questioning as a tool for meaning making. Ultimately, if school leaders in affluent communities are able to recognize systemic inequity and are further able to question and deconstruct the influence of this inequality on the hegemonic paradigm within society they can then go about the work of appreciating the impact of the normative structure itself. In so doing, principals can seek to reconstruct knowledge that is built upon the proposition that the culture within their communities
and the external social realities are interconnected in nuanced and complicated ways and further recognize that their practice both influences and is influenced by these same forces. According to Shields (2010) reconstruction of knowledge frameworks represents a critical requirement of the transformative leader and it is this stage of appreciation that ultimately makes reconstruction possible.

As with the previous stages there was certainly some evidence to suggest that participants are able to take on at least some of the rudimentary components of this stage. Clearly, as much of the evidence presented in the previous chapter indicates, participants spent a lot of time discussing the complicated pressures that they face in their jobs and they repeatedly noted ways in which those pressures are complicated by the socio-economic status of the citizens in their school communities. Participants described members of their school communities as “highly educated” and “successful” and “demanding,” and they described the fierce ends to which parents will go to ensure that their children receive an advantage. In my estimation their descriptions of parents and pressures demonstrated the stage of appreciation by presenting at least a basic level of contextualization of the nuanced context within which they work. In addition, the descriptions of their communities as Mayberry further symbolize the stage of appreciation where participants demonstrated an understanding of the normative construct of their own communities and recognized it as different from other locales. To return yet again to the “good cherries” comment, it is clear that experiences like these demonstrate that participants recognize that they work in communities in which their students benefit from broader society inequity.

Still, while at some level the participants demonstrated that they can clearly make meaning and build context regarding their own experiences, they also demonstrated that in many
substantial ways the nuance required in the stage of appreciation often escapes them. Here I return again to the philanthropy piece, as it represents a unique lens through which to view this stage. In one sense the participants’ descriptions of the role of philanthropy in their school communities does suggest a level of appreciation; ultimately if they didn’t appreciate their own privileged place in society they would neither feel compelled to carry out philanthropic activities or address them with me in our conversations. Still, it is interesting to note that as I have stated previously, the topic of philanthropy repeatedly arose in conversations regarding inequity, power, and privilege and although the participants can clearly see how those prevailing notions play out in the normative context they also fail to recognize the inherent role that these communities themselves play in fostering and reinforcing the inequity that leads to the need for philanthropy in the first place. In addition, the participants’ general experiences of denying their own affluence further exemplify their inability to truly appreciate the nuanced context within which they work and the implications that it has both for them and for society at large. By regularly working to deny the affluence of their community and practicing the bias of self efficacy that I addressed earlier the participants are, in effect, seeking to explicitly forgo the stage of appreciation. In other words, if they can ignore the legitimate power and privilege that they hold in society then they are ultimately absolved of the need to appreciate it. In the end it is hard to appreciate a tension when you fail to acknowledge the underlying foundation upon which it is constructed. As the bias of self efficacy suggests, in many cases participants do not even feel as though a tension exists because they work to convince themselves that their experience is the same as everyone else’s.

The important notions of transformative leadership require that principals acknowledge and appreciate the nuanced relationship between power and privilege and socially constructed
reality in different contexts and it seems clear that the participants in this study, while demonstrating basic levels of appreciation, more generally work in such a way as to not only avoid the challenging prospect of appreciation but actually go about building context in their own mental frameworks that work to convince themselves appreciation is unnecessary. If the important values of transformative leadership are to ever become truly embedded in the practice of principals in affluent school communities they must begin with the important step of both acknowledging their own affluence AND appreciating the influence that both their own community members and they themselves have on the inequitable power structures that undergird society.

**Connection**

The next stage of contextualizing the transformative leadership framework in affluent school communities is the stage of connection which requires principals to demonstrate an ability to connect with community members in a meaningful way that can help to place them in a position to influence systemic change. As Shields (2010) suggests, the ultimate goal of transformative leadership is transformation of the status quo and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks and the normative context that reinforce it, and thus if the stages of recognition, investigation, and appreciation are only practiced by principals then the ultimate goal can never be truly attained. They must, as Weiner (2003) noted, democratize their power and collaborate with community members in a meaningful way.

In general, the findings suggest that participants do an exceedingly good job of connecting with their community members both explicitly and implicitly on their terms. Several participants described the important political function that is requisite within their work and they described how their own political skills and abilities provide them with a certain amount of
capital in their work, and throughout our conversations participants regularly addressed the important requirement of connecting with community members in their work. In addition, much of the evidence collected in this study suggests that participants connect with their community members so well, as to sometimes even do it in unconscious ways. The lengthy descriptions of the practice of purposeful diplomacy are again salient to note here as they demonstrate both the overt efforts that participants make in connecting with their community members and the more implied occasions when they may well not even recognize that they are framing their words in such a way as to further connect and ingratiate themselves to their constituents.

Interestingly, while the practice of purposeful diplomacy represents strong evidence of the connections that participant principals are able to make with their constituents, it also simultaneously represents a level of connection that leads principals to become so enculturated into these communities that they themselves are unable to use their relationship to influence change. As noted previously, the more nuanced processes of purposeful diplomacy require principals to regularly and constantly shape their language in way that is pleasing and non-confrontational to community members of the status quo that those community members are supporting. This constant shaping of language leads participants to use assimilative language and build connections by reinforcing normative structures rather than by questioning them. In short, these participants are so good at making connections with people because they so are intuitively in tune to the expectations and desires of the populations that they serve, but when it comes to transformative leadership this strong connection is, in all likelihood, a hindrance. It is interesting to note here that reflection on the participant responses generally indicates that the longer principals work in one of these communities the better they are at navigating the politics and
communicating with constituents, however, the longer their tenure the more their perspectives tend to fall in line with the perceived views of the community.

In the end it seems clear that yes, the participants do demonstrate the ability to connect well, but they are generally so good at utilizing purposeful diplomacy that their practice of it contributes to them becoming enculturated. Thus they fail to maintain the fundamental vision of transformative leadership which requires deconstruction and reconstruction of a more equitable society. For the stage of connection to act as a process of the transformative leadership framework in affluent school communities it must focus on this fundamental vision and principals in affluent communities must recognize that when connections are constructed solely upon the private good functions of schooling it does not represent a practice that can achieve transformative ends.

Action

The penultimate stage of applying the important processes of transformative leadership in an affluent context is action. This stage is exemplified in school leaders by the conceptual development that comes with changed perspectives and the subsequent concrete deeds that they take to rectify injustice. In short, the stage of action necessitates disruption and reconstruction and it requires that principals purposefully address inequitable power structures and the hegemonic values that reinforce them. According to Shields (2010), the key values of transformative leadership are grounded in critical theories of liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, and justice, and thus ultimately, action is required to redress the power structures in society that inhibit the progress of these ideals. It is important to note here that up to this point the described experiences of the participants represented at least some foundational components of each of the previously mentioned stages of the transformative framework. In
short, while the participants may not be fully engaged in these processes in the transformative sense, they do at least understand and/or practice some of the necessary building blocks in the process. Unfortunately, once we reach the important stage of action it seems relatively clear that the descriptions of participants do not demonstrate this important aspect of the framework. Simply put, action, in a critical and transformative ideology requires disruption, and as the participants describe them their experiences generally revolve around much more exclusively around preservation of the status quo rather than disruption of it.

The findings suggest that, practically speaking, participants in this study largely define their jobs in terms of private good functions and outcomes for students. Whether they were discussing the strong push for competitive structures at the societal or local level, a focus on purely academic outcomes, the desire for increasingly individualized and accelerated programming, or the deeply rooted hegemonic value structures that persist in their school communities, participants described the demanding pressures that the face on a daily basis to focus on private good outcomes for their students. For example, the shared descriptions regarding Harvard symbolize this pressure for private good success. Ultimately it is clear that for the stakeholders in these affluent communities the thought of reconstructing the socioeconomic paradigm is an anathema to their being. To be frank, the social paradigm seems to suit them just fine and they not only see no need for it to change, but would likely not be pleased to encounter a school leader who felt otherwise.

In addition to these pressures participants also described their own practices and discussed both their views regarding particular issues and the approaches that they take when addressing them in private good terms. For example, participants overtly addressed ways that they intentionally communicate with community members in such a way as to reinforce the
deeply held beliefs that these constituents bring to the fore, and they further acknowledged that there are instances (such as when it comes to issues like standardized testing) when they would prefer to focus on other issues but instead acquiesce to what they perceive as overwhelming private good focused demands. Here again we must turn to the practice of purposeful diplomacy and recall the fact that participants were often unwilling to open up about issues that would require them push the conversation into an activist locale. In fact, even at times when it appeared to me as the interviewer that there was some conflict between the participant’s beliefs and her practices they were still able to use the practice of purposeful diplomacy to circle around it by either acknowledging the inequity as a barrier that they feel ill equipped to address or by ignoring the equity and then highlighting the quality of their own staffing and programming.

When the pressures noted above are considered in context with their descriptions of their own practices, it is plain to recognize that the private good pressures they described represent such powerful hegemonic interests that the principals themselves perceive action as a dangerous, line-crossing act, one that they are none too interested in crossing.

Ultimately the important action stage of the transformative leadership framework requires that participants be willing to take an activist-oriented approach and be willing to live amidst tension and pressure. As the evidence suggests, while the participant principals in this study do clearly live with tension they are either unable or unwilling to frame that tension in an activist agenda that seeks to focus more the collective and on public good approaches to schooling. In fact it is likely that the participants are so overly focused on private good outcomes that action almost seems an unnecessary afterthought. Only by refocusing their lens on more inclusive public good approaches and more thoughtfully incorporating some of the early stages of the
The transformative framework can principals in affluent communities hope to get to a point where they can truly work toward transformative action.

**Transformation**

Transformation represents the final stage of the transformative framework for affluent school communities and it requires not just shifted perspectives and changed goals at the local level, but also the inclusion of the key ingredients for systemic change that works to better equalize opportunity at the societal level. As Shields (2010) notes it is this broad-based context that differentiates transformative leadership from other leadership theories that focus their lens on the local level, and it is at this structural level that the findings must be considered here. As noted in the previous section, it seems clear that citizens in the affluent communities that were studied here have no desire for societal transformation to occur. In fact, the majority of their actions and the pressures that they exert on the principals in these communities seem to be intended to reinforce the status quo that provides them with the power and influence in society. In the minds of participants broad-based societal transformation seems completely out of the question and certainly does not occur to them to be a responsibility of the local elementary school principal. It is important to note explicitly here that of all of the pressures and influences that were described by the participants not one sought to push them in the direction of seeking more public good focused outcomes for students within their schools, let alone more equitable outcomes outside of their local communities. In short, just as the framework for transformative leadership suggests, the impetus for societal transformation is likely only to come from the leaders themselves.

After considering all of the findings presented in this study, all of the analysis presented above, and the important implications of the transformative leadership framework noted here it is
clear that transformation of the paradigm of affluence presents an exceedingly challenging notion for principals in such communities. BUT HERE IS THE FUNDAMENTAL KEY: it is highly likely that within our current societal paradigm transformation cannot occur unless members of the powered and privileged class can themselves become actors in the change process. As the power holders and agenda setters in society, the constituents in communities like those in which the participants work maintain such control over the broader agenda in society as to make it all but impossible for legitimate and meaningful change to occur without them. It is ultimately for this reason that the theory of transformative leadership is so necessary in our affluent school communities and that the findings of this study are so very important. Simply put, if the important stages of transformative leadership are not purposefully put into place in affluent communities like these then our ability to transform as a society all but evaporates. To be sure, taking these steps in such communities is no easy thing, but that is all the more reason that it becomes incumbent upon transformative leaders to take them on. In the end transformation of the societal and socioeconomic paradigm represents the ultimate goal of transformative leadership, and while this transformation is very challenging to foment in affluent communities, it is also vitally important for society at large. In terms of the findings of this specific study it seems that this is a requirement that participants feel either unable or unwilling to foment, support, and encourage, and this general lack of willingness shines a clear light on the importance of the transformative framework in society at large, and in affluent communities specifically.
Formal Recommendations

As I reach the conclusion of this document it is incumbent upon me to provide some formal recommendations going forward. In this section I will provide such recommendations in three categories, beginning with recommendations for practitioner principals who lead schools in affluent school communities. I will then provide recommendations for university level educators who train aspiring principals and educational leaders and then conclude with recommendations for further research.

Recommendations for Practitioners

The findings in this study suggest that school leaders who work in affluent contexts face myriad influences and pressures as they go about accomplishing the normative tasks of the elementary school principalship. Not only do these principals feel accountable for providing their students with competitive advantages both at the local level and the societal level, but they also seem to be so immersed in the hegemonic value systems of these communities that they tend to become enculturated into the normative context within which they work. Based on these findings and implications, I would make the following recommendations for practitioners who lead elementary schools in affluent communities:

- School leaders in affluent communities should work to develop a greater awareness of the notions of public good and private good as they relate to the roles and responsibilities of the public school system. Clearly there are distinct differences between public good responsibilities and private good expectations for the purpose of schooling, and the findings in this study suggest that participants do not often overtly address such complicated issues, and that in many respects they may not even recognize when their actions fall in one category or another. Furthermore, the evidence provided here suggests that participants think they believe in public good notions of schooling but function in such a way as to almost exclusively address the hegemonic private good expectations that are thrust upon them by their constituents and by society at large. Ultimately, principals in affluent communities must have a stronger understanding of the differing notions of public and private good expectations for schooling as this knowledge represents a vital first step in ensuring the development of more just and equitable schools. Simply put,
principals must engage in practices that begin with recognition of these complicated and nuanced issues if broader societal transformation is ever to occur.

- Principals in affluent communities should also work to develop a greater and more nuanced awareness of the influences and pressures that shape their own practice. Again it is important to recognize that when our discussions began the principals in this study openly described their belief systems as focusing on public good purposes of schooling only to spend the majority of our time conversing about the influences and pressures they face to reinforce the private good construct of the status quo. By both acknowledging and explicitly thinking about the influences and pressures that they face on a daily basis and reflecting upon the actions that those pressures compel them to take I believe that principals can work to further illuminate their own practice and develop a greater balance between private good expectations and public good responsibility for schooling.

- The findings and foregoing discussion demonstrate that it is vitally important for principals in affluent communities to develop a greater awareness of the power of social construction and its role in shaping beliefs and practices. As the evidence in this study suggests, the principals studied here live and work within a normative construct that reinforces hegemonic values and the status quo, and in many real ways this environment works to enculturate them further into that milieu. I believe that by further developing their knowledge about the subjectivist paradigm principals can and will be better armed to understand and contextualize their experiences and will thus be prepared to make more thoughtful decisions about their own beliefs and practices.

- The findings also dictate that principals in affluent communities work to explicitly engage in the steps of the transformative leadership framework that was presented throughout this document. The compelling goals of transformative leadership, I believe, represent a critical tool for creating and developing a more just and equitable society and principals in affluent school communities work on a daily basis with many constituents who have the power, privilege, and skills to work and be successful within the currently unjust paradigm. Most specifically I would suggest that principals at begin this important work by explicitly focusing on themselves and the stages of recognition, investigation, and appreciation. While the findings clearly suggest that the activist oriented goals of action and transformation do not occur in these affluent communities it is impossible for those goals to have any chance of success if principals do not first have a better understanding of the foundational aspects of the framework that can provide guidance and understanding throughout the process. Ultimately I believe it is critical that principals in affluent communities further develop their own awareness and understanding of the goals of transformative leadership and its ability for improving our public school system.

Recommendations for Those who Train Aspiring Educational Leaders

In addition to the school leaders that currently work in and lead affluent school communities I also believe it is important to make recommendations for university-level
educators who train aspiring school leaders. Simply put, many of the recommendations that I provided above for school leaders themselves could be and should be incorporated into leadership programs that focus more explicitly on issues of social justice and equity. If such issues were more thoughtfully included in these programs it is my belief that educational leaders would be better armed to tackle the difficult tasks that they face in conducting the normative functions of their work. Based on the findings and implications I would make the following recommendations for university level educators who train aspiring school leaders:

- At a foundational level I would recommend that school leadership programs provide students with specific coursework that explicitly focuses on democratic practices, justice oriented educational approaches, and power and privilege. As noted above, the findings presented in this study indicate that the participant principals are not armed with strong conceptual knowledge regarding these important notions and the interrelated relationship that they maintain with the outcomes of public schooling. It is important to note here that while I do not make this suggestion armed with explicit empirical evidence, my general knowledge regarding master’s degree programs in educational leadership suggests that they are heavy on practitioner-focused issues like finance and supervision and light on theoretical issues that focus on the philosophical underpinnings of our system. If the evidence found in this study is any indication the important theoretical and philosophical issues addressed here ought to be of vital concern to practitioners and thus, such training programs must address these issues for the sake of our future leaders and our schools (my own work in this doctoral program represents strong evidence of this important notion).

- In addition I believe that educational leadership programs can and should make a deeper effort and more concerted commitment to embedding discussions about justice and equity into coursework at all levels and across all subject areas. To again turn to my point above, the findings in this study suggest that the participant principals who work in affluent contexts do not maintain a deep awareness of the foundational notions of equity, justice, and transformative leadership, or the complex relationships that these notions maintain within the normative confines of their work. The findings here suggest that whether it comes to school finance, school and community relations, supervision, or curriculum, the foundational concepts of equity and justice can and do play a critical role in the responsibility of the school leader and thus they must be addressed across the curriculum.

- Finally I would recommend that educational leadership programs make a firm commitment to addressing the important role that postmodern perspectives and social construction play in human beliefs about truth and knowledge. As the findings in this study clearly suggest, the participant principals who work in affluent communities have unique experiences and face unique and challenging influences and pressures due to the social construct within which they work. In short, as multiple participants acknowledge,
the experience of living and working in these communities is profoundly different than in other less affluent contexts and yet, not only are all principals generally trained in the same way, but they are also trained in programs that do not even acknowledge the influence that social construction has on the normative context. Ultimately training programs must provide aspiring leaders with at least some recognition that truth is shaped by context and that thus leading different types of communities often calls for leaders to demonstrate and use different skills, abilities, and practices.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

As I conclude the recommendations section it is important that I briefly reflect upon the research process that I undertook to conduct this study and consider the structural basis from which I make these recommendations. I begin here by noting that this was, in many respects, an exploratory study regarding issues of class and justice and the relationship between public good responsibilities and private good expectations for schooling in an affluent context. Clearly, these are complicated concepts that are interconnected in unique and profound ways, and the exploratory basis of this study clearly means that there are still many questions left to be answered. For example as an exploratory study that focused on a very small number of participants who work in a very specific type of community in a very small geographical area, the evidence, while certainly important, represents an opening door for further research much more than it does a concise and explicit list of skills and or practices that can improve principal practice. In short, the limitations and delimitations of this study are numerous and they represent several opportunities for further expanding upon this research. Ultimately, while I certainly feel that this study contributes valuable new information to the growing body of literature surrounding transformative leadership theory, I also recognize that it likely provides the impetus for just as many questions as answers. Thus my recommendations for further research are:

- Firstly, I recommend that further research be conducted regarding the complex relationship between public good responsibilities and private good expectations for schooling. While a strong body of theoretical literature exists regarding this important and influential tension the body of research regarding the interplay of these powerful
notions at the local level leaves much room for further evaluation and expansion of our knowledge, and I believe that it is important for us to more fully explore how this tension exists and permeates practice for school leaders at the local level.

- In addition I also believe that further research needs to be conducted regarding the important responsibility of leading affluent schools. While extant literature clearly exists that addresses some important contextual information regarding the social construct of affluent school communities and the expectations that parents and community members in such communities hold for their schools, research regarding the role of the school leader in such communities is clearly lacking. In short, it is vitally important that we learn more about how leaders can, do, and should lead in affluent communities where hegemonic notions of power and privilege exude significant pressure on school leaders and the ways that they function in such a context. Further investigation of these experiences can only work to advance our knowledge regarding these important issues.

- Clearly I also recommend that the research agenda regarding the issues noted above move beyond the elementary school level and consider broader planes of analysis. As an exploratory study I believe that the elementary school level provided a perfect unit of analysis for a variety of reasons but ultimately, if we are to truly expand our knowledge regarding these important issues and the ways that they influence the affluent context the unit of analysis must be expanded to include the middle and high school level as well as the district level. In addition, various content or programming areas should also be studied in relation to these notions.

- Finally I conclude with the general recommendation that further research be conducted regarding issues of justice, democracy, and transformative leadership in affluent contexts. In the end it is not enough to simply investigate and explore how school leaders lead in affluent contexts. As noted previously, affluent school communities represent a prime locale for investigating and addressing issues of social justice and private good practices because, in short, the constituents in these types of communities hold the power in society and generally feel as though they would have the most to lose if deep and equitable social changes were to occur. For this reason it is vital that we develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the interrelationship between transformative leadership practices and the affluent school context.

Conclusion

If this study represents anything, it is that nuanced, complex, and compellingly interrelated issues can often go unaddressed, and even unnoticed, in our society. The heart of this study is constructed upon the tension between public good responsibilities and private good expectations for schooling, and while this tension seems to undergird everything that we do and
believe in regard to educating children in our democracy it seems clear that we often ignore the complicated, challenging, and implicit issues that we face and instead focus on the more overt influences and pressures that we face on a daily basis. Simply put, there is no tension more fundamental to what we do in schools than the one that pits the general will of the collective against the individually focused will of all, and yet, when addressing and reflecting upon the normative context of their jobs the participant principals in this study demonstrated a much less nuanced understanding of these broad philosophical assumptions than they did of the importance of academic programming or politically astute communication practices for demonstrating that they are assimilated members of the affluent communities within which they work. Earlier in this chapter, I addressed the apparent divide between practitioner-focused issues and theoretical issues that practitioners often look past as unrealistic and inconsequential to their normative responsibilities. As I conclude this study and reflect upon the findings presented here I can only do so by noting that deeper understanding of philosophical and theoretical issues ought to be of vital significance to all educators and to anyone who believes in the foundational importance of the institution of public education.

On a more explicit note I feel that I must conclude by addressing an important issue regarding a certain level of duplicity in our society and it’s relation to the findings of this study. As I addressed throughout the last two chapters, the participants in this study began our conversations by espousing public good beliefs about schooling. They talked about developing citizens, and making memories for students, and accepting everyone, and meeting the needs of all learners, and about the purpose of system that ought to help each child reach her or his fullest potential. They then went on to spend the majority of our discussions addressing private good expectations in their schools and the roles that they play in ensuring those private good outcomes
for the affluent students that they serve. Rather than discussing with me the ways that they work to ensure all of the public good notions that they espoused these participants described the social constructs within which they work, the influences and pressures that they face in that construct, and the practices that they carry out in order to maintain their role within that construct. In the end I believe that these principals were representative of all of us in that they described what they wished they believed or what they think they should believe before describing what they actually do, which, in the end, is quite different.

If we as citizens and educators truly took the need to address public good purposes schooling seriously we could and would do so. We could seek to maintain and develop more just and equitable systems, we could seek to shift the status quo and provide more opportunities to those who face life without them, and we could truly create more just and equitable living spaces in our society. The sad fact is that we really do not want to do that. Hegemony is hegemony because it is hegemonic; it creates such dominant social structures that we all fall in line, even if we wish we would not. It is for this reason that I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to reflect upon the specific findings of this study and the participants’ awareness of the roles that they themselves play in reinforcing those hegemonic structures. If I am to consider myself a transformative leader I must acknowledge my own responsibility for deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge frameworks and embark upon the purposeful work of helping engage the participant principals in further important conversations about the important processes of transformative leadership. In short, if I am to challenge them to become activist oriented transformative leaders than I must first lead by example and do so myself. I must not shirk my responsibility for fomenting transformative change and I must begin with the participants whose work and experiences illuminated this important research.
Ultimately it is for the powerful and compelling reasons noted above that the theory of transformative leadership is so vitally important in our approach to leading schools in general, and in our approach to leading affluent schools in particular. Constituents in affluent communities do not care about the public good purposes of schooling and they hold so much power in society that they drive the agenda and shift the focus of schooling away from public good responsibilities. The hegemonic structure in these communities forces schools to focus almost exclusively on private good outcomes for students and reinforces the injustice that cripples our vision of just and equitable democracy. If we cannot address the important values and goals that undergird the theory of transformative leadership in an affluent context work at deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks then I would suspect that we would be fighting a losing battle.

It is incumbent upon principals in these types of communities to not only recognize and understand this challenging tension, but to face it with an activist oriented approach that can and will create more just and equitable schools, and thus a more just and equitable society.
References


Appendix A

Interview Guide

The interview guide includes a list of questions. It is important to note that while this guided served as a reference and a springboard for conversation, clarifying questions were asked as part of the co-intentional meaning-making process.

Principal:

- What is your current position?
- Tell me a little about your school?
- Can you describe a normal day?
- Why did you get into education?
- In your opinion what are the overall purposes/goals of schooling?
- Do you think that there are other ideas out there about the overall goals and purposes of schooling?
- (if applicable) Is there any conflict or tension between them?
- In your current position are there any influences or pressures that shape, contribute to, or work against those goals?
- How well do you think the current system address those purposes? What about your school specifically?
- How do you, in your school, work to achieve that goal?
- Do you think you are, in fact, meeting that goal?
- Do you ever think about different goals or outcomes for your students?
• Do members of your school community acknowledge and recognize their power and privilege that they maintain in society? Is this something that is ever addressed in your school?

• How would you go about doing that?

• Do you think students here get a better education than students in less affluent schools?
  o Can you define what ‘better’ means?
  o Should they?
  o Is that the intent of the system?
  o Should it be?
  o Can you, in your role as a principal address that somehow? How?
  o Should you?
  o Could you?

• Is there anything else that you would like us to know?
Appendix B

Interview Consent

“Transformative Leadership and the Purpose of Schooling in Affluent School Communities”
Consent Letter

Transformative Leadership and the Purpose of Schooling in Affluent School Communities is a research project that seeks to understand how principals in affluent communities experience and balance the tension between competing expectations for schooling through interviews with school principals like you. This research is being conducted by me, Andy Barrett, school principal and doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I believe that learning more about the practices of principals in affluent communities and the tensions that shape their professional actions can have significant implications for our profession, and it is for this reason that I seek your participation today. Upon completion of this study the findings will be presented in my doctoral dissertation and thus presented in my doctoral dissertation defense. There is also a possibility that the information may later be shared at an academic conference or in an academic journal. I believe that you have some valuable insights to share and I am hopeful you will consider participating in this study.

At this time, with your permission, I would like to invite you to participate in this study and spend some time with me discussing your experiences as principal. With your permission, these interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes; no-one except the researchers will have access to them. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to select a pseudonym to ensure that your confidentiality is protected. Nothing you say will ever be associated with your name in any scholarly presentations or publications related to this project. In addition, I will take pains to hide information that might easily identify you to anyone aside from the researchers. As with other interactions with you and your school, all information you provide will be confidential except that which we are required by law to report. In sum, participation in this project presents no risk greater than normal life.

If you do not wish to participate, it will have no negative effect on you or your current practice. Of course, you may decline to answer any question that you prefer not to answer and may stop the interview at any time.

If you agree to participate in this project, please complete the consent form on the attached page, keep one copy for yourself, and return the signed copy to me.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me, Andy Barrett at, abarrett@geneva304.org or by phone at 630-209-4720, or my university dissertation advisor, Carolyn Shields, at cshields@illinois.edu or by phone at 217 344-2627. If you have questions about the conduct of the study, please contact Anne Robertson at the Bureau of Educational Research, arobrtsn@illinois.edu or 217-244-0515. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Andrew J. Barrett
Consent Form

I am willing to be interviewed about my experiences as principal. yes □ no □

I am willing to have my interviews recorded. yes □ no □

___________________________________  ______________
Signature                              Date
Appendix C
IRB Approval

April 11, 2011

Andrew Barrett
Education Policy, Organization and Leadership Department
334 College of Education
MC-708

Dear Andy,

On behalf of the College of Education Human Subjects Committee, I have reviewed and approved your research project entitled “Transformative Leadership and the Purpose of Schooling in Affluent School Communities” This project meets the exemption criteria for federal regulation 46.101(b)1 for research involving the use of normal education topics in an educational setting where the identity of the participant is protected. It also meets the exemption criteria for federal regulation 46.101(b)2 for research involving the use of normal interviews where the identity of the participant is protected.

No changes may be made to your procedures without prior Committee review and approval. You are also required to promptly notify the Committee of any problems that arise during the course of the research. Your approved project number is 4773 and exempt projects are typically approved for three years with annual status reports requested. Please don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Best regards,

Anne S. Robertson
Coordinator, College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee

Cc: Dr. Carolyn Shields